

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

PAULA HUGHES

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Paula Hughes and is taking place on June 5, 2007. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt.

VanZandt: Today is June 5, 2007. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History, and I'm here in Bay St. Louis with Paula Hughes on Acadian Bay Street; Waveland, actually, almost to Bay St. Louis. Thank you for correcting me. And we're here in her beautiful home, post-Katrina, almost two years now after Katrina, which hit August 29th of 2005. And Paula's just going to share some of her memories here and memories of Katrina, and tell us about what's going on now. So anything you'd like to share, Paula, thank you so much for giving your time.

Hughes: You're welcome, Linda. I, of course, moved here in 2005, the June before the hurricane. I'm originally from Detroit, Michigan.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Hughes: And I'm a registered nurse. I was a trauma nurse at Detroit General [Hospital]. Most of my formal education was in Detroit. I graduated from the School of Nursing in Providence Hospital. And my high school, of course, was in the Detroit, St. Claire Shores, Grosse Pointe area. I went to the university in Oakland, a university in Rochester, Michigan, and worked actually for the State of Michigan, the Department of Mental Health, just prior to moving to Connecticut. I was recruited by Yale. They were looking for somebody with trauma experience, and I certainly had it working at Detroit General when it was the murder capital of the world. (laughter) My specialty was gunshots and stabs, stab wounds. But I was in the trauma center when trauma surgery was presented. We wrote the first book on trauma, and it was quite an experience. I call it my "war years" of nursing. In fact, we trained medics for Vietnam back then.

VanZandt: Did you really? So this was in the [19]60s. Give me a time period.

Hughes: Late [19]60s, early [19]70s. I moved to Connecticut in 1976, working at Yale as a critical care nurse, and I went from Surgical ICU [Intensive Care Unit] on up to charge of the Open Heart Unit there at Yale. So I have wonderful experience in trauma and critical care. I loved Yale and left Yale to work for the State of

Connecticut. It was a real financial move for me to secure, you know, a better paying job with better benefits and a better retirement than Yale had to offer. So I've actually retired from the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services where I held many positions, and charge of the Female Admission Unit was my first position. Then I went to building supervisor, program director, program manager, and my retirement, I was the division supervisor for the department, and that was located in Middletown. (dog barking)

VanZandt: Middletown.

Hughes: Middletown. That's Muffin [dog] barking.

VanZandt: Is there somebody at the door? I'll pause it here. (brief interruption)

Hughes: And that was in Middletown, so I retired, and I ended up here as part of my perfect place for retirement.

VanZandt: What made you—excuse me for interrupting—choose? Had you visited this area before?

Hughes: Well, I had visited on my way to New Orleans. My daughter had lived in New Orleans. My daughter, Julie, had lived in New Orleans for a number of years prior to the hurricane; perhaps fourteen years.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Hughes: And I just love being near the water. I love sailing. I love all water sports. I just like being near the water. It's very soothing. I lived on the Coast in Connecticut and was always traveling up and down the Coast. I just like the area. I moved from Connecticut; it was a good financial move. Living is much more affordable than Connecticut. Connecticut is probably, was and probably still is, one of the most expensive states to live in. And of course I was getting older and didn't want to shovel snow. And I lived in a beautiful, beautiful area; the Ivoryton section of Essex, Connecticut, which is right along the Connecticut River. Beautiful, beautiful area. And I do miss it, but I go back frequently enough, especially in the summertime. But I'm very, very cautious after being in the storm to stay home during the severe hurricane season, which I consider August and September. I want to be here, have my plan in action, and I want to be here to (inaudible). Hopefully, I never will have to, but I'll tell you about my prep.

VanZandt: Yeah, there's so much that I could ask you about your experience in Detroit and Connecticut, but maybe we can hear a few of those—

Hughes: Well, right.

VanZandt: —stories after Katrina. Well, why don't you then just—that's fascinating. I just can imagine what good you did here after the storm then with all of your training and experience.

Hughes: I think—

VanZandt: So tell me maybe—oh, go ahead.

Hughes: I think I was really placed here for a reason. I think this place needed me at the time I was here. I came here because it was so, so, so beautiful, and I was driving around looking for a place to buy, my retirement home, the perfect little place. And it had to be within walking distance to the water.

VanZandt: I was going to say, what is that perfect place, in your mind?

Hughes: That perfect little place would be a cute little house with a small backyard. I had a huge yard in Connecticut. I wanted a small backyard enough to manage, and I loved trees. And I just happened to turn down this dead-end street in my search. My search had been going on for like three weeks. I was staying at the Buccaneer State Park and the Magic Casino in my RV; I had a small little RV. And I just happened to come down this street; there aren't too many streets like this. In fact, it's the only one off the beach that's a real dead end. And I came down this street, and it was like Sherwood Forrest. There were just so many beautiful trees starting at the beach. The Brennans had their summer place right on the corner of Acadian and Beach Road.

VanZandt: Dickie Brennan, Brennans?

Hughes: The Brennans from New Orleans.

VanZandt: I did not know that.

Hughes: And that strip that you came by, their house was right facing the beach. And they had a most beautiful manicured lawn, and then their pool house and their pool. And then from that point on almost to the railroad tracks was just the thickest, thickest woods; it was just beautiful, and it canopied over the road with the woods across the street. They only have three homes along that stretch from the beach to where the turn is, by our pool, and then the street took a turn, and there were, oh, I think like fifteen houses back here, but they were all nestled on these beautiful little manicured properties, and there were no overhead utilities. All the utilities were underground. And everyone had at least thirty to forty trees on their property, so you can imagine. And our builder, who has the big house now on the beach—

VanZandt: I just passed.

Hughes: —house is very similar to that. It's a four million dollar house.

VanZandt: Good Earth Builders.

Hughes: Good Earth Builders, that's Julie Rossen(?), she's a fabulous person. She rebuilt; she's the first one on the beach to rebuild, and her yard looks like a theme park. She has the mountains with the waterfall coming down.

VanZandt: I kind of could see through the fence as I drove by; it was quite impressive.

Hughes: Oh, it's fabulous. It's fabulous. In fact, I could show you some pictures. We had our neighborhood, "welcome back to the neighborhood" party there—

VanZandt: Oh, great.

Hughes: —a couple weeks ago. And it was just breathtakingly beautiful. Breathtaking. It was just like an oasis, and it was walking distance to the beach. It met my criteria, and I thought, "Oh, there's no way that I'll be able to find a house affordable or one that's for sale." And as I made—it's a cul-de-sac; it's makes a little turn. There was a real estate agent had just put up a sign.

VanZandt: Wow, just for you.

Hughes: I went in the house, I looked around. I says, "I'll take it."

VanZandt: Just right there on the spot.

Hughes: Had no idea where I was going to get the money to buy it, but it was within an affordable range, and it's the house next door; it's not this house.

VanZandt: OK. It spoke to you, it sounds like.

Hughes: This was June 6, so I went back and made arrangements to come move here for the closing, and I was here June 6, 2005, and it was the most breathtaking, most beautiful area to be in. And as beautiful as this area was, the people were just as nice. It was such a friendly, warm community. It was everything I could've ever asked for in a retirement place. I just was very thankful every day to God for directing me here, for showing me this place and for me being able to be able to purchase this beautiful home.

VanZandt: Did you know anyone here?

Hughes: No, no, no. I knew no one. My daughter lived in New Orleans and we're about forty-five, forty-seven miles from New Orleans.

VanZandt: So that was attractive to you to be close to her.

Hughes: It was just so beautiful because it met my criteria. It was a beautiful home; it was on a beautiful piece of land. There was all these shade trees; we had a community pool. All the houses were Acadian style. If you notice, all our houses, we all have the same mailboxes and the metal roofs, and it's the Acadian style, the high-pitched roofs, all natural products. There was no vinyl siding or vinyl windows; everything was really beautiful and well kept. And it turned out to be a very nice neighborhood. All the families were wonderful.

VanZandt: How old is the home?

Hughes: The houses ranged in, oh, probably six to ten years old.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Hughes: Now as I said, Julie Rossen, who lives in the big house facing the water on the end of the street, built all these homes.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: And this is called Acadian Bay, this area, although the street when you get back to that turn is called Blue Heron Cove.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: And you'll see a lot of blue herons around here.

VanZandt: Oh, really.

Hughes: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Well, they're very distinctive from the old Victorian or, you know, old Colonial style homes that you see, too. It's really—you're right—a little oasis back in here.

Hughes: Um-hm, it was; it was just breathtakingly beautiful.

VanZandt: Describe your home, if you would. You said it was shady and—

Hughes: My home was a two-story home. I had a master bathroom and walk-in closet in the master bath on the first floor with a great room—(dogs barking)

VanZandt: I think they hear the workers.

Hughes: They hear all the workers outside doing the landscaping. Shhh!

VanZandt: Oh, that's fine.

(brief interruption)

Hughes: It was green, metal roof, two story, three bedrooms upstairs, a big great room with a fireplace down on the main floor.

VanZandt: A fireplace, and that's unusual down here.

Hughes: Well, there's one there. And a nice kitchen, a formal dining room, cathedral ceilings as you walk in, an open staircase going up to the second floor where there are, as I said, three bedrooms and a full bath. And there was also a half bath downstairs, so we had two and a half baths, and a garage, and a beautiful lot.

