Biography

Elizabeth Doolittle was born on January 15, 1942, in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Mr. John Lalande Marks and Mrs. Elizabeth Bruenn Marks. In 1979 she earned a BA in History from Blackhill State University, and in 1984, she earned an MA from Louisiana State University. She has worked as an information specialist for HUD, a librarian at Fort Belvoir, a public librarian in Thibodaux, Louisiana and Hollands University of Virginia. In 2004, she became a librarian at The University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Park, where she was employed at the time of this interview.

She has two children, Aaron (born in 1963) and Elizabeth (born in 1965). She is a Catholic. She enjoys travel, genealogy, and her grandchildren.
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Doolittle: —[Elizabeth] M. Doolittle and today is June 28, 2007. I am the public services librarian at The University of Southern Mississippi, Gulf Park Campus, Gulf Coast Library, (laughter) which is a mouthful.

Swaykos: That’s a long title.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: And you have been with the school for how long?

Doolittle: Ten months before Hurricane Katrina.

Swaykos: Oh, so you weren’t here that long.

Doolittle: So I’ve been here about four years. I’m actually from New Orleans but had been working in Virginia, and so I had just moved back down here.

Swaykos: Oh, where were you in Virginia?

Doolittle: Roanoke.

Swaykos: Oh, I went to Virginia Tech.

Doolittle: I’m sorry?

Swaykos: I went to Virginia Tech, which is right there.

Doolittle: Did you? My daughter works two days a week at Virginia Tech.

Swaykos: Oh, does she?

Doolittle: She works for the Hotel Roanoke.

Swaykos: Oh, OK, yeah.
Doolittle: And they are—you know, Tech owns the Hotel Roanoke.

Swaykos: Right, right.

Doolittle: So she goes to campus twice a week now.

Swaykos: Oh, good.

Doolittle: And (inaudible). Well, what a small world.

Swaykos: Don’t you love it out there? I know.

Doolittle: Well, actually, I’m from down here, and I wanted to come back. (laughter)

Swaykos: Oh, are you? (laughter) So where were you born then if you’re from down here?

Doolittle: New Orleans.

Swaykos: New Orleans.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: And when was that?

Doolittle: Oh, that’s a sneaky one. (laughter) January 15, 1942.

Swaykos: Wonderful.

Doolittle: Wonderful that I’m still here. (laughter)

Swaykos: And I’ve already got you in Pass Christian. And are you married currently?

Doolittle: Do I have to tell you that? I’m in the middle of a divorce.

Swaykos: OK, sure.

Doolittle: (Inaudible) (laughter) I’m not going to put that on a form. They always say, “Are you divorced or single?” And it’s like, “I’m not either yet.” (laughter)

Swaykos: We’ll just leave it be. And can you walk me through your education and your career so far?
Doolittle: Well, I married a military man, and we moved around the country a lot, and I raised my children before I went to work. So I got my education; I had one year at UNO [University of New Orleans], and then I just picked it up wherever we happened to be.

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: So it was actually nineteen years when my children were graduating from high school before I finally finished my degree at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota.

Swaykos: South Dakota, wow. And what year was that?

Doolittle: It must have been [19]79. No. Wait a minute; let’s do that again. (laughter) Let’s do that math again real quick like. I don’t—let’s see, yeah.

Swaykos: That would be [19]79. And what was your degree in?

Doolittle: My degree was in history with a minor in library science, but that was an undergraduate degree, and in our profession, you cannot work in a library as a librarian unless you have the graduate degree. So after Black Hills, let’s see; where did we go? Good Lord, we moved again. No. We stayed in Rapid City; we were still living in Rapid City, and when my daughter graduated that year, she and I went off to college together.

Swaykos: Oh, how fun.

Doolittle: We went to LSU [Louisiana State University], and she did her first year, and I did my graduate work. So I got my graduate degree in—well, actually, it wasn’t right when she graduated. I got my graduate degree in 1984. And by then we had moved to Washington, DC, or Washington, DC area, and there were no jobs open, but that’s where I had to go back because that’s where the family still was.

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: So I worked as a, what we call a “paraprofessional” at the Office of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, as an information specialist; for a year I did that. And then I had a job at Port Balfour as a librarian at the Army Engineering School; stayed there a couple of years, and then they moved the Army Engineer School to Leavenworth, Kansas. OK. I didn’t mind living in Alexandria, Virginia, but I really didn’t want to live in Leavenworth, Kansas. So I got a job; let’s see. Where’d I go next? Galveston, Texas. Now, that had been a school, a college library, but I went to a public library because I wanted to move South. So I went to Galveston, Texas, as a librarian at the public library, and I was there about five or six years. Then I moved—here’s your challenge—I moved to Nicholas [Nicholls State
Swaykos: You guys down here. OK. (laughter)

Doolittle: Yeah, and, so let’s see; and then when I left Thibodaux—oh, I left Thibodaux to go to Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. So that’s how I ended up in Roanoke. Hollins is one of the few all-female, private colleges.

Swaykos: Right, right.

Doolittle: And we got (inaudible) at Hollins, and then I came here in October of [20]04.

Swaykos: And what enticed you to down here?

Doolittle: I had been trying to come South for some time, and I like the smaller campuses.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: And I had some friends here, and family, and just across the line there in Louisiana. So it looked like just a good place to be and a good job, and has been; it’s a very good job.

Swaykos: Good. And what do you like to do besides work?

Doolittle: There’s just no time to do something. I travel.

Swaykos: Oh, good.

Doolittle: I do travel, and I do genealogy.

Swaykos: Oh, fun.

Doolittle: And I love my grandchildren, spoil them, when I can get near them. (laughter)

Swaykos: That’s always good. And you were not in the military, but your exhusband was.

Doolittle: Yes.

Swaykos: Do you have any religious affiliation you’d like to share?
Doolittle: I was raised Catholic.

Swaykos: Um-hm. And how old are your children, and what are their names?

Doolittle: They’ll kill me if I tell you how old they are. (laughter)

Swaykos: That’s OK; they’ll have to find me.

Doolittle: OK. Here we go again with the mathematics. Let’s see; one was born in [19]63.

Swaykos: And who was that? I just need their first names.

Doolittle: Aaron, A-A-R-O-N. And the other one was born in [19]65. And her name is Elizabeth. My mother was Elizabeth; I’m Elizabeth; she’s Elizabeth, and my granddaughter’s Elizabeth.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh. (laughter)

Doolittle: It could get a little confusing sometimes.

Swaykos: That’s a beautiful name to pass on. And what was your father’s name?

Doolittle: Oh, (laughter) it was John, but actually in his family, there were four or five boys, and they were all named John something, and they were called by their middle name.

Swaykos: Really? Oh, OK.

Doolittle: So he was actually called Lalande, L-A-L-A-N-D-E.

Swaykos: And his last name?

Doolittle: Marks, M-A-R-K-S.

Swaykos: Wonderful. Do you know his birth date? That math again. (laughter)

Doolittle: No, actually I don’t. He died when I was six, so. I have it in my records, but—(laughter)

Swaykos: That’s fine. And what did he do for work before then? Do you know?

Doolittle: He died when I was six.

Swaykos: No. You don’t know, and they didn’t tell you stories or anything?
Doolittle: For a while he worked for—he was from down the bayou in Louisiana, and his father was a senator for the State of Louisiana, and his uncle worked for one of the sugar companies. And he went to work for one of the sugar companies, and he went to Honduras; so he spent quite a bit of time in Honduras.

Swaykos: Oh, really?

Doolittle: I’m sorry I don’t remember—

Swaykos: That’s OK.

Doolittle: —which sugar company it was.

Swaykos: No. That’s fine. What about your mom; what was her name?

Doolittle: It was Elizabeth.

Swaykos: Oh, you just told me that.

Doolittle: Her name was Elizabeth.

Swaykos: You know her maiden name?

Doolittle: Of course, I’m going to spell this one for you, too. (laughter) Don’t you love this? B-R-U-E-N-N.

Swaykos: Is it just Bruenn?

Doolittle: Bruenn, um-hm.

Swaykos: OK. And do you know her birthday?

