

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

CLAIRE BOGGS MORRISON

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Claire Boggs Morrison and is taking place on September 8, 2006. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt.

VanZandt: Today is September 8, 2006. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at The University of Southern Mississippi, and I'm here today in Long Beach, Mississippi, at Boggsdale. I'm here with Claire Boggs Morrison. And, Claire, would you mind telling me your birth date and where you were born?

Morrison: I was born April 12, 1915, right here on the original property of my grandfather, in Long Beach, Mississippi.

VanZandt: OK. And we are here—it's actually kind of an interesting time to be talking because it's the one-year anniversary, I guess you could say, or commemoration of Hurricane Katrina last August a year ago. And you have lived here for many, many, many years.

Morrison: Many years.

VanZandt: And have been through Camille, Hurricane of 1947, and now Katrina, and so many other things, other than specific events in life, so much to share with us. We do have a previous interview with you in 1976, so a lot has happened since then that I would love to hear about. So, if we could start maybe, Claire, with you just describing the home that we're sitting in right now in Boggsdale, in Long Beach, and the properties around us, that were around us, and what's remaining.

Morrison: Well, I'm sitting in my little bungalow cottage, which is very comfortable. And the address is Boggs Circle, and the reason it is Boggs Circle is because it's land that we had owned about twenty or twenty-five years ago and sold it off, made it into a subdivision which is south, north of Magnolia, which is the cutoff line. And so that is where we were fortunate enough to be able to buy a home. And I am very comfortable in Boggs Circle.

VanZandt: OK. So, you've been here in this home or owned this home about twenty-five years?

Morrison: No, not this home; I bought it after Katrina.

VanZandt: Oh, after Katrina.

Morrison: Right, after Katrina.

VanZandt: I'm sorry.

Morrison: Yes, we owned the land that we sold off.

VanZandt: OK, and it's a beautiful brick home on a beautiful street.

Morrison: Well, it's a nice, quiet subdivision. There's another—it's also Boggs Circle East, I'm on Boggs Circle West. And in the middle there's a street that's called Driftwood because both properties were my—one was my sister's and one was my property.

VanZandt: OK, and what kind of condition was this home that we're in right now when you purchased it?

Morrison: Well, it was right after Katrina, and we were all cramped up in one little rental that we were living on, which was, I'll say, north of the railroad. And we had just never lived too far away from the water. And I was truly blessed because very few, if any, homes were up for sale because the water came to my neighbor's house. Now, water for this house was roof damage, the roof blew off and it was all—the sheetrock had to be removed and the flooring, I put in brick flooring. I added a little patio to make it more comfortable for me to be outside a little more. And fortunately my son is in building construction, so he pulled all his men together, and by Christmas we were pretty well established right here. So, I'm most grateful and thankful that, after having lost everything, and when I say everything, I mean everything. My son, Robert, came at the last and he said, "Would you want me to take the portraits?" And I said, "Oh yes, I guess you better take them." I had valuable antiques. He had one in his arms and he said, "Shall I take it, Mom?" And I said, "Oh, no, let it go." I figured we had gone through Camille, and that was the worse that would ever happen, and that nothing would happen. Very foolish, but it happened.

(brief interruption)

VanZandt: OK, we'll continue here. Claire, I guess this is a good time to go ahead and talk about Katrina, and maybe get that out of the way before we move into other things. So, I guess, can you tell me, just describe maybe the first few days before Katrina came, and your preparations, and what you did to get ready.

Morrison: Preparations, we were just—we didn't make any preparations. I don't know why, I mean it was kind of foolish of us, but we had just always thought that now we were secure. We were lots further back from the beach, we built according to

the stipulations for after Camille, and we really and truthfully, it was kind of ignorant of us. But, there again, I don't remember great warnings, but maybe there were.

VanZandt: Well, I think that wasn't uncommon. I think many people who lived down here, particularly along the beach, and had made it through Camille, that following that, the Camille factor—they didn't think it would be that bad, and they had made it before so they would make it through this.

Morrison: Right, yes, lots of people—

VanZandt: And didn't take it too, too seriously.

Morrison: —thought that way. And particularly if they had built a house that they—and we have moved back and everything, so. But, of course, we did have sense enough to leave the property, because we all left.

VanZandt: Well, that's what I was going to ask you. So, you evacuated?

Morrison: Oh yes, we did, and we didn't go very far for that, though, because we just went up to, I think it was a Holiday Inn on Highway 49 by I-10. And when the storm was at its height, it wasn't too bad there. It had quite a bit of wind, but and it lasted, it just lasted and lasted. We thought we would never get out of the hotel to see what was happening, what had happened. However, we heard, by way of communication how it is now, that our place was all destroyed. And I remember distinctly my niece, Charlie Boggs' wife, she says, "Oh, I don't believe it. I think they're just exaggerating, it's not all gone." And I thought the same thing. But as everyone knows, the nation knows, that this is the worst disaster in history. And consequently, not just us, but lots of people on the Coast were destroyed and amazed at the depths of the storm, that it almost reached the railroad track, and then there was lots of damage even past the railroad. And it had never, in my lifetime of ninety years, had it been so devastating as it was. So I really can't sit and weep about my problems, because everyone on the Coast was in the same thing. It's just unbelievable to me when I drive down Highway 90 and see how—the depth of the hurricane, it was just unreal. Camille, as I said before, we were washed away, but we were in low lands; it's low property. But you drive a little bit further east and the houses, maybe the shutters were torn off or they had some roof damage, but not total destruction like Katrina. And I guess that was how it came about.

VanZandt: Who was with you when you evacuated and stayed at the Holiday Inn?

Morrison: Oh, OK.

VanZandt: Can you tell me the names and—

Morrison: The names.

VanZandt: —and the relation to you?

Morrison: Well, let's see now.

VanZandt: If you can remember.

Morrison: Yeah, I can remember. It was all of my children, so that was Florette and Robert, the twins, and Robert's wife, Mary, my daughter; Jo Pepper and John, they went to a friend's house, they were not there; Anna and Chuck went to friends' houses; Martha was there; Charlie Boggs and his wife; Archie, my brother; myself; Robert Holmes, that is Florette's son, my grandson.

VanZandt: Florette's your daughter?

Morrison: Florette's my daughter. And Robert Holmes is my grandson. And we were all right there in the same motel and, of course, standing on the balcony or looking out the window or what have you. The night was rough and I can remember that lots of wind, you know. And when morning came, it got even worse.

VanZandt: Which was very different from Camille, isn't it, which hit at night?

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: When did you get to the Holiday Inn? Was this the day before the storm? The storm hit on Monday. Was this Sunday that y'all decided to go?

Morrison: Yeah, we went—that's right, we went Sunday afternoon, rather late, though. We didn't—oh, I have to back up. Robert, he stayed in his house; Robert and Sandy, his wife, and my daughter Florette stayed in his house, which is on Boggs Circle; it's 210, I'm 218. And they thought they would be perfectly safe because Robert, as we said before, and I think it was around nine o'clock that he said, "Gee whiz, that drainage up on Magnolia sure is stopped up. The water is coming down the street." And with that, more or less, he says that they were just—the flood just came in his house, and it was five feet of water before he knew it.

VanZandt: In their home.

Morrison: In their home. But he has a two-story house, so they went upstairs. And when they were upstairs, a tree fell on the house. So they really had a horrible experience. And the water kept rising, and then they realized it wasn't the drainage that was stopped up it was the Gulf, the [Mississippi] Sound, the Gulf of Mexico greeting him.

VanZandt: Greeting him, coming up to his house.

Morrison: So that's it.

VanZandt: Did they have children there with them?

Morrison: No, there were no children in this storm, no little ones. I mean no, no children. I had dogs; oh, we all had dogs.

VanZandt: Were they with you there at the Holiday Inn?

Morrison: Yes, yes. Yeah, we had—Charlie had a dog, my daughter had a dog, and one dog who we could not get or find or locate and his name is J.W., and we looked for him, you know, before the storm and everything and couldn't find him. Then after Katrina, well, that was Joe and John's dog, after Katrina they found the dog. And the dog had made its way almost back to where Robert lived, in a man's house sleeping upstairs on the bed. (laughter) So that dog has been the pet of the hurricane.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Did you know whose home this was, did you know the man?

Morrison: Yeah, yeah, it was David Oliver on the corner. And I mean, for six months after that that dog would sleep on nothing but a table. (laughter)

VanZandt: Really? He knew to get up higher.

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: Isn't that fascinating?

Morrison: It was.

VanZandt: Well, I bet you were glad to know he made it through, J.W.

Morrison: Oh yeah, he's still with us and he's an old dog, too. He's about twelve years old.

VanZandt: That's good news.

Morrison: Yeah, it was.

VanZandt: No pets lost and everyone came through it.

Morrison: Everyone came through it. So there was, fortunately again, we were able to rent a place, and oh, don't ask me how many people lived in that three bedroom house. (laughter)

VanZandt: Were you-all there?

Morrison: Yeah, we were all there for a good three or four months, until I was able to get this house straightened out.

VanZandt: Three, four months is a long time.

