Biography

Ms. Jennifer Marie Walley was born April 25, 1973, at Crosby Memorial Hospital in Picayune, Mississippi, to Reese Moody (born February 20, 1939) and Judy Ann Hill Moody (born March 18, 1949). Her father was a general contractor, and her mother was a nurse. On June 16, 2006, she married Shelton Farmer (born September 20, 1965). Walley has two children, Sarah Jane Walley (born May 7, 1997) and Hanah Grace Walley (born June 3, 2002).

Walley attended Nicholson Elementary School and Picayune Memorial High School. She earned a BS in Nursing at The University of Southern Mississippi. In 1994, she began her nursing career at Crosby Memorial Hospital, which later became Highland Community Hospital. At the time of this interview, she was working at Highland Community Hospital.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

JENNIFER WALLEY

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Jennifer Walley and is taking place on June 13, 2006. The interviewers are Wanda Jones and Kay Lundy.

Jones: Jennifer, we ask a few standard questions that will just be on the first part of the tape. I need you to state your full name and spell it.


Jones: And where and when were you born?

Walley: April 25, 1973, at Crosby Memorial Hospital in Picayune, Mississippi.

Jones: And what are the names of your parents?

Walley: Reese and Judy Moody.

Jones: And now, if you’ll tell me a little bit about your childhood.

Walley: I was born and raised in Picayune. I’ve been here for thirty-three years. Went to school here, always been here, never left. I lived in Hattiesburg while I was in school. And I’ve been employed here at Highland Community Hospital for the past twelve years.

Jones: OK. And tell me about grammar school, middle school, high school and what subjects you liked, or anything you want to tell me about school.

Walley: I attended grammar school at Nicholson Elementary. I attended high school at Picayune Memorial High School. I liked different subjects, science. I was involved in the band and different organizations in school. I was in the Honor Society in high school. I maintained all A honor roll all twelve years; graduated fourth in my class. I was part of the student organizations. And then in college, I went to Pearl River Community College for my prerequisites for nursing. I was part of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, and then at USM [The University of Southern Mississippi], I graduated with high honors. And I was a member of Nu Alpha Theta and the nursing one.
Jones: Sigma Theta Tau?

Walley: Sigma Theta Tau.

Jones: OK. What impressed you to go into nursing?

Walley: My grandmother was a nurse; she was a registered nurse here in the OB department at Crosby. And then my mother was an office nurse for a doctor here in town for about twenty-five years. And I just was looking for an occupation that involved working with people. I debated between social services and nursing.

Jones: OK. And what impressed you to go for a baccalaureate versus an associate degree?

Walley: I don’t know that I even thought about going for an associate’s degree. I just automatically decided on a baccalaureate degree. I did all my prerequisites; in one year I actually completed the nursing program. So I completed everything in three years. So I guess I never thought about the difference. I just went straight for it.

Jones: Gosh. Did you take some classes your senior year that you got some credit for?

Walley: Yes, I was taking college classes while I was still in high school. And then I went summer, spring, winter, fall. (laughter)

Jones: OK. And what year did you graduate from nursing school?

Walley: Nineteen ninety-four.

Jones: OK. So you’ve been out twelve years?

Walley: Um-hm.

Jones: What kinds of positions have you had here at the hospital since you got out of school?

Walley: I started out as just a floor nurse on the med-surg department, working night shift until I had my first child. Then I moved to day shift. Then I’ve always been on med-surg department till the last four years. And then I moved to ICU [Intensive Care Unit]. I did some PRN positions back in ICU while I still worked the floor. And then I became the ICU director. I’ve worked in ER [emergency room]. I worked in OB [obstetrics], but mainly my focus has been on med-surg and ICU.

Jones: OK. Tell me what a typical day was before [Hurricane] Katrina, not right before it but just a normal workday?
Walley: A normal workday. That all depends on the day. We can be—some days are typically slow; we have maybe one patient. And some days we have four. And every patient varies. Sometimes we have just med-surg patients; sometimes we have very intensive patients. Like I said, we have limited staff. We only have one nurse and one tech, and they’re usually based on the patient workload. And every day is different; we never know what to expect.

Jones: OK. Tell me a little bit about your personal and professional life right before Katrina; like, you knew it was coming. Maybe you didn’t know exactly which way it was coming.

Walley: Personally. I guess personally I wasn’t prepared for it. I wasn’t one of these to prepare for the storm, to go out and get everything. I just kind of—I knew I would have to be here. I knew I was scheduled. My mother and father was the ones to take care of my children. So really I didn’t think about what I was going to do. I just knew I had to be at work. What other things you—

Jones: That’s good. And then on Friday, did you know at that point the hurricane was coming this way?

