Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Ethelyn Patricia Connor Joachim

Interviewer: Rachel Swaykos

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An Oral History with Ethelyn Patricia Connor Joachim, Volume 1004
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Biography

Dr. Ethelyn Patricia “Pat” Connor Joachim was born on November 24, 1942, to Mr. Donald Lawrence “Pat” Connor (born June 21, 1912, in New Orleans, Louisiana) and Mrs. (first name unavailable) MacKenzie Connor (born in New Orleans, Louisiana). Her father was a safety auditor, engineer, and served as mayor of Ocean Springs. Her mother was a wife and homemaker. Joachim earned three degrees from The University of Southern Mississippi, a BS, an MEd, and a PhD. During her career, she has served as teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent in Mississippi Public Schools. At the time of this interview she was Provost for the Gulf Coast, University of Southern Mississippi. Her rich and interesting curriculum vita follows on the next page.

Dr. Joachim is the mother of Randall Craig Joachim (born February 8, 1965) and Brian Connor Joachim (born November 30, 1967). She enjoys reading, biking, hiking, working in her garden, traveling, and boating. She is a Methodist.
Table of Contents

Preparing for Hurricane Katrina................................................................. 1
Katrina comes ashore ................................................................. 2
Damage to family’s homes ................................................................. 3
Loss of cell phone service ............................................................... 3
Surge recedes ................................................................................. 3
Generator use after loss of electricity.................................................. 4
Insurance issues .............................................................................. 4
Scarcity of gasoline ........................................................................... 5
The University of Southern Mississippi, Gulf Park Campus ............... 5, 15
Garden Park Hospital building becomes command center ............... 5, 11
Gulf Coast Student Services Center ..................................................... 6
Documenting damages at Gulf Park Campus ........................................ 6
Complete devastation ....................................................................... 6
Library losses .................................................................................. 7
Losses in the form of technology ......................................................... 7
Losses of USM’s employees on Coast ................................................. 9
First administrative meeting after Katrina in parking lot ..................... 9
Difficult road to recovery begins ....................................................... 10
Food after Katrina .......................................................................... 10
Damage at Stennis campus ............................................................... 11
Employees return ............................................................................ 11
FEMA trailers .................................................................................. 11
Student enrollment at Gulf Park Campus after Katrina ....................... 12
Maintaining Gulf Park Web site ......................................................... 12
Affordable housing .......................................................................... 12
Habitat for Humanity ....................................................................... 12
Crunching numbers for compressed semester after Katrina ............... 13
Recruiting students, circa 2007 ......................................................... 14
Post-traumatic vulnerabilities after Katrina ......................................... 15
Counseling ....................................................................................... 15
Enrollment decrease means decreased revenue .................................. 17
Mental health issues ........................................................................ 17
Maintaining hope ........................................................................... 17
Cooperation of Southern Miss family ................................................. 17
Greatest recovery obstacle for Gulf Park .......................................... 19
Prioritizing tasks ............................................................................. 19
Shelby Thames ................................................................................ 20
Emergency money .......................................................................... 20
FEMA ............................................................................................. 20, 24
MEMA ............................................................................................ 21
Congress gives money to Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning ................................................. 21
Scholarships to students who suffered from Katrina ......................... 21
Donations ....................................................................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beckman Foundation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
<td>24, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping in office</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USM Gulf Park reopens October 10, 2005</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with fatigue of community</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, Ocean Springs</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark of recovery</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leadership</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult decisions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement, then Katrina</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst day after Katrina</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Ethelyn Patricia Connor Joachim and is taking place on June 1, 2007. The interviewer is Rachel Swaykos.

Swaykos: —interviewing Dr. Pat Joachim, associate provost of USM [University of Southern Mississippi] Gulf Coast. It is Friday, June 1, at 2 p.m.

Joachim: My name is Ethelyn Patricia Connor Joachim. I am known as Pat Joachim. I am associate provost for The University of Southern Mississippi, responsible for the operations and academics on the Gulf Coast.

Swaykos: Great. Thank you. So first, before we get into school, I’d kind of like to ask you a little bit about your background. How long have you been on the Coast?

Joachim: Well, born in New Orleans; only lived there for three years, but came over to the Coast, so I’ve been a lifelong resident.

Swaykos: OK. How long have you been working for the school?

Joachim: Well, I’ve been with the university since one week before Katrina rolled through. I began August the twenty-sixth, but I had previously been with the university for two years as coordinator of educational leadership, and that was in 1999 and 2000.

Swaykos: OK. So with the storm, you’d already been living here. What city were you living in?

Joachim: Ocean Springs.

Swaykos: Ocean Springs, OK. And how long had you lived there?

Joachim: All my life.

Swaykos: Oh, wonderful. OK. So August 29, what was that like for you personally? What did you do that day?

Joachim: Well, I live in Ocean Springs, and I live on the Bay of Biloxi. My home is an old Victorian home, and the interesting thing about that home is that my
grandparents bought it back in 1926 as a summer residence because New Orleans was hot, and everybody just kind of came to the Gulf Coast. And so they had been coming over and renting a place, and they found this place and decided that the thing to do was to buy it. So the day of the storm, my mother—there’s three acres of ground, and my mother has a smaller house on the same property. And she is ninety-one years old, and she did not want to leave. Well, this, you know, all the discussion about whether we’re going to stay, whether we’re going to go, really began on Thursday and Friday. And none of us really thought that this storm was going to come. But anyway, my elder son Craig, his wife Beth, and their two children—I have a granddaughter and a grandson—they left to go to Alabama.

Swaykos: And what are their names? Sorry.

Joachim: Morgan is my granddaughter, and Connor is my grandson. And of course, he’s—that’s my maiden name, so. And she’s eleven, and he is seven. Well, his wife Beth, my daughter-in-law, is terrified of storms, so every time one comes, she’s ready to leave. And so I said to my older son, “You need to go, Craig.” So they went to Alabama. He tried to talk me into going, but at that point, my mother really did not want to leave, and it still wasn’t certain that the storm was really even coming in here. So my younger son decided that he was not going to leave, that he would come over and stay, you know, at my house so that, you know, we would not be alone. So on Sunday morning, when I realized how bad this storm was going to be, it was also too late to get a ninety-year-old person, who’s not very ambulatory and who has some special needs, to get them on an interstate and get stuck and be there, stuck, during a storm. So we chose to ride it out, and the home in which I live, I had purchased, my ex-husband and I purchased from my parents back in 1977. But my parents owned it. They had bought it from my grandparents back in 1946, [19]47. So knew it had been through Camille. It had been through the [19]47 hurricane, and we didn’t have water in any of those. And of course, assumed that we would be perfectly fine. And once I realized how bad the storm was going to be, it was just too late. So my younger son, that morning, very early, went over to stay with my mother.

Swaykos: This is Monday morning?

Joachim: This is Monday morning, the day that Katrina came through. And of course when I got up very early, and as soon as first light, I could tell the tide had already started to come in. I know the height of piers. I know what normal tide is. I know what high tide is. But at 6:30 or quarter to seven that morning it was so high that one of my neighbors—they have a boat dock, and the only thing that you could see was the metal roof of the boat dock. And so I thought, “You know, this is really going to be bad.” And of course, we knew that it was going to be a very long, windy storm. But anyway, I stayed in my house, which is two-story, by myself, and my son went over and stayed with my mother because she’s a very controlling (laughter) lady, and she was not going to come to my house. And I thought, “You know, I have stayed here. I just think I’m not going to leave my home because if something happens, I could at least move things or do whatever.”
Swaykos: Right. The home your mother was staying in, was that two stories as well?