Morrison: There again, a long time is right.

VanZandt: Particularly when you were used to having your own private compound here.

Morrison: Yes. (laughter)

VanZandt: Everyone had their own place?

Morrison: Yeah, own place. It's hard. Two bathrooms was, I guess, about the worst, and one kitchen and one refrigerator. (laughter)

VanZandt: But you had electricity and water?

Morrison: After sometimes we had immediately, there again, I had wonderful in-laws. And one went to Houston, I believe, and bought us stuff plus a generator, so you see, we had a generator.

VanZandt: That's great.

Morrison: And so that gave us a little bit of cooking and refrigeration; very little air because we had one little unit that he bought, also.

VanZandt: What do you particularly remember as the big discomforts with that many of you together, or do you remember more the—

Morrison: Well, I'll tell you.

VanZandt: —good, togetherness—

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: —of having no other distractions?

Morrison: Yes, because it seems, you know, that time we were just flooded with volunteers, which was wonderful, and all kinds of giveaways. And of course the big item was water, and they were just very generous with the water. My hobby at the time was reading where the water came from. And believe me, it came from almost every state in the USA, which was interesting to see.

VanZandt: Who were some of the groups that you remember, in particular, helping? What kind of assistance?

Morrison: The groups? I tell you, I do remember the Lutheran group, the Episcopalian group, and sad to say, I hope that the Catholics do behind-the-scenes work, but they are not organized to do the work that the other churches gave us. And it's—like I say, I'm Catholic, but I do know they do lots of good behind the scenes. They're just not as organized as some of the other churches. In particular, one group from the Episcopalians came and they helped. They went up to the property and salvaged a *few* small items. I mean, when I say small items, that was another *amazing* thing about Katrina. After Camille—I had all antique furniture—we would find a bed post, or like I found the pedestal to my dining room table, and one or two pieces of furniture that we could restore and salvage. And quite a bit of stuff was found after Camille. And not just me, but every person that I have, more or less, spoken to that lived on the waterfront said that they were *amazed* that nothing of any consequence was ever, ever found, that it must've just swept back.

VanZandt: After Katrina.

Morrison: After Katrina. And *nothing* was found of ours. I mean, I had nothing but little items, just little items that—

VanZandt: Like what, for example, do you remember finding?

Morrison: Well, yes, I have a few of them around this house, a few of them. I have a few of things, that little box on the—cranberry box on the—

VanZandt: Oh, on the mantle.

Morrison: —on the mantle. That Blessed Virgin was found, and that's *very*, very old. And one of the things that I cherish was found.

VanZandt: Describe what you just brought to me.

Morrison: Well, let's see.

VanZandt: OK, we just walked over from the mantle and you brought a rock that's painted. Tell me what this rock, the significance of finding this.

Morrison: Well, this rock is significant of now. After Camille we did get in Will-Stan II [home] for Christmas. Consequently, we didn't have much money and we said, "Well, we'll all just make a little gift of our own to see how talented we are."

VanZandt: Homemade presents.

Morrison: Homemade presents. So we sat around the fireplace and we gave our little gifts, and the only gift that I did—I'm not at all artistic or anything, my sister was very artistic—I picked up a rock and I painted it and I wrote on it, "My love, the Rock of Gibraltar," and gave it to my husband. Do you believe it? After Katrina, the rock was found.

VanZandt: And what a wonderful idea, at the time. Little did you know a rock would be something very good to keep and to have for a hurricane because that's probably going to make it, unlike some of the glass things. Which is amazing though—I see your glass, this cranberry dish on the mantle that made it.

Morrison: Yeah, well, I had to center that gem. And then there's a dish, a gravy boat up there.

VanZandt: Right, I see the white gravy boat.

Morrison: It looks like it's whole, but it's not. The back end—

VanZandt: I bet that went through many Thanksgiving dinners.

Morrison: Yes, and I had a complete set of that that belonged to my grandfather's people, the Hales.

VanZandt: Well, how wonderful that you found that.

Morrison: Well, that's it I've [found.]

VanZandt: And people have sent you things in the mail, didn't they?

Morrison: Well, some things, yes, they have, which has meant plenty, plenty; that was such a nice thing for them to do. They started looking through what they had that —

VanZandt: Might mean something to you.

Morrison: Yeah, that would mean something to me.

VanZandt: And one I'm going to bring up is, I'm looking at it right now, is this Krewe of Toots invitation. And it says Krewe of Toots, and it has the captain's name and Queen Toots, which was your name.

Morrison: That's right.

VanZandt: Tell me about your nickname.

Morrison: My nickname? Well, I grew up and my nickname is Tootsie, and then when the grandchildren came along, I don't know why but they shortened it to Tooty, and I've been known as Tooty; all of my names, so.

VanZandt: And when did you get that nickname? Who gave it to you?

Morrison: The nickname?

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Morrison: Well, Florette's—my first grandchildren, they were twins. And my daughter had twins, and I think one of them.

VanZandt: That's what they called you?

Morrison: Yeah, they called me that.

VanZandt: So it wasn't a childhood nickname but something your grandchildren named you.

Morrison: Well, the childhood name was Tootsie. My brother still, Archie, who's living, Judge Archie, he's still living, he still calls me Tootsie and one or two people, but I don't have many living in that generation that called me Tootsie.

VanZandt: And it's a great invitation, and behind the invitation is a photograph of Stanley, your husband, in his regalia, his outfit with his tall stovepipe hat that says Mayor. So that was a costume that he wore—

Morrison: That's right.

VanZandt: —in one of the krewes?

Morrison: He was Mayor Boggsdale for the Krewe of Toots. And this was a—we started the Krewe of Toots; well, it lasted thirteen years, and then we had to discontinue it because it got very big. There was a band always, and a truck with beer flowing (laughs), beans and rice that Billy Barrett(?) always cooked, (inaudible) it got bigger and bigger, though. They had other people doing it. Anyway, we had to discontinue it because it had gotten so large, and then they had put out that if anyone leaves your property and have had too much to drink and they got in a wreck, well, you were liable, and so we—

VanZandt: And the chances of that happening were pretty good back then, I'm sure.

Morrison: Very good of it happening, so, and they did carry a little insurance but it would've been astronomical for them.

VanZandt: Do you remember when, about the year, maybe that that began?

Morrison: Began?

VanZandt: The Krewe of Toots? Was it—

Morrison: Well, it—

VanZandt: —or the decade?

Morrison: If you would pause it.

VanZandt: Sure.

(brief break)

VanZandt: When it started, OK.

Morrison: Um-hm.

VanZandt: OK. The invitation says 1987, and that was the last year of the krewe, so it lasted thirteen years, and 1974 is when it started.

Morrison: Started, that's right.

VanZandt: OK, and that was sort of a [local] celebration. When New Orleans had theirs going on, you had your own here, right?

Morrison: Well, no, we always had it on the—well, Friday night was always a big board of directors and wives and a few friends. We would start celebrating Friday night. And then Saturday, we'd always have it Saturday before Mardi Gras. And, really, one of the reasons it was started with just about thirteen people, my son was married to a New Orleans girl, but she wasn't too much in love with the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. So she liked it plenty, but not all the big crowds. So I think she's the one who said, "Let's have our own Mardi Gras." And from that it just got bigger and bigger. (laughter)

VanZandt: So it's something your family started?

Morrison: That's right.

VanZandt: Oh great, OK. And how community-wide—this is something that the whole community got involved in?

Morrison: Oh no, no. It was by invitation only.

VanZandt: I see, OK.

Morrison: But then again, that's one reason we did stop it. Because the word went out what a big affair it was, all the grounds and we'd have a mock parade, and a king and a queen, you know, and as word got out it seemed like people that knew us and everything that were invited would say, "Oh, it's Open House, you know," and it got so that we really did not know who was coming to the Krewe of Toots.

VanZandt: Um-hm, kind of lost control over it.

Morrison: Lost control over it, that's right. So with the two things combined, not knowing, I mean, if we could've held it down to knowing who was there and everything, maybe we'd have continued.

VanZandt: But it was time for that to end.

Morrison: But it was fun.

VanZandt: Fun while it lasted.

Morrison: One of the fun thoughts.

VanZandt: Tell me, as I'm looking at this rock that you made after Camille, tell me a little bit about Stanley, your husband, and—

Morrison: Stanley?

VanZandt: —when did he pass away?

Morrison: Oh goodness, I didn't figure that out. Let's see, I can tell by one of the births of the grandchildren. It was twenty-one years ago. He passed away on Christmas Eve—no.

VanZandt: Eighty-five.

Morrison: The day before Christmas Eve. And Christmas Eve we always got together, grandchildren, everyone, and that's when we celebrated Christmas. We always had—Stanley played Santa Claus for many, many years, but as he got—

VanZandt: How wonderful.

Morrison: —older and he did develop Parkinson's disease. Then one of the grandchildren took up being, one of the older grandchildren, or one of the children, I can't remember, took up being Santa Claus. So we would have Santa Claus, I mean standard dress like Santa Claus and everything, ring the bells and—(laughter)

VanZandt: I can just envision that was a huge gathering—

Morrison: Yes, it was.

