Biography

Born on July 3, 1947, Mrs. Aimee Gautier-Dugger is a descendant of one of the founders of the City of Gautier. She studied art, earning a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute in painting, drawing, and printmaking, and continuing on to earn a master’s degree in art. In 1969, she spent a year in Europe, and then studied painting in Mexico. She is married to David Dugger, a pediatrician practicing in Gautier; they have three children, Marie Aimee, the late John David Gautier, and Patrick Dorian Gautier.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

AIMEE GAUTIER-DUGGER

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Aimee Gautier-Dugger and is taking place on February 21, 2007. The interviewers are Kelsey Lange and Olivia Ronkainen.

Lange: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project done in conjunction with the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with Aimee Gautier-Dugger and is taking place on February 21, 2007, at 1:45 p.m. in Pascagoula, Mississippi, at St. John’s Episcopal Church. The interviewers are Kelsey Lange and Olivia Ronkainen. First I’d like to thank you, Aimee Gautier-Dugger, for taking time to talk with us today, and I’d like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you, for the record, could you please state your name?

Gautier-Dugger: My whole name is Marie Aimee Gautier-Dugger.

Lange: And for the record, in case all the labels are lost or damaged, how do you spell your name?


Ronkainen: OK, so when were you born?

Gautier-Dugger: I was born on July 3, 1947, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Lange: OK, and for the record, what was your father’s name?

Gautier-Dugger: Hermes Quinn Gautier.

Ronkainen: And your mother’s maiden name?

Gautier-Dugger: My mother’s name was Marie Aimee Warren.

Lange: OK and where did you grow up?
**Gautier-Dugger:** I grew up in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and I went to high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, and so I guess you could say I grew up with one foot in New Orleans and one foot in Pascagoula.

**Ronkainen:** And how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

**Gautier-Dugger:** Well, I have lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast *most* of my life, but there was an adult period where I was in New Orleans with my husband. Then we moved to Dallas, Texas, for a short, brief—thank you—while, and I was all over the world studying art for about ten years, you know, when I was in college and after college, and art history. So we all come back. We have cement feet here.

**Lange:** So how many generations in your family have lived on the Gulf Coast?

**Gautier-Dugger:** Six or seven, maybe eight. I can tell you how many. It’s five to me from Fernando Gautier, but that’s my father’s family. And his father was the first from the Gautiers to arrive here from Leone; he came after the Reign of Terror, and his name was August Gautier. And August’s second son, Fernando, founded a sawmill in Gautier and did not actually get the sawmill up and going till right after the Civil War about 1865. But my mother’s family has been here since—on her father’s side—since the Pilgrims, and also one of my mother’s ancestors was one of the first governors of Virginia. His last name was Page, and that’s my mother’s father’s side. They’re very English, the Warrens. And then her mother’s side, Marie Aimee Mallory, her mother was a Marie Aimee Chastant(?), and her mother was Marie Aimee Fuselier(?), married to her first cousin, Jean-Marie Chastant. And their grandfather was Agreco(?) Fuselier, and on back, the first relative that came from France was Gabrielle Contrelle(?), and he was the first commandant at the fort; it’s called Atakapa(?), but it was in Natchitoches, Louisiana. And I guess he was, I think he was the first. So my mother’s family has been here a lot longer than my father’s family. My father’s mother’s family was from Ireland and came over before the Civil War, or about that time, to Mississippi. So we’re Heinz 57s, just like everybody else. And Fernando Gautier’s wife Theresa Fayard(?), descended from the Graveline(?) Family who came with d’Iberville, who was the brother of Bienville, and they founded the Gulf Coast. And they were from Canada, and they sailed for the king of France. And Graveline was not allowed to marry his first wife; she was a common-law wife because she was Native American, Cherokee. And so we have Native American in us, too.

**Ronkainen:** OK. So do you want to describe a little bit about your attachment to the region, to this region? Like, what does it mean to you? Big question.

**Gautier-Dugger:** I think I just did, but anyway (laughter) you know, when you’re growing up you just want to get away. (laughter) You know, it’s not that I don’t appreciate where I grew up and what I grew up in because it was the best, most beautiful, most natural place in the whole world. And I was the oldest daughter of
nine children, so it was wonderful when I was invited to go live in New Orleans and
go to high school over there because you know the oldest daughter takes a lot of
responsibility. I had one older brother; six boys, three girls. So it really wasn’t until I
was a full adult, writing my master’s thesis on a Gulf Coast artist, Walter Inglis
Anderson, who was from Ocean Springs, and we now have a museum in his honor in
Ocean Springs, and hopefully you will be able to see this. I’m sure that when you do a
little research, you’ll find that he’s like the primo visual artist. We have a potter that’s
very famous, too, his brother, Peter, and George Ohr. All three of them are very, very
Gulf Coast artists, very well known. So when I did my paper, it was probably the first
academic paper ever written on Walter Anderson, and it was published at LSU,
Louisiana State University, in about 1973 or ’74, somewhere in there. And while
doing the research and getting extremely close to the Anderson family, especially
becoming best friends with Walter Anderson’s wife, Sissy, and reading the names of
the flora and fauna under the many things that he illustrated here on the mainland and
out at Horn Island, which is an island, a barrier reef island ten miles south of us, I just
woke up to the exquisite beauty of the Gulf Coast. You know, I learned to really look
at pine bark and appreciate pine trees, which most people like to cut down, you know,
because they fall on your house in a hurricane. And I’d always been interested in art.
I had two aunts that were visual artists. My mother’s sister was trained in
Fontainebleau(?), and she was a classical portrait artist. My father’s only brother, Jean
Gautier’s wife, was a painter and taught art and taught me in school and at summer
camps and stuff. So it was my Aunt Mallory Page Warren-Hull(?), Dr. Edgar Hull’s
wife, who decided that I was, out of all the little Gautier kids, probably the one that
was most like herself, and so she took me under her wing. And by age seven, I wrote
in my baby book, “When I grow up, I want to get married and be an artist.” I didn’t
know how to spell then, either. But there’s just this dichotomy; you can’t be a really
great artist and be married. I just thought I’d throw that out there. One’s got to give
for the other, you know, and so I am a married artist and an art historian. And I, as I
said, became very aware of every blade of grass through Walter Anderson and through
Sissy’s eyes, not that I hadn’t been brought up that way by my own family. My
mother was very involved with opera and beautiful music, and it was played above our
heads, in our cradles, and on the record players. And everybody in the family had a
real love of art and music and culture. And everybody on both sides of the family was
educated, and the women, too; had a lot of teachers in the family. And so it was
always a given that you got educated; you got your college education. And rather than
be a visual artist, I became an art educator, and my main claim to fame at age sixty, I
can tell you because I have had a lot of talents and wonderful things given to me by
God, but my best talent is teaching classical academic figure drawing. And I got my
degrees all over the place, but the Kansas City Art Institute was where I got my BFA
and—

Lange: What’s a BFA?

Gautier-Dugger: Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting, drawing, and printmaking. I
have accomplished a lot with art education. And my paintings and drawings, people
think that they’re just great, but I’m not that knocked out by them. You know, there
are better. I’ve set standards that are far too high, but I do think I’m the best classical academic drawing teacher on this part of the Gulf Coast anyway. I’m at least the best—I’m probably the best and well trained. I should be the best teacher, anyway. And that’s what I was doing up until the hurricane in the little red barn on my great-grandfather’s property that we purchased when we came back from Dallas, Texas, in 1991. And I had turned this little building into my art school. And I had had an art school when we lived in Ocean Springs; so I just brought the name with me. Do you know anything about Ocean Springs?

Lange: No.

Gautier-Dugger: It was built over some natural springs, hot springs. I don’t think they bubble up any more because the water table has dropped so low. But my first school, art school, was in Ocean Springs right over the spring. It was a gazebo that the City had built, and someone had purchased and brought over to their property at King William’s Cellar, and so it became called—it became known as the Indian Springs School of the Fine Arts because it was right there over the springs. It might not be an acceptable name today, but we still call it Indian Springs. OK? And so my school in Gautier was called the Indian Springs School of the Arts because a young lady joined me and was teaching voice there, as well.

Ronkainen: How far away is Gautier from the Coast?

Gautier-Dugger: Well, it is the Coast.

Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: OK. It took me five minutes to get here. I went straight from my house, which is one block south of 90, Highway 90, and came straight here driving seventy-five miles an hour, probably, and came straight one block south again here to St. John’s Church. So it’s not very far, three miles across that causeway. And the river that my house is on is called the Singing River, and it’s a tributary of the Pascagoula River, which is on this side. So we have always called our home Westside, and even the whole area, which became known as Gautier, was called Westside by the locals because this was both Pascagoula and Scranton; there were two areas of town. And my mother’s family had a summer home that was built in 1845, or thereabouts, on the beach here in Pascagoula. The south part of town was Pascagoula, and it had everything in it from the plantations all the way back to the (inaudible) trails and the fusiliers and anything, every matchbook. I’m telling you everything, everything they could get here that they were able to bring when they had to sell their plantation. And their last plantation that they owned was called—it’s now called—it’s owned by the Rugon(?) Family, but its name is Austerlitz(?) and it’s in Voss(?) River, which is New Roads, Louisiana. And we have a lot—we had a lot of things, the paintings, the portraits, many, many things from there, but a lot of the crystal and china was destroyed when the people loading the, I guess it was a steamer for them to move—just threw the barrels down into the hole and crushed everything. So they
came here and settled after owning thousands of acres of sugar cane and had a grand life, and were thought by each other to be, you know, the height of aristocracy, and they were. [They] thought in French, spoke in French, and made a life here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and apparently did well, did OK. My great-grandmother would still wear her hoop skirts in the summertime because it was cooler. (laughter) You know? It just lifts the dress out, and you just kind of drop up and down, and it makes like a little fan, you know? (laughter) But my grandmother’s mother died young, in childbirth; so my grandmother, Marie Aimee, the something or other, the fourth or (laughter) whatever, third, she was raised along with her sister, Louise, by their grandparents here in Pascagoula. And so when my mother and my Aunt Mallory Page and her two brothers came along, they were raised in the mind-set of the grandparents. So believe me, my mother had a lot of waking up to do in the 1950s when she ended up with nine children, you know, in this modern age because she was really a protected little china doll; she really was, and precious, beautiful, just exquisite looks and exquisite manners, and that’s what they were all about was manners. (laughter) And I don’t know if there’s anybody snobbier than the New Orleans Creoles. And Creoles, you know, mean people born in this country from another land; it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re black, white, Spanish or French, but you can be Creole and a mixture of all those bloods. And so the white French Creoles pretty much controlled the French Quarter and all that area along Esplanade, and that whole mindset came with them over here. And everything from Pascagoula to—well, you know, the whole Gulf Coast, all the way from St. Augustine, Florida, to the Texas border, Natchitoches, the fort I was telling you about, the most western outpost of the Louisiana Purchase was French. So you’re sitting in an area that just when I was growing up—and I’m sixty—there were still people speaking French, and most everybody was still Catholic. In the last, since the age of, since the Second World War, everybody’s moved here from other parts of the state, mainly because of the shipyard here, and so now it’s a great mixture, but mostly, I would say, a great deal first Baptist, Baptist and Protestant religions. So a great deal has changed in my own lifetime as far as the culture goes, you know, but we’re still French. We’re still Catholic, and I wouldn’t say we’re as aristocratic. I wouldn’t even go so far as to say that I’m a lady. I do know people who are ladies, (laughter) but they’re not my age. I don’t even think of myself as grown up, but I’m halfway grown up, probably, you know. (laughter) But I’m answering a lot of the questions out of order.

Ronkainen: That’s OK.

Lange: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: OK? Because I read your questions.

Lange: That’s OK.

Gautier-Dugger: But the hurricane’s impact on me personally, because I know you don’t have three hours, OK, meant that I, as a person, no longer had an art studio, no longer had a life, cannot teach art, and must do for other people, especially my
husband’s pediatric business, which was flooded. So in reference to your questions, I
was not dislocated by my home being destroyed and by moving out of town. I am a
dislocated artist and teacher and person and adult female. We did not leave town for
the hurricane. We had the safest spot in Jackson County, and our house is still there to
prove it, and we have reasons for that, for our staying and for the reasons that the
house is still safe.

Ronkainen: Do you want to just describe your neighborhood before—

Gautier-Dugger: Um-hm.

Ronkainen: —the hurricane?

Gautier-Dugger: Sure will. It’s not really a neighborhood. OK?

Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: Let me—I’ll describe it.

Ronkainen: Sure. Just before you lead into it.

