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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

WILLIAM “BILL” STALLWORTH

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with William “Bill” Stallworth and is taking place on May 22, 2008. The interviewer is James Pat Smith.

Smith: This is an interview with Councilman Bill Stallworth, who is also the director of the Hope Recovery Center in East Biloxi. The interview takes place in Mr. Stallworth’s office at 425 Division Street in Biloxi in the Hope Center. The interview primarily focuses on [Hurricane] Katrina and Katrina recovery. The interview is conducted by James Pat Smith of the USM [University of Southern Mississippi] history faculty. Mr. Stallworth, could you state your name and today’s date and where we are?

Stallworth: My name is William Stallworth. I go by the name of Bill. Today’s date is May 22, 2008. We’re located in my office at 425 Division Street here in the city of Biloxi.

Smith: Good. Bill, we like to collect a little biographical information on people because fifty years from now somebody might want to know where you came from and what your background is. So can you start by giving us your date of birth?

Stallworth: Date of birth is August 12, 1954. I was born in a little, small town called Monroeville, Alabama. We grew up—spent most of my early years in Pensacola, Florida, where my father moved to as seeking employment. He was a Methodist minister, so we moved around quite a bit. I’ve also lived in Jackson, Hattiesburg, and the Coast over that period of time. I [am] the father of five children, a grandfather currently of four and another one on the way. Been married three times, so we just, I guess, keep doing it until we get it right. (laughs)

Smith: What’s your wife’s name?

Stallworth: My wife’s name is Kryzra. Her maiden name was—

Smith: Can you spell that?

Stallworth: K-R-Y-Z-R-A. Her maiden name was Holmes. And we’ve been married now for, going on three years.

Smith: OK. Do you know her date of birth?

Stallworth: She was born on June 17, 1960.

Smith: And aside from your duties with the Biloxi City Council and with the recovery in east Biloxi, what major occupations have you pursued in your lifetime up to this point; the last fifty years?

Stallworth: The last fifty years I've been in sort of a little bit of everything. Basically, I worked my way through school doing odd jobs, bag boy, grocery stocking, dorm counselor, those kind of things. And then after college, I started with the City of Biloxi as a draftsman. Stayed with the City of Biloxi for a while; moved up to a residential relocation officer, business relocation officer. And then moved into some community planning with the Joint Center for Political Studies in [Washington] DC where we wrote grants for small African-American communities throughout the southeast region. Also, came back to the City of Biloxi, worked in—once the city changed forms of government, became the personnel director there, helped institute the personnel system then that the city currently operates under, then became city councilman. Along the way, I had a strong entrepreneurship spirit, so I had a small car wash. Then I started a construction business. I later did small business consulting, and finally the last business I had just before the storm was a computer company, also along the way, a lawn service business and a janitorial business. So we just—like I said, the entrepreneurial bug bit me early on in my life, and I've just never been able to shake it.

Smith: Good. And could you tell us about your education background?

Stallworth: Education background, I got a BS degree from Jackson State University. I went to elementary school at a little school in Pensacola called Golden Elementary, went to Lanier High, junior high school in Jackson, Jones, kind of junior high school, in Hattiesburg, graduated from—went to Rowan High School for a year and then graduated from S.H. Blair in Hattiesburg, went to Jackson State where I received my bachelor's degree.

Smith: Very good. You're a very busy man. Do you have any other activities or interests other than these that we've talked about that would help somebody understand where you come from?

Stallworth: Well, I've always been really civic-minded and really been involved heavily. I was on the boards of several nonprofits, the Job Corps, Boys and Girls Club, Red Cross, Salvation Army, a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. We also—during my political career, I was president of the Mississippi Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, also, president of the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials.

Smith: At one time did you run for mayor of Biloxi?

Stallworth: One time I ran for mayor of the City of Biloxi, as well, as part of that political career. I was on the city council. Previously, I finished out the term of a dear friend of mine, Michael Lester, who was killed in office. And he was the first African-American councilman that the city of Biloxi had.

Smith: He was in an automobile accident.

Stallworth: He was in an automobile accident. I finished out his term, then ran for and was elected for two additional terms; ran for mayor against the incumbent mayor.

Smith: Where does he presently reside?

Stallworth: He presently resides in the federal institution as a part of a conspiracy that basically ended in the death of another city council member and her husband who was a circuit judge, I think, at the time. So we've been involved in quite a bit. Biloxi's always amazing to me. I've never—we used to say that we've had probably more indictments per capita than probably any other city in the area.

Smith: How long have you been living in Biloxi?

Stallworth: I've been in Biloxi now since I graduated in 1975; so I've lived in Biloxi since [19]75. That's almost thirty-three years.

Smith: And you mentioned that your father was a Methodist minister. Do you have a present religious affiliation yourself?

Stallworth: Right now I'm a member of a nondenominational church. I grew up as an African Methodist Episcopal; we call them AMEs. I spent most of my adult, most of my life in the AME Church. Left the AME Church primarily just sort of disenchanted, I guess, because of the lack of outreach that the church was going through. Most of the AME Churches, it has the potential to be a great organization. They're so bogged down into sticking to tradition and inefficiencies that it's really hard for the church to grow. It started out with Richard Allen, and they were doing circuit-riding as a part of that, so even today the idea is still moving ministers around. Unfortunately, they don't, the church as a whole doesn't have the resources to really pay a minister to move his family around, and they consequently don't allow them time to really actually build a church. So every three to four years they're moving. I think that was—and that was one of the things that I never could quite get used to, along with some other inefficiencies. So later, after leaving the church, I just joined in a couple of—went to looking around and joined one nondenominational church, and right after the storm, that church packed up and moved to Dallas. So it kind of left us really kind of high and dry right after that. But we've basically been looking right now at this point in our lives for a new church home, so we visit a lot of churches. Religion and God is extremely important in my life, so just trying to find a really good church that we can become a part of.

Smith: What was the name of the church that left after the storm?

Stallworth: It was called Living Waters, and they were located on Caillavet Street in Biloxi. And the minister, after the storm, decided that he would move himself and the bulk of the congregation that wanted to go, to Dallas. And they moved down to Dallas and left a remnant here. It started out we formed a new little group called Strong Tower Ministries, and recently they sort of joined in with another church. Another minister came and started just recently another little, small starter church called the Palm Tree Ministries that operates out of the Center. So we're just kind of floating right now.

Smith: OK. Did you have any military service?

Stallworth: No, no military service. I tell people as a sophomore in college talking to the Air Force recruiter at the time, I wanted to be a pilot. I had poor eyesight, and I was tall. He told me, "Well, you're too tall to fit into a plane, and your eyesight wouldn't let you be a pilot." And I just took it as a real bad insult. And he said, "Well, maybe we can make you a navigator." And I just looked at him and decided, "Well, this is not what I want to do." Yeah. I wanted this particular thing, and that's all that I wanted, being young. At the time, the draft wasn't in place, and I just decided that maybe the military wasn't for me at that point. And consequently, I never did go in.

Smith: Could you list your children's names and the year of their birth or their present ages if you can't remember the year of their birth?

Stallworth: My oldest is Asia. She's a Pembrose; she's married now. She was a William before that. Asia is thirty-two years of age. My son is Cheo Stallworth. Cheo is now—he'll be twenty-nine on Saturday. He's married. Both of them are married. Asia has one child. Cheo is expecting a baby in the early fall.

Smith: How do you spell his name?

Stallworth: C-H-E-O. Then we have Katora, K-A-T-O-R-A. Katora is now twenty-six, and she's married, living in Houston with two children. I have a daughter Chienyere, C-H-I-E-N-Y-E-R-E, who is thirteen; she's living in Houston. And my youngest son is Sharif, S-H-A-R-I-F. He is ten, and he's also living in Houston. Now as a result of my marriage to Kryzra, I have two other children. One is Nickey, who is —Jeneaka is her real name, J-E-N-E-A-K-A, and Jeneaka is twenty-two; she lives in Hattiesburg. And then Zyprel, who is twenty-four and she's living in Atlanta.

Smith: Can you spell that?

Stallworth: Z-Y-P-R-E-L.

Smith: OK. What was your father's name?

Stallworth: My father's name was Fred Carl Stallworth who went by F.C. Stallworth, Reverend F.C. Stallworth. Dad was born June 23, 1935. Let me think about this; he's seventy-three, so 1935. My mother was Stella Stallworth. She was a Stallworth before she got married. They probably lived in around Beatrice, Alabama. And basically Mother is seventy years old. She was born in 1937, September 7, 1937. As a result of that marriage, there were seven siblings. I'm the oldest, my sister Stella who is two years younger, my brother Jeff who is two years younger than Stella, my sister Marsha who is two years younger than Jeff. Then my mother took a small break and had Tim who is about four years younger than Marsha. Shondra came much later; it was about another six years, and younger than Tim. And Edwin was the baby. So it was boy, girl, boy, girl all the way down.

Smith: Well, a big family. And being a minister's wife would keep your mom busy. Did she have any other occupations that she pursued outside the home?

Stallworth: My mother was a cook and a maid for several families, but most of her life she cooked, so. And that was basically her career. She retired—well, she's on the medical retirement at Keesler right now, but she was a cook there, and that's where she retired from. My father worked a number of jobs, but basically went into the full-time ministry when we moved to Jackson, Mississippi, and he stayed as a full-time minister until he retired about three years ago.

Smith: Bill, talk to us a little bit about your awareness of Katrina, and when it dawned on you what a catastrophe it had been. What were you doing the weekend before the storm, and when did you become aware of its impact on your council district?

