

## Biography

Barbra Kay “Babs” Faulk was born September 18, 1946, in Andalusia, Alabama. Her parents were Archie Lee Faulk and Katrine Griffin. Ms. Faulk received her education through attending public schools in Samson, Alabama, and the University of Alabama. Over the years, Ms. Faulk has held several jobs with various not-for-profit organizations, including the American Red Cross, United Way, and the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation. She also worked as the public relations director for the City of Hattiesburg for two and a half years.

Ms. Faulk first moved to Hattiesburg in 1973. She married her husband, John Blanks, in Hattiesburg on March 28, 1987. In 1989, Ms. Faulk then moved to Florida in 1989, but she returned to Hattiesburg in 1993, where she still lives today. Although she is currently retired, Ms. Faulk remains actively involved in volunteer work with several social service organizations. Her other hobbies include bicycling, working out at the YMCA, and reading.

## Table of Contents

Working for the Red Cross.....	1
Types of assistance provided by the Red Cross.....	2
Preparing for Hurricane Katrina.....	3
Number of people in local Red Cross shelters.....	4
Importance of volunteers.....	5
Reaction to criticism.....	6
Comparisons between Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina.....	7
Greatest challenges during the storm.....	8
Dealing with stress caused by the storm.....	10
Sources of support.....	12
Timeframe for the recovery process.....	13
Plans after retirement.....	14

## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

BARBRA KAY “BABS” FAULK

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Barbra Kay “Babs” Faulk and is taking place on November 3, 2005. The interviewer is David Tisdale.*

**Tisdale:** This is David Tisdale with the The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. Today is November 3, 2005, and today we’re visiting with Babs Faulk. She is the director of the South Central Mississippi Chapter of the Red Cross. And Babs, you are, I guess, the outgoing director. I understand you’ll be retiring.

**Faulk:** Right. I am retiring at the end of the year.

**Tisdale:** Now, you announced your retirement as I understand before Hurricane Katrina hit.

**Faulk:** Right.

**Tisdale:** And so I guess you’re kind of going out with a bang.

**Faulk:** It looks that way.

**Tisdale:** Now, how long have you been with the Red Cross?

**Faulk:** Well, I’ve been with the Red Cross off and on since 1968 either as a staff member or volunteer, but I’ve been back here as chapter manager since June of 1997.

**Tisdale:** Now, why did you choose to work for Red Cross? Have you done other volunteer work in the past?

**Faulk:** Well, I’m a staff member. I’m a paid staff member, but I’ve done Red Cross volunteer work off and on since I was a child. When I was very young my mother used to take me to the Red Cross blood mobiles with her. So the first time I ever served as a Red Cross volunteer was in 1954, and I was just a wee child then and I would go to the blood drives with my mom and they would let me carry the big—they had jars then they drew the blood in and they would let me carry the jars from the donor table over to the technician’s, which I can’t believe they let a child my age do, but that’s how I got started in Red Cross. And then I became a Red Cross staff

member as a caseworker during the Vietnam War in 1968. Learned a lot very quickly and then became a chapter manager later. But I think one of the reasons Red Cross has been a good fit for me, as have my other not-for-profit jobs, is because I think my nature is that I need to be in a job where I can help people, and this has afforded me the opportunity to do it. I don't think I ever needed to be afforded the opportunity that we've had with Hurricane Katrina but, you know, we do what we can.

