Biography

Born on January 29, 1950, Bruce Grimes grew up in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Although he lived out of the South for twenty-five years, he moved back to the same street on which he grew up in Pascagoula and was living there during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Mr. Grimes attended Pascagoula High School; he earned both an MS in civil engineering and an MBA from Tulane University. He has worked as a civil engineer, in construction management, and as a self-employed dry cleaner. He is married to Linda, and they have two children, Joseph Bruce Grimes, and Hallie Louise Grimes. Mr. Grimes enjoys outdoor recreation, reading, and cooking. At the time of this interview, he was building a house in Pascagoula, on the site where his home had stood prior to Hurricane Katrina, at a higher elevation.
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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 Bruce Grimes and is taking place on February 22, 2007, at 1:45 pm in Pascagoula, Mississippi, at St. John’s Episcopal Church. The interviewers are Kelsey Lange and Olivia Ronkainen. First, I’d like to thank you, Bruce, for taking the time to talk with us today. And I’d like to get some background information about you, which is usually what we do for our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you for the record, could you please state your name?

Grimes: Bruce Grimes.

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

Grimes: B-R-U-C-E, G-R-I-M-E-S.

Lange: When and where were you born?

Grimes: I was born in Pascagoula, Mississippi, on January 29, 1950.

Ronkainen: And what was your father’s name?

Grimes: He only had initials for names, J.R. He was supposed to be James Rufus Grimes, but the doctor was a friend of my grandfather’s and was very lazy, I suppose, and just put J.R. Grimes Jr. instead of James Rufus Grimes Jr. (laughter)

Lange: And what was your mother’s maiden name?

Grimes: Thompson(?).

Ronkainen: So where did you grow up?
Grimes: Well, today I live at 911 Pascagoula Street. As a child I lived at—I forget the address, but the other end of Pascagoula Street. So I’ve only moved, you know—well, I say that. I left the South for twenty-five years, but on my return, I live on the opposite end of the same street that I grew up on.

Ronkainen: So from now, how long have you lived on the Gulf Coast?

Grimes: I’ve been back here fifteen and a half years.

Lange: And how many generations in your family have lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Grimes: Both sets of my—no, no. My mother’s parents moved here with their three children to work at the shipyard, the large shipyard here during early World War II. And my father came down individually; so really, I mean, as far as living here for any time period, just my mother and my father, and me being the second generation.

Ronkainen: Could you describe a bit about your attachment to this region, what it means to you?

Grimes: Well, you know, when you grow up in a town, that’s all you know. So you always think that the grass is greener on the other side, and that things just must be better somewhere else. There must be more to do, more to see, and certainly that’s the way I felt here when I finished high school in 1968. Went to school in New Orleans, lived in various places, but it didn’t take long to realize what a good place this small town in Mississippi was to grow up and therefore also to raise children. So the good things about it were the typical small-town relationships, people knowing one another and caring for one another. Friends of parents also acting as additional disciplinary authority figures over children. You know, everybody helped raise everybody else’s children. School systems were, you know, good to adequate, and the outdoors available here was a tremendous draw for me. My brother and I stayed on the river, in boats, on the beach, and swimming, skiing, fishing, floundering all the time. So those would be the main parts.

Lange: So you’ve told us where your neighborhood is. Do you think you could just describe your neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina?

Grimes: Well, my neighborhood, both growing up and where I presently live, you know, basically middle-class, upper-middle-class houses. Nice houses, well kept, you know, a lot of personal pride in where they lived and how they lived. Lawns kept up well; houses painted. Where I live now is on the water, so there’s quite a number of boat slips and boats docked. And most people take good care of those, too. Quiet, mixed neighborhood, you know, some elderly people, other young families with young children. It’s a very—mixed, that’s a good description, and most everyone pleasant, getting along, and caring for each other, helping each other out, you know, just day to day.
**Lange:** So did you stay in your home during Hurricane Katrina?

**Grimes:** I have chosen always to stay for hurricanes, I suppose anywhere that I’ve lived, for the purpose mainly of protecting property, both during a storm and after a storm. I mean, as I’m sure you’re hearing from the stories here, the tidal surge of Katrina is unrivaled by any other storm, any other time. So typically, the danger has only been from roof damage or window damage and therefore isolated parts of a house, and the ability to be there and respond to saving your stuff from getting wet has always been the driving force for me choosing to stay.

**Ronkainen:** OK. So do you want to start from the beginning, maybe, how you started getting prepared for the hurricane when you heard it was coming? Just walk us through it.

**Grimes:** Well, typically, in a typical year, you had probably two or three hurricane warnings that we receive here on average; actually this past year there was none. Not a single time was there even close to being a hurricane. So I just from observation have seen very few windows blown out in storms that I’ve experienced. Many people go to this tremendous trouble to put covers on all their windows, and it’s a lot of work, so much work that sometimes people put them up, and they leave them up for the entire hurricane season. So they live in semidarkness in their house even during daytime because they keep their windows done up. Well, I have never subscribed to that. So I do very little preparation other than bring in things that would blow around, lawn furniture, ladders, dog dishes, things of this sort, and mow the grass because the hardest thing, typically, about posthurricane is cleaning up all the debris in your yard, all the debris blown down from trees. And if your yard’s been recently cut, then it’s much easier to clean up than had it not been cut. So pretty much that was my preparation, and to have my boat pulled out of the water so it was on a trailer, and I didn’t have to worry about tidal surge and having to adjust the lines.