Walley: Actually, I wasn’t even aware that the hurricane was coming because I don’t watch the news. So my fiancé was actually the one who informed me that it was headed this way, and he works out of town. He had to leave that Sunday, so I guess that weekend is when it really all hit me that it was all going to happen. But I wasn’t keeping up with it up until the point that it was almost here. I’m not one to watch the news and keep up with everything, so. (laughter)

Jones: And then you got a call Sunday afternoon?

Walley: No. Actually I was scheduled that weekend, so I worked Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of that weekend. So I was already here. So I worked Saturday and came back Sunday morning and was prepared to stay. Didn’t know how long I would be here, but I knew I had to stay.

Jones: Did you bring some clothes and other personal items with you?

Walley: Yes, I did. Actually, when I got off Sunday afternoon, I went home; packed up. I already had some things together, and I packed up all the belongings that couldn’t be replaced in my house in my car. So everything that I basically didn’t want destroyed—because I lived in a mobile home, and I feared that it would be destroyed with the storm—was in my car. All of my pictures, and most of my clothing and just personal items that couldn’t be replaced was in my car. And so I brought my belongings up here and sent my children with my parents, and I just hoped for the best; didn’t know what would happen.

Jones: And your parents lived close in?
Walley: Um-hm. My parents live here, and they took my children Sunday evening to a house in Hide-A-Way Lake, a local subdivision here, to stay in a person’s house who has a basement, who was out of town at the time.

Jones: How old are your children?

Walley: How old are they? They were eight and three at the time. They’re now nine and four.

Jones: OK. So tell me about work that evening. I mean, you had done your day shift that day, and then that night.

Walley: Well, that day we had—I’m not sure; I think we had three patients in ICU that day. And it was just kind of a tense day because none of us really knew what was going to happen. You know, we was all watching the weather, watching for updates on the weather, just trying to prepare, didn’t really know what to expect. I guess we’ve all been through storms but none that was going to be that devastating. And we was all questioning, I guess, why we were all still here. But that was not our choice, and we knew we had to be here. So it was kind of chaotic at that point but not to the extreme, just kind of busy, worried. Kind of making sure everything was going to be ready.

Jones: And you had about three patients, so you were preparing them?

Walley: Yes. I’m trying to remember exactly which patients we had at that point. I believe we had a couple of surgery patients that had some extensive abdominal surgery if I’m not mistaken. And we might have had one on the ventilator before the storm. I’m not sure exactly which patients we had at that time.

Jones: And then, did you try to get some rest that night?

Walley: I tried, yes, but once, you know, we all kind of were still up after hours. And I still had to go home and get my things together and got back, and it was probably ten o’clock by then, and people were still trying to prepare. So it was still busy, and we were just trying to help other departments and other people, what to do, you know, and kind of on edge, so really couldn’t get any rest. And so I actually ended up staying with Debbie Farmer, the ER director, and we stayed in her office on a air mattress that night.

Jones: And you had some meetings that day about preparation and what kinds of things to do and so forth.

Walley: Yes, um-hm.

Jones: And then tell me about the early morning hours on Monday.
Walley: Oh, let’s see. The early morning, I believe—I know during that morning time I think I was trying to contact my family, and my fiancé was out of town. I know that shortly after that, the phones went out; all the phones went out. And at that point we had ICU full of people. During the storm time, we had a total of four patients every day till the point that we evacuated them all, and three of them were on the ventilator. And then the day of the storm, a lot of people—we had the surgeon who was here; he was new to the area. And like I said, he had two surgery patients, so he stayed back there with us mostly the whole day. And then people just tended to gather in the ICU department during the day for whatever reason. Most of the doctors stayed back there; a lot of the staff just came back there. And it was just very busy, very chaotic just because we were still trying to prepare, trying to see what we was going to do from that point on. But it was just a high volume of people in and out of the ICU all day, plus the patient load. And then I guess during the day we all kind of watched out the windows as to what was happening with the storm. We had a good view of it. I know me and one of the girls who works in pharmacy was standing at one of the windows and saw the actual, when the roof blew off the building, saw the tree across the street blow down and blow towards the building. You could just see all the debris. You could hear the building creak, and the building shake. And then I just remember, we really didn’t know what was going on in the rest of the hospital, being back there in ICU because we weren’t able to leave that area, but I know when we found out that the rest of—when the roof did blow off, we found out the rest of the hospital was getting the water that was coming down inside. And then I guess during the later part of the day, once the first part of the hurricane blew through, and they saw what damage there was, they was looking for somewhere to evacuate the families. And my dad is a member of the school board here in town, and I know that the high school gym was there. So me and one of the doctors went out during the eye of the storm to try to find—I had saw my uncle who works for the school over there just checking things out. So me and one of the doctors went out during the eye of the storm to get a hold of him to see if he could unlock the gym, and which he did, and so during the eye of the storm, we started evacuating the family members across the street. And I just remember that we didn’t get them all there during the eye. The second part of the storm started back up, and the winds were [howling], the rain was coming down; the families were wading through the water. Different staff and different doctors were helping all the families cross the street, children, elderly people.