Gautier-Dugger: All right. I want to tell you that when we bought the house from
my Aunt Josie, Josephine Gautier, she was in her nineties, like ninety-two, ninety-
three. Well, she was born in 1899, and we bought the house in 1991 from her. She
was almost in a state of, you know, just one foot in heaven and the other foot on earth
just lying there, but whenever we would come in to visit her at my cousin’s, she would
become very animated and want to talk. Otherwise she almost never talked. But
when she found that I was going to buy the house and family was going to be in it, it
was almost as if she could just say, “Whew! All right, now I can leave.” And she did.
We bought the house, actually, you know, did the paperwork in November, and she
died on my husband’s birthday; we buried her on my husband’s birthday, December
26, just a few, just a month, six weeks, but she was so excited to find out that we
weren’t really going to change anything, and I even got to tell her that when we took
the beaver board, which is made of bagasse, which is sugar cane fiber, that preceded
wall board, you know, made of gypsum, when we took that off the front hall walls,
there was her mother’s red-flocked wallpaper and the original border and all of it.
There it was just underneath, you know. And she was real excited about things like
that, you know. She had married but kept her maiden name. Now that’s pretty rare.
And she had reasons for divorcing her husband and keeping her name, but, so she had
to keep that house and all that property up as a single woman. And it’s a lot of
property and a lot of house. And so she stayed very good friends with my grandfather
Hermes Gautier who was a very famous person in his own right, and he helped her out
a lot, you know, to keep the house painted. But she did many things to make her
living, and I know that when she was growing up and first married, she was the best
markswoman in the state of Mississippi. And we have all of her one-hundred-shots-
in-a-row skeet shooting badges are there at the house, and she was very dynamic and a
lot of fun, real cute, real tiny, like her mother, and just a ball of fun, I think, very smart. After she got divorced in the late [19]40s, she needed to do some things to stay alive, and so she rented out little buildings on the property because all the outbuildings were there. And the Gautiers, you know, did not have slaves. They came to New Orleans; they came to Boston, then New Orleans, then the area on the Tchoutacabouffa River, which is north of Biloxi, and then to Gautier, which was named for them, at that time called Westside. And they brought their sawmill equipment with them, and what they did was establish a sawmill in Gautier on the river. And it was a perfect place because it was the opening of where the Singing River comes down and opens into the Bay. And Pascagoula always had the deep port, so you had your big ships, really, that worked out of Pascagoula, but you could float out the logs on flatboats, you know, from Gautier out to the big ships that would lay and wait south of Horn Island, and the islands, these huge ships from Norway, Finland, Sweden, England, and Italy, mostly, because during that time England burned down, and they had to rebuild it. And they rebuilt it with pine woods from Mississippi. And it was very sought-after because it was very tight-grained and very long-lasting, you know, and so the Scandinavians wanted it for the masts on their ships, and in order to get a tree that long and that big on a ship, they would just open up the bow of the ship, open up the boards, you know, the lap siding, open it out, stick the whole tree, you know, inside the ship that way and then board it back up. Kind of fascinating, huh? And these huge clippers would go back, you know, to Europe. Pascagoula became a real little port with lots of hotels and ship chandleries; those are the little companies that provide to the people on their ships their food and all their accoutrements that they need. So that’s what my mother’s grandfather did, and he came here and married Marie Aimee Chastant—no, her father’s name was Mallory, another Englishman. Marie Aimee Mallory was my grandmother. She was born in—now this is kind of hard for you guys to believe. OK? She was born in 1877. My grandmother was born in 1877. I was born in 1947. Even that sounds horrible, doesn’t it? Like another world? OK, but my grandmother did not live through the Civil War, but everybody she knew did. Her aunts, her grandparents, everybody that raised her, you know. And so that was pretty much an ethic here on the Gulf Coast when I was growing up, you know. We spoke about it as “The War,” or the ladies would talk about as “The War.” (pronounced wo-wuh). “The War (pronounced wo-wuh) to end all Wars (pronounced wo-wuhs) was not that war (pronounced wo-wuh). That was the Second World War (pronounced wo-wuh), but we’re talking about “The War” (pronounced wo-wuh), the War.” OK? Now, you know what they’re doing? They’re talking about the storm (pronounced sto-wum). They never say Katrina. They don’t say Hurricane Katrina. And they don’t say—they might say the hurricane, but they usually say, “The storm.” (pronounced sto-wum) And I’ll bet you in a hundred years, they’ll be saying the storm, and everybody will know exactly what they’re talking about. But Aunt Josie told us when we bought the house from her—that’s my father’s aunt—that “The water never got past the bottom step.” And we just thought, “Oh, that’s cool, you know, the water never got past—oh, that’s cool.” It wasn’t the water, ladies; it was the Gulf of Mexico at the bottom step. It was the ocean. The ocean with rollers, was at the bottom step. OK? It was big; it was big. It wasn’t just like water, and then it goes away; it was the ocean. And I didn’t ever get
that picture, you know, because a hundred years had passed since 1906 when she was a little girl, what? Seven years old, and she remembered that storm. And they didn’t know as far as ahead that we do that storms were coming. So that happened to be the storm that destroyed Galveston, Texas, 1906. There is no more Galveston. Galveston was bigger than New Orleans ever was. It’s where all the wealthy Texans and Southerners had their huge homes. It was a real port for Texas. And after 1906, it dried up. It never came back. Do you ever hear of Galveston? Have you ever heard of Galveston?

Lange: No.

Gautier-Dugger: But you’ve heard of New Orleans and Houston, right? Well, Houston took the place of Galveston, and Houston was as far upriver from Galveston as Baton Rouge is from New Orleans. And Baton Rouge is taking over all the economy of New Orleans, really. Everyone’s moved up to Baton Rouge. Maybe they’ll drive back and forth, but in my lifetime, New Orleans will never come back. And I am from New Orleans. New Orleans is me. I am New Orleans. And it’s a heartbreaker. It’s horrible. And it’s not just about the people in the Ninth Ward, OK? It’s everybody that’s affected there, all the way from somewhere in Texas to somewhere past Mobile. Do you know how far that is? Three hundred miles or more. And it happened one hundred years ago in Pascagoula, the little town you’re in right now. And by the way, you say it perfectly. It means bread eaters, Pascagoula, bread eaters; don’t ask me why. You’d think they eat fish or shrimp, but, no, that’s what it means, and they [the indigenous natives] were peaceful, according to what we hear. So the storm put Pascagoula underwater, just like it did this time, and everybody’s going “Oh, my goodness.” But they forget; a hundred years you forget. And maybe another time in the 1800s it went underwater; I think 1873 sticks in my mind, but I know that in the late 1700s, maybe not even the late 1700s, but in the 1700s, Pascagoula went so underwater that it was covered from the front beach, which is south of us right now, all the way past the Krebs Lake, which is the little lake that separates us from Moss Point. And that is when one of the first settlers Baron Von Krebs cut out; he left. (laughter) He got out of here, but his descendants stayed; the Krebs did. And the Krebs were married into the Gravelines and Simon De La Pointe was the gentleman that the Duchess de Charmont(?), who was given the land grant here by the king of France, she sent her relative, Simon De La Pointe, here to open her plantations up and get rich; wanted all that gold and all that stuff that was here. But along came Krebs; he moved into what was the last building on the site a hundred years after 1699, or thereabouts when De La Pointe was here, and set up a plantation and then left in a huge deluge. So at least every hundred years it’s been documented that this has happened. This is not anything new, and it’s not just because of the weather changing. The weather does change; you know what I mean? The greenhouse effect? I’m not saying that there is no greenhouse effect; I’m not saying that. I am saying that it happens, and it’s happened before, and it will happen again. And we are getting warmer, obviously, but this has also happened on the earth. We’re making it happen maybe faster and more violently. I mean the polar caps are melting,
and the Gulf of Mexico got so hot that summer before Hurricane Katrina that that is what spurned 50- to 100-foot tidal waves out in the Gulf.

Now my neighborhood, my great aunt had, like, four and a half acres left that she hadn’t given away or her former husband hadn’t sold without asking her. OK? That’s what used to happen to women. OK? And across the street we have one whole corner, De La Pointe, which used to be the first Highway 90, cut through one side of us. Graveline begins at the beginning of us, and nobody but an idiot would’ve built between our house and the Singing River because it gets—it goes all the way down to, like, nine feet above sea level, but that’s where the sawmills were, and it was destroyed in 1906, and they never rebuilt. It was, like, all the equipment was ruined, and my great-grandfather who was the superintendent for the sawmill, that’s why he built right across the street from it and up the hill. He retired at age forty-five; there wasn’t any wood left to cut. This Hurricane Katrina destroyed the woods all the way up past Jackson, all the way up into Columbus, all the way, all the way up Mississippi. Our woods, you know, our pines that people grow pines in Mississippi for paper, they were destroyed. They were just completely flattened. You just can’t even believe how far the destruction went with the trees. So since they didn’t like to cut anything but virgin pine (laughter), so that’s—I’m paying for those sins right now; I promise. I’m sure that’s why we’ve had such bad luck lately, for cutting down virgin pine. But supposedly they were as big as the Sequoia trees in California; they were huge. And we weren’t the only sawmill, you understand, but our family was the first to bring industry to Gautier. And then because they were there, the L and N, Louisville and Nashville Railroad, eventually bought the railroad that had been—that was trying to go from New Orleans to Mobile, and they couldn’t get through because they couldn’t put down pilings in the mud, in the marshes, because there was this little worm called the Torado worm, which would just bore right into those pilings and eat them up. So this nice, brilliant German decided that he would bring a creosote mill, and he set it up right next door to the sawmill, and bingo, you know, they had their pilings being cut right here at the sawmill and then the creosote mill next door that was infusing the creosote into the pilings, which prevented them from being eaten when they were put down in the water and the mud. And so in the early 1870s, late 1870s, the railroad was finally opened up between New Orleans and Mobile, which brought industry to the whole Gulf Coast. So that’s when we began as an industrial area, era; that was the beginning of this industrial era because early on, back when Krebs was over here in Pascagoula doing his thing, indigo and cotton and other things, the McRaes were in Gautier, Westside, on their huge plantation, planting indigo and cotton, and they were exporting tremendous amounts of cotton right out of Gautier. But it was written in the history that Charles Guyere(?) wrote, in French, which I had to study to do my paper on Walter Anderson, that d’Iberville’s search party was sent out from the ship, that was out by Horn Island or Petit Bois, either Petit Bois or Horn, Isle de Horn. See, it wasn’t a horn that you blow; it was a powder horn that was left on the island, and they called it, “You know, that island that I left my powder horn on.” OK. And then in front of Louisiana is Chandeleur, we almost lost. There’s almost no Chandeleur since Fredrick and Camille and Hugo, and da-da-da, and then Katrina just took them. There’s almost nothing left.
Ronkainen: In 1906 was Fredrick?

Gautier-Dugger: No, that was 1979.

Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: But I mean they—we’ve had some big ones, starting with the year I was born, the 1947 Hurricane. And they didn’t even give them names then, but it was called the 1947 Hurricane. And I don’t think they started naming them until the [19]50s. So people just call it the storm, the storm (pronounced sto-wum) of aught-six. (laughter) And here we are again, the storm of aught, what? Six again? Or five.

Ronkainen: Five.

Gautier-Dugger: You know? So my neighborhood had had time, a hundred years, to completely restore itself. The oaks were just enormous and spreading out and reaching back down to the ground. And in front of our house is the biggest magnolia tree, well, at least the biggest one in Gautier, or Gautier (pronounced go-te-yay). Don’t say Go-shay, though. OK? That’s what all those people over there say. They just think it sounds more French; so that’s why they do that. But the magnolia tree and several of our oaks in our yard were registered by Aunt Josie at a time when trees weren’t even being registered, and our house was dedicated and made a state landmark in 1979 by the State of Mississippi legislature because of how famous my Aunt Josie was, my grandfather, Hermes, the house, and all the Gautiers. And it was the house where they all—where some of the second generation grew up, but my grandfather, Hermes, who was married to Hattie Quinn from New Hebron, Mississippi; they restored the oldest family home that Fernando and Theresa had built and is the West-Indies-style home built on the highest bluff of the Singing River right next to Highway 90. When you drive from here to the Gulf Coast, you go down [Highway] 90; you would see it has a white fence and house, lots of land around it, eighteen acres around it. And they purchased it, brought it back into the family, because in 1906 everything was sold. They sold all the land where the sawmill was. They sold the house and all that property to the Dantzler Sawmill. And I think the Dantzlers were just trying to make sure that the Gautiers didn’t go back into business, really, because they never did anything with starting up another sawmill over there. Their sawmill was in Moss Point, and Moss Point being just north of Pascagoula. So for many years it stayed out of the family, our house still being lived in by Walter Gautier, the second son of Fernando and Theresa, the superintendent of the sawmill and his wife, Emilie Donavan(?). And her mother had been—she was related to Krebs, but also her great claim to fame was, she was a direct descendant of Frederick de Sanforal(?) who was the first schoolmaster, the first educated man here in Pascagoula. He laid out all the streets, he educated the children, he started a newspaper, I believe. Anyway, he could read and write. (laughter) And this is a sad story, but I have to tell it to you because I don’t know if this is written anywhere. But this was told to me by several older people from my father’s family, and they were great raconteurs, and some of them
actually told it correctly, (laughter) that when Frederick de Sanforal went to New Orleans to see the great Lafayette when he came to New Orleans, I guess after, before, or during the Battle of 1812 or thereabouts, Lafayette was on his horse, and Frederick de Sanforal was on the ground, and the parade went by, and it is said that Lafayette—I get teary when I think about it because it’s such an emotional kind of a visual thing here—Lafayette got down off of his horse and took his hat off, and made a huge bow to Frederick de Sanforal and made some little speech about him and then got back on his horse. And I’ve heard different ways, like he laid his cape down or put his cape around him or things like that. But more than likely he just got off his horse, made a big bow, you know, took his hat off and bowed; I would think something like that. But anyway, Frederick de Sanforal was given the Croix de Guerre by Napoleon, and he was an engineer and probably an engineer with Napoleon’s army and probably had to come over here to get away from all those people that didn’t like him anymore, you know, because they were always going back and forth over there at that time. And so whatever he was or whatever he meant to Napoleon, I’m not exactly sure, but there’s probably some credence in that story because he was a very well-educated person, and he would’ve been the great-grandfather of my grandmother—great-grandmother, Marie Emilie Donavan, who grew up in Pascagoula. And the house was built in 1878 by Walter Gautier, and I guess he was about twenty-four or twenty-five when he finished it. And he sent to New Orleans or went to New Orleans by train and picked out all the furniture and had it shipped over here, and the house was all furnished and ready to move into on their wedding day, January 6, 1879. And the whole wedding party traveled—they were married here in Pascagoula at Our Lady of Victory’s just down the street, which his wood helped build. He built the church. He built Our Lady of Victory School, and the nun’s house was wood, from the sawmill, that he donated. And it wasn’t just he; he had brothers, too. But they got married at the church and went back to Gautier by ferry, and had their reception, and he carried her across the threshold, and they lived in that house, and I don’t think she died till their sixty-first, right after their sixty-first wedding anniversary, and then I think he died a year later. But my father remembered his grandfather very well. And he and his older brother, Henry Gautier, and then one, some of the younger brothers worked there, but the mills closed down in 1906, so they went to work for other sawmills. But Henry and Walter really were the sons in the name Gautier, F. Gautier and Sons Sawmill. And the reason his name was F. Gautier was because he really didn’t like having a Spanish name, and that’s another story, but we’ll do that another time. OK? His name was Fernando Upton Gautier because he was born on the island of San Juan Fernando when his family was coming from France. They’d gone to France from the States; they took their first son with them. On the way back, Fernando was born on an island after a hurricane, so the name came from the ship captain, Upton, and for the island, Fernando. There you have it. So he was a very proud Frenchman and did not care for the name, so he always signed himself F. Gautier. Well, my-great grandfather retired at forty-five and just kind of did real estate things for my grandfather and stuff for the bank and, you know, had a good time. And I told you that in the 1920s the first highway from St. Augustine, Florida, all the way to Los Angeles came right through Gautier. Right next door to us between—it divided our home from Eugene Gautier’s house, which was on the south side of the old place, La Maison Gautier, and that was
very exciting because it brought a lot of nice young men from Jackson and elsewhere for some of the Gautier girls to marry. And they were educated engineers and so forth. And it also meant that you didn’t have to take the ferry to get to Mobile or Pascagoula. And my father was the person that cut the ribbon on that bridge. And then in the 1950s, they built the Highway 90 you know now. And by the way, the first highway was called the Old Spanish Trail, because it was. That’s where, you know, de Soto and his guys went through here looking for the Fountain of Youth, which is probably Ocean Springs. OK. Well, anyway, there’s our wonderful train. We’ll just let it finish. It comes through our living room. (laughter) The water carries the [sound]; the water carries the sound into our house. But there’s another story about the Singing River. Remind me; you need to hear that.

Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: OK? The legend of the Singing River, why we call it the Singing River, because it actually really did sing. You don’t have that yet, do you? OK, well, anyway. We lived on—when we moved here, our children, our oldest son was in college and Marie Aimee was—no, was John David in college? Yes, he was a freshman at Millsap’s, or something like that, in Jackson. And Marie Aimee was in eighth grade, and Patrick was, like, in second grade.

Ronkainen: These are your children?

Gautier-Dugger: Um-hm.

Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: John David, Marie Aimee, and Patrick Dorian, my little Irishman. Actually, John David was John David, and they didn’t want me to name him John David because everybody would’ve called him Jean David. He was my first husband’s child. My first husband was David Viellet(?) and he passed away due to depression and bipolarism, and my oldest son, John David, also died as a result of bipolarism and depression after going through 9/11 in New York. He was on the bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, when the buildings collapsed. He got it all on video. I have the video. For the next year, he did this most incredible Power Point presentation that was very positive, and it showed the people coming across the bridge, and the positive attitudes they all had, and they all were working as one to help each other; so it’s called, Unity in Diversity. And it’s beautiful. I’ve never played it anywhere because he didn’t ever want to do anything that even looked like he was capitalizing, and the music in the background is Peter Gabriel’s, and I just haven’t gotten around to asking him for his permission to use it. And that was just a short while before Katrina. And he was thirty-one years old, and he was in New York studying at the New York Academy of Figure Painting. And he could, yes, really outdraw me. OK? (laughter) So he didn’t decide until his was twenty-eight years old that he wanted to be a visual artist. He had studied at Tulane, and he thought he was going to be a doctor, and then at twenty-eight he decided, no. He had already studied
anatomy on his own and knew how to draw every bone and muscle in the body. So he just, he was a natural, and he studied with one of the same people that I studied with at the New Orleans Academy, Auseklis Ozols [founder], and he was on his way to coming back to Tulane to teach there; he was getting a master’s. But 9/11 just changed all that; completely changed all of that, and he became extremely depressed, and was teaching school in New Orleans, and we thought that he had recovered, but actually he had not. And so he came back to Gautier and killed himself on our property, and it’s never been the same since. It wasn’t just the hurricane. And we had another hurricane one year to the day after John David died; we had Ivan, and that one was terrible in Florida, and it was almost as bad here. But each and every one of these storms has taken its toll on our property. You know, we’ve lost so much of what we’ve planted, but in the meantime there’s been other things, manmade, that have ruined our neighborhood. And I like to call it Gautier (pronounced go-tee-eh), where I live, because the rest of the town they call Gautier (pronounced go-shay), and really I just, you know, we’re just, I’m a little island over here with my sister, and we’re just in the Old Place, and I don’t care what the rest of them do any more. It’s an impossible situation, and you can interview me for a whole other day on some of these questions about the politics of the area; it’s horrible. Gautier is in anarchy right now. Everybody’s been fired. There’s only one or two people still running the city, and I don’t know if it’s good or bad or what’s happening. It’s in anarchy; they fired everybody. Another one was fired this week. It’s scary. But our neighborhood was nothing but big, huge live oaks and azaleas that my great-grandmother and my grandmother had planted, and camellias all of which were, you know, as tall as this room and taller. And it was just a fairyland with Spanish moss hanging to the ground and the grass beautiful and green, St. Augustine grass, and azaleas blooming in March and April. And the camellias are blooming right now in the wintertime. And this storm took everything that we planted. My son did a—my son, Patrick, who’s twenty-four—did a survey of everything we lost. Now this is before we lost more during the summer, but before the summer and the heat and the dryness. We had no rain after the storm, and all this saltwater had come on our property, and of course it left the salt in the ground, and we couldn’t water. So he did a survey—my sister who—my sister, Michelle Gautier Lee, is a landscape architect. She did a price comparison of everything that we lost, and then we turned that into the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] with our taxes, and it was $55,650 worth of loss, before the summer loss that we had. We could do another $50,000 maybe, you know, of what we’ve lost since then of big trees that finally died. But I will never plant another azalea; they do not tolerate salt. And you would even—you’ll not believe this; pine trees can’t—pine trees grow on Horn Island, but our pine trees were just scorched with the saltwater. The only thing that really does well are the live oaks, the magnolia, the Magnolia grandiflora, and the native myrtles. Hawthorn will make it. Plant hawthorn instead of azaleas; they do have pink flowers on them. The camellias made it; I kid you not. The only ones that didn’t is, like, there was a boat sitting on top of it. So for me, all these years that we’ve been here, what? Fifteen or more. Every day, if I wasn’t teaching art or trying to do art, I was doing dirt therapy because the whole time we’ve been here either my mother, my husband’s father, or my father were dying. It was that period of time that we were losing our parents and then John David. But my therapy
was digging in the dirt, and I was just astounded to find out that I had planted that much stuff. I just couldn’t believe it, you know. And we had an inventory of it because my son did one for science class one time, you know, on the computer, and we only lost one live oak, but it had been damaged by a bolt, two bolts of lightning. And when this tree, which is about 250 years old, when it fell, it missed the screen porch and the house by four inches. And I know this sounds weird, but it loved us; he loved us; he knew. I named him Doc. So Doc died, and he’s still sending out new life. Doc died, but he’s sending out new sprouts. You would not believe how many people came in my yard with their saws saying, “Well, can I cut down that dead tree over there?” I’m like, “What dead tree?” “Well, you know that oak over there.” And I’m like, “It’s not dead; it’s just sleeping.” (laughter) And bingo, you know, it’s popped out with a lot of life. Well, right after the storm, the Mississippi Highway department of [highways]—I mean highways; I’m sorry, y’all—mowed down about I don’t know how many miles or blocks of live oaks that they said were dead in Gulfport in the median because they just didn’t have any leaves on them. I’m serious; they did; 250-year-old trees gone, every one of them. So it’s been—there’s just been so many levels of insanity and meanness going on, out-of-controlness, like, oh, here’s an organization that wants to widen the highways, so, “Let’s cut down the trees while we have a chance to.” Anarchy. It’s like the Wild West. And you talk about anarchy and the Wild West, those first seven days after the hurricane were the most frightening. The hurricane wasn’t scary. We were in the best house at the top of the hill on the bluff over the river, which had gone through every hurricane since 1878, and we knew we were safe, and we know how to be safe, and we knew how to prepare. And, buddy, we were prepared, and we had an escape route and everything. We’re not stupid but—

Lange: What did you do to prepare?

Gautier-Dugger: Well, we learned with every hurricane a little bit more and a little bit more. Of course, I grew up here, and I knew what my parents did. My father even erected a hurricane fence that he could take down during the rest of the time, you know, big, like ten foot tall, hurricane wire fence. That would’ve been nothing in this storm. You know there were boats sitting on top of everything and debris. So I’m glad I didn’t bother with the hurricane fence. (laughter) My father, my cousin, also, he would just go out and unscrew his deck on his dock, unscrew it and take it off because all that becomes, that becomes a projectile towards your house, anything out in front of you. So little by little, we learned what to do. And all of our shutters work; you shut them, and you bolt them. When we built a new addition, about four years ago we started it so we could have a real kitchen and a real bathroom; we put the metal, the steel shutters on it and the roll-down, electric and crank roll-down shutters over the windows, over the French doors. So the back southwest corner is really like a fortress. Then all the other shutters that—I don’t think there’s a single window on the whole house that doesn’t have shutters, and they are very old; so when the wind’s blowing, the little shutter will go flapping up and down in the breeze, (vocal sound imitating shutter) like that. And when it’s doing that, you can actually see out, but you can’t see out through the steel shutters. And over the front door we always use this
huge couple of pieces of plywood because that door was too big for shutters, and I didn’t want to ruin the front of the house with any of that stuff you have to do. There are some things you can do, that you can buy, that are permanent, you take them off and on, but it leaves ugly bolts, you know, coming out of the wall, and I didn’t want to do that on my house. So what you call my house, by the way, is a Gulf Coast cottage. Now, it’s not a cottage, but that’s what they call it. OK. And the ceilings are twelve foot high; all the walls are plaster; all the ceilings are wooden. They’re not beaded; they’re tongue-in-groove just like a floor. And it has a huge attic that goes out over the galleries. The galleries wrap around most of the house. It’s not a central hall access because actually the central hall is a little to the left of the double parlors, and the bedrooms are on either side of the front hallway. And they brought the kitchen in eventually to the back west corner of the house. Then in 1988 they added on an addition on the north side of the house; two bedrooms—no—yeah, two bedrooms, because they kept getting more and more kids. We also have on our property—it has a hipped roof; you know, big, hipped roof with two dormers facing the river. The house also has on the property the barn which Aunt Josie used for many things including Singing River Originals Pottery, which she opened in 1950, and you see that was right there on Highway 90. So that was one of the ways she supported herself was through selling this beautiful pottery which she used—she made molds, which Walter Anderson’s brother taught her how to do, Mack. And she molded from fish and shrimp and crabs and all the local fauna. And she ended up making—my sister has the business now. Harriet Gautier Portus,(?) and Harriet lives across the street from me in the Eugene Gautier home, which is a lot prettier than mine, I think. It is a perfect central-hall, Gulf-Coast, raised cottage. You know, it’s just beautiful. It’s painted yellow, and it’s really cute. Mine’s white with green shutters because I’m not going to change it. And she has the pottery now, and she’s now making—she’s been making—she makes flowers, as well, camellias. And Aunt Josie was very famous for her State of Mississippi flower that she made by hand. There are no molds when she makes the State of Mississippi magnolia, and it’s about as big as a dinner plate, the flower itself. And she used to send them to all the presidents and the governors, and she was very famous, for many things. She also wrote the State of Mississippi state song, and she was real cute. She didn’t always get along really well with my Grandmother Hattie who was running the Old Place across the street as the Gautier home, see, and Josie wanted her house to be the Gautier home, and it was for that (inaudible) scion of the family. The Old Place is—I don’t know how many yards from my house it is, really, but it’s the Old Place, the Eugene Gautier house built in 1888, my house, 1878, the Old Place was about 1865. And it was maybe the third house they had on that property, and then across the marsh and over on the Gulf of Mexico side, on the Bay, is the Henry Gautier home. And I had no idea that the reason we survived was because we were at the top of a bluff. I knew that Fernando Gautier told all his sons to build three hundred feet back and thirty feet up. I knew that was the formula of the thirty, three-hundred thing, but I didn’t know we were on a bluff till I saw the overhead photograph, the aerial photograph of the debris line. And it went back ten feet past my house, ten feet past my sister’s, and ten feet past the southeast corner of the Old Place. And you could just see the debris, just on a straight line all the way over to Oldfields. So we were up the bluff and because—
Ronkainen: What’s a bluff?

