

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

**HOUSTON'S RESPONSE TO THE
VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA**

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Frank E. McBride

Mr. Frank E. McBride was interviewed on June 16, 2006 in Room #524, Agnes Arnold Hall, University of Houston, Houston, Texas. Mr. McBride was one of the first television cameramen that viewed the devastation in New Orleans with the added perspective of having recently lived in that city for four years. This interview depicts the early rescue efforts by local people and one state agency immediately after the storm, while some of his experiences suggest the advent of the overwhelming need for basic necessities including gasoline.

The interview was conducted by Ernesto Valdés, Center for Public History, University of Houston where the tape is deposited in M.D. Anderson Library on the main campus of the university.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Personal background	1
Going to the storm	4
Entering New Orleans	7
Filming the flood	7
Filming the Superdome area	15
Moral dilemmas	16
Personal impressions	18
Filming at the Astrodome	20
Conclusion	21

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

*UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT*

Interview with: Frank Edgar McBride

Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes

Date: June 16, 2006

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

EV: This is Ernesto Valdes, interviewer. I am interviewing Frank McBride for the Houston Project – Hurricane Katrina and Rita. It is June 16, 2006, and we are in Room 524 of Agnes Arnold Hall, University of Houston, at approximately 10 a.m. May I have your full name, please.

FM: My name is Frank Edgar McBride.

EV: What is your date of birth?

FM: January 10, 1964.

EV: And where were you born?

FM: In Marshall, Texas.

EV: The home of Y.E. Tittle.

FM: The home of who?

EV: Y.E. Tittle.

FM: I am afraid I am not familiar with him.

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

EV: Really, the New York Giants' legendary quarterback?

FM: Oh, no!

EV: Were you educated there? Did you go to public school there?

FM: No, actually, I have lived several places. I eventually ended up here in this area at Buford High School, my 4 years there. I went to San Jacinto College and got my degree here from U of H.

EV: What did you get your degree in here?

FM: Radio, television and film.

EV: And when did you get your degree?

FM: I graduated in 1988.

EV: Did you serve in the military?

FM: No.

EV: And your family is still here?

FM: A great portion of my family is still here, yes.

EV: And you are married?

FM: I am married – wife and 3 children all live here in Pasadena here in the area.

EV: Can you give us a little bit about your employment background?

FM: Yes, well, studying radio, television and film, my intention was to work in television. I also had an associate's in journalism and while I was trying to get employed in television, I worked at a suburban newspaper in Deer Park, the *Deer Park Progress*, as a reporter for about half a year. I worked briefly actually for the San Jacinto College in their media department and then began working in television shortly after that in 1989. I worked in Lake Charles, Louisiana, at KPLC – their NBC affiliate there. After that, I

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

worked in Jacksonville, Florida for two affiliates: WJKS, which no longer does news, which was the ABC affiliate at the time; and WTLV, the NBC affiliate there. Along those lines, I did get some exposure to tropical storms and the hurricane coverage. And then after Jacksonville, moved to New Orleans. I lived there from 1994 to 1998. So, got a good exposure to Louisiana and New Orleans area. And then, from 1998 until the present, I have been living here in Houston working . . . KHOU is the third TV station I have worked for in Houston. I came here working for Fox, KRIV. Did the start-up at KHWV and am currently working for Channel 11.

EV: What year did you come to Houston?

FM: I came to Houston in 1998.

EV: So how long have you been at Channel 11?

FM: Just over 2 years now with Channel 11.

EV: Have any hobbies or working with the church or social agencies or anything?

FM: Nothing out of the usual, in the immediate community sort of thing.

EV: How did you first hear that you were being shipped off to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit?

FM: Well, actually, I found out before Hurricane Katrina hit. We basically rotate crews throughout the storm season and people are put on alert . . . "O.K., the next one, you are in line to do this." That particular season, I had already covered Arlene. Actually, I can't remember if that was the name of it. It was the very first one which never reached hurricane status. It was a tropical storm. It hit in the Pensacola area. I had covered that so that kind of took me out of the rotation until they started looking at Katrina, they had already chosen a crew to go out and cover it and then realized they

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

were going to need more than one crew. Ended up ultimately having 3 crews during land fall and I believe part of the decision making on sending me on that was that I had experience in the New Orleans area. I had worked there for 4 years, so they knew I would have some knowledge of how to get around on the ground and what the areas that would be prone to problems would be.