**Lange:** Could you maybe describe your experience during the hurricane?

**Grimes:** Well, let me back up a few hours before that.

**Ronkainen:** Just one question: how far away from the water do you live?

**Grimes:** My house is probably seventy, seventy-five feet from the edge of the water. But not on the Mississippi Sound and beachfront, if you want to describe it that way. It’s actually on a lake that comes in from the mouth of the river, and there are approximately twelve to fifteen houses that front onto this lake. But, yeah, I mean, it’s right at the mouth of the river and therefore on the Mississippi Sound, but not subject to rough seas as it would be on Beach Boulevard here in town. But typically, you know, when a storm’s coming, most of our neighborhood evacuates, and I like to try to walk around the neighborhood and see who’s there. This time I don’t know why I didn’t; I ended up not having enough time to do that before dark, but my immediate
neighbor—or actually he lives across this body of water from me, who had to destroy his house after the last hurricane, Hurricane Georges, and rebuild and has built very high, higher than anybody else in the neighborhood—he came over; we had dinner together. My wife and daughter were evacuated, only about an hour and a half north, and as we came back outside that evening, about ten o’clock, yet another neighbor drove by who is in charge of all maintenance of the facilities for the shipyard. Called up their private weather forecaster in Tampa, and on the speakerphone, this guy who is a well-respected forecaster and has typically been more accurate than our local weather forecasters or the Weather Channel, he says, “Gosh, y’all are lucky, again. This storm is going to Grand Isle”—which is west of New Orleans—“and on up, swinging up through the middle of Mississippi. Y’all will probably get Category One, maybe Category Two type storm.” “All right. Good.” So all the boats in the harbor are all strung out; everything looks safe. So this friend and I, we said, “Well, heck, let’s just go to bed. We’ll get up in the morning. It’ll be a little windy. We’ll fool around with the boats and make sure everything’s safe.” So that’s how I went to bed at ten, ten thirty. Well, at 4:30, for some reason this same friend calls me, wakes me up. He said, “Oh, I thought I saw a light on.” I said, “No, you didn’t see a light on (laughter) in here.” So I walked down to the other end of my house; my bedroom is the farthest room from the water. I walked down, looked out, saw the water was a bit high, but you know, it didn’t appear to be any major—no different than other storms. And I just laid back in a recliner, went back to sleep. Woke up, it was daylight; it didn’t sound too windy. Things seemed pretty good. I sat up, and I see out the door and window, a lot of glass on that end of the house, that the water was higher than it had ever been in my neighborhood, just an inch or two from coming into my house. So I immediately jump up. I had one room—the room I was in on that end of the house is probably one foot lower than the rest of the house. And I looked; I said, “Well, I’ll just move all this room up to the next level of the house.” Most of it’s big, heavy furniture, big leather couches, big table, chairs. So wake up; started running, moving, shifting things and couldn’t move everything because some things were just too heavy for one person. Well, by the time I’m done with that, I look back at the door, and the water is about two feet high outside. So I mean I’m looking through this glass door; the water is much higher than the bottom of the door. I’m like, “Oh, well.” You know, even higher than the rest of the house. So I’m going, “I don’t know how long this door is going to hold, but whenever something breaks, the glass, the door, whatever, the water’s going to go all the way to the other end of the house.” So I started working my way through the house, picking up things off the floor, things that were in direct contact with the floor, rugs, things of this sort, and all of it heavy stuff. I mean, this was, like, the hardest work I’ve done in a long time. So at some point there, before I was able to really get everything up off the floor, the door did break open at the latch. So one door swings open; then the water comes in and goes all the way to the other end of the house. And pretty much for the next—I’m not sure on the time because I didn’t have a watch on; the electricity was off. I didn’t know, but from having asked other people, I think I probably spent somewhere between four and five hours continually moving stuff higher and higher because the water just kept coming and coming higher and higher, not so much—I think the first hour was probably the
greatest rise in the water elevation, but it just kept coming higher and higher until sometime after eleven o’clock.

Lange: Did you have any thought to like leave at that point?

Grimes: No. I mean, leaving would have required swimming, and I was fortunate to have in my house—I have a house, but I also have a two-car garage with an apartment above it. So I always figured that I would be able to go up into the apartment because it was much higher than the house. So no, I didn’t. You know, I’m sure everyone, like me, kept thinking, “It just can’t go any higher than this. Can’t go any higher.” It just kept coming higher and higher. So finally when it’s about chest deep in the higher part of my house, I said, “Well, that’s it. I can’t do anything else.” I just couldn’t move around very well. All the furniture—

Ronkainen: This was the second floor?

Grimes: Well, no. As I said, one room on my house on the north end, nearest the water, was at elevation eleven [feet]. The rest of the house was elevation twelve; so it was just that one foot difference. But I had vacated that lower room long before, but it had become very difficult to move around the house because it was like furniture soup. I’d go in my daughter’s bedroom, and there would be dining room furniture in my daughter’s bedroom. And I don’t know just why, because there were only two places open in my house that the water was coming in. Many houses—I’m sure you’ll hear other stories that it just washed all the windows and doors out, and the water basically just flushed through the house and took everything out with it. But in my house, everything just raised up, and when the water went down, it just came back wherever it happened to be sitting at the time. I had one big window section, probably six by eight, big window section that fell into my house, late in the storm, but otherwise, I didn’t have that flushing action. So most of my stuff stayed in the house rather than (laughter) three or four blocks away, which is, I think, where most people’s possessions washed to.

Lange: So as the water was rising, you just waited in the house until it subsided?

Grimes: No. As I said, my house had eleven-foot ceilings, and I had a lot of places where I could, that were maybe eight or nine feet high that I could move things to. So as the water kept rising, I would move things for the second or third time. Maybe the first time I put them on the kitchen counter, and later on it was obvious that that was going to be submerged. Then I would move it to the top of the cabinets. All the art work off the walls, all framed family photos, insurance files, inventory files, which, of course, were crucial, as I knew they would be by that time. Business files, personal files, big box of family photos, jewelry, shoes; I just sort of tried to prioritize as the day went on, what to save and what to forget about. Furniture was just obvious, nothing to do with it. I mean, I could have attempted to drag it up the attic stairs, but it was all too fast, or it seemed to be, to do that. I would occasionally walk out on my porch, till the water got too deep. I’d walk out on my porch, look across and wave to
my neighbor across the way. I don’t think he ever saw me. (laughter) And sometimes I’d just look out the window; I’d just see this river of water rushing to the north, just ugly, brown, not waves but pretty fast current. I mean, as velocity went, it was surprisingly fast.

Lange: Were you scared?

Grimes: I don’t remember ever being afraid for my life. I made a conscious effort throughout not to hurt myself because I knew, had I hurt myself, there would have been no—it would have been hours before any help could be arranged. But no, as I said, the current wasn’t coming through my house. I always felt that I would be able to get to a higher spot to keep from having to swim. So no, no, I don’t think, the fear of bodily harm or death didn’t come into play.

Lange: OK. So the water’s piling up in your house, and you’re moving things up. Then what happens?