**Tisdale:** Generally speaking, what kind of assistance does Red Cross provide for disasters?

**Faulk:** OK, for disasters, our main responsibilities, because we are chartered by Congress to be the primary not-for-profit provider of disaster services—that's one of the two things in our congressional charter—the things that we are mandated pretty much to do are to provide shelter, food, medical care, and disaster mental health services, and those of course are the initial things that we do when any large disaster or even small disaster happens. We want to make sure people have a place to stay, we want to make sure they've got food to eat, and that their medical needs are taken care of. So initially when a disaster happens we open shelters, and with this disaster operation I think we opened seven or eight and then consolidated in a few days to the Multi-Purpose Center in Hattiesburg, then into a facility down in Lumberton, Mississippi. Those were the ones here in the South Central Mississippi area; of course, we have dozens and dozens across not only Mississippi but other states. We work closely with the Salvation Army; they help provide food in our shelters. But in addition to the food in the shelters, we set up feeding sites in Wiggins, Columbia, Collins, and Hattiesburg, and out of the kitchens in Columbia, Collins, I'm sorry—Columbia, Wiggins, and Hattiesburg we put food into what are called our emergency response vehicles, the big Red Cross trucks, and got food and snacks and diapers and water and other supplies out into the outlying areas in nine or ten counties.

**Tisdale:** And that's the area that this chapter serves now.

**Faulk:** Well, our chapters are seven counties.

**Tisdale:** Seven.

**Faulk:** But during this operation we kind of had a couple of others that we were working in and we provided over 553,000 meals and snacks, and that operation went on for about four or five weeks. Now, the shelters, the large shelter stayed open for five weeks but all of our shelters are closed and all of our mobile and fixed feeding sites, you know, all of that ended by pretty much the end of September, early October.

**Tisdale:** Prior to Hurricane Katrina, what kind of disaster relief work had you been involved with?

**Faulk:** Well, I mean, we respond to disasters for twenty-four hours a day/seven days a week, that's when I'm on a pager or one of our other folks are on a pager. We deal

with single-family fires every single day. We had [Hurricane] Dennis a few weeks before. We opened nine shelters during Hurricane Dennis and fortunately it was a party we gave and nobody came. It was a huge disaster effort that we anticipated a lot of work and didn't have it and we're happy for that. I think that's the biggest thing this spring. Back last spring we had some small flooding in some of our outlying areas. Last year during *the* hurricanes in Florida we opened shelters on numerous occasions. We dealt with evacuees that came up here and stayed with family. We're now dealing with evacuees from Hurricane Rita that are staying with families here. We had, of course, the dam break a couple of years ago that was very unique to our area where we worked with eighty families there. So on any given day it's a different thing. It may be—last year we had an apartment fire that was pretty much Hispanic families. We had to make sure we had an interpreter there. Just a few months ago we had an apartment fire that a couple of the families that lived in it were mentally challenged, which gave us a new way of dealing with things because we had to make sure we got their family involved because they needed medication very quickly but didn't know what they needed. So we're always dealing with hurricane evacuations. There's hardly a year goes by that we don't have a hurricane evacuation. We've been very fortunate and I'm almost afraid to say it, we haven't had too much flooding in the last couple of years but there's been some. Tornadoes, straight-line winds, you name it we've dealt with it. The one thing we haven't had and hope we never do is ice storms. I don't think that's too big a threat here, or earthquakes, but who knows. You know, and right now everything's so dry. We are extremely concerned about forest fires getting out of control.

**Tisdale:** That's right. We've had very little rain since the hurricane.

**Faulk:** Right. Right. But most of the disasters that we deal with are smaller in nature. Just a few families from an apartment fire or a single family that lost their home, we have those, like I said, almost every single day.

**Tisdale:** Go back to August, let's say 26, 27, 28, that weekend.

**Faulk:** Uh-huh, we were getting ready.

**Tisdale:** Yeah, that's what I was going to ask was do you have, does the Red Cross have a set response—

**Faulk:** Oh yeah.

**Tisdale:** —for various types of disasters?

**Faulk:** Oh, absolutely. We have a disaster plan that takes up four or five three-ring binders with all kinds of appendix that go with it depending on what we're dealing with and where it is.

