Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Dorothy Wells Burney

Interviewers: Kristen Wallace, Lucy Maynard

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Biography

Dorothy Burney was born in Escatawpa, Mississippi, on May 22, 1944, to Captain Daniel L. Wells (born: January 16, 1922) and Vivian Marion Wells (born: April 17, 1922, in Escatawpa, Mississippi). Her paternal grandparents were Homer and Vassie Child Wells. She had three paternal uncles: Lonnie L. Wells, Van Wells, and James Wells. Her father, Daniel, worked for International Paper Company of Moss Point, Mississippi, and for the local police force; he worked both jobs for over 50 years. Daniel and Vivian were married in February 1939 in Escatawpa, Mississippi. Vivian’s parents, John and Bessie Marion had four daughters—Vivian, Rosie, Mary and Lillian; there was one male child: Toe(?) Marion.

Ms. Burney attended school at the Davis Chapel Colored School, Magnolia High School, Jackson State University, Michigan State University, and Southern University. She is widowed and has two children: Kimberly Mechelle Burney McLeod (born: May 11, 1969) and Kyla Nanette Burney Lamar (born: April 30, 1972). Dorothy has two grandsons: Kyle Dwight Burney Lamar and Dylan Matthew Lamar.

Ms. Burney states that she is a retired teacher. She worked in the Biloxi Public School system for three years and the Vancleave Public Schools for 31 years. She lists awards or honors of note as receiving the Teacher of the Year Award three times and the Unsung Heroine Award (NAACP). She is active in the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, the Retired Teachers Association of Jackson County, the Democratic Executive Board of Jackson County, and the NAACP Board. Interests and hobbies include sewing, reading, writing poetry, bowling, and helping others.
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Wallace: 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 Dorothy Burney and it is taking place on February 22, 2007, at 9:00 A.M. in Pascagoula, Mississippi, at St. John’s Episcopal Church. The interviewers are Kristen Wallace and Lucy Maynard. First of all I’d like to thank you, Dorothy, for taking the time to talk with us today and I’d like to get started with giving some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. So, first I’m going to ask you if you could please state and spell your name for the record.

Burney: Thank you. My name is Dorothy, D-O-R-O-T-H-Y, Wells, W-E-L-L-S, Burney, B-U-R-N-E-Y.

Maynard: OK, Dorothy, our first question is when were you born?

Burney: I was born in Escatawpa, Mississippi, just right across the bridge here.

Maynard: And what was the date?

Burney: May 22, 1944.

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

Burney: Daniel L. Wells.

Maynard: OK, and your mother’s maiden name?

Burney: Vivian Marion.

Maynard: OK, and where did you grow up?

Burney: I grew up in a little town called Three Rivers Community.
Maynard: OK.

Burney: All Wells at that time when we were little kids. It’s about eighteen miles north of here of [Highway] 63, but it’s in Jackson County.

Maynard: OK, and how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Burney: All of my life, except when I went to school and started my career in Michigan, Muskegon Heights, and it was very cold so I didn’t like the cold weather. So I came immediately after my first six months of teaching there back to Mississippi. It was just too cold.

Maynard: Where did you go to school?

Burney: Jackson State University, plus I’ve attended Southern University, Michigan State, and William Carey [University].

Maynard: OK.

Wallace: What were your areas of study?

Burney: Elementary education and adult education.

Wallace: And how many generations of your family have lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Burney: Well, oh my goodness, all of them, I guess.

Wallace: Yeah?

Burney: Yeah. My family, my dad’s family, his family, my mom, it just goes back like this from the beginning of time. (laughter)

Wallace: Why were they living here?

Burney: Why were they living here?

Wallace: Yeah.

Burney: Well, from my understanding, back years ago when it was like seven brothers, they told us they were sold out to the slaves, and some came to the Gulf Coast, and I don’t know where the others went. But they came and they settled in a little place called Three Rivers, and from there, of course, it began. But my father was born in a place called Basin, Mississippi, which was in—well, his mother was, and I’m not quite sure if he was born in Jackson County or George County, which one of those, but that’s where his mother was from, George County. So I assume from the
midwife that delivered him it was in Three Rivers, which was Jackson County, according to his birth certificate.

**Wallace:** So what is your attachment to this region and what does it mean to you?

**Burney:** To Three Rivers?

**Wallace:** Or to the area that you grew up in, in Pascagoula.

**Burney:** Oh, well, it means a lot to me because it’s home, it is my roots. And wherever I go I tell people that I was born in Escatawpa and I was reared in Three Rivers, and I attended school in Moss Point, and we got all our mail on a rural route in Pascagoula. It was some confusing to kids when I went to college, I said, “But that’s the way it is.” And, of course, it means a lot to me because we were born and reared there, and all we knew as growing up was church, home, and school. And we played with ourselves, among ourselves because there’s fourteen of us; seven girls and seven boys. So my mom said, “There’s enough of you all to play a team, a ball,” or whatever. And so we grew up like that, keeping everything spotless, the yards and no sticks, no papers, no nothing, and playing among ourselves. And holidays we would just cook. They would cook all night—my mom and her sisters and her aunts would come and they would have just food (inaudible) where they cook all night long, and that’s how we celebrate holidays. Then from there to church and then come back and eat more and play.

**Maynard:** What were some of the big holidays that you celebrated with your family?

**Burney:** At home in Three Rivers?

**Maynard:** Mm-hm.

**Burney:** Mm-hm.

**Maynard:** Like, which ones were the big ones?

**Burney:** Christmas, the Fourth of July, Easter, Thanksgiving.

**Maynard:** Yeah.

**Burney:** Yeah. And, of course, my mother celebrated our birthdays.

**Maynard:** Yeah.

**Burney:** And my granddaddy.

**Maynard:** What were some of your favorite foods that were prepared?
Burney: Wow, ham, turkey, hens, fresh pork, about thirteen, fifteen cakes, baked pies. She would make a fruit salad in this huge fruit bowl that her brother brought her from Greece. He is a retired Navy man, and he sent my mother this fruit bowl, and she would make this fruit salad in there. We had nuts, and my grandfather would come and bring [them to us]. He would pick up pecans in his yard and bring bags of pecans and—you don’t see those anymore—peppermint sticks, and my mom would just chop off a little bit and we would have pecans and eat candy, and she’d put it out. And then it would last us until maybe around, way in the spring of the year. It was really large, but you don’t see those anymore. And we’ve had—they’d make ice cream and pack it and put it under the tree, and it’d be just as hard, you know, take all the water off and put ice inside, put paper and more salt and more ice, and just keep packing it. And we had homemade ice cream and fruit. We just had a good time. And her relatives would come and they would cook. And sometimes our aunt, her sister, Aunt Autrey would take about thirty minutes to get all of the food out of the car. And my mom and her sister lived with us, our Aunt Nell, she cooked and they just had all kinds of cake. Our favorite cake was chocolate, coconut, jelly cake and then they had made all other kinds of cakes and all.