Jones: How much water was in the street at that time?

Walley: It was up to adults’ knees. And some of the coworkers had parked their cars out along the boulevard, and trees had broken the windows out one of the workers’ cars. Some of the cars had water coming up in them because the streets were flooded at that time. And there was debris everywhere; limbs still blowing everywhere. The street lamps from the school were still blowing around. So there was lots of obstacles that they had to overcome to get from here just across the street. And I guess at that point, this part of the ICU department was maybe one of the only parts of the hospital that did not leak. So we stayed dry.
Jones: Which was unusual in the hospital.

Walley: Yeah. So that was one advantage that we had is that we did not have any leaks, but their main concern was that we had so much equipment back there. And we had so much going on. And then once we lost power, that’s when we really had the trouble in ICU because we did have three on the ventilator; of course they had to be. We had generator power, but at one point when they had to change the generators out, we lost all that power. And the heat was starting to build up, making it very miserable for us and the patients. And when all the equipment going and the ventilators going, that added that much more to it. So I know we had extra staff members, some of the surgery staff, down there fanning the patients, wiping them down with cool cloths, doing what we could to keep them comfortable. We had numerous fans going in ICU, which did not help. We just blew the hot air around, but that’s what we had. And then the point when they turned the generator off, of course, we all had to bag the ventilator patients till that was resumed. And so from that point on, that’s when it got pretty chaotic and pretty tough to deal with back there. And then we started looking at the point of when we had to evacuate the patients, and I believe ours was the last ones to go because we had to look at how they were going to go. They didn’t have the roadways cleared and things like that. And of course, we had to find someone who would accept the type of patients that we had. Some of them did leave on ground. Some left by helicopter; one left by jet. And actually one of the times that we had a patient transfer, I was the one who went with them. We had two patients in the ambulance. One had to be bagged all the way to Jackson, so I rode with her to Jackson. Bagged her there, and I guess that would be the most—the biggest experience, I guess, was the faces of the people at University Hospital. Once I got there and told them that I was the ICU nurse, I guess because of the condition that I was in and the way I looked, because at this point we was all working in shorts and our scrub tops and flip-flops and hair pinned up and no makeup. And so they looked at me, and they said, “You’re the ICU nurse?” And I said, “Yes.” I guess their faces told it all. But it was a very miserable condition. We was doing the best we could to stay comfortable and get the work done that we had to do.

Jones: How long did it take you to get to Jackson with the patients?

Walley: I really don’t know; I don’t recall the time. I just know that we left here midafternoon, maybe four or five o’clock. I didn’t get home until one o’clock the next morning because once we got there and got the patients settled, then the ambulance had the difficulty of trying to find gas to get back here.

Jones: Were the roads clear all the way to Jackson?

Walley: They were still clearing while we were there, so we got held up in traffic a couple of times while they were actually clearing it. And then of course, when you got in Jackson there was major congestion; people were all up there. So it was a very lengthy trip. Least to say that was a very long day for me, from being up from five till
one the next morning and then having to get back up and come back to work the next
day and take care of—

**Jones:** What day was that, Wednesday or Thursday?

**Walley:** I want to say it may have been Thursday, might have been Wednesday; I’m
not really sure. The days kind of, nights kind of all just kind of run together there for a
while. I was here from Sunday to Friday morning. So it just kind of all kind of went
together. But we did have a couple of patients still left in ICU that we were still trying
to find places for. And like I said, those last two, I think, finally flew out by jet. And
then we had the problem of trying to locate the patients’ families to let them know
where they were going, I think. After the last couple left, I actually went out
personally in the neighborhood to try to find the families and let them know where
they were.

**Jones:** What are some other kind of things that the nurses did that were not
necessarily in their job description, you know, where they had to do all sorts of things?

**Walley:** Oh, gosh. Like I said, a lot of us had to depend on each other. We were
contacting the family outside of the hospital. A couple of us had to do—I don’t know.
There were just so many things that had to be done for them, I guess, that we didn’t
even think about. That’s just part of it. I guess we had to help alleviate the patient’s
fear. I mean, we was all fearful. And then some of the patients didn’t even know
what was going on. So it was just a mixture of things. We just did what we had to,
whether it was nursing or just personal or whatever it was. We just had to bond
together and do the best we could.