Joachim: No. It was a single-story, but it was really, probably, we thought, more sheltered because she does not sit on a bluff, and I do. She is almost at the head of a valley. But as it turned out, as the water kept coming in, it took out all of the duct work under my home. So I very quickly ran around and pulled the registers out and put plastic garbage bags over it because my home is on pillars and put the registers back in, so therefore, I got no water in my home. I was very lucky. I lost three central heat and air units. She had significant damage to her home. It ripped off her front porch. She had several inches of water that came into her house. It knocked out some of the piers under her living room, so the living room floor began to sink. But I knew that it—I watched it very carefully and knew that she was all right. Plus the interesting thing was, as long as we had the cell phone towers, I was able to talk to people all over the United States.

Swaykos: Your cell phone was working?

Joachim: At that point. Then when the cell phone towers went down around eleven o’clock, I lost complete contact.

Swaykos: A.m.?

Joachim: Yeah. Eleven o’clock a.m., I lost complete contact. But there were times that I could not even see Biloxi, which I knew also by some of the trees in my yard where the water was that we had, and the amount of water I had on my property. On the bluff, we had to have had thirty-two feet of water, which is a lot of water. But anyway, I had very little damage to my home. I had one window that exploded in a breakfast room that overlooks the bay, and the wind and rain just came in. There was nothing you could do, but that was the only thing that really was of major significance other than the loss of all my duct work was horrendous. But I had no contact after eleven o’clock with anyone.

Swaykos: Right. But you could see outside—

Joachim: Oh, I could see everything.

Swaykos: —to watch your mother’s house.

Joachim: And I would run upstairs. It’s a two-story. I would run upstairs and look out all of those windows, and of course, I knew that the devastation was going to be bad but had no idea until the water began to recede. And then I could see the condition of the Ocean Springs-Biloxi Bridge, and because of the structure of that bridge and the mess that it was left in, I knew it was going to be bad all over.

Swaykos: When did the water recede?
Joachim: The water really started going back out in my bay area probably about 12:30. And I have this documented at home, but because I took notes so that I would have an idea of where the water was in the yard and everything. In fact, my older son was really upset because when I kept telling him on the telephone where the water was, how far it was, and that type of thing, when we lost connection, what he was seeing on the TV in Alabama, he really thought we were all dead. I mean, he just figured it was all over.

Swaykos: Right. So at what point were you able to get to your mother’s house?

Joachim: That afternoon about four o’clock I went over there and got her, and my younger son. He came on. We got a lot of stuff. And as I told her; I said, “Look, we’re fine at my house. So we’re OK.”

Swaykos: And by that point, you were out of electricity?

Joachim: Had been out of electricity, but we also have a generator that will run the refrigerator and freezer in both of our homes. We have it set up so that it’s the kind of generator that can be placed in the middle of the yard, with these huge power lines that will go to it, and then we just know what we can run. You can’t run air-conditioning, but you can run a couple of lights and keep your refrigerator and freezer going, and that’s important.

Swaykos: Right. So how has the damage recovered at your mother’s house? Have you guys fixed that yet?

Joachim: Yeah, we’ve had all of that fixed. She and my younger son both had to live with me. So my younger son sleeps in his new home tomorrow night for the first time.

Swaykos: Oh, wonderful.

Joachim: Yeah, and that’s pretty significant because he lost everything, and his insurance did not pay. That was just one of those things.

Swaykos: Anything?

Joachim: No, the contents didn’t pay, and because he did end up with flood, and that house was in the center of Ocean Springs, right by the Walter Anderson Museum and never had had water. But there was a natural ravine, evidently, at one time, and that’s where it all flooded.

Swaykos: So his house was completely destroyed?
Joachim: Right. Corps of engineers came in and took that out, and the furniture between flood and the roof being taken off, there was very little that could be saved. And then the interesting thing is when we went to the miniwarehouse a couple of weeks ago to start moving some of the wooden furniture that we thought would be OK, it was really interesting because the legs fell off of an antique table. Of course, we have them glued back on, but we’re lucky. We have far more than what a lot of other people have.

Swaykos: Definitely. So when you went out and you started to survey the rest of the Gulf, what were your feelings about that?

Joachim: Was not able to get to the Gulf Park Campus until Thursday. First of all, it was completely—the streets in Ocean Springs where I live, they were past—we could get out, like, a day or two, the next day, but the problem was finding fuel. Even though you had filled your cars with fuel, by the time the bridges were out, and it was not an easy situation. But I did meet with part of the management team, which is the administrative side of the Gulf Coast operations. We met on Thursday morning and kind of put our heads together to see what we could do. And we knew that we, that the research foundation had just bought the Garden Park Hospital, the old Garden Park Hospital, I guess, about two or three years prior to the storm. And the nursing was—it was going to be for the nursing, the school of nursing. They had kind of begun to renovate one section, which was about twenty-two thousand square feet, and what we did was we decided to set up a command center here. And so then about eleven o’clock, David Taylor, who is responsible for the facilities across the Gulf Coast, we went and toured the Gulf Park Campus, and it was absolutely awful.

Swaykos: What did it look like?

Joachim: There was—it was completely—complete devastation. We found a piece of baseboard and a piece of molding from the provost’s home, which had been on the beach. All of the buildings had damage. The library sustained little damage, but yet as time went on, we found out there was more damage because eighteen inches of water, and there was some leaking. But then also the advanced education center lost the roof, and there was water in that. It completely gutted the bottom floor of that. And of course, the front three buildings, the old, historic buildings, one of them is going to have to be torn down. It’s just so far gone that there is no way that it can really be saved, but that is the administration building. But Hardy Hall, which was one of the original buildings, and then Lloyd Hall, those two buildings probably are going to be restored.

Swaykos: OK, great. So when you looked around, what were your first thoughts as soon as you showed up? And this was your building. You’d only been there, not even a full week at that point. What ran through your head? “I’m in charge of this?”

(laughter)
Joachim: Well, the interesting thing was this—the first thing that we did after we met, and we met at Harlan McDonald’s house, who was head of security—

Swaykos: Who all met together?

Joachim: It was David Sliman, who is head of technology, and then Shelia White, who is our public relations person, David Taylor, Harlan, and myself; it was the five of us. And so in talking about what we could do and how we would do it, we decided that we would go over to the old Garden Park Hospital to this site to see what we thought about it. Well, not knowing this area very well, they told me how to get here. And I was in my car, and we had to talk via radios because the cell phones at that time, still, some of us didn’t have the signal. But anyway, and I drove up over here, and I thought, “This can’t be the place.” And I drove around the block, and there was nothing that even resembled what they were talking about. So when I got back to the front of the old Garden Park Hospital, which is now the Gulf Coast Student Service Center, I called David Taylor, and I said, “David, I think I’m lost. I don’t think I’m in the right place.” And he said, “Tell me—Pat, tell me. Where are you? What does it look like?” And I described it. And he said, “Don’t go anywhere.” (gasping) I thought, “Holy Toledo.” (laughter) And I looked at the street in front of this building, and I thought, “You know, that looks like it goes to the interstate.” (laughter) “Do I get on the interstate and just go?” (laughter) And I thought, “No.” So we came in, and it was not much better than what the (laughter) outside was. But it was doable. We felt like it was doable. So then David Taylor and I got a Gator, and we toured the Gulf Park Campus. And of course, you know, Rachel, at that time, all you’re thinking about is, “What do I have to do? How will it be done?” And so we became extremely busy and engrossed in what we were doing. We started on the back east side of the campus, and we went through, and we took pictures of every building. David did all the photography and drove the Gator, and I had a legal pad, and I made notes. And of course he knew all of those buildings, so he was able to pinpoint so much because he had a wealth of information. But we covered the whole campus.

Swaykos: How long did that take you?