Wallace: How many people would you say would come over for holidays and celebrations?

Burney: Well, of course, there was the fourteen of us and my mom’s sister and her kids, and that would be that, and the aunts, you know, during their lifetime.

Wallace: Mm-hm.

Burney: Mm-hm.

Wallace: And how many hours would they spend cooking?

Burney: Oh, they would get started sometimes that day cooking cakes, and then just go on and on, you know. It would go over to midnight; just didn’t sleep, they just cooked, you know. And as we’d grow older, my mom would let us do certain things but we had to be a certain age to do this, a certain age to do that and we could help.

Wallace: Was it exciting when you were able to help?

Burney: Yeah, and it was exciting that we was able to stay up when we’d find out that there wasn’t a Santa. (laughter) I remember when, this has been about—I was so disappointed. We didn’t get much but we had love. My mother had plenty of love for us. We might’ve gotten a ball and we all played together; one bike, everybody would ride it; a handkerchief or something like that, but we were all excited, you know. We always had nice, always get us nice Sunday clothes. We had Sunday clothes, school clothes, and play clothes. (laughter) And so they were starched and ironed. We went to school; everybody went to school and finished. And all of us went to college and graduated. Our oldest brother wanted to be a doctor; he became a doctor. And I
wanted to be a teacher and I became a teacher. And that’s what I wanted to be when I was in the second grade; I wanted to be a teacher. I have this cousin that taught us that I just deeply admired her and her name was Ophelia Evans. And she was our cousin, and she was such a great person. She was so inspirational in helping all the kids. And at that time there was one classroom. And in that classroom it was like, you know, five classes. I mean, it wasn’t like there was ten or twelve kids in a class, and it was like maybe four or five, you know, ten in some, you know. First grade up to fifth in one classroom, and how she would do it, it was amazing. And as I look back, and being a retired teacher myself, I wonder how did they do that. And to run off papers they had this jelly-looking stuff that was purple, and she would go in and her tests would be made out, and she would put it on that jelly stuff and make copies for all the kids. And we didn’t miss a beat. We had reading, spelling, English, math, science and social studies, and she taught all those classes. It was amazing. And we went on and became successful. And I give credit to my mother because she instilled in us to be all that we could be, and that we could do anything, and that she did not want us to be ignorant. And she raised us by the Bible. We were Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ. So we went there and our cousin taught us. We had several teachers but she was just such a jewel to me, and I often think of her. She passed away not long ago. I wrote her obituary and made her funeral and spoke there because she was certainly an inspiration. And she always—she had so much belief in her students and especially our family, she always would have kind words to say, you know. But it was just a joy to go to school, and we were a set of kids that did not miss school. We had to go to school every day and we got our lesson now. (laughter) Yeah.

Maynard: So where was your neighborhood that you grew up in?

Burney: It was just in Three Rivers, just a small little neighborhood, and at that particular time it was just all Wells. So we walked to school, we walked to church. And along the way to church we had this little building that was the old school that we had church in, we would pick up some wood so we could get the fire started at the church, and we had church. By the time we got to clapping our hands and praising the Lord, well, the fire had gone out but the fire within our souls was still burning, and we just had a wonderful time. You walked in you had two little lights, one in the front and one in the back, dim lights, but it didn’t bother us, you know, we would hear it. We had a good time. And the church was mostly ladies. You know, we had one man that belonged there but he finally left. We had a preacher that would come once a month, but the church was carried on by ladies, mainly, so I grew up with that, so, pretty much.

Wallace: And what about before Hurricane Katrina, where was your neighborhood?

Burney: I lived in Gautier, Mississippi.

Wallace: OK.
Burney: And I lived there because I—when I came back from Michigan I went to Biloxi and I taught school there at Popp’s Ferry for three years. I had my first daughter, I continued to teach, and I had the second daughter, I came to Vancleave because my husband taught at East Central, and Vancleave was his home. So we lived there for nine years, and then we moved to Gautier. And I’ve been there every since. And then I just commuted back and forth to Vancleave for thirty-one years, and my teaching expanded thirty-six years, then I retired. So I started real early in teaching. But Gautier is a nice place, and during Katrina, we always would leave during storms because the wind was so furious. [Hurricane] Camille came and my oldest daughter was four months old, and I really didn’t have a concept of what a hurricane could do. I remember my mom telling us about the one in Louisiana; Kenner, Louisiana, where the cows was floating and everything, but we were young, but I remember that, it stayed in my mind. But when Camille came I just thought it was a strong wind. I went to visit my mother, and my husband and I came back and the car was just blowing and everything. We got ready to get out of the car, my umbrella went somewhere; we never did know where it went from that day to this day. And so my father-in-law kept callings us—we was living in a mobile home at that time—“Y’all better come up here. You better come up here,” you know, and I didn’t want to go. My husband said, “Oh, come on, let’s go.” So we finally got in the car and we drove there, which was just next door. But, then we parked the car and as we—it was about six, seven, the wind was just picking up and I guess about sometime during the night, the house was sort of like this.

Wallace: Swaying?

Burney: Yeah. So we had—I said, “Oh.” And my husband and I both had Kim, you know, we were just—she was only four months, you know, and I didn’t want nothing to happen to my baby. And so we was holding her, and Benny would hold her. I wouldn’t let her lie down at all, and, because we were afraid, you know. And so we got up the next morning and honestly you couldn’t even get out. We couldn’t get out, and that was Camille. And then the next one came was—big one came, it was Frederick, so I went to my girlfriend’s house, my dear girlfriend Mary Wise and her husband, we went out there. Oh, my goodness, we couldn’t get out. It was about a week before we could leave. They had to cut, cut us out.

Wallace: Was that because of trees?

Burney: The trees was all mingling and everything, and there we were. We was blessed. We went back and we still had a home and everything, but none when Frederick came. And I promised myself—and at that time my husband was living and I said, “I’m never going to stay here again when a hurricane comes.” So I went to Jackson, because when I first went to college I met these two young ladies and we took our ACT [American College Testing] test, one of them, in Cooper, and then when my mom and dad took me back to college to register, that was in September of ’62, and Edna Cooper and I, we met again. We was destined to be friends, and Delores Strong, we’ve been friends ever since and to this day we still are. They come to visit
me. One lives in—Delores lives in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and Edna lives in Jackson. So every storm coming, Edna calls me, “Come on, come on, get your things ready, what you waiting on, come on, come on.” And I’d drive to Jackson, you know.

Wallace: How far is Jackson from here?

Burney: Hmm, it’s like three hours drive, but, of course, getting on the road when I went there, it took us from three o’clock—I left here about three-something at one time, and we got there two-something in the morning because the traffic was so heavy. It was coming from Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi Gulf Coast. It was just almost impossible. You just kind of creep all the way to Jackson. But we were blessed. And so she just insisted we come. So my daughter came and got me, and I left my car in my garage. And my oldest daughter went into Hazlehurst, Mississippi, she and her husband.

