Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Joel Ellzie

Interviewer: Beth Morgan

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Biography

Mr. Joel Ellzie was born March 12, 1971, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, to Mr. Tommy Ellzie (born May 9, 1947, in Soso, Mississippi) and Mrs. Kathy Collins Ellzie (born February 23, 1948, in Soso, Mississippi). His father was a mortician at Moore Funeral Home in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and his mother was an accountant at Regions Bank in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Mr. Ellzie has a son, Jax Thomas Ellzie, who was born February 22, 2001.

Since 1992, Mr. Ellzie has been a paramedic. He was graduated from the two-year paramedic program at Jones County Junior College, and at the time of this interview, he has been working at American Medical Response on the Mississippi Gulf Coast since 1997. He was honored in Washington, DC, following Hurricane Katrina, for the Star of Life Award and for the American Medical Response Katrina Hero Award. Mr. Ellzie enjoys spending time with his son, working as a paramedic, fishing on the Pascagoula River, and playing in his rose garden.
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Morgan: I’m talking with Joe Ellzie.

Ellzie: Joel.

Morgan: Joel Ellzie from American Medical Response, and we are here in Bay St. Louis. Joel, where do you normally work?

Ellzie: I normally work out of Gulfport.

Morgan: OK. And tell me about where you were when Katrina hit.

Ellzie: During a hurricane disaster or any type of disaster I’m assigned to the Hancock County Emergency Operations Center as the EMS [Emergency Medical Services] liaison and special needs coordinator for the county.

Morgan: And what do those duties involve?

Ellzie: Numerous things as far as getting special needs patients or elderly patients to shelters, getting nursing homes prepared for disasters, getting them out if they need to get out. People will call and say they don’t have a ride to a shelter or whatever, and I’ll set up transportation for them.

Morgan: Had you been through a major disaster before Katrina?

Ellzie: Hurricane Ivan was probably, is. The biggest thing we’ve been involved with so far was last year, in which during that we had a nursing home that evacuated, and I ended up taking care of thirty-six patients for thirty-six straight hours with not even knowing their names or their medical history. I recruited a bunch of paramedics to help me, whereas usually nurses take care of them. Paramedics don’t do the type of care that they needed, but due to the disaster we did what we had to do.

Morgan: And that’s your training, in paramedic care—

Ellzie: Right.
Morgan: —and emergency response.

Ellzie: Right.

Morgan: And so Katrina, let’s start with the days prior to Katrina. What were you doing to get ready?

Ellzie: On August 27, which I believe was a Friday, I worked that Friday night. I normally work night shift at American Medical Response. Worked that Friday night. That Saturday, another supervisor and I went to New Orleans, that Saturday morning when I got off work, to go the EMS conference down there, national conference down there, and while we were down there, we were waiting for the show to open. Got down there, and we were called, that we had been put under a hurricane watch. And that triggered me to come to the emergency operations here in Hancock County to start setting up and preparing.

Morgan: Prior to Saturday, were you really expecting much action from the storm?

Ellzie: I wouldn’t say to the scope that everything is. I don’t think anybody was prepared for that. We knew we were going to get something out of it. We knew it was going to be, you know, a pretty [good] hit, but I don’t think anybody ever would’ve imagined this type of devastation. I mean, it’s almost two months to the day now, and I’m still here. So I would’ve never, I would’ve never guessed it. I mean I was watching, and I was like, “Yeah, we’re fixing to get hit.” I was watching. Actually I predicted—I’m sort of like the hurricane person at AMR. And [I] started watching it when it was still over Florida. And I told them, I said, “We’re going to get hit off of this, and it’s going to run between Louisiana and Mississippi.” And it did, right up the line.

Morgan: So when you came back from Saturday, Saturday when y’all were called back from New Orleans, what was happening on that Saturday and Sunday?

Ellzie: That Saturday, let’s see. I got to the Emergency Operations Center at two o’clock that afternoon. Left New Orleans, drove home, boarded my house, packed my clothes. And normally we come in here, and we’re here for three or four days and go back home.

Morgan: And where is your house?

Ellzie: I live in Ocean Springs.

Morgan: OK.

Ellzie: So went home. And I knew it was probably going to be here for a little while longer on this one than we normally are, so I packed enough clothes for a week and come on over here. I got here at two o’clock on Saturday afternoon and basically just started preparing, getting my list of patients that I knew we’d done before and calling them and
tell them, say, “Are you going this time, or are you making other arrangements to get out?” That’s what we was trying to encourage people to do, is to get out of the area.