Joachim: It took us about three hours and—

Swaykos: What kinds of things did you see?

Joachim: Complete devastation. You could look at Lloyd Hall, and the water surge had gone through there and shoved everything out of the back. And then Elizabeth Hall, which is right behind it, it had been damaged. I mean, you could see where the floodwater had just run completely through it. And when you looked at—there were no windows left in the—on the first floor. And when you looked at the administration building, well, it didn’t look as bad as what you might think it should look, but it was bad. You could see where all the front entrance hall had caved in. The water had been completely through the first floor. There was a safe that had been pushed out of the building onto the back, and we went up on the second floor where my office was
located. There was not a thing disturbed on the walls. There was everything left in place. We very quickly grabbed some boxes, and I took down my diplomas, and I took down some art work, and we carried out the things that were of value. And we walked around on that second floor, and of course, we really, we didn’t know the true structural condition of the building, but nothing happened, and it was really pretty much fine. It was the floodwater that had gone through. Then we went and looked at Hardy Hall, and I’ve never seen anything like it. I mean, it was completely wracked. The two front wings that extend out, it’s almost like in a U shape with these two wings; one had been an auditorium, and the other had been a conference center with a cafeteria and that type of thing. But I mean the water had gutted everything, and the whole first floor, I mean, there’s nothing but steel hanging; there’s wires hanging all over. There is debris that you just cannot imagine, but yet the front lawn was pretty clean. And the reason that it was clean was because when the water went back out, there was a suction that occurred, and of course, it just kind of cleaned off some of that. But it, of course, did not clean out the debris. And then of course, the old Cox Library was just falling down. The toy library had completely been gutted. I mean, it was just not—there was not one building that was left untouched.

Swaykos: Wow. So what was lost in the way of books in all those libraries?

Joachim: The library, that was not a significant loss because Ed McCormack who is the librarian was very wise when he set up that library. They did not put books on the bottom of the stacks. And so since there was only eighteen inches of water in the library, they were—

Swaykos: It didn’t touch.

Joachim: But the problem was, without air-conditioning, you had a humidity factor, and so they actually had a company—I think it was called CAT [BMS CAT]—that came in and removed the moisture and worked on getting rid of the mildew because that, the mildew and the moisture is what also helped to ruin everything.

Swaykos: Right, right. So what percent of books have been preserved? A hundred percent?

Joachim: I probably would say, I would imagine 90 to 95 percent. I honestly cannot answer that.

Swaykos: That’s great. What did you lose in the form of technology in all the buildings?

Joachim: Anything that was on the first floor was gone. A lot of things on the second floor of Lloyd Hall were gone. So you lost everything. We’re talking about computers, printers, copy machines, telephones, scanners, just everything that helps you to communicate.
Swaykos: Right. Were any records kept on the first floor? Were any records lost?

Joachim: There were some records that were lost, yes. Student services lost some records.

Swaykos: OK. And what have they done to recover those?

Joachim: Some cannot be recovered, but because we are on People Soft, which is a, it’s a software for student records and that the university uses, there were—a lot of that was archived, and it was on the servers in Hattiesburg. So from that standpoint, we were OK. But there were some files that were not in any software, and that were just paper files that are gone.

Swaykos: What kinds of files were those?

Joachim: I would imagine there would be history. There would be some student records, class records, things like that, that were actually a way of keeping record before we had technology.

Swaykos: Right, right. So now you were traveling around with these five people. How well did you know them?

Joachim: No. There were only two people. David and I were the only two that toured the campus. Oh, I’d only met David a week before, and I knew Shelia from being Shelia White, the PR person, from being at the university before. I knew David Sliman’s family. He grew up in Ocean Springs, and I knew him as a very young child, but I had not seen him in years.

Swaykos: How was it trying to work with five people you didn’t know very well on the scale of a large disaster?

Joachim: I could not have asked, *I could not have asked* for a better team of people, and I say “a team” because there’s a difference in a group and a team. A group is just people assembled together. A team is an assembly of people that are working toward one goal.

Swaykos: Of those five, did any of them lose their homes as well?

Joachim: Oh, David lost his home. David Sliman, I-Tech. David Taylor had significant damage. Shelia White had some damage, but not, you know—

Swaykos: OK.

Joachim: And Harlan’s home was in very good condition, and that’s why we went there. (laughter)
Swaykos: Oh, good, good. So how many faculty and staff did you have pre-Katrina?

Joachim: Hm. All right. Let me think. I would say—Rachel, I cannot be absolutely sure because I don’t know how many are at Stennis and how many were at the Gulf Coast Research Lab, but I would say across the Gulf Coast, there were probably three hundred to three hundred and fifty.

Swaykos: OK. And do you know how many of those lost their housing?

Joachim: There were 128 that had either lost their homes or lost most of their homes, but I will tell you this. I went to Hattiesburg with David Taylor and Dr. Bill Hawkins, who is executive director of the Gulf Coast Research Lab, and Sharon Walker, who was the administrator for the Marine Education Center, which is part of the Gulf Coast Research Lab. We went to Hattiesburg on Friday to meet with all of the heads of all the departments and Dr. Thames and the executive cabinet. And we decided, we had already scheduled a meeting to meet with the faculty the following Tuesday. I think it was Tuesday. It may have been Thursday. But anyway, the only place that we could find large enough to get everybody from the Gulf Park Campus together was in the parking lot of the Long Beach High School football stadium because nothing was left. So we met on the west side because there would not be any sun in the morning on the west side.

Swaykos: How did you get word out to get everyone there with electricity down?

Joachim: Well, there was no electricity, and it was very—some people—we had a telephone tree because we’d established a telephone tree that Saturday morning. We knew what we were going to do after the storm. When we met that Saturday morning, in a prestorm meeting, we knew how we were going to contact—we had already been trying to contact everybody. We put it on WLOX because some people had that. We put it on the radio, and it was cell phone and word of mouth. And it was amazing the number of people that were there for that meeting. Remember, some of them had lost everything but the clothes on their back. They’d lost their offices. They’d lost their homes, their cars. But anyway, we all met, and it was good to see everybody, and the most important thing was to share a vision of hope with them and that the future was going to be good, and yes, we had an unbelievable challenge, but we could do it together. And it was worth doing, and so—I’m not a real tall person. (laughter) About five, two; five, three. And so when I went to speak to everyone, they couldn’t see me. So they decided they—we had a microphone. Somebody had commandeered a microphone and a sound system. They backed a pickup truck up, and they said, “Would you stand in the back of the pickup truck?” And I said, “Well, of course.” So I jumped up in the back of the pickup truck, not literally, but close to it. And I had to take off my shoes because it had a liner, so it was not—so there I was barefooted. Now most of these people did not know me from Adam’s housecat.

Swaykos: Oh, right, because you were new.
Joachim: Right. Some people did know me, but I welcomed everybody and told them it was so good to see everybody safe and sound and talked very briefly about the losses and that Dr. Thames had said, "No one would lose their jobs." That is so significant because it meant that their paychecks would go on; their retirement would go on; their health benefits would go on. They at least knew they have a job, but on your job description it says, "and any other duties assigned." And I said, "I don’t know what we’ll all be doing, but we’ll all be in there working together.” And I assured them that the administration was behind us, and that Dr. Thames and the whole cabinet were firmly behind us. And at that time—it was divine intervention—(laughter) a caravan pulls up, and it’s—

Swaykos: Into the parking lot?

Joachim: Yes. And it is Dr. Thames as well as a lot of the cabinet. And they came, and Dr. Grimes, who was the provost, they both joined me in the truck. And it was very gratifying to all the people out there that Dr. Thames made that trip down, and that he cared. And of course, he came down many, many, many times after the storm. And he was the one that opened the checkbook to the reserves of the university that enabled us to spend the dollars to do what we had to do because FEMA money still is just beginning to trickle in.