EV: So, do you remember the exact date that you shipped out to go?

FM: I remember the days of the week. I don't remember exactly the . . . it was towards the end of August and it was actually the Sunday before Hurricane Katrina came ashore, we were dispatched. We probably left right around noon from Houston and headed towards Louisiana.

EV: And you waited for the storm to hit?

FM: Once we arrived in Baton Rouge, we staged there. The station preferred that we not be in the strike zone for safety reasons. The other crew that we had was staging a little further to the east in Hammond, Louisiana, and they were doing phone calls from that area. But we didn't have anyone actually riding the storm out in New Orleans or anywhere further east like the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

EV: And when you say "we," who was "we?"

FM: Well, I was personally traveling with Janice Williamson who is a reporter at KHOU. She and I were the ones that left on that Sunday. Another crew that had gone ahead of us was actually a three-person crew: It was Keith Tomshe, Jeremy Diesel, and Gustavo Perrera. And they were assigned from that point to concentration on what was going on in Mississippi although they were holding back until after the storm also. And

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

the third crew was Jason Whitely and Tony Delgado. Jason was the reporter. Tony Delgado was the photographer.

EV: How do you travel when you go? Do you take one of your vehicles?

FM: Yes, we have sport utility vehicles. Our station across the board drives Ford Explorers – not four-wheel drive, just standard, street issue cars, with all our TV, video support gear and, in a sense, all of us had extra supplies knowing that we were going to maybe be cut off from the usual grocery stores, different things. So, we had large ice chests full of water, food, ice. We also took all the personal items we thought we might need and extra rain gear/trash bags, to cover things up. Things in preparation for heavy rain and possibly being cut off from going to restaurants or grocery stores or anything like that.

EV: Is it kind of like camping food: dried food, granola?

FM: Pretty much. Lots of tuna. Lots of things in cans.

EV: Now, do you just stay at regular hotels and motels along the way?

FM: Well, we had a hotel room in Baton Rouge the Sunday before the land fall. Actually, that ended up being where we kept . . . ultimately throughout our coverage, we kept at least 4 rooms in that hotel that large numbers – I am getting ahead of myself – but large numbers of people were using those rooms throughout our coverage. Actually, it was specifically the Embassy Suites there on Interstate 12 in Baton Rouge.

EV: But the only reporter that went with you was Ms. Williamson?

FM: I was teamed with Janice Williamson, yes.

EV: You were there after the storm passed - were you there when the dikes broke?

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

FM: Half the time, yes. Actually, when we were going out to kind of set it up a little bit, when we were driving out, Janice and I were listening to WWL on AM radio out of New Orleans and they were doing their, ‘everyone needs to evacuate’ – they were giving all the warnings to their listeners there. And having worked there, I was kind of discounting the seriousness in their warnings. I was talking to Janice and I was saying, “You know, the whole time I was there, it was always this is the big one any time a storm came.” And I was kind of saying, “But it is their job. They have to make people aware that there is a danger.” I was kind of saying, you know, it is probably not going to be as big a deal as they are making it sound like. I think back on that now and just . . . I think it is very ironic. I was thinking that they were overstating the seriousness of it. Now, I think it was appropriate if not maybe less than it really was.

The morning that the storm came in, we were doing live shots – sending back stories for the morning show at our station. This would be Monday morning.

EV: Live shots from where?

FM: From Baton Rouge. And basically just showing wind and rain. You know, there were some trees down but minimal damage in Baton Rouge. And the reports we were hearing from New Orleans were a little more severe but didn’t sound like they had been hit terribly hard. We were thinking, well, it looks like Mississippi is a real story. And it was probably late Monday we started hearing about things were getting pretty serious in New Orleans. They were starting to get the flooding problem. And the hotel we were staying in, there were several people from FEMA that we would see them at meals. It was the night before Tuesday, so it would be Monday night, we were speaking with a representative of FEMA asking them if they were going to be going in the next day and

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

they had expressed that they probably wouldn't be able to -- roads were impassable, they would rather wait for things to be cleared and that they would wait until they were given an OK to go ahead and enter.