Grimes: Well, it was kind of funny; earlier in the day, probably about seven, all of a sudden I hear my cell phone ringing. I went, “Wow!” (laughter) “Somebody’s calling me.” And cell phones were working, so it was really quite a surprise because you know, last hurricanes—cell phones are a relatively new piece of equipment. So I said, “Wow, my cell phone’s ringing.” So I ran back to my bedroom, picked up my cell phone. It was my sister, who was in Atlanta, calling. “Hey, we’re watching on TV. What’s it like down there?” I said, “Well, the water’s about midcalf right now, and it looks like it’s coming up. So I don’t know.” Then we talked a minute and hung up, and that reminded me that my wife had asked me to call her. So I called her, and as I said, she was only about an hour and a half north, and they really hadn’t received many effects there yet. And she said, “Well, what’s going on? We’re watching on TV,”’ dah, dah, dah. I said, “Well, it’s about up to my thigh, now, and I think maybe this is the end of it. And I’m moving stuff. I’ll call you when I get a chance to.” We hung up. Well, of course, I didn’t get to talk to her for two days because the battery went dead on the cell phone soon after that, and cell phone service went out all together. When I finally decided to give it up because it was just obvious that water was still coming, and there was nothing left for me to really save of any significance, I thought that I would go around and open the front door to my garage apartment, which pretty much was all under water. So I don’t know, I had this smart idea I was going to do this, but I think I had to swim there because it was too deep to stand. So I swim out there, and I dive down; I turn the knob, and it’s locked. And I go, “Oh, it’s locked. Why didn’t I think it’s locked?” So I swim back to the house; I go all the way to the other end of the house, back to my bedroom, and I find the key. Go back out, swim out, dive down, unlock it. You know, it felt like I unlocked it, but I couldn’t get it open, but I’m underwater trying to—you know, I had no leverage on anything. So finally I gave that up. I said, “The thing’s swelled shut; I’m not going to open it no matter what.” So the first time I went, this big window section fell into my house; I had heard something hitting it as I swam by the first time, but I couldn’t see it, and didn’t bother with it. And when I’m going back in the house, the whole thing falls in.
No big deal. I mean, the glass broke, but it didn’t fall toward me. So I go back, and when I tried the key, and I’m swimming back around, the one and only thing I know of that floated out of my house came floating up. Big leather couch with a box of CDs, which I would have loved to have saved, and my dog. (laughter) I’m like, “OK, I’ll take the dog.” (laughter) And this dog had been following me all morning long; every room I would go to, he would come splashing along behind me and barking, like, “Hey, do something for me.” I’d grab him; throw him on something that was floating or still in one place, and he would sit there. And when I would go to another room, oh, he’d come right behind me. So this went on all morning long till finally I’m looking at this dog. He was sitting there on this couch. Had I not crossed paths with him right then, he would have been gone because that couch sunk in the water, maybe 150 feet away. It’s still there today. So I grabbed the dog, swam him back inside, pulled down my attic stairs and sent him up the stairs, up the attic. So I came out, and I suppose then, not being able to go through the door, I knew I was going to climb on the roof to get into the bathroom window to get into the apartment. So I snagged a wooden outdoors bench and stood it up against the apartment and climbed up it, got on the roof, broke all the windows out. Really, now, I mean, I stood there—once again, I didn’t want to hurt myself. So I meticulously pulled every piece of glass out of the thing, just threw it over. And I think I must have gone back in the house, I guess, just to make one last run around. And I remember standing there close to the back door and saying, “Well, this is it; I’ll just go on up. Nothing else to do here.” And I hear this unearthly scream. You know, not a human scream. “What is that?” And I look out my back door onto my back porch, which joined my house to my apartment, and there’s my cat hanging on the screen door, hanging on the top of the screen door, water up to its chin, just screaming. (laughter) I said, “Oh, no. Now I have to save the cat.” I’d forgotten all about the cat, you know. The cat was in the garage with a litter box and food, and it was all set up until this water came in. I looked at the cat; I said, “There is no way I’m going out there and say, ‘Here, kitty.”’ (laughter) So I found a couch cushion floating and swam out there. The cat just walked right onto it. So I swam it back into the house and took it to the attic steps. It didn’t come out till three days later. Then I said, it’s like, “That’s it. There’s nothing else I can do or need to do.” So I climbed up on my roof, and actually, I’m going to guess this was eleven in the morning. So from six to eleven, I’ve been active, active, active, just adrenaline driven, rushing around, trying to save things. And at eleven—and I don’t know how it was before as far as the wind goes. I really never noticed the wind. Now I was inside, but typically in a storm, the wind is so loud, you just can’t ignore it. But I just think I was just so busy, I just didn’t notice because obviously there was a lot of wind. My house had no wind damage whatsoever. Two or three shingles, that was it. I still had a lot of tree damage. No trees down, but big limbs, eight-, twelve-inch diameter limbs just twisted off, broken on the ground. But at eleven, I climbed up on the roof and actually walked around the roof of my house twice, just looking. You know, I just said, “I got to see this.” And it was worse than ever, just this huge river of water as far as you could see everywhere, just still moving north, water still coming in. So I got enough of that, went into my apartment, and it’s a fully furnished, nice apartment, and just laid back in a recliner and said, “Wow.” (laughter) “I can’t believe I’ve just been through all this.” You know, the water’s still coming up. Wind, as I said, didn’t seem
to be an issue at that time. And immediately went into this, because this is the kind of mind I have, thinking about it objectively, planning and trying to recognize what’s going to happen and needs to happen. So I immediately began thinking about the breadth of this storm and the effects that it was going to have on the community and the economy, really, the national economy, maybe even international economy, from damage to off-shore oil equipment, pipelines. I knew if I had that much water in my house that most all this town would be flooded. So I just really went into this serious and not-so-healthy analysis of what would be the impact of this storm, so much so that probably within thirty minutes, I had this shortness of breath. I couldn’t quite catch my breath. I’d take a deep breath, and I just felt like I needed some more, and it was strange, and thought, “Maybe this is a heart attack; I don’t know.” I don’t have much family history of that, but it was sure enough heart-attack-inducing conditions. But it settled down, and I probably went to sleep a little bit. I don’t know; I just sort of worried and tried to doze because I was exhausted. I’d had not a single drop of anything all morning or nothing to eat and had done all that work. So occasionally I would stand up and walk over to the window. So I’m on the second level. Look out to see if the water was low enough to go back outside because I was curious and certainly wanted to see where things had landed. But, once again, the electricity was off; I didn’t have a watch. I don’t know what time it was, but I think it was three or four o’clock before the water had subsided enough to be able to go back outside and go anywhere because people’s houses are usually the highest thing on their property, and it just looked like maybe it was out of the houses, but then again, maybe not. I imagine it was three or four o’clock, finally, you know, I went back outside and, of course, all the neighbors who I didn’t think were there came pouring out of their houses, even kids, old folks who should have been in the hospital. So the same neighbor who I’d had dinner with the night before comes over, and we walked around a little bit, but not much. I didn’t want to see; I mean, I could see it was so bad. I just didn’t want to see it. You look down the street to the south, toward the water, and there sat a house right in the middle of the street. I was like, “Oh, I don’t even want to go down there.” But three doors down from me, I’m walking by their house, and there’s a couple standing in the door that I really didn’t know. I mean, I knew these people; I knew their son; he’d gone to school with me. And they’re holding this sign up; they’re just sitting there with this terribly dejected look on their face with this little hand-done sign, you know, one foot by two feet or something, said, “Help.” So I walk over there, and I said, “What’s the problem? What do you need?” “My daddy’s out of oxygen.” Their father had been sick for a long time and been basically bedridden, on oxygen, and he would not leave the house. He’s crazier than me. So he’s out of oxygen. I mean, this is the afternoon of the storm. So fortunately for him—and I was certainly glad—a neighbor who’s a policeman came riding by on a four-wheeler at the same time, and he was pretty much giving a newspaper photographer a ride around so he could get some initial images of it all. But he was able to contact the hospital and somehow get some oxygen for this neighbor. So that’s pretty well it; that’s the day.