Stallworth: Well, we had had several other hurricane scares and Katrina, it just—you know, about maybe a little bit more than a week and a half before it came about, and we knew it was out there. We just had this eerie feeling that this one was really coming down the pipe. So as it got closer and we really determined that it was coming in, we spent the period before it got here, that weekend before, just sort of batting down the hatches and trying to get people, you know, the word out that, you know, this is looking to be a really dangerous storm. Most people had survived Camille, so at first everybody was just not really paying attention, but the closer it got in, the more and the stronger we saw it developing, I really got out, and I spent the day before the storm actually going around, riding and begging people to please leave. If you can leave, leave. If you've got some place to go, don't stay here because this is a real, really, really bad one. My wife and I and one of my grandchildren, Cory, that we were keeping at the time went to my mother's house, which is about—in north Biloxi, which is for those that don't know it, maybe two miles from my home across further north.

Smith: Is this across the Bay?

Stallworth: Across the Bay. And we literally rode out the storm there. When Katrina came in, we just watched it and just figuring, “Well, it was a really bad.” I mean it just started, winds picked up early, and it just kept coming and kept coming, and finally, as soon as it was over, I was able to get out. I told Kryzra that I was going to go out and check our home and just see—it was after Katrina had passed—to see how things were. As I went through, we could just see coming across, getting close to the Bay, had to go around, try to come over the I-110 Bridge. And you could see that the entire area in D’Iberville was just—I mean, the Bay had just completely covered most of that area. You could just kind of work your way around through Popp’s Ferry and finally get down to the bridge, and get on a ramp and head back across the I-110. The wires were down. The signal lights were down, and so just sneaked around the cable, managed to work my through and get into, on the peninsula, but most of the peninsula was just, at that point—this was probably two or three hours after the storm—the water was subsiding, and it was just total devastation. You know, at first I managed to get to our house and I thought, “Well, the house looked OK from the outside.” So I just figured, “Well, maybe it was just OK.” And I tried to get in and couldn’t really get the door open, and I just kept pushing. And finally when I opened the door, it was just unbelievable. I mean the whole house had been flooded. Everything, you know, furniture was turned all over, appliances floating around, you know, they floated into the rooms. And I just looked at it and just knew, you know, Kryzra was not going to be ready for this one.

Smith: Where is your house located?

Stallworth: It’s located on Bohn Street, which is just south of Division, which is—

Smith: It’s a major artery.

Stallworth: Division is the major east-west artery on the east end of town. But I took the opportunity just to ride around because I just wanted to make sure that—tried to see how people were, and they were absolutely in shock. I mean people just stumbling out of their homes, and you could just see the despair. And I had intended, I told Kryzra I had planned to just be gone for about twenty or thirty minutes. Three hours later before I was late, I made it back and just told her that things were really bad. That was all I could just say; it was really, really bad.

Smith: Anything in particular that just stands out in your mind from that ride?

Stallworth: There’s so much because this was still late—

Smith: Late afternoon.

Stallworth: —late afternoon, early evening. So by the time the sun was going down, I made it back. And the picture of the house, the picture of everything, cars, trucks, everything, trees, homes just washed in the middle of the street. And you’re making

your way around, and you see people just looking stunned. And you know, there was no power, so everybody sort of found a place to bed down for the night. The next morning I was up early, made my way back over across the Bay, and the real devastation hit at that point; I mean, just the extent of the devastation. People were just truly, at that point, able to come out of their homes and the utter look of shock, a blankness in people's eyes and a fear because there was no food, there was—I mean everybody's house had been flooded. There wasn't a house, basically, on the peninsula that just on the east end of town that really did not get flooded. Because it was a peninsula, the water—there was a thirty-foot wave of water that Katrina had pushed in, and it filled up the Back Bay, and it met in the center of the, kind of in the center of the peninsula. So everybody got flooded. But seeing that and then seeing the bodies of people who, you know, you just saw the day before, they just—you know, you tried to get them out, and you'd look at them, and you knew they didn't make it. A couple of people that—most of them I knew—they just walked around, and people were saying, "Well, you know, Councilman, there's a body over here. What are we going to do? How are we going to get food? What are we going to do?" And you're walking around—because I'm back on the city council by now. I took office and won the election in June and took office in, you know, took office in May, took office in June, and Katrina's hitting in August. So I'm sitting here just looking around and realizing we don't have anything, nothing at all. I mean, I'm riding and trying to take survey of, "Is there anything that we can utilize?" The grocery stores are all damaged. The Dollar Store that's on Division Street, the windows have been blown out, and people were scavenging for food. And I recall just riding around, and I saw this one family. They were just sitting off in the back of some trees, and it just caught my eye. And I stopped for a minute, and the lady started trying to wave to me, you know, to come see. And she said her husband needed to get something, that he was a diabetic, and he was going into shock. He needed something to eat. And I just asked her to stay right there, and I'll run and get it. And I went up to the Dollar Store where people were scavenging for food, and I just stopped and said, "Look, is there anything that I can get? I got a lady over here; her husband is a diabetic. We need to get him something." And people, you know, one lady came out and said, "Well, I don't have—I found this liter of Coke." And somebody else said, "Well, here's some dry cookies, and here's some"—so I took, you know, it wasn't the best for him, but he needed something. So I went back around and gave it to them. And I just asked them, "Why are you sitting here?" And they told me they were waiting on the coroner, their aunt—you have to understand this couple was probably in their late sixties. And they had an older aunt who was in a wheelchair. Now, later I found that they were—the water came up, and they survived by being able to get on the table and climb up into their attic and literally just kind of wait on the storm. But between them, they didn't have the strength to pull their aunt up, and it's just—they had to literally sit there and watch this lady drown. Later I knew the lady, and she was Miss Moore, a feisty lady who was just taken, and she was one of the many that was lost. When we get to that—as we got into that and just seeing all of that, all I could do was just try. And I got to somebody who had a cell phone that was working, and I remember calling my brother Jeff. Jeff is a pastor in Jackson, and by then I was just kind of really, really realizing

just how serious it was. So I called him and told him, “Brother, we need to have some help.” That there was nothing, no food, no water, and we needed some help.

Smith: This is a very emotional memory for you.

Stallworth: All of it is. I try not to really get into it because it’s extremely—it just, it takes me back and to the utter helplessness of the situation.

Smith: So you called your brother who’s a minister in Jackson. Do you know the name of his church?

Stallworth: Jeff. Word of Worship was the name of his church, and I just begged him for, you know, get on the phone, call the rest of the family because I wouldn’t be able to call out, and asked him to please, in their community, try to get something down here. We just needed everything. We need water; we needed food. And I remember just riding, riding, looking, seeing everybody, and they were just all hurting so badly, and there wasn’t a whole lot I could do at that point but, you know, handle as many of the crises as I could. (crying) You know, people who were trapped or people who needed and managed to get to city hall at the corner to go out to the people who had died, and try to pass on the list there. And city hall really didn’t have anything, you know. So I went back out into the community just scavenging for food for everyone and trying to get supplies. And we just continued on.

Smith: Bill, you said that you’d ridden around the weekend before the storm trying to get people to leave. Do you have any insight into what it is that would make someone stay even though the city councilman’s in the street asking them to leave?

Stallworth: Yeah, I mean, you know, people always ask that question, “Why do people stay?” Well, there were a number of reasons, but this is a very poor community. Most of the people—we did a survey after the storm, and 40 percent of the people made under fifteen thousand dollars a year; 70 percent made under thirty-five thousand dollars a year. So you can imagine it’s a relatively poor community. Well, most people don’t realize the storm came like, you know, August, at the very end of August, and people don’t understand the significance of that. It is between pay periods. If you were working in the casinos, you may have been getting paid weekly or biweekly. Definitely if you worked for the government, you got it the first and the fifteenth. A large portion of the population was elderly and are retired, and they get paid on the first of the month. So when you’re looking at around the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth, you only have a few dollars left. So the question—yeah—

Smith: There’s some month left at the end of the check.

Stallworth: There’s a month left at the end of the check. There’s just nothing at all. And by then, people, they may have fifteen or twenty dollars to hold them to the first, and you’re asking them to go somewhere. Now, also remember that prior to this, we

had also had other hurricane scares, almost two or three right in a row. So they may have tried to get out.

Smith: There was in fact an attempt.

Stallworth: Right.

Smith: A mandatory evacuation earlier in the summer and no storm.

Stallworth: No storm. And people spent hours on the interstate and stuck in traffic and couldn't get a room only have to come back. And this one, they were just completely out of money, and there was no place to go. Literally no place to go. Shelters had really not been opened. We were just ill-prepared for the storm. And looking at Camille, which had been the storm of record for some thirty-plus years, you know, most people realized that in the interior of the peninsula, you didn't really get any water, you know. It happened further on the beach; you got a little water coming in, maybe on the very tip of Back Bay, you know, but nothing that would—you just figure, "OK, I'll ride out the storm. I'll ride the winds out." Nobody was prepared for this thirty-foot tidal surge. People—I thank God that it came in the early morning hours. I mean if this had happened, if it had come in four hours earlier, the death toll would've been astronomical because nobody would've seen the water coming. People were able to see the water rising and tried to get further up, but waking up in the middle of the night in total, pitch-black darkness, and water is flooding your home, so many people would've been totally disoriented that they would literally drown in their homes. So I thank God for his mercy in just allowing it to happen that early because it would've been just so much, much worse.

Smith: What was the total official casualty or death in Biloxi from the storm?

Stallworth: I think the coroner registered some ninety-nine people that died in the storm. We kept talking about that because it didn't count—with that count it was just actual people who may have drowned or who were missing. And those that were missing, he really couldn't certify them; still hadn't really certified them all. But the people who died as a result of injuries, heart attack, stroke, you know, in the process of evacuating and the stresses, we lost several folks. And we just figured, you know, ask the funeral directors; they will tell you the numbers were substantially higher. They were extremely busy. And after the storm is when the toll really is. You know, it's unfortunate people can count the deaths as a result of the impact of the storm, but nobody looks at what happens particularly in the elderly community right after something like this, when all hope is just gone, and you just lose them. I mean you just lose them, left and right. I told somebody, "I've been to so many funerals; I can't go anymore." I just—somebody that's intimately close to me, "I just can't do any more funerals. I don't have it in me." And I know people think, "Well, you're the councilman; you should be"—I can't do it. I simply can't do it. It's, it just leaves me. I know the people, and I know they're gone, but the emotional trauma, I can't deal with. I can't do what I'm doing and deal with that, so I don't deal with it; I just work

it and keep going and trying to fix it; make it happen; do something; let's get back on our feet. And we've done substantial work in that regard, but it just, you know, I try to understand when people are frustrated.

