

76-year-old rides out Hurricane Harvey, 4-state road to recovery

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A survivor's story: One year after Hurricane Harvey

AUSTIN, Texas — Lying on her bed in Port Aransas the night after Hurricane Harvey tore through, Sandra Maynard was startled when her lap dog, Fritz, began to bark.

“I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, the looters are here.’”

The 76-year-old had just inventoried her home and was making plans for her second night alone since her one-story townhome flooded with rainwater and sewage. She had a flashlight, but all her candles were gone.

“I did have sheets and stuff in a closet,” she said, “but if I put them on the bed, they would only get wet because the mattress was all wet.”

No one else in Maynard’s 29-unit housing complex had waited out the storm, so when two men approached her window, she was frightened initially. But it turned out to be the Port Aransas police.

“Are you Sandra Maynard?” they asked. “We’re here to evacuate you.”



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Even almost a year later, sitting in a FEMA-provided housing unit, the relief Maynard felt that day overwhelms her.

“I’m sorry, at this point [in the story], I always cry,” she says. “I really thought I was going to have to spend another night in that terrible place.”

‘If you don’t leave, you’ll be the last one’

Maynard had undergone a medical procedure only a few weeks before Harvey, and her condition had worsened, making it difficult to drive. As Harvey approached, she saw her neighbors packing up their cars.

“I went out in the morning [of Aug. 25] ... and they said, ‘We’re not staying. We’re leaving. ... If you don’t leave, you’ll be the last one.’”

Maynard may have been able to catch a ride to safety with a neighbor, but she was too independent to ask. She didn’t want to be a bother.

The wind and rain grew stronger throughout the day, and Maynard lost power around 5 p.m. At 9, she lay down to try to sleep, but it was nearly impossible.

“The wind was so severe, it sounded like somebody was throwing bowling balls on the roof. It was just pounding, pounding,” she said. “About quarter to 10, I thought, ‘Gosh, I hear water.’ I got out of bed, and my feet were already in water [before they touched the ground].”



Water was coming through the spaces around Maynard's front door and windows. Worse, there was water coming up through her bathtub and toilet — sewage water that mixed with the rainwater flooding her house.

Facing the destruction

Eventually the water stopped rising, just short of 3 feet, and Maynard lay down again and drifted off

to sleep. When she woke the next morning, she got her first look at the destruction Harvey had left behind.

“I went outside ... and there was debris all over the place. I walked around and [there was] nobody — it was quiet, very quiet,” she said.

“There's a little mini-mall in front of our townhouses, and there was a boat sitting up by one of the stores and a couple of boats in street,” she continued. “All the windows and doors were blown out of all the mini-mall stores. I could have gone in and helped myself.”

The first person she saw was driving a white pickup. When he pulled over to take photos, Maynard asked for a ride to a friend's house on higher ground, and he agreed. But they ran into floodwaters before they could reach it. The stranger took Maynard back to her townhome, where she asked him to wait while she went inside to look for money.

“All I had was \$10,” she remembered. “I gave it to him, and I gave him my niece's phone number ... and I said, ‘Would you call her and tell her to come and get me if



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she can?”

Maynard's niece, Shawn, lives in Richmond, Texas, about 3 ½ hours away in normal driving conditions. With any luck, Maynard wouldn't have to spend another night in her dirty, soaked townhouse. But at that point, she wasn't feeling very lucky.

Family reunion

Around 4:30 in the afternoon, Maynard realized her niece probably wasn't coming that day, and she began making plans for the night. When the police later showed up to evacuate her, Maynard thought the nightmare was finally over.

They took her to City Hall, where an EMT checked her vital signs and told her the readings looked fine. Then a state trooper walked up.

“He said, ‘Are you Sandra Maynard? Your niece is down at the police barrier.’” Incredulously, Sandra asked, “She made it?”

She had made it, and the state trooper immediately took Maynard to the barricade for a reunion.

“When I saw my niece, I cried, and she was crying, and we hugged and hugged,” Maynard said. “I didn't think she was coming, and I was just so tickled to death to see someone who cared enough to drive through the hurricane to come get me.”



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Maynard's immediate post-Harvey crisis was over, but as many disaster survivors find, the road to recovery was just beginning.

In search of a new home

"We started for Richmond, and we were actually driving in the hurricane, because it was slowly moving up to Houston," Maynard said of her trip north with her niece. "[We saw] a lot of places had been devastated."

After arriving in Richmond and enjoying "the best shower I had ever taken in my whole life," Maynard mercifully sank into a peaceful sleep. Until early the next morning.

"Shawn woke me up the next morning and says, 'We have to evacuate.' I said, 'What?!'"

The Army Corps of Engineers was preparing to open the gates to a reservoir in an effort to prevent uncontrollable flooding. Unfortunately that meant Shawn's community, Pecan Grove, could flood very soon.

Shawn and her family headed to her daughter's home, but it wasn't big enough to accommodate Maynard too, so she went to her nephew's home in Sealy, Texas.

That was Sunday. On Thursday, she had to be rushed to the hospital due to her worsening medical condition.

Maynard spent seven days in the hospital in Katy, Texas, then returned home with



her nephew, Dan. After only three days, she had to be rushed to the hospital again. The doctors in Katy couldn't figure out how to help Maynard, so they sent her by ambulance to a hospital in Houston.

"The hospital was crowded," she said. "This is [shortly after] the hurricane. There were lots and lots of people who were suffering."

Soon she returned to her nephew's home in Sealy, where her health slowly improved during the next month. She then spent a month with her niece in Richmond, a month with her sister in Wisconsin, and a month with her daughter in Minneapolis. Then she journeyed to Illinois, where she planned to spend a month with her cousin.

A place I could call my own

"[Right] after the hurricane, my daughter got on the phone [to FEMA] and started to put me in for help," Maynard said. "She was right on the ball ... right in there pitching for me to get some kind of help and aid."

By the time Maynard left for Illinois to spend a month with her cousin, FEMA had called her a couple of times to offer temporary housing, but their options didn't fit her needs. Maynard had lost her car to Harvey, and she wanted a place near Port Aransas so she could go home periodically to check the progress on her home's rebuild.

Shortly after she arrived in Illinois, FEMA called again, this time with an available mobile housing unit (MHU) in Rockport, Texas, less than 20 miles from her home. Maynard said, "I'll take it!" and moved into the MHU in January.



“I’m very happy to have a place that I could call my own — that I wasn’t sitting in somebody’s apartment or house and being an extra burden to them,” she said. “After five months of living with other people, you get kind of stressed out. You just think, ‘Am I ever going to be back?’”

Maynard found her MHU clean, comfortable and well-equipped. It came with furniture, bedding and kitchen appliances, and FEMA picks up the tab for the utilities and rental of the lot.

“I’m very happy with what I’ve got from FEMA, although it did take me a while [to get it],” she said with a laugh. “I was surprised how well they’re looking after me; [the MHU even has] a sprinkler system in case there’s a fire.”

Maynard visits the local senior center often, and people frequently ask how she was able to get a FEMA housing unit. Many complain that they deserve federal help too but haven’t received it.

“You have to go after it yourself,” she tells them. “Don’t sit back and wait for them to come to you. You have to be on the ball. ... If you want something in life you have to go after it.”

To view a video on this topic, visit www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey.

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/>.



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