We didn't realize that it was going to be that difficult to get in but our plan was still to go and see how far we could get on Tuesday morning. And when Tuesday morning came, we headed out Interstate 10. We had already heard that once you get into like the Metairie area, Jefferson Parish, there was no way to go other than Interstate 10. Once we got to the river parishes around Gonzales, we would try to get on the opposite side of the Mississippi River.

EV: You said Metairie?

FM: Metairie is probably the largest city in Jefferson Parish just west of New Orleans. So, we decided to approach on the west side of the Mississippi River. I believe it would be considered the west side -- the opposite side from the Interstate. We crossed to Gonzales and there were a lot of downed trees, not devastating looking damage along the way but trees, things that were making it difficult to pass down the road, until we got probably from St. John Parish into Jefferson Parish. Then, we started to see more significant damage. It was a little harder to pass along the river road that we were driving. And as we got to where the Huey P. Long Bridge feeds into River Road where we were driving, we encountered a convoy and it was mostly State Parks & Wildlife and Fishery boats being pulled by trucks and pick-ups and all their different equipment that they were coming from the state. And there was this convoy of boats, so we decided O.K., these guys are going somewhere that we need to be. So, we joined in with this convoy and followed them in and they took a long, winding trek that took them back in to

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

across the river, right at the crescent of downtown New Orleans where the Convention Center and the two spans going into the downtown area were. And after figuring out how they were going to be able to work their way to where they were going, they meandered through the French Quarter into what is called the Faubourg Marigny area and went on their way eventually to the lower 9th ward which is where we followed them. At that point, the street where they stopped to start staging the boats, to start launching them, had maybe 6 inches of water in it. It wasn't anything really significant, just enough to get your shoes wet. And we decided to park our car and start taking some pictures of what these guys with the boats were doing and what they were doing was lining up, backing them over this bridge that goes across the industrial canal in New Orleans. It separates 9th ward from lower 9th ward. The opposite side of the canal is what they considered the lower 9th. And they were launching the boats on the opposite side of the bridge and all they were having to do is just continue backing up and they were in water so they were able to launch the boats.

We started watching this process going on and asked if we could perhaps get on one of the boats and see what the operation was like. So, we were able to accompany one of the efforts and there were people all around this area that were standing on the roofs, some of them by themselves, some of them in groups. You know, as many people as they could, they would get them into the boat, asked them where other people they knew needed rescuing were and they were trying to keep records of all these things.

It was really hard for them to keep track of who had been rescued, where someone else was needed to be, but the thing that really struck me was shortly after they would launch, they would find people immediately and the boat would fill up and they would

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

have to return and let them out. And then, they would try to remember where people had been before that they weren't able to pick up or that they had been told needed rescuing. And each time they went out, maybe they went a little bit further but they weren't going very far. And by that, I mean, just maybe one-quarter of mile and then back. It was obvious that the problem extended way beyond, several miles. You couldn't even see where the end of the problem was and houses upon houses in the distance.

You start doing the math in your head. If they can only go this short distance before the boat is full and then they return, how long is it going to be for the people that were several miles out before they get any attention or any help. And as they were going on these trips also, you could hear people who had . . . it was pretty clear they had gone up into their attics whenever the water was rising on them and had no way to get out. They were trapped up there, we could hear them shouting out from the vent holes in their attics, and if the boat was full at that time, they would say, "We will come back. We will get you some help." And again, you hope they remember where that person was and that they can get help to them but it was just overwhelming the number of people that needed rescuing.

There were a significant number of boats involved but just from the perspective of the one boat we were in, we would go almost no distance at all, it seemed, before the boat was full again and we had to go back. And you just had to wonder, how long is it going to be for those people that are very far out? We went on like this for a long time, from my perspective, but what was, in reality, like 2 hours. Go out with the boat, fills up, brings them back in.

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

By the time we had gotten back onto the bridge and we are seeing the growing group of people who now were rescued from their homes but now didn't know where to go, we were feeling exhausted just after 2 hours. We are feeling dehydrated and needed some relief. At that point, it struck me: These people have been here . . . when the sun came up this morning, they were out there on their roofs or in their attics and the storm had caused the water to start coming up later that day so some of these people were heading on maybe 18, 20 hours in those conditions with direct exposure to the sun or the stifling heat inside their attics. And the scope of the problem was really starting to hit me at that point. You know, if I am feeling this badly after just 2 hours riding on a boat, how are these people feeling standing stranded on their roofs? And how long is it going to be before someone can come help them?