**Jones:** How about supplies and medications?

**Walley:** Oh, we did OK as far as supplies. We were well stocked before the
hurricane. We didn’t require a lot of excessive supplies because we knew what our
patients were going to need. That was not a surprise. Actually, I guess we were one
of the departments that kind of stayed together during the storm, that didn’t get totally
strewn through and things like that because I think that once that DMAT [Disaster
Medical Assistance Team] got here, the department, they had to use the supplies out of
that. And so we tried to keep ICU together. That was kind of one of the areas that
still, like I said, that didn’t get wet, didn’t have that much destruction, so it was still
very useful. And they had actually talked about using that department while the
DMAT team was here, keeping that part open, to actually take care of patients while
the other part of the hospital was closed. But they never did have to use it. And then
sometimes we’d have to bring in supplies from home. Of course, we had to bring food
and clothing and things like that from home. So we did OK as far as supplies.

**Jones:** How did you and the other nurses support each other?
Walley: Gosh. Like I said, ICU became a gathering place. It seemed like the nurses stayed back there, and the doctors stayed back there. I know that right after the eye, when we thought the storm was over with, me and the ICU tech was concerned about our homes because we had no one there to check on them. So we actually left out on foot, to go check on our homes. And we walked, oh, gosh, good two to three miles, probably, total to get to our homes and check them out and then come back to work. And we had rubber boots on while we were here, and waded out during the storm. And once we got out there, we decided that the storm was not over with (laughter) because the winds were still gusting and howling, and the rain was still falling, power lines were still falling. But we all had to support each other because there was always that question of, “What is actually out there?” Because none of us knew actually what we had to look forward to outside of this, none of us. Like I said, I didn’t get to leave till Friday morning, so I didn’t really get home until then to actually see what type of damage I had and how everybody else was.

Jones: At what point did you have contact with your parents and your children after the storm?

Walley: I believe it was the next day. I believe they, somehow or another—I can’t remember exactly how—they got in touch with me. But it was the next day, I believe.

Jones: So during that period of time, you didn’t know if anything happened to—

Walley: I did not know if my children were OK, if my parents were OK, and then the biggest concern, I guess—well, another major concern was my fiancé did work out of town, and we didn’t have contact for almost a week. So he didn’t know if we were OK, and I didn’t know if he was OK. But once I got to Jackson, I got my cell phone beeps; they start coming through, and that’s when I finally talked to him.

Jones: You were able to answer a few calls at that time.

Walley: I was, um-hm.

Jones: Then what kinds of things went through your mind on your way back from Jackson?

Walley: Well, that was kind of a restful time actually because we actually got to get a hot hamburger, actually saw lights, and there was actually people. Normal life was going on up there. And then it was kind of a relief, kind of a break. The ambulance crew was very nice. They knew what we went through, and they were like, “You lay back there, and you rest.” And that was actually time I just kind of laid down and got some much needed rest. And at that point I really didn’t think—during the whole time, I really didn’t think about what—you don’t really stop and think about what went on and what you just went through. It was the weeks to come, I guess, is when we realized, we looked back and see what we went through and what we did. It’s just when you go and you look and you see the ceiling hanging down and the wires
hanging down in the hospital, and there’s water up to your midcalf and you’re in rubber boats and shorts working, and we took on many other roles, I guess, as nurses after the storm, cleaning up. We did housekeeping; we wiped down walls; we mopped floors; we did linens; we did whatever we had to. And then I knew some of the staff brought food in for the cafeteria to cook that they had at home so it wouldn’t go bad. And like I said, we just, being a small hospital, I guess we’ve always kind of helped each other, and at that point we really helped each other, made sure that everybody had what they needed.

**Jones:** The patients on the beds, were they injuries, storm injuries?

**Walley:** No. I believe they were all COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] respiratory-type patients. No. We didn’t have any injuries. I did see some of the injuries; I did help out in the ER during the time. In the days to come, once we got all our patients out, there was lots of chainsaw injuries and things like that, but we never had any in ICU because once we got the patients out, they tried not to admit anymore.

