Carol Lassiter Mars was born on August 15, 1952, in Jackson County, Mississippi. Her parents, Harvey “Guy” Lassiter (b: October 5, 1926 in Jackson County, Mississippi) and Mamie Adams Lassiter (b: July 27, 1926, in George County, Mississippi), were married in Jackson County on November 9, 1951. Her father’s family came from Evergreen, Alabama, to Moss Point and her mother’s family moved from George County to Jackson County. Carol’s father Guy worked for International Paper Company. Carol married William Mars (b: December 29, 1953, in Jackson County, Mississippi) on November 6, 1976, in Jackson County. They have no children. Carol states her religious affiliation is Baptist, and she has served on the Board of a local organization called Citizens Against Needless Death in Youth.

Ms. Mars attended Charlotte Hyatt Elementary School, Moss Point High School, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Jackson County Community College, and The University of Southern Mississippi, receiving her master’s degree in Library and Information Science. She began working in the Jackson-George County Regional Library System on March 23, 1976, and worked there for thirty-one years, retiring March 31, 2007. Ms. Mars lists her hobbies and interests as reading, working crossword puzzles and Sudoku puzzles, traveling with her husband on business trips, and visiting the Smoky Mountains.
Table of Contents

Background, family........................................................................................................1
Pascagoula Library before Hurricane Katrina .............................................................3
Hurricane's effects on Pascagoula Library .................................................................4
Cleanup after the storm ...............................................................................................4
Hurricane's effects on other library workers ..............................................................6
Personal preparations for Hurricane Katrina ............................................................6
Hurricane's effects on the neighborhood around Pascagoula Library .......................7
Personal and emotional effects of Hurricane Katrina ..............................................8
Thoughts on the community after Hurricane Katrina .............................................9
Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina .................................................................10
Thoughts on relocating after the storm ...................................................................10
Opinions of local, state, and federal officials ............................................................11
Importance of Pascagoula Library to the community ..............................................12
Thoughts on how the rest of America viewed Hurricane Katrina .........................13
Comparing Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Camille ...........................................14
Being better prepared in the future ........................................................................14
Final thoughts...........................................................................................................15
This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Carol Mars and is taking place on February 22, 2007. The interviewers are Kelsey Lange and Olivia Ronkainen.

Ronkainen: 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 Carol Mars and is taking place on February 22, at 9:15 a.m. in Pascagoula, [Mississippi], at St. John’s Episcopal Church. The interviewers are Olivia Ronkainen and Kelsey Lange. First I’d like to thank you, Carol Mars, 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 oral history interviews. So, I’m going to ask you, for the record, could you state your name, please?

Mars: Carol Mars.

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


Ronkainen: Perfect. Could you tell us a little bit about when and where you were born?

Mars: I was born in Jackson County, Mississippi, here on the Coast at the Jackson County Hospital, which is now a nursing home. I’ve lived here all my life. I was born in 1952. I lived at The University of Southern Mississippi for a few months when I went to school there. I have, like I said, lived here all my life.

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

Mars: Guy Lassiter.

Ronkainen: And your mother’s maiden name?

Mars: Mamie Adams.

Ronkainen: OK.

Lange: And where did you grow up?
Mars: Originally, Moss Point, just north of here.

Ronkainen: OK, so how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Mars: All my life.

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

Mars: Three.

Ronkainen: OK, and describe your attachment to the region. What does it mean to you?

Mars: Well, having lived here all my life, I have lifelong friends and family here. I like the water. It’s just a nice place to live.

Lange: And where was your neighborhood, or where is your neighborhood?

Mars: When I was growing up it, was in Moss Point, and then in 1990, we, my husband and I moved to Vancleave, which is about twenty miles north of here, same county, still in Jackson County.

Ronkainen: Could you describe your neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina?

Mars: In Vancleave, pretty much the only damage that people had up there, since we were out in the country, were shingles and trees. Nothing like down here, this far south of the interstate.

Ronkainen: Do you want to describe the library before?

Mars: Yes, I can do that. My husband and I came the next morning after the hurricane—

Ronkainen: Do you want to talk before Hurricane Katrina?

Mars: Oh, before? Oh.

Ronkainen: And then after.

Mars: OK, sure. I’m sorry.

Ronkainen: That’s OK.

Mars: OK, before Hurricane Katrina, do you—do you want like the physical library or my work there?
Ronkainen: Everything.