EV: What other boats were out there besides the Louisiana Parks & Wildlife?

FM: There were some individuals who were volunteering their boats.

EV: Did you see any city or government boats out there or anything?

FM: I do not specifically remember there being like any Coast Guard or other markings on boats. I cannot say that they weren't out there but I just did not make note of that.

EV: Did any boats ever stop to bust open those attics or let people out and at least be on the roof?

FM: Yes, they did. Not all the boats were equipped to do that but some had either like bars, some even had axes and they were able to pull the wood that was covering up the vents and the people were able to crawl out. We witnessed a few of those and all the while that the boat rescues are going on, you could see in the distance there were also

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

helicopter rescues going on. And from our perspective, the hope was that that means would rescue those people that are so far out from where we were.

EV: When you said that there were FEMA . . . we had heard that FEMA didn't respond until days afterwards. So, there were some people on-site already?

FM: Well, I don't know if they made it on-site. We saw them in Baton Rouge and they were staying at the same hotel we were. And when we asked them if they were going to be going in the day that we were, they said they weren't planning on it because they didn't think they could make it. And that was the day that we went and we were able to make it in. So, we found that a little ironic. We don't know for a fact that they didn't go that day but they said their plan was not to go in there.

EV: You never saw them again after that?

FM: We did not.

EV: Did you notice what kind of vehicles they had?

FM: I do not know what they were driving.

EV: Then, when you left . . . that was your first day, right, or your first morning?

FM: Well, that was our first two hours. After we had gotten out and we spoke to some people about what their experience was, we got back to our news truck, started pulling out some water in our truck and we were told by some of the rescue workers that we should not be doing that. We shouldn't let the people know that we have supplies there or we are going to get mobbed. And it didn't occur to us that we were in that sort of situation. That caused us to look around. And these people were starting to get a little desperate. The ones who had been pulled off the roofs were sitting around on this bridge and didn't know what their next move was supposed to be. And nearby in the rising

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

water was a shoe store and many of the people that lived in this neighborhood were going into that shoe store pulling out bags of shoes which I suppose that could be something you would need for survival or maybe it was just an opportunity – I am not sure what the reason was but everyone – old, young, children, were walking around with these grocery bags or shopping bags and they were floating them on the water full of these boxes full of shoes come out of the shoe store there.

EV: Did you take any of your own pictures when you were there...your own camera?

FM: No, I didn't have the opportunity to do that. I was mostly doing the video.

EV: And so, was that the entire day?

FM: No, it wasn't. From there, we went back towards the main part of like the French Quarter and the Canal Street area. As we got to the French Quarter on Decatur Street, we saw a police car stopped. This was a New Orleans police car . . . stopped at a corner and there was a bar there on Decatur Street that had been blown open by the wind. We thought they were either securing it or maybe someone was looting, we weren't sure. We pulled up to document what the police were doing at that location and it appeared that they weren't doing anything. We didn't see anyone inside the bar. And then, on the opposite side of this street, there was a Walgreens and the Walgreens was all boarded up but the door was slightly ajar and then shortly after that, some New Orleans police officers start coming out with supplies in their hands. So, you can use whatever word you want to for that but they were removing items from that store.

EV: They weren't first aid kits . . .

FM: They seemed more like food and drink items.

EV: Did you say anything?

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

FM: We asked them what they were doing and rather than responding to what they were doing, there was a policeman who started telling us about the general situation in the city and advising us that we might consider leaving. And the officer that we spoke to, he was a motorcycle policeman. He seemed to have actual fear. He was saying, "You may not know it but the second levee has broken, the water is coming up, we have to stay here, we don't have a choice but you need to get out while you can." He seemed to genuinely feel like it was going to get really bad.

EV: Was that the first time you had heard about the second levee broken?

FM: That was the first time I realized that there was more than one and that the water was still rising. And Janice, when she heard this news, she was actually kind of hoping that we would leave at that time. I figured we ought to at least get a second shot of this. So, we went over to the Canal Street area and went out to where a bunch of the police were staging around Rampart which is pretty much where the French Quarter starts at Canal Street. We watched the water and it was slowly but it was definitely creeping up Canal Street towards the river.

EV: Initially, when you left the scene and they were going out hauling people in, you said you interviewed several of the people, what were some of the experiences that they related to you?