Doolittle: February 20, 1919.

Swaykos: Do you know when they were married?

Doolittle: No.

Swaykos: OK. That’s fine.

Doolittle: You know I could get all this information for you.

Swaykos: What’d your mom do for work?

Doolittle: My father was sick for a while before he passed away, and my grandmother, who lived with us, of course never worked, her generation, you know;
you didn’t do that. And there were two little ones, so my mother went to work before, actually, women really started going to work. And she started during World War II at the WPA [Works Project Administration], peeling potatoes. And at the end, she had worked herself up the (inaudible) to a GS9 or [GS]10.

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: Yes. Most of the time during World War II, she was a clerk for the Army at the port of embarkation in New Orleans, and that was the shipping point for supplies going overseas and returning. And so that’s what she did.

Swaykos: Great. Thank you. So why don’t we start with you moved down here ten months before, (laughter) and where were you living then?

Doolittle: At 212 Michigan Street. How soon we forget. (laughter) I’ve just moved around too much.

Swaykos: And that was a house?

Doolittle: [Yes], 212 Michigan Street, it was a house I had rented; it was a cinderblock house, so it was kind of a strong, little house. Well, actually it wasn’t little, but it was—you can’t see it, but it’s only a few blocks from the Bay, and in between it and the Bay is Bayou Moline; so there’s lots of water around, but it was a nice, quiet neighborhood, not overly developed. Most of the homes out there, it actually wasn’t in Pass Christian; it was in Henderson Point, but the mailing address was Pass Christian. And a lot of those homes developed as camps or weekend getaways for people, and so they were not quite the same style as a big house.

Swaykos: Right. Were you living by yourself out there?

Doolittle: Um-hm, yeah. And my landlord had one around the corner, and he also had one on the West Bank of New Orleans, but he would spend most of the week out in Pass Christian. And a lot of the lots in that neighborhood are not developed, have never been developed; so it was really—you thought you were living in the country. And I used to walk; I had a route mapped out, three miles a day.

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: Um-hm, yeah. It’s hard to do now because the streets are so messed up, and they’re dirty, and there’s debris on them, and so I’ve gotten out of it. But I was walking every day, and you always felt safe because it was a nice, quiet neighborhood. You got to know the people in the neighborhood; if not real close, you knew them because you walked every day and talked to them; so it was nice. It was nice. I enjoyed it.
Swaykos: Good. Were you, being from New Orleans, were you [in the area] for [Hurricane] Camille?

Doolittle: No.

Swaykos: OK. You’d already moved away by then. OK. So were you familiar with storms?

Doolittle: Oh, yeah.


Doolittle: Yeah. And when we lived in Galveston, we evacuated a number of times because of storms. And actually, there was one that hit Thibodaux, that came up that way. It wasn’t a mandated evacuation, so we didn’t go, but we really should have (inaudible). (laughter) We, all the people around us, didn’t go. We really should’ve been moved out because it was pretty severe. So yeah, I know storms.

Swaykos: OK. So when the warning for this one came, how did you prepare, and what did you do?

Doolittle: Everything I was supposed to do except one, which was to pick up my computer when I left. First thing I did was call my friend, or actually I think she called me, and said, “Come to Hattiesburg. You can’t stay there.” And I said, “I’m on my way.” So I have a container, a plastic container that I keep my storm supplies in, you know, bottled water, tuna fish, peanuts, all that stuff, extra batteries, flashlights, and I just put that in my trunk. And I took my files, my current files and put them in one of those plastic things and put it in my trunk, put my genealogy in my trunk. And because my landlady had told me when I rented that water had been in that house—actually, water had gone over that house with Camille, but it only came up four feet inside. So I went through my house, and believe me it was not easy for a person my age. I went through my house and put everything up above the four-foot level, moved things away from in front of windows, covered things with plastic, put things in the top shelves of the cabinets and stuff. So I thought I was well prepared.

Swaykos: What did you think about the storm coming? I mean, did you think it was just another—

Doolittle: It didn’t matter. If it was a bad storm, I was going, and I was taking precautions. If you live here long enough, you realize it’s a way of life. I mean, if you’re living in California, you’d know what to do if there’s an earthquake, right?

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: If you live in—where’s the fire burning? You know what to do if they yell, “Fire!” Yeah.
Swaykos: California, yeah.

Doolittle: I mean, it’s just a part of life down here; you just, you know to prepare, and you know to be ready, and you know to get out.

Swaykos: What day did you leave?

Doolittle: Actually I left on Sunday morning because Saturday we had a call from the university to come, and you have a procedure where we clear the top of desks, move things off the floors, and that sort of thing. So I had gone in Saturday afternoon and spent Saturday afternoon helping get the library ready. No, maybe that was Saturday morning, and then Saturday afternoon, I did my house, and I was ready to leave early Sunday morning. And I have to say, I was really surprised because we had evacuated; I believe it was Ivan that had come in, a month or so before, and we had evacuated for that, and the roads were a mess. You could hardly get out of here.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Doolittle: Well, then when I left Sunday morning, I thought it would be like that, too. I don’t think I saw ten cars between here and Hattiesburg.

Swaykos: On Sunday morning?

Doolittle: On Sunday morning; well, it was early. It was like six o’clock in the morning (laughter) when I left.

Swaykos: Oh, by the time I left at nine I was backed up for hours.

Doolittle: Oh, I’m glad I left early.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Doolittle: Yeah, I’m glad I went early.

Swaykos: So you didn’t see anybody?

Doolittle: No. I kept thinking, “What’s wrong? Why aren’t people leaving? They know they’re supposed to get out.”

Swaykos: Yeah. Did you know any neighbors? Did anybody stay? Did you encourage others to leave?

Doolittle: I checked—I live next door to a very elderly lady—this is coming from me. (laughter) And I did check to make sure she had made arrangements to leave. Her cousin lived about two houses down, and he and his wife were planning to take her,
and they were going. They had a plan. And then catercornered across the street from me was another elderly lady; she was in her late eighties, and she lives all alone and drives this big van and just has a great time. She goes to shows and sells jewelry. So I went over and talked to her, and she told me she was leaving, too. So there was a young couple directly across the street from me that hadn’t been there very long, and I didn’t know them, and they weren’t there; so I figured they were gone. And then most of the rest of that block is empty, so. So yes, I did check with people, especially those elderly people to make sure they had plans.

Swaykos: Good. So you got up to Hattiesburg in no time because there were no cars.

Doolittle: I know. I was like, “Wow.” (laughter)

Swaykos: And what’d you do for the rest of the day?

Doolittle: Oh, I went right to my friend’s house. I was staying with Mary Judice(?) who is a retired librarian from Thibodaux, Louisiana. No, no, up the road from Thibodaux, Napoleonville. Napoleonville. She retired the year before and had moved to Hattiesburg because that’s where her son and his wife were; so I went up to her house. And we made some arrangements putting a lot of extra water in tubs and containers and all that sort of thing, and making sure we had enough flashlight batteries and such, and food.

Swaykos: Since I’m not from here, I don’t know. How far inland do people prepare for a storm? I mean, Hattiesburg is quite a bit north.

Doolittle: Not anywhere near a beach. (laughter) They don’t usually go—storms tend to, in my experience, break up when they hit land; they start to break up. I think for one to go up into the Carolinas is usually considered a really bad one to keep moving that long. This one just went farther and was strong. I mean most of them that make it up to the Carolinas, by then they’re just kind of rainstorms, a little wind or something. They’re not really a hurricane anymore. This one just held together; it didn’t start breaking up; it just held together for a long time.

Swaykos: So you got up to Hattiesburg, and you guys prepared up there. What was the evening like, knowing it was coming the next day?

Doolittle: Hard to sleep, you know.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Doolittle: It was tense. I don’t think I was afraid for my life because I think we, you know, we had things worked out. She has a center hallway, a little hallway, which is, you know, has no windows. Because it had three doors going off of it, it had the frames to help hold things up; so I don’t think I was afraid for my life, and I don’t think any of us thought about the destruction we’d come back to. That was too far
ahead to think. Right now, we just needed to do the right things. But it was still a little hard to sleep. I mean, I was tired because I had hauled everything the day before and had got up so early to drive, but it was just hard to sleep.