Smith: How long did it take before you saw substantial food, water, basic relief from the outside getting in, and what was the source of it?

Stallworth: Honestly, it took probably eight to ten days. I think on the, about the fourth day the National Guard managed to, around the third or fourth day, they managed to get a water-and-ice delivery in. And I remember being there helping people, helping them get it organized and helping people get it. We started unloading ice and water, and people were lining up because nobody really—we got word around that there may be an ice-and-water delivery, and this is where it's going to be. And folks started lining up, but it didn't get there until almost nightfall. So I remember just unloading that and watching people just disappear into the night; there was still no power. So they would get their water and ice, and we had lights from the trucks, and then they would literally take it and just disappear. And I thought how profound that it is, just people's souls just disappearing into the darkness. And then later they started really getting on to a schedule, so there was food, you know, and water and ice that was arriving. And I remember, in terms of food, I think it was like the second day after the storm, and I was riding around, and I passed by Main Street Baptist Church, and they had set up a temporary little feeding kitchen. And I stopped in to see how they were making out and what they were doing, and I remember seeing them dish up this plate, and it was just broth with a few little vegetables in it. (crying) I remember going up the church stairs and just crying like a baby because that was all that there was, but at least somebody was trying to do something. Because, you know, you would think the government would be here and FEMA and Red Cross. And I tell people, it took FEMA about eight weeks to get here, and Red Cross arrived maybe three days later, so. This was the hardest hit area of the Coast; we lost well over three thousand homes here right away in the storm. Everything else had gone under water. People were sleeping on wet mattresses and on tents or anything that they could, and nobody was here, nobody.

Smith: About what day after the storm was this soup kitchen open at Main Street?

Stallworth: It was actually open like—I understood they had opened, like the day they started serving, the day before, so it was like the second day after the storm, they had tried to start doing it.

Smith: And you saw them the third day.

Stallworth: I saw them on the third day. And I was, "We're going to find something." So I started going around and asking. Where the grocery store had been, I started asking them, "Can we, you know, is there a way we can get the food out of here? Can we just get some food out?" And a couple of employees up there, and they were like, "Well, they told us not to let anybody in, but we'll let you in if you can get

it, and you can”—and they were really, really nice people, and they allowed (crying) me to go in and get the food. And we took it out and dipped it because it was all the canned goods. You know, most of the food was ruined, but canned goods were still good. They were covered in mud, and we found the water, dipped the cans, and they were taken back down to the soup kitchen. And scrounging around I found seafood packing companies had lost power. I knew some of the owners, and they were saying, “Well, this is going to go bad.” It’s still pretty solid because a lot of it was just acting as a coolant for itself. And they told us we could get that, and I think that was probably kind of like one of the joyous memories. I’ve never eaten so many large shrimp in my life, but we were really happy to get it, and about maybe, I would say maybe seven to ten days after the storm.

Smith: Do you remember the name of the grocery store or where it’s located?

Stallworth: Yeah, it was Sav-a-Lot at the time and it was on Division Street.

Smith: And do you know the name of the seafood companies that emptied their freezers for you?

Stallworth: It was all of them. It was Schimper’s, Gollott’s, all of the companies, most of the packing companies that lost, Lesso Seafood, all of them lost their power. They knew that they couldn’t maintain the stuff they had in there, so we just ate, and that was one of the nice things. And about seven to ten days later, Salvation Army starting coming in trying to get set up, and I remember seeing these two trucks. The roads had been kind of cleared, and there was these two trucks that came in. And one of them was a Papa John’s Pizza truck, and they set up, and they started serving pizzas, and we ate pizzas. They would have a sort of a egg pizza in the mornings with some pineapples or something on it, and then in the evenings you’d get pepperoni or sausage on these little personal size pizzas, and they were just rolling up. I just remember that I was so thankful that something had finally arrived, and people were starting to show up, and the load could be lifted for a minute because until then, we were strictly on our own. And I tell people, being an elected official in a situation like that is not very good, particularly when you’re hidden, and everybody knows you, and they’re trying to figure out, “What we going to do?” And you don’t have any real answers for them. You’re directing them to any resources that you can find; you’re trying to get that, and asking people to share. We’d take water and ice to people who we knew were shut in or couldn’t get out or elderly, and my wife and I were just loading some stuff on the truck, and we’d drive around till dark, trying to get them something. And then trying to make it back to my mother’s house, spend the night, and start all over at sun up, and it just kept going that way. So we just got that.

(brief interruption)

Smith: You had a lot of personal loss of your own. Your own house was flooded.

Stallworth: I lost—

Smith: How long did it take you to be able to drag your battered furniture out and get your house straight?

Stallworth: It took us nearly weeks; months, as a matter of fact. What happened after the storm is part of that encounter—and I had what I call the first of my divine appointments at that Main Street feeding kitchen. After that grocery store run that I told you about, we came back, and I ran across a pastor who had told me some guys had been by there, and they were looking to try to do something to help, but he didn't know what to tell him. He just told them that our city councilman would be back in a little bit. And I told them, "Well, if they come back or make another run, if they come back, I'll see them." By the time I got back with another load of food, I ran across these two gentlemen, Kenny Ray and Alejandro; they were from an international relief organization called Oxfam America. I'd never heard of Oxfam at any point in my life, and here are these guys that walk around in jeans, and Kenny had the Scottish brogue and had an accent going, and Alejandro was a young, Hispanic gentleman. And they were looking around, and they were saying, "Well, we're here. We've been here for a day or two, and we've been trying to find someplace that we could plug into." I looked at them and laughed, and I said, "Well, what are you trying to do?" And he said, "Well"—he introduced himself and told me they were from Oxfam. He said, "Well, we have never done anything domestically in the Americas, and if this had been an international disaster, you know, we would've had the UN [United Nations], and we would just go check in with them, and they would tell us where to go and what place to be, and what we could do, but we haven't been able to find anyplace." And I looked around and laughed, and said, "Look, I have no problem telling you what to do, and when to do it, or anybody else. So tell me what you want to do, and I'll make it happen." And they said, "Well, we don't have a lot of volunteers but"—looking at the kitchen, he said, "Can y'all use some monies for food and supplies?" I looked over at the pastor and said, "Yeah, we can but, you know, I don't know what, where, you know, we could do something, but we could." And we got talking a little bit longer, and he said, "Well, you seem to have a pretty good feel of what needs to done. Why don't you—what would it take for you to try to, you know, get something to try to help?"

Stallworth: And I looked at him and just said, "Look, I tell you what. If you can get me some computers and some power and some tables and chairs, I can set something up. I'll find a place, and I'll set something up and get something started." Because by now I'm really tired, and I'm looking at them, and they're just wondering, kind of like, "Why are y'all wasting my time?" But I prayed to the Lord for some help, and it was just something in their spirit that said, "Don't blow them off. Just listen." So these guys come and say, "Well, if you can find a bank that we can make a deposit into, I could have you ten thousand dollars tomorrow for the soup kitchen, you know, and maybe another ten thousand for your stuff," for the tables and computers and stuff. And I'm looking at them like, "You? Yeah, right, come on. Why y'all would mess with me at a time like this? Don't pull my chain right now." But I just kept in the back of my mind this little story that just little things come to you at (inaudible)

because I had prayed to God so badly for help; I mean constant prayer. And it just dawned in my mind about this little story about this guy who was drowning and praying to God somebody would—you know, for God to come save him, and a boat came along, and he said, “No, I’m waiting on God to save me.” A plane came along, and everybody tried to help him, and he finally drowned. And when he got there, he asked God, “Why didn’t you come save me? I prayed to you.” God told him, “I sent a boat and a plane, and you were too stupid to get into them, and so you drowned.” I didn’t want to be that guy, and that story just kind of—so I called, I remember getting a hold to Dobie Shields(?) who was chairman of the local Coast Community Bank that I’ve done a lot of banking with, and they had a branch that they’d gotten open because they were able, they were connected to other branches. But they had one branch that was open a little further in. And I said, “Dobie, I don’t know anything about these folks, but I’m not going to take any chances. Can you help me? I need to have a routing number and an account set up that I can put money into.” And she just said, “Well, we’ll route it, and you can put it in.” And luckily the church had an account there, too. So I got his account number, and I gave him my account number, and I said, “Look, here’s the account number; here’s the routing number.” And that was the end of it. I told him I need to go because we still need—I mean, by now other folks were clamoring around when they needed so many other things, and I said, “Well, I’ve really got to go.” And I really didn’t pay it any—didn’t give it another thought. I truly didn’t. And about maybe two days later I asked the minister, “Have you talked to those guys who came by?” And he said, “Well, no, I really hadn’t—I didn’t see them yesterday.” And I said, “Well, did you check and see?” And he said, “Well, no, we’ve been really working, and we really hadn’t checked to see.” And so we managed to get to somebody else’s cell phone, and I think Cellular South was about the only true phone that was working. And because I got that cell phone, and actually I think the City at that point had almost found some lines and had gotten some emergency phones in, as a city councilman I was able to get at least one. But I called and asked them, and sure enough the very next morning, they said, “Well, we did get a wire in?” And it came in when he said it was going to be in, and you know, “The money is in the account.” And I’m sitting there thinking, “How, what, how, what, what?” So at that point I looked around and found Visions of Hope, which is on Division Street; this is another nonprofit. Their entire office had been flooded out, and they had a little conference room that had never been completed. It was just an empty shell of a building. And I got in touch with the person there, and I said, “Look, can I use this for a little while?” And she said, “Well, we won’t be using it; you can use it.” We went in and got some volunteers, and started gutting the place out. I managed to find my way to one of Dobie’s branches and get two thousand dollars cash out that account and had heard that by now Wal-Mart and Lowe’s didn’t have power, but they were letting people get some emergency supplies. So I went and stood in line over there, and they were letting us in like two or three at a time, and people were getting stuff. And I managed to get a generator; I got like two generators and some tables and chairs from Lowe’s. And went over to Wal-Mart and stood in line over there, and when I got there to get ready to pay, they wouldn’t take cash. And I said, “Why won’t you take cash?” They said, “It’s just too hard to keep. You got a credit card?” “Yeah, but”—“Well, just give us a credit card number.” Now, no, they didn’t know if the credit card was

good. There was no way for them to check, but they didn't want to have the employees handling cash because there was no place to put it. Now, I didn't quite get it at first, but it made sense later that you don't want to have that much cash in a disaster, sitting around with no place to deposit it or put it, and, you know, it's too hard to track, but these credit card receipts, you know, we can run them later and they're good, good; if they're bad, well, we don't lose as much. But I used a credit card and bought some computers. We went back to that little place, and we started setting up the center, and it just took off. I mean there were so many people in town. I remember going to A.J., who's the mayor of the town.