Wallace: Was this during Katrina?

Burney: Uh-huh, Katrina. And so, I just said, “Well, I’ll just put a little something in a suitcase.” And so he said, “Come on, come on, come on.” So I left my car in the garage, and they drove their car, and we went on up the road and everything. And so, it was bad in Jackson, too. The lights went out, trees was popping, my girlfriend’s fence came down and we was trying to watch and see what was going on on the Gulf Coast because we didn’t know if we were going to have a home when we got back or not. And we couldn’t call anyone. It was over. It was you couldn’t call. No connection, no nothing. So we came, we left Jackson and we couldn’t come back in, just come down to Mississippi where we could go out of Mississippi into Alabama to get back into Mississippi, and they lived in Mobile. So we had to go back out and then come back, and go into Alabama and come down that way to get in, get back to Mobile. That took us a while, but we got back there, and thank God my daughter’s home, they had lights and everything. It was bad over in that area but they still had their lights and that was a blessing.

Maynard: Where does your daughter live?

Burney: In Mobile.

Maynard: OK.

Burney: West Mobile. But I couldn’t get home. I could not get back to Gautier. I-10 bridge was messed up. They had a big hole on [Highway] 90 between Gautier and Pascagoula. So I stayed in Mobile seven days. And finally we got back over here. I didn’t know what to expect. I was just bracing myself. But each time I would leave home I would always know my house was blessed and all and I would pray. And I would say, “Now, Lord, it’s yours and everything I have belongs to you, you know, I’m yours, so take care of me and my home.” And so when I got back I was amazed it was there, and I was so happy. I had water, it was damaged and all of that. The car
was fine, and some say you never leave the car in the garage because the pressure or something was—whatever it does, but it was fine, you know. And they said that the water was up. It was two neighbors that stayed, was frightened to leave. I don’t live very far from the Mississippi Sound and they said the water was over the mailbox, it was just all the way to my door. It got into my living room, two of my bedrooms, my den. And so the other two bedrooms and bath, two baths, it didn’t bother, but it was the rough, the water went around it. So we came in and took up the carpet and everything; got a man to do that. Cleaned my furniture and I said, “I’m not throwing my furniture away.” I’ve got this green something oil(?) and greased my legs down in oil, and we got to prop it up and we had to put a new floor down there. And in the living room I just cleaned and cleaned, and when the insurance people came out, the man told me that I needed to pull that carpet up. He said, “The carpet is OK but the padding needs to come up and be thrown away.” And he wrote down a name for me to get some stuff to put on the floor to get [the mold up]. So I am still working on my home; still trying to get it back. My fences was gone and everything on the outside. I tried to get everything in, and living by myself was difficult, but I did what I could do and I had to leave the rest. And so I don’t know what happened to it, it just left, you know. But like my rocking chairs, I put those in [my living] room. So just for—it just was—I couldn’t do anything. I pulled everything out and just had—the house was just in, just [inaudible] because I lived in one room, in one of the bedrooms, and I did not cook or anything. I just ate peanut butter. But immediately when I did, I began volunteering and helping people, the ones that did not have anything. I did have something. I began to take older people to get stuff so they could have water. And someone came by my home and left a small box, and they left me a note that said, “I know that you would never ask anyone for anything, but we’re going to leave you something.” It was a small box of food because they knew it’s just me. And I guess the Army, the Corps of Engineers; they would just put water and leave. When I would come back I would have water out on my front porch; they would just leave it there for me. And I was very thankful. I don’t know who left that box to this day. They knew I was out helping the people, I began to just volunteering because there were so many folks and it was so sad. And everyone was sad because they didn’t have anything. Not an automobile to get from A to B, you know. Not a home. Not a spoon. Not a fork. Nothing to put their head on. And I was thankful because I still had a roof, a leaky one but it was a roof, you know. So, the Corps of Engineers came out and they covered my roof for me, and I was very blessed and I was very thankful that they did that. Otherwise, I perhaps would’ve ended up tearing out all the drywalls and all that stuff, but they covered that, and they took care of that part for me, and until I could get a new roof put on. I was very thankful to First United Methodist Church in Gautier came to my rescue. And also the United Methodist Church in Vancleave, where I taught school, came to my rescue and helped me. People would come by and leave me notes and said, “I’m here for you and where are you?” And I couldn’t call them because we had no phone to call anyone, you know, but they would say, “Miss Burney, I’m here for you.” Or “Dorothy, I came by to see you. Where are you?” you know. And you couldn’t get to most of the people because you couldn’t even get down my street it was so bad.
Maynard: Yeah.

Burney: The debris. So you had to kind of find yourself. And at night it was very dangerous to drive; you didn’t know what you was going to hit, so once you got in you were just in. So I was blessed, I had a little old black and white TV. And my daughter would say, “Mama, don’t stay there.” I said, “Well, I’m not afraid.” And I had a large flashlight and I would just, at night I would just put it on, just sit it like in my bed. And I kind of stayed in that area, you know, because I couldn’t—I had an alarm system but, of course, you know it wasn’t working because there was no electricity or anything like that. And they had the Corps of Engineers at night, they had those little four wheelers and they were just like all over the neighborhoods, you know, I guess they was protecting us. But it was good, they had a curfew and everything, so I made myself, you know, after, I would work until about 4:30, I worked at the Civil Action, helped giving out food and making sure the kids had, you know, milk and diapers and all of that, and older peoples had food to eat. But for me, I just ate cheese and crackers and peanut butter and that was it, you know. Some days I just didn’t—I’m not a fast food person and they didn’t have anyplace around there to eat, so I would just eat that and drink water.

Wallace: What did your neighborhood look like after the hurricane?

Burney: Oh, it was deplorable. It was just, people were just pulling out stuff and water. On my street, it was just the home next door and the home, the two homes on the right hand side of me they got much more water than I did. My house is kind of on an incline. They had to throw away a lot of stuff because their homes really got more water than I did, and the way mine’s was sitting I got water but I didn’t have to throw any of my stuff away. Because what I do before I leave, I always pull all my stuff in the center of the floor, and I just throw quilts and sheets on top of it. I take all my pictures down and put them in the center of the bed and just put quilts and, you know, just in case. And the ones I can’t, I leave. But, and I usually take my dishes out and just put them on the floor, because you can’t hurt those. But this particular time I didn’t do that. We didn’t have enough time. The storm came so fast it was strange, because it was like a daytime storm and we always get it at night, but it came in the day. And my neighbor said that they was trembling in their boats, the water just came like a rushing wind but it was like a train or something, and it just came up and everything began to flood. So they were saying, “Oh, Miss Burney’s house is going to go away,” because behind my home is a huge ditch, and that was up. And after the storm they was back there looking for bodies; I don’t think they found any but they was looking in every stream of water for them. So, the street was bad, and by the time you thought that they got some of it out, it was filling up again, you know, and folks was tearing out and it was just a sad sight, throwing their stuff away, and some of it just wasn’t good any more. The mold had just taken over. But I went to Lowe’s and got me something to treat the mold all around my house. But my rocking chairs and things were black, they were snow white and they were just turning like the mold, so I didn’t want it to get inside and so I began to treat that, and I got a young lady to help me to get that all clean, and I just kind of set it out on the lawn so it wouldn’t come in

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the inside of my home because I had a little bit in there and I kind of got rid of that. So I still watch for it but I hadn’t seen any.