VanZandt: And could you see the beach, the water from?

Hughes: No, no, no, no.

VanZandt: But you could walk out, and you were right there.

Hughes: No, because of the number of trees, there were trees everywhere, but the water, as I said, at that time was probably, oh, I was probably, maybe, the tenth house in. I think I'm the fourth now or fifth; I'm not sure.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Hughes: We lost all those houses along behind Julie, and actually we lost one house on our little circle street here. (dogs barking) It collapsed; it totally collapsed.

VanZandt: And what happened to yours?

Hughes: My house next door had a huge window in the front and a huge window in the back, and when the water came in, it was like a tsunami. This wall of water came in and took down everything in its path, and I didn't have closed shutters or boards on my window. So it blew out the windows and all the window frames with the window. You know, it just blew everything out and made a clean sweep of my house. All the furniture and everything just swept away. Swept away.

VanZandt: Out the east side.

Hughes: Down the road as far as almost to the beach, and it went in two different directions. It went towards the beach; well, actually I had stuff on the next street and stuff—so it went in three directions. It went towards the beach. It went west, and it went north, south and west.

VanZandt: Uh-huh.

Hughes: Because I found, after the storm, some of my crystal stemware, very delicate china—

VanZandt: Intact.

Hughes: —china dolls way down the road on the straightaway, intact in debris around trees, and I found it with a pitchfork. I just went looking with a pitchfork, and I couldn't believe the number of things that I found intact. I had a whole garage full of tubs full of all my personal stuff that I hadn't unpacked. Like photos and linen, and of course all that stuff was lost. All my books were lost. I was—

VanZandt: Were you a collector?

Hughes: I was a major collector.

VanZandt: Really? What kind of books?

Hughes: I had at least 150 out-of-print cookbooks; they were all lost. I had—I loved history. Actually, not only was I a registered nurse, but I also was a science teacher.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: So I have a master's in education, and I have a master's in healthcare administration—

VanZandt: Oh wow.

Hughes: —along with my bachelor of science. So I had a lot of books. I had a holistic practice at one time, just a side thing, and I had all my holistic books, all my medical books, all my psychiatric journals and books. I had—

VanZandt: You had a real library.

Hughes: I had a lot of good classics. I had a collection of good classics. And I had a Katharine Hepburn collection; that I was going to pass down to my granddaughter.

VanZandt: Collection of what?

Hughes: Katharine Hepburn's, some of her letters, some of her magazines, some of her—

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: —and a lot of her books, a lot of old articles and old magazines that I had picked up at tag sales. And the reason that Katharine Hepburn was important to me is

my granddaughter is a Hepburn. She's a, you know, she's a Hepburn; she's a niece of Kate, the late Katharine Hepburn.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: And so I had a personal relationship there with the family for a number of years.

VanZandt: Through her father?

Hughes: Her father is the nephew of Kate. Kate lived with her brother, Dick, in the house in Fenwick, which is a part of, it's right at the mouth of the Connecticut River on Long Island Sound. The family sold it after her death. And so my son-in-law grew up in that house.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: And Kate lived there; when she was not in her New York apartment, she lived there, and her last, probably, ten years, she was there full time. And Dick passed before she did.

VanZandt: Do you have—did you meet her and spend time with her?

Hughes: Oh yes, yes, oh yes. I spent time with her; I met her on many occasions, family occasions, and I was very, I considered myself close with Dick. He was elderly as she was, and I would take him for little drives in the country. And I would stop by and bring her flowers. And of course the grandchildren were there at the house a lot. We had family events there.

VanZandt: What was she like?

Hughes: Kate?

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Hughes: She was a beautiful person, very interesting person, very beautiful person, a very, very kind and generous person, and she had quite a circle of friends and people that, you know, adored her for her talent as an actress and the friendships. She had many, many friendships over the years. And of course right on that property Howard Hughes landed his plane—

VanZandt: Absolutely.

Hughes: —so that property was filled with a lot of history, and it was a good place to go swimming, and it was a good place for parties, and (inaudible) grew up there, and the kids spent a lot of time in that house. In fact, my youngest son actually was part of

the reconstruction team that came in and rebuilt the house, remodeled it for the person that had ended up buying it. So I had that collection I wanted to pass down to her, and I lost it; it was totally destroyed.

VanZandt: Do you think that you can replace, I mean obviously they're irreplaceable, but from the family?

Hughes: No, and we do have family things. And she is, now, she is very much a Hepburn, so. And her father's very supportive, and my daughter, they're now very close. And she has two brothers, Spencer—

VanZandt: Right, right.

Hughes: —and James.

VanZandt: Did you see the movie—I'm curious, about—that had Leonardo DiCaprio about Howard Hughes?

Hughes: Oh yes, I did.

VanZandt: What did you think about the portrayal of her? Was it Kate Blanchett, I think who played—

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: Yeah.

Hughes: It was very typical of the family.

VanZandt: Was it.

Hughes: From what I know of the family.

VanZandt: Um-hm, it was interesting. I thought she did a good job playing her.

Hughes: Um-hm, it was, yes, it was a good movie.

VanZandt: Well, back to Katrina. What was left, what was salvageable from your home?

Hughes: Oh, the only thing that I managed to save, and I'll show you, is my bed.

VanZandt: Really?

Hughes: Yes, and the poles, the posters, the posts I found. So I had this wonderful house over there, the green house; I called it the green house—

VanZandt: The green house.

Hughes: —because it was painted green.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: And I loved the neighborhood. In fact, I had always been somehow involved with the Red Cross, and back in Connecticut I taught CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. And I was a CPR instructor for a number of years for my community and for the friends. And once a year we'd have a campaign to get everyone certified, and I would partake in that at work with other people that were other instructors. And, but other than that, that was my only affiliation with the American Red Cross. So when I came here I thought, "Well, I have to do something in my retirement. I'd like a part-time job, but I have to really do some volunteer work." I mean I've been very, very fortunate to be blessed with this beautiful area, this beautiful house, this beautiful neighborhood, being in this best location, and I really want to get back. So I went to the Red Cross headquarters in Biloxi, and I became recertified as a CPR instructor. And they asked me if I'd like to go to their disaster training, and I did that, not knowing that, you know, this would ever happen, but I figured, "Oh yes, since this is a hurricane area."

VanZandt: What does that involve, just briefly?

Hughes: Oh, it's just a really, it was just a class, one class.

VanZandt: Very general?

Hughes: In fact, it was a very general class, and it was just they talked about the hurricane and some of the important things about a shelter. And with my background I felt pretty confident, but I didn't think that I'd ever become—have a role of becoming a manager of a shelter. And so I took the class, and it was an all-day event and it was nice. I met some nice people there at the Red Cross office, and they gave us this big book as we were leaving and—to read it, and I found that book later in my debris; it was totally ruined.

VanZandt: Oh, how ironic.

Hughes: And I never really got a chance to read it.

VanZandt: You could've written it, I imagine. (laughter)

Hughes: I could have, afterwards. So I actually went to the shelter. My first experience at the shelter was not a good experience, and that was during Hurricane Dennis that happened just a few weeks before Katrina. The shelter was located in Kiln, Mississippi; they call it "The Kiln," Kiln, Mississippi. It's quite a distance north

of here, and the shelter had been designated for quite some time; it's North Central Elementary. And they had other workers there. And I had brought my dog, and my dog was not welcome. And so I didn't stay for very long; I just stayed until we knew that it was past, that we were not in danger, and left with my dog. So when they called me the Friday before the storm and asked me if I would man the shelter in The Kiln, which is the only Red Cross—the official Red Cross shelter in all of Hancock County, was this one located at North Central Elementary School.

VanZandt: Which was pretty far from the most populous areas of Hancock County, would you say?

Hughes: It must be at least fifteen miles north of, maybe, I-10. I mean it's quite a distance.

VanZandt: I passed it on the way to lunch.

Hughes: It's quite a distance in the country. It's in rolling country. There's some farms. There's some beautiful homes. There's ponds out in that area.

VanZandt: And that's been—

Hughes: It's a nice area.

VanZandt: —a criticism of the Red Cross. I mean, how did you feel about that, you know, the locations of their shelters that they're in rural areas, and they're away from the, you know, the people who really need—

Hughes: I understood why; it has to be far enough away from the threatened area.

VanZandt: Exactly, safety range.

Hughes: But yet, being out that far, I often wonder how would people get there; not everyone has access to a car.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: Or has enough gas to get there, but in a hurricane you have enough warning. So there was buses available to pick up people that wanted to go, but then of course, not everyone wants to go to a shelter, especially a shelter way out there, and leave their property and with maybe not an opportunity to get back when they'd like to get back. So there was transportation to take individuals out there.

VanZandt: Well, that's good to know.

Hughes: So when they called me on Friday and asked me if I'd go to the shelter on Saturday to man the shelter, I said to Pat, "I would like to, but I have my dog, Kirby,

my old Irish Setter,” who was, like eighteen years old and was not doing well, and I promised a friend and neighbor that I would go get her mother, who lived right on the beach in Bay St. Louis and bring her with me, no matter where I went. I would just take her with me; I promised her I would take her mother. So when I mentioned that, you know, I really had other obligations and as much as I would like to do it, I had the dog, and I could not leave my dog behind. And they said they were desperate, and they would take me and my dog if I could come and man the shelter. And opening a shelter requires more than just going there. There’s what they called a “shelter kit,” which has all the paperwork, and then you have a supply of coffee, and snacks, and water, and all the signage that has to go up on the roads. And—

VanZandt: They expected you to do all that.