Gautier-Dugger: OK, bluff. The top, the crest of the land where you’ll have a sandy plain and a bluff, and then it will drop off to the river. It sloped downwards, and where it sloped down—we were way back. We were more than three hundred feet back. We were a good whole neighborhood and some streets back. Because as soon as it starts sloping, it’s a gradual slope, and then it was just marsh out there in front of me. But about fifteen or twenty years ago some lovely Jackson County people filled the marsh. OK? And so—I’m trying not to talk about all the negative stuff. All right, so we’re at the top of the bluff, and our front step must be right at that top of the bluff because the debris started, the debris comes in, and when I say debris, I mean you just can’t imagine. But anyway, the debris starts building up, and it built up the height of our porch, which is about four to five feet off the ground at the front, and at the back of the house, it’s only about two feet off the ground because it’s higher at the back of the house. And it goes on up to twenty-six feet where our barn was located that burned. Well, so we have the main house; it has a curving sidewalk out front with sides on it that directs down towards the magnolia tree, and they were—it was brick but covered with a veneer of cement mortar. It’s the only place in town any of the kids could ever roller-skate in the last century and the early part of this century. So it’s very old; it was done a long time ago. And here’s why the house survived. I haven’t told all the things we’ve done to prepare, but this is why we survived. We were at the top of the bluff; the debris built up and built up and built up, and the water would crash, the Gulf would crash against this debris, which was like a barrier or a berm or a dam. And we’d see waves that would crash ten, fifteen feet up in the air, and then they would hit the debris, come back down and hit the debris, and just kind of slosh in towards the house. But then the sidewalk was deeper, so the water would go down into the sidewalk and then be directed right back out down the front, down the hill towards the magnolia tree and towards Graveline Road. Well, I haven’t told you the ugly part of the picture of Gautier. This is when I (inaudible) my head and left Gautier (pronounced go-shay) and went back to Gautier (pronounced go-tee-eh). Well, the city, in a political deal, allowed these really nasty, bad people to divide up the property where the sawmill had been, which was just a bunch of pine trees and, you know, just a big hunk of land on the river. Instead of buying it as a park and putting up a gazebo in an area where people could stroll along the river and see the deep water, they bought another piece of land way back on the Mary Walker Bayou where—I am not kidding you—the gnats, which are these little, tiny bugs we call no-see-ems, will carry your body away; there’s so many of them. It’s horrible back on that side. But here we are on the front bluff of the Singing River. You could see out to Horn Island from there, and you could go out easily except that there’s a train bridge to go under. So the Old Place and my house and my sister’s, we’re between the Highway 90 bridge and the train bridge, pretty much protected, you know, from anything happening. So we could’ve had a nice park out there. Instead, they allowed somebody to buy it and chop it up into thirteen lots, and I’m talking about just seven acres, thirteen lots. And so two houses were built down on the water and two houses were built up on Graveline, and I have photographs and video to show—and this is when the water had already started receding back to Graveline—pictures of the water,
when it was from Graveline down to the river, going through the roofs of those houses. And the two houses on the river were absolutely demolished, and the two on Graveline should’ve been demolished, but they hurried up and stabilized them and put them back together. But they’re big, old, ugly, modern brick houses, and (whispering) you know what? That’s a mortal sin what they did. (laughter) Because what they really did that was really, really aggravating to me is the little part of the bridge that was left from the old Highway 90 where all the old men who worked in—either they worked in the sawmill, or they had worked in the, or their grandparents had, when they worked in the creosote mill, which closed in 1979, they would just go down to that pier and fish, you know. And the people that bought those houses decided that they didn’t want those old men down there with their cars fishing down there. So they had the City demolish the bridge, the pier; that was the real crime. And then when they demolished the pier, two weeks later we had Hurricane Ivan, and because the pier had acted like a buffer, a jetty, to the oaks on the bluff of the Old Place, two three-hundred-year-old oak trees went down because their jetty was removed, the pier. Now, sometimes this is an afterthought; you don’t realize that, you know, that this pier was a jetty for those two trees. But we were so sick; we couldn’t even do anything. We just were so sick; we couldn’t even talk about it. It was like our great aunts had died and were lying out there on the ground with their feet up in the air, you know. The only saving grace was that the Navy came and sawed them up and took them up to fix Old Ironsides, which is the Constitution, the oldest Navy ship we have, which is—is it in Boston or Philadelphia? (laughter) I think it’s in Boston. And so—it’s either in Boston or Philadelphia, and I have Alzheimer’s now, so I can’t really remember some things like that. But the oak is being used because—do you know what the crotch of the tree is? It’s where the branch comes out, like under your arm.

Lange: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: And they take that from these oaks, and they can use that to build where the, you know, hull of the ship curves. So it’s very sought after. Well, about the same time the bridges were being enlarged and I got the junior high kids from Gautier to go out and measure all the oaks on the highway and then declare them historic and put names on them and all that, so the highway department couldn’t destroy those oaks. Of course, that made me persona non gratis, but do I care? We still have those oaks. And about that same time my brother Quin Gautier Jr., Hermes Quin Gautier Jr., who’s just one year younger than I am, who’s the manager of the Old Place, talked to the highway department people that were going to throw away all that cement, and they made a buffer all the way along the entire bluff from between those homes that were built and the bridge. So we now have the bluff, and even Katrina didn’t take it down. Some of the dirt washed out, but you know, we still have—they just piled all that cement up that came out of the highway and the bridge. So we have weddings there now and receptions and parties, you know. Nobody lives there. As I said, Hermes brought it back into the family in 1939; my Uncle John showed it with my grandmother, They showed it as a historic house that you can visit and all the antiques and blah, blah, blah, you know. It was very Southern, and that’s how I grew up, showing that house; that was my job. And I had to wear hoop skirts, believe it or not. So you should’ve seen me sweeping the galleries in my hoop skirts; they had a,
you know, way of making the leaves blow off the porch. (laughter) But anyway, my father bought it from—my father bought the house from the estate, and then he died a few years ago, and so all of my brothers and sisters and I own the Old Place together now; so it’s still in the Gautier family. My sister owns the house behind it; I own, you know, my home. We’re all on that bluff. The only house that’s out of the family of those that remain is Twelve Oaks, which is owned by a family from Jackson, Mississippi. One of the houses that was lost in this hurricane, the only other Gautier home was built by Henry, his first house, and it was lower down and closer to the water, because, you know, first sons don’t always listen. (laughter) And then the Chastant House on the beach in Pascagoula was completely wiped off the map. There’s not one portrait. We had portraits back into the 1700s. And this is another way you prepare for a hurricane. You go down to my grandmother’s home on the beach; you get the portraits out; you take them uptown, and you put them in the vault at my father’s company, the Pascagoula Ice and Freezer Company. They have this big walk-in vault. But my cousin, who owned the house at the time, and we owned all the stuff inside with him from the plantations, was out of town, and he didn’t tell us he was out of town, and we didn’t know nobody had gone to get the portraits. So we lost Jeanne Marie Chastant, Maria Mae Fuselier, Agrical(?) Fuselier, his wife; we lost them all. We lost everybody, and we lost my Aunt Mallory Page’s portrait that was painted by John Deprechal(?), her teacher at Fontainbleau. So we lost, it was like losing people, and other than losing those people, which my daughter says to me, Marie Aimee, who’s thirty, says, “Mama, they’re dead. Why are you so upset?” (laughter) Because the portraits kept them alive to us, you know, and it’s the history that we’ve lost, and the oak trees that we—and the magnolias, and the homes that are historic that we can’t replace, but nobody’s crying. And I promise y’all this, really; I know it sounds shallow, but nobody’s crying because we didn’t lose any people.

Lange: Um-hm, during Hurricane Katrina.

Gautier-Dugger: It’s stuff; it’s stuff. And everybody I know that lived on the beach in Pascagoula lost everything, you know. Ninety-two-year-old ladies on, just my, all my family, so I had nowhere else to go. All my family lived on the water. It didn’t occur to me to go anywhere else. We don’t go. We stay; we take care of our home, our boats. We had the barn to board up. We had the playhouse, where my daughter lives now, to board up. We had the old smokehouse, the shed; we had to board all that up. We had to close up the whole office, pick up all the equipment, move the charts, everything out of harm’s way, cover everything with plastic. We did the office. We did the house. We did the yard. Our boat was already out of the water. I didn’t have time to think about my grandmother’s house on the beach. I didn’t have time to think about my father’s house in Pascagoula; the boys were doing that, you know. “Let the boys do that.” But one thing I need to pass along that’s really, really important. OK? We didn’t know this until Ivan. My brother-in-law across the street, Billy Portis(?) taught us this. You get rope putty, P-U-T-T-Y, comes in a coil. Most hardware stores only have one or two containers of it because people don’t usually ask for it. So we go to every hardware store we can get to, and we buy all this rope putty, and we put it into all the window crevices and French door crevices all over the whole house, but especially the French doors because they never quite shut tightly, you know, no matter
what you do to them. And so we learned to do that, and not one drop of water came in through the French doors or the windows this time. It all came from the top. Not one drop got under the house; it all came from the top because it was about the wind. And here’s something else you need to know, and I’ve told this to Dickie Scruggs, who’s the attorney that’s trying to sue State Farm, for people like Trent Lott, the senator, and Gene Taylor, the representative, who lost their homes. I saw the train bridge blow out, big steel sides blowing into the river. Not the river so high up that it was pushing them out, but just big gusts of wind that just, like, picked them up, threw them in the air and then down into the water. I saw it blow out. We had something that drove the shutters into the French doors in my southeast bedroom and then popped one of them off and knocked it down on the front porch, and after that, that thing just sat there on the front porch and never moved. So the wind was very fierce at one point, probably very early, and then the water started coming up. And when it started coming up, it came up very fast, as everybody will tell you, and it didn’t stay up an awfully long time either, but it was so fast and so furious, and the girl’s deck came off of her house in one huge piece. It’s as big as this room. What? Twelve by twelve or something, with steps and sides and everything, it came over in one piece. And the magnolia tree caught it twenty-two feet up in its branches; you can see all the scratches on it. And it held the deck, and it would lean towards the house, and it would grab the deck, and then it would stand back up again, and it looked like it was going to let go of the deck, and then it quickly leaned back forward. It was just like a human being, you know, and that’s when I got scared because it was at the height of the storm. So it would’ve come across the debris, hit the front door, knocked down the dormers. The dormers would’ve come down; I mean, the whole front of the house would’ve been knocked off. But my daughter Marie, who had come from New Orleans the night before to help us and to get out of New Orleans, was mopping the floor and covered in creosote and kerosene that was coming down from the attic. And my husband was in the attic the entire time, Dr. David Dugger, who’s a pediatrician who does behavior and development, one of only two of them in the whole state of Mississippi—another story. He was up in the attic funneling the water into garbage cans with plastic because 60 percent of our tar paper and shingles rolled off the house in the wind because there were spaces between the decking that’s the way they used to build the houses for the cedar shakes that they put on them. So the air got behind it and pulled it off from the inside out. But when my husband was in the attic, about the same time I heard the big steel shutters about to come off the house and that big shutter fall down on the front porch, and probably when the oak tree fell, which was on the south side of the house—all about that same time around nine o’clock in the morning, David was in the attic, and the whole attic lifted up and kind of came back down like it was breathing, you know, [inhaling, then exhaling]. And so something came through. I don’t know if it was a water spout or a tornado, but it was higher than my house because it did not destroy my house. And the only thing I don’t really like is that FEMA said the water only got to thirteen feet in Gautier. Go measure how far back the Old Place is and my house, and how high up our houses are. The water was at our—ten feet from the corner of our houses, and it was the big palm tree, it was the oak trees, it was the magnolia tree, it was these trees, you know, that caught the huge debris and kept it from knocking us down. And so the trees are very important as far
as being prepared. And I had planted a big—you could not see into my property, it was so planted. And so that caught a lot of the debris. It killed a lot of the plantings, but it did catch a lot of the debris whereas a fence would’ve been just crushed. So that’s some of the things you do. And if you find out a hurricane that has a forty-seven-foot tidal wave is headed towards Pascagoula—as we heard at one point it was coming between Pascagoula and Mobile—you get out of town. OK? And we were almost prepared to do that. But then it moved further and further west, and we realized the eye was not coming across us, and it was going further towards the Texas/Louisiana border, so who would have thunk it, you know? Who would’ve ever realized that it was going to be so broad and do so much damage. But I understand there was a smaller eye that came over Pascagoula, so that’s why we had so much damage here.

Let’s see what else you do to prepare. You pray. You get lots of water; you draw all the water in the bathtubs. We have a well, and we have city water. You draw the water; you get the flashlights and the batteries and all the typical stuff that people do. You get lots of cans of tuna fish or whatever. I have a gas stove; it’s not a problem, in my new kitchen. You get out your saints, you know, you put them all over. I had Mary or Jesus or Joseph or somebody in every room, you know. And let’s see what else you do to prepare. You get lots of rope, life jackets; you put your boat at the back door, you put your cars under the carport, you get ready to leave if you have to leave, and you’re tied together, and you have your hurricane box and a floating ice chest, of course. You buy a generator. We put one on our older refrigerator and brought all of my husband’s medicine from his office, which was just five minutes from our house, but it was on Highway 90, and a bayou backed up into it. So we brought the medicine to the house, and we put it in the back refrigerator, and we hooked the refrigerator up to the generator. So we never got to use the little air conditioner we bought so we could keep cool; it was much more important to keep the medicine at forty degrees. And then for a little while at night, we would run some fans so we could go to sleep, and then David would go back out and put it on the refrigerator. The problem with all this is you can run out of gasoline, and then you’re up the creek. But we got our paddle; it floated it, and I still have it. (laughter) But anyway, we did run out of gas, so David siphoned it out of my Explorer, and for six months my Explorer was broken. (laughter) And then as far as that, gasoline, we had every gas thing that we could find filled up before the storm, you know. We had everything right there in the old kitchen where you could get to it. We had just—we were ready; we were ready for anything. We had food; we had everything. Across the street at my sister’s house it was like a palace; nothing happened. I think she lost three shingles. Go figure. Because she became the family member where everybody went to eat, and we had these big dinner parties, candlelit. It was just elegant and gorgeous, you know. And we had these huge cans of food that we were getting from the fire department and different places, you know, big cans of beans, red beans, and lots of rice and food that I didn’t even know was good, you know, like some kind of beef stew that was great, in a can. And you heat it up on your gas stove, and you just keep on going, and eventually everything thaws out in the refrigerator and freezer. So you have these pots of gumbo and soup, and you know, just cook everything that’s in there, cook lots of it. It’s the best eating you’ve ever had. And then, a week later of
course, then help started coming in a week later. For almost a week, when you slept, when you went out at night, you could see every star in the sky, and the sky was as black as you can imagine. And the stars were just twinkling because there were no electric lights to interfere, and no shipyard lights, nothing, you know, just beautiful, beautiful stars. We had a little swimming pool in the yard, so we could float around in the water and cool off. We had lots of ways of taking care of ourselves, but the scary things were: when the deck almost got us; when I thought my daughter was going to die because the whole front of the house was going to blow off and she wouldn’t get out of the front of the house; when my neighbor came running over to tell me that the river was coming up Graveline and from the back of her house, too. And I took her out front, you know, to the window where the shutter had fallen and you could see straight out into the Gulf. I said, “Look, Jackie, it’s going down. It’s already going down. It’s not coming up; it’s going down. It just looks like it’s getting worse.”