VanZandt: —for Christmas, with everyone gathered around. Tell me about that. What were some of those special holidays like?

Morrison: (laughter) Well, in those, in the first holidays I mean, there was my mother, my sister, my brother, and myself. I mean of the older generation. And then, of course, the little babies and teenagers. And we just always had it on Christmas Eve. Sometimes there'd be quite a bit of crying from the little ones. (laughter) And as they grew older, they did it, there was no more crying, just fun and joyous. And through the years, though, as time went on, my mother passed away, then my brother, sister, husband, and Lelia(?), she was the last, so.

VanZandt: And I want to ask you about Lelia in a little bit.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: Tell me, while we're talking about your siblings, Claire, how many siblings did you have, and if you could name them?

Morrison: Yeah, well, I was one of six.

VanZandt: One of six.

Morrison: My oldest brother was William, and then I had my sister Mary that we always referred to as Sissy, and then Hale, my brother, who was the Congressman in Barstow, Alaska. Then I had—after Hale came—

VanZandt: Were you in the middle?

Morrison: Yeah, then came me. (laughter) I was fourteen months younger than Hale, mind you. And then myself. Then I had a brother who was a Jesuit priest, and then my brother Archie, who is still living, he's Judge Advocate for many, many years and just recently took retirement. I had a hard time getting him to take it, but he is now. But he's not too happy with the results of Katrina, because he loved Long Beach like we all do.

VanZandt: Where did he practice?

Morrison: He was with the Court of the Coast Guard, a judge advocate with the Coast Guard for many years.

VanZandt: Here? Did he live in Long Beach, as well?

Morrison: No, New Orleans.

VanZandt: New Orleans, OK. Well, how did he come out through Katrina?

Morrison: Well, he was totally washed away.

VanZandt: Where was his home?

Morrison: His place was up front, where the original Boggs home was. His place was Breezydale I. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK, which was around Baton Rouge?

Morrison: No, no, no.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Morrison: Archie was [lived] here.

VanZandt: OK.

Morrison: He had his home here and so did his son, Charlie Boggs. And Charlie was a prominent attorney in New Orleans, and he always came here, spent the summers with his parents here. And you better just pause it.

(brief break)

Morrison: All right, you want me to—

VanZandt: OK, all right. So his summer home was here.

Morrison: His summer home was here. And he was here every summer, you know, commuting on the commuter train, which was always interesting to go to the depot and pick him up with my children, because they loved doing that in the afternoons, the smaller ones. (laughter)

VanZandt: Tell me about that. What was the commuter train like?

Morrison: The commuter train?

VanZandt: Right.

Morrison: Oh, it was great and they would love it because they'd get on it and play cards and have a drink or two. And their wives and children would be there at the station, either Pass Christian or Long Beach. Usually, at first it only stopped at Pass Christian.

VanZandt: And we're hearing a train right now. How appropriate.

Morrison: Yeah, uh-huh. And then it started stopping in Long Beach. So Archie commuted on through the summer and it was big entertainment for the little children to go the train and meet their uncle. And of course he had two children, a daughter and a son. And as the years went by, his son then built a home here, so there were two places right up on the original property where my grandfather had his home. And Charlie, who—he would come too in the summertime. Now, that time he drove because he could commute and the driving got very simple and easy. So, and he was returning to New Orleans when he developed leukemia and had to give up his practice and retire, which he did. And he lived over here three years, permanently here, and his wife, because his children were grown and married and away. And Long Beach started all this business about they were going to do a high-rise. Do you want to hear about it?

VanZandt: Yes, absolutely. I'm very curious of the differences, and how you feel about redevelopment here. So sure, tell me about that.

Morrison: Exactly, I'll tell you plenty about that. So when Long Beach, the lovely little town of Long Beach, which has always been a small town, but a nice place to live. And we have excellent schools, and at that time we had Southern [The University of Southern Mississippi], and hopefully Southern will come back.

VanZandt: It will.

Morrison: And I see you're going to have a wonderful person starting, Robert Bass.

VanZandt: That's right.

Morrison: Who was our mayor, and Lord, I wish we still had him.

VanZandt: Oh, so you're happy about that, so you will still have—his presence will be felt down here, right?

Morrison: Right, yes, and hopefully Long Beach will come back in that direction.

VanZandt: And you attended Long Beach High School, didn't you?

Morrison: Yes, I did. Anyway, let's see, where was I?

VanZandt: Back on track. So you were talking about some redevelopment and—

Morrison: Oh yes, redevelopment.

VanZandt: —talking about building some condos back then.

Morrison: The aldermen in office were pushing the condos, high-rise, high-rise, and the developers were just coming in here like mad. And I can remember about thirty years ago or twenty-five, when Hale was still living, he'd love to come to Long Beach. And he was sitting on the front porch rocking and he said, "Let me tell you something, the Mississippi Gulf Coast has not been discovered. But believe me, when it gets discovered, you are going to have trouble with developers coming in here." Well, sure enough, it happened. So my nephew, Charlie Boggs, was so adamant about putting down the condos, because we don't want condos and gambling, that he decided to run for alderman and he was elected. And he has gotten the condos to slow down to a great extent by not allowing it. But then some of them are still battling it. Consequently, at this point, Charlie had lost everything, his home. And his father lost his home. His father's in bad health. Charlie's not in the best of health, however, his condition is in remission. They're trying now to get him out of office, so (laughs) they're trying desperately to get him out for the fact that he is not living in his ward. Well, coming—

VanZandt: What ward is that?

Morrison: Ward One. Well, come and check out Ward One and see how many houses there are for sale or for rent or what have you. It's not to be had. And particularly for his circumstances, you can find these smaller places, these little places, and the prices have gone up.

VanZandt: Right.

Morrison: And they need lots and lots of work. And, anyway, he found a place in another ward, I think it's Ward Two or Three, I don't know. And so they're trying to remove him from that in that he does not live in the right ward. But of course, as I have to—

VanZandt: Seems like those types of expectations would go by the wayside under these circumstances.

Morrison: Yeah, but I have to brag a little on him; he's a smart attorney and all this nit picking about getting rid of him, well, it's going to backfire on them because (inaudible).

VanZandt: Oh, go right ahead if you feel—whatever you feel like sharing. Would you rather me—

Morrison: Well, no, the other aldermen have decided that—they sent a letter to the DA [district attorney] requesting that Charlie Boggs be removed from office, because of the fact he does not live in Ward One. So now they have a countersuit going on, because Charlie and his two other aldermen who are for him have said that it was misrepresentation, which it was because they could've consulted all the aldermen.

And the aldermen wrote this letter and the mayor had signed it and sent it to the DA. So we're having a little bit of fun dealing with it. We've had some good editorial letters in the paper that are being published. Every now and then a bad one will come out. (laughter)

VanZandt: I hope he's taking it with good humor as best he can, but I'm sure—

Morrison: Yes, he is.

VanZandt: But he has some good support, I'm sure.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: How long has he been an alderman there?

Morrison: Well, it'll be a year in just a little bit.

VanZandt: OK. And prior to that—

Morrison: He was an attorney in New Orleans.

VanZandt: An attorney, yes.

Morrison: So he does—

VanZandt: What kind of attorney, what type?

Morrison: (Inaudible). He was mostly with representing the doctors' insurance. And that's been fun and games, insurance people. (laughter)

VanZandt: That's right, and some of the doctors, too—

Morrison: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: —in some circumstances during Katrina, and—

Morrison: That's right.

VanZandt: —holding them liable for things that have happened.

Morrison: Oh yeah, um-hm.

VanZandt: New Orleans is a whole different ballgame than what's going on with the Mississippi Coast right now, there's so many—

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —so many differences. And you were talking about redevelopment, and I'm curious how you feel about what's happening in, for instance, at the other end of the beach

, the Coast in Biloxi, with so much of that effort being driven by the casinos and—

Morrison: Well, I think that Biloxi's just turned it over to them; that's what I think. I mean they're—I guess they did. But now, Gulfport is being very cautious. Long Beach would love to turn it over to them. They think that quick bucks will be the answer, which is not the answer; slower progress and we will have a better class and a whole picture, which we don't want to turn Long Beach into. Pass Christian has held firm, and there's no trying to get high-rises in Pass Christian; it's low-rise or nothing. And that's what we asked for, low-rise or develop it but in the proper manner, because it's too valuable a property. I wrote a letter not too long ago and said, which I noticed, obviously I mean, I was driving along and looking north, you know, and just noticing the scarcity of our beautiful, Live Oak trees from Biloxi to Gulfport, and West Gulfport, a couple of the streets they start seeing the Live Oaks. And they are coming back after that terrible beating. Long Beach is like a bouquet of live oaks and—

VanZandt: That's so true, Claire. As I was driving this morning I noticed that exact thing—

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —and I took my camera out and I thought, I have to get pictures of this because it's such a stark contrast to—

Morrison: Right.

VanZandt: —coming and driving from Gulfport in this direction.