Smith: A.J. Holloway.

Stallworth: A.J. Holloway. And I kept going up and saying, "Well, A.J., is there anything I can help you with?" And A.J. told me, he said, "Bill, if I need you, I'll call you." And it was just really sort of dismissive. So I said, "OK." And I went back; we managed to get that started, and I started gathering volunteers because I saw so many people, and they were trying—everybody was trying to do something, but nobody knew what to do. So I got a couple of volunteers, and we started working. We started setting up distribution centers, places where people could get water and food. Other groups came in; they wanted to have—using contacts, I set up a site for them, and they would start bringing in some supplies. And then I had them come to a meeting and just sit down and said, "Look, this is what we need to do, and this is how we need to do it. We've got to be able to set these groups up because people won't have to walk from one end down to the other." And we set up at one point here and got a map of Biloxi and just used that as a way of starting to organize.

Smith: How many automobiles, do you think, were functional on this end of town after the storm?

Stallworth: On this end of town, none. I mean it was—

Smith: Walking distance is critical when there's no car.

Stallworth: Walking distance was critical because I mean, when you're talking about elderly and others, you know, walking for four or five miles just through debris and climbing over trees and doing all this other stuff, and trying to weave your way through just wasn't always easy at that point. So the groups started coming, and they kept coming, and then it was just like word got around, and everybody started showing up. And we started doing that, and I remember nine o'clock in the morning; I have a meeting with volunteer groups. They were meeting at three in the afternoon to talk about what we were supposed to do that morning, what we needed to do the next morning, and we would be closing down at dark because there was still no power. We had generators, and we thought somebody was going to steal these generators. One of the volunteers actually just stayed overnight because she was afraid that—she called, and she said, "Well, the doors, we don't have any way of locking the doors, and we've got these computers and stuff and people are going to steal it." And I was like, "Well,

we just pray to God that they won't." And people didn't, and we were able to continue to operate. And as we got more and more groups in, we were able to organize them very quickly. We divided the area up into grids, and it kind of looks—and we just took it and divided up our neighborhoods, and then I basically stuck a—listing the organizations. I would, "OK. Would you take this area right here, and would you start kind of gutting out the home and pulling all the stuff out of the home so that the debris haulers could take it out?" And they agreed, and putting people in their groups and each one of those, they started moving very quickly to get that done. We were able to get a lot of the homes gutted out very quickly. From there we started planning our rebuild process and how to get food, water, and other supplies, and how to keep things rolling. It became the nerve center of the relief effort in this area, and it just grew. We kept growing. Organizations would come in and join in. A few other organizations came in that didn't have volunteers, but they saw what we were doing and they offered money, and we were able to get some grants to keep it going. And we just had it really organized. We started collecting information on the residents; if you came in and needed food or water, just go get it. But now if we got blankets or we got bicycles or we got quilts or we got sleeping bags, I need you to sit down and fill out some information. I knew it was going to be extremely critical that we are able to, at some point, tell people who was still here and some general information about what their situations were. And the only way you could get people to do that in times of crisis is utilize those carrots to make them stop long enough to fill out this. "Well, OK, to get this"—"Well, yeah, I'll fill it out." And they would fill it out. The volunteers would take it, and we would just get it, and we started trying to get it into the computer and start typing up and printing out stuff, and it just, it kept going and kept going until the day we'd gotten past this point of, "Yeah, this community is pretty much well on its way to recovery." The groups that have been here working along with the center have rehabbed well over six hundred homes. We built about thirty new ones and got another hundred or so on the way, and we just keep doing it, just keep going at it. And it's been a nonstop ride since Katrina.

Smith: So this center, as it's called, Hope—

Stallworth: Well, the official name of it is the East Biloxi Coordination Relief and Redevelopment Agency. The name kept getting longer and longer, you know, as people tried to talk about it; so we shortened it up to the Hope Coordination Center. And the Hope Coordination Center is comprised of the East Biloxi Coordination Center, but also we have a number of other volunteer groups who are housed here. And we have a design studio for Mississippi State [University], and the design studio's architects from there that became a permanent part of it. As a matter of fact, I met David Perts(?) who is the director of that. David had been looking around trying to find a place to plug into, and he came to one of my meetings. And he looked at my little map with all my stickies up, and David walked up and introduced himself and said, "Is there anything we could do?" I said, "Well, I don't know what you—what do you want to do?" He said, "Well," he looked at the map and said, "Well, I can make that map look a lot better for you." And I told him, "By all means, go and do that." And we started a friendship and a relationship that's still going strong today, and they

became tied to us. As a part of what we were doing, David kept coming back, and I would ask him, “Can you”—he brought the map back, and it was nice and neat and colorful. And I’m like, “Oh, OK, cool. Can you do some more? Can you do this, this, and this?” He went, “Yeah, we can handle that.” And he would send it up, and they would print it out at the extension center in North Biloxi and bring it back over and, you know, and we just—well, finally, a grant came up from HUD [Housing and Urban Development], was just tailor made from them, and they needed a local partner, and we partnered with them, and now we’ve become a 501(c)(3), and we just partnered with them, and it gave them two years of operating expenses to help people get back on their land. So we used that as a crux to start doing that community planning process where we knew that they were going. By now the governor had called a charrette, and they came down with a bunch of architects, and they closed down at the Isle of Capri Casino, and they started just planning how this city was going to look. And we just knew that, “OK, this is going to be not good for us.” So we went through a whole six-week planning process. We surveyed; that’s detailed questions of five hundred residents that we went out and had volunteers go out and survey, had them to answer the questions. We compiled that information. Then we also did a six-week planning process and started out with about three hundred people, and we carried them through a six-week counter planning process. And at the end of the day we were able to produce a report, and it was really interesting. As I looked at the information that we had been able to gather, one of the things that really stuck out in my mind was we did this prestorm assessment of needs and poststorm assessment of needs, and I knew that affordable housing would be on the top of everybody’s list, and I was trying to get an idea of what everybody—the rest of the needs. I knew affordable housing would be number one, but the number two thing just kind of threw me back for a minute. You know, the thought, you know, maybe schools, jobs, you know, security, money, and those things would be like number two on it. Not it. Number two was that people wanted a sense of community brought back, and it just, kind of like just clear as a bell, “OK, this is our course, this is our plan. We’re going to take number one and number two, and we’re going to make a map and get people back in their homes and build a sense of community back into this community.” And we started doing that, and we’ve been working on it ever since. So we’ve done everything from park renovations to home restoration to now some economic development in developing workforce housing initiatives.

Smith: Most of what we’ve talked about here has been done through private, nongovernment agencies, by charities.

Stallworth: Absolutely, the government—I tell people, and they listen. I say this to folks, “Look, governments do streets; they do drainage; they do police; they do fire, but they don’t do people, never have, never will be able to do people anywhere near effective. People have to do people.” And these organizations, the churches from—I truly was, before the storm I was really, I considered myself a Christian saved but a cynic. I was just so—everything you read in the news, watching the people around, just looking at the human condition and just got like everybody else; I was just absolutely cynical about people. But that storm really—I tell people, “It provided an

opportunity for God not only to show up, but to show out.” I mean people came from everywhere, and they still come. And I couldn’t believe that. And asking, “Why would you come?” And they just said they had to come. They just literally had to come. Their spirit couldn’t be still, they had to come. The God in them came through, and they came in and did some of the stinkiest, messiest, dirtiest jobs. I mean everything from pulling out bodies—in terms of the public-safety people who showed up and the forensic people who were trying to get here—to just mother and her children, you know, coming down from all over the country, Oregon, and just coming down and getting immersed, digging out people’s mud, pushing mud out the houses, ripping out old stinky Sheetrock, furniture, foulness of—by now, mold and everything else had set in, and stuff is just stinky and bad. And they would come in and do it with such a willing heart. I couldn’t believe it. (crying) And I still can’t. It was just nice to know people cared and, you know, who all it is. I know when I go and talk to people now, you know how the world is; so I make an apology early on to folks. I said, “I don’t know where you stand in terms of belief, so if I offend you, I apologize upfront because you’re going to hear a whole lot of God talk coming out of my mouth, because I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, I am a living example and proof that there is a God, and he does and is alive and well and doing.” I mean, Pat, trying to just walk out and do all of this stuff that I knew I—everything that I had done in my life, God had put and positioned me to be at this point in my life. And then walking out and absolutely knowing there is no way to get what I need, and simply looking up and say, “God, I need a little help.” And I’m serious; I’m not lying to you, but as surely as I could walk the time between walking and getting up right now, and walking to my parking lot to get in my truck, exactly what I needed would be there. And it was just absolutely astonishing to me. I don’t care what it was. If I needed somebody with a truck or a generator, it was. Somebody needed to have medicine, I could literally [pray], “Don’t know where I’m going to get it. You know it’s critical; the person’s got to have it. I don’t have it. Lord what am I going to do?” I would literally just—I could be sitting here, and I will get a knock on the door, you know, “We were just down, and we were looking, and we are a group of physicians and nurses, and we were just wondering if somebody needed”—“There it is, yes, right over there. There’s the person.” (crying) So I know that there’s a God. Nobody will ever be able to convince me that there isn’t. I would, before I denounce my God, I would die, literally. I understand how people could get so caught up. You read about the disciples; you read about all these other folks who believe so strongly that they would be willing to die for that belief. I know now. I was a preacher’s son. I grew up in a church. I really didn’t—I had a relationship that I thought was special as a child. We fell out; God and I fell out years ago. And, but at that point in my life, I understood the real meaning of what God was about, and that it wasn’t just a concept. It’s just not the thought. It’s not just some elegant deliberation that people can argue and debate back and forth. It was real. When I had no one, when I had no help and no way of getting any, God stepped in, and he provided my every need. So the churches, the groups, all of these nonprofits came in and did what the government, still to this day, hadn’t been able to do. I mean the federal government appropriated money; people still are just now getting that money, some three years after. Can you imagine if we had waited for just them to help? Now, people would still be as they are in New

Orleans and other places where government really tried to take a stronger hand in this, and they fouled it up so badly. But people, people working together can accomplish anything.