**Tisdale:** So it's like a crisis plan, done in advance.

**Faulk:** It's a crisis plan, it's a disaster plan and that is updated on a continual basis. We, on the 26 and 27 and 28, were here making sure that we had volunteers lined up to work in the shelters, making sure that we had current shelter agreements with the shelters that we were going to open if instructed to do so by Emergency Management because they are the ones that we work with. We work with six different emergency—or seven different emergency managers in eight different counties and they are the ones that call us and say, "We think it's time to open a shelter in our area." What we traditionally do with a hurricane evacuation is we try to identify shelters that are strategically placed along the evacuation routes. Because we are situated where we are, we always anticipate evacuees from both Louisiana and Mississippi when something threatens that area. Quite often Alabama and Florida are included in that. Last year during the hurricanes that hit Florida, there was one particular one that we had evacuees from Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama, but not really from Louisiana. This time our evacuees were primarily Louisiana/Mississippi because that's what we were, that was the area that was threatened.

So, and we also have, of course, people from our local areas who live in maybe older wood-frame houses, mobile homes or older apartments that always come to our shelters because even if we're not really threatened here, they feel more secure being in our shelters. And so we were getting ready making sure that was lined up and that we had all our cell phones activated. Cellular South provides those phones to us. We made sure we had those on hand, that we had radios from Emergency Management, that we had ham radio operators on standby to come in case we lost power which, you know, we did for almost two weeks, so without the ham radio operators we would really have been in a pickle. But we were doing those kind of things: make sure that we had plenty of water, that we had supplies on hand, that we had food orders ready to fax to Sam's and to the Merchant's Company and to our other providers, and we were working with our national organization to get people that we thought we would need on standby. Our emergency response vehicle was dispatched to the Coast on the [August] 27 because that was the staging area for the emergency response people. So we were doing those kind of things in the days before Hurricane Katrina. And then, of course, opened shelters on Sunday, the day before the storm hit, because you don't want to wait and do that when the storm's happening.

**Tisdale:** Right. Right. About how many people do you think you, well, could you estimate that y'all wound up serving? And I guess to some degree you're still providing services—

**Faulk:** Oh yeah. Well, I mean, we—

**Tisdale:** —even now, even as we speak today.

**Faulk:** —we'll be doing services on this disaster for probably three or four years. We had about 2,200 in the shelters, at the height of the storm, which was really far fewer than we anticipated. We think a lot of people went east and west or went further north because we did not have nearly the numbers that we thought we would have. There

were shelters open as far away as Virginia, especially once New Orleans and the Mississippi Coast had to be evacuated after the storm. We still have shelters open around the country.

**Tisdale:** Well, we were all kind of surprised that this turned towards us pretty quick.

**Faulk:** Oh yeah.

**Tisdale:** Because on Friday a lot, you know, we were still—early in the day we were getting forecasts that it was going to Destin or Panama City—

**Faulk:** Right.

**Tisdale:** —or farther, and then by day's end it's coming, you know, the prediction is Mobile, Pascagoula. Then, of course, as we know, it came right for the, directly for the Coast and New Orleans. So it sounds like the Red Cross gets ready well in advance—

**Faulk:** Oh yeah.

**Tisdale:** —no matter what.

**Faulk:** It's a constant thing. It's an ongoing process. We, year round, try to recruit and train volunteers to get them placed in strategic positions to know what they're going to do and without those hundreds of volunteers that responded, whether they were our trained volunteers or spontaneous volunteers that came in to help for a few hours or a few days, or are still here helping, we would not have been able to do our work. And then, of course, the hundreds of volunteers that came from across the country.

**Tisdale:** So you feel good about the volunteer response that you had?

**Faulk:** Oh, it was phenomenal. We had volunteers from as far away as Canada, Scotland and Spain. I have to tell you my Spain story. Can I tell you my Spain story?