Wallace: Did a lot of people lose their homes completely in your neighborhood?

Burney: Oh yeah. Further down there was more water and lower. Yes, they lost their homes.

Maynard: Would you say it was by the wind or by the water?

Burney: Both, the water—mostly where we live, the water. And I’d ask my insurance man every year, I said, “Do I need flood insurance?” He says, “No. Miss Burney, you don’t have anything to worry about.” I taught all of his kids and his grandkids, and he was my agency and he said, “Miss Burney, don’t worry about a thing. You don’t need any flood insurance.” I would pay my insurance in full every year, and I asked him, and he said, “You don’t worry about a thing, you’re not in a flood zone.”

Wallace: So, how did the insurance affect you during the hurricane? Were you able to claim?

Burney: Yes, I was. My insurance came right out, and I had Farm Bureau, and they came out and they gave me, paid me $7,000. Of course, my roof was that much almost to put on. And the floor, and you had all that other work to do, so the insurance could not pay, didn’t pay all of that. So I went to work for FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] for a little while. They called me. Someone recommended me, always recommended me for something, and FEMA called me and asked me if I would come. And I said, “Yes.” And they went on to tell me, and I said, “Well, I’m retired and everything, and I don’t mind working to help the people.” So I worked there for a little while and it was so sad. I got sick on that job because I think the impact of the older people, black and white alike, they had lived in their homes and they were paid for, everything they had was paid for, so they had savings like most peoples, a little savings. And they got their husband’s social security which was not that much, and although they might have lived in affluent neighborhoods, but they didn’t have much. When the storm came they had nothing. And the little money that they had saved, they was trying to live off of that in hotels and flying here and there, and they had nothing. They would just sit down and just start crying because they had nothing. All their lives they never wanted for nothing and then, BOOM, they had nothing and it was a sad thing. And, of course, I would wait on like one hundred and more people a day. Because of my personality and my caring attitude, you know, they would want to come back over and over to talk to me because I would give them words of encouragement and I would tell them that it’s going to be OK, and I wanted to do everything to try to help them get money from FEMA. Some did and some did not. Some received very little and some none. Some, within my opinion, never should’ve gotten a dime, but did. But that was not my calling; that was FEMA’s calling. Some came in that had no damage and claimed, you know, but that was not
my calling. My job was to write down the information and put it in. And then when I would see folks come in, knowing that they needed help so badly, they were turned down.

Maynard: Hmm.

Burney: They said, “Ineligible, not enough damage.” And here I am I was living alone, I’ve always been honest, worked hard for everything, never asked anyone for anything. I didn’t challenge it; I said, “Fine.” I continued to work and I saved that money so I could try to get my home back in shape because the insurance did not pay me.

Wallace: So how did—what were your, some of your opinions of the, like, politics, you know, with the local, state, and federal levels before Katrina?

Burney: Before Katrina?

Wallace: Yes.

Burney: Well, I didn’t see that much happen. It seems like to me, now the local politicians—I guess they tried to do everything to make things safe and to try to get everybody to move on safe land, and then try to get everyone out of town or put folks where they would be out of harm, you know, I think they did that. Um, the state, I think maybe things could’ve been much more different knowing that we lived in the area where the hurricanes would come and really affect. And they said that this was a mighty powerful storm, so perhaps the state could’ve done more or maybe should’ve been here, you know. I mean already situated. Now they did—they had some of the stuff in place, like the electric people, they came from different states and everywhere. Some of those people were just kind of sitting on the highways, you know, state, how they had them here. The federal, I think that Gene Taylor really did a lot to try to help the people on the Gulf Coast.

Maynard: Who is Gene Taylor?

Burney: He’s a congressman.

Maynard: Yeah?

Burney: Uh-huh.

Maynard: From Mississippi?

Burney: In Mississippi, uh-huh. Trent Lott, you know. They tried to help with the insurance claims, I don’t know where they were, and did not want to pay the people, that was disheartening. When you have paid your hard earned money for years and years and years and years, and I’m a person that I never used insurance. Although I
have plenty insurance but I never use it, not even my health insurance. Thank God I’ve been blessed. Just recently I got sick and I had to use it but if you pull my record and all the insurance that I have, just pay, pay, pay, pay. And then when something like this come up, well, you expect for someone to come in and do right by the people, and I just felt like it was not right. That part was not right for some insurance, you know. And perhaps, you know, others tell me, “That’s all you got was $7,000 and you had to have a roof, your fences put back and all the water on the floors and, you know, $7,000?” And naturally things are skyrocketing, you know, the material, you couldn’t find labor. Everybody was trying to beat everyone, it seemed like, you know. And you had to be very careful about that. But overall I think they did pretty well considering, but you know knowing that the area and knowing what the storms will do to this area, maybe things should’ve been more impact than what they were on all levels.

Wallace: Do you know of people who had problems with their insurance as well?

Burney: Do I know?

Wallace: Yeah, other people.

Burney: Mm-hm, lots. Lots of them. They would come in and some of them would get $1.67.

Wallace: That’s insulting almost.

Burney: Home completely destroyed. I’m not talking about—one lady came in and had a $200,000 house; $1.67 is what her insurance gave her. What can you do with that? It was an insult to them and they sent it back. And I, perhaps, would’ve done the same thing. And this is the kind of money, because you had to bring that to FEMA, your proof of whatever you received from your insurance.

Wallace: You had to bring your, like, the money that you got, proof of that to FEMA and then they would go from there?

Burney: Yeah, you had to file that when you went in. And if you got money from that, you had to send a copy in. No, not the money but the proof of it. You know, like when I filed I had to send in what they paid me.

Maynard: So how did you actually hear about Hurricane Katrina?

Burney: Well, it was on the radio, [local TV, WLOX].

Maynard: Mm-hm.

Burney: You know, the TV, and the newspaper, and they kept saying it’s going to be a great storm and all, and they was encouraging people to take shelter and leave and
things like that. So, I think, perhaps, we had enough time to leave, most of us that wanted to. You have to realize that there are some that would not leave, regardless. Some folks would not leave their home because they leave they know they come back they won’t have anything and they started looking and all this, you know. But I never thought about that, I just said, well, it’s yours Lord and everything I have and everything I am belongs to you. So I would just go on. I wouldn’t worry about it, you know. I would try to put my insurance policies, my papers like that, and my life insurance in my car, and take that with me just in case. But you cannot take all that stuff. You know you can’t take a house with you. You just have to leave it. Lock up and leave it.