Well, her house is twenty-six feet because that was my aunt—the back of my aunt’s property, and her parents built that house in about 1940. Her mother was in the house on a gas—what do you call it? On an oxygen machine, in the house on an oxygen machine because she wouldn’t leave. This is how hardheaded we are. OK? And because she knew how high up her house was, and it was safe and had been through every other hurricane, but she didn’t have enough gas to run her oxygen machine. So, that’s why Jackie came running over in a fit. Well, I hate to tell you this, but Jackie died. She was sixty-seven. Her mother’s ninety-two—or eighty-nine. Jackie just died. And Jackie’s only one of many, many people who were in perfect health before the storm, who the stress of it all has killed; it’s killed them. The obits, if you just go back and look at the newspapers on the Gulf Coast for the last year and a half, you will not believe how many thirty-, forty-, fifty-year-olds are dead, and it’s not all suicide; it’s some suicide. It’s just horrific. And you really need to do that, go through the newspapers and look at the obits in the Sun Herald.

**Lange:** We’re going to have to just stop the tape because I think we’re going to run out of tape. (brief interruption)

**Gautier-Dugger:** OK, this is what it looked like a week before on our—this is our hot tub right here. And you go through these doors into our bedroom right here. So that’s the southeast corner of the house. And see how lush and green and beautiful it was.

**Ronkainen:** Um-hm.

**Gautier-Dugger:** Well, that’s the way it looked. Everything broken and dead, that’s when the tree’s down. This is during the storm, but the water has already left the yard and gone all the way down to Graveline by the time it was safe enough to go on the front porch and take these pictures. And it’s still, look, it’s still here, you know. It’s still coming through. It’s halfway up that house that was demolished. Now he’s built a house up on stilts, as he should’ve done in the first place, and it looks like the back of a FEMA trailer. And this is the historic district; there is no more historic district. That’s my sister’s front porch; if you look north—what’s that—east, northeast? Yeah, northeast, right there, the Eugene Gautier house. So you can—it’s sort of—there’s a
debris line that goes through like that, and the Old Place is behind her house over that way, the first Gautier home. This is the big magnolia tree; it had been damaged in other hurricanes. You see this limb is broken. It used to be buttressed on the north and south; it thought it was an oak tree. I never told it differently. OK, now, this is the deck that came from across the street, and you see how it’s up? It’s down on the ground now, but it was all the way up in the tree, way up in here during the high tide, highest of the tide. You can see it. Now, I do have a picture of it coming through the roof; maybe it was on the video. You know it was very hard to take pictures because when you—see, these are called “rollers.” You know, rollers like you’re out in the ocean.

Lange: Is that water?

Gautier-Dugger: Um-hm, and that’s Graveline Road right there. And look, at one point it was up to this man’s windows—I mean up at his rooftop, and the girl across the street, it came right underneath her upstairs windows. It was right up there. See that little white line?

Lange: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: Underneath her windows. So, God knows how high that was, but it doesn’t seem it when you look from my house to hers that her house is that much lower than ours, but it is. Because we’re already—we’re at least four and a half to five feet above the ground, and the ground is that much higher. This camellia bit the dust; it didn’t live. Well, then it had so much debris on it, you know. But (long pause) God, we have to—nobody can see these pictures till I get these persons out of it, right here. This is the oak tree that fell and missed the house. See, part of it’s right there in the bushes. Oh, that’s the top of the magnolia tree. See how tall that thing is?

Lange: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: And it just stands right back up. You would not believe how flexible a magnolia is. Now these are the boards on the front door and all the shutters shut. This is another wide door, so we have to have a board on it. This is in our side yard, looking out towards the Gulf of Mexico right here. I guess you could call us waterfront. (laughter) And all these big trucks were up, you know, on the driveway on our south side. They were the backs of trucks and these people across the street at this boatyard used them for storage and stuff. That’s the way our roof looked in certain places; just the deck boards were showing. So you can imagine, we had a lot of water coming in. And look, when we were taking these pictures, it was in the afternoon after the storm, and look, you can still see that; see how the lantern is swinging?

Lange: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: There was still some breeze. It wasn’t heavy, but there was still a strong breeze. This is where the water came in. We patched it with tarpaper, and then two or three weeks later, whenever Rita came through, we already had all our office
furniture in here, so that’s when we lost the first copier/printer/fax machine because it was right underneath that in Rita. And believe me, you cannot run a doctor’s office without that machinery. The building now has, instead of this little roof off of the north side of it, which covered the brick porch, there’s now a glassed-in room on the front of it, which we used as a waiting room. And that did not get harmed in the fire. The part that was harmed in the fire was from like the plate up, so the whole roof has to come off.

**Ronkainen:** How did this fire start?

**Gautier-Dugger:** In the water heater closet. And the water heater was damaged in the storm, but we didn’t know it. You know, in other words, we put new sheetrock around it, thought it was OK because it was working, but apparently some of the electrical parts of it got messed up, getting wet. Now I have this nice little, newel post decoration that we take in; that’s another way we get ready for a hurricanes. I don’t leave my hand carved acorn on top of that post; I take the whole part of it in a hurricane. Look at this debris.

**Lange and Ronkainen:** Um-hm.

**Gautier-Dugger:** You could literally walk across the top, but there’s this big dip from my yard; then there’s Graveline Road, and then up again, this huge dip, maybe ten feet to my sister’s yard. But that whole ten-foot drop where the road bed is, was filled with debris. You could just walk straight across, if you could walk on the debris, if you were crazy, because of snakes and staph infection. Now—

**Ronkainen:** So you were saying that, when it wasn’t on, that you guys started work right away, right after the storm stopped?

**Gautier-Dugger:** We had to, that afternoon. You see all this—this is the roof; these are the roof shingles that blew off. They were all over the ground. And certain faces won’t show what happened. There’ll be a face—and so that’s why I think there was tornadic energy up there doing damage, like, for instance, see where the new addition is here?

**Ronkainen:** Um-hm.

**Gautier-Dugger:** We have the steel shutters that come down, and these are steel shutters. These are the roll-up-and-down shutters. We decided to do that instead of getting a swimming pool, an in-ground pool, because that’s how expensive they are, but they work. OK. They really work. And there’s our dog. And we had two goldfish and two cats, too, so how was I going to—I wasn’t going to leave those animals and fish and birds and my house. If you’re not there, you can’t dry things up. You can’t take care of your antiques, your art, your house; I mean you’ve got to be there. It’s an organic thing; you’ve just got to work with it. These have big steel straps, you see, that come with them that go over them. This was impervious. But this face, the west—was that the west? Yeah, the west face of this roof, look at that. The only thing that could cause something like that is some kind of tornadic action
that would come down between these two peaks of the roof and tear up those shingles right there. Oh, look at the palm tree, how it’s still blowing at this point. My puppy just had to go outside; he couldn’t wait any longer. So it was very—there was still rain, so that’s why the pictures are kind of cloudy. And when—do you have this thing turned on right now?

Lange and Ronkainen: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: Oh. Well, you know I told you that the train bridge blew out; there would’ve been no way to take a picture of that, or a video of it, because there was so much rain that was blowing sideways that you couldn’t see clearly enough to take a picture. See what I’m saying? It would’ve been too cloudy. Now this is—the funny thing is, on the backside of the house facing west under the porte-cochere, you could just stand out there during the storm, and the wind was being knocked off of you by the house. Hurricane Ivan and Hurricane Georges, all these other storms we’ve been through in that house, were a lot more fierce. I mean, the walls moved in Hurricane Georges in 1999, ’98. And these houses were not built in 1998 and yet, even after a storm that brought water up to the street, they still let those houses be built down there; graft, corruption, greed. So there’s my beautiful dormer, and it looks like those are wooden shutters, but they’re not; they’re steel because I just got tired of replacing the wooden shutters up in the dormers. And so we just finally—instead of putting a solid piece of steel behind them, they’re open in the back so when the attic fan is on, it can still draw air through the dormers. And there’s no screen here; we didn’t ever put it back after Hurricane Georges because we just liked it better without the screen. And anyway, it’s like so much screen, it’s unreal, and it’ll just blow right back out again. So we only screened the area on the south end where we have the hot tub that’s right off of the bedroom. Now this is—excuse me—the neighbor down the street had a big bulldozer, and he just came, and he bulldozed all this out of the way. FEMA didn’t, you know. The neighborhood—well, he’s not really a neighbor, but you know, he’s, like, down the street, but a person in the area—not FEMA—got on his machinery, and he cleared the street. But this boat came from his boatyard. And let me see what else is interesting. Let’s just flip through these pictures quickly so you can do something else. OK, this is looking from my sister’s yard over to our yard, you know. You see the debris?

Lange: Um-hm.

Ronkainen: Yes.

Gautier-Dugger: It’s as high as the yard. Now, what will happen is the—where the wave action was—this is looking from my yard. This is how far up the debris came and then the waves would be, you would think they would be back here behind that, but there was still some waves in front of this, between this and my house. I’m going to try to show you how close they were. OK now, that’s what’s left of the house, so they had to tear it down. And they had to tear that one down. It was completely open on the front, like a dollhouse. This is a huge hot tub that was in my sister’s yard. And I was standing on my porch, and she was standing on her porch, and I said, “Harriet, I
love your new hot tub.” She goes, “I know. Isn’t it great? I’ve always wanted one.” And then this woman whose house was out here on the front, right here, we didn’t know it, but she was standing out here, and she could hear us. And she goes, “That’s not funny at all. That’s my hot tub.” And my sister says, “Not any more.” (laughter) Ha-ha-ha, we have a great sense of humor. Before the—oops. Between the houses before the hurricane, you know, when you could walk back and forth, my sister and brother-in-law were getting ready to leave, and they were coming back across in the rain, you know, because we weren’t about to go at this point. We still weren’t, we weren’t finished until three a.m. preparing for the storm; there was that much to do. So at three a.m. I laid down on the sofa in the new addition in the kitchen and fell asleep, and I slept until all that banging and noise when the wind came across, first, before the water. OK, so they were walking back across the street, and the police stopped them and said, “Don’t you know that there’s a mandatory evacuation, and you’re south of I-10?” And [he] goes, “Who are you, and what are you doing?” or whatever. And she goes, “Oh, it’s nothing. I’m a Gautier. I’m a Gautier girl, and this is my sister’s, and, really, our property touches 90, so”—see, because we owned all the way from my house all the way to the highway, my house, the Old Place—my house, Harriet’s, the Old Place, see, and then [Highway] 90. She says, “Well, we’re not really south of 90; we’re on 90.” (laughter) And she said, “I’m a Gautier.” They said, “Oh, yeah, we understand. (laughter) You’re crazy.” But see, these houses have been there so long; they were safer than any of the hospitals or banks or any of the other places that flooded or lost their roofs, you know, totally, the flat-roofed buildings. This is my nephew sitting in a nice easy-chair that was in the front yard. Now this is the Old Place, and there’s this huge valley here between my sister’s and the Old Place. And see, what happens is, the water where it’s just washing, washing, washing and splashing, it clears the yard completely, and then where it stops, it leaves that debris line up there, way high, way up there. And of course that boat had to be reclaimed by somebody. This is my yard, after the storm. I don’t know where that came from, (laughter) but it was in my yard. My daughter was taking these pictures starting here, I think. So she started walking down the street, taking pictures. And this is looking back towards our house. The boatyard’s up here; all their boats and ships were all up alongside of our house. That’s the name of the boat. (laughter) There were cars turned upside down, you know, like in the ditches. Oh, yeah, here’s some. There’s this strange, eerie color in the sky. No humidity the day after the storm when these pictures were taken. Sunshine, balmy, we would call that halcyon, no clouds even. These big houses, just gone.

**Ronkainen:** So what do you think has come from Hurricane Katrina?

**Gautier-Dugger:** You mean besides devastation?

**Ronkainen:** Yes.

**Gautier-Dugger:** Wonderful people that have come to help us, including you-all, and who will listen to our story and take it out into the world and let people know that for the next twenty-five years they can keep sending spring-breakers here because it’ll take that long. And there’s so many people who, like us, feel that, you know, you just
get up, and you do what you got to do for yourself, and you don’t wait for people to come help you, but they still do need help. And we’re all victims, but we just don’t realize it, you know, and we’re going to give up sooner or later. I mean we lost our office because of the hurricane. And then partially due to the hurricane, we lost the barn and our office all over again, as a result of the hurricane, and so we’ve had to move again. And I should’ve been painting my daughter all that time instead of the walls of the office, you know. I’ll learn. OK, this is just down the street from us, you know, cars washed into the bayou, sofas on the front lawn.