Swaykos: Right, definitely. So that was Sunday night. Can you just walk me through Monday when the storm hit, what you guys were doing and thinking?

Doolittle: It was really scary then because we were trying to stay in that hallway, and we would hear this big crack.

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: And the first time we heard it, we didn’t know what it was so went running to see, and we were looking out the windows, and all of a sudden we heard a big thump, and we realized it was a tree. So it was not clever to go to that window. So after that, we’d hear the crack, we’d wait till we heard the thump before we’d go look. My friend Mary has been fond of her trees and knows what every kind is, and she lost twenty-five trees that day.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: But we were very, very lucky because both our cars were parked outside in the driveway, and neither one of them got a tree. But her driveway—she had this long driveway; I don’t normally have good distances, but she had three trees across her driveway, but none hit the car and none directly hit the house. There was a cedar tree out back, and people tell me—I don’t know this—but people tell me that they have shallow roots, and the whole thing, the roots just all came out.

Swaykos: Up out of the ground.

Doolittle: Yes, and the tree fell, and the top branches of the tree caught some of the gutter along the back of the house. So we were extremely lucky with that many trees down; that’s the only one that hit the house.

Swaykos: Did it scare you when it hit the house like that?

Doolittle: It was a different sound because it was scratchy, sort of, you know, like if it raked across the house, and we hadn’t heard that sound before. But there were so many—well, that’s all we could do, was hear sounds, you know, because we were trying to stay in that hallway.

Swaykos: Was it just the two of you?

Doolittle: Um-hm.

Swaykos: Or did she have other people come over?
Doolittle: No. It was just the two of us. And one of the doors led to the bathroom, so we were able to use the facilities, and even after the power went out, we had so much extra water we had collected, that it was OK.

Swaykos: What time did the power go out?

Doolittle: What time did the storm hit here? About nine in the morning? About nine in the morning?

Swaykos: (Inaudible)

Doolittle: Oh, OK. It took about an hour or so to get to Hattiesburg, got there faster than we can drive (inaudible). (laughter) So it was very soon after the storm reached Hattiesburg that the power went out, but we had lots of batteries and flashlights, and we had a little battery-powered TV, which we probably would’ve been better without because that was more scary than anything else because you couldn’t see because it was so splotchy and fuzzy, but you could hear this man, and it was the Biloxi, the Gulfport—

Swaykos: WLOX?

Doolittle: Yes.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Doolittle: Yeah, they were still, they were the only station we could pick up.

Swaykos: I think they were the only ones running.

Doolittle: And of course they were in the worst of it, so we were getting horrible reports even before—that was what was really scary, was we were listening to them talk about the destruction, and it hadn’t gotten to Hattiesburg yet.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: So that’s really, that—because you get really anxious because it’s coming; it’s coming.

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: And he’s telling us how bad it’s been, so that was one thing that was very scary. And then the rest of the day we just kind of huddled there in the hallway. It didn’t hang; it also moved very quickly. I think it had passed through Hattiesburg before noon.
**Swaykos:** Really?

**Doolittle:** Yes. It moved really quickly, which was a good thing because you didn’t want that hanging over you. And it didn’t continue to rain much afterwards like a lot of storms. The rain just kind of went with the storm. So we went out to look, and of course we had no power. Then we could see that the cars weren’t damaged and that the house was not, but Mary was still upset about her trees. (laughing)

**Swaykos:** Oh, I’m sure.

**Doolittle:** So and then, I can’t remember; I think it was—I don’t think it was that afternoon, or maybe it was that afternoon. Her son, who lives about a mile down the road, came with a friend of his, and they sawed those logs and put a chain on them and pulled them out of the driveway. Couldn’t clear the whole yard, but he could at least clear a path for the driveway. And of course he wanted to check on his mother and see if she was OK because we had no phone service or anything. And so then Mary wanted to go riding to see what had happened, and I really didn’t (laughter), but since she was being nice to me, I decided to go. And it really was dangerous; they kept telling people not to go driving around to look, but we spent an hour or two driving around.

**Swaykos:** Around Hattiesburg?

**Doolittle:** Not really, her house is in Oak Grove, which is adjacent to Hattiesburg; it’s sort of southwest, I think, of Hattiesburg. I mean, it’s right adjacent, and they call that Hattiesburg; it’s like Gulfport and Biloxi and all this area. And so we didn’t really get out of Oak Grove; we didn’t go very far. You couldn’t go very far; it was just too much. In fact, there was a tree at the end of her driveway across the road that people were having—they couldn’t come into her yard to go around it because her mailbox was there, so they kept going into the neighbor across the [road’s] yard in order to get around that tree that was in the middle of the road, and because the mud was wet we watched a lot of people—

**Swaykos:** Get stuck.

**Doolittle:** —get stuck.

**Swaykos:** Oh, gosh.

**Doolittle:** And you think people would know, but I don’t know; they just kept trying it. So we had no—and Mary is not real well, and so the next day because we had no air conditioner, and it was 98 degrees—

**Swaykos:** Oh, my gosh.
Doolittle: —and nothing was blowing. I mean, nothing was even stirring, so her son came and told us to come to his house and stay because he was sharing a generator with his neighbor; his neighbor was letting him plug in. He couldn’t run his whole house, but he could run his refrigerator and freezer and a fan, every now and then. So he came and got us and took us over there, and that was Margaret and David Judice, and they were great; they just took us all in.

Swaykos: Good.

Doolittle: These are really nice people. (crying) Sorry.

Swaykos: That’s OK, sure. (brief interruption)

Doolittle: Mary and I have had—went to library school together, so we’ve known each other a while.

Swaykos: Really? Oh, how fun.

Doolittle: Yeah, but I didn’t know her son real well, but he took us all in, (crying) and he had a family, a couple that were nurses. And they would come in during the day and sleep in Margaret and David’s bed, and then go to work all night. I mean, these people just took in anybody they knew, so they were just really nice people.

Swaykos: They sound like really great people.

Doolittle: So we stayed there, and we continued to stay there because they couldn’t get Mary’s power back on because the box pulled off of the house, the electric box.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: For the most part it was putting power poles, and that’s where their workers were committed, was putting all the power poles and lines back. And David’s neighborhood, which was a new neighborhood, all the power’s underground. They didn’t have to—when they, like, restored neighborhood power, the whole unit came up.

Swaykos: Oh, good.

Doolittle: So he got power within about a week, but up until then, at least we had cold water and a fan.

Swaykos: So you had been staying there that whole time?

Doolittle: Oh, yeah. We stayed with them a little over a month.

Swaykos: Oh, really?
Doolittle: Um-hm.

Swaykos: Did you come down here during that time at all, or did you keep in contact with anyone?

Doolittle: There was no way to keep in contact with anybody because nobody’s cell phones were working, especially mine. And I didn’t know who to come to, to come down here. I contacted as soon as—David has a wireless, a modem in his house because he works from home, and he works for a software company, and so we were able to get the computers up, running, within a few days. And so I was able to communicate with the main university. (phone rings) Excuse me. (brief interruption)

Swaykos: You were saying you had just gotten back in contact with the main campus.

Doolittle: So I contacted the main campus via e-mail, by using their—

Swaykos: Um-hm.

Doolittle: And so I was able to find out that they were all OK. And they had heard from a few people who were, like, scattered all over, and our director actually stayed here. And he only lived, like, a block from the beach, and he had to climb out his window. He doesn’t talk about this. He doesn’t talk. We don’t know exactly what happened because he just won’t talk about it. But we know he stayed.

Swaykos: And what’s his name?

Doolittle: Edward McCormick (?). And let’s see. What happened?

Swaykos: So you were there for about a month, and you didn’t come down at all. Did you—I know that there was an eventual meeting down here.

Doolittle: Yes, I heard about that from the e-mail from the main campus. So I did hear about that.

Swaykos: When you were at home watching TV, when you were seeing everything down here because you got power back within the week, can you tell me what you were seeing, and what you were thinking about that?