**Tisdale:** Sure, yeah.

**Faulk:** Had a young man named José who was here visiting friends. When he was in college in Madrid he roomed with a young man from Hattiesburg who was in college, studying abroad and they got to be friends. So when José came to America to learn to speak [English] a few months ago, at the end of his training he came to Hattiesburg to visit. Well, when the storm threatened, the Spanish Embassy called and they were going to send a helicopter to evacuate José, and he said, "I'm not going. I want to be an American Red Cross volunteer." And they said, "You must get out of harm's way." And he said, "I'm not going. I want to be an American Red Cross volunteer."

So the family that he was visiting with brought him here the Thursday after the storm hit and he was here for over a month.

**Tisdale:** Wow.

**Faulk:** He slept on a cot right here in my office and took a shower with all the other volunteers staying in the Girl Scout Troop Activity Center and he worked on our, out in the field in our emergency response vehicles sixteen hours [a day], seven days a week, taking food and water and supplies out into the area. And, of course, all the teenage girls fell in love with him because he had this *wonderful* accent and he was very cute. The thing that was interesting to us is [that] I would answer the phone at 6:30 in the morning and it would be a TV station or a radio station in Spain wanting to talk to José, or a TV station or a newspaper in Germany. So I went, “OK, this is not just your typical kid.” So I said to José, “José, are you special?”—after the twentieth phone call from media in Spain—and he said, “Yes, I’m special. I’m special because I’m a Red Cross volunteer.” And that was the end of the conversation. We later learned that he is from a very prominent Spanish family. But he spent five weeks, got his visa extended and we had to do all the paperwork to get him back home when it was time, so that he could be a Red Cross volunteer, and he ended up on the main Web page on our national Web site.

**Tisdale:** Oh, that’s fantastic.

**Faulk:** Yeah, it was great.

**Tisdale:** So that’s probably your most outstanding commemorative stand-out and I know there’s a lot of them.

**Faulk:** Well, there’s so many, but that was just such an incredible experience for all of us that he was willing to work that hard when he could’ve gotten out of the way, when we had dozens and dozens and dozens of people here who it never occurred to them that there was something they could do to help. Yeah, it was special. We’re all going to visit him.

**Tisdale:** Oh, OK, well that sounds fun.

**Faulk:** And stay at his house.

**Tisdale:** That sounds good. There was a lot of criticism and finger pointing after this disaster.

**Faulk:** Absolutely. Will continue to be.

**Tisdale:** Well, you know, state, local, federal officials, charitable, with the disorganization—what are your thoughts on how the response was that these victims, not only from this organization but from others you know across the, and would you—

**Faulk:** We get hate mail every day. I get cussed—if I don't get cussed out by 8:30 in the morning every day, used to be 6:30, I feel like I'm not doing my job. I had to have my phone number at home changed to a private number because I was getting calls at four o'clock in the morning—once I finally got to go home—being cussed out, you know, from people that didn't get what they think they needed. That's the nature of the beast. I think that every organization probably did a good job. I think we all could've done a better job, but absolutely nobody from the president's office in Washington to the Red Cross office in Hattiesburg and everybody in between had ever dealt with anything like this. There's no way for us to have had the experience or the expertise or the equipment or the supplies or the volunteers or the money or anything else because this was bigger than anything we have *ever* dealt with.

**Tisdale:** Had you had any experience with like Hurricane Camille or maybe a disaster?

**Faulk:** I worked [Hurricane] Andrew as a volunteer twelve weeks after—

**Tisdale:** Hurricane Andrew was hit, um—

**Faulk:** Miami.

**Tisdale:** Miami.

**Faulk:** In 1992.

**Tisdale:** Right.

**Faulk:** That was the biggest thing Red Cross had ever dealt with, and between then and now it was still the biggest thing Red Cross had ever dealt with other than 9/11 [September 11, 2001], which is a different kind of disaster.

**Tisdale:** Right. In your mind did this top Andrew? I mean, in terms of the devastation?

**Faulk:** Oh yeah. The number of people killed, the area that was devastated, and certainly the amount of dollars it's going to cost to take care of this disaster, but nobody could've possibly been prepared to respond to this.