FM: Oh, the stories were pretty much . . . a lot of these people had been through several storms there . . . never thought that it was going to be that big of a deal and were caught off guard whenever the water came up and came up very quickly. And there were some that had been there whenever the last big one was. I believe it was Carla in 1965?

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

And they said, "They threw the gates open on us then and they're doing it again now." A lot of them were convinced that this was someone's doing rather than a natural occurrence. And that may be just wanting to find a reason for just happened rather than it just being a random act. I don't know that they were basing it on anything that they had observed.

EV: And going back to that police officer, if they were going to be in a bad situation . . . many of these cops, their homes were flooded, they couldn't get to their families . . . I mean, they could be just ripping the place off or they knew what was coming down, they knew they had to get some food and water for themselves.

FM: Right, and by no means was I passing any judgment on them but especially that one specific policeman and we got him on video saying it as well. He didn't seem to be trying to be overly dramatic. He really seemed to think that the situation was going to be very grave very soon and that we would be well to try to get out of it.

EV: So, what did you do after that?

FM: Well, what we decided to do at that point was to see what was going on, at least to go near to the Superdome where that was the shelter of last resort. So, we went over into the Superdome area and there were large numbers of ambulance and emergency personnel staged underneath the elevated freeway right beside the Superdome. And we stopped to speak to some of them, about what the operation was. And they basically were there to help care for the people who were in and around the Superdome area who needed medical attention, people who have chronic problems, people who were suffering from the heat and they were busy beyond . . . they couldn't keep up with the amount of attention that was needed by these people. And we wandered a short distance. It was

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

where Clayborn Street intersects underneath the freeway there near the Superdome. We saw this man lying on the sidewalk and at first thought, we thought maybe he was just unconscious, taking a nap and then realized this man was dead. And it appeared that maybe he had fallen from the freeway overhead because it looked like he had trauma to his head. It wasn't clear why he was dead but there was this dead man lying on the sidewalk. And we went back over to where the ambulance personnel and paramedics were and, you know, just let them know this person was over there and they said, "Well, maybe someone can cover him up. He's dead, we can't help him. We've got all these other people that we need to help." If someone was beyond helping, they weren't going to be concerned with that.

EV: What was your reaction? Had you ever seen anyone dead like that in the middle of the street?

FM: That really made the situation surreal in that no one is doing anything about this person lying there and obviously, he is beyond help but, you know, in ordinary, civilized times, you expect that someone will tend to that. This was a whole different situation. It was a level of priority where that was not going to get attention at that point.

EV: All normal conventions are put aside.

FM: Yes.

EV: Was that pretty much your reaction to the whole scene? When you went to the Dome, it was already getting packed, I guess, by that time?

FM: We were not able to get inside. What we were seeing were the people who were . . . a lot of the people we encountered outside and we also were able to get to the elevated freeway near the Superdome. These were some of the people who had been in this

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

situation with the boats that we saw earlier. They had made their way. A lot of them said they were told to make their way to that area and that would be eventually how they would be evacuated, would be from that area. I know that there had been some accounts where people were told to go to the Convention Center. I never heard anyone that told us that they were told to go there. We did go by the Convention Center that day which was the Tuesday and there were some people on the sidewalk – very few though – and no one was in the building that we could see. The doors were all secured. So, it was after that that the whole situation at the Convention Center developed. But the people we were talking to, well not inside but around the Superdome and on the elevated freeways there, didn't know what their next move was going to be. They just knew that they needed . . . they were supposed to be in this area, this is where other people were, so that is where they were going to be. But the ones up on the freeway were starting to get pretty desperate at the time that we encountered them just because there was no shade, they didn't have any access to water up there, they had young children with soiled diapers and no way to do anything about that. Things were getting pretty bad, very uncomfortable and going from uncomfortable to dangerous.

EV: What was your feeling about the fact that you had this ice chest full of water? I'm not trying to put the monkey on your back but when you are in a situation like you can't – I mean there are some situations where, like you say, you would be overwhelmed – I understand the moral dilemma of being in that kind of ethical situation but, I mean, inside, you still feel helplessness.