Doolittle: Hours and hours and hours of destruction, destruction, destruction. I wanted them to turn it off, but they wanted to eat up every bit of it. It just, to me it became very depressive to sit all day long and watch all that destruction. (brief interruption) I mean, I knew it was bad, but there was nothing I could do, sitting up there. So I’m more one to say, “What can I do today,” than to just sit there and look at that. So after a couple of weeks I finally made an appointment with the director of the
Hattiesburg Library, the university library, her name is Kay Wall (?), and I went over and talked to her and said, “What can I do? I need to do something rather than just sit home all day.” So she gave me a couple of projects to work on and said if I wanted to work from David and Margaret’s house I could, but she would give me a desk, a carrel, there in their offices, and I could work from there, too. So, but there wasn’t enough work to do to have to go in every day, so I couldn’t do that, but it was good. I think she understood I needed something positive to do, not just sit all day and watch all that drama because there really wasn’t much else on TV even after that. It was a long time before any real TV came back, so that was kind of difficult.

Swaykos: And how did you end up back down here then?

Doolittle: After I attended a couple of meetings down here to talk about where we were going to go, and how we were going to operate, and when we could get open and such, I realized that I couldn’t drive back and forth from Hattiesburg that frequently. So I have some friends who lived in Diamondhead, and her name is Laura Novak(?), and I’ve known her since kindergarten. (laughter) We went to school—

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: Yes. We went all through school together. And so I went over there, and I said—and she’d wanted me to come there to begin with when I evacuated, and I said, “No. I’m going to go ahead and go to Hattiesburg.” And she and her significant other, horrible Andre, they were quite traumatized by the storm because they are at the back of Diamondhead, the top actually, north, as far north in Diamondhead as you can go, but they have, I think it’s called Mud Bayou that runs right behind their property, but there’s a—it’s quite a ways from the house itself. And the house is still up on stilts, but there’s a basement underneath, and so the water actually came up to that bottom basement step. Then a tree fell on her car, and the tree took off the back corner of the back porch. So they were really, they were traumatized. But she had wanted me to come there, so when I told her I needed to come back, she said, “Well, it’s obvious; we have your room upstairs.” And I do, in their house, I always have a room, and so I moved back to Diamondhead. After a short while, I realized that that was not much of an improvement. It’s about, what? Sixty-five, seventy miles to Hattiesburg, but the far back of Diamondhead is like thirty miles, so I really only cut it in half, but it was better than the sixty. So I moved into Diamondhead, and then I could drive in as much as I needed to. And we started working in this facility to try to get things going.

Swaykos: Can I backtrack a little bit?

Doolittle: Sure.

Swaykos: Can you talk to me about the first time you went back to your house?
(phone rings) I’m sorry. (brief interruption)
Doolittle: The first time I went back to my house, we haven’t reached that point yet.

Swaykos: Oh, so you didn’t even go back to your house.

Doolittle: I couldn’t go back to my house.

Swaykos: So you were coming up and down for the meetings, but not even going to your house.

Doolittle: No, because the corner of Pass Christian where I live is up against the Bay of St. Louis and there was concern about contaminants in the soil. And so even after they took the concertina wire down at the—well, no, I guess not that early. But everything else opened, and that corner never opened; we could not go back in.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: And finally—I mean, that must’ve been, I guess it was a good two months or more.

Swaykos: OK. So you had already been back down here and working before you even got to see it.

Doolittle: Exactly.

Swaykos: OK. So then excuse me. Now, back to her house again. (laughter)

Doolittle: That’s OK. I mean, it’s very unusual because most people did go back to their houses. But having seen the destruction I was, I knew what I would find, but I couldn’t even get there to see it, and that was kind of frustrating. So anyway, I drove back and forth from Pass Christian and actually very much enjoyed the challenge of putting together library services here. I mean, it’s not the kind of career challenge (laughter) you get very often. You know, “Here’s a room; start a library.”

Swaykos: Right. Well, what was it like going back to campus the first time?

Doolittle: It was quite some time before I did that, too, because we had to get passes to go, and there were a limited number of passes. And we were so busy trying to set up here that I thought a lot of other people needed to go there or wanted to go there, and for me there was nothing I could do over there. So I needed to stay here and work.

Swaykos: So you knew it was destroyed over there?

Doolittle: I knew the library building was still standing.

Swaykos: OK.
**Doolittle:** So when I did finally go back over there, I don’t think I was that shocked because I had seen so much destruction in the neighborhood that I knew things were going to be bad, and our library was standing. And that was the most important thing. There was kind of disgusting mud and sod on the first floor, but—

**Swaykos:** How did all the books fare?

**Doolittle:** The books fared very well because our collections, our reference collection is on the second floor, and our general collection is on the third floor. So actually the books themselves fared very well. What was on the first floor was the circulation area, the twenty-four/seven computer lab, and periodicals. So we lost everything on the bottom shelf in the paper periodicals. But we only keep our paper periodicals three months, and then we get the microfiche copies. So that was not that significant. What was significant was that we had our forty-something microfiche tablets, and everything in the bottom drawers of those had gotten wet, and that is a picture to see. When we opened one of them, there was mold growing across the top of the microfiche; I’ve never seen anything like that. It was just fuzzy stuff; it wasn’t the black mold that was in the wall. It was like a fuzzy stuff going right across the top of all those little—you know how it’s a little envelope with the microfiche cards sitting in it. It was right across the top was all this [mold]. And then in a drawer further down was a roll of film. The boxes had the black mold on them, but when you opened them, it had not gone to the film. So it was kind of interesting. But the cabinets are very expensive because they are very big, and they’d have to hold, that type of drawers are designed to hold that type of material. And we lost about forty-something of those because they rusted on the bottom, and they had to be trashed.

**Swaykos:** Trashed, yeah.

**Doolittle:** Um-hm. And let’s see; what was—oh, collection management was on the first floor, as well. And that’s where the ordering and receiving of all new materials and such is done, and she had just received two very large donations of materials and still had them in boxes on the floor; so that was a lot of loss there. But let me think what else. The Heritage Collection is also on that first floor. The Heritage Collection is—this campus was the Gulf Park Women’s College back in the early days, and I’m not sure of the date, but I want to say [19]76 when they closed; they sold the campus to USM. But part of the agreement was that we would house the materials. So they have a reunion every year.

**Swaykos:** Really?

**Doolittle:** Those little old ladies come (laughter)—sorry. (laughter) They’re sweet; they’re really sweet. The ladies come for the reunion every year in July, and they like to go in their room and look at all their yearbooks and their pictures and their trophies. And it’s just really nice. So fortunately most of that stuff was up; it was in cabinets and up. It wasn’t on the floor. They had some lovely furniture in there, upholstered
couch and chairs and such; it was very pretty. But actual materials were pretty much up, so there wasn’t a big loss there.

**Swaykos:** Good.

**Doolittle:** Yes, because that’s their early records and all.

**Swaykos:** OK. So you were given this hallway. (laughter)

**Doolittle:** No. I was given the room down at the end. I don’t know if you’ve seen it yet, but I got the room down at the end. And it’s about—it’s a little bit bigger than this and told to start a library. And we have no money for furniture, and even if we did, it wouldn’t make any difference because we couldn’t get any furniture shipped in, and we couldn’t get the ordering process going, nothing. So this building had been empty for, I think, five years as a hospital, and there were still a few pieces of furniture and such out in the rest of the building. So we sort of—I baked a cake for a couple of the construction guys.

**Swaykos:** At the Diamondhead house?

**Doolittle:** No, by then I was in my trailer. Oh, yeah, it was at Diamondhead; I couldn’t cook in my oven in the trailer. Yeah, it was at the Diamondhead house; I baked a cake, and I brought it to work for a couple of the construction young men, and they nicely (laughter) hauled bookcases and a counter; it’s like a receptionist’s desk in a hospital. So we turned it into our circulation desk, and they put up shelves for us in there. And we got these tables and chairs from, I think these came from the campus. I know my chair belonged to the nursing department because the nursing department had actually, they hadn’t moved in, but they had started refurbishing to use this as the nursing facility, and so they had some things like chairs and things here. And so we just kind of scrounged.