Smith: Can I get you to evaluate the City of Biloxi's, the City government of Biloxi and its role in the immediate aftermath of the storm and in the recovery over the last couple of years? What has been good or adequate? What needs changing for the future?

Stallworth: The future of this city, as always, needs to develop plans that are going to solidify its position, but more importantly protect to provide a better quality of life for its citizens. After the storm they were holding meetings every day, and I would go to those meetings; I mean just sit there. And I was just absolutely astounded one day, and I walked in, and I just asked—because A.J. and I have a strange relationship. We were on the city council together. We ran for mayor at the same time, as you very well know, and I think that has a whole lot of carryover. So whatever I say, half the time, may be suspect. But I was talking to him, and I went to some of his staff people, and I said, “Well, I’m kind of concerned. How are y’all determining what needs to happen, and there are no maps, you know, in this war room? Y’all are just talking, but you don’t have any.” If you look around this office, there are maps and charts on everything. You’ve got to be able to see what’s going on, and you have to have it in some kind of pictorial picture, you know, some kind of pictorial form that you can actually grasp the information very quickly and—

Smith: Show other people.

Stallworth: —show other people very quickly. They had nothing, and they were just talking and people were just there, but to their credit I realized they were overwhelmed. A.J. had always been very conservative. He wasn’t prepared, nor was anyone else. I don’t want you—I’m not putting it as that—nobody could be prepared. I think in terms of they were blessed early on because the casino revenues; somebody was smart enough to do this business interruption insurance, which gave them some money to actually operate. So they were able to quickly start clearing the streets and getting some debris. And the things that the government does in terms of trying to restore all assets to the streets in terms of trying to provide security, I would have to give them high marks in terms of being able to get that accomplished. In terms of what they were able to do for the people, it just wasn’t part of the consideration. They don’t know how to do it. So after we really got started, then they had some people on staff up there who were taking volunteers’ names, and they started calling us and saying, “Look, can you take them and you refer them?” And we were able to absorb them, but—

Smith: So pretty quickly you became kind of a social agency for the City with volunteers looking for places to go?

Stallworth: Right.

Smith: You were finding the projects that needed to come through.

Stallworth: I found the projects for people to be doing, and it wasn't part of the City; it was just something that got started.

Smith: You started doing a job, got a reputation—

Stallworth: And everybody started to do it.

Smith: —and the City doesn't know what to do, and they sent it to you.

Stallworth: You got it, and that's exactly how it transpired. And we started just really, really working. The City moved forward, and they got the casinos back up because that was the paramount in the mayor's mind at that time was to try to do everything. And being mayor, if I were mayor, I would say that part of my priorities would've been the same thing; you know, get the economic base up. But in our efforts we'd started getting the churches up, and we started getting, wanted to try to return stability to it. I got this notion, OK, that you can always try to fix problems; then you're going to have problems. But if you fix people, people fix the problems. You know, you want to cure the ills. You don't, you know—somebody's got a plague, and you want to bandage up the sores. The patient's going to still die. You need to get to fixing the person because if they get healthy, their body will take care of fixing the sores and get all of that. Well, that's my philosophy. So we tried to, as much as possible to try to quickly get some order restored; more than the streets, get people to the point that they could feel something was happening [and] there were places that they could go to get help. There were things that were going on, and there were people who could quickly address what they needed to have. And we were able to do that very quickly and very successfully. As a whole, the City, like I said, in terms of what they've done, what they need to do, need a better plan of action for a future event. They need to really work closely with nonprofits. Then if anything that's come out this storm is the untapped resources that you have in your community that are there if you would feed them, supply them with—they could really help solve a lot of the community's issues and really should be a intricate part of community building because with the right coordination coming out of city hall and the right directions in terms of what you see that needs to be done, planning and making them an intricate part of fixing the people, then a lot of the city's problems, a lot of things that you are really trying to get your city to become, actually happens at that point in time. So I think that they need to have a stronger sense of that. I think that they clearly need to now take advantage of this and utilize this opportunity to diversify the economy. Casinos are—this is a company town, casinos. And casinos—I don't mean it derogatory because they provide a lot of jobs—they could pump a lot of money into the area on the standard of, quality of the residents in terms of affordability, and monies in their pocket has been improved as a result of them being here. I want that, you know, understood, but I think that it's a big, huge mistake to try to put all your eggs in that one basket. I think that because of the increased (inaudible) capacity,

because of the infrastructure that they bring to the table, now would be a really good time to start going out to other types of businesses and industries that are not directly tied to them. It could be offices, service industry, even heavy industry. You got land working in conjunction with the other municipalities up and down the Coast that this becomes a very viable area. Unfortunately, in all the cities, we got all these little kingdoms and no real way of working together. The storm has brought about some forced collaborations, things like the wastewater treatment and the sewage and the solid waste where all the government agencies have got to come together and work together to make something bigger happen. That should be the pattern. That should be the order of the day.

Smith: How is that working?

Stallworth: Actually, it's working pretty well because it's tied to money, and it's in the requirements, so they have to sit there, and they don't—they may not like it, but it's actually a lot more efficient. And one of the things that we are learning this—

Smith: So they're coming together over sewage.

Stallworth: They're coming together over sewage and waste. I mean that's what's forcing them. The cost of it's getting too prohibitive for anybody to really take it on by themselves, so they have to do these common skills. The same thing can be accomplished with police protection, and you know, we've got more than enough resources. We just don't utilize them very well. The one thing I've learned as part of this coordination center is that's what a City and government needs to be about. Don't get into trying to do it all; coordinate it. Make it happen; help your citizens; empower them so that they can make it happen; work together collaboratively. The sheriff's department is patrolling just this portion, and the City's patrolling this portion, and there's such a waste of manpower that, you know—what would happen if you put on the map all of these real problem areas where drugs are prime, and all of a sudden you start working collaboratively with the sheriff's department, and the other Cities that say, "Look, you know, why don't we put this additional manpower into these areas? Why don't we do community policing? Why don't we really work with the neighbors so that they feel empowered that now they can run the drug dealers out of there by working along with us? And give us the intel[ligence], and we can make this so that it's not a drag on the community any longer." Now it becomes a very viable part, people would love to live in, and you know taxes go up, property values go up, and people are a lot happier. You know, plan collectively to do things, coordinate. That's how you get things done. So as a part of that, we continue to do and work toward that end.

Smith: Can you evaluate your experiences with FEMA and MEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency and Mississippi Emergency Management Agency?

Stallworth: Actually, at the time of the storm, they were two of the most sorriest, screwed up, unproductive agencies that the federal government has. You know, Bush,

when he came in, reorganized. FEMA used to be a cabinet-level position, and after 9/11 they got thrown under Homeland Security. I thought that was a real big mistake. I still think it's a *huge* mistake. It's one thing when you are a cabinet position; you can get to the man in charge and say, "Look, I've got to have this, this, and this." It's another thing when you have to go through a whole bunch of bureaucracy to get anything done. FEMA was disorganized. It was pathetic. It was a sorry excuse of an agency. MEMA was just a smaller version of the same unproductive, poorly-organized agency that couldn't handle small emergencies, let alone something as huge as Katrina, and they just got clearly swamped, overwhelmed. Poor coordination at the federal level. No coordination, virtually, at the State level. You know, when people were trying to send in supplies, they were being held up around Hattiesburg because somebody thought maybe it was going to be too much to send in. When people are sitting here starving half to death because the help is sitting there waiting to get in, and you're sitting up there holding it for weeks because you don't have anybody on the ground. Nobody came and looked. There were no MEMA representatives or FEMA representatives here. How the heck would you know what's going on, on the ground? You don't. Instead, you're sending resources to places, you know, that don't really have—we're taking care of people up around Memphis and—what the heck for? You come down here and help here; you can bring them back home in a heartbeat. Monies, the trailers, the whole nine yards. We had to have temporary housing, but you know, imagine what would have happened if you could've got together with us with all these volunteers, and you could've taken some of that same money that you spent on temporary housing, put it into permanent housing, and people would've had the situation solved. Penny-wise, dollar-foolish, that's what I call it. That's the mentality that people had. We would spend roughly twenty-five thousand dollars to buy a travel trailer; we would spend another thirty thousand dollars having it delivered and set up, and another fifteen [thousand dollars] getting it stored at the end, and we're pushing a hundred thousand dollars for this menial, this little cottage that we're going to take into a field at the end of the day, stomp it and have to trash and burn the whole thing and hopefully not create a pollution problem. *Or* we could've been a little wiser about it and say, "OK, we need to get in and get some houses built very quickly. We need to get it back on people's lots." [They said,] "We don't want to do wealth building. We don't want to give people a leg up." And I, you know, I don't understand that at that point in time.