**Lange:** Why do you think that people are so adamant about leaving, that you didn’t know anybody was there but then you found out afterwards they really did stay?
Grimes: Well, I would say that it’s always a difficult decision to go or stay for people because if you go, you need to go early so that you don’t run into an interstate parking lot. And if you stay late, then you certainly have that chance of not being able to go, and I believe in this situation, that’s what happened to a lot of people, is they were going to leave Sunday afternoon, but they drove just to Highway 90 right through the middle of town here, which is far from making it to the interstate to making it to another state probably to be able to find a hotel room. Instead they turned around and came home. That’s most of the stories that I’ve heard of people who normally would have left but did not in this case. I’m talking about kids, too. I have a friend; they were one block off the beach, new house, two children a bit younger than mine, you know, maybe fifteen and twelve, and they watched from their second level. They watched the house south of them, which was on the beachfront, get busted up and come washing toward their house and banging against their house. (laughter) So you know, yeah, I have a story, but compared to many people who either were or easily could have been in life-threatening circumstances, mine feels sort of blasé in comparison. And that’s up and down this Coast. So many people had to evacuate their houses during the storm and swim or get in boats, or stay outside during the remainder of the storm. I felt fortunate that none of those conditions fell on me. I actually thought one time about swimming across to my buddy’s house. But I was like, “Nah, why take the chance?”

Lange: So could you talk a little bit about maybe your occupation and how that was affected by Katrina?

Grimes: Well, that’s a good story, because I have my own dry-cleaning business, and I have stores in three different towns, Pascagoula, Gautier, Ocean Springs, so all of them, the three adjoining communities on Highway 90. Well, my plant where we process all the clothing is in Gautier. It turned out—well, I really hardly left my property for two days. I was just trying to salvage what there was. The world seemed to have stopped, and no one was worried about anything except their own personal situation, just getting—I mean, people did not have food or water and certainly not utilities. And those things were very critical at those beginning days. And nobody had cars because all our cars were flooded. So you saw a lot of adults riding bikes, which is not typical in this town. (laughter) So probably two or three days after the storm, Wednesday or Thursday of that week, my neighbor whose son is a used-car dealer and happened to have a few cars that were running, gave me a ride over to my nearest store here in Pascagoula, which I thought was on high ground, and I was hoping just maybe had not been flooded, but in fact—my son’s car was in the back. My son was off in the Army, so I had his car parked inside in the garage part of the building. But I catch a ride with her, the daughter of my neighbor, and only to see that I had had three and a half feet of water in that store. And that car was flooded. So I just got a ride back home. The next day I hitched a ride over to Gautier to where my plant is where I had another vehicle, my company van, delivery van, and as we came into Gautier, you go over two bridges to get there, the river and marsh system is in between here and there. And the first thing you saw was a boat sitting in the middle of the highway. I was like, “Oh, gosh. I’m flooded over here, too.” And along the Coast
there’s not a lot of elevation difference; it’s pretty flat, but there is a little up and down as it goes. And we’d get in a low spot on the highway, and I’d say, “Oh, I flooded. There’s no question; I flooded.” Then we’d get up on a higher spot, “Maybe not; maybe not.” (laughter) I went through about three or four cycles of this to get to my store, and sure enough, a block this side flooded, a block to the north, and a block to the south. From where I was, west stayed dry, so I was like, “Wow, what a relief.” So I had a vehicle now, and I was able to get fans to bring home, a lot of things that were useful with no air-conditioning and such. And the storm hit on Monday morning; the next Monday was Labor Day. The next day, on Tuesday, the day after Labor Day, I opened my business in Gautier and Ocean Springs. So I was the first and probably only dry cleaner open in both Ocean Springs and Gautier. There was one other in Moss Point, another community that adjoins Pascagoula. And the one reason I wanted to open up was to be able to get my employees back to work so that they could have a paycheck. I mean, they’d already missed one week; so I was very glad to be able to do that for them. I really had no idea quite what to expect, but what in fact happened, not only that week, but in the ensuing months, is that we were swamped with clothes and blankets and comforters and curtains and drapes and you name it, anything fabric in somebody’s house, they just brought in by the truckloads, pickup-truckloads. And I only had half as many employees as prior to the storm. So I had quadruple the clothes and half as many people to do the work.

Ronkainen: And where did your other employees go?

Grimes: Oh, they just left town; I mean, there were so many people in this area who rented; if their place was messed up and they were a renter, they just had no place to go. I mean, in Pascagoula nearly every residence in town flooded. So there was really no place to go; there was literally no dry place to lay your head down for so many people, and if people had no financial resources, they really—I mean these trailers in town, they were a month or two or three coming in. I mean, there were so many; it took a long time to provide them for the people who needed them. But the first couple of weeks, maybe just the first week, it was just—I mean, I worked seventeen, eighteen hours a day either at my business or at home, trying to salvage what could be salvaged. In my case, for my living conditions, my apartment stayed dry, so I had a good place to live, but I needed to dry out the lower level so that I didn’t have problems with mold, if that was going to be a problem. I don’t think it was as much as people had anticipated, but it was an exhausting week, worried about food. Food, water, ice, all this work, and trying not to just kill my employees with exhaustion, also. My wife came up with this great idea. She said, “Why don’t you take those clothes to somebody else and have them do it.” I said, “That is a good idea.” So I have friends in Mobile in the business, so every day, really for the next several months, I would load up in my delivery van, just fill the thing up with clothes, and take them to Mobile to two or three different cleaners there. And every day you take stuff and load the van back up with finished stuff, and bring them back. And had I not doubled the size of my business that summer—I mean, I was just finishing, right before Katrina hit—there’s no way I could have handled that volume of clothing and items. Oh, it was killer. (laughter) It was so much (inaudible), probably quadruple,
and I didn’t charge anything extra because really this was not regular cleaning; this was restoration work, for which people probably charge double under normal circumstances, but it was impossible to do so here. I mean, it would have just been—I just couldn’t have done it. I mean, the people were so busted up and sad and had so little anyway, there was just no way to do that. So I charged regular rates; it cost me a lot more to do the work. So basically in four months, I did a year’s worth of business and made no money; just broke even. But as it turns out, that was all right. Now, a few of my competitors did not reopen, probably at least three. One has since closed down. My business is really booming at this time because of less competition, and people are slowly but surely moving back into the area and dressing up more. I mean, for months after the storm, the dress code dropped down to whatever you had, just very, very casual. But now, people who were wearing nice clothes to work before are back to doing the same.

Ronkainen: So you stayed in your apartment. What did your wife and daughter do?