Mars: OK, all right, OK. I can just give you a little bit of background about my dealings with the library. I started working there full time in 1976. I’ve been with the library system—it’s an eight-branch system, Jackson-George County, two counties—since then, for thirty-one years. I worked at the Moss Point Library for nine years. I was reference librarian at Pascagoula for five. And then when we moved to Vancleave in 1990, I was the branch manager at that branch. And then in 2000, I moved back, and since then I’ve been the branch manager at the Pascagoula Library.

Ronkainen: OK, so do you want to maybe go through, step-by-step, the hurricane, what you did before, and then?

Mars: Right, OK. At the library we have what is called a Poise Manual, and that gives, in any situation, what you are supposed to do. And in that manual is a section on hurricane preparation. And what you do is we cover all our book stacks with visquine, and we tape it on the ends.

Lange: What’s visquine?

Mars: It’s like a heavy, heavy plastic. We move anything around from the windows like chairs and all, in the middle, center of the library as best you can. We cover all of our computers, any kind of equipment like that with heavy garbage bags, and then we close, and we hope for the best. (laughter) The library has two skylights that have been notorious for leaks. Well, before the hurricane, the city worked on the skylights; had a group come in and work on those because it is a city building. And I thought, “Well,” when we went in the next day to look, I thought, “Yeah, we’re going to have big leaks.” The skylights did not leak; however, we did flood, which is highly unusual. Want me to talk about that now? OK. All right. When we went in the back door—my husband and I went in the back door of the library the next morning—there was water still standing. In our main—on the first floor, we received between six and eight inches of water, some places a foot, which doesn’t sound like a whole lot, but that’s just enough to ruin everything on the first floor, you know, our desks, circulation desk, staff desks, all furniture, all shelving. Fortunately, we do not practice, or try not to practice shelving books on the bottom shelves, so we didn’t lose two, maybe three hundred books in-house. Our main focus on losing books was the books that were checked out to people, and that was between four and five thousand, so that’s where we lost our books. We have a mechanical room that houses our chillers and motors for our air-conditioning unit; that received three feet of water. So, we didn’t have air-conditioning till, maybe late May, early June in the library. Once we saw what had happened, I contacted our director, and within a week or so, we were able to contact all of our staff in all the different libraries. Our library was the one that received the main damage. OK. The others, they had minor damage, maybe some shingles and that type thing. But, what we did, the staff at Pascagoula Library, which upstairs is our headquarters library, and we were able to farm different staff members out to various libraries. Some had left the region and did not return, but we were able,
everybody was pretty much able to keep their jobs. I think we, maybe, laid off just a few people, and they were mostly part-timers, like pages and that type thing. And then, of course, we were closed. Well, the library system was up and running; I think it was like September the twelfth we were able to open all branches. And we moved our mainframe and all of our computer stuff—main stuff was housed upstairs in the Pascagoula Library. We moved that to the Moss Point Library. All headquarters personnel moved to the Moss Point Library. I moved up there, as well. So we were able to operate and get the library system going so that people would have somewhere to go. And just as an aside, if you have a library card in our system, it’s good at all of our branches. So that was a good thing. In, must’ve been—well, not long after, after that—it must’ve been, maybe, in October, the city hired a company called Serv Pro who, they were responsible for taking out, in all city buildings, taking out everything and putting it on the side for, like, the county and different people to pick up to haul to dumps. Serv Pro came in; they took out all of our desks and everything off of the first floor. They put the sheets of visquine down on the floor and just piled our books on there, and they did a pretty good job, you know, by keeping them in some kind of semblance of order so that when we come back, then that we could shelve them again. They did that. Our technical services department that catalogues our books, we moved that department—because they’re upstairs, so we moved all of their equipment and everything to another branch, our Gautier Branch. So they were able to operate out of their meeting room. So, we didn’t have that much of a lag time not receiving books to catalog; so that was a good deal. We were considering moving our genealogy and local history department to another branch, which would’ve been a big undertaking simply because of the facts that we did not have any air-conditioning, and those books are irreplaceable, and we did not want to lose those. What we ended up doing is taking more sheets of the heavy plastic, the visquine, and we put it between our fiction department and our genealogy department, and we put screws and all so it would seal it off. And we bought window units and put in those windows to keep the air circulating and keep it dry, and we had no books with mold. We did that, the same thing in our technical services department before we moved them so that, you know, those new books would stay good. Our custodian came every day, and he stayed at Pascagoula Library with the windows open and, you know, trying to keep the place clean to keep mold and all from settling as best we could. Then it must’ve been in January because it was pretty cold, my first assistant and another employee and I went to our director and asked if we could start boxing the books that are on the floor because we wanted to save those. Our custodian made us up some kind of a concoction where we could spray on a rag, and we wiped down every book. And we put them on carts and let them dry. And we did get—

Ronkainen: How long did that take you to wipe down all your books?