Smith: Don't want anybody better off after.

Stallworth: No, than they were before.

Smith: Than they were before.

Stallworth: Which is stupid.

Smith: Get them back where they were before.

Stallworth: Get them back to where they were before. OK, so create, instead of taking this, Katrina, as an opportunity to really do something substantial. It's like—oh, you were talking about A.J. [Holloway]. One of the things I used to laugh at about A.J. when he first took into office, he would literally go down the street and fix a storm pipe, like in the middle of the street, and come back and pave. You'd see this little jagged edge, and you're sitting there thinking, you know, "For another five or ten thousand dollars, you could've had a completely redone street." So you know, that's the penny-wise, dollar-foolish kind of mentality.

(brief interruption)

Stallworth: So MEMA and FEMA were just cusswords as far as I was concerned, and didn't mind telling anybody and them to their faces. I told all of them; Red Cross, I told every last one of them what I thought of them to the tune that the national director and some of his folks came down to sit down and have a meeting, you know. "We understand that you've been very critical." "Yes, I have and rightfully so. You did a piss-poor job." Red Cross had \$2.2 *billion*. By the time I met with them, they had like a hundred million dollars left. And I'm sitting there, "How the heck did you—what did you do with \$2.2 billion?" (heavy sigh) Again, people just did not think. So what the government needs to do is plan and be ready because this *will* happen again. There is no question about *if*, it's just a matter of *when*.

Smith: The federal government appropriated something like five or six billion dollars in community development block grants to help with the recovery, and some of that went into housing grants. You talked about how involved the Hope Center here has been in housing. Do you have any observations about the way the grant program through the City government authorities worked?

Stallworth: Not very well. I mean we were talking about all these homes that we've done, and they've been done without that money, through private donations, monies, you know, people like Oprah and others who gave substantial monies to the organization so that we could do this.

Smith: Volunteer labor.

Stallworth: Volunteer labor, volunteer resources, monies that people didn't have. Now, monies are starting to flow in, and it's going to eventually help, because everybody didn't get all that they needed to recover.

Smith: What's the hang-up with the MDA [Mississippi Development Authority] grant program that makes an area like this so slow getting its spigot turned on?

Stallworth: It's the government. OK, government plans for two things—they don't plan very well, and they've got a knee-jerk reaction to everything. After some of the things that FEMA went through about trying to get emergency money out, there were some people who took advantage of that situation. Well, the government decided that

we aren't going to have that happen again, so all the, you know, where there may have been 5 percent, let's give them 10 percent of people that *might* 've taken advantage of the situation. "Well, the other 90 percent of you just have to wait and suffer because we need to figure out some way to deal with this 10 percent. Now, we may only be able to reduce that down to about 5 percent and cut it in half, but we need to deal with this 10 percent. So now the rest of y'all will have to sit there and wait." So they had to try to figure every way that they could make absolutely sure that whoever this money was supposed to get to, they may ultimately get to it. And it still didn't; the money came down as an insurance bailout program. I mean initially that's what the governor did in terms of how this program was first designed; people who *had* homeowner's insurance—and people say, "Why do you say that?" If you had homeowner's insurance and you didn't have—you were not in a flood zone.

Smith: Not in the flood zone.

Stallworth: Not in the flood zone, *then* you could qualify for a homeowner's grant. Well, what about those folks who didn't have any insurance? What about the poor people who didn't have any way of getting that? What about folks who were in the flood zone that may not have had flood insurance? What about all of these other folks that got left out? That wasn't why the program was developed; it was developed to stop the insurance companies from being sued because everybody, at this point, had been lied to by the insurance company. A perfect example: agent came into my office not more than thirty days before the storm, sat in there. I'm asking the question, "Am I covered?" You know, "My house is in good shape?" "Yeah, you got everything covered. We've got you covered every way but right." And we sat here for, I mean literally, two hours discussing the overpriced term life insurance policy that she was getting commission off of, that I wanted to cancel, and she was trying to persuade me to keep it. Instead of telling me that, you know—I'm asking about flood insurance, and, "You don't need it. You're pretty well covered. You've got everything else covered." I'm asking, and this is what I'm being told. Now, can you imagine my horror when I'm going back in, and I'm asking where my coverage is, and they tell me, "Well, you don't have flood insurance now." "You told me, 'Well, you know, we only cover this, and we can pay you the waterline rule. Anything above where the waterline came in your house, we'll pay you for; anything below, we won't.' I had five feet of water in my house, so you aren't paying me jack, and you're sitting here with this stupid look and doing this, and I'm really angry now because not only did you not get me flood insurance, you didn't discuss it with me. Because when I found out that flood insurance on my house was going to cost me two hundred and fifty dollars for a year, I'm paying you that much in these stupid life insurance policies that you're trying to get me to keep." I was *livid*, and to this day I am still livid. I hadn't canceled the policy because I knew if I cancelled I probably won't be able to get insurance anywhere else. But I was with this particular State Farm, and my agent; I am too through with them, you know. I didn't get anything. You're asking about this—my house got cleaned out as a result of this because after months of cleaning out everybody else's house, and my wife's sitting there watching me do all this, said, "You know, are we going to get to ours?" And I kept telling her, "We will. We will."

And then there's this group from Portland that came in, and just one day just asked us, "How's your house?" "It's still there. We'll get to it when we got some time because we were doing this for them; we'll get to it." And my brother, my brother, Tim, who happened to, as a kid always had to have a key to everything, had a key to my house. So he took them by there. And I came home, passed by, and I walked in, and I walked out, and just looked and got back in my truck and drove off. And people were trying to figure out why, and I said, "Now, because when I drove up, I saw my wife sitting on the corner of our porch, and I saw that look in her eyes of relief that something was finally being done to her house, and watching those folks do that, all I could do was walk in and want to cry, and I didn't want anybody to see me cry, and I got back in my truck, and I drove off, and I stopped further up the street, and I cried like a baby because I could deal with this, and I was so thankful that somebody had done something for my wife."

Smith: And you managed to get back into your own house, two-and-a-half years after the storm, or almost three years?

Stallworth: We got back in; and we got back in, again, because my wife after about a year and a half told me, "I just want to come home; I just need to go home."

Smith: You stayed with your mother for a year and a half?

Stallworth: I stayed with my mother for almost six months, and then we got a trailer. We didn't get a FEMA trailer; we got Mississippi Home Corp. David Stilling(?) at the City had told me he got a trailer from Mississippi Home Corp, and we couldn't, for some reason—we just maybe never stopped long enough—just couldn't get the FEMA trailer, or whatever, but called up Mississippi Home Corp. And Chuck Morris up there, who was the director, I talked to him, and I said, "Well, Chuck, David Stilling told me that y'all had trailers and that I could rent a trailer from y'all." He said, "Well, Councilman, I only got one left." I said, "Chuck, you *had* one left. How soon can you get it here?" Pulled that trailer down, and we went in that trailer, and we thought it was the finest thing since sliced bread. But after about nine months in there, she was just like—because it was parked right next to the house, and she just looked at the house, and there was nothing really being really *done* there. And every now and then DFS(?) would have a group that would come down, and they would just go and do something. When she said she just needed to go home at (train whistle) and try to do something with my house, and these nice people—met one of the finest guys I ever knew. I call him my brother to this day. A guy by the name of Bill Puckett. Bill came, and he was, he came down from Portland, and he was here for about a month, and Bill started working in that house. And I remember we came home, ready to get started on it, and it was like ten, eleven o'clock at night when we left the office, and we pulled up, and there was this light on in the house. And we walked in, (crying) and there was Bill up on a ladder, working just diligently. I saw my wife just break down and start crying, and I couldn't do anything but be so thankful that he stayed on there; he just stayed there working. And he got to the point that the house was enough that we could move in, so.

Smith: You made it clear that you sort of put yourself to the bottom of the list, when your volunteers were around; many months getting to your own place. How did your group establish priorities for where help was sent? Did you have a process there?

Stallworth: Yeah, I set up a process, was we got them in, we tried to get to, I call, the neediest ones. And we knew families had medical emergencies or elderly, or you know, kids were involved, and that was critical. I tried to, with the resources that we had, we tried to direct to them quicker. A lot of it had to do with the grids. As we cleaned out the grids and we got them ready, then I put a group into the grid, and we'd take the homes in there, and using that priority trying to get—

Smith: Sort of section-by-section.

Stallworth: Section- by-section. You know, I remember something my grandmother said that helped me through this entire storm, says, “Life is hard, yard by yard, but inch by inch, it’s a cinch.” You know, when people are trying to figure out what they need to do in a disaster, one of the things I tell them, “If you look at the disaster area as an area, you won’t do very much of anything, but if you can break it down into small pieces, then you can get your arms around it and figure out what needs to be done. Do that one little area, and then move to the next one, and then to the next, and then to the next one, and replicate it, and then you’ll be out very quickly.” I told you I had a janitorial service, and I got involved in it because I used to try to clean my home, and it would take me forever. I mean like I would be working on it for four days, and just at the end of the time I still hadn’t really made it. I picked up this little book, and it talked about cleaning. And this is how you do it; start in one corner of the room, and you start working from there. You do everything, clean it, polish it, while you walk around the room, all work your way around that room to the door and out. And I started following that, and it was amazing to me that I got down to, I cleaned that house in two hours, and it would be spotless and polished, and it just, it taught me a lot about form. And I started realizing that all my life I had been sitting there with other folks, always that guy who would sit down and say, “You know, there’s got to be a better way to do this,” and just sit back and then figure out that way. Well, part of what we’ve been able to do with the storm is just figure out better ways of doing it, providing the service orderly and systematically so that we could move quickly and get things done. In this community, as I say, it was the hardest hit. We got the storm, and New Orleans got the water. But we got the storm; we got the devastation; we got the trees, the winds, and uprooted houses, the houses that were totally decimated. But by far we’re the area that’s recovered the quickest, and it’s largely because of what happened here.