Wallace: How long before the storm did you know about it?

Burney: Oh, they started telling us [from the outset]. We started watching TV and they were saying it’s over here and it’s moving so many, you know, so many knots here in the Bahamas and it’s headed to the Gulf of Mexico and blah, blah, blah, blah. And you watch it, you know, everybody stayed glued to the TV, you know, and it’s on the radio and it’s in the newspaper and everything. So, you just started watching. Everybody had TVs going and they’re watching the storm, they’re tracking it. And then you go to the local stores to buy your groceries, they have it there where you can it track, too.

Wallace: Mm-hm. Was there an evacuation notice for Gautier?

Burney: Oh yeah.

Wallace: When did you first hear about that?

Burney: Oh, as the storm got closer, I guess maybe about twenty-four hours, I guess, before.

Wallace: Did you think it would hit your home?

Burney: I knew we would probably have wind, water maybe, you know, just I couldn’t conceive it. I was devastated. It was heartbreaking. And it’s very hard now for me to ride around. I just don’t ride around. I just go where I need to go because it’s so painful. I went to Biloxi, and I rode along the beach, and it brings tears to your eyes. We can get from here to Ocean [Springs], from here to Biloxi. We have to get on the interstate and at that time, all the traffic was coming into Gautier from I-10 on Vancleave-Gautier [Road]. It was like you were smothered. You couldn’t get off of [Vancleave-Gautier Road]. You couldn’t get out of Gautier and you couldn’t get into Gautier. It just took hours [because of all the traffic]. The eighteen wheelers, everything was coming through and you were stuck. So to do my volunteer work I would just get up real early and get where I was going, and just sit there until it was time to open up.
Maynard: So how did you prepare for the storm? Were there some things that you did before Hurricane Katrina hit?

Burney: Yes, I did. I got some water and bought some things like Vienna Sausages, you know, peanut butter, crackers, little stuff like that, chips, you know, drinks, items that you can just take out the can; mainly for my grandsons. And kids of today, they don’t eat that. But I told them if they get hungry enough, they have to. So crackers and candy and cookies. And I didn’t buy very much of it because I just felt like we’re going to have a storm and we’ll be back tomorrow. And I couldn’t leave Jackson the next day; there was no gas, couldn’t pump any. It was just bare. And then once we got on the highway we had to find a place to get gas to try to get back to Mobile and that was a hard task. And just so happened that we roll up to this gas station and you could put your credit card in there and get gas, and that’s what I did. And we were blessed in that respect because we were out somewhere and I didn’t know where, we were just riding and it was a [very dark] two-lane road. And so we went through changes to get back to Mobile. Mobile had damage, too, and when we saw the Gulf Coast on the TV, I didn’t know what to expect. I braced myself.

Maynard: Mm-hm.

Burney: I didn’t know if I’d have a window or door. Usually the neighbor next door, if he makes it back, and if there’s anything, like before my doors came open and he went and closed my doors for me, so I didn’t know if it would be open, broken, or if it was even standing, because they left, too, and they never leave but they left because they said this was going to be a fierce storm. But we was blessed and I’m just so thankful for all of the people, the prayers of the righteousness and for the people that was helping, all the volunteers that came from everywhere, like you guys. All over the world, helping [hands were coming in]. And I [know] there are people today that are still outdoors, they have nothing because they can’t get anything in those FEMA trailers, they’re not as large. It’s from there to about where the tape is, from that cabinet [as we sit]. They have lots of FEMA trailers with folks just living there and nowhere to go. And they keep extending their time. I don’t know what’s going to happen.

Wallace: So during the storm, were you worried about a lot of people?

Burney: Was I able to do what?

Wallace: Were you worried about a lot of people?

Burney: Oh yes, definitely. I was worried because I’m a caring person, and I worried about my former students and how they’re [doing], and my relatives and the church members, friends, family, little ones, and just the people in general. The older people that could not help themselves, they couldn’t drive, just stuck, you know. The only way they’d get something is if somebody would just take it to them, or go get them and take them. And I took some to the Methodist Church in Ocean Springs, a young
lady, she didn’t have anything, I took her down there. They gave her some food and a mop and a broom and, you know, cleaning [items] and everything like that. Another lady that I took items [to]. And then in Biloxi, I got [items for] my sorority sisters, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, and a lot of my sorority sisters in Biloxi lost everything; nothing, not even a car. So I got some [items] for them and took it to them so they could have something, and took them mainly cleaning [items]. Some of them didn’t have anything to clean. Nothing. I gave it to them because it was for them and once they could get their places back, they at least will have something to start off with. It was just, say, like tissue and paper. And I was [excited about helping]. I’m just an honest person, and I said to some of the young ladies that would come in, “Haven’t you been here before?” And they said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, you need to share. We need to share with others because there’s so many people that do not have.” And I didn’t need any of that; I had tissue and all those items, soap and all that, I didn’t need any of that. But then there were folks that needed it and didn’t have anything. The home went and everything went, you know. And I said to this bunch of young ladies, “Let’s not be greedy. If you’ve been once and you know there are others.” One lady, I shall never forget, came in and I said, “Get whatever you need.” And she said all she wanted was one pair of thongs just to slip her feet in. She got those and she left. Nothing else.

Maynard: Hmm.

Burney: And then there was others, you know.

Maynard: Take all you can get.

Burney: Mm-hm. And went to everywhere they could go, you know. So I’m a person, I’m against that, and I don’t care who you are, greed I cannot stand. It’s not necessary. You don’t need it, you know, how much soap can you use, how much tissue, how many paper towels, how much of those items can you really use? And I said to a young lady, “I don’t like to use stale papers.” (laughter) “So you get that stuff and it gets all kind of bugs. After a while, it’s no good, you know.” So I said, “Well, if you get some, a supply of some, and then, of course, use it, then if you need more come back, but just don’t get it and stack it and stack it and stack it, when there are others.” There are folks right now that I’ve taken tissue to, food, cleaning items from my home—I’ll go into the dollar store and buy it and give it to them. All of the items they were giving away they didn’t get any, and that’s sad. But, obviously, you have so many of—so much of that when people just slip through the cracks where they get nothing. Because we were a family that was raised up that you didn’t ask or beg for anything. So I can understand. We’re not on welfare or anything like that, so I can understand people standing back and not coming because I was one of those. But, now, it’s to help the people, I’m all for that. That’s the kind of teacher I was. I bought my kids shoes and underclothes if they didn’t have them. I didn’t need to ask; I saw the need with my own eyes and I just called them up and got sizes. I put it in their backpack and I said, “Do not open this until you get home and it’s no one’s business but yours, and you’re not to tell.” And that was the end of that.
Wallace: So were there some people who moved away that you still haven’t heard back from?