Grimes: Well, my wife works for a business whose office was very flooded and just completely damaged, and they set up a tent outside of their office for probably two months, I suppose, but with very limited phone, no Internet connection. So for the first few weeks, she would stay a night or two here, deal with them at their temporary office setup and then drive back up to the country in Alabama, only an hour and a half away, and use their Internet connection to contact their various suppliers, customers, legal, accounting, all that type of thing. And my daughter would usually go back and forth with her. My son was off in the Army, as I said, and my daughter was just going into ninth grade. And we actually thought very hard; it was a difficult decision on school because the schools were mostly all damaged. The high school, which was not damaged at all—I say, “at all,” I mean, it wasn’t flooded—was sort of taken over by federal agencies as their headquarters and housing assistance. The building was providing some much-needed services, for sure, but it looked like they might miss a whole semester of school. And my daughter is a very bright girl, very college-bound child, and we sort of hated to think about that, missing a semester. That would be a pretty major occurrence. So we really had planned on sending her away. We had thought about sending her to Germany for a semester because my wife and she had just been to Germany the summer before on an exchange program, and this couple over there were ready to take her. They had a daughter same age. But we kind of weren’t sure we wanted to do it, and we finally decided we were going to send her, but just for a few weeks, just until school did start because by that time, it was apparent that it would not lose a whole semester. I told her; I said, “I know I saved your passport. I know I had it in my hand the day after the storm,” because she and my wife had given me theirs when they had returned from Germany in June, this being August or maybe September first by then. And I said, “I don’t know where I put it.” I saved so many things; it (laughter) was hard to find them all. But I think, maybe the day after, we reached a point, we said, “Well, you’re not going; it’s just too late now.” My wife was checking some things in the top of my daughter’s closet, and she pulled out a couple of things. “What are these?” “Oh, I don’t know. Daddy put that up there.” And she reaches up there; she pulls down her passport. (laughter) I thought my
daughter was going to croak. She cried so hard, “Daddy told me to look up there.”
(laughter) So my wife was very busy with her work. They sent off all their hard
drives to some business in Minnesota that specializes in memory restoration. My
daughter babysat probably fifty, sixty hours a week, for one couple in particular who
had two granddaughters, maybe age five and three, and they would bring them over to
our apartment most every day. And my daughter would babysit them, saved all her
money, bought her a laptop.

**Lange:** How long immediately after the storm did you not have to worry about food
and water anymore? Like, how fast was the response?

**Grimes:** I don’t know that I have an exact answer on that. It’s all a little blurry, those
first few days. My refrigerator did not fall over, one of the few things that didn’t fall
over. So I ate out of my refrigerator for at least Monday. No, Monday was the day of
the storm. So at least Tuesday and Wednesday I probably ate out of my refrigerator,
and things were still OK, happened to have a lot of leftovers. Water, I don’t remember
what I did for water at the beginning. Maybe I just had soft drinks or something; I
don’t know, but the response was very fast, for Red Cross particularly, and National
Guard. Those two groups were in my neighborhood. I’m sure, if the storm was on
Monday, I’ll bet you the first one showed up on Wednesday. It was really wonderful
how quickly and how frequently they would come by and distribute both water and
ice, and in the case of Red Cross, I think at first they were distributing, hot meals in
Styrofoam boxes. And then after that it was the MREs [meals ready to eat].

**Ronkainen:** Which is?

**Grimes:** Meals ready to eat. It’s a military term, and they used to just have them for
military, but it seems the Red Cross has these things stockpiled to take to disaster
areas, which I had never had one before. I’ve done a lot of camping and backpacking,
so I’ve eaten a lot of dehydrated meals, which you would rehydrate by basically
cooking them over the fire. But these, they were pretty neat, really, and I don’t know
the chemistry behind it, but there would be a little aluminum box with a top, and a
little Styrofoam dish, a rather flat dish bigger than the aluminum box, and a little
plastic container of water with something in it and maybe two little pads or something.
I’ve forgotten now exactly how that worked, but I think it maybe looked like two
napkins folded up or something similar, not quite paper like a paper napkin, but you
would put those in the bottom, pour that liquid on it, put your tin with the food in it
back on top of it, shove it back in the box, and all of a sudden, steam would start
coming out of the box. And whatever chemical reaction was happening there would
create heat enough to warm that meal up and rehydrate it. And they were pretty good.
I mean, I think everyone was amazed how good they were. And they were quite
hearty; they were something that would fill you up and make you feel as if you had
eaten something. I had seven Mexicans working at my house one day, cleaning the
house out. They were all out of work because their jobs were shut down, and they
would meet down the street, maybe a block from my house. If you wanted some
Mexicans to work, you’d go down there, say, “I need three of y’all.” Just bring some
home with you every day, but you sort of had to feed them because they didn’t have anything. And so I’m working these, and my wife had to go to a meeting that morning. I’m like, “Oh, no. I hope she comes back soon,” because I’m in there having to direct their every move, and my Spanish is certainly not fluent. It was enough to work them through the morning, but I didn’t have near time enough to even think about doing anything for food. So my wife gets home. I said, “We got to feed these seven guys,” and myself, my daughter, and her. So my wife goes up in the apartment there, and she found some more leftovers and whatever, you know. And she made up just probably enough stew-type stuff to feed two or three people. Then she brings that out, and I’m like, “Linda, look. That’s not near enough.” (laughter) And about that time, ding, ding, ding! It was the Red Cross truck with these MREs, (laughter) which is the first time I had seen one. And so we all go out there, stand in line, get one, come back on the porch of the house; had some lawn furniture out there by that time. And some of them just starting opening up, popped the top on it, just starting eating the stuff crunchy. (laughter) And I told my daughter, I said, “Hallie, tell us how to do these things.” She’s a fourteen-year-old girl, good eyesight; I needed my reading glasses. And so she read it, and the rest of us did it as the directions said and had a nice meal, but the Mexicans, they just popped them open and ate it just like it was. But overall, the response was tremendous in providing the absolute necessities to get by, and all nice, friendly, wonderful people, bringing it around. The attitude of people who came to give help was just off the charts. Honestly, probably nobody in my neighborhood had ever needed help, and none of us thought we would. We certainly wouldn’t have asked for any under other circumstances, but you just all of a sudden say, “I need it, and you’re here. Thank you.” (laughter) It’s just simple; there was no way to do without.

**Lange:** So were they helping you rebuild your house?

**Grimes:** No, just providing food, water, and—

**Lange:** No, I mean the Mexicans.

**Grimes:** Oh, the Mexicans. Just cleaning it out, just getting all the possessions out of it, which is pretty much what everybody did because the water got up so high. All of us threw away things that we maybe could have saved had we put them to the side, had we thought that it wasn’t going to rain, which it didn’t rain for months. So many things could have been set outside and saved because we live in a very rainy environment; and especially August, September, you can just kind of bank on the rain, but in fact it didn’t rain for about four months, which was really odd. But everybody just threw away everything they had. They just hauled it all to the curb, made a huge pile of it, and it was all over town, everybody’s stuff, because people who weren’t in their houses, they didn’t save anything. I mean, they came back, ever how high the water was, everything that water was on, most people were disgusted with it and had images of it being contaminated with whatever, this and that, sewage and different things. They just threw everything out. So that’s what I had them doing; I was just getting stuff out of my house so that I could then clean my house out, strip the
sheetrock off, dry it out, and save it from becoming a mold-infested, uninhabitable place.

