

Surviving Hurricane Ike

By: Shelbylynn Mendive

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Narrator (Me)- Welcome everyone my name is Shelbylynn Mendive and this episode is called Surviving Hurricane Ike. Before diving into our story this podcast does contain some intense emotional aspects involving a child, so viewer discretion advised. In this podcast we dive into one personal story of a survivor from the 2008 Hurricane Ike that hit the Texas Gulf Coast. This podcast is very special to me, because the survivor we hear from today is my best friend, her name is Erika Vera. Hurricane Ike was one of Texas most powerful hurricanes. The hurricane resulted in high damage cost of up to over twenty-nine billion dollars in damages and it killed, sadly, 74 people¹. Hurricane Ike hit land in the beginning of September as a category two hurricane with winds up to 110 miles per hour. Here's Erika sharing some simple background information about her and her family.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- I'm originally from Houston, Texas, and the reason why we moved to Galveston was because my dad got a better job opportunity there. He was a construction worker for Sprint. I have a big family. I am the oldest of four siblings. I have a younger sister and two younger brothers. My youngest sister's name's Emily and my two baby brothers they are named Giovanni, and Manuel. I am very close with my family. I try to go see them as much as possible.

Narrator (Me)- Erika and her family were never prepared for what they would face in September of 2008. This is Erika talking about the days leading up to the storm hitting land.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- No one wants to think that they're going to experience anything like this. I never want to experience it again. It was the worst thing ever. My parents knew a hurricane was coming because they saw it on the news, but they tried to not let me and my sister know about it. They were trying to make sure that we were okay first because they didn't think it was going to be such a big deal. I was eight and my sister, she was around, I would say one or two, and my baby brothers they weren't even born yet. So, they, luckily, they didn't have to go through what we went through.

Narrator (Me)- Erika's parents had several tough decisions they had to make to decide how they would handle Hurricane Ike. Here's Erika explaining a little bit about what her parents did.

¹ The Texas General Land Office, Hurricanes Ike and Dolly, June 23, 2020, recovery.texas.gov/action-plans/hurricanes-ike-dolly/index.html.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- So at first they wanted to see, they wanted to ride it out, but then once on the news they found out it was going to be 10 times worse than that, when my mom sat me down and she's like, "Okay, Erika, this is going to be a little scary, but it's okay. We're going to be here for you. There's going to be a hurricane coming. We're going to go up to Dallas with your uncle for a while, but don't worry. We'll be right back." I was believing my parents because at the same time, I was still a little confused on what's going on since I was just so young. We evacuated before the storm hit. I was just trying to do whatever my mom was just telling me to do. The way my parents dealt with the situation was the best way to handle it in my personal opinion, because if we tried and stayed it, it would have been worse because most likely we would have died.

Narrator (Me)- Even though 2008 was several years ago Erika still remembered the moment her parents told her that they had to leave their home in Galveston to evacuate.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- I was in my Mom's room playing with my little dolls. It was a pretty interesting thing because, because my mom told me that everything was going to be okay. No one would ever expect them to lose a house or anything. So, when I saw my mom packing weird things such as our birth certificate, passport, social security, it was a little confusing at first. When my mom told me to pack my stuff. I was just thinking, "Oh, I'll just like pack my little toys, everything will be fine, I don't need anything important," but when I look back, I kind of regret doing that. Because coming back to find everything destroyed and knowing that I could have brought a little bit more stuff. It was all last minute. My mom was just on the phone with my uncle asking if we could stay for a couple of days, and that's it.

Narrator (Me)- Erika as a child tried hard to find the positive in the situation her and her family found themselves in.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- It was a pretty hectic rush. No one could just say, "Okay, pack whatever you can, pack your whole childhood in a mini car," like that's literally impossible. My baby blankets. That was the first thing I grabbed. I always have it with me everywhere still to this day, I still have it. I was a little scared at first. Everyone's always scared at first because they never know what to expect, but then I started to get a little excited because, you know, we haven't seen our uncle in so long. So, it was like a mini vacation, I guess you could say.

Narrator (Me)- While in Dallas, Erika and her family tried their hardest not to spend every minute there worried about what Hurricane Ike was doing to their home.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- My parents they were in front of the TV constantly watching the news to see what was going on. It wasn't really an elephant in the room. Like it was pretty comfortable, but at the same time you felt a little bit of awkwardness, because the news was on and we still didn't know what was going on because we were left in the dark about what was going on with our home and everything. We always had hope that our house was going to be there or the same little house was going to be there not destroyed, maybe just a little bit of damage, but not to what we saw.

Narrator (Me)- With so much anxiety and fear her family was facing I asked Erika if her parents ever talked to her and her sister Emily about the possibility that they could lose their house.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- They're putting it off until we for sure knew what was happening, because they didn't want to scare us. I really didn't think about it. No seven-year-old really thinks about their house being destroyed by a hurricane.

Narrator (Me)- I couldn't help but wonder if all of fear she had building up made her feel powerless, not knowing if her home will still be there when they finally have to return home to Galveston.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- It did feel a little powerless because like we didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know what was going on. All we knew is that we had to leave.

Narrator (Me)- We shifted the conversation to talking about some specific places Erika was fearful would not be there when she would return back to Galveston, while in Dallas Erika commented her parents were constantly watching the news, and that sadly they saw one place that meant a lot to their family was destroyed.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- Every Friday, my family and I will go to Joe's Crab Shack, and when I saw on the news later that it was completely destroyed, like it broke my heart, because that was our family hangout and just to realize that it was destroyed in 0.2 seconds it was like, wow, this is getting serious. Slowly we were losing hope on our house when we saw that.