Smith: You’ve expressed frustration with the grant program. I’ve heard other people express different frustrations with the amount of the grants. Some people got grants, and then they would be insufficient to rebuild. Have you had problems like that?

Stallworth: Always. The first round of the grant was based on the insurance coverage. Remember, I told you there was an insurance bailout. Well, the formula for that was that whatever your house was insured for, they upped it by 35 percent, and then gave you the difference between what FEMA may have already provided you, in terms of monies, in terms of their federal assistance, and anything that you may have gotten for insurance, and they made the assessments. But let's just say, particularly in our area where some of the homes are older, and say a lady and her husband bought a house fifteen, twenty years ago; they may have gotten that house for like ten or fifteen thousand dollars. They got the insurance proceeds. The value replacement cost of the house went up. Agents don't come and tell you, "You need to get a replacement policy." They say, "I'm going to give you a policy for twenty thousand dollars. And, by the way, keep paying the premium on this twenty thousand dollars because I'm going to make a lot more commission, and you still got the insurance company coverage." So people don't understand the value of real estate. So they may think, "Well, I may need to up that a little bit. Well, can I get a thirty thousand dollar policy?" "Well, sure." But the insurance company fully knows that that house is probably valued at eighty-five. Well, the replacement cost is going to be a hundred thousand dollars. They don't want to deal with that because if they have a loss, they may have to replace that. It's better that they have this thirty thousand dollars, so if they had a loss, that's all they're going to get. Well, when the governor's program started basing it on the insurances, then those smaller areas really suffered the most. If you had a two hundred thousand dollar house, and you were in that same situation, then you came out pretty well, but still not enough to rebuild that two hundred thousand dollar house because the cap was a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. But even on the smaller houses you probably got a third, by the time they got through, a half of what you really need to do anything with. And by the time you got it, if you hadn't gotten recovered, I mean you are seriously out of luck. The ones that we were able to get done, we got done with volunteers, so that brought down the cost a lot, but.

Smith: So people have used the grants to buy materials, and you supplied labor?

Stallworth: We just started getting into that. Some people come in who have monies for materials now; we case manage them. And yes, we will work with the volunteer groups who are still here and try to do labor. Try to help them get there. We assess it and have them put monies back into it. The rest of them have been grants that we got, some from Red Cross who utilized some of that hundred million dollars that they had left to set up some programs that provided that. After we had a long talk, I was surprised that people actually listened. I told one of the guys, I said, "You know, I'll give it to y'all. Y'all really did listen to me, didn't you?" Because they came up with this grant program for materials, and they came up with different versions of how to provide mental health coverages, so all of that worked out pretty well.

Smith: I talked to General Griffith about the Renewing the Renaissance report, and in my talk with him, he believes that Biloxi was doing better with affordable housing than probably just about any other community in Harrison County. He was sort of

optimistic about the recovery of the peninsula in affordable housing. How do you see that?

Stallworth: Well, I think part of his optimism, again, comes back from things that have happened here. People are getting back into their homes. They're getting back into that. The affordable housing initiatives, the Biloxi Housing Authority along with our agency, and others are trying to solve the problems, and there's a really kind of organized, concentrated effort to do that. We're short on money, but the will and the determination is there, and we're producing housing every day. If you walk out of here, you'll see another house going up across the street; that's another one of ours. You go around, you see these new little homes; they're a lot of ours. Habitat's [Habitat for Humanity] coming back in and starting to now focus in on trying to get some homes established here as well as others. So his prognosis for the peninsula is probably pretty true, in terms of affordable housing. The governor's workforce-initiative housing, which is another term for affordable housing, but it's "workforce" because people don't like the term "affordable," we're *giving* something away, but we'll make it workforce housing. But workforce, again, has to be affordable for those workers who are making—and what people don't understand is when we talk about affordable housing, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about working-class people and getting them into a home that they can afford. Rents went up twice as much after the storm. People can't afford to do it. They're struggling, paying over 50, 60 percent of their income into housing. They can't, they're just simply not able to maintain that. So we've got to get that problem solved. Now, on the flip side of that is that I think it'll happen for another reason, is because the industries who are dependent on those workers are also pushing it. The casinos, who are heavily dependent, are saying, "Well, you know, we don't really have places to put people. We can't attract people because they don't have any housing, and y'all need to build some housing." Well, that makes it a priority for the governor and some of the State agencies. So yes, I think it would be a fair assumption to say that this area probably has a really good chance of making some housing affordable, but you know, not necessarily for the reasons that most people think.

Smith: How long do you think it's going to be before the housing stock in this area of Biloxi, affordable housing, is back to where it was before the storm?

Stallworth: Probably five years.

Smith: Five years?

Stallworth: I would say five years it'll probably be where it was, like in terms of the quantity of units. Quality of units, it's going to be a whole lot better. But the quantity will probably take about five years to get it up and going. And, again, that's directly related on how fast stuff can happen. The area as a whole could have more affordable housing units, but we have this NIMBY thing going on. NIMBY—Not In My Back Yard. Everybody's real supportive of the callout for affordable housing as long as it's not built anywhere close to "me." Well, you know, if everybody has that, then where

in the heck are we going to build it? And all of it can't come into the poorest area because that's just, I call it stockpiling. We need to get some houses here with better incomes so that a lot of those services that are needed in the community can be sustained. But what people don't understand is that—because I tell them, when we talk about tax credit properties, these are the same identical units that are out there being built market rate, except that through a quirk in the tax law people are able to get monies from corporations and buy down the costs for that unit. The corporation gets a tax break; it's still a thirty million dollar complex. The difference is the owners only had to really come up with ten million of that thirty million, and the law says that's what you have to base your rents on; not the thirty million, on the ten. So instead of having to pay twelve hundred dollars for an apartment, now it can be rented out for six hundred. Well, what's the difference except how much somebody's going to pay? And the people are afraid; they got this picture of public housing. They don't want to have a bunch of poor people living next door to them and for various reasons: they're going to bring down property values, going to do—you know you get the whole host of stuff. But you know, people have got to have a place to live. And it's interesting to me to watch, that I'd watched during the storm, when the powers-to-be homes were destroyed, “Oh, this is a major crisis. We got to get something going. We got to make this happen. We got to get these homes set back up.” But as soon as their homes get built, “Oh, well, then that's—why we got to deal with this?” People are strange.

Smith: Let me ask you about race relations. I did a long interview with Dr. Gilbert Mason several years ago, and he talked quite a bit about the difficulties post-Katrina in this area of Biloxi where he practiced medicine. What's your observation? Have you seen anything that confirms or challenges the stereotype of Mississippi in race relations?

Stallworth: Well, race relationships—

Smith: Coming out of Katrina.

Stallworth: Coming out of Katrina, I think race relationships have improved, to some degree. I think that we still have to realize that there are these, still, inherent problems of people when there are not enough resources, people are often divided among any way they can, and that's racial, but a lot of it is just socioeconomic conditions. Poverty is a big problem here. When people are poor, then it's easy to pit people against people, or it's easy, because they are less in power, to blame the ills of society on a particular group of people. But I think because of all the volunteers that have come down through here, and I think because of the upheaval in the community, what I'm seeing is that it's becoming truly integrated; you know, neighborhoods are truly becoming integrated: Hispanics, Vietnamese, African-Americans, and whites, poor whites, sort of living side-by-side, and it's a whole new opportunity. Now, it's going to be interesting how it all plays out. What we're hoping that we'll be able to do is to do a whole series of sort of getting to know your neighbor. Neighborhood block captain, we're taking the same concepts trying to develop neighborhood block

captains because we want them to really get to know each other, break down some of those stereotypical walls and try to understand your culture, my culture, and everybody else. A lot of it comes about with fears. You don't know that much about the black community. We know more about the white community than the white community knows about the black community, or the white community knows about the Vietnamese community, or the black community knows about the Vietnamese community because blacks know very little about Vietnamese or Hispanics, and Hispanics know very little about blacks or Vietnamese, or you know, typically the white community is the majority community, so you basically have to learn pretty much kind of how that operates, but you really don't *fully* understand how it operates because you're on the outside looking in, versus being a part *of*. So you know, it's kind of like looking in a room, and you see something going on, but you don't get the sound, you don't get all of the additional information to understand truly what, so you make these assumptions that may be very incorrect. So we assume things about the white community; the white community assumes things about the black community, and we assume things about the Vietnamese community and the Hispanic community, and everybody just needs to have an opportunity to get to know each other because what I've found, because I've had to deal with all of the communities and been blessed enough to be on the decision-making side of much of this, to be actively involved, but what it all comes down to is that, without exception, there are good and bad in any group. But for the most part, there's a whole lot of good, and for the most part, everybody wants the same thing. I want a really good quality of life for my children. I want my grandchildren to be able to grow up in a safe environment. I want to have a good standard of living. I want to have the things that you want to have. I have the same ethics and morals, you know. I may dress a little different, but that's part of the culture, you know, coming from Africa, and I love bright colors, you know. Certain garbs are part of the heritage. Just as the Irish, you know, wearing something different; kilts, you know, or a man walking around in a skirt—what's up with that? Well, but it's part of the heritage. It is a regal attire. But from the outside, you're looking in like, "This is real strange." Well, when you look at some of the things we look at, we feel the same way. Inside of these communities, some of the things you're looking at, the community's looking at, too. You see a young man walking around with pants hanging all down to his, you know, half way off their thighs. Most of the people in the community who are older are looking at them and say, "Boys, why don't y'all pull your pants up? That looks horrible." And then you see little, white kids walking around with their pants all in the side. And it's like—it's just, we're people. You know, *Time* magazine came up with something a while back, and it said—I thought it was great, full article. On the cover of *Time* they had these two black people who said, "Adam and Eve were black." And I thought—my mouth dropped open. I thought that was, you know, "Oh man, are we going to get it now." But, and you look at the civilization, the roots of civilization is, I mean there are virtually no taking—my grandmama used to say, "You peel off that outer layer, it's going to be real hard to determine who's who and what's what." We've been shaped because of the areas that we lived in. The migration, now the scientists have determined, "Well, the migration, oh, heck, everybody did come from here." We just changed because of climates, but now we find this as a reason to segregate ourselves, and that's part of

human nature. Even in homogeneous societies, we'll find a whole new, "Oh, you're Protestant; I'm Catholic. Let's go kill each other." Why? We're brothers; we're sisters. Why can't we find what we have in common and determine that that's more important than what we have as opposites?