Hughes: Well, I told that I would appreciate, since I couldn’t come until Sunday, that if they would get all the paperwork out there and get all the signage before I came there and have it set up, and then I would be there.

VanZandt: Because you had to get your own house in order, I imagine, and this was two days before the storm.

Hughes: Well, I never experienced anything like this, so I was more concerned with my dog. And I really, like everyone else, expected to return to my house with maybe sections of the roof or the shutters gone or some—certainly not what happened. I had an upstairs that survived. If I had any idea, I would’ve hired someone to put everything upstairs. I certainly—I had a garage full of those plastic containers that held a lot of my things that I hadn’t unpacked. All my personal effects, all the photo albums of my five children and, you know, all my precious collections; you know, they were all there, my cookbooks, Kate’s stuff. I mean, I could’ve taken it all with me and put it upstairs if I knew that upstairs would survive, and it did. But I left; I picked up my friend Eunice who was the sweetest little lady that lived down the street right on the Beach Road. And she had a wonderful house. She had lived there for quite a few years, maybe forty years.

VanZandt: What’s her last name?

Hughes: Patterson, Eunice Patterson. And I had befriended her at the shelter during Hurricane Dennis, and she would call me, frequently, and ask me why I wasn’t taking her to lunch, even though I had never made arrangements for it, (laughter) but she sort of latched onto me. And I would take her out to lunch or take her to appointments. And her husband was in the nursing home during the last, well, during Dennis, and I would take her to visit her husband. And then her husband had died between Dennis and Katrina; so she was alone, and she had two dogs in the house. Her daughter had warned me not to let the one dog out of the cage because it would bite, and it had chased her around the house. They were two black Labs. So when I went to pick Eunice up, I made sure that they had food and water. And she was very reluctant to leave her house.

VanZandt: I can imagine.

Hughes: She was not happy; she did not want to leave. She had been there during—

VanZandt: Camille?

Hughes: —Camille, and the house had been there and—

VanZandt: Made it through Camille.

Hughes: —made it through Camille, and she had a house just full of priceless antiques. And she had a collection of dolls that was unbelievable. She had traveled all over the U.S. for years and years with her doll collection. She had every doll you could imagine; big and small. She made dolls; she made them herself.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: She poured them and fired them and, *beautiful* dolls, collectibles, priceless dolls. I imagine that her doll collection was worth about \$500,000. She had cabinets full of dolls. She had priceless antiques, and jewels, and money, and a baby grand [piano], and a beautiful home overlooking the beach. She had a panoramic view of the beach and a *huge* black wrought iron fence around her house. She had really beautiful, beautiful property, beautiful home, beautiful possessions. And whenever I'd pick her up, whenever I took her anywhere, she'd have to fuss with the dogs. And I'd have to walk to one end of the fence and call the dogs down while she fussed with this big padlock. She had a big chain and a padlock, and I would have to get the dogs to one end so she could open it, and she would always fumble with that. So I went there to pick her up, and she was not willing to go. And when she finally got in the car, I couldn't believe the way she was dressed; she had a little pair of gold high heels on. She looked like she was going to a party—

VanZandt: To a party.

Hughes: —with her jewelry, and her makeup, and her hair, and her little outfit. And I had asked her to go back in the house to look around to see if there was anything she wanted to take, as far as money or jewels or anything that, you know, she didn't want to leave. I thought we would be back, and everything would be fine, but if there was anything that she would want to take, she should take it. So she came out with a party bag. You know the little paper bags where you put ribbons on—

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: —for presents, for gifts, she came out with that, and I thought, "Oh!"

VanZandt: Just, did it have anything in it, do you know?

Hughes: Yes, the things that I told her to bring, I imagined.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: And so I decided I would take her to my house, and I would feed her breakfast. I'd make a nice breakfast before we left. And she wouldn't get out of the car. We got to my house, and she wouldn't get out of the car. She says, "Well, if we're going, let's go." I says, "Really, you really need to eat some breakfast." So I made breakfast; I even brought it to the car, and she wasn't interested. Had the big dog in the back seat, her in the front seat; I had a Honda Accord. And I had put some emergency stuff in; flashlights, a blanket, change of clothes, some snacks—certainly not enough—the dogs' food, the dog water, the dogs', one of the dog's beds. I didn't have a bed for me or an air mattress. So she wouldn't eat, but when we started out, I remember driving out to the end of the road and looking at the beach, and I thought, "Well, I didn't get a last chance to look at my house." So I turned around and came on back and looked at the house, looked at the neighborhood, and said, "I'll be back, and hopefully nothing will happen." But I remember coming back. And then I drove along the beach to go to Nicholson to get up to the highway, and it was the most *beautiful* day.

VanZandt: Oh yeah.

Hughes: The sun was out, and the beach was gorgeous, and the water wasn't even rough. And I thought, "Nah, this can't be happening. I don't believe this is happening." So we get onto Nicholson heading towards [Highway] 90 and the highway, and of course Eunice says, "Well, are we going to breakfast finally?" (laughter) I said, "You had your chance, and you wouldn't take it." She says, "Well, I'm hungry, and I want to go eat." I says, "Well, I'm going to stop at Wal-Mart, and I'm going to pick up some things." I was thinking, "I have to get an air mattress. We have to have something to sleep on. Maybe I'll find a sandwich or something." We got into—and this is Sunday, Sunday around noonish, before noon. I was thinking breakfast; it was before noon, and it was a madhouse in Wal-Mart.

VanZandt: That's what I was trying to picture.

Hughes: It was. It was. People were starting to leave. In fact, before I left the street, I checked with a few neighbors asking, you know, where were you going, and my one neighbor down the street whose house collapsed, totally collapsed, it's not there; it's that lot where there's no house.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: There's a slab.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: I asked her where she was going. She says—and her husband’s a veterinarian, and they have their veterinarian office right on Highway 90. And she says, “Oh, we’re going to the office. We have some pets there, and we’re going to stay with the dogs, and we have a few friends that are going to join us.” She said, “The place is built like a—it’s built so strong that we’ll be fine there. No wind can blow it over, and it’s a cement building.” And she says, “It’s built like”—I’m trying to think of the word. Anyways, “It’s very, very strong, and we’re going to be there.” And I saw some of the other neighbors just boarding up their windows; everyone was going. Tony Trapani(?), I don’t think they boarded up, but they were on their way out, too. They were the white house on the end of the street. They owned a restaurant in town.

VanZandt: Sure, right.

Hughes: And he had three crosses at the end of the street, and those crosses had been there for a long time. And if you go in his restaurant you’ll see a—his restaurant down in Bay St. Louis—you’ll see by the bar this blown-up photograph that somebody had taken of the three crosses that were at the end of our street and—

VanZandt: What kind of crosses are you talking about?

Hughes: Wood, big wood—

VanZandt: Wood, OK.

Hughes: —crosses that he had put up, and every once in a while they would disappear, and then they’d come back. And I’d say, “Tony, what happened to the crosses? They’re gone.” And he says, “Well, some *anti-Christ* set fire to them.” (dog barks; brief interruption) I want to back up and tell something.

VanZandt: Sure.

Hughes: You know, I had been at the pool that Friday that they had called me. I had been at the beach, and I’d come back. My thing was to go in the pool before I came home. We had a wonderful pool, gorgeous little pool area with a cabana and palm trees, and a nice wood fence around it.

VanZandt: Is that where this pool is?

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: On the end when I first came into—

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: That is a temporary fence, but the pool's up and running.

VanZandt: Right, um-hm.

Hughes: And we all paid our fees now to get that pool to look even better than it was.

VanZandt: Yeah.

Hughes: We're putting irrigation and sod and the palm trees, and a little pool house with a shower and a bathroom, and that area for the pool equipment, and then a little area to eat in. And that'll all be going back.

VanZandt: Oh, wow.

Hughes: But I can remember being in the pool and saying, "Oh, it can't get any better, God. Thank you, thank you, thank you. This is the life. This is all my hard work, all my life. This is it. Thank you, Lord." That was the Friday before the storm. So I got into Wal-Mart; there was only one mattress, air mattress left; it was a queen size. It was better than nothing.

VanZandt: You lucked out.

Hughes: I thought, "Oh, I wonder. We're going to be so far north." But I did end up buying crash helmets and life jackets. I mean this is—

VanZandt: Did you?

Hughes: I was just—

VanZandt: Yeah.

Hughes: —grabbing stuff; flashlights, grabbing stuff and on my way to the cashier, Eunice's voice came into my head—she's waiting in the car—"I'm hungry." So I grabbed a poor boy.

VanZandt: (laughter) Good for you.