Morrison: Exactly, and Long Beach still, in particular the university, oh, it's just beautiful oaks there. And to destroy that is just wrong.

VanZandt: And we should say that it wasn't the storm that destroyed them.

Morrison: No. Exactly, that's what I wrote. It was not Katrina that did it, because those good old oaks withstood. (laughter)

VanZandt: That's right; those are the ones that are still standing, that's right, so it's man that has taken them down, not nature.

Morrison: It's man that has taken them down.

VanZandt: So you wrote an editorial?

Morrison: What's that?

VanZandt: A letter to the paper?

Morrison: Yeah, I did write one.

VanZandt: Well, it takes people like you who are willing to be vocal and express their concerns. How do the rest of your friends and people who are in the community [feel]? Do you get a sense that you-all are standing together on some of these issues and feel the same way? Is there any tension between local government in the community, or just—

Morrison: Yeah, there's a great deal.

VanZandt: —describe it.

Morrison: At this point, there sure is. Because of the fact that, frankly, I mean I'm talking frankly, we always thought that north of the tracks, you know, had a different way of life, I'll put it. And they did really not appreciate the beach. They always used to accuse the beach people [residents] of having plenty of money, you know, but not so plenty of blood, sweat and tears—

VanZandt: Heartache.

Morrison: —to keep it. Yeah, uh-huh. And—

VanZandt: So you see a class division there between—

Morrison: Right, those—

VanZandt: —north of the tracks.

Morrison: Uh-huh. But now, Long Beach, I mean, you can't continue to say that because they have some lovely, beautiful people. And beautiful homes that have turned into lovely, beautiful subdivisions; people that have come from all over and who do appreciate living close to the beach and know what the area, what it's like. But unfortunately I have to express it, we have aldermen in there that are still thinking of the old route that the beach is to be turned over just to the rich and the famous, or something, and that's the unfortunate part about it. And Charlie and two other aldermen are appreciative of it, and they realize the value and not to destroy it.

VanZandt: So at this point, in Long Beach are there plans on the drawing board for high rises, for casinos? Tell us about that, on the record.

Morrison: Yes, yes there are. In fact, they had a—I don't know if you can call it, I forgot—an election or, but it somehow or another it didn't count as something.

VanZandt: Referendum?

Morrison: Yeah, referendum, uh-huh, to vote for casinos. Well, politics are just so, when you've really gotten to know a politician. We don't have statesmen anymore like we used to, like my brother Hale. (laughter) Anyway, they did have this referendum and very, very, a close, close vote for gambling or not for the gambling. Gambling won, but by a very little vote. It was in the heat of the summer when lots of the people were gone, lots of the people were still frustrated and trying to get their lives together. And it was done on a day that was bad for most people to vote on. So we feel that that wasn't—

VanZandt: A fair—

Morrison: —a true, fair—

VanZandt: —true reflection of—

Morrison: Right, uh-huh.

VanZandt: —what the community would support.

Morrison: What the community really wants, yeah.

VanZandt: That's a shame.

Morrison: Yeah, it is a shame.

VanZandt: So it's going to be a battle for a long time all along the Coast, it seems.

Morrison: Oh yes, it is. It will be.

VanZandt: Uh-hm. And tell me, if we can get back to your personal story, there's so many—it's hard to stay in a certain direction there's so many great tangents to go off on, but tell me about your compound. You showed me a wonderful sort of brochure that you had that has photographs of each compound that you had, and I didn't count. How many different homes were on the Boggsdale compound?

Morrison: Now you got me.

VanZandt: Before Katrina?

Morrison: One, two, three?

VanZandt: Let's see.

Morrison: Yeah, let's count them from there.

VanZandt: Let's do that.

Morrison: It's on that paper and they gave it to us in a hurry.

VanZandt: And I'm going to call out the names: Meadow Beauty, Homestead, Grandee's Park, Will-Stan II, Maggiolata, Brunswick, The Marigold, Gracious. So that's three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

Morrison: Eight.

VanZandt: And then My Cabin by the Sea and Breezydale III; so ten. Breezydale II and Driftwood II, so—

Morrison: Twelve.

VanZandt: —twelve separate homes—

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —that your family lived in here.

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: And what is left now? What is standing, still standing? I'm sure it's hard to talk about each one, there's just so many memories.

Morrison: Nothing is standing.

VanZandt: Nothing.

Morrison: Nothing is standing.

VanZandt: Every one of them [gone].

Morrison: Every one is gone. Plus, there was Magnolia, which was our property. There was—that my son and Charlie Boggs built together. It's gutted to the point that maybe they will have to take it down. That's as much that's standing; that is the *only* thing standing on Boggsdale.

VanZandt: And all of these that were standing after Camille, were most of them standing? Of course, some were built later on.

Morrison: Well, after Camille there was our house and Archie's house. And my sister had three small cottages that she rented, and all of those were gone. There were just three rentals. And then my home and my brother's home. So, in Camille, there were only five homes that were taken because at that time none of my children were really established or—

VanZandt: That was before they had moved back here?

Morrison: Right, before they moved back; they were all either in college or out of college or traveling, or settling in other places that they thought would be a much better place to settle in. (chuckle) And but as time went on, and as they got more knowledge of other places to live, then they realized that Boggsdale wasn't such a bad place to live, particularly if they could come home and get a free lot (laughter) and build.

VanZandt: Right, and be near Mom.

Morrison: Yeah, and father.

VanZandt: Tell me some of those—what's so special? What is it about not only, I'm sure *you*, to begin with, as the mother and head of the family, and then your own property, but the community of Long Beach, and just this area that has drawn everyone back? What are some of those characteristics that are in the spirit of this place?

Morrison: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: I'm sure it's hard to define.

Morrison: Well, I think one thing, it's been the friendliness of Long Beach. And we have had lots of—what do you call it—people that have come from so many different areas. We started with the NASA. In fact, I worked several years at NASA.

VanZandt: That's right, for GE [General Electric], is that right?

Morrison: For GE.

VanZandt: When it was Mississippi Test Site.

Morrison: That's right. And so many people were coming in from that area, and—

VanZandt: Huge influx of people with that.

Morrison: —right—and they were all welcome. And, of course, we always, we had Keesler [Air Force Base] for many years. But then many, many people that came to Keesler as young men remembered the Coast, and believe it or not, they came back

and established their retirement homes here. So Long Beach had kind of become a retirement center, because of the fact that it was a small town and everyone got along, and we had our good school system and we had the climate that was good. So, consequently, it did kind of become a retirement town. But what's wrong with the retirees? Retirees are, usually when they retire, are financially able to support themselves. They give back with being volunteer workers, they're still active. They have enough means to pay the taxes and to live a comfortable life.

VanZandt: Real support to a community.

Morrison: But as time has gone on, Long Beach looks like they don't want retirees and they just want to throw it wide open to quick money, *I* say, which would be wrong.

VanZandt: What kinds of decisions have been made that make you say that?

Morrison: Oh well, it's because they're still fighting so for the high rise and the gambling. That's the thing that we really want to keep away from here.

VanZandt: Um-hm, particularly if your schools, your private schools—

Morrison: Exactly.

VanZandt: —that have managed to fair fine—

Morrison: Right, and we have a—

VanZandt: —good tax base.

Morrison: —all the churches are beautiful. I mean, we have lots of Methodists. We have the Lutherans. We have just a few Episcopalians; we were starting to. They had a lovely beach church. It was small, but it was growing. And they were totally washed away. So I haven't heard if they're coming back. But, of course, the Baptists and the Methodists have.

VanZandt: And what church are you a member of? I know you're Catholic; what is the name of the church that you attend?

Morrison: St. Thomas.

VanZandt: St. Thomas.

Morrison: Yes. And I tell you that on this date, that the night before Camille (laughs)—

VanZandt: Tell me about that story. Were you putting on a wedding for your daughter?

Morrison: Jo Pepper, yeah, Jo and John. And they had both been in the Peace Corps and they found each other, and we were having this wedding.

VanZandt: That's how they met, in the Peace Corps?

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, how fantastic. Where were they stationed in the Peace Corps?

Morrison: Africa.

VanZandt: Where in Africa?

Morrison: Liberia.

VanZandt: Oh, how fascinating. And so they came back here. Were they finished with their Peace Corps —

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —at the time they got married?

Morrison: Yeah, they finished. I think that, uh, I know John was teaching; I don't know what Martha went into. But anyway, they were getting married and it was great preparations, and what have you.

VanZandt: Was this to be a big formal wedding, church wedding?

Morrison: Yeah, yeah they got married at six o'clock in St. Thomas Catholic Church. and they—and then, of course, we had the big reception at the home. They were married August the 16th. Yeah, because I think August the 17th was Camille.

VanZandt: Um-hm, 1969. Tell me, if you can go back, just briefly. I know you talked about it a little bit before in a previous interview, but I was just amazed that you were able to pull off a wedding the night before such a major hurricane. Did you know, did you have much advance warning?

Morrison: No, no we didn't have much warning at all in those days; they really didn't. In fact, I don't remember if I said it in that interview or not, we just had window units in those days, and all of a sudden about two o'clock in the afternoon, or sooner than that, all the electrical system went out. Because we added another unit to make it cool, cooler—

VanZandt: To cool it down.