**Lange:** And then the rebuilding began?

**Grimes:** Well, in my case, I looked at my house, which I had just remodeled several years before, maybe twelve years before, extensive remodeling, probably could have built a new house, same size for the same price, but my house was one of those houses in town that everybody liked. It was a beautiful house; everybody knew that house. It was a very attractive house on a very attractive setting, the property. So we fixed it up the first time around, but looking at it a second time, it’s like, “Oh, man. I hate to go back in there and have to remodel that whole thing again. The previous hurricane of any significance, Hurricane Georges in [19]98, the water came within a foot of getting in the house then. So we looked, and we said, “You know, Katrina was certainly a very unusual event. We wouldn’t expect that to happen again, but Hurricane Georges really wasn’t that big and bad of a hurricane, and the water nearly got in the house. So we’re going to get full flood insurance coverage. Maybe we can cut off a piece of the property and sell it. Let’s tear the house down and build a new one higher.” So that’s what we’ve done. I’d say most people didn’t make that same choice, but then again, many of those people didn’t have flood insurance and therefore didn’t have $250,000 to start from on building a new house. I mean, people with no flood insurance, they were just looking at total, complete financial loss, if not devastation. And there’s still probably some financial devastation to show up here, and that was one of those things I was worried about right after the storm. I’m sitting there thinking, “Man, there’s going to be tens of thousands of bankruptcies up and down this Coast.” Doesn’t seem to have happened because I think there’s been a little bit here and a little bit there for people to be able to somehow survive through it. And now this grant program that’s finally showing up has checks in people’s mailboxes.

**Lange:** So how long did it take for your house to be—are you living there now, then?

**Grimes:** No, we have continued to live in my garage apartment, fortunately, because for most people in my neighborhood, either they lived upstairs—initially, they lived upstairs in their house if they had an upstairs. It didn’t get in anybody’s upstairs space, the floodwaters. Or they, you know, within the next month or two or three, had a trailer put in their front yard. Have you seen any of these trailers?

**Ronkainen:** Just descriptions.

**Grimes:** You need to go see one to really get a feel for the size, how small they are, how cramped they are, how inexpensively constructed they are. You hear everything. Neighbor friend around the corner, he said he could hear a dog fart out in the street. (laughter) And I believe it. Another one, he says, “It’s the only place I ever lived where I could sit on the toilet, fry eggs, and watch TV at the same time.” (laughter) They’re small; they’re really very, very small. So many people got their trailers, and maybe they would sleep in their upstairs bedrooms and cook and whatever in the...
trailers. So we were very fortunate to have this garage apartment, which we had fixed up very nice as a rental a few years before, well, just prior to remodeling the house.

Ronkainen: So you have a plan to rebuild your house, then, on your own property, higher?

Grimes: We’re working on architectural plans right now. We, by choice, decided to wait until most other people had done the bulk of their rebuilding. And now all over town, “How are things going?” “Oh, they’re so much better; I just moved back into my house.” Or, “I’m just about to move back in my house.” So it’s just reached a point now, nearly eighteen months after the storm that most people are back in their homes.

Ronkainen: In your immediate neighborhood?

Grimes: Well, all over town, all over, well, in this county. There are three counties on the coast of Mississippi; this one was the least destroyed. We had a lot of flooding, but when you go to the next county, and the next one over, yet, they have a much higher water level, and it entered their areas with much more force. It just washed in, loosened everything up, maybe even washed it inland, and then when the water came back out, it took it all with it. Just scorched-earth look over there; I mean, if you go over that way, this town looks normal compared to the areas to the west.

Ronkainen: So how would you say your neighborhood is different now than pre-Katrina?

Grimes: Well, one thing that hurricanes have always done is have a cleansing effect. I mean, they do damage, but usually it’s the older, weaker stuff that goes first. And so it’s sort of like revitalization in a way, and that’s certainly in my neighborhood and this community as a whole, is that the older, weaker stuff—of course, some old stuff was real well built. In this case, if they were in the front, on the beach, they still got destroyed because it was just overwhelming force. But when all is said and done in my neighborhood, it’ll be a nicer neighborhood because most places will be new. They’ll be new or remodeled. Everything will be new or remodeled at the same time, and quite a number of new ones in my neighborhood. Now what is different about them is that most of them are built one full story off the ground. So they all, they look bigger, particularly the ones who have closed in that lower level. You know, many of them you see right now, they’re just up on either concrete block pillars or timber pillars, and you can see right under them, but I think most of them have plans to close that in in some way or another. And so they look bigger—bigger, taller structures.

Ronkainen: Was it not an option to relocate for you?

Grimes: Well, I have my business. So I certainly needed to stay in the area. And certainly it’s an option, but then you basically leave your investment of your present home to an uncertain future. Presently the problem with acquiring homeowner’s
insurance on new or existing properties is, there is a great degree of uncertainty on what to do. And the most certain way to approach it is, for the present owner to continue with a house on the same piece of property. I mean, I know y’all just came into town, so you don’t know this whole thread of this insurance problem, but State Farm Insurance probably has 50 percent of the market around here. And they just announced the other day that they would write no new homeowner policies in the whole state of Mississippi because they’re angry that this suit, a class action suit, went against them recently. Well, not that it went against them; they agreed to settle for, I don’t know, two hundred million dollars or something. So they decided not to write any new policies. So if you bought my house, you couldn’t get insurance, not through State Farm and probably not through these other companies, either. So that uncertainty is slowing the rebuilding process all the way from the Texas line from Hurricane Rita over to this area, all the way to Alabama with Hurricane Katrina.

Ronkainen: Do you think that these storms like this will provide a permanent change where people may decide to completely [leave] old neighborhoods, or will there be more of a tendency to just continue staying and fighting to live here?

Grimes: Well, some people made an immediate decision to remove themselves from harm’s way, even if they’d been in a house that had never been even threatened by flooding before, this experience was just too damaging and traumatic for them and financially damaging that they have chosen to move somewhere inshore, maybe only ten miles, maybe twenty. I don’t know of many areas that, areas of any size that the population of that area have said, “This particular few blocks or this particular canal or waterfront section is just in too much of danger’s way, and we should just close it down all together.” I don’t think too much of that, even though the way the federal government regulations and the National Flood Insurance Program, if your house has been flooded two or three times, and financially the damage exceeds 50 percent of the value of the structure, they tell you, you either have to raise it, move it, or demolish it. So, I mean, there are some areas that are mandated under either—well, the Flood Insurance Program is pretty much the driver of that type of decision. So there are people who had to tear their houses down and build them higher because of it being mandated for them to do so. There’s a little money, a little compensation for being told to do that, but not much, maybe thirty thousand, not enough to rebuild a house. (laughter)

Lange: So how do you think the United States has been in response to Katrina?