Hughes: And she ate on it, three days; I swear. She loved it. So we got in the car, and I had water, and I had enough supplies, and some junk stuff, and we headed north with the dog in the back and her in the front, complaining and complaining. "*There's no need for me to leave my house. And what about those dogs? You know?*" I said, "They have water; they have food. Everything's going to be fine; we'll probably be going back to the house, you know, probably tomorrow. After the storm has left the area, we'll go back, and everything will be fine." Eunice said, "*Well, I hope so*

because I could have stayed there.” Well, you know, what happened to her house; there wasn’t even a foundation left. I mean it just swept everything away.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: Everything away. So we got to the shelter and, to my shock and surprise, there was no Red Cross workers there. There was no supplies.

VanZandt: On the Sunday, the day before.

Hughes: Yes, there was not even a generator.

VanZandt: This is the only Red Cross shelter in Hancock County.

Hughes: This is the only Red Cross shelter in all of Hancock County; no generator. Even if we had a generator, as I checked the toilets out, as I was canvassing the buildings—there are several building, and the main building where the office was and then several other buildings with walkways to them. It was an elementary school. I checked out the bathrooms, and to my shock, even if we had a generator, we wouldn’t have had flushing toilets because they were magic-eye operated.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: I asked, “Were there Red Cross people here? I don’t see the supplies.” We had some water, and we had some snacks, and some stuff somebody dropped off, and I believe it was the Red Cross. And the Red Cross did come before the storm, but they were, oh, just like hardly made it to the building, and they had left some water and some snacks. But there were no other Red Cross workers, and there was no generator. And we had very little, but they gave us what they had. And then we had people started pouring in. People started pouring in, and by Sunday night, I think the power was off. We had no power; the cell phone towers went down real quick. We had no cell phones, no communications.

VanZandt: So they hadn’t made sure that you were provided with communications equipment, a radio, two-way radio or anything?

Hughes: Well, we wouldn’t—we had no power; we had no power. We did have—Hancock County Sheriff’s Department was there with three or four deputies. We had the AMR [American Medical Response], who was a godsend; he was wonderful. I can’t remember his last name, but his first name was Bill, and everyone called him Wild Bill. He was there with a few of his EMTs [emergency medical technicians], and they were just wonderful.

VanZandt: And the AMR, just for the record, people—

Hughes: American Medical Response; he had his ambulance. And on the ambulance was a little generator, which probably saved lives because anyone that came—and we had people that had breathing problems and needed their treatments—he was able to provide that. And he was my medical man. Even though I was a nurse, I did not function as a nurse. I was the only Red Cross worker there, and I automatically became the manager. And it was quite an event. We had, I believe, I think we got up to the number of close to 500 evacuees, and we put them in all the halls away from any windows. So we didn't have keys to any of the rooms anyway. We did have the office, and we did use their paper and their supplies, and I made up my own Red Cross sheets. And we had wonderful volunteers from the county that manned the office, and we worked in shifts.

VanZandt: And who coordinated that, if Red Cross didn't show up?

Hughes: I did; I was the one.

VanZandt: You did. So you brought in, you made those phone calls to get people there?

Hughes: Oh no, they were already present. The AMR was present; the deputy sheriff's group were present, and the county workers were there. We were there, and everything worked out, amazingly so. Even—

VanZandt: Were there cots for people to sleep on?

Hughes: No, no, no cots. No cots. And it was very, very, very hot. And I'm not from the South; even though I did get here as quick as I could, (laughter) after I retired. But—

VanZandt: It was hot.

Hughes: I didn't realize; I kept saying, "How did this floor get so wet?" The floor was soaking wet, and it's because of the condensation, and the extreme heat; the floors were always wet. No one had any cots. A few people had a few blow-up mattresses, but we had everyone crammed in. And I'm saying "crammed in" all the halls of the building. I designated the building where the office was, was building A. And the first thing I had to do was I had to arrange where everything was. Building A, we had building B, C, D and E, building E, and then G for the gym. We didn't use the gym until during the height of the hurricane; two of the roofs blew off two of the buildings where I had people in the halls, evacuees.

VanZandt: How did they react to that? Panic?

Hughes: Well, we had to form a human chain to get them out of there because the debris was flowing everywhere. I mean, there was—those overhead walkways, the roofs fell off of. There was buildings flying everywhere, all kinds of debris flying; the

roofs were flying. All kinds of debris and the wind was horrific. We didn't have the water, except water from rain, but the wind was terrific. I mean, I'm amazed that—I mean, there were tornadoes. Tornadoes are always associated with hurricanes, and there were tornadoes going through. The wind was horrific. I never spotted a [tornado], but it was just unreal. So we had to form a human chain and get those people out of those buildings, and it was incredible.

VanZandt: Were there children, I'm sure, too?

Hughes: Children; we had everything.

VanZandt: Elderly?

Hughes: Elderly, children, people in wheelchairs.

VanZandt: Did you prioritize in any way, or how would you organize such a thing?

Hughes: Oh, it was between the AMR and the police and myself organized evacuating out of those other buildings that were now damaged. We couldn't stand; the roofs had blown off, and there was debris everywhere. But the main thing was to get everyone in a building, away from windows, sitting till the worst of it was over.

VanZandt: And that's when you took them to the gym?

Hughes: We took them to the gym, but when we got to the gym, I had poor Kirby locked up in the gym. He had chewed through his leash, and, poor thing was—

VanZandt: Bless his heart.

Hughes: in the—(phone rings; brief interruption)

VanZandt: OK, so you're moving everyone into the gym.

Hughes: Yes, and when we moved into the gym, found Kirby. Actually, I really didn't know he was in the gym. I had some teenagers. I gave everyone a job. (laughter)

VanZandt: You've got to, team work.

Hughes: I had the teenagers in charge of my dog, a couple of teenagers, and they all liked Kirby, and they took him in the gym. He was able to walk then. And when we got into the gym, we realized that some of the windows had blown out in the top of the gym, so one section of the gym we couldn't use. And it was wild; it was really wild. And then the noise from the hurricane was hitting the—you know the big fans in the top of the gym?

VanZandt: Right, sure.

Hughes: These big things that—

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Hughes: —spin around to—

VanZandt: Industrial size? Um-hm.

Hughes: Yeah, those big ones. It was making the horriblest noise. And I would make rounds from building to building to just check on everyone, to make sure everyone was calm, and you know, the children were OK, and the elderly were OK. And we had everyone sitting in the halls, and we had a lot of people, so there was—it was pretty cramped. And I had made—I designated somebody in charge of every group, you know, so every sitting area had somebody that they could go to.

VanZandt: Right, with a leader.

Hughes: A leader, a manager. And, but I would make rounds because they knew that, you know, to make them feel a little comfortable, I would make rounds from building to building. When it got really bad, I just stayed. But I can remember going to the gym because I was concerned with this noise, and that was really scaring the children. And I talked to them all and told them it wouldn't be much longer; it wouldn't be much longer. Now this is Monday, and it—

VanZandt: What time of day would you say this is? This must've been in the height of it.

Hughes: Oh, the height of it was—

VanZandt: In the morning?

Hughes: —Monday at six a.m., I believe, was the height of it, and it didn't stop until late in the afternoon. It was, when everything just—we knew it was over. And now assess the damage and start preparing for what we had to do. And that was about four o'clock. I'll never forget the feeling of—because I had been making rounds, and you know, I mean I was used to doing this at a mental hospital, you know, crisis intervention, you know.

VanZandt: I'm sure you just kicked into that mode.

Hughes: Checking out things. And, oh, I kicked into the mode; it was automatic. Believe me; it was automatic. I had been through a lot of—I've been through hostage situations in Detroit. I had been through threatened bombs and all kinds of crisis.

Emergency, medical emergencies, as well as behavioral emergencies, working for the State of Connecticut as many years as I had in a state facility, you know.

VanZandt: And what's important, Paula, in that, most important? Is it to be a calming presence?

Hughes: People need to know that they're safe, and that is vital; that's more important than eating, and they need to be communicated to. Communication. They need to know that there's somebody in charge, and that they're going to be safe, and they need to have that communication. To be not knowing what's happening and to be in this—I mean these are people that have left their homes; some of them had no idea where their relatives were, their children were, their parents were, what happened to their animals, not to mention their homes, their life, their jobs. I mean they just evacuated, and of course, we all had this thought in our head that, "We'll go back, and everything will be fine." But as the hurricane progressed and we got word through what emergency information we had through the EOC [Emergency Operations Center], we knew it was far greater than we could have ever imagined and that we may never have a life like we had seen previous to this. So knowing that, and the anxiety that you lost everything you worked for, you probably lost your job if it were local, you not knowing—I had no idea if my daughter got out of New Orleans and my three grandchildren and my son-in-law. My last communication with my daughter was on Saturday, and I had called her up because I had that television going constantly, the weather station, watching, and hoping it would blow over like Dennis. I had called her and said, "Julie, you better leave. You better"—

VanZandt: Because it was heading that way.

Hughes: It was; I mean, and she says, "No, mom, I think you're exaggerating." She says, "It's going to miss us." She says, "It's not going to hit us; it's going to miss us. Don't get—you're just new living down here, so just—you know, I been down here; it's not going to—don't panic; it'll be OK." (phone rings) She said—(brief interruption) So where was I?

VanZandt: OK. So you were worried about your daughter, Julie, and trying to encourage her to leave.