Morrison: —and called my electrician and I couldn't locate him, and someone said, "Well, I think he's over at the radio station." So I did get in touch with him, you see how in those days you didn't get these answering machines (laughter) with the menu on it. (laughter)

VanZandt: You actually could speak with a real person.

Morrison: Yeah, a real person. I was lucky enough to get the radio station to ask for the electrician. And I said, "Oh, I have to talk to him because we're having a big wedding here tonight, and it's so [hot] and all my electricity is gone." He said, "Well, two bad things, a hurricane and a wedding." (laughter)

VanZandt: He said, "Well, there's a big hurricane coming, too," on top of that big wedding. Well, did you know that at all before?

Morrison: Well, I'm sure, Linda, we knew it, but we didn't—

VanZandt: You just didn't think anything of it.

Morrison: Um-um.

VanZandt: So people weren't leaving and preparing? Life just went on just like any other day?

Morrison: Unh-uh, no, it was a big wedding. I mean, we had them far and near. I mean, because the Morrisons were a big family. And John's family wasn't such a large family, but they all came from Missouri.

VanZandt: So you had out-of-town guests and—

Morrison: Oh yes.

VanZandt: —just all kinds of people there.

Morrison: All kinds of people. And the wedding went on beautifully and, oh, the church scene and then the reception. And the wedding lasted quite a long time, way into the night. And then I think that—let's see—oh, my brother Hale was out of town. He was, I think he was in California or something. He kept phoning and telling my mother then, this was Sunday morning, he said, "Mother, you positively have to leave." He said, "That's going to be a bad hurricane." And so mother kind of, she and Hale, and Hale, you know, insisted. So we phoned Jo and John, I mean, some of the children knew where they had gone to one of the hotels in Biloxi or something for their honeymoon, and they said, "You better come and put all your wedding gifts up in

the attic, because they're having a bad storm." This was Sunday morning. So they came and they put their things in the attic.

VanZandt: A lot of China and crystal, I'm sure.

Morrison: Yeah, and silver, too. Anyway, they put their things in the attic. And then we all decided, well, we'd all go over to the Edgewater Gulf Hotel, which was a gorgeous, lovely hotel that they destroyed after Camille. And there again, [we] took nothing. One bottle of champagne left over from the party, and a deck of cards to have a hurricane party.

VanZandt: (laughter) You were just thinking you'd shelter yourselves but not worry about anything material—

Morrison: And it was not too bad, and the eye of the hurricane, when they predicted that it was coming through, we all sat in the hallway and chug-a-lugged that bottle of champagne.

VanZandt: Still celebrating, weren't you? (laughter)

Morrison: (laughter) Yes.

VanZandt: You didn't have time for a hurricane.

Morrison: Still celebrating, right.

VanZandt: So you were in the hallway of the Edgewater Hotel.

Morrison: Edgewater Hotel.

VanZandt: How many of you? Where did the guests go? You had so many people there for the wedding.

Morrison: Well, oh, my guests—well, they did then start scurrying out Sunday morning. Yes, they did. And there were several of them that were right down at Pine Lodge, which was a little motel down the way. No, then they did start leaving. But not till Sunday morning did they leave, the guests from out of town.

VanZandt: Hm, that was a close call.

Morrison: Yeah, well, Camille was supposed to have hit New Orleans. And it did take a quick turn, so that did Camille off. Better pause for a minute.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Morrison: Right, that's a good idea.

(brief break)

VanZandt: All right, so you were at the Edgewater Hotel. And then after the hurricane was over, I guess there was a point where things calmed down. Did you hear the wind, and were you ever afraid at any point in that hotel hallway that you were in danger?

Morrison: Not really, because it was sturdy. You did hear the wind, though. I mean, you did hear the wind. But I don't think the water—the water never came up to the—it was high, the Edgewater was high, and I don't think the water ever got to the hotel itself because it was—

VanZandt: It was just built up high.

Morrison: Um-hm. Well, as I was saying, getting back to the wedding, no one was too overly concerned about it. And five of my neighbors who lived in the area, they were more or less elderly—I say elderly, seventy, yeah, seventy-plus, maybe, people. And they just went back to their homes and they were drowned, all of them, because they stayed.

VanZandt: Tragedy.

Morrison: Well, in this area, it's, like I said previously, it is a low area.

VanZandt: And they lived in Long Beach?

Morrison: Yeah, they were neighbors—

VanZandt: —and were your neighbors?

Morrison: —close to us, uh-huh, yeah, right on the avenue—

VanZandt: Close to the beach?

Morrison: —some of them, and one, and two were on the beach, uh-huh. So that was—

VanZandt: A lot of tragedy—

Morrison: —right after the wedding.

VanZandt: —to deal with right after your celebration.

Morrison: Yeah, and St. Thomas Church was destroyed, and the old original church that was built in 1905, I believe. So that was the first hurricane—

VanZandt: And that was where they were married?

Morrison: Yeah, that's where they were married. And that's the first hurricane that took St. Thomas, and it was an old church. So, after Camille, then started over again. I first spoke about—

VanZandt: Well, tell me about that, when—

Morrison: You want me to—we're going kind of backwards.

VanZandt: We are going backwards.

Morrison: That's all right.

VanZandt: We can skip over that if you'd like. You just take the lead.

Morrison: You can straighten it out.

VanZandt: As things come out, right, because here we are again with Katrina. But I was just curious about some of the contrasts between your feelings now after Katrina and after Camille. And I'm sure, it sounds like you must've been in shock after Camille, not expecting it to be what it was, and then walking outside and being confronted with the destruction of your whole compound.

Morrison: Well, it was perfectly devastating. And like I tell my children, at that time, I mean, I can't remember what age I was but I was quite a bit younger. You take thirty-six from ninety and you got it. (chuckle) Anyway, our—

VanZandt: But your children were mostly grown at that point.

Morrison: At that time.

VanZandt: All of your children were grown.

Morrison: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

VanZandt: And lived away, most of them.

Morrison: Yeah, you're right, except two were still in high school, I say that, in effect. And you just figure after we'd worked so hard getting it all back together after [19]47, because I went to garage sales, we refinished furniture. And once again, there was no such thing as flood insurance, in those days, and volunteer help or anything like that was unheard of. FEMA was certainly unheard of where they gave you money, because we had a difficult time with what our homeowner's policy to get a little insurance, we did not get the full benefit. But anyway, it was a struggle.

(brief interruption while tape is changed)

VanZandt: So you were basically on your own so much more then after Camille than here—

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: —as far as help and assistance.

Morrison: Right, we were on, yeah, you really just had to pull up your boot straps and get with it, and get started over again. And I had acquired things that I loved, you know, and I had my original grandfather's paintings in the house.

VanZandt: Tell me about those, if we could go off on that tangent for a moment. I'm looking at one that's above your desk here, is that one of your [old] paintings?

Morrison: No. That's a new one. That's my mother and myself and my sister. (laughter) And we were quite young.

VanZandt: And you're which, on the right?

Morrison: I'm the one in the blue.

VanZandt: In the blue.

Morrison: Yeah, and that's me.

VanZandt: And that's so beautiful.

Morrison: And that's Mother.

VanZandt: Was that commissioned by someone here, an artist in Long Beach?

Morrison: Yes, it was, uh-huh, not Long [Beach]. She was, well, Kimbro(?), Sally Kimbro. She lived in Bay St. Louis, she did it.

VanZandt: And you're having tea. Well, tell me about your grandfather, if we could just briefly. He was an artist.

Morrison: Yes, he was, and a writer, and a dreamer. (laughter)

VanZandt: He sounds like a real Renaissance man, and dreamed of the compound and built the home.

Morrison: Yes, he was, he was from Virginia, and studied art in Florence, Italy.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Did he know early on that he wanted to paint?

Morrison: Well, I guess so.

VanZandt: Or he just had the talent?

Morrison: I don't remember too great a deal about him; I was very little when he died.

VanZandt: What are your memories of him and his personality?

Morrison: Of Grandpa? Well, I remember that he had a beard (laughs) and white hair. And he walked with a cane. And I'm sure he was an opinionated man, because I can remember my mother saying that as he grew old and would go out to catch the streetcar, and as he got older, well, Billy, my brother, was then about twelve, and mother told Billy to go help Papa—we called him Papa—get on the streetcar and help him into Gulfport, you know. Well, he just reared back and he says, "I am not nursing children." (laughter)

VanZandt: Turned that right around on her.

Morrison: Right, yeah, so. And, of course, he came from the old school of Civil War, and blacks were still servants because he would—as time went on, there was still prejudice, I think, in my father and, but—

VanZandt: This is your mother's father?

Morrison: No, that's my—

VanZandt: This is your father's father you were talking about.

Morrison: Father's father.

VanZandt: And when did he come to Long Beach from Virginia?

Morrison: In 1875.

VanZandt: 1875, OK.

Morrison: He came to Long Beach.