Burney: Mm-hm, yeah.

Wallace: And you don’t know where they’re at.

Burney: And—

Wallace: —don’t know where they are?

Burney: Don’t know where they are. Some say they’re here and some say they’re there, but no one seems to know precisely where they are, you know.

Wallace: Does that make you sad?

Burney: Yes, because I’d like for them to come back and claim [what’s left of their goods], their land or whatever they have, but, and then some are not coming back and that’s sad, too. Some are afraid to build anything because they feel like if another storm come, you know, that this would happen. But I really think that this was a very unusual storm. It was like the tsunami that was in India, the way they tell me the water came up, the mighty rushing water came in. So we might not have this type of a hurricane for another one hundred or two hundred years, but then who knows, who knows. Only God.

Wallace: What do you think you would do if there was another hurricane?

Burney: Oh, I would leave.

Wallace: Yeah.

Burney: Yeah, I would leave. I would drive myself to Jackson or my daughters would drive me over to Jackson, or I might even go further because Jackson was bad. So I might go to the Delta of Mississippi, to my other girlfriend’s house, Connie. (laughter)

Maynard: It’s good that you have friends all over.

Burney: I have friends all over the United States. I have the most wonderful friends and I just love them like my sisters and my brothers, mm-hm.

Maynard: Would you ever consider leaving your hometown for good or?

Burney: No, I wouldn’t. No. We were born to die, so wherever we are we’re going to. Our time has been numbered, the days have been numbered, that’s it. And we
can’t—you can’t run from death. But God gives us common sense to get out of harm, you know, get out of danger, of course, but I wouldn’t move away, no.

**Wallace:** What organization were you volunteering with before you got in contact with FEMA?

**Burney:** Um, community services, you know. I would walk with the [American] Heart Association and Sickle Cell [Disease Association]; a member of the Democratic Executive Board, and [past chairman of Executive Board] of Civic Action. I do a lot of volunteering with Head Start. My church, I work all the time there. (laughter) Financial secretary, sing in the choir, [writing] the programs, whatever’s needed to be done at my church I do it. And whatever I need to do to help anyone, I’m there; take them to the doctor, fix food, and things like that. Make sure that the older peoples are taken care of. And of course, the young ones, too, because sometimes there’s a lot of kids that are being mistreated these days that you see that are just dirty and nasty, and they look like they’re hungry and usually I call the Department of Human Service, because it’s not fair, it’s not right.

**Maynard:** Can you describe to us your experience in Jackson when the hurricane came?

**Burney:** Yes, we were sitting just watching TV. I was on pins and needles, of course. And the TV stayed on longer there so we could see everything blowing apart and the cameramen were trying to show and everything. They kept saying, “This is gone, this is gone” you know, and we’re just sitting there and just wondering what’s going on, is anyone killed or anyone, you know—so pins and needles. Thankful, praying, and being where we were safe. But I did have a student that was killed, a former student, when I got home, was swept to the Gulf. She was found in Biloxi and they couldn’t save her. Her brothers saw her and she said, “Loosen me and let me go”, and she just went on to the ocean. That was one student I taught in Vancleave, and that saddened my heart and so many people. And then when I got back and they told me that they had been behind my house searching for the dead, and that saddens me. So every now and then I’ll go behind my fence to see if there is anything back there that I need to call, you know, but I haven’t seen anything. So hopefully, hopefully they got everyone. So being away from home and knowing that this was such a fierce storm, naturally you were so concerned. You know, you didn’t sleep, you couldn’t eat, your mind was just on back home and all the peoples and homes were gone and you could see this on TV, so you didn’t know just what and you couldn’t even call anyone, so you just had to pray and hope for the best.

**Wallace:** Mm-hm. How long was it after Katrina that you, like your life was sort of back to normal? Were you still scared after or have nightmares or anything?

**Burney:** Yeah, I didn’t want to see the damage. I just didn’t want to see anything, you know. And I had to because I had to leave out to come to Moss Point to volunteer there to help pass out the food and stuff, and you couldn’t [miss] nothing. I mean, the
buildings and everything was just gone, service stations gone. And at night it was just black. All the lights was out, and it was an eerie feeling because I was at home and there was no lights. Some folks had generators, you know. I did not have one. I didn’t want one for the simple reason I felt like, oh, well, it won’t be out that long, you know, so I didn’t buy one. I guess I’m going to buy myself a small one, you know, just in case, this time. But, you know, I am alone. They say you need to crank them every month to keep them whatever, so I said, well, I’ll just, would not buy myself one this year.

Maynard: What do you miss most about your community?

Burney: Well, I miss—I go to get things and I discover that it’s not there. The timing has changed where I get my medication. Sav-Rex Drugs don’t have anyone to work for them, so they have these strange hours, and I might go there and it’s closed. And so now I go in the broad open daytime to make sure that I can get my medicine because they used to stay open to eight and they’re not anymore. And I go for something and it’s not there any more, you know. And it’s different. I know that the hurricane affected the folks and their way of thinking, a lot of them. They can’t get folks to work in these places, you know. Things closed and they don’t seem to have the same items that they had before, you know, and you have to wait and wait and wait for everything. And even if you go to Lowe’s, and they don’t have it, you have to wait, you have to order it, it’ll be in a couple of days or whatever. So nothing is the same anymore. And it’s kind of an eerie feeling, you know, when you go for something and it’s not there. And we have been so used to having it there, but it’s not there. And so I think they’re working on trying to get everything back to normal as much as possible, and we just have to be patient and work with society to get it back.

Wallace: Do you think things will ever be back to the same?

Burney: Oh, it’s going to be a long time, I think, before we get that again, because the codes are so strict now for building, repairing and all of that. Folks do not have the money, so it’s going to take a while. They’ve got to have jobs for all the people, and that’s not materializing. We have just Wal-Mart, Ocean Springs, Pascagoula. And in Gautier we have just two stores over there, Jerry Lee’s and they are local grocery stores, you know, and they don’t have everything you need when you go, when you’re picky and so, you have to either go to Wal-Mart. And I’m somewhat afraid to go to Wal-Mart because they’ve been snatching purses and stuff like that, so I usually go to Mobile or Sav-A-Center in Ocean Springs to make groceries.

Wallace: Were you injured at all?

Burney: Hm?

Wallace: Were you injured at all through Katrina?

Burney: No, mm-mm, not at all. Just sad. Emotionally drained.
Maynard: You said that the United Methodist—

Burney: Mm-hm.

Maynard: —Church helped you. How did they help you?

Burney: Well, they helped me to get my roof put on, and I bought all of my materials, and they helped me with the [fence], to put it together for me. And actually I had just got myself a new chain link fence about, hmm, a little over a year. But I wanted a privacy fence. Of course, I had to build myself a storage house; I had to build that and that was about $3,000 to get that back and get my wooden fence, get my privacy fence back up, and I had to get that. So I was blessed and I’m so thankful to United Methodist Church, Gautier First United Methodist Church.