Mars: Oh my goodness, about two months, at least, at the very least. We did get electricity back in the building, so we were able to get fans to dry the books once we wiped them down with this stuff that he made for us. And then we boxed them and stored them. And I think that pretty much saved the collection. We worked on that for, well, it seemed like several months. It may have been just been two or three
months. Then probably in, it must’ve been about June, mid-June when we finally got our a/c up and running. The city hired an engineering firm, Compton Engineering, a local engineering firm and contractor, to do the work on the building. They started, I guess it must’ve been about June, with ripping out—well, Serv Pro, let me go back; Serv Pro ripped out four feet of sheetrock and all of the bathroom fixtures and everything. So, they came in, and they got the building cleaned, and they started with the sheetrock. And can I back up for just a second? The way we received water, we, of course, we got it from the beach this way: there was an old bank across the park, across the street from us, across Jackson Avenue, that was going to be torn down because they were building, in the process of building the new Merchants and Marine Bank. The old bank took on five feet of water. We’re built up just enough, which we were very fortunate there, but we got that kind of water, then the river out here, we got river water, and we also got sewage, so there—I mean it was a nasty mess. But anyway, Serv Pro got that done, and the contractors were hired, and they started on the building, and it went pretty fast; it really did. But we had to order—you know everything takes steps; we ordered our furniture, and we ordered our carpeting and all. So, and we got new shelving, got that up, and then we brought the rest of the staff in and started shelving the books. And we opened up January 29, and it looks really good. If anything came good out of this hurricane, it looks good. I mean the building and—we moved in that building in 1986, and so all furniture, everything was, like, twenty years old, and so, it looks real good.

Ronkainen: So that was over a year then.

Mars: Um-hm. So we were able to do that, and people that have been coming in have been so grateful that we’re back open. There were a lot of people that never went to any of our other branches for whatever reason; I don’t know. I didn’t ask, but they had not been to the library in seventeen months, and they were just thrilled we were back. We were—we had the opportunity to upgrade, so we went from, like, twelve public computers to eighteen public computers. Our adult fiction section was upstairs in front of our genealogy and local history department.

Lange: How many floors was the library?

Mars: It’s two. So when we ordered new shelving, we ordered enough to bring my adult fiction section downstairs, which I’ve always wanted to do but just didn’t have the means to do it. So we were able to do that, so therefore the genealogy and local history department could expand, and that’s a good thing because we are one of the only libraries left on the Gulf Coast that has a lot of the information that we have because the libraries over there were destroyed, and some of their departments were destroyed, their genealogy departments were destroyed. We brought our two genealogy librarians in midsummer, and they were able to take queries whether it was the phone, snail mail or e-mail, and so we were able to do that. Of course, people couldn’t come in the library for security reasons, you know, didn’t want anything to fall on their heads, but that’s a good thing. We rearranged some of the downstairs. We put our public computers in another area. We—before the hurricane we had a
circulation desk, and we had a reference desk. Now it is a huge public service desk; it’s twenty-four by twenty-five and it’s really, really nice. So, we were able to—people that come in only have to go to one desk to check out or return, or that type thing.

Ronkainen: So, all of the departments that were moved out temporarily have all been—

Mars: Have all been moved back in, yeah.

Lange: Can you talk a little bit about the workers in the library? Were some really close to the Coast, when the hurricane hit?

Mars: Yes, let me think. Y’all—one team will be interviewing the director that was the director at that time, Bob Willits. I think he was on for 3:30, maybe, this afternoon. He lives in Moss Point, but he lives right down from the river, plus he has like a canal thing running in back of his house, and he received quite a bit of damage. Let’s see; from our library, we had one of our genealogy librarians lived near the beach, and she lived in a two-story building, house, and all of her things were destroyed on the first floor. Y’all will be, somebody will be interviewing her, Rene Hague, this afternoon, also. One lady that lost everything had a houseboat, so they were able to live on their houseboat, and I think they’re back in their house now. I can’t remember how many in the library—there were several in our library system that lived south of [Highway] 90 whether it was Pascagoula or Ocean Springs or Gautier, that received a lot of damage to their homes. As far as I know, everyone is pretty much back in their home now or at least building back is on the way. Personally, like I said we had just a few shingles and a few trees. My husband’s brother lost everything he had, and my sister lost everything she had, but they are picking up and moving on.