**Lange:** What’s the definition of a bayou? Is that a swamp?

**Gautier-Dugger:** It’s like a creek. Yeah, it’s a little tributary off the river. I’m going to tell you the story of the Singing River, too. Marie, by the way, is thirty, and she is twenty [weeks] pregnant now, so we’re going to get a grandchild this coming summer. So we are going to turn that barn into her house; she and her husband are going to live in the barn.

**Lange:** You said twenty months. You mean twenty weeks?

**Gautier-Dugger:** I mean weeks—blah. (laughter) Yeah, she’s not an elephant. Yes, twenty weeks. And we learned yesterday that it’s a boy. This is Trent Lott’s wife, Trisha, the only picture that I had the nerve to take because I was so unnerved when I got to the beach three weeks after the storm. I mean, I couldn’t even go down there. First of all, you didn’t have gas, and there wasn’t time, and we were working too hard. It was not fearful except at night, because at night you would hear all these sounds, and you didn’t know if it was people or raccoons. And if they were scavenging through your stuff looking for wood or scavenging through your stuff looking for food, you know. It was just terrifying. We slept with pistols by the sides of us on the floor. We couldn’t open those metal shutters except a foot because we didn’t want anybody to scoot underneath it. My daughter was so frightened the first night, and she was twenty-nine years old. OK? And she was across the parlor and dining room from us on the north side of the house in her room, and really it was actually the guest room at this point, and the Friday before the storm, the lady had delivered the rest of the curtains and the shower curtains that were all handmade and embroidered and initialed and, you know, gorgeous, etoile de jouer(?) design. It was just perfect. And all the furniture had just been restored, and it was Gautier family furniture that I had inherited from my parents. Actually, the bed that all the Gautiers came from, from the Old Place, we drew straws, and I actually got that. I got two, big, tall, têster(?) beds, you know, which wasn’t fair. I should’ve gotten one, but they screwed up. Anyway, there was only a tiny bit of water that came through two cracks in that wooden ceiling, and I discovered it early on and dried it all up in there. And of course everything was put up. I mean the curtains were laid across the bed with plastic on them, you know, and there wasn’t any way for anything to get hurt. But of course, water could’ve gotten into that big têster, up inside of it, and ruined all that work that we had just done, but it was like a few inches away from the cornice and just a little bit of water, you know, when it ran into the corner I dried it up, and the most perfect room in the house stayed perfect. But now my son, Patrick, is living in it, and so it’s not perfect anymore. He
just graduated from LSU [Louisiana State University], and so he’s home. He’s a musician, and he’s an English teacher, or going to be one, we think. Anyway, so my friend came from Texas, and she wanted to go down to the beach, and she was a chef, and she brought us tons of food and lots of wine and good spirits, and stayed with us. And so I went with her to the beach in Pascagoula, and she took this picture of—that’s Trisha Lott; you can just barely see a little bit of her face, because Trent Lott’s house was in my cousin’s, Edgar Warren Hall’s, front yard and house. His dormers went two blocks back into my cousin Edgar Hall’s house and yard. And everything from the lake came up behind my cousin, Dr. Edgar Hall’s house. And they had the most beautiful antiques that he’d inherited from his mother, my special Aunt Mallory Page who raised me. OK. Well, he is an oncologist; he’s an oncologist, and he was mainly at the hospital, I think. I didn’t get to see him for a while, but I wanted to see where my great-great-grandfather’s house used to be, you know. So we were on our way down there to see it, and I didn’t cry till I got to Edgar Warren’s house and saw all my aunt’s things all over the yard ruined, you know, the Belter(?) sofas, the (inaudible), the Mallard(?) furniture just everywhere and figurines, and, you know, china, porcelain, pottery, and all that, it survived. It just floated right back down and landed, you know, usually unbroken, amazingly. But silver and—silver was pretty ruined and basically anything wooden. I found my grandmother’s bed jacket in a tree, and that’s all I have of her from that house. I mean, I have things from the past that were given to me, but not very many because it was a museum, The Chastant House on the beach in Pascagoula. It was a museum with everything in it from every generation, going back seven generations or more, and so we never took anything out. So when I went and found Dr. Hall at the hospital, I think he thought I was going to—I jumped out of my car to go hug him, and I think he thought I was going to be mad at him because, you know, he didn’t remove the portrait. And I said, “Edgar Warren, guess what? There’s nothing left to fight over.” (laughter) Boy, was he relieved. Because it was a difficult situation with the ownership of he owned the house, and we all owned stuff within the house.

**Lange:** Right.

**Gautier-Dugger:** And what do you do with it? But there’s the deck, and we basically left it right where it was and stabilized it and left it under the tree because my great-grandfather had a shoofly, which is a little deck built around a tree. Originally he had a shoofly there because Old Highway 90 came right here, which is now De La Pointe, and he would sit out there on his shoofly and greet people with lemonade. And what it was is they would get out of their car, talk to Mr. Walter, and tell him where they’d been, and where they were going and come back and tell him when they had been there what it was like, you know, because they’d be going across the country. And so that was their lemonade stop and probably their bathroom stop, too. See the blue tarps on the roof? We did that, (laughter) my husband, daughter, and I. Then the first—see, we had this funky, little blue, blue-collar swimming pool I call it, that my son had given my husband for Father’s Day, and it really was a big help because we could jump in it and cool off and float at night. See the yard is still beautiful and green, but the salt soon took care of that. And this is sea grass, flotsam, all this junk; that’s what this is. It’s marsh grass, you know, that’s mixed up in there,
and you talk about stinking. And then the crab factory down—there’s a Vietnamese crab place down the street, and instead of freezing their product and putting it away, they just walked off and left it. And we had crab rotting, and it smelled like death, you know. So that’s why we had to hurry up and clear this property, and we couldn’t wait for any FEMA to come in two years and clear it. Amazingly the ivy has survived that we planted there that came from the Old Place, and the oak tree has begun to send out branches. But you see how fried everything is already from the saltwater?

Ronkainen: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: The day before—see, this is the back of the yard where it didn’t have as much salt, and this is the front where it had salt. And the debris line, you see what an even line it is?

Lange: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: Well, it’s also ten feet away from the corner of the playhouse, and Marie and Chris have been living there, and now that there’s a baby on the way; we’re just going to fix that barn up, and they’re going to have a house. And now she’s helping to run her father’s business, instead of teaching English as a second language in New Orleans because (laughter) who wants to go to New Orleans right now? Chris goes over there and works for an insurance company and drives back every day. You can—see the bridge? That’s Highway 90 Bridge; you can see it pretty clearly across the front yard towards the northeast of our house. This is looking to the south; well, directly south is this way. This is southeast; well, no, this is pretty much south, but this is a peninsula that sticks out that my grandfather sold to somebody in the [19]50s for three thousand dollars, this whole peninsula, because he said, “What idiot would build on that? It’s too low.” And of course there were houses all the way up, mansions. So the charrette teaches us to build really tall things at the river, so that allows for all these land-rapers to come in and build their huge, you know, skyscrapers all along the water, because you’re supposed to build those at the water, according to the tenets of the charrettes. See, the way—it’s a land-use program that basically advises you to build your biggest, highest concentration of businesses and people at the water with high-rises, and then the further out into the countryside you get, the less and the more sparsely populated it becomes. And there are some good things about it, such as, you know, when we had the medical office in the backyard, it was sort of like we were living above the grocery store, but you know, walking distance to everything. Little squares where you’ve got your grocery store, the church, everything on squares like, say, Savannah is the perfect example of this where every block or two is self-sustained. And that part of the—that idea from the charrette is good, but, “Yeah, uh-huh, we’re going to sell the Old Place so somebody can put up a high-rise. We’re going to tear down our houses so high-rises can be built there. Right.” But what’s to keep these people across the street from us from selling their property now and putting up high-rises? Nothing. Because the city will use that, “Oh, well, this is what they told us to do.” That’ll be there; you know, so I’m glad I’m sixty. I am so glad I’m sixty and at least half grown, so I don’t have to see those high-rises across the street. But anyway—
Ronkainen: What would you hope to happen now?

Gautier-Dugger: Well, I tell you what. It’s too late now, but if somebody had asked me, my opinion, I would’ve told them have FEMA reclaim that property, pay those people for their houses, send them to higher ground, don’t let them rebuild, it will flood again, and turn it into a park like they should’ve done in the first place. We, I told them, my father told them, we all told them, “It’s suitable only for a park; it will flood; it’s the drainage for all these houses up here on the bluff.” Did they listen? No. Did they call Quin Gautier; did they laugh at him? Yes. Am I mad at them? Yes. You don’t call my father an old fool. He was an extremely well-educated gentleman. And they’re just a bunch of redneck hicks with no education, so I pity them, really. But see right here where the grass is still? It’s St. Augustine grass; it hasn’t died yet. It’s still beautiful and green. See, that’s where the water was crashing, still. It was closer on this side, but over here it was further away. And the water was crashing there so that’s why it’s green there and then the debris in here. These pictures are taken from our roof, rooftop; I took these off the roof the next day with the helicopters going all over. That’s where the bridge blew out. See?

Lange and Ronkainen: Hm, oh, yeah.

Gautier-Dugger: Big sections of it, big. You know what those people did, the CSX Corporation Line?

Ronkainen: What’s CSX?

Gautier-Dugger: Whatever it stands for, CSX is the name of the bridge, the train company.

Ronkainen: Oh, OK.

Gautier-Dugger: Maybe Kansas City Southern, I don’t know, one of those companies. But anyway, they took those old rusty sides, they picked them up out of the river, and they put them back up there, and they still haven’t repainted it. They have no intention of repainting it. But if they really wanted to open up Gautier, what they should’ve done at this point is put an opening, a bridge, a railroad bridge that opened here so, you know, larger boats could go in and out here, and then they could’ve had all this down here would’ve been park, you see, where people could’ve—or marinas or something. And what it is, is greed and corruption; just remember that. That’s what—see how many of them blew out?

Ronkainen: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: It was lovely. For more than six months we didn’t have to hear the train whistle. Now, that’s Ingalls Shipyard, and that’s Pascagoula on the other side of it, see, and you can really see it from my roof. These are ships being built up on their—in the dry docks over here, but boy, they were really damaged at the shipyard; they were really knocked back. These were all the soccer balls that came from down
the street. One of the guys, one of the kids down the street was a soccer champion.
One, two, three, four, about eight soccer balls.

**Lange:** Who are these men that are doing that?

**Gautier-Dugger:** Oh, they were our saviors and our neighbors, really. They came from Arkansas to clear the railroad bridge, I mean railroad tracks. They work for CSX all over the country whenever there’s a disaster. Well, the Sunday after the hurricane—the Saturday after the hurricane, I think, this gentleman comes to our back door, and he has a pony tail, and he looks kind of scruffy, and he’s got a beard. And he starts talking to my husband, and then I go out there and listen, and he’s from Arkansas, and he’s got—his name is John Fairless(?), and he owns this huge company that, you know, enormous equipment, the biggest equipment I’ve ever seen in my life, and he brought nine men with him. And they were just, you know, realizing, “Whoa, we can’t clear the railroad.” There’s no reason to clear it. Well, there’s no railroad; it’s torn up, and all the bridges are out, everywhere. The bridge is still out from Ocean Springs to Biloxi and from Pass Christian to Bay St. Louis. They’re still—there’s no way; you can’t go Highway 90; you have to go I-10, which is ten miles north of 90. Well, he said, “I’m here, and I’ve got all this equipment and all these men. Can I help y’all?” And I said, “Yep. (laughter) Yes, you can help us.” So he went around the yard with me, and he tied all these pink ribbons on things that were sticking up. You couldn’t see the bushes; the debris was all over the top of them. See, there’s just that little piece of the azalea right there?

**Lange:** Um-hm.

**Gautier-Dugger:** Of course it died anyway, but. So we tied these pink ribbons everywhere, and they snipped off some of the ends of the low-lying oak branches. So when they brought their equipment on the yard, they didn’t hurt anything. And they went all over the yard picking up plywood and everything, and they made a roadbed for their tractor bottoms so that they didn’t ruin my yard. It was basically, you know, it’s still indented in those places, but it’s nothing like most people’s yards which were just bulldozed. You know, people came in with bulldozers and just shoved it all off. They picked it up. They picked it up and set it down. Picked it up and set it down.

**Ronkainen:** Where did they move everything to?

**Gautier-Dugger:** Well, I’ll show you. Now, this is the end of the sidewalk that I was telling you about that drained the water from the front of the house back down the hill, towards the magnolia tree where the deck settled down. And I didn’t tell you this, but eventually we ran into some guys that actually knew how to make that original mortar up, and we had every one of our piers remortared. And we had the sidewalk completely fixed and all these sides on it because then we realized how important it was, because the water did go under my sister’s house because she didn’t have that sidewalk with sides on it. So as they were picking up all this stuff, bit by bit, and raking and picking up, and picking up and moving—see these piles? Well, these are not the ones that were in front of our house, but that’s what it looked like. Directly
across the street from us, they just would just keep piling it up there, and the FEMA trucks would come and get it, and take it to this place where the FEMA trucks dumped it, and then it was ground up and hauled off somewhere else in the world and used as mulch, probably. And it had every kind of sickness and disease in the world that you can think of in it, you know, from staph to—I can’t even tell you—cholera. But this is my beautiful, little oak tree that was surrounded by—this is a baby oak that’s about thirty-five years old surrounded by azaleas that Mr. Clifford planted for me; he was in his nineties when he did that. He brought them from his yard and planted them in my yard. And the debris is just, I mean it’s just, oh, it’s just killed everything, see. This is one of our great nighttime dinner parties and instead of burning the—they were burning little candles but also, must have like a big flounder lantern over here lighting us up. This is my sister, Harriet, her husband, Bill; Bill’s sister, Bill’s brother, I mean. This would be Will; this would be Colonel Danley, my brother-in-law. This would be the old coot, Dr. David Dugger; see, he’s got the beard. That’s why they call him an old coot. My niece, Page; my nephew, not Freddie, not Finley, one of the Meyers, I’m thinking. There’s my ugly, fat face there; there’s my son, Patrick’s head; and I don’t see Marie. She’s in there somewhere, maybe taking the picture. OK, that’s some of the debris that, you know, as it looked across the street from us, all along that, you know, those lots that had been built on.