Swaykos: Right, two years later.

Joachim: That’s right, two years later. So it was just—but the people, they put their shoulders together. They were willing to do anything they had to do, and we had faculty and staff here from the very beginning. There were people that worked very long hours, and let me tell you, it was not the best situation. We had no place to go get food. We had to find food and bring it in, but it was amazing. There was food. There was water, everything. And everybody just pulled together, and it didn’t make any difference.

Swaykos: Right. (brief interruption) So after that first meeting, where did you start?

Joachim: Well, we began to set up—we had already—we worked Saturday and Sunday before we had that meeting, and we’d already started to come in here and decide where we were going to place different offices. So it was a matter of moving, and Jill White(?) made sure that there was a handout for everybody to give them as much information. In fact, they did news releases almost every day, and we just came in. Remember, we started with twenty-two thousand square feet. And the rest of the building had not been occupied for five years, and I mean, there were some places there were no ceilings. There were wires hanging down; there was no power. I mean, it almost looked like it had been through Katrina. I mean, there was—the yard was grown up. There was plywood all over the windows. You could not see out. I mean, it was like it had—a box. (laughter) It was just awful, but there was hope because we, as we began to move through the building and get everything straightened out, we knew that people had jobs. And we knew we were going to reopen, and we knew we
could do it. And the one thing that everybody has to be commended for is that the success of this venture is because it was us. And success is spelled with U-S. It was not “I” on anyone’s part because failure is spelled with an I.

**Swaykos:** What building damage did you have out at Stennis in your research center?

**Joachim:** Stennis had very little damage. They had some roof damage, much less than even a million dollars because they had roof damage, but it’s a pretty—it wasn’t subject to floodwater. So they didn’t have that. It was strictly wind.

**Swaykos:** OK. So when did the staff start coming back? Was that, that would be almost two weeks later since you had a meeting a week later with all of them.

**Joachim:** Oh, everybody started coming back then. I mean, people would say, “I’ll do anything you need. Just let me know.”

**Swaykos:** OK. Great. So how many did you have come back? And did you give them all the time they needed?

**Joachim:** No. Everybody had to be back by the twenty-sixth of September, and if you weren’t back at that point, then you were docked. And then what we did was, we compensated the people that did come back because after all, they—many of them had just as much loss, as great a loss, and so they deserved that compensation.

**Swaykos:** Right. Do you know how many were living in FEMA trailers?

**Joachim:** Oh, golly. I’d have to go back and pull the statistics on that to tell you. But FEMA trailers didn’t come for a while, so people were living with people. And the ones that couldn’t come back, many of them, it was because they had no place to live. But the FEMA trailers really started rolling in probably the second week, but there weren’t that many of them. And the major problem was where do you put them? At the university, we tried very hard, worked very diligently, trying to find places for them. In fact Ray Scurfield and Pat Smith—Ray Scurfield had lost a good bit of his home, but he is a professor in social work and also a counselor, and he just—I mean, he spent—he was here every day until late in the evening. We would just—everybody did everything they could for each other.

**Swaykos:** So what were you guys doing while you were here?

**Joachim:** Literally, moving furniture, moving technology, wiring the building, because none of that was done. Laying out the plans for the rooms, telling carpenters and painters what had to be done. You had to make sure, putting up walls—we had to put up walls. We took large areas that really were not good for—particularly good for anything, and we put—we literally put up walls within those big areas and made rooms. And you had to have corridors to get to those rooms because you can’t just, you know—
Swaykos: Do you know what the total cost of rehaul was for the building?

Joachim: I would have to pull figures for that, Rachel, but I think that probably the recovery on this, which it’ll be covered under FEMA for relocation costs, but I would imagine that we probably have spent maybe close to five million, easy.

Swaykos: OK. And do you know what insurance estimated the damages at the original Coast to be?

Joachim: Well, they said the Coast—they felt the Coast was like, the Gulf Park campus, eighteen million, and I really would have to pull all those spreadsheets to look at them. But it was extensive, and the problem is that when you go to rebuild, you’ve got inflation with cost, and you can never rebuild for what you built the first time.

Swaykos: Right. Exactly. What was your—moving into students, what was your student enrollment?

Joachim: We maintained 65 percent of our student enrollment across the Coast, and that’s pretty phenomenal, but student services, they had their specialists and their coordinators on cell phones, calling students.

Swaykos: Wow. Were students trying to call in to see what happened?

Joachim: What they did was they would have to go to the Web site. And we actually had our Web person go to, was in Jackson for a while, maintaining the Web site because you couldn’t do it from down here.

Swaykos: Right. Do you have the numbers on what your enrollment was pre-Katrina and what it was afterwards?

Joachim: After Katrina it was 1677, and before Katrina it was maybe right at 2500.

Swaykos: OK. And what do you think you lost that 35 percent to? Where did those students go?

Joachim: They lost their homes. I mean, the devastation and destruction, they just couldn’t come back to—

Swaykos: How hard would it be for a college student to live on the Coast right now?

Joachim: It’s getting better, but there’s not a lot of affordable housing. But if you notice, right around this building, there are twenty-five homes going up right now for Habitat—that are being done by Habitat for Humanity. But an interesting—just to show you what the students went through, the ones that came back, I had a student that
came to my office one Wednesday afternoon, and I’ll never forget. It was at the beginning of the semester, and what we did in order to get a full semester in, we compressed an eighteen-week semester into a ten-week semester. It became a summer semester, which meant your classes were longer. The other thing is that the schedule had to be completely redone. We didn’t have as many classrooms. We could not offer quite as many courses, but we maintained 78 percent of the original schedule. I had a student come to my office, and he asked me if I would allow him to drop a course. And I said, “Well, let me ask you.” I said, “If you drop this course, what is this going to do to you in terms of when you graduate and how you finish your degree?” And he said, “Well, I only have these two semesters left,” which was fall semester and then the spring semester. He said, “And I was supposed to take four courses this semester and three courses next semester.” So by him taking three courses in the fall, the shortened semester, and then taking the four courses in the spring, he would still be able to graduate. And one of the things that the group—the team did that was working on the schedule, they went back, and when they reconstructed the schedule, they made sure that every course was offered that was needed by students that were going to graduate in December. So everybody that was scheduled to graduate could get the classes they needed to graduate. And they did the same thing with May. That was the next group of courses that went in. And then they put in as many courses as they could. So I said to him, I said “Did your family incur a lot of damage?” And he said, “Yes.” And I said, “Where do you live?” And he said, “D’Iberville.” And I said, “How much damage?” And he said, “Well, we lost the whole bottom of our house, the first floor.” And he said, “We lost a car—an automobile and everything that was on the first floor.” He said, “But the problem is,” he said, “my mother—we only have one car, and my mother works in Biloxi.” So she had to travel the bridge, which was not easy because the traffic was so heavy. And he said, “She works in Biloxi. She comes home at lunchtime. She picks me up and then drives me all the way over here.” And the traffic was horrendous, so that took her—probably the whole trip was close to three hours. He said, “And then I don’t have class until 5:30 this afternoon.” He said, “So I sit here.” And he said, “Then my mother has to come back.” Or he started class at six o’clock. “My mother comes back at ten o’clock to pick me up.” He had to get into his house at that time through a stepladder to the second story, but he came back. And I saw him at graduation that year, and he graduated, and I was so proud of him. But that’s just one of the stories.

Swaykos: Right. How many students did you graduate that were supposed to graduate that year?

Joachim: Two hundred and fifty-eight, I believe.

Swaykos: OK. Is that an average-sized class for you?