Grimes: Well, you got two things; you got the government, and you got the people. I know there’s a lot of anger toward the federal government for their supposed slow response to this event, and maybe in New Orleans it seemed kind of slow, but this was the biggest disaster of modern history. There’s no way that the federal government could have been ready to respond on short notice to such an event as this. To look at it another way, if they had the resources, had taxed us enough to have the resources ready to respond to an event of this sort, we would be complaining about them having spent so much money and having so many people on the payroll just for the possibility
of an event such as this. So I think it was proportional to what our expectation should be for response to something of this magnitude.

**Lange:** And for the people?

**Grimes:** Well, if there has been one aspect of this post-Katrina activities that has been just the most heartwarming and to make you appreciate the good of human nature, it’s the tens of thousands of people who have come here to work and help, not the ones who are on payroll of the federal government or anything; they do their job, but not necessarily the most ambitious, hardworking bunch because most people who were hired to do this FEMA work were people who didn’t have a job. So they weren’t the top-tier worker bees. (laughter) But the individuals who have volunteered to come down here and help physically, manual-labor assistance to people who have been damaged with the storm, it is just beautiful and incredible. And I wish somehow, somebody had a number to throw at it, how many tens of thousands of people have come down here and given up their vacation time, college students on spring break. I mean, there’s been many people who have come and stayed just because they could see how much help needed to be given. So they basically came here, left what they had behind, maybe sold whatever they had behind, and dedicated themselves to the volunteer effort to assist in the recovery of this area. That has just been—I mean, at our church, there were probably for several months if not a year, fifty to eighty people at our church every week. And many other churches the same way; still going on now. A college buddy of mine called me today; he’s in Gulfport; been there a week, working, from New Jersey. So I mean, from all over the country. We’ve traveled all around the country, a couple of overseas trips and run into people who have been down here helping out. It’s a beautiful thing. I don’t know if ever in the history of this country that you’ve had that sort of migration of people coming to a disaster area to help. I think it’s a historic event in volunteerism in this country. It’s really neat.

**Ronkainen:** How do you feel about the possibility of this place becoming a very touristy area, or how do you feel about any other major, permanent changes that Hurricane Katrina may have caused?

**Grimes:** Well, this part of the Mississippi Coast has never been a tourist destination. It is a big job-creation area with this large shipyard, which maybe twelve, thirteen thousand people a day work in the shipyard, a few other smaller places, a big refinery that probably has fifteen hundred people and three or four others, smaller than that, that hire, that have several hundred employees. I don’t see much of a shift in the economic base of this county. Now, to the west, which has always been a tourist destination; I mean, prior to the development of the Alabama and Florida panhandle coast, it was the beach tourist destination for the central part of this country. All the Midwestern states, I don’t doubt people from Toronto, Ontario, wherever, would come to the Mississippi Coast because there was twenty-six miles of beach and many restaurants, tourist destinations, amusement parks. It was quite a—and I grew up when it was that way until Hurricane Camille destroyed it. So these areas over there that are just scoured-earth-looking right now, they were also severely damaged in
Hurricane Camille in 1969, did not build back very quickly at all, and Alabama and Florida panhandle coast developed at that time and took all that business. So until the construction of casinos in Harrison County, it had been relatively dead as far as tourist destination. Well, the casinos were extremely damaged during the storm. No telling how many hundreds of millions worth of damage they had had. Hard Rock Casino was due to open the day of the storm, still has not reopened from fixing the damage. Of course, a lot of it is insurance-related delays, also. So I think Harrison County next to us here, Biloxi, Gulfport, they’ll come back the same way they were before, probably more tourism-based economy than prior to the storm. But here in this county, I think that we’ll basically stay at the same economic base as we’ve been building on through the years, very much defense-related industries, defense and petrochemical.

**Ronkainen:** Has your dry-cleaning service in Pascagoula been restored and opened again?

**Grimes:** I waited nearly three months before opening it, but the main reason for waiting was lack of employees. Just as you hear about New Orleans, the older, weaker houses were the ones that were damaged the most. And that’s where the lowest level, low-skilled workers live. So there were many of them displaced immediately after the storm. They all went to other places to stay with relatives or whomever until these trailers started showing up. And these trailers, FEMA trailers as they’re called because that’s who they’re provided by, either, if you were a property owner, they would put it on your property. But if you were a renter, then they had established—I’m sure, seven or eight just here in these two communities of Moss Point, Pascagoula—trailer parks. So maybe they would put a hundred of them in some area, and that’s where people who previously had been renting apartments or houses would be, in these trailer parks.

**Ronkainen:** So what work do you feel still needs to be done in this community to get back to as normal as it can be?

**Grimes:** Well, there are a lot of government-funded infrastructure repairs and improvements that need to be made, many of them contingent upon getting federal funds to make those repairs. And then on an individual basis, many people need to stop waiting on someone else to do their work on their house. They need to stop waiting for some magic bucket of gold to fall out of the sky, and put forth some sweat and some tears in redoing their own houses, as most people have. But you can ride around town, and you see many that the trailer is still sitting in front; these people are sitting in their trailer, when, if they put a few hours a day onto fixing their houses up, or at least mowing their grass or cleaning up their yard, something. So there’s a divide between the people who do for themselves and the people who don’t in this area. So you got the two sides, the government and individuals. And people need to take responsibility and make forward progress on their own.
Ronkainen: Do you think that when the next hurricane comes, people will be more inclined to leave, or people will be more inclined to be more prepared and stay?

Grimes: Well, I think that will depend to some degree on when that event occurs. Like this past hurricane season? I think had a hurricane even come into the Gulf of Mexico, you would have seen people leaving a week early. (laughter) But as time goes on, people forget about what happened, and they tend to be a little more brave or foolish as to go or stay. I mean, this past season so many people were still in these trailers that no one wanted to be caught in a sixty-mile-an-hour wind in these trailers, much less a hundred, a hundred and twenty. I mean, they just wouldn’t have been safe. But in general, I think people will be more cautious than prior to Katrina.

Lange: Will you leave? Will you evacuate?