VanZandt: OK, and I don't want to make you repeat what you—you've given me this wonderful brochure that gives this history, so we'll include that—

Morrison: A little bit of it.

VanZandt: —with your interview.

Morrison: No, my mother's father was an Irishman. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, you mentioned the Irish temper.

Morrison: (laughter) Yeah.

VanZandt: So those are your memories of him, huh?

Morrison: Oh, I remember Grandfather Hale good; he was quite a character, yeah.

VanZandt: And did he live around here, as well?

Morrison: He lived in Bay St. Louis. So I would go there.

VanZandt: Did you spend a lot of time with your two sets of grandparents?

Morrison: Well, quite a bit because my grandmother lived to be ninety-eight, and so.

VanZandt: Oh my goodness, how wonderful. You've got some good genes going through your family, and they're just so healthy and—

Morrison: Yeah, the Lord's been good; that's all I can say.

VanZandt: Well, tell me about your faith through this, Claire.

Morrison: My faith? Well, that's what I started to say about—after Camille, I'm sure I was devastated. And, of course, we just had to pull ourselves together. But it was so hurtful losing everything. So now I can really empathize with my children. (tearing up) Well, you know—they have worked and gotten themselves together. And like I said before, I look back on the years between Camille and Katrina as our Camelot, kind of—(chuckle)

VanZandt: Camelot years, you said. Yes, I remember. (chuckle)

Morrison: I did because we just had so many wonderful memories.

VanZandt: Building everything over again.

Morrison: And the children all, we were—

VanZandt: Coming back.

Morrison: Well anyway, now my children are about the age, I guess, or some of them you know, some of them may be a little bit older. And they had gathered up all their belongings, their children more or less raised, you know, and getting them through college. And there they had total destruction. And they had to start *all over* again. Every one of them had just finished their mortgage on their homes, and it was just—so I can, I know how they feel.

VanZandt: You've been through it, right.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, I'm sure that they depend on you as a great source of support, emotionally, having been through that before with children.

Morrison: That's right. So I feel that I've been blessed more than most people, because I had so much, such a full life with all of my children surrounding me; children, see the grandchildren grow up, see them being born, one or two getting married—I mean, just all kinds of celebrations. Christening, I mean—

VanZandt: Graduations.

Morrison: So, I have just accepted what Katrina has done.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And that's your faith that helps you—

Morrison: That's right.

VanZandt: —get through.

Morrison: Exactly. And that it's just—and there again, look how fortunate I am to be comfortable. And there's still people homeless, still.

VanZandt: Well, I passed, you know, driving down [Highway] 90, many, many FEMA trailers still along—

Morrison: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: —the empty lots, so.

Morrison: Oh yes.

VanZandt: And it was such a nice feeling to drive on your street and see some actual homes.

Morrison: Yeah, we've come back quickly.

VanZandt: You really have.

Morrison: All these homes were, all these—

VanZandt: What did they look like?

Morrison: Well, you know, they'd be gutted. They were like, well, all of this sheetrock, we had to—

VanZandt: Um-hm, I mean, what we're seeing is just so lovely. Brick floors, and—

Morrison: Yeah, and they had rugs, they had carpets. Well, I had, never had—we had floors, flooring, oak floors.

VanZandt: So you put the brick in.

Morrison: I put the brick in place of the flooring. Well, to begin with, the old flooring was out of reach financially and the laminated floors; I'd like the brick.

VanZandt: Well, it makes sense to have that in a climate like this, too.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: And to not have carpet.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: Floors are easy to maintain.

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: And your windows here, you have beautiful windows that look out onto this backyard.

Morrison: Yes, and that's what I like. That's really, because it gives me a feeling of openness.

VanZandt: Um-hm, right.

Morrison: And the thing—and you should—I think that'd be, my daughter wouldn't mind, my daughter who had the three sons, the twins and the son. And then her husband left her when she was, when they were twelve and fourteen. Anyway, it turned out that it worked out good. She was with us first, and we had that double-car garage. And I—an architect [made] it a little garage apartment, and so she's there and she's the one who owned Meadow Beauty, you know. And she's very happy. She says that she'll never, never leave.

VanZandt: Really? I know that makes you feel good.

Morrison: But she's happy. And Robert has his house back in operation.

VanZandt: And how far is it from where we're sitting?

Morrison: It's just—we can walk there.

VanZandt: OK, we'll take a tour.

Morrison: We'll take a tour; I'll take you on a tour.

VanZandt: And how are the grandchildren doing?

Morrison: Well, they just—

VanZandt: What ages? I know you have so many, I'm sure—

Morrison: Yeah, right, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Are some in high school?

Morrison: Well, the grandchildren, no, all the grandchildren are out of high school. Let's see, one graduates—Bill had twins. (laughs)

VanZandt: So, one of your daughters, who was *your* twin, had twins.

Morrison: Yeah, had twins. And then—

VanZandt: And then a son had twins.

Morrison: —my son—yeah.

VanZandt: Oh my goodness.

Morrison: He has one son, who's all finished college. And he's living down in Destin as a chef. Then he has twins; a girl and a boy. The girl is graduating from college in December; she's kind of been goofing off. Then he has a son, her twin brother is Jimmy, and he graduated with all kinds of honors. Had a wonderful job with Exxon.

VanZandt: Hm, fantastic.

Morrison: And he gave it up, because for the last two years he's been studying to be a priest, and at the moment he's in Rome.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Morrison: Yes, so he's having—

VanZandt: So he's studying in Rome.

Morrison: —so far—yes—he's very happy.

VanZandt: What a place to study.

Morrison: Yes. Yes, but he's—

VanZandt: How long will he be there?

Morrison: Well, it'll be about—

VanZandt: Is it a long time?

Morrison: —four years before, he will be there at least four years before he'll be back.

VanZandt: And I know this is sort of off the subject, but that reminded me when you brought up Rome, that Lindy Boggs, your brother's—

Morrison: Wife, yeah.

VanZandt: —wife was the US ambassador to the Vatican.

Morrison: The Vatican, yes.

VanZandt: For several years, wasn't she?

Morrison: Yes she was, yes, uh-huh.

VanZandt: So I'll bet she's very happy to hear that he's in Rome.

Morrison: Oh yes, yes she is. And Lindy's in New Orleans, back in her beloved New Orleans. (laughs)

VanZandt: Is she? Oh, that's wonderful. And how did her home do?

Morrison: Well, her home had some damage. But she was there on Bourbon Street, a big home and everything. And she's not back in it but she's in New Orleans with, living in—it's not a retirement home either, really. It's a little hotel, but she knows the people there. (chuckle) But she's doing well and she's ninety and still active.

VanZandt: Do you see each other?

Morrison: Not too often, no. I quit driving to New Orleans and she never—she quit driving a long time ago, because she had chauffeurs. (laughter)

VanZandt: You need that commuter train again.

Morrison: (chuckle) Yes, we sure do.

VanZandt: Wouldn't that be great to play some cards and, yeah.

Morrison: Yeah, that commuter train was nice, because you could get on it and get right off at the end of Canal Street.

VanZandt: That's wonderful. What a great time. And your husband, I know, when he got in the construction business, that's when you kind of settled here with the children and—

Morrison: Right.

VanZandt: —and he was traveling. Did he commute on that train, as well?

Morrison: No. No, no, he had to drive because he would have—he did road building and levee building—

VanZandt: OK. Did he?

Morrison: —and stuff like that. And he did quite a bit of it around Baton Rouge and maybe sometimes north Louisiana, so he—no. His life was not as routine-ish as an attorney's. (laughter)

VanZandt: Right, oh, he was all over the place.

Morrison: And his life—yeah—and his life was, depends a great deal on the weather. So he had a little gambling blood in him—

VanZandt: Oh, no. (chuckle)

Morrison: —very much. (laughter) Sometimes it was wonderful contracts, you know, and the weather was good and everything.

VanZandt: Right, that's an up-and-down business.

Morrison: Not that he was addicted to the real gambling, that we see when they put these casinos in, it's sad.

VanZandt: Have you seen that?

Morrison: Sad. Oh Lord—

VanZandt: Have you seen that much in your local community?

Morrison: —yes, you have seen it. And one of my daughters is a therapist, you know, and a—what they call it.

VanZandt: Psychologist?

Morrison: Psychologist. And I mean, of course, she never divulges who or what, but she says it's frightening the people that have become addicted to gambling.

VanZandt: And I'm sure it cuts across all ages.

Morrison: Oh yes.

VanZandt: You see so many of them are retirees that they're courting—

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —and bringing them there, which—

Morrison: That's their entertainment.

VanZandt: —it's just tragic, people on fixed incomes.

Morrison: I mean, it's just sad to see those old people who are struggling there. And in wheelchairs and, oh, it's—

VanZandt: I'm sure, as a psychologist, she really sees that first hand.

Morrison: Yeah, and people losing their homes and everything.

VanZandt: And how it ruins lives and bankrupts people.

Morrison: Yeah, bankruptcy. So now where are we? (laughter)

VanZandt: You know, you've mentioned Lelia. And since you showed me a photograph of Lelia, and she was such an important person in your life and your children's lives, can you tell me a little bit about who Lelia is?