Lange: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: This is the only destruction to Marie’s house in New Orleans, in Metairie; the brick wall fell down. That’s it. No water came inside. It’s pretty high land out there. But she has on her LSU Tiger ears right there; she’s being funny. But she packed up her stuff and got out of there because there’s just no infrastructure any more. It’s not safe; it’s horrible. People are being murdered now. Twenty-four people have been murdered since January 1. That’s what it used to look like from the Old Place with Puppy; see my son’s black and white Springer Spaniel?

Lange and Ronkainen: Um-hm.

Gautier-Dugger: All the way over to our yard. Now, this is my friend, Betsy Schultz that came out. Listen, I hadn’t seen her in years. Somehow she got through to me on my brother-in-law, Danley’s, cell phone because he’s a colonel in the Army, and it was still working. We didn’t have any way of communicating, no towers for our cell phone, no way to text message, no way to e-mail. The only thing we had was this little crank-up radio, and it has a television, which we could also run off of our generator. And these radio stations out of New Orleans teamed up with the radio stations on the Gulf Coast, and these men never went to sleep. They just constantly kept telling you what was happening, “Call us in and let us know what it’s like where you are.” Well! We couldn’t call. We couldn’t get in touch with anybody, but we could hear what was going on. So it was our contact with the world with these little radios. There’s my paddle, see? You never want to be up the creek without one. (laughter) It floated up. So Betsy came out bearing gifts of food and drink and bringing new life with her. This rug came up in the storm; we cleaned it and put it on our deck. Do you like it? (laughter)
Ronkainen: Yes.

Lange: Yeah.

Gautier-Dugger: She brought her dog with her, so Puppy had a friend. And she cooked; I cleaned, and we waited on the office staff like they were queens, over at David’s office, which was twenty feet away from the back door where he was trying to see patients. And basically for months I cooked, and so I gained all this weight and drank all this wine and gained all this weight back that I had just lost because there’s no time to exercise/exercise, but you never stop working. You’ll talk to anybody, and they’ll all tell you, “All we do is work. We work at work, and then we go home, and we work because we’ve got to fix it at home. And it’s just what we’ll do for the rest of our lives—work, work, work.” And this is the man that owns the house that we told him not to buy it, that it would flood, and it did, and so then now he’s built this house up on stilts, and it’s even uglier than before, because we have to look at it. And any place else in the country they would’ve never let that happen, and this would’ve been a historic park, and then we would’ve had a whole historic district. But instead what they’ve done is they—it’s called a non-contributing area to a historic district—and basically what they did was they cut the heart out of the whole historic district.

Lange: Why do you think that was allowed in Mississippi?

Gautier-Dugger: Well, it was allowed in Gautier because of a political payback that somebody needed to do, the mayor needed to do. He needed to get his son out of jail, and pass go, and pay a hundred, you know. I’m not going to get into the whole story, but, really, it was a political payback deal because the police chief of Pascagoula and one of the city council members, who is now the mayor of Pascagoula, were allowed to buy this and build spec homes over here because, “They were going to beautify Gautier. You know, raw land is so ugly.” Don’t get me going. I don’t want to be negative. OK. One day my great FEMA friends got the Navy CBs [construction battalion or Seabees] who came down—actually, they were stationed in Seattle on the Stennis, which is an aircraft carrier, and Stennis was a Mississippi senator so it was named for him. So they brought these guys, who were not being paid, down from the Stennis to Stennis Space Center down near Pass Christian, and one day they came down to our yard, and they pulled off this entire porch roof and columns in about an hour (laughter) and took it all away. And then my brother sanded the paint off the windowsills, and the next these people came and plopped on this cute, little glassed-in porch on the front, you know, room. So we had a glassed-in waiting room. And then the next weekend it turned cold because it took to, like, November 1 to get that glassed-in room. But that’s a very short time when you’re considering. But our patients were sitting out here on this porch with homemade fans that they could make with art supplies, little water bottles, you know, toys and games for the children that my daughter-in-law, stepdaughter from California was mailing out with her friends, clothing they could go through, and diapers and things that were sent to us. And then they went inside this cute, little building and got to see the doctor. And that’s David, and he went white-haired overnight. He really did. He became an old man overnight. He doesn’t really look as old as he does there. I think he got some more color back in
his hair. (laughter) And that’s not the whole story, but that’s just part of it because we were trucking along for about a year and a half, seeing all these patients who we thought weren’t going to ever come back to us, but they come from Pensacola to New Orleans from Hattiesburg to the Coast because he’s a pediatrician with a subspecialty in behavior and development. And there were two; the other doctor retired, so now it’s just he. So I look upon the fire as sort of a godsend because we would never have moved from that building, you know. We’d still be giving pink slips to our patients and telling them to, “Go find another doctor, we don’t have room; we don’t have room for you. We can only see the ADD children, the behavior problems, the developmental people; we can’t see the little, sick children and the little newborns, and you need to just go find a doctor.” Well, Dr. Fuhr(?) died leaving his business in Ocean Springs, and our building burned, and fortunately I did not go with the space that the hospital had for us to use, which was horrible, and very bureaucratically tied in, you know. And so we went with Dr. Fuhr’s building, and it only took us two weeks to start seeing patients in the barn, and it only took us two weeks to start seeing patients in Dr. Fuhr’s building, and it’s huge, and we don’t have to turn away anybody. As a matter of fact, we’ll probably have to get another nurse practitioner. But you know, whenever a door closes, two windows open; I firmly believe that. And I don’t really know why John David is gone, except for his own benefit. He’s happy now. He went to peace. He went to a place of peace and happiness. It just left us unhappy, you know, but he was so emotionally miserable from dealing with all the pain he had dealt with his whole life, from being bipolar, from being sensitive, and from being brilliant, and by caring about, from caring about the earth. And things like what the city of Gautier has done, those things hurt him badly, and they hurt me just as much, and I’ve just buried myself. We had a historic commission going, and the city refused to allow it to be aligned with the State Historic Commission, so really basically it’s a historic committee. You know, it doesn’t have any teeth in it. So if we had had a historic commission, they could’ve blocked something like that, those ugly houses being put down there. Not that they’re blocking my view; I’m not going to be here much longer. It would’ve been so beautiful to have a historic park there that could’ve gone along with all those old homes, and then you could’ve had a hub of the city. They have made the hub of the city the mall that was built in the [19]70s. That’s Gautier, the mall. So you’re about to fall asleep, you need coffee.

**Ronkainen:** No, I’m not.

**Gautier-Dugger:** Yes, you do; you need some coffee.

**Lange:** Like, great, OK.

**Gautier-Dugger:** I don’t know, when I—I said a few things when you didn’t have it turned on that I don’t know if—

**Ronkainen:** Oh, you have to tell us the legend of the Singing River.

**Gautier-Dugger:** OK, and then that’s it, right?
Lange and Ronkainen: OK.

Gautier-Dugger: OK, but did I—you know the things that we discussed before you turned it back on? Did we cover those things, mostly?

Ronkainen: A lot of stuff that you didn’t want to be covered haven’t been covered.

Gautier-Dugger: Well, good, OK, good, because, I mean, I’ve told you enough negativity. I don’t want to get into it as badly as I could. I don’t want to seem like, you know, it’s killed my heart and soul, but it really has. Not just the hurricane, but living in Gautier. And now that my beautiful fairyland is not a beautiful fairyland anymore, I really don’t want to—I don’t even care if I’m there anymore. And my parents aren’t alive, and my fairyland’s not there, and, except for David being here to take care of patients, I just don’t care anymore. I don’t even care. And there was nobody in the world that cared as much as I did, you know, and it’s from these horrible, mean, negative people that are not from there, and if they are from there, they don’t even get the whole picture because they’re not educated in the least, you know. And it’s just, it’s just all about bulldozing it down and bringing in red fill dirt and building the next little strip mall, you know. And what’s going to end up happening all over the whole Gulf Coast is that, especially in a little town like Gautier, which was falling apart before the hurricane, and now everybody’s either been fired or left, and there’s just a few people up there, and so now is the perfect time for all these big, greedy companies to come in and buy up property and start putting up the high-rises, and you know, probably a casino will come in and buy up the Old Place, and then we’ll have to move, too, you know. (laughter) I don’t know; my brothers, there are six of them and three girls, so they outnumber us, and they would sell to a casino. I think they would. Not my brother, Quin, who’s done all the work, but the rest of them would sell. So all these azaleas are gone. But Aunt Josie Gautier, I keep talking about her a lot, and really, when I was growing up, she was sort of like “Nosy Josie” because the grandmother that—my grandmother just, well, she was probably perturbed with her a whole lot because she was always getting so much off of my grandfather, you know, like getting the house painted, or you know, doing all these repairs and things that she couldn’t get done. And my grandfather, Hermes Gautier—to back up and not talk about Singing River just yet—was the one Gautier that came from Fernando that probably accomplished the most and was known the most, and just really did more with his life than almost anybody else. Now I might be wrong, and I can go down the list, and I am the historian, and I could rattle off some big, important names, and people that think that they’re really important. But Hermes was the youngest boy of nine children, and he was little bitty; he was very short, and they called him “Rabbit” because he would run really fast. And they played—everybody would come to the big empty field at the Old Place to play baseball. And he went to college in New Orleans at Soule and got a business background, and took over a couple of ice plants. Now, at that time, ice plants also sold coal in the winter for heat and cooking. So ice plants were integral to running the seafood industry and keeping your food cool. When he was a little, bitty boy he would take his goat cart across the railroad; he had it rigged up where he could pull the cart, or something, you know, on the railroad tracks to Pascagoula, and he would buy ice and put it in sawdust because,
of course, his father had the sawmill. So he would put the ice in the sawdust, bring it back to Gautier, and he would go around and sell ice. So he was a very industrious little kid. And so he bought ice plants and did very well. And during the First World War, he and my grandmother were some of the only people around who didn’t realize that there was a problem, you know. They had a car; they had wheels on the car. They had gas to buy, and they had a big house and servants. And everything was cool for them. And then my father was born in 1920, but they lost three children and had my father, and ten years later my Uncle John. During the Second World War they still had everything, including tires on their cars and, you know, everything you’d need. But as my father tells it, there was a certain period of time there in the Depression when they really didn’t have a lot, but nobody realized, in Pascagoula, that they didn’t have a lot because you didn’t have to wear many clothes; it never got really cold, you know. If you had a sweater, you did fine. And in the summer they didn’t wear shoes, probably. And he describes the neighborhood that had a lot of relatives in it over in Pascagoula as, you know, people just come out into the middle of what we call “the lot” which is this big, beautiful area between all the houses. All the houses kind of backed up to this big lot. And they would bring the piano outside, crank up the piano, start playing the piano, and start boiling crabs and shrimp and frying fish. And that was the way he described his summers, you know. Sailing, he always had a sailboat. He was privileged. He was privileged. But the kids he grew up with didn’t know he was privileged, and he didn’t know he was privileged. He thought everybody was privileged because everybody had plenty to eat, all the vegetables and fruit they could grow, all the seafood they could eat, and everybody was just basically happy. And black people lived right along with the white people in the same neighborhoods. You know, you had a neighborhood of black people and a neighborhood of white people, and it was like that everywhere, New Orleans, too. And those people that were the African-American families, they depended on those white people for their jobs. And the white people depended on those black people for all their help, and they weren’t looked down upon or as slaves, and all their kids played with all the white kids. They all played ball together, and fished together, and climbed trees together, and went to separate schools. But there was a camaraderie there that there still is, you know, even in my neighborhood in Gautier. But we’re working on our fifth generation of Bilbos, who’s now Bilbo Washington, Hanshaw, you know, these people that are all related over there; they started off working in the sawmill, too. The Gautier family never had slaves. So there was just this egalitarian attitude that the Gautiers had, and I think it came from Fernando coming from France after the Reign of Terror, and he just didn’t want to have anything to do with being an aristocrat or the Catholic church. You know, it’s just like, “Don’t talk to me about it; don’t bring it up. I don’t want it.” You know. He probably lost his entire family and got out all by himself, somehow, because at age sixty-five he started all over again in Boston. He got there on a ship, married a fourteen-year-old girl who—her name was Laura Louviet(?). She was a French-Canadian in the Boston area, and she was fourteen. And see, probably she had lost all her family. So you don’t just grab up a girl and take her; you marry her, you know, if she doesn’t have a family. You become her guardian, so to speak, and you marry her. And so there was always this egalitarian attitude from the Gautier side of the family; whereas my mother’s side of the family, you had this very haughty,
aristocratic, you’re-better-than-everybody-else, you-can’t-marry-those-people, you-
can’t-play-with-those-people attitude. Not about blacks, but about whites. Whites I
couldn’t go to play with, have over to my house, or spend the night with, you know. I
remember my father only telling me that about one little girl in particular because her
father had gone to jail, not because she was low class or anything, you know. But,
mm-mm, those Louisiana French Creoles were, and still are, very proper. OK, well,
in this dichotomy of my mother’s family and my father’s family, that’s really a
dichotomy, you know, so I came out somewhere in between. Very well educated,
made my debut, went to finishing schools and high schools in New Orleans, went to
college, got my master’s degree, my father paid for my whole education, spent my
whole year of 1969 in Europe, went to Mexico and studied painting. I was privileged.
I got a great education out of it. Really wonderful education, and that’s really the
most wonderful thing that a parent can give you besides your good healthy genes. So
my Grandmother Hattie came from very poor Irish people up in New Hebron. And
when I say very poor, they lost everything because of the Depression. So when her
sister moved down here and married Henry Gautier—her name was Archie—soon
after Hattie came down and married Hermes Gautier, (Her-meez) Gautier. They
called him Hoi-miss. And so she immediately started going for all the good stuff in
life, the beautiful house, the beautiful antiques. She liked pretty things, and she
garnered them to herself, and then she shared them with the world. She put them in
this house over in Gautier that they purchased, and she opened it up for parties and
receptions, and anybody that wanted to have a wedding there or party—and then
eventually in the [19]50s, she opened it up for tourists. But because of this she was—
OK, she was the—what on earth do they call it? The democratic, the chief democratic
female in Mississippi—what would you call that position? Democratic chairwoman
for the State of Mississippi. She was political; she started the Garden Club. She did
this; she started that; she did that. She was a do-gooder, and she did a lot, OK, and so
was my grandfather. And my grandfather started the chamber of commerce on the
Gulf Coast; he went up and personally talked Robert Ingalls into coming to
Pascagoula to open a shipyard here. He was a senator at one time, a representative in
another time, president of the board of supervisors; he just did stuff, you know. He
just didn’t sit around; he made stuff happen. But it was so long ago that people of
today don’t know who he is or anything; it doesn’t matter really. You die. As my
father said, “You just die, and they forget about you so, so what?” But he made a
mark, and in this process Grandmother Hattie had this house to show, and so she made
up all these wonderful stories about the Gautiers, you know. She had all this lore
about Fernando and where he came from and how he grew up and the girl that jilted
him in New Orleans, and so he went to the Gulf Coast and married this beautiful
Indian princess. Well, everybody’s an Indian princess. You know that, right? You’re
never just part Indian; you’re an Indian princess. OK. Well, she wasn’t even a quarter
Indian because as it turned out, after I started studying genealogy, it was probably her
great- or great-great-grandmother who was Graveline, and this Choctaw woman’s
child. Anyway, she did have—she was a Fayard, and she did have some Ryan(?). So
she, being a Fayard and Ryan, did have some Native American Choctaw blood in her,
and she looks just like an Indian; I have her photograph. I have the original
photograph that was taken of Fernando with his big, long, white beard and his long,
thin nose and his white, white hair and his blue, blue eyes when he was probably in his sixties, and his wife when she was probably in her fifties or sixties. And so, you know, they’re old in these pictures. But I have tons of wonderful photographs and lots of history, and a lot of it was in that fire, and I just don’t even want to go through that closet. It can be cleaned, and they’ll be restored, but it won’t be the same. Anyway, back to the story. So at the same time that Hattie was setting up the Old Place as the *Old Place*, the Gautier family home, which it was, and Archie was over there with Singing River Originals making all this *wonderful* pottery, which by the way has made it into the museums and is a very attractive art pottery. And she got together with this other lady from Pascagoula named Bessie Seely(?), and they wrote the *official* version of the Singing River. OK. And I will tell you the *official* version according to Josie Gautier and Bessie Seely. OK? But Charles Guyeret(?) also told a version of it in his French history of the settlement of the Gulf Coast, and there were several other versions. And so the natives did have this story. Now, whether it sounded like the Lady of the Lake, the way the French people told about it, you know. The Lady comes up out of the river, and then she goes back down into the river and, you know, all this other, [*Le*] *Morte d’Arthur*, the chivalric stories of Arthur. And, you know, the French stories sound like that. Well, here’s the official version.