**Tisdale:** Would you describe it as just an overwhelming—

**Faulk:** Oh yeah, totally overwhelming. I said that on national TV when I was asked, "Are you overwhelmed?" I said, "Absolutely, we are all overwhelmed." I do think we—I do *hope* that all of us, whether it's a federal agency or not-for-profit depending on donations like us, have learned to plan bigger. But I can tell you—

**Tisdale:** Do you think that's the biggest thing that's been learned from this? That was what I was going to ask you, do you think—

**Faulk:** Yeah. It's just that you know—

**Tisdale:** What would you do different?

**Faulk:** —be prepared for the worst. Yeah, uh, have a lot more people strategically placed earlier on. One of the things that is a misconception to the public is that we are—people think we're a government agency and that we have a zillion people, you know, ready to go at a moment's notice and all this equipment and supplies. Well, we have six emergency response vehicles in the state of Mississippi. We have eighteen Red Cross chapters. The largest one has maybe nine or ten staff members; ours here has five, during the storm we only had four. And so even with a lot of volunteers, you know, it takes a while to get things in place. One of the things Red Cross has done for several years and one of the emphasis areas for us, and with the help of our local media, has been to educate people to be prepared to take care of themselves for up to three days in their homes. Well, they need to take that message seriously. You need to have enough water in your house to take care of yourself. You better have a first aid kit.

**Tisdale:** So part of it is personal responsibility.

**Faulk:** Personal responsibility, absolutely, bottom line. I didn't have enough water in my house because, you know, what my husband and I said— when's the last time we did without water? You know, have enough flashlights, have medication there, have an escape route from your house. We have dozens, as you well know, of people who had to cut their way out of their houses. Those are things that you can say, "OK, I'm going to be prepared for." You couldn't get in and out of my neighborhood. There probably wasn't three people in our neighborhood with a chainsaw because I live in the middle of town and you don't cut stuff down with a chainsaw in your yard, but we needed them thirty minutes after Katrina hit because you couldn't get out of our, in or out of our neighborhood. But I just, I think nobody, there's no way we could've been as prepared as we should've been. I think there is now, but I do think we have to take responsibility. I was so, I was flabbergasted when [Hurricane] Wilma hit Florida and you have people that went through five hurricanes last year that knew for ten days that it was coming, who stood in lines blaming FEMA and Red Cross because they didn't have water in their house and gas in their tank—*hello?*

**Tisdale:** Hmm. Yeah, that was—

**Faulk:** They knew for ten days and they went through five last year. I think I would've gone and bought water and Spam and tuna fish and canned pears, you know. I got them in my house now, and will have forever. But we do have, we as individuals have to take responsibility for ourselves. We feel like we were incredibly quick in responding to have—to sit down with Salvation Army four days or three days into it,

four days, and start planning the routes on where their feeding vans would go and ours would go because they certainly don't need to go in the same area, and that by the fourth or fifth day we were providing food in the field. I think that's a phenomenal response as big as this is, and that by the fourth or fifth day we had volunteers from as far away as California and Washington in our parking lot here to help. That's a phenomenal response.

**Tisdale:** What were the biggest challenges?

**Faulk:** Not being able to get supplies. Sysco was not able to meet the Salvation Army or Red Cross needs because they were so enormous in four different states—

**Tisdale:** And Sysco, that's the food service?

**Faulk:** That's a food supplier. Merchants Company, locally, helped us as much as they could and did a phenomenal job. Sanderson Farms in Laurel, the thousands of dollars worth of food they donated, I can't even imagine. Folks like John Curtis at All Brand Foods who came and sat in here when we had no power and got on his cell phone while we were on ours and found a supplier that could make 5,000 sandwiches a day and it ended up being 15,000 a day for us—those kind of things that happened. We just figured it out, trying to work to get water in here. Sam's was—we faxed them an order at 5:30 every morning, and 7:30 every morning we picked it up. You know, you just figured it out. But I mean, the fact that we had no power, we had no water, we had no phones, and so communication was the *biggest* challenge, but getting supplies was, in a sense, to be bigger because people have to be fed and babies got to have diapers and—

**Tisdale:** Medicine.

**Faulk:** —Cindy has got to have her insulin.

**Tisdale:** Right.

**Faulk:** Yeah. So that was the biggest thing as far as trying to make sure that happened, and what compounded that was the lack of communications.