Joachim: Well, they had been averaging, I think, around three hundred, three hundred and twenty-five; so it wasn’t bad.
Swaykos: OK. So every effort was made to recover all records possible to keep those students on track?

Joachim: And they were on track. I think that everybody but one or two had the opportunity, and I think that that could have just been maybe a smaller class.

Swaykos: OK. And have you had your enrollment grow each semester?

Joachim: Oh, yes, yes.

Swaykos: OK. By how much, do you think?

Joachim: Well, this past semester we had 2446, and the fall semester, we had 2443.

Swaykos: OK. So it’s grown a little bit.

Joachim: Yeah. And we are looking for—this summer we are up by about fifty students. That’s not a lot, but it is for this time and this area and especially when you consider that there is no Katrina scholarship financial aid.

Swaykos: Wow. None at all?

Joachim: Well, not for Katrina. There’s financial aid, but not—you see, Katrina, there was financial aid for people who had suffered a hardship with Katrina and could qualify for it.

Swaykos: But that has since gone?

Joachim: Um-hm.

Swaykos: Grant money lost, is that what it was?

Joachim: Well, it was just—it was only good for, I think, a year and a half.

Swaykos: OK. How are you going to go about recruiting students now?

Joachim: We’re using television, printed flyers, newspaper, the radio, billboards. Electronic billboards are great. And the Web site is good.

Swaykos: Good. So are you looking to get your numbers all the way back to pre-Katrina?

Joachim: We are looking to hit three thousand this fall, and we are—

Swaykos: In this building?
Joachim: We have this building. We have the Gulf Park campus. And we can take probably up to five thousand students between the two campuses.

Swaykos: OK. What is reopened on the Gulf Park campus?

Joachim: In the fall, the advanced education center will be open. The library will open the first of October or the end of October. And then the Holloway Complex is open, and the business building is open. The technology learning center, which is referred to as the toy library, which has a lot of equipment and services for disabled people on the Gulf Coast, there’s a new building that’s being built, and that will be complete at the end of September.

Swaykos: Great. Have the living conditions that the students are going through and the stress of Katrina affected their academic performance?

Joachim: I don’t think that it has. I would imagine if you really did a study and looked, you would have to look at student-by-student, and compare, so that you could make some generalizations. But I think that as a whole—on a whole, the students have really worked hard. I will say this. The university, the professors in particular, have been very good about trying to be accommodating and make adjustments and work with the students. You have to understand that—and one of the faith-based workers that came in and talked with me about trying to help us out, probably said it better than anybody else. He said that the people on the Mississippi Gulf Coast right now are really like corn flakes. (laughter) And I looked at him, and I thought, “What does he mean corn flakes? Are we flaky?” And I said, “What do you mean by that?” And he said, “They’re very fragile.” He said, “If you held corn flakes in your hand and squeezed too tight, they would crumble and break.” He said, “So you’ve got to be very careful.” And that is true. It’s really been a lot of trauma.

Swaykos: Has there been any mental health services to address that trauma?

Joachim: Yes. Ray Scurfield has done counseling for faculty, staff, and students. We brought in some additional counselors. Some people have used it, and some have not.

Swaykos: Are they free services?

Joachim: Yes.

Swaykos: OK. And why do you think those who aren’t using it, are not, in such a hard time?

Joachim: I think it’s a mind-set. They haven’t been—maybe they’ve never used counseling. I’ve never gone to counseling, but I think that because I have a tendency to talk about things.
Swaykos: You said Ray Scurfield is doing counseling for the staff. For those that know him and work with him, there may be a comfort level that they couldn’t break to speak with him about that. Were they given somebody else they could speak with?

Joachim: Yes, yes.

Swaykos: OK. Great. And how many faculty and staff do you think have utilized those resources?

Joachim: I don’t know. He sent me an e-mail; he periodically sends me the information as to how many people he has seen, faculty, staff, students. And he has even worked with some families.

Swaykos: Oh, great, full families of students?

Joachim: Well, they’ve come in, and what’s happened is sometimes a parent comes with a student, and maybe it’s a wife.

Swaykos: OK. And how many students have? Would that be with the same numbers?

Joachim: Yeah.

Swaykos: OK. Have you noticed any—this is usually with younger kids—any behavior problems, anything with students showing emotional distress that’s disturbing the classroom or anything like that?

Joachim: Not at this level.

Swaykos: OK. Great. What was your diversity makeup, your ethnic or racial makeup before the storm?

Joachim: I would have to pull that. I mean, it’s just not—with only being here a week—

Swaykos: Right.

Joachim: And then once that storm went through, the first year we really spent getting everything in order. And of course, it’s a continual work of progress because right now, we’re working very hard on reassigning space within this building, space on the Gulf Park campus, finishing buildings. The film program is moving down here in the fall of [20]07, and so we have a building that we’re completing for that. The building projects and the renovation repair projects have been extensive.

Swaykos: Have you created any extra jobs to help?
Joachim: David Taylor with physical plant, he’s had to hire a lot of temporary people, but we have not within other operations because with the enrollment being down, the revenue stream is down. And we’re doing everything we can to maximize and stretch every dollar.

Swaykos: Definitely. Were any positions eliminated?

Joachim: No. We just—by attrition, if someone left, we did not fill unless we absolutely had to.

Swaykos: OK. Great. Do you know if there’s been any issues with staff and their families as far as mental health issues? Have you had a lot of divorces in your staff?

Joachim: I can’t—really can’t answer that. I really cannot answer that, but you know, trauma and tragedy will do one of two things. It either brings people closer together, or it divides them.

Swaykos: Definitely. Has it brought you all closer together as a family, all the staff?

Joachim: The Southern Miss family? Yes, it has because there has been a very, very strong interaction, collaboration, supporting of each other from the Hattiesburg campus and down here, but one of the blessings that has come out of everybody being in one building and on one campus is the synergy. Everybody knows everybody a lot better. They care about each other.

Swaykos: Good. How have your relations with Hattiesburg been?

Joachim: They’ve been excellent. Everything that Dr. Thames and that executive cabinet said they would do, they did. And I can’t think of a time that I did not call up there, or—and I’m up there for meetings quite often. I cannot think of one time that they did not come through for what we needed.

Swaykos: Great. All the staff and faculty that I’ve talked to has said that you are such an optimistic person, that from the beginning you came in, getting on the truck, rallying everyone together to say you knew it would and could be done. How do you keep that optimism, especially directly after, after everything you had seen when you drove around?

Joachim: Well, Rachel, because of my administrative experience, I know that you have to have revenue to maintain an organization. And I never expressed this in the beginning, but down the road, I guess my one concern was to bring back some normalcy to the lives of the people within the university and on the Gulf Coast, but if we did not reopen, it was going to be a very difficult loss for the university, plus you can only pay people for so long. And these people believe in Southern Miss. We have a good product. The people on the Coast needed us. And so I just felt like that we could do it together, and I knew we could because the quality of the people that work...
within this organization. I mean, your father-in-law, I had never met him before, except—yeah, I did. I met him, I think, the Thursday before or the Wednesday before the storm, my third day here. But to have an opportunity to work with people of his caliber and across the Coast, Joe Swaykos, Steve Lohrenz, Bill Hawkins; I mean, Pat Smith, Ray Seurfield, Jerry Coleman, the Billings. The quality of people is unbelievable.

Swaykos: You said you felt like the Coast needed you. Did you get any help from them, from community members?

Joachim: Not really, because this was—to get everything set up, I mean, we had to get in here and do the dirty work ourselves. There were professors that went back over to that campus with the plant management—not plant management but with the facility people, and I mean, they came out sweating, dirty, filthy, but they were retrieving anything that could be retrieved and was, you know—

Swaykos: What do you think was the most important thing that was saved from that campus?