**Morgan:** Was Ivan, last year, a good test run and almost training for what happened this year?

**Ellzie:** To some extent, but at the same time, they cause people to be complacent because we thought we was going to be hit by Ivan last year. And we thought we was going to be hit by Dennis earlier this year, and it turned and went to Florida. So people got complacent. They was like, “Well, it’s going to turn again. It’s going to turn again.” And [that] is the reason that I believe we had so much loss of life.

**Morgan:** And then Saturday afternoon, after you came back, what were you working on?

**Ellzie:** Saturday, just calling my—(brief interruption) Saturday, just calling the patients that I knew, talking with the hospitals: what were their plans? Talking with the local nursing homes: what were their plans? Were they staying, or were they going? Were they going to need any help? What was their contingency plans? You know, just getting prepared on Saturday, really, answering phones, telling people to get out of the area, [and that] if they needed help getting out of the area, we’d make arrangements for them. Really that’s all I did Saturday afternoon all the way through until Sunday morning. Went to sleep for a couple of hours Saturday night from one to three. As a matter of fact, since I only—I slept for two hours during that timeframe, got up at three o’clock, and I was antsy and was preparing to start calling my patients so I could get their special needs to the shelter there. I started calling them at six o’clock in the morning and saying, “OK. It’s time to go.” On Saturday, it was just, “Be prepared. Pack your stuff. Get ready. We’re going to come get you tomorrow.” So they’re just not in the shelter for so long. Be at home as long as you can. So Saturday morning at six o’clock I started calling them, and then all day Saturday [I] was moving patients to the special-needs shelter. About three or four o’clock in the afternoon, the shelter we had, which is close to the railroad tracks in Bay St. Louis, we determined that we were going to get hit pretty hard by this hurricane. So I had to evacuate my special-needs shelter to another place. So yeah, several hours doing that on Sunday, into the night, before I finished that.

**Morgan:** So where did the special-needs patients finally end up?

**Ellzie:** They finally ended up at East Hancock Elementary, north of I-10. So now they were pretty, a pretty good ways away from the water. So where they were four or five blocks away from the beach, I now had them fifteen miles inland, so a lot safer up there.

**Morgan:** And then Sunday night and Monday, the storm comes in. Where were you? Where did you ride out the storm?

**Ellzie:** I rode out the storm in Bay St. Louis at the Emergency Operations Center, south of Highway 90, sitting there. As far back as I can remember, I was always fascinated by bad
weather. So I stayed outside a lot of the time and just watching the wind blowing, the rain, trees falling down, houses blowing over right in front of us.

**Morgan:** So you saw some of the houses blow off their foundation.

**Ellzie:** Yeah. So I watched my car drown when the storm surge come in. (laughter) I got good pictures of it. While we was at the Emergency Operations Center, there was thirty-five people in the Emergency Operations Center. After it started getting bad and the winds started getting real rough, still at that point we really hadn’t even had any storm surge, but the roof was ripping off. We could hear [it], just tearing off. Had a bad water leak cause a small fire in the Emergency Operations Center, so we had to get that taken care of.

**Morgan:** Is there any procedure with American Medical Response at which they say, Things are so bad we’re pulling our people now”?

**Ellzie:** Well, we do stop ambulance transports when the wind gets fifty miles an hour or so. I mean because they’re so top heavy, they’ll just flip over. And that had been stopped like two o’clock in the morning. Two or three o’clock in the morning, on Monday morning, we stopped ambulance service, as far as going out. Now, that was from where my standpoint, that was my call to do. Now, we had ambulances all over the county, and we’ll still call certain ambulances. It might not be as bad up in the north part of the county, and they still feel comfortable running the call, so it’s really left up to the crewmembers. If they feel comfortable and safe in running the call, then they can go ahead. But I know in the area down here south of I-10 where we were, the wind had gotten pretty rough, and I had told them, I said, “Start calling, and if they don’t feel comfortable, just start making a list.”

**Morgan:** But was there ever a point at which y’all were waiting for your superiors to call and say, “It’s so bad we want you out of the emergency center”?

**Ellzie:** No, because I don’t think nobody realized it was, that it would be this bad. I mean, as far as the building itself, it didn’t—I wasn’t scared to be in the building even with the roof ripping off. That didn’t bother me because I’ve been in tornadoes before, and so I’ve been in houses with roofs ripped off and stuff like that. So it really didn’t bother me. It’s a solid-wall, brick structure, and it survived Camille, so as far as blowing down, I didn’t have a problem. I wasn’t scared or antsy about anything like that. Roof ripping off? Go ahead. It didn’t bother me. Then soon, you know after we started, the roof ripping off and all this kind of stuff is when we started noticing the storm surge started coming. And where we were in that part of Bay St. Louis, we were in one of the higher spots in the city. And it came from all four sides. So at that point we was like, if we wanted to get out, there was nowhere to go. We were surrounded, and it was just hold on until it was over and done with. And during that, seeing the storm surge come in, I mean, I just watched my car and everybody else’s car in the parking lot, drown. And then it started coming into the building, and we started shutting doors, trying to keep it out. And it just started filling up the building, and then we started moving people to the higher part of the building and (long pause) but—
Morgan: Was it the water, like the water level was rising—

Ellzie: Right.