**Tisdale:** Do you think expectations were unrealistic?

**Faulk:** Absolutely, I think expectations were unrealistic. Absolutely. They will be next time. We are an organization that depends on volunteers. Salvation Army is an organization that just depends on volunteers. Seventh Day Adventist is an organization that depends on volunteers. Southern Baptist Kitchens depend on volunteers. And they have to come from other areas because so many of our people here were trying to get out of their houses and take care of their own. But we had, one of the things that was amazing to me, we had volunteers who came and worked here and never told us their homes were destroyed. They came and worked.

**Tisdale:** Incredible.

**Faulk:** Sixteen, twenty, twenty-four hours a day and never said a word about the fact that they didn't have a house to go home to.

**Tisdale:** What does this do for you, personally? You know, you're about to retire, I mean, you made plans for retirement, and all of a sudden this comes—has this been a life-changing event for you?

**Faulk:** Yeah, absolutely a life-changing event.

**Tisdale:** I mean, and you face a lot of—

**Faulk:** Priorities are totally different.

**Tisdale:** And you face a lot of tragedies.

**Faulk:** Ah yeah, because that's all I've ever done my whole life pretty much, with the exception of a few years, is working not-for-profit.

**Tisdale:** And you've been to Vietnam.

**Faulk:** No, I haven't been to Vietnam.

**Tisdale:** Oh, OK. I thought you said—

**Faulk:** I was a case worker during the Vietnam War, but I was a case worker in Alabama where Craig Air Force Base was.

**Tisdale:** OK.

**Faulk:** No, I never went overseas.

**Tisdale:** OK.

**Faulk:** I had lots of friends that did. But yeah, I think this is a life-changing event for many of us like Camille was. I wasn't here. I'd moved here after Camille. I think we all know now, after living without power for two weeks, what's important, what we can do and don't have to have. I know I, you know, I know I can take a cold shower, don't really like to do it but I did love when I got the water back and I could take a cold shower. I know that I don't have to have three hot meals a day; that MREs [meals ready to eat] are good.

**Tisdale:** They're very good.

**Faulk:** I know that what matters are people and getting their needs met, and that I've got a house to go home to every night, and we've got thousands and thousands of people that won't have that two years from now. We've got thousands of people that will be sleeping in tents two years from now, just like we did after Hurricane Camille.

**Tisdale:** So it's going to be a while—

**Faulk:** And Andrew.

**Tisdale:** —before we recover from this.

**Faulk:** Absolutely. And I think my priorities are different.

**Tisdale:** How did you deal with both mixture of—I mean, you know, you talked about the criticisms—

**Faulk:** Yeah.

**Tisdale:** —and being cussed out, but was there enough praise coming in to kind of—

**Faulk:** Absolutely.

**Tisdale:** —balance things out?

**Faulk:** Absolutely. We have a bad press day and a good press day. You know, I have fourteen people tell me how sorry we were and somebody would say, "Thank God for the Red Cross," and that's all it took. One "at-a-boy" wipes out all that other. And just the volunteers, I mean, that's just—see, I'm crying now—that's been incredible. I know that I have a lot of processing to do myself, and I cannot do it by myself, to get myself back to not feeling responsible for the folks we didn't get to help or that we didn't help as much as we should because right now I feel like everybody that doesn't get what they need is because I'm not doing what I should do. And I know that's not true in my brain, but not in my heart. And so I've got to work through all that.

