

Storm Stories Transcript

Gail Melliush

JULIE: This is Julie Christie interviewing Gail Melliush of Cardiff about the storms of June 8-11, 2007.

GAIL: My name's Gail Melliush. I was here in the floods, we have the vet clinic at Cardiff. It was about half past 5 on that Friday night. I had one client in the waiting room with their dog, who was a diabetic, who was coming to pick him up, and it was a nice quiet evening, we all thought we were all going to get out nice and early and then the storm hit. The water started to come down, quite heavily down the footpath, we looked out and went oh gee that's looking a bit a ominous and we spoke to the owner of the dog and said I think you really need to take your dog home. And within about 5 minutes when we looked back out the, out the front door, her car which was parked out the front was starting to float, and that's when we realised that we were really in some trouble. So I raced in and basically tried to lift my computers up off the ground, concerned we were going to wipe out all the computer system, then I realised that would be the least of our problems. And then we raced out to get our cats that were in our boarding facility out the back, we had about 7 cats in boarding so my nurse and I ducked out there and started to get cats into boxes to bring in to the hospital. By now the water was probably, up 6 or 7 inches into the back room and the cats were starting to get wet and we got 2 cats in, in their boxes and inside into the high cages which were sort of 3 foot up off the ground. And then the lights went out so now we had probably 10 inches of water running through the building and no lights so we ferreted around looking for a torch, got the torch, got the rest of the cats from out in the cattery inside and realised that even 3 foot off the ground may not have been enough room. So then we also had a 50 kilo collapsed dog who we couldn't lift, or we couldn't walk so luckily a neighbour, came down and he took the dog up to his house, we didn't know him from a bar of soap, and, but he came in, took the dogs. We then loaded all the cats into my car and thought that we were gonna drive out of here and go back to my place and put them all in the garage. But, once we loaded up 7 cats, my nurse, myself, the client, her dog and, drove off, we realised that we were trapped cause there was no way out. All the water had cut of all our access roads so. By this stage we were also absolutely drenched cause we'd been outside ferrying animals. Inside, the water in the clinic probably got to about 2 foot 6, it was up quite high, up the doors, it became obvious that we're gonna have some dramas trying to open the doors, when we got into one room the flood of water pushed the door shut. For a moment there we thought we were gonna be trapped and we couldn't get out especially because it was all pitch darkness. But we got out, drove around, I was so cold that my teeth were chattering I couldn't speak, people thought I was in shock but I was just frozen cold. And I thought we can't do this, we can't sit here all night in the car freezing to death. So we then came back and knocked on the door of the guy who'd taken our dog and went in there and he had about half a dozen people from the beauticians two doors down, they were all in there standing in front of his fire, and we all piled out with all our animals and stood in his lounge room as it were. And we probably stayed there for an hour or two. We were absolutely freezing and it was all, everybody had a blackout, so he gave us some clothes to put on and we, sat there for a while and luckily for us he had a truck so he went to try and get us out and see if he could carry us out anywhere, and my nur, one of my other nurses lives at Glendale so we managed to get out. We left all the animals at his house, and he got us out to our nurses house then. By then we got, in touch with my partner, and said, clinics under 3 feet of water, got all the animals out, they're at the guy up the roads house so he came in from Merewether

and we managed to come back. By then the water had subsided down to about 6 or 7 inches so we could walk over via the overhead bridge and come down and get the animals out. So we got them all back to his house and, yeah came in on the Saturday to look at the devastation. So back on the Saturday morning we rallied the troops and we had, 3 of our nurses, and their partners, my husband and, we came in to find about 6 inches of sludge all through the building, no power, no computers, no phones, just mess and so, we all just got in and started cleaning and hosing and I'm miss pessimist and I going we're never going to open again this is, we're out of action for at least a month and my optimistic partners going no, no we will be, we'll be up and running on Tuesday, and I'm thinking in your dreams. So yeah, Mr optimistic said oh no we'll be, we'll be up and running on Tuesday, and, I still had my doubts but we just kept cleaning and cleaning and cleaning and counting all our things that were missing and making up drug orders to get the orders in early than in on the Tuesday. Yeah a lot of effort, a lot of time, a lot of sludge and, cleaned it back up and, we were up and running on that Tuesday morning we opened. Surprisingly someone turned up on the Saturday morning in amongst the devastation with their dog he wanted to have desexed and we said, sorry, we're not really able to do that at the moment. So we were sort of, we were up and we were able to function not completely normally for probably a week cause a lot of our, our x-ray machines got damaged, most of my tax records floated out the door, I think, and disappeared down the street. Its amazing how much stuff you have that you don't realise what its worth until you start trying to, replace it and things that you just can't replace like your tax records and, yes there's so many things that, you don't realise how important they are until they're gone. But, yeah we've, we've been lucky compared to a lot of the other places because we've been able to work and still earn an income so, most of the other shops down here have had to close and, and it would make an impact to their work, for sure, and their income. But, and now we've actually just spent 9 months renovating our clinic and we now have to pull it all apart and start all over again. Because all the draws in the new cabinetry are all swollen and, the walls have all been moist and, moved, flooring is all the adhesives on the vinyl flooring have been affected by the water so all the floors have to come up. The walls have been removed from probably 3 feet down and every piece of furniture we have and cabinetry is gunna be replaced. Our computers have all, all of our computer system got wiped out, so our telephone systems so we've had to replace all of that but, yeah so it's been hard but it'll be an ongoing problem it's not something that's just over and done with in a week even though you look. A lot of our clients come in and think oh you didn't get anything, we show them the pictures and they go oh, oh gee you've done well to get back up, so but yeah that's probably, our story really [laughs].