Morgan: —or the wind was driving it in?

Ellzie: Both. We were standing and watching. We was measuring on a car tire outside how fast it was coming in, and it was coming in at about a foot every ten minutes, just where we were. It just, it’d just come in. You could sit there and watch it literally come up. So according to looking at the car tire, it was about half way up the car tire in ten minutes, and it covered the car tire in twenty minutes. And within thirty, forty-five minutes it was pouring through my window in my car, so. (laughter)

Morgan: It was lot of power.

Ellzie: Yeah. So anyway, we moved everybody to the front of the building, which is the higher part. I think it’s the only part of the building that didn’t get water inside of it. And there was four of us stayed in the back where the phones were. There was no phones up front in the building where we were. And there was four because the phones were still ringing. People were still trying to get out. And people were still trying to call American Medical Response to come and get them, or just anybody to come and get them.

Morgan: What do you say? What could you say to people who called in?

Ellzie: “Sorry. What’s your address? And as soon as this is over with, we’ll come check you.” There were several that we knew didn’t make it, that we talked to. There were several that I talked to that I begged to leave, [who] would not go. They were complacent. You know, “I survived Camille. I’ll be fine.” So I can’t force them to go. And knowing the flood damage and where they were, you always, you speculate until—it was a few weeks later when they started confirming the dead, and you look at the list and go, “There’s this one.” And I counted three that I knew of personally that I’d talked to on the phone, just in the first list, so.

Morgan: And of course the rest of the nation, the first reports were that everybody in Bay St. Louis was drowned and gone.

Ellzie: Well, now during the storm, one of the last phone calls to come in I answered, and it was my boss, Steve Delahousey. And he asked me, he said, “Joel, just tell me your situation.” And there was just something in his voice that just sounded weird. And he said, “Tell me your situation.” I said, “Well, sir, the roof’s ripping off, and we’re standing in about eighteen inches of water inside the building.” And he said, “Oh, God!” And I was like, “What?” (laughter) And his voice cracked, and I was like, “What’s going on?” And he said, “The National Weather Service just told us that the worst is not over with.” I was like, “What do you mean?” He said, “They’re saying to expect about ten more feet of water.” Now, mind you, we’re in eighteen inches of water already, and we’ve got ten more feet coming. There’s nowhere to go. (laughter)
Morgan: Was there a second floor to your building?

Ellzie: No. There was just, there was two steps. That was where we were sending everybody else, was two steps higher than what we were, so. And that was the only dry part in the building, was just those two steps upwards. Anyway, as I was talking to him, his voice broke, and he handed the phone to someone else, actually Brent Dierking, one of our directors. He asked me, he said, “Joel, I need to ask you something.” I said, “What’s that?” He said, “Would you like to leave a message for your family?” And I said, “Sir?” He said, again, “Would you like to leave a message for your family? I will personally deliver it to whoever you want to leave the message for.” And that’s when I got scared. It didn’t bother me, the water coming in, the roof ripping off. That’s when it hit home that they think we’re fixing to die. And I did. I left a message for my wife and son and did what I had to do there. And I said, “Well, listen, I’ve got to get off the phone. I’ve got to make preparations.”

Morgan: Were your wife and son in Ocean Springs still?

Ellzie: No. I had sent them to my mom’s house up in Laurel, so, which was (laughter) one of the worst places.

Morgan: And it also was hit badly.

Ellzie: It was hit hard, too, from what I understand.

Morgan: No storm surge but—

Ellzie: No storm surge.

Morgan: —the wind.