**Swaykos:** Did you unload all your books from the other campus and just bring them over here?

**Doolittle:** Oh, no, no, no, because they would not even fit in this whole building. We had fifty-five thousand square feet in the other building. And this, the part of this facility that USM has now is five thousand square feet, and that’s everybody. So what we brought over—this is a very small sampling of our reference collection, and it changes each semester based on what courses are being taught here. So we haul them back over there and haul those over here. And then down in the other room, we have some shelves, some bookshelves with reserve materials on them, and the faculty put these on reserve. So that’s all the collection we have. We started a courier service and put a form on our web page; students can still search a catalog, fill out the form, and we run the courier over there every day Monday through Friday; they bring the books back over here for the students to check out.
Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: So that has worked very well.

Swaykos: Good.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: So that’s the business end. Let’s talk about the personal end.

Doolittle: The personal end, OK. I stayed out in Diamondhead, and I was getting kind of tired of the drive; I don’t like long drives to work, anyway.

Swaykos: Yeah. Fas was so expensive then, as well.

Doolittle: Um-hm. I had a little—it wasn’t little, but I had a car, and it was eleven years old, and it was paid for. OK? (laughter) That’s a story in itself, too; we’ll probably get to that one. But it just tired me out, that drive. And I was working one night till nine o’clock; one night a week I work nights because we’re short-staffed, and we don’t have enough librarians to staff the desk at night, so I work till nine o’clock. And if I was leaving here at nine o’clock and had to drive an hour or more out there, I had to be back here by eight o’clock the next morning; it was just, it was really dragging me down. So in, I want to say the end of October, I got a call from FEMA that I had a trailer ready.

Swaykos: Even though you still hadn’t seen your house?

Doolittle: (long pause) I don’t know if I’d—yeah, I guess I had seen the house before then. So you want to hear that part first.

Swaykos: Yes, please.

Doolittle: OK. When I finally got out to my house—well, I had looked online. NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] had put up these maps, and you could—they had taken pictures immediately after, and you could zoom right into your house.

Swaykos: Oh, really?

Doolittle: And so I knew the house was destroyed. The roof was sitting in the middle of the street, but by the time I got back, they had to clear the streets so people could get down them. So they just took bulldozers and went down the streets. So my roof was crunched up into my yard by then. The house was gone. There were two toilets, two bathtubs, and my washer and dryer still sitting there. The refrigerator was in the yard, and the couch was in the yard, but most things were gone. Two weeks before Hurricane Katrina hit, because I hadn’t been down here that long, my son-in-law and
daughter emptied my storage facility in Roanoke, Virginia, and brought my furniture and (inaudible). And they weren’t even unpacked; so that was kind of traumatic.

**Swaykos:** Did you go by yourself?

**Doolittle:** No. Laura Novak went with me; she’s a really good friend. (crying) Thank goodness because I don’t even know if I could’ve driven away from that; I was so torn up to see it. Sorry. As I said earlier, I forgot to take my computer, of all things, and the funny part is that I had bought one of those little backup devices that you hook to your computer, and it downloads your backup once a week. And when you go, you just take that little device with you, and I didn’t even take that. So it was quite traumatic because all my pictures were on there. (crying) Sorry.

**Swaykos:** No. I know it’s hard.

**Doolittle:** Yeah, it is.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Doolittle:** My daughter doesn’t do well with scrapbooks and stuff, so I had an album for each one of the kids, the grandchildren, (crying) one year for each of their years. Sorry.

**Swaykos:** I’m so sorry.

**Doolittle:** You don’t have to keep saying that; you didn’t do it. (laughter)

**Swaykos:** I know.

**Doolittle:** It’s just, it’s hard to talk about because you can’t replace that stuff. It wasn’t just pictures she sent me. When my granddaughter would do piano recitals, we’d have our programs and stuff, all their report cards; everything was there, so that was probably the hardest thing to lose.

**Swaykos:** Were you able to find anything? I know people talk about finding stuff.

**Doolittle:** I did; I did find some things. My mother had passed away two years ago, and my mother was—she had sewed all her life because she loved to sew. And she ordered her fabric because she never drove, all of her life, and she never drove because in New Orleans you didn’t have to; you could take the buses back then. But she belonged to these fabric clubs where they send you these little squares every month and you order fabric. And so even the last couple of years when she couldn’t sew, she still would keep buying fabric. This was a joke with everybody who knew us, my mother. And when my mother passed away, I had those big, big plastic containers. I had about ten or twelve of them just stuffed with fabric. So the first thing we saw when we got back to the neighborhood was this fabric all over the place. (laughter)
And I’d say, “I recognize that one. Oh, I recognize that.” And all, mostly about three houses down seems to have caught most of my stuff. And so it was just amazing to see that fabric all over the place. So then, because I had not unpacked any of my boxes, and I had put them against a wall, some of them up against an inside wall with a couch in front of them, they were there, but they were like just maybe the bottom level of them, the bottom of the stack, but the boxes were all wet and muddy and that sort of thing. So yeah, I had to pack lightly afterwards, but I probably salvaged about twenty boxes worth of stuff.

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: Yes. But the surprising stuff is I have crystal. Do you know how delicate crystal is?

Swaykos: I know.

Doolittle: And here’s this crystal, this little crystal wine glass and little crystal water glass. I’ve only got one of each, but (laughter) I did get my big crystal vase, and that was really heavy. I think it just couldn’t, the water couldn’t move that thing. It was just really strange.

Swaykos: Yeah, it sounds like it.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: So you were able to salvage some.

Doolittle: I was.

Swaykos: Although some of the most important—

Doolittle: My mother also collected pins, jewelry, costume jewelry, and I had put them in those plastic containers that usually you see men use them for bolts and nuts and such.

Swaykos: Right, right.

Doolittle: And I had them in those little plastic containers, and because I was moving I had put cotton in each one to keep them from jarring around. And I guess when the water wet that cotton, that thing wasn’t going anywhere, and it sunk, too. So I was able to collect about three or four of those. Of course getting the cotton away from those pins, it’s just like pull and pull and pull. But anyway, I was able to save some of those. Some of them, I’ve been able to clean up; some of them were just too much damage because it was saltwater, and it was so long before I got that, and it was so hot out there that they just didn’t make it. But anyway, after my second trip out, Laura said to me, “I don’t know why you’re wasting all this fabric; I bet you could do
something with it.” So we started collecting all this fabric that was all over the neighborhood, and I washed it, and I have now cut out squares and planned a Katrina quilt.

Swaykos: Oh, how wonderful.

Doolittle: So I’ve never done any quilting before, so I don’t know how it’s going to look, but I remember the pieces of material that my mother used. (crying) Sorry.

Swaykos: Don’t apologize.

Doolittle: So you know—sorry.

Swaykos: That is so wonderful.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: That’s so amazing.

Doolittle: Well, that’s not the most amazing story. The most amazing story—and this is really going to make me bawl. My mother’s father, she really liked her father. Daughters like their fathers. So I have a lot of stories about him; he died when she was about fourteen. And (crying) I had one picture of him just had one picture, and it was in a frame next to the picture of my grandmother in the frame. It was one of those standup folding screen things. And about my second or third trip back, I don’t even know why we were walking down the street, and it was standing up straight—

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: —up against the fence, and there it was. And it was clean; it was a little faded, but there it was. It was a miracle; I mean it was really—I’m sorry.

Swaykos: No. You’re fine. Don’t apologize. (brief interruption) That’s an amazing story.

Doolittle: It is. I mean, if it hadn’t been standing up, I would not have seen it, nor would it have survived, even, after the storm because everything laying on the ground that was paper just disintegrated.

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: So, it was a—

Swaykos: That’s so wonderful.

Doolittle: I know; it was wonderful.
Swaykos: That’s awesome. And I hope you make that quilt, and I hope I get to see it. (laughter)

Doolittle: Leave me your e-mail; I’ll send you a picture of it. It’ll take a long time, but I’ll work on it, so.

Swaykos: I’ll have some e-mail. So you made a lot of trips.

Doolittle: I made about five or six trips to the house.