Joachim: I think the most important—let’s see. (crying) This is hard. OK. The most important thing that was saved was the unity of Southern Miss on the Gulf Coast because these are buildings, but it’s the people that inhabit the buildings that make the university. And by being able to relocate, we just relocated a whole organization.

Swaykos: Right. I can tell it’s really hard for you. Even though you were new, you must feel so attached to this place already.

Joachim: Oh, I do. Why is the—oh, I am sorry. (crying)

Swaykos: That’s OK. Would you like me to get you something?

Joachim: No, no. (brief interruption) I guess, Rachel, the reason this experience has been really—it’s been very, very rewarding, and I appreciate the opportunity to have been part of all this because when I got down off that truck and started moving again among the faculty and the staff, I had people that I certainly did not know. They only knew me by face, and a lot of them maybe had seen me in the news or whatever because I had been in administration with the school district for a while. But there were people that came to me and said, “I’ll do anything you need. I’m here to help. I’m with you.” And when you have that kind of willingness and that kind of support, we all pulled together, and I mean, it was unbelievable. Everybody supported everybody, but it was not anything that any one person could do by themselves, and it was far more painful to a lot of those people who had been on that campus for fifteen years. But I must say, I have my BS from the Hattiesburg campus, my master’s from the Long Beach campus, and my PhD was done mostly in Hattiesburg, some courses on the Coast, but very few, but that was even harder for them because it was—they
had put a lot of time and energy into that. And so it’s—and we do have a very, very bright future.

**Swaykos:** You do.

**Joachim:** You know, and I know—in fact, I really believe that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

**Swaykos:** That’s great. And having them all rally behind you must have just increased that optimism.

**Joachim:** Well, it did. It gave you the momentum. It was sort of like you think of a spider web, and you’re in the middle of the spider web, and you are a net. And all of a sudden, you’re so tired, and you feel like you’re going to fall, but there is that net to catch you and support you, and it gives you the wherewithal just to do what you have to do.

**Swaykos:** What was, after you all rallied together, what do you think has been the greatest problem the university has faced in recovery?

**Joachim:** The hardest thing has been that the faculty went without offices, but there was nothing else that could be done. We got them as quickly as we could. That was a hardship because they didn’t have a private space to go do their work, carry on their research, get their materials together for their classes. And yet that really was difficult. When we started out in this building, I was in an office that was about eight feet wide by ten feet, and it was my assistant Barbara and I together. One desk, one telephone, (laughter) two chairs, one file cabinet, and one computer, and we, at least, had a place to answer the telephone, but they didn’t. And yet six weeks after the storm, most of them—a lot of them had lost all of their instructional materials. They had lost their research, and yet they were ready to stand and deliver for the students.

**Swaykos:** How quickly did Hattiesburg try to replace all that material for the professors?

**Joachim:** Well, you have to go back and remember, there was nothing open anywhere. Nobody knew what they’d lost. You had to get inventories and try to figure out what you had. And so what we did was, they knew that they were going to be able to recover. They did the best they could to get those—we got those materials just from any place that we could.

**Swaykos:** Great. How did you prioritize every task that you needed to do?

**Joachim:** Well, we knew that the physical space had to be ready, but in the same time, the technology had to be forthcoming. We had to make sure that we were going to have furniture. And I guess my experience, even though some people probably didn’t think it was good experience, but being a principal for an elementary school and
assistant principal for junior high, I knew what it took to run a school. I knew what you had to have when you started school because I started school many times, and also as an assistant superintendent, I knew everything I had to do. But anyway, so those were things that were easy for me to think about. And Ann Billings with student services, she knew what had to be done as far as getting kids back registered, and all of that. Shelia knew what had to be done with the media. So you let the people that know what they’re doing just do it. They’re the experts in their field. But they weren’t accustomed to things such as, I said, “OK. Do we have clocks for every room? Do they have batteries.” So I said, “Get all of the clocks.” Because they were all battery-operated, “Put them all in one room, set them with the same time, and then let’s check the time to make sure they’re synchronized.” And we had to make sure that they ran. And then I said, “We don’t know if we have enough water fountains. We don’t know if all the water fountains are truly going to work as well as they should.” We bought cases of water and put in the hallways, in the classrooms, and they were just there for the students to take. And then I said, “We don’t have enough bathroom facilities. Get six Port-o-lets and put them on the outside.” Well, those are things that, unless you have run a school—

Swaykos: Right.

Joachim: Then we also knew that, reminded them that the classrooms had to be labeled, and those room numbers had to be in the same place on every door. They put together a floor plan. They numbered the rooms. They hung the signs. The people were out, everybody was out in the hall helping.

Swaykos: Good, good. So it sounds like you guys worked pretty efficiently. Where did you get the money for the emergency, the stuff you started right away? Where did that money come from?

Joachim: Dr. Thames opened that checkbook, the reserves. And so there were accounts that could be written checks on, and so that—not checks, but POs [purchase orders] because that’s how we operate. And there were procurement cards, and I’ll tell you. Bryan Billings has handled FEMA, and that is an unbelievable responsibility. He handled the Gulf Park campus, and Kris Fulton handled the Jackson County sites, and then Hattiesburg had theirs. But Bryan came out of a meeting on Thursday, and he had fifteen pages that listed all the project worksheets for the university.

Swaykos: Wow, and that’s all dealing with FEMA?

Joachim: It’s inventory. It was buildings. I mean, it’s just—

Swaykos: Do you think FEMA has been a hindrance for your progress, or has it been a help?

Joachim: Oh, it’s been a help because we could’ve never financially done this. Never. And the other thing is the fact that this building was bought by the USM
[University of Southern Mississippi] Research Foundation, and Richard Hadden is head of the—(brief interruption)

**Swaykos:** —and how they have been helping you finance this?

**Joachim:** FEMA, we could have never done it without FEMA because when you go to build back, Rachel, if it is a project where you’re going to rebuild everything, rebuild exactly as it was, then no matter what the final cost is, they cover 90 percent of it. They covered 100 percent of the debris removal. They covered 100 percent of the cleaning out of the buildings, all of that. So there were A and C projects, and those are the ones they covered 100 percent.

**Swaykos:** Have you worked with MEMA [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency] at all, or is that for lower educational (inaudible)?

**Joachim:** No. MEMA actually, you go through FEMA, and then you go through MEMA after that with the same paperwork, but they require the documentation to as to what has been spent. FEMA does the projections as to what the project’s going to cost, and you list everything on your project worksheets, but MEMA is where you actually begin to get your money back. It comes from FEMA through MEMA.

**Swaykos:** OK. For your financial situation with the loss of tuition, how does your financial situation now compare to that of pre-Katrina?

**Joachim:** Well, it’s been very difficult because we lost a lot of revenue, when you—but one of the things that really helped was Congress gave ninety million to the IHL [Institutions of Higher Learning] to be disbursed among the universities and all the higher ed[ucation] institutions that suffered damage from Katrina. There was a formula that was used, and USM got the greatest share of the money. In fact ours was twenty-seven million, if I remember correctly, and that money was dedicated to scholarships for students who had suffered from Katrina. And the reason that was important is because then they had the financial aid to pay their tuition. The tuition was our revenue.

**Swaykos:** So then it came back to you in the end.

**Joachim:** Right.

**Swaykos:** But it kept students here. Do you see any problems with that going away now? Do you think your enrollment is going to decrease?

**Joachim:** Oh, no, because it’s gone. It was good January, summer, and last fall, but see, it was only three semesters.

**Swaykos:** And you’ve kept your enrollment.
Joachim: We have increased.

Swaykos: Great, great.

Joachim: Yeah, we’ve increased!