Morrison: Yeah, I can tell you about Lelia. Well, you want me to start from the beginning?

VanZandt: Sure, yeah.

Morrison: Well, as I told you, babies were coming (laughter)—

VanZandt: Just keep coming and coming! (laughter)

Morrison: —in the new house, Will-Stan—

VanZandt: You were in Will-Stan I.

Morrison: I was in Will-Stan I, yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: And you put an ad out—

Morrison: —and there I was, and I put an ad in the paper and I prayed (laughter) and my sister prayed that I would get some help. Because Mother, I mean, was, like I say—wonderful to have right there, but after all, she was the grandmother, and she was getting older, and it wasn't her responsibility. So then Lelia comes to the door and applying for the ad. And she was giving me all her qualifications as to what she could do and how she could do it, and then it was that she cooked a little, which was true through the years, (laughs) and but she had made our beds real good. She worked at the Markham Hotel. So I said, "Lelia, can you rock a baby?" (laughter)

VanZandt: And that's just one thing.

Morrison: And she said, "Yes ma'am," in those days. And I said, "Well, come on in and start rocking." (laughter)

VanZandt: "I'll put you right to work. Here's a rocking chair." So you had a good feeling about her, obviously, though.

Morrison: Yeah. No, I didn't phone around for recommendations or anything.

VanZandt: You just went on that motherly instinct.

Morrison: Right, right. And so, well, I guess the next day or so, really, she got into work. But anyway, she lived way in North Gulfport. And she would come faithfully. And she was never a big talker, but she had lots of feelings. And as time went on, then she got to when she would talk, she would tell everything. And I didn't know whether she liked the job or what, but she was rocking Bill until he'd go to sleep.

VanZandt: She kept coming, driving from Gulfport.

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: I guess she liked it all right.

Morrison: Yeah, but there was a reason—I didn't know whether she liked it or not; her cheeks were always puffed out! And she didn't talk much, but she kept coming faithfully on that bus every morning. She'd be there about between seven and eight o'clock, she would be there. So as time went on I discovered that she chewed tobacco. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh really? How did you discover that? Do you remember?

Morrison: Well, yes, because of—yes I do. Because she would do the washing, you know, and I always discovered something, you know.

VanZandt: There's something on it?

Morrison: Yeah, there was something on it. And one of my children or somebody said, "That's Lela chewing tobacco." I said, "Lelia—"

VanZandt: So they knew; they were onto her.

Morrison: The older ones, yes. (chuckle) Anyway, she just stayed on with us all through the years.

VanZandt: Did you ask her to stop chewing tobacco?

Morrison: No, no, she was a strong character. And when tobacco went up so high, she just quit overnight.

VanZandt: That's great.

Morrison: And she just quit tobacco. But uh, what else shall we talk about?

VanZandt: So, Lelia was with you, you said, fifty-five years.

Morrison: Fifty-five years, uh-huh.

VanZandt: So she raised, raised your children. I see someone—

Morrison: And grandchildren.

VanZandt: —coming up to your doorstep. Maybe I'll, I think I'll pause this.

(brief break)

Morrison: Well, OK, you ask a few questions.

VanZandt: I guess that just—we were talking about Lelia.

Morrison: Lelia.

VanZandt: What happened to Lelia, then? She was with you fifty-five years, and was such an important part of your family.

Morrison: Right, uh-huh. Well, did we review—did we talk about this before?

VanZandt: We talked earlier off tape.

Morrison: Off tape, OK. Well, Lelia was still so loyal, and all of us, all of her children because—and her grandchildren, too, were around, all her white children. (chuckle)

VanZandt: Right, because she never married. She never had children.

Morrison: She never married, never had children, and she did refer to my children and the grandchildren as all her children. And sure enough, they were her children. Well, she insisted, almost to the bitter end, she had terrible arthritis in her knees and she put it off and put it off. She would come every day, though, with her—not every day. Each one had a couple of hours for her to come and work for them for her, and toward the end of her life, the last five years of her life, when she was living in our guest house at the pool house, she would struggle and go to—you would see her walking to each person's house. Bill's house, who was too far up front, he would have to come and pick her up and take her there. He lived upstairs, and she would literally go up on her hands and knees to Bill's. And what she would do would mop with a dirty mop and do the clothes washing. Well, the clothes washing she did OK, but Bill said he would have paid her to stay home, but she insisted.

VanZandt: She was determined.

Morrison: Yeah, she was.

VanZandt: To keep working hard.

Morrison: So Robert had to pick her up because he lived here on Boggs Circle, but then myself and Martha and Anna, she walked to those houses and Florette's.

VanZandt: So she ended up moving to the compound and living—

Morrison: Yes.

VanZandt: —with you all?

Morrison: Yes, she did. Well—

VanZandt: When did that happen? How many years had she worked for you, do you remember? Was that towards the end?

Morrison: Toward the end of her life. We wanted her to come much, much sooner, but she was still happy with—she thought she'd lose her friends, and her friends were just her church members. She worried about it. I think she was Methodist and had a little group of friends out in that area. But then, finally, her area got so bad, you know, that she was getting frightened. And she was happy to come and live on the compound in the guest house at the pool house. And she had a good six years or so of happy living there.

VanZandt: How wonderful.

Morrison: And she didn't lose her friends, because her friends would come and pick her up for church. And that was about—that was really her social life, us and her church on Sunday. And, of course, she was invited to every party, and not as a servant but as a guest. And sometimes some of the guests may have been horrified, but so be it. Lelia was our family and she was just true blue to the end. Anyway, she'd put off and put off having her knees operated on. And I would take her to the doctor, you know, and the doctor tried to get her to do it earlier. But Lelia was a strong character, and she made up her mind it was—oh, this was funny about Lelia. When her teeth finally started giving out, well, she decided to have them all pulled out, which she did. And I guess it was necessary because they had gotten out of—well, she got these false teeth and all you could see were teeth on Lelia. (laughter)

VanZandt: She had a new smile.

Morrison: So she stuck with them and stuck with them, and finally the teeth got so they were OK, you know. Anyway, the same way with her knees, she wouldn't be operated on. Finally she consented because they had gotten so bad, and when they were doing the pre-whatever they have to do before they operate you, you know, they have to examine you thoroughly. They discovered that she had an aneurysm in her stomach. So the doctor told her, "Lelia, we can bypass that aneurysm and you can live with it like that, but then again it might, you know, rupture." They had to tell her all of this and that that would be the end of you because you'd bleed to death or something. And she said, "Oh no, I want to be operated on." So the doctors went ahead with her wishes. And, of course, we all thought it was not a very good idea because she was eighty-five then, and—but anyway, she went through with it and it was just too much.

VanZandt: Um-hm, too much for her body to handle.

Morrison: Too much. And, of course, she had a lovely funeral. And her group, they sang beautifully, they really did. They were just a small group. And all of her children and most of her grandchildren were there that could be there at the funeral.

VanZandt: That's wonderful.

Morrison: So that was it; end of Lelia. And of course, I'm—

VanZandt: Well, I wondered just—oh, I'm sorry to interrupt—just, I'm thinking about what life was like at so many different times in your life along the Gulf Coast, and just thinking of her as an African-American here living with you. And it makes me think about the [19]60s, of course. And I just wonder if you could reflect a little bit on that time period living down here, and I'm sure protests on campus, and—are there any vivid memories of that time?

Morrison: I have vivid memories of that. When I was a child, of course, I guess that's where we were with the railroad track kind of being the class distinction. Because right back of us was a little settlement of black people. And there again, they were all good black people. In fact, I can remember that one of them worked for Mother, and then there was no problem except that they better stay north of the railroad track. But I don't know how the city officials handled it or what have you in those days, because I was still quite young. On a certain Sunday they would all walk down to the beach and they'd be dressed in white. And they would take and dunk those ones that were in white, full head-first and everything. And they'd be baptized, and they'd be singing, and they'd be having a big celebration because they'd seen the Lord. And it was just a beautiful ceremony, really, now that I look back on it in my adult years and everything. Of course, all us kids would run to the beach to see it; we wouldn't join in as we would have—

VanZandt: Sort of a spectacle.

Morrison: Yeah, right, but I guess we would've been—I don't know, but we didn't literally join in with them.

VanZandt: How old were you when you—

Morrison: Well, that's when I was a child; I was about ten or twelve then.

VanZandt: Hm, very impressionable.

Morrison: Yeah, very impressionable. But then, I mean, I'm kind of jumping, I know. Then when Bill, the second son—and I only had two boys—when he was about, oh, eight or nine, his best friend was Squeaky, north of the railroad tracks. (laughter)

VanZandt: Squeaky, huh? (laughter)

Morrison: And he and Squeaky were big (inaudible) and my father was still living at the time, and my father still had a little touch of prejudice in him. (laughs) And he

adored Bill, he adored my son, and he would try to discourage Bill with his playmate but—

VanZandt: It didn't work, huh.

Morrison: It didn't work. (laughs)

VanZandt: They would find a way to get across the tracks.