Swaykos: OK.

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: And you were able to salvage about twenty boxes.

Doolittle: There wasn’t enough to keep going back. After a while, it was just making yourself feel bad.

Swaykos: And because you didn’t own it because you were renting, it wasn’t then your responsibility, finances of the home.

Doolittle: No. No. And my landlord was underinsured because it was, it had originally been her place to come in Pass Christian as their getaway house. And then they had built a bigger, newer one around the corner; so she didn’t—I mean that one was paid off and everything, so she didn’t have it insured.

Swaykos: What about her home that was around the corner? How did that fare?

Doolittle: The back porch and the railing were standing, and that’s about it, so. But one amazing thing was when you came into the neighborhood, you passed over this little bridge over Moline Bayou, and two people had docked their boats, their sailboats right near the bridge, and they had tied them off to each side of the water. And I remember when I was leaving, and I thought, “Oh, dear, I hope their boats will be safe.” Do you know when I came back, those boats were there?

Swaykos: Really?

Doolittle: No damage, nothing, there sat those boats just like they were left. And somebody said that’s because they tied them off on each side, so they could move, and they float. But that was beautiful to see those two boats.

Swaykos: That’s amazing. How long did you live in Diamondhead?
Doolittle: Until I moved in the trailer in November, so a couple of months in Hattiesburg and almost two months in Diamondhead.

Swaykos: Did you have to file? What’s the process for getting a FEMA trailer?

Doolittle: Well, we did paperwork from David’s house in Hattiesburg within a few days. We heard on the radio and TV that you had to file this formal (inaudible). That was another story, too. We all went online one day, and we filed our papers, and the next day we got up, and we all went to check on our papers and see the status. And everybody else got a note that said, “Your form has been received.” Mine said, “There’s no form for this person.”

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: So I thought, “Oh, gosh, I did something wrong.” So I filed another one. And then a week or so later, the news starts talking about, “Boy, are you in trouble if you’re asking for more than one. If you’ve done multiple forms, you’re fraudulent; you’re going to go to jail.” I had a heart attack.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: So I called them, and of course calling FEMA was impossible.

Swaykos: I’m sure.

Doolittle: People were telling us they were getting up [early]. The only way they could get through was to get up, like, three or four o’clock in the morning. Well, I was so nervous about the fact I might have fraudulently filed two forms, I got up at three o’clock one morning and called, and I got through. And the first thing that lady said to me when I told her was, “Oh, you can’t do that. You can’t do that.” And I said, “I didn’t mean to do that, but I did do it.” “You can’t do that. You can go to jail for that,” she tells me. (laughter) And I’m, “This is not encouraging.” So I said, “Well, I know I made a mistake. What do I need to do to fix it?” “Oh, I can’t do anything for you. I can’t do anything. You could go to jail for this!” (laughter) So she’s just making it worse. I bared my soul to that man over there that I had done two forms. (laughter) So he said, “We’ll just merge them.” And it wouldn’t have
been a problem because it was an honest mistake, but he said it would’ve taken you out of the system; you wouldn’t have gone step-by-step like the other ones because it would’ve flagged that something was wrong, and so it would’ve had to go to a committee to look at. So it would have slowed down the process. So he fixed it, and that was not a problem. But I wrote a whole thesis on the FEMA funny stories, so. (laughter)

Swaykos: So then they called you and said you got a trailer.

Doolittle: Oh, yes, they called me. Oh, you have to hear where our trailers were because that’s significant here. They set up a lot of trailer courts around here, and there’s been a lot of trouble in some of them. They’re huge; they have barbwire around the top of them. People don’t want them in their neighborhood, the whole thing. And they’re kind of scary. And I live alone, so you don’t go into that kind of setting. Well, the school district in Long Beach, because Long Beach was trying to make sure they could draw the university back, rather than having the university go away. So the school district had this large piece of property around their office, and so they turned it over to FEMA to put trailers in for their teachers and USM people. So we didn’t go into a regular kind of trailer court. We went into—it had thirty-nine trailers in it, and they built us a huge washroom with about six or eight washers and dryers, industrial size, and of course we either knew the university people, or we met them very quickly afterwards, but most of them we knew when we got there. We met a lot of nice teachers in the school district, and so it was, it was a nice environment, and we felt safe.

Swaykos: I see. So you got there. Were you living by yourself?

Doolittle: Yes.

Swaykos: OK. Somewhere along the line I got the story that you were living with three other ladies.

Doolittle: Oh, no. The way that story works is there were four ladies living alone in that trailer park who worked at USM.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: And one person knew how to do one thing, and somebody else knew how to do something else, and somebody else knew how to do the other thing, secret little things that—see, when they gave the trailer to you, the people who turned the trailer over to you are only trained to do the paperwork to turn over the trailer. And the company that set the trailers up, they only bring them in and set them up, and then they’re gone. And then these people come who are going to turn it over to you by doing paperwork, and nobody knew anything about the trailers.

Swaykos: I see.
Doolittle:  They couldn’t tell us anything. And so I didn’t even know how to light the oven.

Swaykos:  Oh, really?

Doolittle:  None of the people turning the trailers over to us knew how to tell us to do those kind of things. So I thought, “This isn’t going to work.” So what I did was invite those ladies over for dinner one evening, and I said, “I know how to do this. What do you know how to do?” (laughter) And so then we started eating regularly, and we called ourselves “The Fabulous FEMA Females.” (laughter) And we made jokes about everything because it was either laugh or cry, and we’d all done enough crying.

Swaykos:  Right. Who were you with?

Doolittle:  Marlene Naquin(?) from the math department, and Faye Mitchell(?) from nursing, and Dianne Hickman(?) from student services. Well, actually we had another one for a while but she moved, Edith Avandante(?) from the math department. She was from Mexico, and her husband was teaching up in Michigan, I think; so soon after she went ahead and went up there.

Swaykos:  I see.

Doolittle:  So, but there were four of us. And then Dianne had some problems with her dogs. It got down to three of us; so we are still the three.

Swaykos:  And so what did y’all do while you—how long did you stay there?

Doolittle:  Almost a year. I think I was there eleven months.

Swaykos:  So what was your time like with everyone?

Doolittle:  I didn’t have any problems. I had nice neighbors, and we would get together. We started getting together almost every week after a while just because there isn’t a lot to do, and it wasn’t like you could go out to eat or to a movie or anything. And I like to cook, so I would just have them over and just surprise them. I like to cook when I don’t have to cook, a pot roast and potatoes. I can look for these strange recipes, and because you came, you have to eat it. (laughter) So, but I never did get the oven lit.

Swaykos:  Really?

Doolittle:  No. (brief interruption) (Tape 2)

Swaykos:  —your stove lit. (laughter)
Doolittle: Oh, you had to—FEMA contracted with people to do maintenance on the trailers. During the year I was there, I think we went through at least four contractors. People just didn’t want the job after a while since they thought it was going to be good money, but there are a lot of people out there. I’ve heard of horror stories from these men about the way some people actually take care of their trailers, and you don’t even want to go in them he said, so.

Swaykos: What were they saying?

Doolittle: Well, I mean hearsay, but people just tear things up and don’t take care of anything and then call maintenance expecting them to fix it. So we went through about four contractors, I think, while I was there, that time. I’m sorry I don’t have the booklet to give you. Marlene has it because I asked her for one more piece of information. But I wrote all these stories daily.

Swaykos: Oh, did you?

Doolittle: Yeah.

Swaykos: OK.

Doolittle: Because I collected the stories from Faye and Marlene and wrote them down, and we just had lots of funny stories. But anyway, they came—you would call them to get some help and to get something fixed, and it was, of course, summer. And when summer came, it was very, very, very hot, and my trailer was very, very, very hot. And so when I called for maintenance one time, they came out; they discovered that it was wired wrong, and that the air conditioner, every time the air conditioner kicked on, it would run for two or three minutes and switch over to heat.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: And so (laughter) it was really hot.

Swaykos: I’m sure.