**Jones:** What about the splenectomy patient? Did you have that patient or not?

**Walley:** Yes, I believe we had—I’m trying to think which one was splenectomy.

**Lundy:** The one that was—they did surgery, and it was so hot.

**Walley:** No, no, no. We did not get that patient.

**Lundy:** He didn’t come back to ICU?

**Walley:** No, mm-mm. He stayed on the floor. Um-hm.

**Jones:** When you were getting back on the edge of town that evening, what kinds of things were you thinking about?

**Walley:** Well, it was early morning, just like I said, about one or two o’clock, and it’s just dead silence in town at that point; everything is just black. And I guess at that point I knew that everybody in my family was OK, and we had come through the obstacles, and all the patients were OK, and coworkers were OK. So I guess it was a point of relief, but then we had to look—it was the point, I had never been through any of that, and I didn’t know what to expect afterwards, and we certainly didn’t expect that it would take as long as it did for electricity to come back on, and just things to get back operational. I guess it was still the fear of the unknown at that point, but still kind of a relief that we had made it that far.

**Jones:** And it was that next day, then, that the MASH [mobile army surgical hospital] team showed up?
Walley: I believe they started coming in a couple of days later. Yeah. And mostly they came in and started setting up outside and started using some of the supplies out of the ER. And we just kind of helped them get set up and make some of the phone calls that they needed. They were still trying to—they were actually trying to help us coordinate to get some of the patients out and things like that because then I’m not sure of exactly the time frame because all the days started just going together. It was just from one point to the next, you know.

Jones: How has going through the storm affected you, impacted you?

Walley: I guess you learn what it’s like not to have all the luxuries that we have. You learn to deal with no electricity, no air [conditioner]. You learn how to deal with the basics and do the best with what you have. I know that a lot of us have talked, and if we have another Category Five hurricane that we hope not to be here. And a lot of our families say, “No. You will not be there,” because it was—a lot of them did not know how we were. And I guess you learn to appreciate what you have, and you appreciate the life that you are accustomed to. It’s definitely something I wouldn’t want to go back to; it’s just hard emotionally, physically. One tough thing that I dealt with, when we moved the patients out, we weren’t able to get in touch with family members. It concerned me a great deal that they were leaving, and their family didn’t know where they were. And sometimes we didn’t know where they were going. They just left on an ambulance, and they were taking them to whatever hospital they could get them to. Some went here; some went there. So that was a concern I had because it would be hard if you had a sick family member and you couldn’t get in contact with them or couldn’t get to them. And a lot of the people around here had limited resources. They couldn’t go where their family was anyway. It’s just a time that I hope that we never have to go through again, just like one of those once in a lifetime things; I hope.

Lundy: Do you think you can be prepared for something like this, Jennifer? I mean, do you think with all that we’ve learned—or do you think it would just be best to evacuate?

Walley: With that category of a hurricane, I think it’d just be best to evacuate.

Jones: It’s just not something you can be prepared for.

Walley: Yes, I just think that’s the best. And during the time, we had talked to some of the older staff who had been here through Hurricane Camille, and they had gave us stories about what they went through back then. So we kind of laughed and joked about that, but then we kind of come to relive some of that again. So I wouldn’t want to go through another one.

Lundy: You think being an experienced nurse—I mean, you graduated what year?

Walley: Ninety-four.
**Lundy:** Twelve years. Did you see any of the younger nurses here? Did you have any comparison to nurses that haven’t been out of school very long? Did you see the younger nurses, and how they dealt with the disaster? And how (inaudible)?

**Walley:** Yeah, I could see how different people coped with it, how it affected some people. I guess the more experienced you are, you learn to see what’s actually critical versus what’s not critical, and what kind of basic steps you need to take. So yeah, you could see that. And actually you could see it with the doctors, as well. I know the surgeon that just moved here to town, he actually rode the storm out with us in ICU. He would not leave ICU, (laughter) although he would sit there in the chair and fall asleep, and he had his little camera phone going from one window to the next taking pictures. Then when he would try to call, and he said, “I can’t get out.” I said, “No, sir. You’re not going to.” (laughter) And I said, “You’ve never been through this, have you?” He said, “No.” And it was just the look on his face; he was really shocked, and he just kind of stayed there with us the whole time.

**Lundy:** And he’d been here three weeks? I think he told me.

**Walley:** Not too long.

**Lundy:** He had just moved here; I think he said three weeks.

**Walley:** Yeah, and then some of the doctors were out of town. And then another doctor stayed with us in ICU; he came and rested in the bed for a while. Like I said, ICU was kind of a gathering place; people kind of floated in and out. When we evacuated the families, that’s where they went through, was the ICU. Then we have easy access with the back door, and a lot of people came through. And then after the storm, there was the thought of a lot of people in the community who were seeking drugs; that was a concern that they would come to that back door, and so we had to keep that door locked at all times because there were patients, well, people, kind of just hanging around asking doctors and different people, what they could do, and saying that they needed this and that. I guess after the storm, there’s the fear of people who were looting. You know, you heard all the horror stories: people shooting each other over gas and water. And then we had the fear of no gas. How was we going to get back and forth to work? I guess that’s very trying emotionally, too, that you have to think about where you were going to get water from, or ice.