**Tisdale:** But you still keep coming in.

**Faulk:** Oh yeah, which I won't have an opportunity to do for a while, and I'm concerned about the volunteers and staff here who aren't going to be retiring, who have not had time to decompress. My husband teased me because I came home telling we needed help *decomposing*. (laughter) And he said, "I don't think that's the word you want to use."

**Tisdale:** You don't want that to happen.

**Faulk:** “I think you need a new term for that.” But anyway, they’ve not had an opportunity because we’re still working lots of long hours like today, and the other few staff members here and the volunteers that had been working so hard have not been afforded that opportunity. That’s why disaster mental health workers in Red Cross are so critical, and the ones that we had involved and still, before and after and during, that are not only dealing with the client but they’re going to be dealing with all of us, too, to help us process. We had disaster mental health workers who lost their homes. We had disaster mental health workers with ten people staying in their homes and yet they’ve been working with our clients—they’ve got to have somebody to help them work through all the emotions they’ve been dealing with, too. And that’s the part of disaster relief that people don’t see, you know, that newscaster that’s been out there day after day whose house is torn up. That fireman—

**Tisdale:** What about your own home?

**Faulk:** My home’s OK. I had shingles down and crap in the yard. I’m fine, you know, my house is fine. Dirt and dust everywhere but that doesn’t matter, you know. I mean, that doesn’t matter, I got a house. Got neighbors that don’t. But the people who are out there on the front line who are still dealing with it and haven’t had, don’t have time to do that debriefing, you know that, those are the issues that the people who are, the disaster mental health issues are going to be huge and we’re seeing them now. In the last two days and today—as you said, November 3 we’re two months into this—I have had two different people in my office whose marriages have already split.

**Tisdale:** Hmm.

**Faulk:** In two days. I’ve had two in my office. These are clients who have damage to their homes or lost their homes and they evacuated up here, and their lives are torn apart and their marriages have disintegrated two months into it. This time next year—and those are two I know about, there are dozens and dozens of others I don’t know about—and by this time next year there’ll be hundreds, if not thousands.

**Tisdale:** That’s just the nature of it.

**Faulk:** That’s the nature of something this big is that people are ill equipped to handle it and that’s when we will have disaster mental health services available for a long time. The downside is if they don’t come to us we can’t get them linked into a system to help them.

**Tisdale:** What kept you going during all that time?

**Faulk:** Huh?

**Tisdale:** What kept you going during all that? Who did you lean on?

**Faulk:** That would be y’all.

**Tisdale:** Your husband?

**Faulk:** Yeah. My husband worked in the shelters and helped here at loading supplies and everything until he got, you know, until the power came back on at his office and he had to go back to work. But just, we all lean on each other. We're like a family.

**Tisdale:** And what's his name, what's your husband's name?

**Faulk:** John Blanks.

**Tisdale:** And where does he work?

**Faulk:** Community Bank.

**Tisdale:** Community Bank, OK.

**Faulk:** Yeah and he, in fact, the first day he went to work in his Red Cross t-shirt and his shorts because he was at a shelter and the boss called him and said, "You know our power's back on, can you come in?" And John said, "Yep, but this is the way I'm going to come in," which was fine because we didn't have any power or water or anything at home. But we all, we're like a family, so we're trying to take care of each other.

**Tisdale:** Here at the Red Cross.

**Faulk:** Yeah, all of our volunteers and all of our staff, and we've got volunteers that started the first day that are still here.

**Tisdale:** And you say Red Cross is going to be involved with this for quite a while.

**Faulk:** Oh yeah.

**Tisdale:** Now, what would you, if you had to rough estimate, a rough estimate about how long for this recovery?

**Faulk:** Ooh, minimum of two years. I think it's going to be longer.

**Tisdale:** At least two years but probably longer?

**Faulk:** I think it's going to be a lot longer. And we're working with the other organizations now. (brief interruption) We are working with most all the other not-for-profits in the faith-based community to activate what's called a VOAD, a Volunteer Organization Active in Disaster that will be working to look at how we can all work together to address the long-term needs. You know, I'm especially concerned

about our frail elderly and disabled, and so we're all going to be sitting around the table together for a long time.