Doolittle: And I don’t know if that was the man, or if it was one who was fixing something else, but I said to one of them one day, “Does anybody know how to turn these stoves on, how to turn on these ovens?” And he said, “Oh, yeah. I can do that for you.” So he showed me how to do it. And you have to get one of those things you light a barbecue with because the gas nozzle, or whatever it is that the gas comes out of, is at the back of the thing. I mean, I don’t think this is really a clever way to build a trailer. You’d think they’d put it right at the front. But it’s at the back, so you’ve got to get this long thing and get it back up in there. So I thanked him, and I thought, “I still am not going to use that oven.” And then I couldn’t get it to light. I did try to use it. And so another man was out for something else, and I mentioned it to him, and
he looked at it, and he said, “Oh, I’ve seen these before, and here’s your problem. There’s an adjustment knob in here for that flame, but it’s covered up so you can’t get to it.” So he said, “Well, I’ll just drill a hole and turn it up for you.” And I thought, “Can’t you lift the lid?” Most stoves you can lift up the lid.

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: And he said, “No, no. You can’t do that on these.” So off he went; he got a drill, and he drilled a hole in the front of the stove panel, and he turns with this little tool, and he turns the flame up, and then he lit my oven for me and showed me how to do it. I thanked him, quickly turned that oven off when he left and thought, “I’m not doing that.” And then one day I was cleaning that stove, and I just reached over there and lifted it up, and I thought, “He didn’t have to drill that hole in this stove at all.” (laughter) But we had lots of fun in the trailer. But towards the end, the school district was getting kind of tired of having us there, I think. It turned out to be more than they expected because what happened to some of the trailers as they emptied, FEMA said, “Well, you have our trailers; we have to put people in them.” And so they started moving other people in, and it just became a different kind of community, so.

Swaykos: What did it turn into?

Doolittle: Oh, I don’t want to say that; that’s nasty. (laughter) It wasn’t that bad by the time I left, but Dianne was the last one to leave from our group, and she said that it was really dangerous, and people who evidently don’t have to go to work in the morning, and so they’d sit up all night out in the lots and were noisy. And when I went back to see her one day, in my car’s parking space there’s this beat-up old car off its tires and jacked up on cinder blocks. It was just, unfortunately, stereotypical type, and I hate to be that way, but, so it wasn’t becoming a very nice place, and people needed to get out.

Swaykos: What did you see in the families? Were there families there?

Doolittle: There weren’t that many families because it was, as I said, only thirty-nine trailers, teachers and USM faculty. Let’s see. Families; there was one family in the back that had a couple of kids (inaudible). Yeah, there were a couple. There were two in the back, had little girls about the same size. They were kind of across the road from each other, so they kind of amused themselves. Most families just dealt with it. There was a family in the back, and it was parents and a grown daughter with, I think, two children, but—oh, and they were all in that one trailer. I don’t know how they did that because mine was small, and that one wasn’t much bigger. And I cannot imagine if you even had two people living in one how you would do it. I mean, you’d have to really like each other. They’re just, they’re so inconvenient.

Swaykos: So did you see a lot of extra stressors, a lot of anxious people?
Doolittle: Not in the beginning when it was the regular. In fact, people were, mostly the teachers, the Long Beach District teachers who knew each other, so it was a very friendly atmosphere. Sometimes people sat out in their yards; people chatted and stuff. I didn’t see a lot of extra stress to begin with, but then later on (laughter)—some people just don’t like living in trailers, and I can—me, I was just glad to be some place, and it was eleven minutes to get here. I was right around the corner. But my friend Faye Mitchell, she didn’t like living in a trailer from the very beginning, so it was a negative experience for her. She was always finding things that looked discomfitable to her. I just thought, “I can’t look at the negative. I have to look at, ‘What am I going to do tomorrow?’” That’s the way I got through the whole storm was saying, “OK. What do I do know? What do I do tomorrow? Can’t look back. I’ll deal with the back memories ten years down the road or something. For now I have to keep looking at, ‘What do I need to do next? What do I need to move forward with?’”

Swaykos: What was the hardest part of living in a FEMA trailer park?

Doolittle: I can’t say there was any one hardest part other than those. I cut myself, my arms, tore my arms terribly because the doorways are, I think, twenty inches. And if you try to pass through a doorway carrying anything, it was always cutting my arms. (laughter) It became a joke. They would check me each morning when I got here to see how many new scars I had. (laughter)

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Doolittle: Actually for me there wasn’t anything. I mean, it wasn’t the ideal place to be, but it was mine; it was clean; it was comfortable to a point. And the storage space, that was a big issue, but those are so minor. Those are minor issues, really. The fact that I bought a jacket and came home, and couldn’t hang it in the closet because it was—we had two, eighteen-inch closets. Think about your wardrobe. (laughter) So I didn’t have any major—I mean I’d have stayed longer if I hadn’t found what I was looking for at the time. It wasn’t that uncomfortable to me. It was close; I would come to work and go home. I bought a new computer right away, and Orb(?) came out, and he built a board across a part of my dining set, that bench and chairs table thing. And we covered it; Laura and I covered with contact paper stuff, and then set it up as my computer station. So I had, I still had two seats at the table, but I had my computer station right there. So I was comfortable enough; I had everything I wanted. Big, big refrigerator. Could’ve used a bigger bathroom; we love to joke about that. (laughter) You’d sit down in the [tub]. You have to have a day and a half to get where you’re going because it took you that long to get yourself unwound and out of it. (laughter) I mean, we just made terrible jokes about those poor little bathrooms. Really, it’s better than living on the streets. So I wouldn’t say that my experience in the trailer was bad or stressful as much as everything else was.

Swaykos: Right, right. So how did you get moved out?
Doolittle: I think I just saw an ad in the paper. I’d been looking because towards the end there, they had a representative; we each got assigned a representative who would come out every day, and—or not every day, but every two weeks and ask us if we had looked anywhere, and where did we look, and she’d bring us some suggestions. So she brought me a couple of suggestions, and they were—I drove around, and they were—I don’t know how to say this, but projects, Section 8 projects. And I thought, “I live alone, and an old lady living alone, I do not want to be in a Section 8 project.”

Swaykos: Right.

Doolittle: And they were saying we were going to have to be out soon anyway; there was going to be a deadline on these things. You could only have them eighteen months. So I was always on the lookout for something, and I saw this house, called, and agreed to come out and meet the man. And he said, when I came, he said he’d already had four people look at it; so I was kind of scared I wasn’t going to get it. It’s about four blocks from where I used to live. I lived on Michigan; now I live on Alabama. So, and now I’m the city instead of four blocks outside of the city. So I was lucky to get it. My rent went up 15 percent for a smaller house, but it’s raised, so it wasn’t washed away, but you can see there’s a watermark on the window, outside because I can’t get to it to clean it because it’s raised ten feet. And that watermark is five feet from my floor, and the water was fifteen feet there.

Swaykos: So he just refurbished it?

Doolittle: He gutted it and refurbished it, um-hm, yeah. His father had lived in that neighborhood for a long time, and he, his father, had several rental properties in that neighborhood; so he kind of wanted to get into the groove with his dad. So he bought this one and redid it, and he didn’t have any trouble renting it at all. (laughter) It’s a lovely little house with a covered front porch and a big back porch that’s not covered; so when I want a lot of sun, I go sit out back, or if it’s raining, I sit out front. But it’s a nice little house.

Swaykos: So you’ve had to repurchase everything for a home?

Doolittle: Yeah, that’s—well, no, actually I was lucky there. He had a refrigerator and a stove, and a washer and dryer. And I was very glad because I had purchased a stove, a refrigerator—no, not a stove—a refrigerator and a washer and dryer from Sears about six months before the storm.

Swaykos: I see.

Doolittle: And after the storm, I called them, and I said, “My washer and dryer do not work.” (laughter) And they said, “We’re sorry; you still have pay for it.” So I had to pay for those appliances, which I thought they should’ve been a little more generous on that. So obviously, when they got the last payment, they’ll send a card back. So when I got here and I—because that’s a real—I don’t think people realize quite—I
hate to say that people don’t realize it—what it costs to replace what you own, even if you just replace the essentials. A washer, a dryer, a coffee pot—well, the church gave me a box of stuff with some pots and pans. When we moved into the trailer, this church group came by with boxes for us; they had dishes and glasses and silverware and a coffee maker and bed sheets and a blanket and a coverlet. So it was very nice. Some out-of-town group just came by.