Hughes: Oh yes, I was encouraging her to leave. I can remember a previous hurricane when I was out east. My oldest granddaughter called me, who was probably like ten at the time, and she says, "Will you talk to your daughter and tell her we need to evacuate, a hurricane's coming?" So I could imagine the panic of the kids, and my daughter's very calm, says, "Mom, look at. I'm going to a hurricane party. We'll be fine." "No, no, you won't be fine."

VanZandt: What else do you do in New Orleans? A hurricane party.

Hughes: Hurricane party.

VanZandt: And how old were her children?

Hughes: Children at the time were probably eight, ten, and twelve.

VanZandt: OK, young.

Hughes: Yes, about eight, ten, and twelve. So I thought, “Well, what can I do?” I says, “Just get out; get out. That’s all I can tell you. I’m giving you the advice.” So I had no idea if she ever got out, and you know to get out you have to get out early, especially if you live in a city; the roads fill up very fast. And she had to cross that long Pontchartrain Bridge.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And what kind of communications did you have, if any? You said the EOC, you got information from them. How did that happen, any word that you received?

Hughes: We ended up through the AMR; I think they were the only ones that ended up with any communication.

VanZandt: They had a radio?

Hughes: Yes. So I’ll never forget walking into the gym, and the gym was filled with people, and it had now calmed down. The storm was over, and I walked in there, and the noise, of course, was gone, and it was quiet, and everyone was like—and I walked in, and everyone started clapping and cheering. And it was, oh, and it was like, “Oh my God, we made it through. We’re all survivors.” You know. And now the big thing was to assess the damage. And what are we going to do with all these people? Do we have enough supplies? What is out there? Everyone is going to be really wanting to go check out their homes, you know.

VanZandt: Right, they’re wanting to leave.

Hughes: And do they have enough gas to get back if they go find—and what devastation are they going to be seeing?

VanZandt: Would you say the majority of them came in their own automobile or by shuttle?

Hughes: Well, we had a group of Jamaicans, believe it or not, from the Grand Hotel. And I believe that was located in Gulfport or Biloxi?

VanZandt: The Grand Casino was in Biloxi.

Hughes: OK, the Grand Casino filled up a bus full of their workers and brought them all the way out to the Kiln, so we had—and they came very late before the storm; so

we were really packed, and I think we had about 500 people. And keeping track of all these people and then making the announcements that we have checked everyone in, we need to have an official body count of everyone present, and if anyone leaves, they need to let us know because now we had people wanting to go out there. And we didn't have really much communication about what the roads were like or how far they could get, and it was pretty bad.

VanZandt: Did you know the town had been wiped out?

Hughes: At that point we didn't know too much except that it was pretty bad, that it was pretty bad.

VanZandt: So to sign them out, did you have clipboards with sheets of their names when they checked in that they had to sign—

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: —before they left?

Hughes: Yeah, everyone had to sign in. Everyone had to officially sign in, and we processed them through the office with the help of the county workers were there working shifts keeping everything going. And then the people that lived in the local area started filtering over to the shelter, not for help, not for seeking help, but to help us.

VanZandt: Oh, how great.

Hughes: Was there anything you needed? If they had a pool or if there was a pond or water or supplies or clothing, they started bringing them. We used—we had no flushing toilets. We had sixty toilets or so—

VanZandt: And you needed buckets of water.

Hughes: —that were a mess. And not everyone had gas to be driving back and forth to the pond, so we—there were a bunch of buses in the back lot, so we ended up siphoning gas out of the school buses.

VanZandt: And that's not easy.

Hughes: No.

VanZandt: I tried that.

Hughes: To get gas so we could have trucks go back and forth to the pond. And we had to break into the janitor's closets for mops, and brooms, and bleach, and we found these big, you know, these big garbage cans on wheels, so we got them loaded onto a

truck. I think maybe we used two trucks. Took them down to the pond, filled them up, and then this wonderful man who was somehow, worked for a plumber or was a plumber. When you can imagine, we had all these toilets that were filled up and couldn't be flushed. You can imagine. I was so worried about everyone getting sick. But we had to flush those toilets. And he came forward and volunteered, and got a group of guys, and they went down and got water from the pond, and he went through, and we flushed every toilet, cleaned every bathroom, put one of those big garbage cans on wheels outside of the bathroom with a smaller bucket. So when you went in, you went in, you took your bucket, you know your little bucket to flush the toilet. We encouraged all the guys to go out back to urinate. And we had monitors for all the bathrooms. We had manager for all the sleeping sites. And the same guy ended up taking over as manager of the gym. The gym was major sleeping area, and it was difficult to be able to control that many people. And you know we keep everything safe and clean.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: And he stepped forward, and he said he would take over the gym as the gym manager. He found a table and chair and set it up out at the entrance, and he found masking tape, and he sectioned off the whole gym.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: With tape. We had an area this large for a larger family, a smaller family; this is the walkway, you know, the floor of the gym. He sectioned it all off for living spaces.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: Because as we got more information flowing in from the police or whoever came in to relieve the other police to tell us what was the devastation out there, we knew that this would be a long-term housing. And at this point we knew that we were going to need food. So there was a—oh, the morning after the hurricane, two Red Cross workers—and I want to say they were from Tennessee—came, and they were like a Godsend.

VanZandt: I was going to say, I bet they were; you were glad to see them.

Hughes: These two workers, I can look in my book and find the name, which we should really have because these guys deserve a medal.

VanZandt: Well, you can certainly send it to me and I'll include that.

Hughes: Because they came with their vehicle, their Red Cross vehicle packed with stuff. And they were very experienced guys. They were wonderful. They came there; they knew how bad it was; they dropped off their supplies. And he was instrumental

in going to what was the kitchen and cafeteria, and says, “This is where you’ll set up food services, and we have some stuff but not enough to feed all these people.” So that’s when we took the doors off the hinges of the kitchen and the food lockers, and we had food for all those people for four days. And on the fourth day, the government, FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] came.

VanZandt: On the fourth day.

Hughes: DMAT [disaster medical assistance team] came; a medical unit out of Florida came and set up a MASH [mobile army surgical hospital] unit, but they came with tents and everything. It was—

VanZandt: That’s DMAT?

Hughes: —wonderful. DMAT, it’s a federal agency but out of—

VanZandt: Disaster management?

Hughes: It was a disaster management—

VanZandt: Uh-huh.

Hughes: —medical unit. And they set up an emergency room and a clinic, and oh, it was wonderful.

VanZandt: How fantastic.

Hughes: And then the helicopters came about the same time with the food and the water, the MR[E]s [meals ready to eat], the heater meals, and all the water supplies that we needed.

VanZandt: So you managed to get through until that fourth day.

Hughes: Until that fourth day. And also four Red Cross workers from Iowa and Indiana came. And I’ll never forget the words out of this one guy. They came with their nice, clean clothes and badges. I never had a shirt or a badge.

VanZandt: I wondered if you had the vest or what you had.

Hughes: I never had a shirt or a badge. I was told when I joined the Red Cross, I asked if I could get a T-shirt and they said, “Well, we usually get those after you’re in them.” And, it was funny because they did have a banquet for all the people that worked through Hurricane Katrina, and the gift for working as a volunteer was a T-shirt. So I held it up, and I says, “I finally, I finally have been awarded my T-shirt. I guess I deserve it now.”

VanZandt: I'd say you earned at least that.

Hughes: I earned it. So on the fourth day these four workers from Iowa came, and you know, no one had any—there were a few people, maybe three or four out of all those people, a lot of them came with the clothes on their back, sat in the halls, that's about it, or in the gym. And I'll never forget what he said to me. He said, "We're here to help. Could you kindly show us to our accommodations?" And I'm like—

VanZandt: Oh, my.

Hughes: I'm like, "Wow. Where's he coming from?" You know, it's not like in the movies; there were no cots. There were no blankets; there was what you came with is what you sat on. You know, there weren't no chairs.

VanZandt: Doesn't sound like they were trained very well.

Hughes: And my dear, little friend, I brought her in the back room where I had a mattress, that blow-up mattress, and I held her that night, and she cried. And she was crying, not for her possessions, not for all her jewelry and her antiques, or her dolls; she was quite wealthy, I imagine, to have that nice of a house on that piece of property with that many possessions, and a baby grand, and it was a beautiful place. She never said anything about her possessions, but she wept, and I held her, and I cried with her; she wept for her dogs.

VanZandt: Absolutely.

Hughes: The word was coming in, and I didn't find out until that Wednesday—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, it was when the Red Cross workers came, they came with a satellite phone, and I was able to call my daughter in Connecticut who was able, somehow, to get through to Eunice's daughter, Sharon Siebert(?), who had now evacuated to Texas, and let us know that she was OK. Somehow we got—Julie called from Nashville, and she's OK. So I found out. And everyone else was finding out about their lost ones. Well, every morning, we'd have a morning meeting and address the basic needs, and keep that communication going, and I had our police officers speak on safety issues. The AMR guy spoke about the health issues, and we had food service now. We had a volunteer police officer from Waveland, who also worked at ABC Rental, was in charge, him and his wife were in charge of the kitchen, our now cafeteria. And that's where we had our meetings, or we'd have a meeting outside. And they were in charge of the food service, and they did a terrific job. They even slept in the kitchen.

VanZandt: Were there corporations sending supplies down, too? Private corporations?