FM: It was very hard. What we ended up doing was trying to be very judicious. When we thought we could safely provide someone some help, we would. I hadn't mentioned

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

that before we went in, we had to strap gas cans to the roof of the car knowing that we might not be able to refuel. And when we were in that same area by the Superdome, there was a man who had his whole family packed up in his car, they had all their stuff but they had no gas. They couldn't go anywhere further. And he was saying, "You got some there?" I mean, he wasn't insisting, he was just asking. And I looked at the situation, didn't see that there was anyone around, like large groups that were going to rush us or anything so sure, I gave him a can.

EV: One of those 5-gallon jerry cans?

FM: It was like a 10-gallon can. We strapped 3 of those to the roof. I gave him one of them and hoped that that was going to get him somewhere safer than here. But even that, you know, you had to weigh, are other people going to see this and all of a sudden it is going to become a situation out of control...and the same with the water. There were some people that we were able to give them some but we had to make sure that it wasn't going to set off a big reaction where we were going to be overwhelmed.

EV: Were you there when the people were turned back on the bridge in that other town, that neighboring town, to New Orleans?

FM: I did not. I believe that was Jefferson Parish, and I had only heard tales about that. I didn't see any of that first-hand.

EV: Did you ever write down any notes or diary on your experiences?

FM: No, this was not a case where I was able to do that.

EV: Can you share some memorable scenes, besides the ones you've mentioned, that you think you probably never would forget?

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

FM: Well, it wasn't what I saw. Probably the part that nagged at me the most was the immensity. When we were doing the boat rescues, just knowing how, in just the small area where we were, there were so many people, and then you multiply that out to how far the flooding was and just you almost immediately come to the conclusion they can't get to all these people in time. And that hurts. It makes you feel very helpless and wonder, is there any way that it could have . . . you know, obviously if they hadn't been there whenever the water came, that would have been the ideal thing but, you think, this is the 21st century – is there some way that we can speed up this process and not let these people die a really horrible death out here just because they are exposed and no one can get to them?

I would have to say when we had to leave, probably about 2 in the afternoon on that Tuesday that we finally had to start heading back towards Baton Rouge to try to get our stories on the air, just knowing that that water was rising, you've got this growing crowd on the freeway and on the ground around the Superdome that don't know how they're going to be getting out. It was just a feeling of what we've seen is really bad and it's going to get worse.

EV: That is when you began to realize that the announcer you heard on the radio that morning was not exaggerating?

FM: Yes. Actually, well before that I had realized that that was not an exaggeration.

EV: Having known New Orleans since you lived there for a fairly long period of time, I mean, everything that you ever saw about the city was gone except, I guess, for the French Quarter.

FM: Canal Street but . . .

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

EV: They were untouched, right? I understand that the Quarter didn't get as much water as they thought it would. It sits a little higher.

FM: Right. The Quarter, especially at the time that we were there . . . I understand that it took on some after because of the rising water, but aside from that there was no power and a lot of streets were impassable because telephone poles and other debris was in the way, it was pretty much intact. The people in that area, a lot of them who had stayed were asking us, should we leave or should we stay here? And our advice was, from what we've seen, I don't see any way that this area is going to be viable for a while. You might want to consider going somewhere else. And a lot of them were planning on leaving and I don't know what ultimately they did.

EV: So, you just stayed a certain amount of time?

FM: As far as on the ground in New Orleans, just the one day on Tuesday. Landfall, we were in Baton Rouge the Monday before.

EV: So you are two days covering the storm?

FM: Yes.

EV: Did you cover it when the people came here to Houston?

FM: Almost non-stop, yes.

EV: Were you at the Dome or both? The Convention Center?

FM: Yes. I covered those pretty much every day out there.

EV: What were the conditions like inside the Dome? I mean, massive people.

FM: I was very impressed at how organized it was. You know, they had set everyone up in rows. There was obviously a lot of trouble getting people together but as far as giving them places to be in there, there didn't seem to be any conflict among the people

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

saying, "I don't have a space." There seemed to be a place for everyone. They had a system for how they got their meals, how they could try to make contact. They had rooms full of computers set up for them to come in and try to get their names on databases so family and friends, whoever was trying to contact them, could. And constantly overhead on the speakers, you would hear PA announcements – people's names, trying to find family members, trying to find people that they had lost.

EV: Were you all interviewing these folks? Were you still with Ms. Williamson at the time?

FM: No. On the Houston end of things, it was a variety of people that I would be working with on a day-to-day basis.