Lange: Did you want to maybe talk about your personal experience with the hurricane, like during the hurricane, and how you did anything to prepare for it?

Mars: Sure, sure. One drawback of living where we do live is we do have a lot of trees, and there’s one particular tree we were scared was going to hit the house. So my mother lives in Moss Point, and she lives in a house that is up off the ground, which is a good thing. So my husband and I decided, well, we might better go stay there, just in case, because she doesn’t have any trees around her house. So, we went to my mother’s, and we have a golden retriever; we took her with us, and it was pretty scary. We watched it for a while, watched the wind and listened to the rain hit up against the windowpanes, and then her cable popped, and it was banging, this big thing about like this, was banging up against the window. And we were scared it was going to break the windows. So my husband went out and he cut it, but just to get out and to hold the door so that it wouldn’t slam, and he could get back in if he needed to real quick, was a job because the wind was blowing so hard. We had absolutely no idea of all the flooding, none. When we got out the next morning, downtown Moss Point was all
under water, and we’ve never seen that before because we lived here during Camille, and Georges, and Frederick, but we’d never seen water like that before anywhere around here. But that’s—we made sure we had plenty of water to drink, plenty of ice, Cokes on ice, and you’d go out, and you’d buy crackers and potted meat and Vienna sausages, anything that you don’t have to cook, pretty much, so that you can have plenty of snacks. When you go to the grocery store—I don’t know if y’all ever been through a hurricane, but if you go to the grocery store before a hurricane, you’re going to be there for a while, and then those shelves are empty, because people, I don’t know, you just eat. (laughter) I guess that’s one way of dealing with the stress, unfortunately for some of us here, for me anyway. But that’s basically what we did; we just, we locked up the house and came to my mother’s. She had a little bit of roof damage. You couldn’t even tell; just a few shingles blew off. And then when we were finally able to get back to Vancleave, we were very, very blessed that we only had a little bit of damage.

Ronkainen: Do you want to talk a little bit about the neighborhood that’s surrounding the library, what happened to that, how—

Mars: Sure.

Ronkainen: —they’re doing now?

Mars: We are across Pascagoula Street which is just right—you know, the library is right down here. I don’t know if y’all know that, just right down past the railroad tracks. Across this street, Pascagoula Street, that’s where the downtown city part is; all of that flooded. The Jackson County Sheriff’s Department, the first floor there of the courthouse, all of that flooded. People have told us that during the height of the storm, there were boats coming up Pascagoula Street, going around picking people up that were stranded. The bank I was talking about, their, a lot of their employees stayed because it’s safe, but it flooded. So they ended up on the second floor, and I think some of those were picked up by that boat as well. I have heard—I don’t know this for a fact, but I have heard that after the hurricane—and they started with—the new bank started back building it—that they added—I don’t know if it was structural or whatever—so that if we have another one like that, that their employees will have a place to definitely be safe. Some of the employees of the bank had left, you know, they left their cars there. Well, their cars were submerged. The buildings down from us on Jackson Avenue, you have First Federal and the post office, the Pascagoula Post Office, that’s another, another big thing; all of that got water. Now they’re operating out of a trailer, and I think now they are fixing to, I guess, tear that building down and rebuild the post office. We thought we were going to have to have a foot of concrete poured on our first floor because FEMA guidelines—because we’re operating under FEMA because we had no flood insurance, didn’t think we’d ever need it—said that we had to either build a wall around the library or either raise it. And the only way to raise that building would be to put a foot of concrete in it. Well, if we did that, our shelving wouldn’t fit. We have like ninety-inch shelving. So the city opted to build a two-foot wall around the library with flood gates. Well, that hasn’t taken place yet,
and I guess eventually it will. I was concerned that that would have to be done before we open, but it didn’t, so. I don’t know; I heard that they were going to have to do the same thing with the sheriff’s department, just build a wall around their area, but I’m not sure about that. There’s several attorneys across Pascagoula Street. I know that two of their buildings are back, and that they’re operating out of there. There are a couple of, two or three businesses that were down there that they’re not coming back. They just took, I guess took their losses or gains or whatever and said, you know, they’re not coming back. But the other buildings, as far as I know, that I have seen, they have started rebuilding, and some have opened, and some are just waiting to be complete.