Hughes: Well, I—

VanZandt: Or was it mainly—

Hughes: This was just—in the beginning we got supplies from when the Red Cross came, those two guys. And then we didn't really need much after, you know, after we started getting the supplies, and then people started filtering out, and we probably had our population down to about 200, maybe, when I left. I stayed a week, and then I left. The Red Cross workers that came, I turned it over to them. I was really concerned about Eunice and wanted to get her out of there. It was really, really hard on the children and the elderly, hard on anyone not knowing, and they wanted to get back to their house, and not being able to get back into their areas. And then some just went on to relatives, to a safe haven elsewhere, but there was that population that had nowhere to go, and they stayed right there. But thank God for FEMA, DMAT from Florida, and the good and ever present—and in fact, before DMAT came and set up the hospital ER [emergency room] medical unit, we had heard that the roof had blown off of the Rite Aid. And we had somebody go, who had gas enough to get down here, and get all the medical supplies they could that were not damaged, and medicines.

VanZandt: Great.

Hughes: There are people that needed medicine.

VanZandt: Absolutely.

Hughes: And—

VanZandt: Wasn't looting, was it?

Hughes: No, no, it wasn't looting. We took what we needed, and that was the only thing that we did get. And so I took—I left. But when I left it, was a functioning community. It truly was. And what amazed me about it, I can't take credit for this functioning community. Everyone worked together. I mean maybe I did a lot of leadership, which I was very qualified to do, and the organization of things. And I knew what everyone needed as far as what the needs were, and how they should be addressed. And we had our morning meeting, and we addressed our needs, and I let other people address it. It was not just me, you know; I'd start and introduce this one and this one. This one's taking care of this, and does anyone have any questions, and what, you know, let them—

VanZandt: Delegating.

Hughes: Delegating and, we had somebody that would read from the Bible, and we'd have a morning prayer in a public school. Hah-hah.

VanZandt: You must've gotten really close to these people.

Hughes: I did, but I left after a week. I felt it was enough. I will say that I did not sleep. I caught very little sleep during that time.

(brief interruption)

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: And what a delegator you had to be in your meetings, but you didn't feel like it was you, but the team effort.

Hughes: Everyone—it was definitely a team effort, and everyone was wonderful. It was the most incredible experience that God could've ever given me.

VanZandt: In what way?

Hughes: Because we had so many people that were going through such a major crisis all together, and yet they formed a community. We had leaders just arise, you know. We had God present. They hugged each other. They helped each other. The children, the elderly, everyone sort of just held on to each other and got through the most horrible experience that anyone could have ever had. And it was because of the presence of love, you know. And in the Bible, it's Corinthians, and I'm not sure what number is, but it talked about disaster, and then in the end, all that was left was faith, hope, and love. And love being the most important. And if that didn't show it right there. We had faith; we had hope, and there was love and respect for each other. And it formed the most wonderful community, being in that shelter. It was—there was just a wonderful feeling amongst everyone, helping each other, you know. When somebody would come back and say, "Oh, their house survived," or "It's not that bad," or—then of course we had those people that lost everything, had no idea what they'd ever have, or their families didn't make it, or they can't find. But everyone embraced everyone. Everyone. It was a wonderful experience.

VanZandt: Strangers.

(brief interruption)

Hughes: So it was just a wonderful experience, and I thank God to this day that I was placed here to be able to witness that.

VanZandt: What a gift.

Hughes: It was wonderful, wonderful experience. And our deputy, our Hancock County deputies were wonderful. The Hancock County workers that just were there working.

VanZandt: Do you know some of their names, that you could mention?

Hughes: Anita. I think of Andy, one of the police officers. They were all just a wonderful—and Bill. What would I have done without Bill, and the deputies, and the Hancock County workers, and others that just came forward and couldn't do enough? Like the young kid that said, "We need to raise the flag." We found this ragged flag and raised the flag. But everyone was so willing to help, and it was just beautiful. And the people in the community gathered clothes. And we actually had a room that we made into a supply room with all the donations, whatever it was, so we could pass them out.

VanZandt: Yeah, that must've been a massive organization afterwards.

Hughes: And passing those out. And I'll never forget the EMT worker, the young girl that just graduated from EMT, just got her certification. She was out sweeping the walk, because there was glass and debris everywhere, and we had to make the area safe. The cleanup crews, the guys that cleaned up the bathroom so we could use them, you know, building shelters so we could have some shade and some play areas for the kids, and just everyone that sort of just helped do what we needed to do to have a living environment, a healthy, safe environment. Cleaning up every day. When we'd get up, we'd get everything on the fence to dry, and wash and bleach the floors. And of course being a nurse, I was concerned with, you know, contamination and infection and people getting sick.

VanZandt: And you probably didn't have laundry facilities.

Hughes: Oh no, no, but we washed things.

VanZandt: Hand washed.

Hughes: We had clean water. We had water for washing. We ended up getting big tanks of water that we used for showers, and we hooked up hoses and ran them along and put holes in them so we had a community shower.

VanZandt: When was your first shower, after the storm? Do you remember that?

Hughes: Oh, no. I remember (laughter) we found enough water. I remember actually standing in the bathroom and stripping down, and just pouring water over my body from a bottle, from a little bottle.

VanZandt: Yeah, a water bottle?

Hughes: And cleaning—a water bottle—and cleaning Eunice the same way and getting her cleaned up. She's eighty-four years old. So I had to get her off to the airport; so I got gas enough from the deputies to put into my vehicle so I could take her. I felt the place was organized; it was functioning, and I could hand it over to these Red Cross workers and leave. We had enough food. We had enough supplies. The medical unit was there—

VanZandt: The immediateness was over.

Hughes: —and they were wonderful. In fact, I got the nicest compliment from the commander; he says, “You know, I’ve always had”—I shouldn’t probably say this, but “I always had difficulty working, and there was always a conflict between our unit and the Red Cross.” He says, “But I’ve never worked with anyone like you.” He says, “This has been such a great experience.”

VanZandt: How amazing. What a compliment.

Hughes: And it was a wonderful compliment. A wonderful compliment to get—

VanZandt: Yeah, very, for a man.

Hughes: —from this commander of this DMAT. And they went over—I never did get the pictures, but they wanted to do a little photo shoot of me walking through the camp, well, their camp, you know.

VanZandt: Wow. You’ve never seen pictures that they took?

Hughes: I’ve never seen them. I do have a picture of me because I used to meet the helicopters so we wouldn’t lose our—this flight that came in. So they would make sure that they got to the kitchen. I would always make sure I met the helicopter.

VanZandt: And were they able to land pretty close, like, right by the school?

Hughes: We had them land right in the field.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Hughes: Oh, these are just some of the pictures I took of the area. Not in here, I guess. Well, is it in here, maybe?

VanZandt: It’s amazing, like the Waveland Market that sprang up and—

Hughes: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: —and just, you know, people who—

Hughes: What would we have done without these wonderful volunteers that came from everywhere?

VanZandt: That’s right.

Hughes: To volunteer their time.

VanZandt: It was a real effort from nonprofits and just individuals from all over the country.

Hughes: Oh, I know.

VanZandt: To fill in those gaps.

Hughes: Oh, I know, we had people from all over that was just so willing to help. I had a picture of me—I'll show it to you later.

VanZandt: Oh, sure, I'd love to see some of your pictures.

Hughes: I have tons of pictures that I took, but I have—I thought they were in here.

VanZandt: Well, I may later bring a scanner down and see if we can scan some and put them in the volume when it's bound. I have a picture of that "Vent, we listen" [sign in Waveland].

Hughes: Yeah, oh yeah.

VanZandt: By St. Claire's. Yeah, that was great.

Hughes: Yes, did you have the one, "We work free for sex"?

VanZandt: No, noooo, "We work free for sex"?

Hughes: Look at this one. (laughter)

VanZandt: "Will work for sex." Now, where was that?

Hughes: That was along Clermont Harbor.

VanZandt: What were some of the signs that you remember? I saw one on the way, "State Farm [Insurance] sucks." (laughter)

Hughes: Yeah, "State Farm sucks."

VanZandt: You can still see that, two years later.

Hughes: Oh, the ones that used to really be heart wrenching, because we had a lot of people die in this area that stayed behind—on the next street, we had a man and his wife and two sons die, and the daughters were in the tree. Their clothes were washed off, but they survived in a tree. We had a couple further down in that white house—well, it was left, a little structure was left of it, cement structure—they found their bodies in the tree that night. I had a girlfriend that came back to her place and she—I

don't think she ever returned; there was a body on her deck. There were a lot of bodies.

VanZandt: I thing fifty-five people, I heard maybe, in the county.

Hughes: How many?

VanZandt: Fifty-five.

Hughes: Oh, more than that.

VanZandt: Is that what you've heard? Really? More.

Hughes: We had those big refrigerator trucks with bodies in it downtown. No, there was a lot of people that were never found, that their bodies washed out to sea, and they were finding bodies up until recently in woods and under collapsed homes, and a lot of people stayed behind that were really traumatized. So I ended up leaving to take Eunice to Atlanta, Georgia.

VanZandt: Did you first take her to see her house? Did you-all come back when you got out of the shelter? I'm sure you were anxious to see your house.