Wallace: How would you say the hurricane has changed you?

Burney: Well, I was always a good person and always caring. It has given me that insight more on people. I realize now that never become to [complacent] about anything or a person, or never think that that person has it all. That’s not so. I learned a lesson from that. You know, you’d think that maybe they don’t need help because they have everything; not so. Or you say they might have money; not so. So I learned something from that, you know. You never know one, until you learn about that person. And we might think what we want to, but we don’t know until we actually talk to that person. So, I learned a lot working with the people. I’ve always worked with people as a teacher, and taught adults at night at the junior college. I realized I learned something from them, but I learned so much more, had more insight and in-depths on a person, what they have and their values in life. And sometimes their values is not what we think they are. We might see the fine cars and the fine home, and the jewelry and all of that, but it’s just something that folks have because they like it. And my mother said, “A person always get what they want sometimes and they beg for what they need.” But I think these people didn’t beg for what they want, they just inherited a lot of stuff. And then right when it came down to Katrina, we were all in the same boat. We had money in the bank but you couldn’t get it out. And then if you got it out, you could only get two hundred dollars. I went to the bank after I got home. I left from here with two hundred dollars, because I knew I was coming right back the next day, you know, so I said, “I’m not taking all that money.” Well, (laughs) I spent that and bought gas, you know, food. When I got home you couldn’t get any money. I couldn’t get any money out of the bank. So I had money but I couldn’t get money. And then when we could get money, you could get two hundred dollars. And then the line was wrapped around, you couldn’t even get in the bank. So I went to the bank, I know, at least five times and I would leave. So my girlfriend, I call Wise, Mary Wise, and I said, “Wise, I don’t have any money.” And she stopped me right there, she said, “How much you want?” I said, “Just give me thirty dollars.” But we’ve been friends for years. She gave, she said, “No, you take thirty-five dollars.” So she gave me thirty-five dollars. She said, “Will you need more?” I said,
“No, I just want a little money in my pocket where if I get so hungry, and I get so tired of eating peanut butter and crackers, I could at least try to go and get me a sandwich or something, you know. So she called, she was worried, “Dorothy, you know you need more money, you need more money.” As I said, “I can’t get any money, you know.” I had money but I couldn’t get it.

Wallace: Where did she live?

Burney: In Vancleave. We taught school together for, hm, years and years.

Wallace: The bank was open in Vancleave?

Burney: Uh-huh.

Wallace: Yeah.

Burney: And so they were able to get out. So she got to me and she brought me some money. So in my teaching career I taught in Vancleave, and this is predominant white, a white group, and I taught at the middle school. And mainly I taught mostly white kids all of my career for, perhaps I taught 3 percent black kids, and that was not very many. Some years, not any. And most of my career I was the only black teacher; it didn’t bother me because we was taught to love everyone and people were people. And they really are, ladies, they’re human beings like you and I. They have values; some have morals and some do not. Some have good principles and some do not. But I found out that they are people just like you and I [inaudible], you know. But that was just hard times for all of us at that time for Katrina. And so finally when I was—finally got some money and I got two hundred dollars, and I made it last. I mean that was to buy gas when I could, you know, get gas. Because, and I didn’t have any electricity, I couldn’t cook anything. All the food—my boxes was clean and my refrigerator and my deep freeze, all that was completely thrown out. My daughters, they threw all that away. So I didn’t have any food in the house, just the water and, you know, stuff like—you know I’m a diabetic so I can’t eat all that stuff like, any canned stuff, there’s too much salt in it. I have high blood pressure. So it was just mainly like crackers and peanut butter, I’ll just eat that.

Maynard: Did you have any problems, because you were diabetic, with getting things that you needed?

Burney: No, because I had my medication. I knew the storm was coming so I made sure I had all my medication, and so I did that, and the peanut butter didn’t bother me. And so they were serving hot meals, and I really didn’t eat because I didn’t know how long it had been cooked, and if it had salt in it; I didn’t fool with that. I went down to—I took a lady down to the Presbyterian Church to get something and they insisted we eat something, so I ate a piece of chicken, a chicken wing, and I think they had cream potatoes, and I told her I said, “That’s enough. I can eat that, but nothing else.” And a dinner roll.
Maynard: Were you concerned about your health at all during the storm?

Burney: No, not really because I was taking my medication. I had my blood pressure pump and I had my, um, to test my sugar. I had that with me. And I’m never—I try to keep myself calm at all times. Although it was a strain to do that, but I did, you know, because there wasn’t no sense in just getting yourself out of whack because there was nothing—there was nothing I could do but try to help the people, and that’s what I did. And that way that was a common factor for me. It gave me a sense of relief, I was helping someone, you know, to go through this.

Maynard: Were your daughters worried about you?

Burney: Yeah, they didn’t want me to stay there in the home by myself with no electricity, but I said I wasn’t afraid, you know, and I could just let the garage down manually. I have an opener but I just did it manually.

Maynard: What made you decide to go back to your house alone?

Burney: Well, I wanted to go back there because I felt like that I needed to be back just in case of, you know, the looting or anything like that, and you never know.

Wallace: Were you ever scared about being home alone or?

Burney: No, when that came I just locked the doors and I had a little TV and I watched that. And it would be, you know, just Katrina, Katrina. It was showing things and all that, and I would fall asleep and sleep all night.

Maynard: What would you like to see in the rebuilding of your community?

Burney: Well, I’d like to see more lighting. I’d like to see a nice supermarket. I’d like to see our mall to be developed more with lots of stores, and lots of clothing. I’d like to have a community recreation center where old, young, and alike can go and exercise and have the different arts and crafts. I’d like to see more businesses come into Gautier and have more jobs. And I’d like to see more, perhaps, more homes being built. And I’d like to see the neighborhoods cleaned up better, the streets and everything; I’d like to see that.

Maynard: Mm-hm. As a retired teacher you probably noticed a lot of what was happening with the schools and—

Burney: Yeah.

Maynard: —some are probably closed or gone. So, how long did it take before things returned to normal for the school kids.
Burney: Well, in Gautier they have one school that they’ve gotten started on, and what they did, that school, it was completely destroyed, they put it in another school and put buildings there, and they have two schools in one school. So they’re working on that school trying to get the teachers and students back in that school, which is good. But things seem to be going, you know, just nicely. Naturally, crowded, but they’re working on that and kids are learning. The teachers are in control, and so they’re doing a good job.

Wallace: What are some of your hopes and fears for the future?