**Ronkainen:** Do you want to talk about, a little bit, how you were maybe personally or emotionally affected by the hurricane?

**Mars:** Sure. Like I said, I’ve been here through Camille, and Georges, and Elena. They were bad. They were very, very bad. More wind than water. When my husband and I drove down, after we left the library, and drove down Market Street to the end right by the beach, one of the ladies that was our purchasing agent at the time had a little house behind a big house that was on the beach. Well, when we got that far, the two-story house that was in front of this house, I mean you could just see there was nothing left of the first floor, but the top was still standing. And her little house, three walls were gone, and there was one wall, and she told me later that when she went to see if she could salvage anything, her chandelier was laying on the ground, and it was unbroken, nothing wrong with it; all the little vases and what, they were just laying there intact. On the other side of Market Street there were two brand-new houses that hadn’t been occupied that long, and they were virtually gone. Seeing stuff like that was, I just couldn’t believe it. It was amazing. And we still had no idea how bad it was. And my sister lives north of I-10, across through Moss Point and over the river, and like I said, a little north of I-10, and her neighbor called them because they went to another city and said that water had gotten in their house. Well, they assumed as I assumed, that water had gotten in their house from the top, you know maybe their roof had blown off or had leaks, but they said no, that the water from the river had gotten in. And they got five feet of water in their house. Had never, ever, ever thought anything like that would happen. And then we rode some and just saw that just nothing, just slabs. One of the ladies that I dealt with, with the city, owned a place on Beach Boulevard, you know right down there on the beach. Her house was two story. She had green wrought iron stairs going up, you know, like this. Very pretty house. All that was left of her house was, the stairs were standing and the pilings, and the rest was just gone. We had a friend that—am I rambling too much?

**Lange:** No.

**Mars:** OK. We had a friend that went out in their boat to see the damage from that way looking forward, and they said it was just amazing. They could not believe what was not there. *But* they said there was a line. You know how, when water at the beach or on the river, when water comes up, and it’ll leave a debris line? He said out
past the islands out there, said there was a debris line about a mile wide, and it reached from one end to the other, probably over to Louisiana, and said there was refrigerators, anything you can imagine from a house, was out there. My husband works at Northrop Grumman; his office was on east bank, and you could see the river from his office, and they got, I think he said, like, eight feet of water in his building; so anything he had was gone. But in one of the buildings at the shipyard there was somebody’s Jacuzzi—it sat seven people—had just ended up in this particular building, just sitting there. But I have never seen anything like it, and I hope I never will again. It is really heartbreaking to think of the places that we just used to go and take for granted, you know, whether it was a restaurant we used to eat at or just a store to go to to buy whatever, and you know it’s not there anymore. And it never will be there, or maybe one day they’ll be back, you know. Who knows? But it’s pretty heartbreaking.

Lange: That kind of leads into another question.

Mars: Sure.

Lange: How has the storm changed the way you think about your community as a whole?

Mars: Somewhat like after 9/11, as well as our community as a whole here with people trying to help others and seeing if they can be of some service even though they have lost things to help others. It’s amazing the people that have the generosity and then the people that have come down, such as y’all, to come down and try to help rebuild or just offer a helping hand. We have one gentleman, and he’s going to—he may have been interviewed yesterday. I don’t remember. He’s named Tom Higgins; I don’t know if y’all interviewed him or whatever. Anyway, he wrote a book about his Katrina experience, and Mr. Higgins is a card. He wrote it, and he went to Staples; he had it bound, and he had several copies printed. He sold them for $25 apiece, and all the proceeds came to the Pascagoula Library. He’s a very, very faithful library user. And he sold several thousand dollars worth of books. We received donations from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from people out in California, just all over, monetary donations or donating used books. We had one young man from Pennsylvania that was working on his Eagle Scout, and he was working on his last thing. I’m not sure what it’s called, but his dad called me the first of last year and wanted to know if he took on the project of collecting books for the library, would that be OK with me. And I said, “Sure.” And I explained to him about our policy; any books that are donated or our Friends’ books, we go through them, what is put in the collection, you know, what I want to put in the collection that’s fine. If we don’t, they’re sold at our book sale, and that money comes to the Friends, which they purchase things that we can’t legally purchase. So, either way we use the books. Well, he, this young man turned eighteen this January, and he had to have everything collected and shipped and received by his eighteenth birthday. So his dad and I kept in touch with one another, and it was the young man’s idea to do this; so he placed barrels at different stores and things in his neighborhood. Well, he ended up collecting like 14,000 books. And his
dad called me back in October; he said, “I’m just trying to get them shipped.” So there was an organization—oh gosh, what was it? Brothers Brother I think’s the name of the organization, on his end, that agreed to ship the books at their cost to us. So they shipped them UPS overnight. They had put them in boxes from like an Office Depot with handles and lids. They knew a retired librarian who put them in categories, so the books are marked. It’s wonderful. And they’re stacked. I haven’t had a chance to go through them. I received them back in January or the first of February—no, it had to be before January before his birthday. We’ve got them in our meeting room. I just haven’t had time to just go through each box. But that type thing has just been amazing. And I know the people in New York feel the same way after 9/11, the generosity and the feeling that people actually do care, you know? (laughter)