JULIE: Have you been able to visit your rescuer?

GAIL: Yes, our rescuer has only moved into the area 2 weeks ago, and we were very grateful when he looked after us, and I said if you have any problems with your animals obviously bring them down to us. And, sure enough a week later he bought one of his, he has 2 dogs, he bought one down, we saw her and, and resolved her problems and then probably 3 weeks later he was down with the other dog and I said oh how's your female dog? And he went she's disappeared and, she disappeared but funnily enough I had a lady in a week earlier with a stray dog that turned out to be his dog and she gave the [unclear] and he hadn't looked and she hadn't scanned it to see if it was micro chipped and the microchip wasn't in the right name. And it was only that I put 2 and 2 together and went hmmm I remember that dog cause she was on heat and yes so yes we've seen him since and I think Kay and everybody has

been up to see him as well the, the other ladies that were there. But, yes certainly bring you together when you, as I said we didn't know him, he'd only just moved in, and really he was certainly our knight in, shining armour for sure [laughs]. Yeah, initially when the water started racing down the street we went out and had a look at the drain, cause we were right next to a drain, and there was a lot of debris stuck in the wire across the drain, 2 garbage bins and, my nurse and I stood up trying to lift them over but they were full so they were too heavy for us and, and even in the time we stood there the bits of wood and things started to block up behind it. Now in retrospect after having seen all the stories about the people that have been swept away and the things, I certainly wouldn't, try and do it again cause probably if we had lifted it, cleared it, it would have just pushed us down, now luckily for us we're not in the drain it wouldn't have pushed us into a drain it would have just flung us back on to the road but, yeah you don't realise the force of the water until it hits you, and you don't realise how quick, that, that's the. We looked out the front and the time it took me to walk probably 10 yards to the front door and go geez that waters getting high and then walk out the back, our cats were going underwater in that 2 minutes, its just lapping to 3 or 4 inches and then to 6 or 8 inches to 2 or 3 feet, that all happened in, oh, I think, probably 15 minutes. And you don't think we have to get people in off the street to stand in the doorways and hold the doors open so that we could keep getting in and out. We could see it's dark, we could see things floating out our doors, like our dog foods were floating out the door and, and as it turned out because we've been renovating our back room had all of our tax, all our paperwork things were sitting in boxes in the middle of the room ready to get put into storage. And when we came in on Saturday there was nothing left in our room. I bought a dryer that morning, that had floated off down the, hallway, it worked, we plugged it back in, and it worked. Our [unclear] got ripped out of the wall, ripped the socket out of the wall but we plugged it back in and it worked and our air conditioner went under 4 foot of water and it works but its not gunna work in 6 months time. It's all gunna rust out.

JULIE: The people that were holding the doors open for you, were they just trying to get home or? Where did they from?

GAIL: No, most of our help came from the beauticians, three doors down they came up and said do you need any help and we had, there was, a lady, her daughter and her husband, and a couple of the girls who worked for her and then the guy from up the road came down, cause he had a torch cause the darkness was a big issue, you couldn't, we knew where everything was so we were wading through the water but they didn't. So they just had, they could only just stand there while we moved. And initially they came and said do you need any help and we went no, no we're right, because we thought oh yeah we'll get the cats into the car that's not a big drama, but my nurse, her car was parked in the driveway and the [?wall?] smashed in on her car and wrote it off. So it got floated and then it got smashed in the windows, so it was storm damaged and flood damaged. And it looked like a car yard the next day, there was just, cause we, there was a hole in the drain and all the water rushed under our building and pushed all the footpath up, and there was probably 2 tonne of sand out the front of our building that, the footpath was all up and down like an earthquake had been and, and then great piles of sand everywhere. The cars out the front had like 2 foot of sand up all around there wheels, so, yeah unbelievable amount of devastation, you can't picture it gunna happen.