**Jones:** —set to like National Public Radio?

**Walley:** I guess the actual way of communication that we first got through was the satellite phone. I’m not sure exactly who brought the satellite phone into the ER, but that’s when we actually got some access out to the world. We didn’t have anything around here.

**Lundy:** You didn’t have a radio. Did you know what was going on, on the Coast and New Orleans?
Walley: Oh, no. We knew what was going on outside the windows; that’s it.

Lundy: So you really didn’t know—

Jones: When did you find out—

Lundy: —how bad it was?

Walley: It was probably at the end of the week, I guess.

Lundy: So you were that many days not knowing?

Walley: Actually when I finally got to talk to my fiancé, he would tell me because he had TV access. He was in Alabama; he would tell me what was going on. And it was probably the next week until whenever they were getting news coverage that we could actually see what had happened, what we had been through.

Lundy: So you didn’t know? Y’all were just totally (inaudible).

Walley: No. We knew what was going on around us, just right here.

Lundy: Did you ever fear for your own life during the hurricane?

Walley: No. I don’t think I feared that death or injury would be a problem. I feared for my family. And I guess I feared for material possessions, my home. That was my biggest fear, as to what was happening to my home at the time and my family’s home. That was the biggest thing on my mind outside of work. What’s going on? What’s going to be left? And the fear of not knowing is just something that held heavy on your mind.

Lundy: While you were going about your work.

Jones: Did you lose your home?

Walley: Yes. I lived in a mobile home. I had tree limbs in the roof, and the ceiling blew off the bedroom, and water poured in. So yes, it was unsalvageable. Like I said, I had my possessions that couldn’t be replaced in my car, so they were OK.

Jones: And they did survive? You didn’t have water in your car?

Walley: No, no.

Lundy: And your personal things you brought?
**Walley:** Some of them, yes. I still had the majority of them, but I did lose some, but nothing that couldn’t be replaced. I had told her that before the storm, I had packed up most of my children’s clothes and my clothes, and pictures and awards and things that couldn’t be replaced, and they were all in my car. And I guess once I got out, off of work and was out in the community, some guy gave me some water, and he looked at my car, and said, “Do you live in here?” And I said, “No. This is my house; this is my house right now. This is everything that I have.” (laughter) So it was piled up and falling out the doors, and then once the tree across the street blew down, it started blowing this way, and my car was actually outside the window, and I was fearing that the tree was going to blow into my car. So I just watched that all day and to see a big oak tree fall down like nothing, to see the roof blow off while you’re still in the building.

**Lundy:** That’s scary. You can’t even believe it.

**Walley:** The plywood just peeled off like tissue paper and blew away.

**Lundy:** And you are living in?

**Walley:** I live with my fiancé now.

**Lundy:** So you didn’t replace your trailer.

**Walley:** No, mm-mm, no.

**Jones:** If you were going to speak to a group of nurses that somehow knew that they were going to go through a storm like this, what kinds of things would you say to them?

**Walley:** Goodness. I don’t know. Like I said, I don’t know that you’d ever be prepared. It’s your own personal experience how you take it, how you perceive it. Some people here were very fearful; they’re just fearful of bad weather. You have to focus on what’s going on around you. It’s individual, and I don’t know that you could ever prepare for it because everything’s going to be different. You never know what the outcome is going to be. You just have to try to keep yourself together, keep your thoughts together. And that was the problem during the storm, was to keep ourselves together so we could take care of the patients. We were all fearful what was going on; it was hard to focus on what we had to do. We knew we had to do it; it was just hard to focus on the patients and focus on that it was an actual workday and that we were here to work, rather than a life-threatening event.

**Jones:** I heard that particular theme from others. Was that pretty much unspoken, as far as holding it together?

**Walley:** Yeah, we just kind of did it. But I guess it was, again, individual. I don’t know. Everybody didn’t express how they were experiencing or how they felt. We
just dealt with every change at the moment. But I know back there in ICU, I did have another nurse that day, because we were full, we found it very difficult to focus on what we had to do that day. Your regular routine of the day did not happen that day. We dealt with hospital problems; we dealt with family problems; we dealt with patient’s problems, and then we were kind of the resource of, like I said, evacuating the patients. And so it was just, I guess, a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour thing. And then we didn’t know what was going to happen if we lost power. Monday we knew we had generators, and we didn’t know how long they would last. And then you have three patients on a ventilator. So it’s just something I don’t think you could ever be prepared for. I mean, if you have the appropriate equipment, appropriate supplies, but far as emotionally, skillwise, it’s just something individual.