EV: And were there any particular scenes there that stand out in your mind? I would think just the fact that they were able to organize this mass, that would be impressive enough and I talked to some folks who have been involved with that. It was impressive.

FM: Mainly it was just the number of people who, whenever they saw the need, they dropped everything and they got themselves out there because there is no way that that operation could have worked without the people who made themselves available to do whatever was needed out there.

EV: The volunteers?

FM: The volunteers. You couldn't count the number of people that were out there. And they weren't just willing, they were . . . 'Please, let me help. Let me do something.'

End of Tape #1, Side A

Start of Tape #1, Side B

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

EV: Did the station take the time to debrief you when you came back from something like that? Did they say, "Tell us what you saw" to you? I know that the reporters were out there to tell their stories. Is there anything that goes beyond that . . . you came home, you did your job, here is another job. Is that basically what happens?

FM: I don't think there was anything formally where we were able to go over our experiences and decide what went right, what went wrong and basically get the gist of what we had gone through there and the reason was because the story had come here. And we really didn't have time to go through that process. I think otherwise, we probably would have but at that point, over here at the Astrodome, that was a beast that needed to be fed over there. That story needed to be told. And every day, it was, you know, probably 4 or 5 of our crews going out there and just doing that story alone.

EV: Well, we had more happy endings out here, didn't we?

FM: Absolutely, and it was good to see our city rise up for something like that.

EV: Yes, that was very impressive, wasn't it? Anyway, you said you didn't have any of your own photography or anything. Had the other photographers . . . did you ever discuss it with them – sit around over coffee and say, "Man, did you see that?"

FM: Yes, we have had a lot of not really specifically Katrina discussions but there has been a lot of sharing here and there of the experiences. The things that went on after I was there were at least as surreal, maybe even more so, like what went on at the airport, that turning into a hospital out there.

EV: I missed that. What was that about?

FM: Well, they took Armstrong Airport and basically took the people that were in the worst condition out of the city and turned that whole airport into like a triage center. And

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

people laying all around the terminals and down the hallways. It is not anything that I saw first-hand but I saw the TV accounts of the guys that came back talking about it, describing the smells in there and the sound of people moaning just all around. It sounds like that was something you probably don't want to encounter too many times in your life.

EV: Yes. There was some talk on the internet . . . I don't know if you have ever taken the time to download the Katrina stuff on the internet. A surprising amount about the pets, the animals that were left behind and they went back to rescue. And, I mean, I like animals but I am just kind of surprised by the intensity with which people went to go rescue the animals, as much as people.

FM: I understand that was actually a lot of the reason a lot of people stayed where they were is the evacuation didn't provide for animals and so they decided they weren't going.

EV: Again, I am just impressed by the intensity to rescue of the animals. There were some that you don't really hear that much about, were the cattle – the farming communities around the edge of New Orleans. The dogs and pets are one thing but you had herds of cattle and stuff, and all that. O.K., are there any other people you think, camera men, that you think we ought to talk to, or reporters?

FM: There probably are, yes.

EV: You mentioned one that stayed for two weeks. Who is that?

FM: The reporter, Jeff McShan. Yes, he was there for two straight weeks. He would probably have . . .

EV: Do you think he might be amenable to . . .

FM: He is a reporter. Yes. He would have many a story to share, I am sure.

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar

Interview: June 16, 2006

EV: Did Vicente Arenas go out there?

FM: Yes, he did. Vicente Arenas, Sher-Min Chow.

EV: Let me sign off. That concludes the interview with Mr. Frank McBride.

INDEX

Armstrong Airport	22
Astrodome (Houston)	20
Baton Rouge	4, 5, 6
Educational background	1-3
Federal Emergency (FEMA)	6, 10, 11
Filming rescue operations	8, 9
French Quarter	7, 12, 13, 19
Hammond, La.	7
Houston	20
Huey Long Bridge	7
Jefferson Parrish	7, 17
Louisiana State Parks, Wildlife, and Fishery	7
looting	11, 12
Metairie, La.	7
New Orleans Police Department	12

Interviewee: McBride, Frank Edgar**Interview: June 16, 2006**

sharing necessities, dilemma of	11, 16, 17
St. John Parrish	7
Stations, radio and television	2, 3, 5
Superdome	14, 15, 16
supplies	5
volunteers	10
Williamson, Janice	4, 5