Morrison: I forgot about that.

VanZandt: That's a great story.

Morrison: [dog enters view] Look, there's the dog that survived. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh really, is that J.W.?

Morrison: That's J.W.

VanZandt: He's beautiful. Is he a Spaniel?

Morrison: Uh-huh. He's not my dog, he's not our dog but he comes here to day care. Is this on?

VanZandt: Yeah. He's looking at us through the window.

Morrison: His parents, they were—(brief pause of tape)

VanZandt: —anything that's important for you to share.

Morrison: Well, I'll tell you about my early life. As I say, I went to New Orleans and I was a sophomore in high school. I went to the Metairie High School, where I made friends rather quickly in the school. But as for any—and then when I finished school, my brother was in college. And I remember all of his friends were a totally different circle than my circle of friends.

VanZandt: Is this Hale [Boggs] that you're speaking about?

Morrison: Yeah, Hale I'm speaking of. And New Orleans was a pretty closed society. But anyway, I managed to make my way and have my lifestyle.

VanZandt: And what took you to New Orleans? Why did you move to New Orleans at that point in your life?

Morrison: At that point, really, there was not much employment around Long Beach. And my father was still in New Orleans, working with the insurance and the bank, and

so that's what really brought us back to New Orleans once again. And as time went on, I was active and, of course, it was the Depression and I didn't get to go to college, and I went to work, which I was happy to do at D.H. Holmes, which was one of the nicer department stores on Canal Street. And if I remember correctly, I think I worked for \$18 a week, if that could've been possible. But I know it was a very, very small salary.

VanZandt: Were you living on your own, or did you live at home?

Morrison: No, no. By that time, when I graduated and everything, my sister and myself and Hale and Archie—Daddy had retired and Mother, and they moved back to Long Beach and stayed there until my father's death. So we managed an apartment and Hale was at Tulane [University], or just finished Tulane and was getting married. And Archie was still at Tulane. So, anyway, we, my sister and myself, worked and Hale, of course, always worked little jobs at Tulane; he did various and sundry things. In fact, when he was going to marry Lindy, some of the Morrison family said—she was a Claiborne but her mother was a Morrison—said, “Oh, she's”—and Lindy was very popular and very well liked in the university section, university ground, and said she was going to marry a gum salesman because I think they gave away free gum and got paid for giving away free gum.

VanZandt: (laughs) Some kind of promotion.

Morrison: And he sold suits and whatever, he was always ambitious and always found a way. Well, I'm trying to get back to what my life was like. I remember those years I was a very fickle sort of person and really didn't know what I wanted in life. I mean, I was active, and I was always pretty much fun loving. And I guess I kissed many a frog (chuckle) before Prince Charming Stanley came along. And that was a very odd romance because Stanley is Lindy's uncle. Not that much greater in age, but. Anyway, we got so that Stanley and I would babysit a little bit for Hale and Lindy, Barbara their first child. And occasionally we would, with the Depression so we would walk around the block or I had a old beat up car, as my cousin just said that there was a little Ford and I could navigate in that one, and I had a quarter for gasoline or something. Anyway, I must say it was a time in my life that I was unsettled, but I did go to a business school and took shorthand and typing. And then I got a job with another company, Air Reduction Sales, I believe. And then, like I say, after—I guess you'd say playing the field in those days, because my children all tell me now and Stanley himself used to say that I proposed to him. (laughter) Because we had been really great friends for about three years, because I no longer had to put on the show as to being someone and not being my real person. With Stanley, I was real.

VanZandt: That's a great way to start out, isn't it, good friends.

Morrison: And with Stanley, it's always been real from day one. So, he did, I guess, recognize my natural nature. But still there was no proposal in three years, and I

thought, and I'd met a cousin of his who courted for about thirty years, and I thought, oh—

VanZandt: (chuckle) It's going to be one of those.

Morrison: —and then by that time I thought, well, maybe it'll be just a courtship for thirty years. And I said, "Look, I'm a good Catholic girl." In those days you didn't do that shacking up. (laughter) I said, "It's either matrimony or—"

VanZandt: Um-hm, make a respectable woman out of you.

Morrison: So they have laughed about that. Now, I don't know whether I did or not, but I know that we—

VanZandt: Encouraged him, maybe?

Morrison: —did encourage him and we did design this ring—

VanZandt: I was looking at your ring.

Morrison: —that I have on my finger today.

VanZandt: That's absolutely beautiful.

Morrison: The center was my mother's engagement ring. And the other diamonds were Stanley's sister's; she had that ring. So we did plan the engagement ring together and then, of course, we were married. And then—

VanZandt: Where were you married?

Morrison: I was married at St. Thomas Church; I came home to Long Beach to be married.

VanZandt: Was it a big wedding? What was your wedding like?

Morrison: Well, it was big because of the size—

VanZandt: Family.

Morrison: —of the family, yes. And I had my friends from New Orleans come, and I had, I think, eight or nine bridesmaids. All are dead except one, and she's still living. And it was a big wedding, considering, you know, that—

VanZandt: The time period.

Morrison: —yeah, the time. And like I say, Stanley's from a large family and they were the kind like us when weddings, funerals, births, they all got together and celebrated. So—

VanZandt: What year was that, do you remember, you got married?

Morrison: Married in 1940.

VanZandt: OK. (motioned to pause recorder)

Morrison: Please.

(brief break)

VanZandt: OK, here we go again. Well, Claire, I know it's getting late, and you've shared so much time with us already. So, in closing, if we could just maybe close this on a note about what effect Katrina and this terrible tragedy has had on the community, on life, just life here in Long Beach and *your* life, and just share your reflections of changes.

Morrison: Well, it has brought people to the realization that regardless of what you have and what is meaningful to you, it's more or less *stuff*. Because everything has been taken away from us, swept away. Not just us, but the whole Coast area. And everyone who was in Katrina has suffered loss of things. But in the grand finale, you learn that the only important thing is *life*. And when you have your life and your love and sincerity, which would come out in full forces, all know the way that we have—the nation has received us as victims of a natural disaster. I mean, they've been generous with *self*, which is always a positive action of love when one gives of self. It's easy to write a check, if you have the money, but they have come and helped us survive and support us morally in every way. And Katrina has done that to the Coast area. So, consequently we will just move on and live and love always, there's that love and friendship of human beings. That's about all, Linda, that I can think of.

VanZandt: And we've seen that just throughout this recording. And two of your daughters have come by. One's living next door in this wonderful separate apartment that you've built. And then a cousin has stopped by, who's rebuilding and working on homes in Slidell. And it's just—I'm sure that's a daily occurrence. You're all going through the same things, the same struggles.

Morrison: That's right. Yeah, and my cousin has just left. She was in Slidell but her devastation was like ours, but yet there's that comradeship and then the—

VanZandt: Well, there's a quote that you, something that you said in the last interview about thirty years ago, and I just wanted to read this and see your impressions of this again. You said, "Tribulations prove later to be a worthwhile experience."

Morrison: Right.

VanZandt: And I wondered if you—is that true, still, and do you see that—

Morrison: Yes, I can, um-hm.

VanZandt: Um-hm, because of the friendships and connections—

Morrison: Yeah.

VanZandt: —that are made?

Morrison: Right.

VanZandt: Yeah, well, that's a wonderful way to end it. And I just wish you all the best and with your incredible strong faith that you have, your network, your support, your family, these great children of yours who you're helping, and you've been through it before—

Morrison: Well, yeah, my heart aches with it. You get, as they say, “You can't”—like they say, “You can't really take—your children will disappoint you sometimes,” but all of them have done—I'm proud of all of them, they've all been—the togetherness is what I like, that they are loyal to each other and to the family. And that is another important thing, I think, Katrina has brought families together closer.

VanZandt: Right. And you have sure fostered that with Boggsdale, from the very beginning, and your grandfather's idea of all these homes that you could all stay close and celebrate all of life's occasions together. So I hope that that continues.

Morrison: Well, I do, too. (chuckle)

VanZandt: And I wish you the best. Thank you for sharing your time.

Morrison: And of course, I mean, people say, “What are we going to do? Are we rebuilding?” Well, right now, it's all up in the air, we really don't know *what* we're going to do. We have to wait and see what the regulations will be and, of course, at my age I don't know that I will rebuild, but the children still have all their property and some are considering it. My nephew is definitely coming back. And, of course, I'd like to end, too, with the most glamorous and the best party that was ever given was on April 12, [2006], because people did come from far and near, once again, and helped me celebrate. And, of course, I did not want a big party. And, Lord, I'm so glad the children went ahead and said, “No way, we're having a party.” (laughter)

VanZandt: Was this for your 90th birthday?

Morrison: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: This past April.

Morrison: This past April.

VanZandt: What a fantastic celebration.

Morrison: And for the—

VanZandt: They overruled you.

Morrison: In Camille—we go out in style, I can tell you. With Camille we went out with the wedding; with me [post-Katrina], we went out with my birthday party.

VanZandt: Birthday party, well, that's the spirit.

Morrison: Uh-huh, OK, let's—

VanZandt: Thank you

(end of interview)