Narrator (Me)- Finally, Hurricane Ike passed through Galveston, which made it safe again for Erika and her family to return home to see the damages caused by the hurricane.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- It was a good ride up until we hit the bridge to Galveston. Once we hit the bridge to Galveston, it was crazy. There was people trying to remove boats from the bridge. I specifically remember there will be a nice patch of trees and now they're all completely gone. There was cars flipped over. There was furniture all over the streets, cracks, holes on the streets as well. It was crazy. It was walking into something totally new. Like this wasn't my home anymore. My elementary school was destroyed, completely destroyed. I've been there for four years and it's destroyed, like my whole childhood basically destroyed.

Narrator (Me)- Erika then moved into talking about what destruction in her own neighborhood, and the pain she felt when she saw what the storm had done to her house. This next clip can be a bit more emotional to handle hearing, because Erika tells us about all of destruction, she saw within the neighborhood and of her house.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- My neighborhood was completely destroyed. Houses were completely destroyed. Cars completely destroyed. Like going in, you still try to believe that there's hope, that your house survives, but once you—once I hit my neighborhood, that's where all of us lost hope. We were just like, yeah, we're going to pull up to a house completely destroyed due to this hurricane. It was completely jaw-dropping. No, no one was talking, we were just looking at what used to be our home is now completely destroyed. We didn't know what to do. We didn't know what to say. We didn't know how to feel at all. We pulled up to the house. There was a tree on our roof. Completely left a hole on our roof. There was water up until the second step of the stair's, windows were broken. And as well, we saw our car was moved from where we originally left it. There was dents. The windows were broken as well, and my mom, — it was my mom's car. So, my mom always had a rosary on the window, on the mirror, the rear-view mirror, and that was gone. It was no longer there when we came back. We couldn't take all of our family albums. We couldn't take all of our pictures. We couldn't take our furniture. Of course, some of our clothes we had to leave jewelry as well. Like as soon as we pulled up to our driveway, my mom and dad were just like, "Stay in the car, stay in the car," they were the first ones to enter the house. They didn't want us to see what was destroyed, but as soon as my mom came out, she just got on her knees just started crying, because everything was destroyed, and she was holding her wedding dress in her hand and she was just crying her eyes out, because her wedding dress was destroyed. And then that's when I went inside to see what was destroyed. My first communion dress, the dress I was baptized in as well was destroyed. My dad lost his pictures of his great grandma that died before I was even born. There was a lot of things I regret not grabbing. Like there was some baby toys that I've had since I was little that I didn't grab, because I didn't think too much about it. I wish I grabbed—I helped my mom grabbing more photo albums of us.

Narrator (Me)- After seeing so much of their belongings destroyed it was then time for Erika and her family to decide what they were going to do next.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- The car was completely totaled. There was no way of fixing it. The engine was destroyed. There was dents everywhere, windows were broken. It wouldn't even turn on. We tried. The house was, we couldn't fix it. We couldn't afford to fix it at all one bit. So, we decided to sell it. We were going with the motion. No one knows what to do after their house gets destroyed of course. So as soon as we saw our house, and we went through the whole house to see if we could save anything and nothing was— we couldn't save anything. My mom was just— my mom came up to me she's like, "Okay, Erika, I know this is scary, but right now the only option we have is to go back with tío"— tío means uncle in Spanish—so we went— so we just decided to pack as much as we can, what was salvageable, and moved back to our uncle's in Dallas. We just completely turned back around, because there was no point of staying.

Narrator (Me)- Not only did Erika's family lose their house and favorite hang out spots to Hurricane Ike her parents also lost their jobs.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- They completely lost their jobs, because the company buildings were destroyed where they were working. And so, we went to Dallas my dad and my parents were both jobless. They were jobless forever, at least five months before actually finding a new one. We were, luckily, our uncle was nice enough to let us move in with. We basically stayed in Dallas for a good year and a half before we were able to get back on our feet.

Narrator (Me)- Erika was very grateful for her uncle for allowing her and her family to live there after losing their home. Erika's family eventually made their way to Houston Texas where we ended up meeting each other and have been best friends since. Erika says she still feels scared when she hears about hurricanes but thinks she has grown so much from that one experience of her and her family Surviving Hurricane Ike. Here's some of Erika's final thoughts, as well as her advice for when dealing with a Hurricane like Ike or a natural disaster.

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Interviewee (Erika Verra)- I think it needed to happen, um, I'm not going to say I'm grateful that it happened, but if it didn't happen, then I wouldn't have met the amazing people that I have in my life now. If you could leave, just leave, pack up as much as you can and leave. There's no easier way to do it. Have a backup plan as well. I kind of hope my parents had a backup plan, but they didn't it, but now people have time. People have— there's more resources now um due to previous natural disasters as well. Ike was one of the worst events that I had to experience personally, and I would never want to put an experience like that on

my worst enemy because it was— it was a lot to deal with even still to this day, you still suffer from, from it and no one should ever have to deal with that. So, I— I always recommend going out and um, if you need help find the help that you need. I'm glad I got to share my story.

Narrator (Me)- Thank you so much for listening to my podcast Surviving Hurricane Ike I hope you enjoyed.

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