**Ronkainen:** So what do you hope, if anything positive can come out of Hurricane Katrina, what do you hope that would be?

**Mars:** I hope that all insurance stuff gets resolved. But no, I hope that people don’t take anything for granted, whether its material or each other, don’t ever take anything for granted because it can be snatched away in a heartbeat. We had had people come in; Rene was telling me in their department where they had done their genealogy, you know, they had it all laid out, everything, and it was wiped away, and they had no backup, so they’re having to start over. There was one lady that came in, and Rene may tell this this afternoon; she used to be a judge here and is trying to reconstruct her genealogy. And we have the local paper on microfilm, so she was going through the years of when she, back in I think it was the [19]60s or [19]70s when she first ran for judge and all, and then came across a picture, and it was of her, and her mother, and her daddy. She said, “That’s the only picture I have of those people.” So we made a copy, and we’re trying to get the best copy we can from a microfilm copy so that she’ll have that. So, you know you can’t take anything for granted.

**Ronkainen:** Was there any thought of relocating the library?

**Mars:** To my knowledge, no. The city may have had thoughts on that; even our former director may have had a thought on that, but to my knowledge that was never discussed.

**Ronkainen:** And do you know why they wouldn’t want to relocate?

**Mars:** For one thing probably there’s not very many places available here for that size of a building to build, to my knowledge. Another thing, this may never happen again. And if we did move, the next time it may be wind, and wind may cause the damage; that’s just my personal opinion of it; I don’t know.

**Ronkainen:** How about yourself? Have you thought about relocating or the potential of another hurricane, is that—
Mars: Well, it’s funny because when I came back to Pascagoula Library to work, my husband and I thought, “Well, we may need just to move back,” because he works here at Northrop Grumman, and I work down here at the library, and it’s, like, it takes me about thirty-five minutes to get here. And so we thought—this was 2000, 2001 and [200]2, we looked at several different places. Well, the places where we looked, they’re not here anymore. So, you know, I thought, well—because there would always be something that went wrong, or we didn’t like there. Where we live, we live virtually in the woods with no neighbors. Well, where we looked, your neighbor’s right there, you know, and after living there for ten years like that, we’re kind of used to being on our own. So, we have decided we are probably not going to move south of [Highway] 90, but like I said, next time it may be a wind thing, and it may take that house away. Who knows? You can’t figure that. But right now, we’re fine where we are.

Lange: Right. Just a different question.

Mars: Sure.

Wallace: What is—what was your opinion of local, state, and federal politicians before Hurricane Katrina?

Mars: They were fine. I worked closely with the city manager of Pascagoula. We get a lot of—we get funding from our cities, counties, state, and grants. And for the most part, they have a good feeling about the library. A lot of them are library users. Of course, some of them are not. But I have not had any problems with them. They’d always, if we went to the city for whatever reason to ask for capital improvement grants for the library, whether it’s to—we built a computer lab, and they had to do a match with a grant, and they were fine with that. Everyone’s been fine.

Lange: And after, everything was fine?

Mars: Yeah, pretty much, everything’s fine. Of course, you know, it is a city building, and they were tied up with their own things going on because, you know, they had to relocate in trailers and whatnot, but any time that I went over and talked with them, they were always very nice and tried to be as helpful as they could, you know. They were spread very, very thin. And then we had to deal with FEMA and MEMA, and you know that’s—

Ronkainen: What’s MEMA?

Mars: That is Mississippi Emergency Management Association. (laughter) Of course, FEMA is federal. Anything, it has to be funneled through MEMA; any federal funds has to be funneled through MEMA, then through our state agency, and then the cities. I don’t understand it all, to tell you the truth. But anyway, we made it through, and we got what we needed.
Ronkainen: Is there any differences now, post-Katrina, with traditions or a sense of community, do you feel like, with the library and also where you live?