Hughes: No, we couldn't get to her house; there were no roads down here.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: I managed to, before I left for Georgia, managed to get up on Nicholson [Avenue] and was able to go through the back way to get to my house. And I'll never forget; it was just like, "Oh, my goodness." And I couldn't believe it; it was devastating. And I stood there on the property and probably in shock. You couldn't even get to the Beach Road, and the debris fields were incredible. I mean, it was just as high as a two-story, three-story. It was just debris fields everywhere, and everything was down, and it was quiet. It was dead silence. There were no birds. There was nothing. No sounds, no nothing. No train, the train tracks were twisted, and the bridges were out, and there was no life anywhere. Everything was gray. It was horrible. And I stood in that yard, and I felt something at my feet, and I looked down, and I thought it was my plaque that I got for retirement, you know the wood with the metal on it with just something they would say. I went to pick it up, and I ended up putting it right back where I found it. I felt there was something around my back like holding my shoulder or just calming me. And I went and picked it up, and you know what it was? It was Psalm 23, "You walk in the valley of death," um-hm. And that's what it was. It was the valley of death. Death of our whole area. Total destruction. And it was funny; it was weird. It was—now, my girlfriend, my best friend had died a few years ago, and later on in the FEMA trailer, I had taken two books with me, one of them was my Bible, when I went to the shelter. And I didn't realize that I was sitting—hadn't really gone much to the Bible, but it was at my head

on the shelf of my FEMA trailer, and I happened to open it up, and it fell right into the Psalm, that same psalm section. And then it was the holy card for my girlfriend's funeral, and I didn't realize that on her holy card, you know, they have a picture on the front and then on the back, her name, and her birth date, and her date of death, was written the Psalm 23.

VanZandt: That's important in your life.

Hughes: Yeah, it was important. It kept flashing up.

VanZandt: Yeah.

Hughes: Kept flashing up. So anyways, I took Eunice to the airport, and it was quite a busy airport, and she had her little bag of goodies that she clutched to her side. And I don't even know if you want this on tape or even want to write this, but she was not too happy to go to her daughter. It was her only child, but they had a very up-and-down relationship, and she wanted, of course, to go back to her to see her house or what was left of it. She was not happy about going to Texas to reunite with her daughter and her granddaughter who was expecting the first grandchild, which would've been her great-grandchild; they were at a hotel in Texas. And she managed to get on the plane. I stayed there until she made it, and then I went to North Carolina to get my RV to bring back because I knew I was going to have to have something to live in. And she made it to Texas; her daughter picked her up, took her to the hotel, and she wanted her own room. She didn't want to stay with her daughter. So they got her her own room, and she created such a scene that the hotel called the police. And the police came, and they wanted to know what was in this bag she'd been clutching for, how long?

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: The bag that I had the air mattress in, and she had this little paper bag, and it would never have lasted, you know, and she kept it at her side. She had 54,000 dollar bills in that bag in hundred dollar bills. She had about \$80,000 worth of jewelry in that bag. But the biggest shock was she had a .22, a gun and she made it—

VanZandt: She had taken it with her, and you didn't know?

Hughes: She had it on the airport; I saw her go through the detector.

VanZandt: That's amazing.

Hughes: It failed at the Atlanta, Georgia airport. She made it to Texas with all that money. She was in that shelter all that time—

VanZandt: That's what I was thinking.

Hughes: —with all that money in that bag and a gun and some jewelry.

VanZandt: And that was never taken from her; that's amazing.

Hughes: And it—well, no one knew, including myself. I would've wanted to put it in a safe place.

VanZandt: And she just wanted to get back home; it sounds like. She didn't want to be there.

Hughes: Oh, I know. I know. And then she told me afterwards where other money was. There was some in the baby grand; there was some here, and there was some there. And well, I went back to her property, and I looked, but by the time I got back it was—you know, we were into weeks, and everything was gone. And then my daughter came down, Shelly, and I just didn't have the heart to go searching. She says, "Mom, you have to start looking for things." And that's when I found things down the road. I found my bed was the only thing that survived. Of course that was left in the house. Everything else washed out.

VanZandt: It came through one window and went out the other.

Hughes: Yeah, through the back and through the front, and the foundation was shifted off, but upstairs was fine. I had white carpeting in the upstairs.

VanZandt: Oh my, was it still white?

Hughes: And the towels were hanging perfectly; the beds were made. I had three bedrooms and a bath upstairs. Everything was how I left it, and there was just big footprints; it was the military. They came through in their search-and-rescue mission, and they had the big crosses on all the houses for who searched, the date they searched, what group they searched, and was there any dead bodies or any debris. There was the four quadrants.

VanZandt: And you still see that up. I saw one on a house down the road.

Hughes: You can see it on my house; that's my house. That was my original house.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And your roof must've remained intact, or was it blown off?

Hughes: No, the roofs were damaged, but this roof here had two sections. This house was much worse because you could've driven a car through here. There was nothing here, and it was pretty well sealed, so there was a lot of debris inside.

VanZandt: And who lived here, Paula, because this was your next-door neighbor?

Hughes: This was my next-door neighbor, a young couple, Mike and Renee Lawson, and they moved north of here. It's interesting how some people wanted to stay, and others couldn't get far enough away from the water; it was devastating. She left a lot of things that weren't—but, you know, everyone's possessions, what was left of them, what didn't wash out to the sea or into the woods, which no longer exist, but everyone's possessions were mixed. So you could find things, and it could've been the neighbor in the next street or somewhere two miles from here. Eunice had that doll collection, and her dolls were all over Bay St. Louis.

VanZandt: I was just imagining dolls all over town.

Hughes: Her dolls were all over Bay St. Louis.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. And her grand piano, did it make it?

Hughes: Aw, the baby grand; I didn't take a picture of it, I don't think, but it was laying on the road there. And I did take something from her property. Her daughter says, "Take anything you can find." And I kept looking for stuff, but I couldn't find anything, but I did—this was part of a big thing and that little (inaudible).

VanZandt: Oh, fantastic. Perfect planter.

Hughes: Um-hm, yeah, and (inaudible). And this is all stuff I had in North Carolina, or stuff I bought. And of course everything in the house is bought new, except the bed.

VanZandt: Right. And I see, just looking in the back across your fence, I mean, you hear construction going on now, and you see beautiful new homes next to slabs like we have back behind you. Would you say most of your friends have come back? I'm sure it's just a mixed bag.

Hughes: Well, on this street, we have—let's see. We have one, two, three, four, we have about 50 percent of the people have come back.

VanZandt: About 50 percent.

Hughes: About 50 percent have come back. Others that moved, moved away from the water, didn't want to be near the water.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: Now, you see, I have no trees here. Now, I had, like, thirty trees in this property and about twenty-five on the next property.

VanZandt: Were these pine trees, oaks?

Hughes: These were pine and everything else. But mostly these tall pines. So these yards were very, very, very shaded. Julie built these houses within this forest, and it was very shaded. The yard, it was too shaded, almost, couldn't get enough of light to have anything back in the yard. Now, we have no trees. And I went and bought all these palms and had them planted, and I actually never, ever saw the houses behind me, never.

VanZandt: It must seem strange to have such a long-range view now.

Hughes: Oh my goodness, you can see the water actually.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: From here. And from the front of the house, as well. I never was able to ever view any of the houses because we had so many woods here.

VanZandt: So that's kind of a positive now; you can see the water.

Hughes: Yeah, but the negative is what saved us, the fact that we even had structure to rebuild was the fact that we had the woods—

VanZandt: They blocked.

Hughes: —and we had the houses along the beach. See, the beach is directly this way.

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: You know? My house is sitting with my—my back of my house is west; the front of my house is east. This side is towards the water, but we had this massive woods and the big homes along the beach.

VanZandt: The Beach Boulevard.

Hughes: That really took the—

VanZandt: Served as a barrier, didn't it?

Hughes: Barrier, definitely a barrier, yeah.

VanZandt: And now that's gone.

Hughes: And all these houses that were here, they were just totally destroyed. So I must say this is—I have to say something about Julie Rossen and her ability to build a good house. Because these structures stayed. They might've been shifted; they even came off the foundation, some of them, and the walls were somewhat destroyed. I

mean, there were no walls in this house, I mean everything was—the first floor, the water came over the door. We had—how high is the ceiling, would you say?

VanZandt: Well, oh, probably, what, fifteen?

Hughes: That high?

VanZandt: Feet?

Hughes: Twelve, maybe?

VanZandt: Maybe. OK, maybe thirteen.

Hughes: OK, so the water was about ten feet then. So, well.

VanZandt: And I noticed that it's not built up, though. You see a lot of the homes that are built up. What are the elevation requirements now? Are there any?

Hughes: Well, if you had a certain amount of structure left, you didn't have to build up; but if you ended up with no structure, you had to go up several feet. In fact, Julie's home was not that high up. They were talking about the houses on the beach. But even, it didn't matter what your elevation was; it actually did not matter what your house was made of or what your elevation was. The strength in that storm took everything. It took the bridge. It took the railroad track. It took all these buildings downtown in Bay St. Louis. It took all of Waveland; there's nothing left of Waveland. That whole Main Street, Coleman Avenue is gone. It took all those beautiful, big houses that were supposed to withstand hurricane force, but no one ever expected to have a disaster of this magnitude. Just like everyone that complained, well, how would you know how to respond if you never had anything. I was thankful I got a FEMA trailer, and I'm thankful that I live in this country. And I'm thankful that we have the good people that we have that were able to come down here and help everyone. I'm grateful for my neighbors that were good. But I'm really grateful that I live in the USA. If I was in another country, I wouldn't have had the help I had from the state, from the federal government, and from other good people, organizations and religious groups that came down here.