Anola(?) was this young, *beautiful* princess from Pascagoula, the peace-loving tribe. It means bread eaters, you know, Pascagoula, and they would come down from what is now Martin’s Bluff where they stayed during the hurricane season, and they would only come down to the Coast, you know, for their powwows and their parties and to eat their shrimp and their crab and their oysters, because we have all those shell heaps. And, but they would go back up a little bit north of the Coast to get away from the hurricanes. You have to go at least ten miles north to get away from them; then the tornados get you, you know, but. So we don’t know *exactly* where their village was, but according to Aunt Josie it was right there across from the Old Place, right there on that bluff, right there in Gautier. Now, the people in Pascagoula, they all say that it was over here on this branch of the Pascagoula River. It depends upon where you heard the river sing. Well, Anola was from Pascagoula and Altoma(?) was from Biloxi, and everybody knows Pascagoula and Biloxi don’t get along, still to this day. And Altoma was a Biloxi Indian chief’s son; of course he had to be an Indian chief, and of course she has to be a princess, right? So that made them very important. And he was from the warlike Biloxi tribe. They were just bloodthirsty, bad guys. Of course, these are the people that greeted Iberville and, you know, traded food with him and taught them how to live here, right? These were the Biloxi tribe. Now, the Biloxi, by the way, as a sideline, they were chased off the Gulf Coast a long time ago. Andy Jackson probably, Andrew Jackson, the great Andrew Jackson, probably had a lot to do with that. So there are very few, if any, descendants of the Biloxi tribe or the Pascagoula. They left a long time ago and went to west Louisiana. Probably got caught up in that Trail of Tears thing, too, you know, as they all left and went out to Oklahoma and were put on Indian reservations. But these two, I don’t know how they met each other, maybe at one of these big powwows where they ate crabs and oysters and fish like the Gautiers did, you know, during the Depression, but they met each other, and they fell in love. And what was there to do? What was there to do? Altoma just had to come over here to Pascagoula and shack up with his lovely Indian
princess and her family, with her family. I mean the sweet, loving, bread-eating Pascagoula Tribe. Well, of course, when Altoma’s family found out that he had come over here and married the Indian princess of the Pascagoula Tribe, they put on their war paint, and they headed out in their canoes. And I don’t know how they got here, just exactly, but probably by the Bay. OK. There are ways you could get here, as did Fernando, by coming down all the tributaries of the Tchoutacabouffa River, and so forth, down to Pascagoula. OK, but—and they probably knew all those things. But they got here, and there were very few, for some reason, illness, wars with the Biloxi, there were very few warriors left, warrior braves of the Pascagoula Tribe. They were mostly older people and children and defenseless people. So what were they to do? What could they do when they found out that the Biloxi Tribe was coming to annihilate them all and take Altoma back. They all went to the river holding hands, walked out into the river singing, and drowned themselves. And that’s why the river sings. And on a very still night when the wind is north, and there’s no shipyard, and Katrina’s just come, and there’s not a sound anywhere, if you go to certain spots along the edge of the Singing River and the Pascagoula River, you hear this low, moaning sound, and that’s why the river sings because it’s the Indians. They’re still humming. They hum. Now, when I was a little, bitty girl, I remember going across the Old Highway 90 Bridge in Pascagoula, and they stopped the car. It was my grandmother’s old, blue Dodge. I remember the windows were all rolled down. You know, you could stand up in these cars; they were so tall. And it was hot, so the windows were down, and that’s how we heard it. We stopped the car, and I heard the river sing, but I was on the Pascagoula River. And my father heard it sing very near the outlet that emptied into Lake Yazoo where his house is on the inner harbor. My father ended up buying his parents’ house, which was a eighteen—well, it was a pre-Civil-War house that was restored several times, including by my parents in the 1970s, but it’s down near the beach, but it did not—it flooded, but it didn’t ruin it. It can be fixed. But very near his house, just about where they put the shipyard, was a place that he could go and hear the river sing, and he took my mother in his sailboat to go hear the river sing. So they heard the river sing, but ever since the shipyard got all cranked up and they started doing a lot of dredging and all this industry has come here, nobody’s ever heard it sing. If anybody tells you they’ve heard it sing since the 1950s, they’re liars. It’s just—you don’t hear it sing any more. And it’s been investigated, scientifically and otherwise, Ripley’s Believe It Or Not, even, investigated it, and they don’t know why. But here’s a funny thing. In the [19]50s, Aunt Archie, who brought back, with my Grandmother Hattie, the De La Pointe House that they call the Spanish Fort—it’s the oldest building east of the Mississippi River, right here in Pascagoula. And they used to have this big Indian pageant there every spring, and we’d all put on our makeup and our costumes, and the Eagle Scouts would dance almost naked. Then they had this singer named, her name was Princess White Cloud, and she wore white leathers just like a Plains Indian. These people probably wore palmetto skirts, dried, or, I don’t know, they may have used moss, for all I know, but they did not wear white leathers. OK. And she would sing with this guy, and his name was Buddy Ehrlich, and they would sing their song, that they sang to each other, was “When I’m Calling You” that Nelson Eddie and Germaine, or something, MacDonald used to sing in this song from the 1940s movies, you know. So the way they did this big Indian Pageant,
it was just so Cecil B. DeMille, you know. It wasn’t your real Indian pageant, of course. But it was a lot of fun, but nobody’s had an Indian Pageant in a long time in Pascagoula. But Ocean Springs has a landing of d’Iberville. They call him d’Ilberville (pronounced dee-iberville), not d’Ilberville (pronounced dee-ber-viya) but d’Ilberville (pronounced dee-iberville). They have a landing, a party and reenactment, or they used to before the hurricane. I don’t think they’re still doing it in Ocean Springs because the very first fort was, instead of the landing party, which came up the river and saw the bluff of the Old Place and went back and reported it to d’Ilberville—this goes way back to that story we started a long time ago. It was too shallow to get the big ships in there. So instead of settling at the Old Place, they went further east, and they found that inlet where Ocean Springs is, and they put their port in Ocean Springs, but Biloxi wants to claim it. OK, just like Mobile and New Orleans are always going on about who started Mardi Gras, you know, that kind of thing, which we just had yesterday. So there’s a lot of lore. You asked that in your questions. Yes, we celebrate everything. There’s a certain joie de vivre that exists here because we’re French. And we were Spanish for a while, too, you know, and Catholic. And we can drink (laughter), you know. They just go wild on St. Patrick’s Day around here and have parades. And Christmas has gotten so commercialized; I can’t tell you what other people do. It’s just so repulsive, but you know, they start it before—they start after Halloween and go all the way. It’s ridiculous but—

Ronkainen: It’s the same up in Canada.

Gautier-Dugger: Um-hm. Mardi Gras is definitely something we do here on the Coast, and always have, and as a matter of fact, the very day that d’Ilberville set foot on soil here was on Mardi Gras Day, so he named the bayou, Bayou Mardi Gras, the Mardi Gras Bayou.

Lange: I’m just going to stop the tape there. (brief interruption)

Gautier-Dugger: To answer your question. In reference to where my kids were during the storm, as I told you, one was in ashes in the back room, thank God, and the other two, Marie was helping us during the storm because she came from New Orleans. And she found that the best way to get out of town was to wait till like ten o’clock at night, and when she came, there was not a car on the road, and it was just like, zip, straight over here. But it’s a two-and-a-half-hour, hour-and-a-half-hour drive, maybe, to two-hour drive from Metairie. She couldn’t go back to New Orleans and teach because there weren’t any schools left where she had been doing English as a second language, and she’d been tutoring for Sylvan Learning Centers, and all they wanted her to do was come back and clean mud, and she could do that for us, you know. So she stayed here to help us start our business back up, and she literally painted the walls of that building that burned on the inside. Then Patrick, who was desperate to get in touch with us, and we were desperate to get in touch with him, and neither one of us could reach each other because there was just no way to get any word out. I mean we could’ve sent smoke signals or something, you know. But he had to evacuate Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge by going to Dallas, Texas, because all the roads were turned around one way out of Louisiana, you know. And
so he had to go with his friend to Texas, and they were at her father’s apartment, and he does intelligence for the Army. So he had all this intelligence equipment there, you know, all these PCs [personal computers] with all this stuff on them. And so several days after the storm, Patrick found out that we were alive by pulling up our site, and he could see our house. He could see the house, all that debris. He said, “What’s that blue thing out there in the yard? What’s that? What’s this?” You know, because eventually he did get a phone call through to us. But he knew we were alive, but we didn’t know where he was, and we didn’t know that he knew we were alive. And another thing about communication, a cousin of mine is the one that got through to James Lee. James Lee told the cousin we were OK. The cousin up in—she works for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]; she put up a Web site or something, saying that we were all OK, all the Gautiers were OK, everybody, all the Quins, everybody down there was OK. Then my friend, Betsy Schultz, out in Dallas—no, she moved. She’s in Austin, Texas; she was at Sullins College with me, you know, a million years ago. She, somehow, Googled me, got me through this site that my cousin in Washington, in Arlington had put us up on, and that’s how Betsy got with us. It was strange the people that actually got something through or could. But we, finally, when my brother-in-law finally got this telephone through the Army, we were able to get some word out. The problem is that they just didn’t have any cell towers that were high enough and strong enough. And the ludicrousness of the radio saying, “Just e-mail us your so-and-so, and we’ll come get you,” like, (laughter) yeah, like we have electricity, like we have cable service. That was the last thing to come up was cable. When we started our office back up, we had to use DSL [digital subscriber line] line, not cable. Eventually we went back to cable. OK. So that’s my kids. I just had to let you know.

(end of interview)