Mars: Other than, I think, just from the people coming in the library saying how grateful they are that we are open, that’s another thing about taking things for granted. People, I guess took for granted, “Yeah, the library’s there; we’ll go to the library.” And then it was not there, and they are so grateful that we’re back open. I know, just from a personal thing, that—now, this is just a small thing—our local grocery store is like a mom-and-pop grocery store. When they finally were able to get power and get back open, we were extremely grateful that they were open and happy that they were back in business. So it’s just the stuff that you take for granted every day; once you lose and you get it back, then you’re very [grateful]. Air-conditioning is a wonderful thing, you know. And I have to hand it to our Singing River EPA guys, our electrical people; they really worked round the clock to get everybody electricity back, and the people that came in and helped them, that’s—it’s a good thing. Out in the country where we are, if you have no power, you have no water because we have an electric pump on our well, and you can’t let that run dry, so, stuff like that.

Lange: Is there any interesting or funny or even a horrible experience that you could maybe describe that happened to you?

Mars: Oh gosh, let me think. Hm. (long pause) Right now I just can’t; I’m just at a loss.

Lange: We can move on to another question.

Mars: OK, sure, maybe I can think of something.

Lange: Is there anything you want particularly to put on record that this will be in the history about, maybe just in general about the hurricane, that you would like to say?

Mars: Um, one thing you can’t do is you can’t assume. You can’t assume when there is a threat of a hurricane, that even though you prepare for things coming down, you can’t assume that there’s not going to be things that happen like water coming in.

Lange: Where did the main water come from?

Mars: The beach and the river. One thing that is kind of, I guess, funny in a way, was the morning that my husband and I came and looked at our—at my library and saw that everything was wet and we still have water standing, he said, “Well, we’ll go down to my office,” because he had a little window unit in his office, and he said, “I’ll turn on my window unit because I’m sure everything’s fine there.” And he said, “We’ll get us a cold Coke out of there and whatnot.” Because it was so hot. So, we drove up to the guard shack, and the guard was there, and my husband told him, he said, “We’re going to go get a cold drink out of my refrigerator. Would you like for me to bring you one?” Well, these guys have kind of a quirky sense of humor, and so
they said, “Yeah, you go right ahead.” So we got there, and when we opened the door there was furniture piled where the water had rushed in and whatnot, so that was kind of funny in a, not a ha-ha, but kind of a quirky way. But that is one thing, never assume. Because he did what we did; he bundled up his computer; he covered his books; they did all that type thing. Well, that didn’t make a bit of difference when the water came rushing in. And there’s an old adage that my mother has told me; she said, “Never go to bed if you’ve had even an argument or a spat or something with your husband, never to go bed angry.” You know, so that’s another thing. If you have a situation, and it’s not a good situation, always make sure that is resolved in case something does happen because you just never know because you don’t want that on your conscience or anything, so. I don’t know if that answered your question, but. (laughter)

Ronkainen: How do you think the rest of America has viewed this, what’s happened in Mississippi as well as New Orleans?

Mars: I think that’s twofold. I think, one thing I think they see the devastation and see how bad things were in New Orleans and here, and one thing that was really, that really broke my heart going back to the other thing—and I hope I’m not rambling too much. But anyway, we, in July our library system went to the Convention Center, I think it’s called, in New Orleans, anyway, for an ALA Convention, American Library Association Convention, meeting, they were fine where they were. But we were on a bus, and we toured; to get back on the interstate or whatever, we toured down in some of the poor sections of New Orleans, and there was spray painted on the doors, numbers. And I was telling my husband about it, and he said, “That’s the number of people they found dead in that dwelling.” And that just, it just gave me chills because it was so, so sad. But I lost my train of thought. What was the question? I’m sorry.

Ronkainen: How America—

Mars: Oh. I think they see this as, or saw Katrina as a really sad thing, a thing where they wanted to do something but didn’t know what to do. I got a lot of calls from people all over, “What can we do to help? What can we do to help?” And that is a very, very good thing. I think that the outpouring of their giving hearts is wonderful. And then on the other hand, I talked with someone, and I can’t think of where they were the other day. Even though it’s been seventeen, eighteen months, I think a lot of people think we’re OK or New Orleans is OK, but we’re not. The library, thankfully we’re back up, but I rode down to the beach the other day and just went through some of the neighborhoods; it’s still horrible. And I can just imagine how it is in New Orleans now going through some of those neighborhoods. And probably New York’s going through the same thing; I don’t know, I’m not sure. I hope that they’re OK, but I know it has been projected here that it’s going to take years for us to get back to normal, as well as New Orleans; they’ll take a longer time than we will. But overall I think that with all the disasters that’s happened in the last several years, people are just
learning that other people are basically good at heart, and I’m sure y’all have heard that before.