Grimes: I think my wife would drug me and shoot me, (laughter) do whatever she had to do to drag me out of town. Personally, the house I’m going to build is a reinforced concrete house. It’s not going anywhere. It’ll actually have a third level on it. I still believe in staying and protecting your property. And when I say before and after, looting, that’s a real issue. I mean, there’s a lot of bad guys out there that before everybody gets back, they’re out there rooting through houses and stealing and burning them down, so the protection of your own private property is an issue. But I’m serious; this house that I’m going to build is basically going to be hurricane-proof. It’s not going to go anywhere. So I mean, if you had to live through a few hours of part of your roof being blown off or some of your windows blown out, that’s not very life threatening. But no, my wife was so worried; she didn’t talk to me for two days. Nobody had any idea. I mean, and a lot of the news reports were over-exaggerated. Stories were over-exaggerated as far as number of people dead and this and that. I mean, right after the storm, we were walking around, “Did you hear Pat King’s missing?” Pat, y’all are going to interview him. Everybody was saying, “Nobody’s found Pat King.” Well, he was asleep in his truck. He sat in his truck through the storm, right there on Beach Boulevard, looking at the storm and watching his house bust up and wash away toward this family of four’s house I mentioned earlier. So for the next few days, “Have you heard so-and-so’s missing?” So it was even worse on the news, I suppose, with my wife being an hour and a half away.

Ronkainen: Seeing, like, your home, your childhood community completely underwater in this severe storm, how did that affect you, like, on a personal, emotional level?

Grimes: That’s a good question. I knew there was some area of the storm I wanted to cover before we finished today. From the time I first got up in my apartment, after the water got too high, I laid back in that recliner; I had that shortness of breath incident, oh, man, I mean, the next two months probably. And once again, I don’t remember exactly when things happened, but I couldn’t sleep. During the day, I wouldn’t have any shortness-of-breath problem. But I’d lay in bed at night, and just go right to sleep because I was just exhausted. But I would wake up just very shortly thereafter,
(gasping) you know, and I’d try to relax and breathe regular and go back to sleep, but it was just day after day after day; I was just exhausted. And nobody was really thinking straight, so to speak, because you had so much to think about and so many things going on. So I think probably the second week after the storm, I had my wife take me to the emergency room one night just because I said, “Take me out there. I don’t know what they’ll find, but just take me out there.” Well, the hospital—I think it was probably the first week, probably within a week because the hospital here was still half dark—I mean, everything, all the toilets were plugged up. It was like a third-world hospital. They hadn’t had any refrigeration all week; it was a mess. So they didn’t much do anything for me, but when it did happen to me in the middle of the night, my wife was able to get a hold of FEMA and the insurance company, so that was a good thing. But probably the next week or the week after, I came home after lunch one day. I was just so whipped out, and I’m sitting in that same recliner, actually. My daughter was there, and no, no, it was longer than that. It was maybe two weeks after I first went to the emergency room here, once again, I was just so exhausted; I just couldn’t do anything. I was just—and I was driving back and forth to Mobile every day. Everything was just overwhelming. And it was a Friday, and I told my wife, I said, “Man,” I said, “I just want to check in the hospital and get them to find out what’s wrong with me.” Because I never had any kind of problems before. A big, rough, tough guy, you know? Never had any anxiety or fears or anything before. So I had her take me over to Mobile Infirmary. I had some friends on the board there, and I knew I’d be taken well care of and got myself checked in. They gave me a shot, put me to sleep, probably slept for twelve hours, woke up, felt good. (laughter) And stayed there the weekend, and they ran every test imaginable on me, stress test, EKG [electrocardiogram]; I don’t know what all, but everything looked fine. Pulmonary function, I thought that might be what; there were some rumors going on that if you were in and around this water a lot that you might have some sort of fungal lung infection or something. Well, none of that; they didn’t find anything wrong with me at all. So I came back home, still [the] same thing; couldn’t sleep, just worn out. And the doctor who was in the hospital, who was in charge of my case in the hospital said, “Well, come back and see me in my office sometime later.” So I’m sitting at home, I said, “Man, I’m going to see that doctor today.” And I sat down, and it seemed like it started in my toes and worked its way all up to my—I remember it stopped right here, just this sort of numb feeling. My lip was just numb and kind of quivering. I called my wife, I said, “I don’t think I’m going to be able to drive myself over there.” And my daughter’s looking at me like, (laughter) “Is Daddy going to die or what?” So a few minutes later I felt all right, and I drove over to Mobile to see this doctor; waited in the office forever. And he gave me some kind of antianxiety pills, but they were, like, real short, only good for, like, a couple of hours. And then later on, I’m told that when that wore off, you were kind of worse than you started. And that was kind of the way it was. It was kind of like, “Hey, I could eat a handful of these things, I think.” And it really wasn’t doing the job. So I had a customer who was kind of a friend, not a close friend, but who was a psychiatrist. So I called him—I’d never been to a psychiatrist—told him what the situation was. He said, “Come see me.” We sat down and talked; I told him what it was. He said, “Yeah, I’m getting a lot of that. Here,
take this and that. Come see me next month.” So it was some sort of antianxiety type of drugs, not Prozac. What are those?

**Lange:** Antidepressants.

**Grimes:** Antidepressants, yeah. It wasn’t antidepressant; it was antianxiety stuff, and that really smoothed me out. I mean, this psychiatrist really did the right thing for me. And I’d go back and see him every month, and he’d say, “Well, how you doing?” And maybe about the third month, I said, “Well, I don’t know; I’m feeling kind of drugged up. I’m feeling kind of stupid.” He said, “OK. Just take half of that every day.” And over several months time, we worked down to nothing, and I think I’ve been fine since. (laughter) But without that, I don’t know. I think I would have just become so exhausted, I just don’t know how I could have survived, really. It was just something I couldn’t control; not being able to sleep was—everything else was all right, but not being able to sleep, you just can’t go on like that.

**Ronkainen:** Is there anything else that you want to put on record, or one last statement about how you feel about Katrina?

**Grimes:** I don’t know; I could probably talk another hour about it. But one statement, I don’t think so. Except thanks to anybody and everybody who’s come into this community to help. You really just can’t imagine, unless you’ve been here, the impact of that both physically and in allowing many people to have the confidence that they could overcome this and continue living here, particularly the older folks. There’s one lady who lives about four houses down from me; she’s probably eighty-five years old, lives alone. She was resigned just to selling her house like it was and moving away, moving to where one of her kids or grandkids were because she wasn’t going to be able to physically or financially restore her house back to where she could live in it. Well, here a church group shows up, rips all the sheetrock out. She said, “Well, maybe so.” Maybe only two weeks later, another church group came in, redid all the sheetrock. She was like, “I think I can do this.” So as big as the storm was, that has been the next biggest thing really, in a sense, is all this volunteer help that’s assisted so many people, as I say, both financially, but as much as anything emotionally, and been able to see that they could get past this and survive. But all in all, when all’s said and done eighteen years from now, it’ll probably be a better community and a better place for this having happened, and just cleansing out all the old and giving opportunity for new because Pascagoula is constricted on all sides from any future development and basically has been fully developed for ten or twelve years, and by that I mean not much vacant property so that the storm has created opportunities both for new businesses and new residences. So that’s a good thing. (laughter)

**Lange:** I think we got everything.

(end of interview)