VanZandt: So you feel fairly positive, overall—

Hughes: Oh yes, definitely.

VanZandt: —of the federal responses, the state response, local response.

Hughes: You know, it was slow in coming but yet the magnitude, no one had ever experienced anything. I was just grateful to have the response that we had and the good people. Now we know what can happen. Now hopefully we're better prepared.

VanZandt: Well, tell me about that, this summer as we've started hurricane season now. You know, will people react differently?

Hughes: Definitely.

VanZandt: Will people leave earlier?

Hughes: Every time—let me tell you, I was in my FEMA trailer, and it was over a year ago. I hadn't even begun to rebuild. And, oh goodness, it was well over a year ago. It was in February, and I have this little emergency response thing that comes on only for emergencies, and I was sleeping, and it woke me up out of a sleep.

VanZandt: Is it one of the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] radios?

Hughes: Yes, it was one of the NOAA things.

VanZandt: OK.

Hughes: And it was saying, "If you're in a FEMA trailer, get out; there's been a tornado spotted in your area. Leave your FEMA trailer immediately." Hah.

VanZandt: Did it scare you?

Hughes: And I thought, well, where can I go? Where can I go? I mean a FEMA trailer, get in a ditch. I looked at the ditch out there; it was filled with polluted water. Where can you go?

VanZandt: Right.

Hughes: So I had taken my dog, Katrina; I rescued her after the hurricane. She's a Siberian Husky. I had her with me. Kirby, my Irish Setter, I had to put to sleep shortly after the hurricane. He was very traumatized; he couldn't walk, and he was in terrible pain.

VanZandt: *Oh.*

Hughes: He had problems to begin with, but it just did him in. I took the dog, Katrina, and my little dog, Muffin; I got in my vehicle, and I pulled into the garage here. It was a shallow place, but I figured at least there's some structure, and I'm in my car. (laughter) But how are we preparing now? I think it's on everyone's mind, now that the hurricane season is here; it's on everyone's mind, and what we need to do. And you need to be prepared. Thank God that the technology is here so we have plenty of warning. You know that if a hurricane is headed in this direction, and if it's anything over a Category One, and we do not have the protection of other houses, of the woods, and the water is so close, and what's happened before, we've learned.

Lessons learned: get out, get out early, have a tank of gas; always have your gas tank filled. Have a plan; having a plan is crucial. I have a plan. I have an RV; it's a small RV, but it's gassed up; it's got propane in it; it's filled up with food. I have— (laughter) I just bought yesterday one of those panel trailers.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Hughes: I will not buy furniture again. If I ever have to lose stuff like I lost last time, I will live in a tent. I will never buy furniture again. I bought some pieces, and I had some precious pieces that I had in North Carolina, and I brought down here. The things I lost before, I can't replace. But I will not be unprepared this time. I have that trailer that I will fill, and I will leave town and be out of here. Most likely I will be a shelter manager again or be at some shelter helping.

VanZandt: You'll get that phone call.

Hughes: Yes. Well, when I came back, I ended up volunteering. I was with the Morrell Foundation for three months.

VanZandt: Well, I wanted to hear about that, too, and I don't know if you—you know we may have to continue, I know you've got things to do. Do you need to stop now? I could come back another time after your trip?

Hughes: Sure, you can come back anytime.

VanZandt: Because there's a lot I'd like to ask about that.

Hughes: Oh yes, yeah.

VanZandt: Because I visited the I Care Village.

Hughes: Oh yes, I was there at the very beginning.

VanZandt: Well, I was so impressed. I think I met Rose when I was there.

Hughes: Oh yeah, she—

VanZandt: Do you know Miss Rose?

Hughes: Yes, Rose.

VanZandt: Um-hm, so would that be all right?

Hughes: Oh, that'll be fine.

VanZandt: If we continue?

Hughes: That would be fine.

VanZandt: OK. Because I know you've got so much, and there's—I really would like, probably, another hour, hour and a half to really talk about that.

Hughes: (laughter) Yeah.

VanZandt: And the future.

Hughes: Oh yes, definitely.

VanZandt: And what you see happening now that Bay Bridge is open, and so much

—

Hughes: This whole area.

VanZandt: —controversy about the casinos and just, you know, where things are headed.

Hughes: I know.

VanZandt: And what the future will hold.

Hughes: Everyone wants this area to be like it was, and it never will be, and we have to realize that. I feel like sort of like a pioneer woman, you know.

VanZandt: You are, um-hm.

Hughes: And I want to be here. Like I said, I wasn't born in the South, but I'm here now, and this is my home, and this is where I will stay. And I will help in the rebuilding in any way I can.

VanZandt: And do you feel like the average citizen has been able to be a part of that planning process?

Hughes: Everyone that's here (dogs barking) is part of it. If you didn't want to be part of the rebuilding, then you left. Everyone that is here has a vision. And you have to have a vision. I mean, I obviously have built myself this pretty little place, you know.

VanZandt: It's beautiful.

Hughes: And my yard's going to look really nice once my sod is in. I'm putting a porch, a screen porch, that's why I poured that slab.

VanZandt: Oh, that's great. Right.

Hughes: There's going to be a nice screen porch along the back.

VanZandt: Oh, you need that in the summertime here.

Hughes: I'm going to have a hot tub over there.

VanZandt: Oh, a hot tub.

Hughes: Yeah, and this is going to be my little oasis.

VanZandt: Yeah. And it feels like Florida with the palm trees. (laughter) It really does.

Hughes: I love it.

VanZandt: It's going to be great.

Hughes: But this is my home, and I'm going to be here, and totally, I'm totally committed. And I'm committed to helping other people, and I feel like I really want to join an organization after I'm totally done, so I can respond to another disaster in some part of the country, the United States. I'm thinking of AmeriCorps because I really—

VanZandt: I'm sure, you got to know them well.

Hughes: —got to watch them, and I think they're a really good organization.

VanZandt: Boy, they need you.

Hughes: And I would like to give up at least two months, two to three months of my time to give back because I certainly am appreciative of everyone that's come to our aid and helped us, and I think that it's only right that we give back.

VanZandt: I think you're right, Paula.

Hughes: Give back.

VanZandt: That's going to be the way I think a lot of people feel, that now they see that they can be involved, and they feel that need to not just have been a recipient but to be able to pay some of that back.

Hughes: Yes.

VanZandt: Yeah.

Hughes: And we have been a recipient of wonderful places throughout the United States that have adopted us and helped us through this. And there's still a lot of work to be done.

VanZandt: Right. Well, I want to hear about that.

Hughes: And I think after this hurricane season, you're going to see people coming back. I think we're going to see these empty lots being rebuilt with homes, and you see a lot of for sale signs, and I think that we're going to become a real big community again, and hopefully it will be residential. I really cringe at the thought of condos going along the beach because this is the only stretch of the Gulf that doesn't have commercialism.

VanZandt: The high rises.

Hughes: The high rises and the restaurants; we can go onto Highway 90 for that.

VanZandt: Right, it's so unique.

Hughes: And Biloxi, and it is a unique area, and it's a beautiful area. I chose it for a reason. And I feel very, very fortunate to be able to have the opportunity to live here. I feel very fortunate that I was here during that crisis, that I had a part in it. I have now a part in rebuilding.

VanZandt: Well, Waveland was very fortunate to have you; I can't imagine, you know, for you to be willing to step up to the plate at a moment's notice and do what you did, is not something a lot of people would do. To have the skills that you have, you were the perfect person to do that, having been through all your training.

Hughes: Well, I think my training—I tell people; you know, I've worked for the State of Connecticut. I've worked in trauma; I've worked in critical care, and I think that there's a reason. There's a reason for everything.

VanZandt: It's interesting when you look back and see your [background and training]—

Hughes: And I'm just following the role that I'm supposed to be in. I mean, it's not like I had planned to be here during this time; it's not like I had planned to be the shelter manager or have been there at the time, but God placed me there, so I was there.

VanZandt: That's great.

Hughes: And I'm here now, and I'm just thankful because I truly feel that we're blessed. We're blessed.

VanZandt: Oh, absolutely.

Hughes: You know you have to look at it that way.

VanZandt: Yeah, you do.

Hughes: We're blessed.

VanZandt: You do; you have to, to take that next step forward.

Hughes: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Well, Paula, I'll stop now, so you can get ready to get out of town and go on your fabulous trip to Connecticut and all over the place, Canada.

Hughes: Visit the children, visit the relatives. And have one nice week on Block Island, just laying back.

VanZandt: Yeah, that sounds great.

Hughes: It does; it will be.

VanZandt: That sounds great. Well, enjoy it and thank you. And we'll pick up again and finish, if that's OK, and talk a little bit more.

Hughes: And it's a pleasure meeting you, and you're welcome to come back anytime.

VanZandt: Thank you, thank you so much; I can't wait. All right, we'll stop for today then.

(end of interview)