**Ronkainen:** Do you think it can go back to normal?

**Mars:** Maybe not a hundred percent (laughter) because there’s been so much personal loss for people, but I think it can get close.

**Ronkainen:** You said you were here for Camille, as well.

**Mars:** Um-hm.

**Ronkainen:** Could you talk maybe a little bit comparing the two?

**Mars:** It seemed to me—well, of course I guess it was, I was a teenager back then, so your perception is different from when you’re older. The one thing I remember about Camille, my family and I stayed at a church because our home was an older home, and it was wood, and we didn’t know what was going to happen; nobody knew what was going to happen. And we lived in Moss Point. Of course we didn’t live over near Biloxi where they got, and over that way where they got the bad part, but I can remember looking out the window at the church and watching the trees blow, but before the lights went out when it would start popping and all, and I don’t know why I can still see that, but that’s one of the things I remember about Camille. And we went—I was dating my husband at the time, and we went over to New Orleans not long after that, and it was after the roads and all were fixed where you could go 90. Of course we didn’t have I-10 then, so you had to go 90, but they made a way for us to get over there. And I remember thinking, “This is horrible,” because you had boats that were up on land, trees down, and whatnot, but I think that that loss was bad in itself. But to me, I guess more stuff is gone since Katrina. I think that, if that makes any sense. There’s more a broader path and more devastation with Katrina than with Camille, even though Camille’s winds were higher, so I don’t know, maybe you’re comparing apples and oranges, I don’t know. And like I said, being a teenager, perception was different than, you know, you’re responsible. I wasn’t responsible; my parents were responsible for me back then. But Camille, it was, it was bad. There were—of course now, I’m sure y’all have heard of the Camille party that they had in the apartment building over there. There were several people that were going to stay and have a Camille party. Well, that apartment building was wiped out, so all of those people were killed. I guess it was just people had not experienced that type thing before is why they decided to stay, but I hope that’s our last one for a long time. (laughter)

**Lange:** Do you think that the sense of community may be stronger, and perhaps if something did, like this, happen again that they could pull through again?

**Mars:** Oh yeah, definitely so. I think we will be better prepared as a community. There may not be anybody here; (laughter) they may be all gone, you know. But I think that people will be—they will probably do overkill in preparation, which is fine.
People just weren’t prepared for what was going to happen. Like if you had a box of pictures on the floor in your bedroom, and you got four or five feet of water, you know, maybe they’re going to put them up in the attic; I don’t know. But, yeah, I think people will be more prepared and maybe watch the weather closely; I don’t know. I know the Saturday before [Katrina] hit on that Monday, I was working. I was showing Elvis Presley movies. (laughter) And our director said, “You know we’re going to close at noon because this looks like it may be a bad thing.” He said, “But we’ll be back Tuesday, and then we’ll assess the situation.” So, you know, he said, “Just go ahead and do your preparation with the visquine and covering up the bags and everything.” He said, “And we’ll definitely be closed Monday, and then we’ll be back Tuesday and see how things are.” So, you just don’t ever know.

Lange: Um-hm.

Ronkainen: OK, do you just have any final thoughts?

Mars: Well, it’s been nice talking to y’all. I hope I haven’t rambled off too much. I just when I think of something I tried to get it in. Just that I hope everything gets back to some sort of normalcy for the people that are still living in FEMA trailers. That’s the hard part is seeing the people still living in the FEMA trailers, but I’m glad they had them to send down here because I don’t know what people would’ve done. I really, really don’t. I hope that New Orleans and Louisiana and over that way, I hope they get back, back to where they can have some kind of normalcy because that was really pitiful, really, really bad. Other than that, I want to thank y’all for coming down and thinking about us down here. We do appreciate it, as I’ve said; we appreciate the kind hearts and the people that—and the outgoing of love, and whatnot, that the people have shown for our area.

Lange: OK, thank you for coming.

Mars: Hey, thank you. I appreciate it.

(end of interview)