**Tisdale:** But there was cooperation during that, too.

**Faulk:** Oh yeah. Oh, there always is but this is really a more formalized, let's look at the long term needs and how we can all work together to address them, who can address them, who can address folks that are going to need food six months from now and others that are going to need medical. You know, we're all going to work together through the VOAD to try to make sure the needs get met.

**Tisdale:** OK, final question and this is something we talked about a little earlier. Before I came over here, we talked about just the range of emotions that—

**Faulk:** Mm-hm.

**Tisdale:** —from sadness to laughter, and what do you take from this? What are some things that stand out most to you, maybe some memories that—and like you say, you've still got some work to go before you retire in December, is that—or leaving?

**Faulk:** Yeah, I'll leave at the end of year. And I've got to get back to doing my regular Red Cross work, not just Hurricane Katrina work because I'm *way* behind on everything. I think just the resiliency of our people who live in Mississippi who seem to be able to pick themselves up, brush themselves off, and start all over again; that is amazing to me. I'm not sure I would have that kind of strength had I lost everything. The ability of the people of Mississippi to be so generous with their time and their talent, their resources whether it's financial or you know, letting people stay in their homes or loaning people cars or that kind of thing, you know. Mississippi has the highest per capita giving of any state and we're one of the poorest, so that always amazes me and we've certainly seen that here as people want to help. We've seen help come from all across the country—

**Tisdale:** And we've met a lot of people from all over.

**Faulk:** —truckloads and truckloads and truckloads of equipment and supplies, and from children and adults, and your cities and, you name it. And also the financial support that we're, that *all* the organizations are going to need to continue to do our work. The laughter that has come from our volunteers who come in after working a sixteen hour day and sit down to a bottle of water and a cold sandwich and seem blessed to have the opportunity to do it. And sit and tell stories about what they saw that day, you know, the people that they encountered and how thankful the people were, those kind of things. A couple of stories, and you would have to be here for, you know, three days for me to tell all my stories, but people, you know, kind of are leery of Jeff[erson] Davis County. We always hear that there's just a lot of crime in Jeff Davis County. So before we opened our service center up there I told our volunteers, "Now, don't get out of the car until the sheriff gets there and makes sure

the, you know, the security is there and get in your car the minute you get through and be back out of Jeff Davis County before dark,” because that’s what I’d been told we needed to tell them. They had the best time. The ladies in the churches in Bassfield, Mississippi, cooked turnip greens and cornbread and baked cakes and brought them for our volunteers. They all gained about five pounds. The sheriff brought them lunch one day. They had a ball. We did not have one incident there and, you know, we were told we need to be nervous about going to Bassfield. Those people were so happy that we were there, they welcomed us with open arms. And that happened everywhere, but that was just about volunteers calling and saying, “We were just, you know, are you sure we went where you told us to go because we were told to be scared to get out the car and everybody there greeted us with ‘we’re so glad you’re here?’” and everything, so that’s kind of a fun story. Just, you know, just stories about people getting help, and right now I’m kind of brain dead, I think, and I can’t think of a lot of them but there are dozens and dozens and dozens—there are hundreds of stories. And I’m going to try to write some of them down as we think of them, all of us that are here, just for our Red Cross archives. The letters we—we’ve taped up letters on the walls outside so that those days that we’re exhausted, we see those letters from folks thanking us and that lifts us up. And we get calls and letters every day that are from thankful people, and that’s what it’s all about.

**Tisdale:** Well, on behalf of the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, Babs, we appreciate you taking time to talk about this experience.

**Faulk:** We appreciate y’all doing it. I’m looking forward to hearing everybody’s tapes.

**Tisdale:** OK, thank you very much.

**Faulk:** Thank you.

(end of interview)