Swaykos: Good. So you’ve increased your students. Have you had any problems recruiting staff or any staff retention issues?

Joachim: Well, we have lost some staff because some people, that were not married to the Coast, left. But for instance, we have a very young professor in science and technology, and it’s Dr. Julie Cwikla. In fact she lived in Ocean Springs right down the street from me. She lost everything. She had nothing but a slab left. The sad thing is she was married to a dentist, and he decided that he no longer wanted to be married. So she lost her home; she lost her office. He had been at Keesler as a dentist. They’d only been here a short time, maybe four or five years. But she is a perfect example of someone who chose to stay here on the Gulf Coast because she’s committed to the university. She is committed to the students in Mississippi. She writes a lot of big grants. She gets huge grants. She’s an incredibly bright, young woman, and her grants involve teacher education, and she wants the students in Mississippi to have a better education.

Swaykos: Great. So she’s here working for that.

Joachim: She has stayed here, and I mean, she’s a wonderful asset to our university. She could have left, but she didn’t.

Swaykos: So she stayed. I’d also like to talk about what other resources you have gotten from the community, from the outside community. What volunteers did you have? What aid did you have coming in?

Joachim: We had a tremendous outpouring of gifts. Some were in the form of money, not particularly significant money.

Swaykos: Mostly from alumni, that kind of thing?

Joachim: Well, yeah, there was probably close to a million dollars that was sent in through the foundation, but it was for Katrina victims and recovery. The other thing is, is that the Beckman Foundation gave the university a scholarship. It’s a million-dollar scholarship, and they make scientific equipment that’s used in science and technology. And they came down, but then we had universities all over the country that would send things and that would send contributions, wanted to know what could they do to help. That was one of the problems was we had to set up a donation center, and now in our crisis plan, there is a donation coordinator so that when it happens, we know where we’re going to put the things, how we’re going to separate it out, and that type of thing.
Swaykos: What kinds of things came in besides money?

Joachim: Clothing.

Swaykos: Really?

Joachim: Oh! Everything for your home, everything. Things to work in the yard. You would not have believed the toilet paper, the paper towels, sheets, blankets, just a tremendous outpouring of love. But I think that the Gulf Coast has benefited so much from the faith-based groups that have come in, and they really have not worked as much on our campuses as they have out in the communities. But without them—I don’t care where I go, and I travel a fair amount. I have been in New York in the elevator, and the couple on the elevator had come down here and worked. I was down on Captiva and went to a party, and some people couldn’t wait till I got there because they had actually worked in Ocean Springs. I was in West Virginia at Greenbrier just recently. Some people there had been to the Coast several times. I have been in San Diego; I ran into people. It’s unbelievable the people that will tell you that they have been to the Coast, and they can cite examples, so you know they’re not just talking.

Swaykos: Right. When you got all of the supplies, did you give them out to your faculty and staff that lost everything?

Joachim: Faculty, staff, students, and then when we—they had so much pride; they didn’t want to take anything. So we had to be examples, and some of us would go down, and we would walk through the halls, carrying this stuff. And one of the things that I sent out in an e-mail one time was that this faculty and staff was so good about giving to others, but they really needed to learn how to accept graciously and appreciate and give the other person the satisfaction of being able to do something for someone else.

Swaykos: Right. What was the most touching experience you had with volunteers or donators?

Joachim: We had a lady that used to work here at the university, and she’s with another university now. I can’t think of Claudia’s last name all of a sudden, but I did not know her, but she had people at her university make things, and they made afghans. And she collected gift cards, like to Lowe’s, Wal-Mart; I mean, just unbelievable, and it was a gift-card tree. She collected scarves, all kinds of supplies, things that you might not think of, and she drove them down herself.

Swaykos: Right. That’s great. Can you describe what it’s like working with FEMA and the insurance companies? The process of what you’ve had to go through to create funding and to create proposals, all that.
Joachim: It has taken a tremendous amount of work, and as I said earlier, Bryan Billings has been our FEMA representative. Every faculty and staff had to turn in an inventory; all of that had to be documented and put into project worksheets, which had to go into the computer. So it was a lot of data entry, but then not only that. You had to make sure that all the entries that were coming in were correct. And then there were surveys or assessments that were done of all the buildings, and you had to do all of those descriptions. You might have a file folder that might be an inch thick just for one project worksheet. So it’s a tremendous amount of documentation and organization, and Bryan has done a very good job with that.

Swaykos: What’s the hardest part in working with them? All the paperwork?

Joachim: The fact that they’ve had so many different people on the job, and then the rules seem to change. But I don’t really know that it’s the rules changing. It’s just that maybe people weren’t as well aware of the rules as they should have been, and the other thing we have to take into consideration is, this is really the worst natural disaster that’s ever hit the United States. They have never been faced with this. So yeah, it’s been a challenge. It’s been hard, but it’s been well worth the effort.

Swaykos: Now that the country has been faced with this, and we see how FEMA regulates and is working, do you think there should be any other legislation or regulations put in place by the federal government to deal with disasters of this magnitude?

Joachim: Well, we have learned, and FEMA has learned a great deal about this, and it requires someone with a great deal of expertise. And it requires someone with a very organized mind to be able to put the process and procedures in place. I think that you have to be prepared and know when you’re going to begin sending everything to a site. You can’t wait to see what the devastation is. You’ve got to be ready with FEMA trailers or FEMA houses or whatever. Rachel, it’s really a very difficult situation because there’s no—you almost have to be on-site before the storm goes through.

Swaykos: Do you think that should be a law, that they need to—the country needs to prepare as much as the area prepares?

Joachim: It does. And then the other thing that we all have to remember. I think that that FEMA now, with different elevations, and I think that—I believe that we have to really control where people build as well because it’s the—who is FEMA? FEMA’s the taxpayer. And if you know that an area is going to flood, your dad, the information—Joe Swaykos, over at the CHL [Center for Higher Learning], they have in the Viz lab, they can now tell you exactly what areas are going to flood. If the storm surge is two feet, this is going to flood. If it’s three feet, four feet, whatever, they can show that to you. We have that information now, so we really should not allow people to build back unless they build back elevated enough and strong enough to withstand because otherwise, we can go through this again because with global
warming and the Gulf warmer now than it has ever been, and especially the shallowness of this Gulf out here, it's very conducive to storms.

Swaykos: Right. Have you taken that information that he has and applied it to this campus as well as rebuilding the Gulf Park campus?

Joachim: Absolutely. And we have done everything we can to show that information, so that other people can benefit from it as well.

Swaykos: Great. What has been your proudest accomplishment in this recovery so far?

Joachim: Opening October the tenth. It really is because when you go back and truly think, you don’t stop and think about what you’ve accomplished. You don’t have the luxury of—you did not have the luxury to stop and feel sorry for yourself. All you could do was work nonstop from the time you got up until the time you went to bed. And I can tell you this; no one had any trouble sleeping. (laughter) I’ll never forget—

Swaykos: So tired from working.

Joachim: Well, because I had rearranged my house now, as a single person. I had converted bedrooms into an office, and another bedroom into a huge walk-in closet. (laughter) So I have a fifteen by sixteen walk-in closet. But anyway, I slept in my office because I also had some other people staying in my home for short periods of time. I slept in my office, and I pulled out a—it was a love seat, and I pulled out this—I would sleep on this bed every night, that had a four-inch mattress, maybe three inches. And it was less than a twin size bed. And my brother from South Carolina was here, and he came in, knocked on the door and came in one night and wanted to tell me something. And when he saw the bed I was sleeping in, he said, “Patricia, how in the world?” I told him, I said, “Phillip, I don’t move.” I said, “When I get in this bed,” I said, “I go sound asleep.” (laughter) “And I don’t wake up until in the morning. I am absolutely fine.” But it was a dry bed, so you know, no one had trouble sleeping. You just worked. And there are some pluses to it, too. I think I lost twelve pounds, and I wish I’d kept it off.