Lundy: Did you ever have disaster preparedness? Do y’all have that kind of training?

Walley: They did have some classes before; a lot of the safety managers and department directors met on what to do. As far as groupwide, no; hospitalwide, no. Of course we have safety manuals, what to do during internal and external disaster, and basic steps.

Lundy: Do you think that helps? I mean, do you think that helps structure what you did next, or did you go on autopilot?

Walley: I guess overall, the overall hospitalwide, it probably helped. Everybody had a job to do, and you knew that somebody was taking care of this and taking care of that. As far as individualwise, individual units, I guess we were kind of on autopilot. You knew what you had to do for a hospital structure, but as far as individual patientwise, it’s autopilot. You do what you have to but, you still follow the overall what you’re supposed to do, be prepared, who you answer to, who tells you what to do. And we knew that other people were taking care of other problems outside of our unit, and things like that.

Lundy: In nursing school at USM [University of Southern Mississippi], did we give you any skills—I mean, any nursing school, but you in particular went to USM. What skills are helpful in a situation like this, should be [taught] in nursing school? I mean, in this catastrophe?

Walley: I don’t know about other programs; I’ve seen preceptors from other schools, preceptees, actually, from the other nursing schools versus USM. And I think USM has a more holistic approach to it, that you’re not focused just on clinical skills; you focus on professionalism; you focus on factors outside of nursing as far as everything. And I guess I was taught always use—that you just look at. You have to look at the whole picture; you don’t just look at nursing problems because some of them are not nursing; some are social. And I guess it’s just looking at the overall picture, not just focusing in on one thing.
**Lundy:** Do you think that helped in this particular—

**Walley:** Oh, yes. Yeah.

**Lundy:** When everything, you feel like, was falling down on you.

**Walley:** Yeah, because this was not a nursing problem. You had to use your nursing skills, but you had to use personal skills and you had to use—you had to be support for other people as well as keeping yourself together; be support for the family members, be support for the patients. And so they have emotional needs; we had emotional needs, so it’s not—and then, of course, you had to think about what was we going to do with the patients at that point in time. So yeah, it’s not one single thing; it was a big picture, and like I said, I guess the fear of not knowing what was going to happen next. You don’t know what—like today, we’ll know what we’re going to do tomorrow. You know what’s there tomorrow. At that point, we didn’t know what was out there. We didn’t know what the community looked like; we had no idea. And we had no means of knowing until we saw. Actually after the storm died down, you could see people out riding around as far as they could get. And I guess that’s when the world came back, too, but during that time that the actual storm blew through, it was nothing.

**Lundy:** The loudness and then the quiet.

**Walley:** Yeah.

**Lundy:** That quiet of the eye, and then (inaudible).

**Walley:** Of the eye coming through, and then it started all over again.

**Lundy:** Yeah.

**Jones:** I know it’s hard to describe the eye of a hurricane. It’s eerie.

**Walley:** Yeah, it was just total peace and quiet there for a while, like the world stood still, and then it started all over again.

**Lundy:** But not quite as (inaudible). But you still know, “Don’t walk out there (inaudible).”

**Walley:** (laughter) Yeah, we experienced that, “Don’t get out in it.”

**Lundy:** Hearing you talk about some of the events that occurred, looking back on it, we might could even see it as a checklist, that this is done, and this is done, and that’s done. But actually to have experienced it, I sense that you had a lot of anxiety over a period of time about what’s coming next, or what are we going to do next, and it wasn’t as easy as checking things off.
Walley: Oh, yes. I’m kind of an organized person; I like to know kind of structured what we’re going to do, what we need to do, kind of know how the day is going to go. And at that point, you don’t know; you don’t know what’s going to happen. We didn’t know if the windows were going to blow out at that point. And you saw the roof falling in and then the water coming down, and of course, the electricity going out. And of course, there’s a high level of anxiety. Of course, you hear other people talking about, “Oh, this building’s not going to make it. We’re not going to make it.” So you go through many emotions; and no, it’s not a checklist. You can check, but you’ll have to go back and check again, because it didn’t work that way.

Lundy: Are you having any—do you have any like residual-like feelings about coming up on hurricane season again?