Smith: Do you think the storm experiences made more of that—

Stallworth: The storm experiences could—

Smith: —commonality?

Stallworth: The storm experience, and in particular in this community, has made more. I can't speak to the larger communities because if you were not necessarily affected, you still operate in that bubble. But there's no question in this community and other communities like it up and down the Coast, that there has been this breaking down of some barriers. There has been a little bit more information passed on.

Smith: I talked to a lady who had had substantial help from a religious group in rebuilding her home, and she said, "What bothers me is I don't know in my community if we would do the same thing." Do you see any evidence that our volunteerism, our willingness to help other people has increased after the storm, or do you think people are just too busy and still overwhelmed to see what the impact of others from the outside helping has been?

Stallworth: I think that, and now I understand that maybe there have been some seeds planted, but truly I think that they are right, that in our community I've seen a stronger sense of volunteerism—I mean when I say "our community," the whole Gulf Coast—I've seen a stronger sense of maybe we need to be a little bit more aware. But I don't see that we would be packing up full-scale to go and help others. I see that we are doing more of it than we would've done pre-Katrina, but I still don't see that real serious change that I would've expected to see where people can appreciate that the impact of what volunteerism can do and inside of themselves feel the need to give back. Consequently, what I'm seeing now is—not all over the place—is as I told you, we went from a period of need to a period back to greed. People are back into their worlds starting to think instead of—I told somebody, "It sounds strange, but in a way I miss those early days of the storm. Through all that pain, through everything else, there was a sense of community where everybody helped everybody, where people were truly trying to help each other." And what I see now is we're getting back to that, "Well, I got mine; you get yours." That's not a good place to be.

Smith: Maybe we could close out by—can you estimate the percentage of effort that's going into different types of assistance programs through this Hope Center. What percentage of effort is going into housing versus other kinds of assistance?

Stallworth: Right now through the Hope Center, 75 percent of our efforts are still into housing because there is still such a critical need for housing. The other 25

percent is looking at community redevelopment, and that's being involved with that concept of trying to build people. We started working on some economic development activities, some real estate development, some social development kinds of things that ultimately we would hope to migrate, that the balance is reversed. That 75 percent of our effort is going into people-building capacity or community-development capacities, and smaller and smaller percentages actually are being dealt with housing.

Smith: What would be an example of community development?

Stallworth: Community development deals with building and empowerment of people; teaching people how to advocate for themselves, teaching people how to develop inside of themselves the ability to fend for themselves. I use something as simple as, in our community, and most communities now, people will sit back and they got a weeded lot that's in the neighborhood. Well, we've got to call the city councilman, we've got to call the mayor, and we've got to get that lot cleaned up. And I'm sitting there thinking, "Yeah, you can do that, and that's going to probably take about six to eight weeks to three, you know, ninety days or so. Or why don't a couple of the neighbors just simply go out there, that street get together, a few folks on the street, and just say, 'OK, John, you bring your lawnmower. I've got my Weed Eater, and kids you get out there, and we're going to knock this down. And if you pick up any other little balls and stuff, and then we're going to cut it. Oh, by the way, since it's been sitting vacant here, why don't we just pull together, and all of us chip in a little money, and we'll put up a little basketball goal out there, and then the kids can have a place to play off of the street?'" It's coming back and rebuilding what we've lost. What we've lost is a sense of community. I mean a true sense of community. See, we all can recall—you're in that same age bracket as I am and older, that we recall a time that neighbors helped neighbors; people worked together because there wasn't the government, there wasn't this sense that somebody's going to come do it for us. You had to fend for yourself. Part of our effort in terms of community development is restoring that to the community, teaching people how, and empowering them how to talk to their neighbors, get to know their neighbors, how to take charge of their life, how to determine what you want to have in your community and *then* how to implement and make it happen. Restoring the economic development, small business development, you know. In the last eight years, this whole country has been singularly focused on, in terms of the federal government, large businesses, big business, everything big business. This country got to be great because of small businesses, Mom-and-Pop operations; that's what makes this country strong. That's what made it so, you know, dynamic. What we did over the last, not only the last eight, but the last sixteen years virtually have just been able—it started with [President Ronald] Reagan, moved on, and [President Bill] Clinton didn't really—he started doing some, but he didn't do enough to bring back that small, entrepreneurship spirit. That's why this country's lagging behind in education. That's why this country's lagging behind in jobs, opportunity. That's why we're losing our quality and standard of living because we don't invest in what we need to; we aren't producing anything. Remember a while back, Ronald Reagan came up with what I

thought, and I was young and called it, I thought it had to be—this didn't make any sense to me then, and still doesn't make any sense to me now. Two theories: we're going to become a service economy, and we're going to provide by the trickle-down effect. OK, I'm sorry. I'm going to give money in the hand of the wealthiest, and it's supposed to trickle down to the poorest? It ain't doing it now. Why would I think that if I gave them any more, this is going to happen? Is there a potential tipping point somewhere? No. In terms of this other notion, service economy, I'm with the—well, critics say, “Well, Pat, I'm going to sell you a hamburger, and tomorrow you can sell me a hamburger. How about that?” Well, “Who's making the darn hamburger?” “Well, that's coming out of China.” (laughter) You know. Those are the people that got it; that's why our trade deficit with China is so huge. We've exported all our jobs over there, and everything we're importing here. You can't find—looking at this little thing, this jawbone, it's made in Taiwan and Korea, and your microphone, this particular brand, is probably somewhere in that same—

Smith: It's made in the USA.

Stallworth: Made in the USA.

Smith: Yes, sir.

Stallworth: Well, that's one of the few things. What's that say? I guarantee you it's not the USA. (laughter)

Smith: The machine itself, made in Japan.

Stallworth: See? You know, and when you start looking at all of these little products, you know, it's just amazing; staples, everything, made in China, made in Mexico, made in—nothing's made in this country anymore. We've got to get back to producing. So part of our effort is also stimulating that small business development, and all of that goes to make a community stronger. If somebody asked me what do I want to have this community be like in the next five years, my answer to that is, “A place that you would *love* to live in.” Not that the people here would love to live in, but that *you* would love to live in and anybody else who walked in and said, “Man, I *like* this place.” That's what I want to have.

Smith: Fifty years from now, what will somebody want to know that you know that we haven't talked about?

Stallworth: Fifty years from now is, why Biloxi may not get where it is. Or, whatever happened to the potential? Fifty years from now all this will be an afterthought in everybody's mind, and it'll be something that they read about in the history books. But I think what I really want people to know is that this was a golden opportunity in time where people came together, worked together to overcome. And the thing I really would hope is that we take advantage of that and make it into an effort that won't just die off, but start a movement that takes hold in the country where

we get back to being neighbors, where we get back to being friends, and when we start looking at what we want, not for ourselves, but for our children. If you really think about it—and Pat, we’re in that age group, and just before us. We lost it. Our parents didn’t think about themselves; their whole existence was trying to be built on, “How can I provide a better life for my children?” Our generation got into the me/my, “I need my MEMA; I need my 60K job, I need my, my, my, my, my, my, my,” and we stopped worrying about anything but us. We’ve got to get back to the point where we start worrying about our children because when we start thinking about our children, we start thinking about their future; when you start thinking about their future, we start thinking about the planet. We start thinking about all these more important things than ourselves because at the end of the day, you can’t take it with you. And, truly, one of the things I tell people is another older song that we knew about in our church, and it went like, “If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can help them with a word or a song, then my living would not have been in vain.” I think fifty years from now I just want people to think and come to a realization that life is really important and that doing something for somebody else is what it’s all about because at that point, that’s when your life is truly not in vain. I just—I’ve done a lot, and I think for my epitaph, that would be, I think, the thing that I would want to have on my epitaph. When I was young, I thought I would be a millionaire. And I made millions. I’m not a millionaire, but I’ve made millions. But I’m kind of like Solomon at this point. After all the money, all the power, all the glory, said all of it was for naught, except for the love of my God. And that’s where I am. I want my life to have meant something. I won’t have a lot to leave my children, but I want them to know their father tried, and that’s the thing I want, my folks left with me. My father and mother, they didn’t graduate high school, but in all their children, they were instilled with this whole notion of service. And I want that for my children, that they be of service. That’s what I want people to know. This area, we all have the same problems, developmental problems that any other portion of the community could have. There’s a great lesson to be learned from this laboratory, because you got big business pushing against poor people, all over a piece of land. We got hit by one of the biggest storms that was ever recorded in the history of mankind; happened right here. Total devastation of housing and most of the infrastructure, and today, at this point, we’ve been trying to make a life and make this place better than it was before. Fifty years from now, I want people to maybe learn some of those lessons about how to help build community, how to restore order, and how to empower people because at the end of the day we don’t have enough money. We don’t have to throw out all the problems that we face. At the end of the day, we don’t have enough time to do it all by ourselves, but at the end of the day if we work together, life can be really great.

Smith: Very good. Anything else you need to add?

Stallworth: No, that’s about all I got.

Smith: OK.

Stallworth: I’ve cried enough; I’ve worried enough, and I’m tired.

Smith: Thank you.

(end of interview)