Swaykos: Oh, gosh. So that was a great day, opening.

Joachim: It was. In fact the commissioner of IHL, Dr. Tom Meredith—I had to be in Hattiesburg that morning. It was a Monday morning; had to be in Hattiesburg that morning at six o’clock for an executive cabinet meeting. And in that meeting Dr. Meredith was coming down to the campus for nine—that campus for nine o’clock. And Dr. Thames said to me, “Pat,” he said, “would you ride with us because you know the Coast far better than I or Meredith or Frank Alley.” And when Dr. Meredith walked into this building that morning about eleven o’clock, he could not believe what he was seeing. He saw people who were busy, happy, doing what needed to be done.
Classes were being held. Everything was smooth, well organized. He was just—he said, “This was done in warp speed.”

**Swaykos:** Great. What do you see as your biggest challenge to keeping this recovery so speedy?

**Joachim:** People are beginning to really be tired. And so you have to kind of back off and not push quite as hard, but you stop and think about the stress that they have been under, and so I really feel like that is one of the big things. We’ve got to keep everything moving. The transition to the Gulf Park campus is extremely important. We’re going to have the new campus, the additional campus that we have to begin with that. I’ve got a new site over at GCRL [Gulf Coast Research Laboratory] in Ocean Springs. We have Cedar Point; that’s got to be developed. You know, CHL has an expansion going on right now. They’re enlarging their facility. So there’s just an awful lot going on. But Rachel, [we’ve] got good people all around, and they know what they’re doing, and they do it.

**Swaykos:** So you’re measuring your progress with student enrollment as well as all your new projects being built. What do you consider done? How long do you think it’ll take, and what will you consider finished as a recovery?

**Joachim:** I don’t see the recovery completed until we move completely out of this building, and we will be on the Gulf Park campus and the new additional campus because we’ll be in the process of building the new campus. We try to maintain as much stability as we can, make improvements every day as we go. We’re adding new programs. We just have to—

**Swaykos:** Great. What lessons now—as a leader, as an administrator, you’ve been at every level, it sounds like. What lessons could you share with everybody else? How to handle? Maybe you’ve learned, prestorm, something needs to be done, or how to recover as well as you have.

**Joachim:** OK. As a leader, there are several things you have to be able to do. One, you have to be a good communicator, and that’s not just written nor verbal, but it’s body language. You have got to be a good communicator. You’ve got to be able to articulate. You’ve got to be able to share a vision. Then the next thing is is that you have to make sure that you have strong, knowledgeable people that are committed, but you have to give them the support that they need and the authority or the autonomy to do what they need to do. And you have to respect each of your people, but you have to earn their respect. And it’s not something you can buy; it’s not something you can be given, but you’ve also got to be a cheerleader. But you also have to be able to make tough decisions, but the important thing is that you stand behind those decisions.

**Swaykos:** What have been some of your toughest decisions that you’ve had to make?
**Joachim:** It’s been having to tell people no occasionally, and very often maybe because of budget or because of other reasons, but when you have to look at the good of the whole, then you’ve got to do what’s best for everybody. And so that’s—after all, our students are our products, and we have to be ready to give and do the very best for them.

**Swaykos:** Right. Have you had—you talked about knowing when to exert your authority. Have you had to really exert your authority?

**Joachim:** Several times, but—

**Swaykos:** Would you like to—

**Joachim:** Well, there were times that some people really wanted to move back onto the Gulf Park campus, but it was not in the best interests of what was good for students and faculty and staff. And so that was a very difficult decision, and one of the decisions that I made that was not a popular decision in the beginning was that we needed these additional eight modular units, which are called quads. And it was felt that we really didn’t need them, but if we had ordered them by June the thirtieth of that year, which we did, we only had to pay 5 percent for them, on two hundred and forty thousand dollars. Well, even with some data that some of my management team—they made an appointment. They kept trying to talk me out of it, and they made an appointment, and they brought me some information. But when I looked—when I listened to them, but they did not have any compelling data. And I knew within my own being that we had to have those units down the road, and as it’s turned out, it’s just been said, “Thank heavens we have them.” And it was really funny because David Taylor and I get along very well, and I have great respect for David; like him, too. (laughter) But anyway, so when we got through with the meeting that day, it was Ann and Bryan Billings and David Taylor, and so when they stood up, they thought they’d convinced me. And I said, “No. I’m sorry. Order the modular units.” (laughter) And we were kind of joking, and David said, “You just don’t get it.” (laughter) And I said, “Well, let’s just say you all did not present enough compelling information.”

**Swaykos:** Right. So you had to go over everyone and be the boss. And that’s who you are, right?

**Joachim:** But people respect that in the long run.

**Swaykos:** Right. Now that you know those five, how are y’all getting along?

**Joachim:** Very well; very well.

**Swaykos:** What surprised you most in this whole process?

**Joachim:** I never dreamed—when I was hired, I was hired as an interim.
Swaykos: Oh, really?

Joachim: They asked me would I take this for two years. See, I’m retired. I had retired from the Ocean Springs School District on June the thirtieth. I was retired forty-five days, but I really had had seventy-five days off because I had so much time built up with the district that I was off the month of June. So I was off all of June, all of July and came back on August the twenty-second. And when I came back, it was a challenge, and it was exciting, and I thought, “What a great way to do something for the university, and I’ll do this for two years.” Well, I never dreamed that I was going to become so emotionally involved in this university and enjoy doing. It’s really been a capstone for my career, but I will say this: it’s because of the people and the opportunity. And Dr. Thames did, before he left office, he did remove the interim. So Dr. Saunders has indicated that she wants me to stay; from what I understand, from what people have said, the faculty and staff would like for me to stay. So I’ll probably be here another year or two. Who knows?

Swaykos: Oh, good. So as we close, what would you, going back, what would you say was your worst day? The worst day you can remember after the storm.

Joachim: Rachel, one of the bad things about me is that I have, (laughter) I guess it’s a mechanism, but I never think about the bad things. And I’m trying to remember, and I guess I don’t know. There was never really a bad day. I probably—and it wasn’t with this job. Maybe it was the fact that my brother and his wife who’d been married for fifty years lost everything they owned, and then my son had lost everything. And my mother was significantly damaged, and it was just maybe one day when I was riding home, and I looked around, and I thought, “It’s going to take a long, long time.”

Swaykos: Yeah. Have you taken time for yourself?

Joachim: I didn’t the first year, but I have. And you reach a point, too, that you really do need those breaks because I have a lot of energy, and one of my downfalls is that I expend so much energy all day long that sometimes at night there’s not a lot left for friends and family, because I have a lot of night meetings as well. But the way I look at this is that there are so many people that their lives depend on this. And I can’t let anything—got to take advantage of every opportunity.

Swaykos: Is that a lot of pressure?

Joachim: It’s a lot of stress.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Joachim: There is.
**Swaykos:** So we’ll end with, then, what was your best day? I know for the school it was opening, but personally, what was your best day?

**Joachim:** I think probably the best day was the day that we did the recognition for the heroes of Katrina, and Dr. Shelby Thames, Dr. Jay Grimes, and I stood on the platform. We had a wonderful ceremony, and we recognized all of the people that had worked so hard. And they gave Dr. Thames a standing ovation because of his commitment to the Coast. And I guess it was looking out at all those people and knowing that we had made a difference.

**Swaykos:** Good, good. Any last notes?

**Joachim:** No. (laughter)

**Swaykos:** Thank you so much.

**Joachim:** Well, I don’t know if this is what y’all really—

(End of interview)