Walley: Yes, I’m very anxious about it, yes. And once you’ve been through that, you do fear that it will happen again. I don’t think, personally, and a few of my friends and overall community, I don’t think that our life is back the way that it was pre-Katrina, and I don’t know that it ever will be. I know personally that it caused a lot of interpersonal problems, financially. And when you get uprooted from your home and lose things, and you know other people lost homes and personal belongings, it’s just hard to go back. And then the community is not the same at all. I mean, we have so many new people here. It’s not the way of life that us hometown folks knew that it was, and that’s very hard to deal with. Some change is not good. Yes, I’m very fearful of the next one.

Lundy: And now you’ve got a new hospital.

Walley: Yes, Highland. I don’t know that we’re that high. (laughter)

Jones: (Inaudible)

Lundy: No.

Walley: Because we’re the first piece of high ground that you come to from the Coast and Slidell.

Lundy: I like that. I actually think that’s a good name.

Walley: Yeah, actually we didn’t get flooded; we just got wind damage and things like that.

Lundy: Because Slidell is like at—

Walley: Oh, I forgot how many feet.
Lundy: How many feet (inaudible) and that’s how they named it. It’s pretty good after the hurricane to have some pinnacle. I hope it means a good sign.

Walley: I hope that means something. I hope that we stay high and dry. (laughter) I hope that everybody does not have to go through another one of those. I mean, you see it. You see it happening in Florida. You see it happen around you. And you’re thinking you’re glad that it didn’t happen to us, and unfortunately it did. And I hate it for other people, too, but once you’ve lived through it, then you really know. It truly is a natural disaster. And then it was probably months before I ever made it down to the Coast, just as far as Waveland, and to see what the devastation that it caused. Then you look back at what you had, and you think, “Oh, it wasn’t all that bad.” So when you look at that they have nothing left standing, you think a tree in your living room or a limb in your living room is nothing compared to your total home being gone. And I know one of the ER doctors; he lived on the Coast, and he was here during the storm, and he didn’t know what was going on during the storm. But shortly afterward he found out that his whole home was washed away. So that was hard for him, and it’s heartbreaking for us, too, to see him lose everything. You lose material things, and you look around, and you think you had it bad, but then you look somewhere else, and they had it worse.

Jones: Is there anything else that we have not asked that you would like to share?

Walley: I can’t think of anything. I’m sure there’s things that I’ve left out. It was just a big, trying time for everybody, and like I said, I was here from a Saturday to a Friday morning, I believe. And there’s a lot of employees who left, but there was a majority of us who stood here and stuck together. And it’s really good to see those that were around us that stayed and helped and those that came back when they could and helped.

Lundy: Those that left, did they leave for various reasons?

Walley: Yes. Some said they would not stay during the hurricane. Some left because they had to take family members out of town, for reasons. And then some were just not scheduled, so of course they left for their own safety. But like I said, some of us were here, and some of us have been scheduled for every hurricane that has blew through. And unfortunately that’s me. (laughter) I’ve been here; I had to stay during [Hurricane] Ivan; I had to stay during [Hurricane] Cindy, but we didn’t have any damage from either one of those. It was nothing like Katrina. And I don’t know that so many of us will be here if there’s another Katrina. It was just too hard on everybody involved.

Lundy: Those people who left, do you have any sense that there was some feelings that you-all who stayed, were there any negative or positive (inaudible) that you-all stayed and (inaudible)?
Walley: Yeah, I could sense some, yeah, because there are those who leave every storm, and then there are some who stayed, or I can’t say storm, who are always here, no matter what the needs are of the hospital. And then there’s always those who are gone. I guess you can see sometimes; I can’t judge personally, but you can see sometimes the feelings of some people on how they actually feel about the job and about the hospital and about each other. Some of us have deep-rooted feelings; some it’s just a job. And I guess a lot of us stayed, and because we are a small hospital, we all were concerned about each other. Maybe if we were a larger institution, we wouldn’t have so many strong feelings for each other, and we would probably fend for ourselves versus helping a large group of each other. I don’t know; this is the only place I’ve ever worked. So I just know that it’s like one big family, patients, families, and employees. We come to know our patients; we come to know their families. And like I said, we got out in the community to try to find the families after the storm, try to communicate with them what was going on with the patients and where they were. I don’t know that everybody would have done that, but we tried to do what we could. And I actually, a couple of times, I had took people home from the ER who didn’t have a ride home after they had been seen by the DMAT team. So we just did what we had to.

Jones: (Inaudible)

Walley: That’s right. Do what you have to. That’s right.

Lundy: Well, I bet your patient’s probably in there by now. Do you have somebody coming in?

Walley: I do have a patient, on the vent, supposed to be coming in, but I don’t know that they’ll give report till I’m back there.

(end of interview)