Burney: Well, I hope we don’t have another hurricane. And I try not to have fear because [inaudible] of the devil, according to the Bible, so I don’t like to live in fear. But, and I’m pretty sure, we keep living that we’ll probably see another hurricane. I just hope that it’s not as fierce as the one we had before, you know, and that God will spare us, and have mercy on us because we certainly have been through it. And it’s going to take a while for folks to get back in their homes, the ones that are not in their homes, and we’ve already had tornadoes and stuff like that, and homes to [tear] down and folks have almost got them completed and they’ll be destroyed again. And you can imagine how they feel and the neighbors and anybody here in that situation. My heart goes out to them, you know. So my hope is to hope that we never have that again, and that God will have mercy on us.

Maynard: What do you think your reaction would be if there was another hurricane?

Burney: Oh, I don’t know. I know I would be devastated. I really would be. I would leave, I’ll tell you that, and I would pray for the best like I did before and hope that my home is standing. That’s all I can do. But if it is, then maybe I’d just go in a retiring—a senior citizen home some place else.

Maynard: Yeah.

Burney: Yeah, and not worry about it, just sell out if there’s anything there.

(laughter)

Maynard: So, you do a lot of volunteering. Did you get a chance to work with some volunteers who came in from out of state or out of the US?

Burney: Out of state and out of the US, yeah, they came down.

Maynard: And how did you feel about them?

Burney: Oh, I thought it was wonderful.

Maynard: Yeah.
**Burney:** It was sincere and it was honest. They were from all walks of life, all backgrounds. They were young, old. The gentleman that put my fence up, he was a judge, retired judge, a retired superintendent of schools, a retired teacher, a minister in the church. These were highly educated folks that came in and did this. And I thought, you know, what a mighty God I serve to send me these wonderful, wonderful folks, that they could be home doing something, but they were all retired. All retired gentlemen and they took their time to put that fence up as if they was putting up for the White House. They did it for me and I was thankful.

**Wallace:** Did you ever expect so many people to show up in Mississippi?

**Burney:** I didn’t. In my wildest dream I never even thought of it. And they came down by the busloads, the carloads, and they’re still here, a lot of those people. The church called me yesterday, United Methodist Church, wanted to know was there anything else that I had to be done, and I have not returned the call. I will do it today because I got home late yesterday.

**Maynard:** A lot of people felt that Mississippi got ignored during the hurricane and there was a lot of focus on New Orleans. Did you ever feel that way?

**Burney:** I did. I said they acted like Pascagoula, Moss Point, and Gautier didn’t get water. And we live on the Sound, the Mississippi Sound. Y’all heard of that?

**Maynard:** Mm-hm.

**Burney:** The Mississippi Sound. All the water, I can leave my house and walk to the Sound. I mean, the water was just everywhere.

**Maynard:** Yeah.

**Burney:** In Pascagoula, though, the beach and all those areas over there, completely gone. And it was just like we were not even included. It was like New Orleans and they mentioned Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian, you know, but there was Biloxi and Gulfport and Ocean Springs and Gautier, Moss Point, Pascagoula, you know, this is all the Gulf Coast. So I think that we were. The coverage was all there and somewhat still is, and it’s like we didn’t get that much, you know.

**Maynard:** How did you—

**Burney:** The president came down and he said that he would make absolutely sure that everything would be back, he would make sure of that. But, I mean, that’s all?

**Maynard:** Do you feel like he didn’t stick to his word?

**Burney:** Yes.
Maynard: Were there a lot of false promises from other people as well?

Burney: Yes, but that was the head man.

Maynard: Yeah.

Burney: He was, what you could say, the father of the country, you know. When the president speaks we all listen. It doesn’t matter if you’re a Democrat or Republican, you know, you listen, and when someone says something, you want to believe just that, no more, no less.

Maynard: Mm-hm. How has that affected the way you look at politics in the US now?

Burney: Oh, well, I like politics and it does not change my views. I realize that politicians say lots. (laughter) And I think, in honesty, that they try, but you know, you do have a body that has to vote on things, you have to have a body that listens, you know. You have the House, you have the Senate, and all these people have to have their say-so. But, no, I like politics and I do work in it. I’m on the Democratic Executive Board here in Jackson County and all, so I still work in it. It didn’t change my views. I try to change their view, if it’s anything, you know, mm-hm.

Wallace: Well, that about wraps it up. Is there anything that we haven’t asked you that you would like to say?

Burney: Well, no, I hope I’ve been a help to what you all wanted to know from me.

Wallace: Mm-hm.

Burney: You know, I’m a kind of a low-key person but I like working in the background. I like getting things done, and I believe in honesty, respect, and love, having good morals and principles, your word is your bond, and I think you should stand on it. And whatever you say you should believe in it. You can have an opinion about something, but then, too, you know, you can talk it over with somebody else and it can be changed. There’s one saying that says, “To thy own self be true” and if you’re that way then you can survive. I’m a person that I like to write poetry and poems, I guess, and I like sewing and cooking, and just public speaking. People seek after me for my opinion. They respect my opinion. That’s what they tell me, I never tell. And I’m not so quick to give it, I have to think about it and call them back, and we talk about it and discuss it at length, and then I will make a suggestion of what I think there should be. And most of the time they take my opinion, and I turn out to be right. (laughter) So I think about, I always tell them, “You have to have good reason and thinking skills, and you need to think before you speak because that’s important. And then you need to reason out what you want to say before you say it. And one thing you should never, never say anything to hurt anyone.” And I’m very diplomatic and I think that’s why folks seek after me for my opinion. I always try to see the good
in everyone regardless. Although they might be bad, but I still try to see some good in that person because I know that to their own self they need to be true. But somewhere down the line they slip up and for a number of reasons we don’t know why a person does what he or she does, but they do. You know, just Anna Nicole Smith, the astronaut, you know, we don’t know why—Brittany Spears, Michael Jackson, O. J. Simpson—just really bizarre things, and why? But there is a reason for it, and we don’t know, but my heart goes out, you know, to these people because there is a problem. Anna Nicole is dead but, and I knew her lifestyle, but I still feel sorry for her and the baby, and for them to fight over her like that, you know. And I think that we knew the kind of person that she was and everything, and her thinking was not good, so they should release the body to the mother and let the mother have the say-so since, you know, she had a lifestyle. And if somebody loves someone, you’re going to help that person. You’re just not going to let them just go and be completely destructive, and you can very well say that I believe her life could have been saved if she had listened to her mother, you know. And with her, she was a strong little girl, she wanted to do what she wanted to do, you know, and so she would say anything, you know how kids are, young folks are, their mother do this, their mother do that, and they get mad and they say all things—I don’t believe her mother was mean to her, I just think that she was a person that wanted to do what she wanted to do. But the baby, the baby is crying for the mama and I know she is, and my heart goes out to her. She’s so sweet. And I think the grandmother should get the baby and bond with that baby. That baby needs bonding and that’s not fair to that little baby, no. Now, things like that, it just hurts my heart. So I’ll be glad when they bury her because I think she deserves to be buried, as well as James Brown. (laughter)

**Maynard:** Well, thank you so much.

**Burney:** Well, you’re welcome, ladies, and I certainly enjoyed you all.

(end of interview)