Swaykos: Wonderful.

Doolittle: And they adopted our trailer court, and they bought us those things, so. But still, you have to—I mean, if you think about all the things you have that they’re really kind of essential, that’s not frivolous things.

Swaykos: Right. What other volunteer and donation services did you use and receive?

Doolittle: At that point when I was living in Diamondhead, the lady across the street told my friend that I was staying with that the Red Cross was giving money to everybody who lost things in Katrina. And if I would give her my Social Security number, she’d turn my name in, and she did. And they just came to the door one day and knocked, and I went to the door, [and] they handed me a check for three hundred dollars.

Swaykos: Wonderful.

Doolittle: Yeah. It wasn’t a big amount, but you know it was—they did that for everybody whose name was turned in to them, so it was really good at the time. Let me go back to FEMA here. FEMA sent a inspector out, (laughter) which is another story; they said I didn’t have to be meeting the inspector because the house wasn’t mine. And then they called, and they said they were going to send an inspector. And then they called and said, no, I don’t have to have an inspection because the house wasn’t mine. Then they called and said they’re sending this inspector out. So I go out and meet this inspector, and he’s there to inspect what was lost, as a renter. And FEMA had some kind of formula. If you had a living room, you got X number of dollars. If you had a bedroom you get X number of dollars. If you have a bathroom, you get [X] number of dollars. It doesn’t matter what was in those things. And so he had me show him—because the slab was still there—I had to show him the spot, “This is the bedroom. This was the bath. This was the bedroom.” I had to show him where the rooms were. And so he entered that kind of information in his little program, and I said, “But what about items I had?” And he says, “It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter if you had the most expensive living room set in the world sitting in that room, or if you had the cheapest living room setting, you got X number of dollars because you had a living room. So I eventually got twelve thousand dollars from FEMA.

Swaykos: For the rooms?
Doolittle: For the rooms, um-hm.

Swaykos: Has that been able to help you refund everything you’ve needed?

Doolittle: Oh, heavens no. You had to itemize, and I started the night after the storm, writing down everything I could remember because we had to itemize for our taxes that year, turn it in, pages and pages and pages of stuff. And I guarantee you it was worth more than twelve thousand dollars. No. By the time I bought a computer and some clothes, it’s amazing. I mean, I couldn’t go buy just blue jeans and T-shirts because I’m a professional; I have to dress a certain way. And so by the time you buy two or three suits, it was gone in no time at all, and it didn’t replace very much. I bought a used living room set and a computer table when I moved into my home, and I bought a daybed that I sleep on in the office because my daughter works for a hotel, and her boss told her she could go to their warehouse to pick whatever she wanted to bring to me. (crying) So it’s Hilton and Doubletree.

Swaykos: Amazing, yeah.

Doolittle: And so, and I didn’t have a place until recently, and so he said. “That’s OK. It can sit in your storage.” So she went over, and she picked out some furniture for me, just not a bed; nobody wants a hotel bed. (laughter) But, yes, that was very generous of him; it was very nice.

Swaykos: That’s wonderful. Was there any other volunteer in food services you used and that kind of thing?

Doolittle: Well, when we were in Hattiesburg right after the storm, like, I think the day after, the Baptist people from—

Swaykos: Baptist Men, North Carolina?

Doolittle: No. It was the convention out of Florida. They said they were waiting because we had helped them last time. So they were ready. (crying) But I think our national government needs to look at how these people do things. They were so—I’ve never seen anything (inaudible) in my life; I wanted to invite them home. They were there the day after the storm. They brought a trailer, and they set it up, and it was their washroom and their shower facilities. And their workers could leave their clothes with that washroom and pick them up later; somebody stayed there and washed their clothes for them. And then there was a feeding trailer and a sleeping trailer. And they had teams; they had teams set up. Teams come in for seven days, so you don’t get overtired. You’d come in; you’d go into a trailer to sleep; you’d get your clothes washed; you get fed, and you get out and work. I mean just like that. (snaps fingers) It was amazing. And they almost, I think about the third day, were handing out those cartons with (inaudible) for supper. You could go by and pick up a meal, or dinner or lunch, too. And then they would schedule to come out and clean yards. I thought that was really nice. (Inaudible) And they said they’d stay seven days; they’d come back
if they want to, but on the seventh day, they go out; the next team comes in. Well, there’s several teams doing that. And I thought, “That is so clever.” They were here like the day after. Does somebody need to take lessons from them? (laughter) So that was real good. But then after we got down here, of course there were no food stores open yet. Well, there was in Diamondhead; there was a food store open pretty quickly. By then it was two months. But when I was at work here, there was no place to get lunch, and the Red Cross food truck would come by, and we knew the neighborhood they were in; so somebody’d say, “I’ll go to lunch today.” And she’d go over to the neighborhood, the other side of the tracks where she knew the truck was running, and she would say how many people wanted, and she’d bring back six or seven dinners, and we’d all have lunch from the Red Cross. So they were very good. I know that people sometimes don’t think well of the Red Cross, but I mean, they didn’t hand us billions of dollars, but they did feed us. And that first group gave us water, which was very important for some people. Anyway, so volunteer groups, other than the Red Cross and the church group that came to the [trailer court], I personally—there were a lot of people, but I mean, there was nothing I could get them to do. I couldn’t get them to come clean the yard or help me build a house or anything like that. I think as a renter, I fell through the cracks. I also think that nobody has yet looked at—and this someday will probably be very significant. I have respiratory problems. I had asthma as a child. They should’ve told us the day after the storm, “Get the heck out of here.” The formaldehyde level was 300 and something percent above what you’re supposed to tolerate. The black mold was three hundred thousand times worse than what we’re supposed to. And I’m saying this on tape; I may be in jail next. That dioxide plant out there on the North Bay is always under suspicion for leaks; certainly the storm did something and brought some of that into our soil. And that was just two blocks from my house (inaudible), and I was digging in it. We didn’t know these things. I got really sick one day when I was out there; my blood pressure just went right down. We went to—we called them PODS, points of distribution, and set them up. Again it was church groups, where they’d hand out food, and they had medical facilities. Actually it was a team of medical internists from Roanoke.

Swaykos: Oh, really?

Doolittle: It was so funny. I was like, whoa, but they took care of me and got me settled down.

Swaykos: Oh, good.

Doolittle: But I think that was it because after the storm, I had severe problems and ended up in the hospital for a week with them trying to get my lungs open. By the time they got me to the hospital, I had no air movement in my lungs, and the doctor tells me now I have chronic bronchitis and COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] because my lungs have been scarred. I believe that it’s a result of all the contaminants that were in the air and the soil and such. I mean, you can’t blame anybody for that. I don’t mean it to point blame, but the result is that I am much
sicker now than I’ve ever been in my life, and that’s not something anybody has yet looked at, the long-term physical effects of this storm. They’ve looked at our post traumatic stress syndrome, but I think someone needs to go back and look at how many people have long-term [negative physical effects]. *But they better hurry up. OK?* (laughter) Because I’m not going to be here much longer. But anyway, so.

**Swaykos:** So we’re two years down the road. Lastly, do you want to tell me what you’ve learned through all this?

**Doolittle:** Oh, gosh, more than I can ever tell you; probably the thing that—(crying) that people are good to each other.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Doolittle:** You asked the wrong question, again, didn’t you? (laughter)

**Swaykos:** (Inaudible)

**Doolittle:** The volunteers and each other, just we’ve become so close, and we take care of each other, and the friendships we made are tighter. You may not have known these people very long, but they’re tight friendships now. Oh, I learned an awful lot, an awful lot. It would take another two tapes to tell you all the things I’ve learned, (laughter) but it definitely has been a learning experience. I think the most significant is I’ve learned how good people can be.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Doolittle:** Yeah.

**Swaykos:** Thank you so much.

**Doolittle:** I’m sorry; you had to watch me [cry].

(End of interview)