Ellzie: But the wind, from what I’ve been told. I have yet to make it up there. I’ve been down here the entire time. But anyway, I’d sent them up there. Got off the phone with them, and I told the EMA director, Bryan Adam, and Tim Kellar, the chancery clerk, and Rick Fayard, who is another supervisor with AMR—the three of them and I were the four in the back, answering the phone. And I told them, I said, “Guys, this is what they’re saying.” And at that point when we got off the phone, the phones were dead, and that was it. Cell phones didn’t work. Radios didn’t work. Telephones were gone. Power was out. TV was gone. So we had lost all communication at that point. And I told them what they had told me. So we gathered everybody in the room where we were in the water and told everybody, asked everybody, said, “Now, just start counting off numbers.” And everybody started, counted a number, one through thirty-five. And we got a sheet of paper and wrote number one, and that person wrote their name out beside it. Number two and that person wrote their name out beside it. I was number eighteen, and I wrote my name out beside it. Got the list filled, and we put it in a heavy-duty Ziploc bag, waterproof bag, and we nailed it to the top of the roof, so that if something did happen, if we did have ten
feet of water come through and something did happen to us, they would have a list of who
was in there. And we got a waterproof magic marker and wrote the numbers on our arms
so that they could have an identifying mark.

Morgan: What is it like identifying your body (laughter) so that someone will be able to
take news to your family? Is it just all business at that point?

Ellzie: Yeah. At that point I had went into, instead of caring for—now, there’s a
(inaudible) in the business I’m in, but at that point I had stopped worrying about other
people. It was, “Let me take care of myself, and when this is over and done with, I’ll take
care of them again.” And it was—I got off, you know, after we did all that, got that sealed
up, I walked off in a little corner by myself and said my piece, what I had to say, and
started making my own personal preparations. “What am I going to do when the water
comes in? Should I leave the building? Should I tie myself off to the rafters?” Got all my
belts and started putting them around me just in case I did go out, [and] I could use belts to
hang onto something or tie myself off to a tree or a post or whatever I come across. Just
things I would’ve never thought I would’ve thought in my life. And never would I have
imagined somebody would ask me to leave a message for my family either, but again,
that’s something I hope I never am in a situation where I have to do that. Not even when
I’m ninety (laughter) do I want somebody to ask me that! Mm-mm, never.

Morgan: So how much water got in the building?

Ellzie: That was, believe it or not, that was about all that was in there.

Morgan: Wow.

Ellzie: That was about as high as it got. It was about eighteen inches inside the building.
The ten foot that they expected didn’t come, which the eighteen inches we had, we didn’t
expect that either. But at least we didn’t have the ten feet that they expected. If we
would’ve had the ten feet that we expected, we would have had a lot more people die than
what we had.

Morgan: And how long were you trapped inside the building? When were you finally
able to get out?

Ellzie: Well, after about, I guess it was about a couple of hours, we started noticing the
water was receding. Another guy at the—

Morgan: Tire gauge again?

Ellzie: Yeah. Started watching the tires on the cars as it was going down, and it was like,
“OK. Now we could start seeing the road again.” We could start seeing Highway 90
again, and we got to going, “OK. Well, let’s start riding around and see what kind of
damage is out there. See if anybody needs any help.” And another guy and I jumped in
his truck. He had a big truck, and we just started riding up and down the road and going as
far as we could to see if anybody needed any help, see if anyone was out there, see is anybody trapped that needed help or whatever. And we went down to Notre Dame De La Mer to check on that. It’s an assisted-living place. I run in there, checked that out, went on down to the Seminary, a place for retired Catholic priests, went down in there, found a gentlemen that was trying to get somewhere. So the guy I was with carried him to where he needed to go and left me, which I told him that was fine. I was going to check out the neighborhood in the area. And at that point, further down that way towards, we was going toward the beach, the water hadn’t receded that much down there. And I was wading in water anywhere from ankle deep to waist deep going in certain areas. And I was walking down Highway 90 toward the Bay St. Louis bridge and made it to what used to be the bridge and discovered that the bridge don’t exist anymore. And had turned around and started back to the Emergency Operations Center, and they picked me up. And I was like, “Let’s go back.” And come back and tell them, I said, “The bridge don’t exist anymore. It’s not here.” And they was like, “Well, it’s just covered up with water.” I said, “Mmm. It’s not there. It doesn’t exist. The pilings is all you see.”

**Morgan:** Wow. And so from there, how did you begin to, with no communications and no resources, how did you begin to find your people and begin rescue?

**Ellzie:** Well, really we was using pickup trucks. Rick Fayard, the other supervisor from AMR, him and another guy commandeered a school bus and started riding up and down Highway 90. Highway 90 was as far as you could go. Everything off the road, off Highway 90, was flooded, so you could only stay on Highway 90. We just rode back and forth as far as we could go, and we’d make one trip toward Waveland and come back toward Bay St. Louis. And the next time you’d just get a little bit further into Waveland, and then you’d turn back around. Now each time you’d get a little bit further into Waveland and just picking people up as they was walking out. You know pickup trucks, cars, dump trucks, school buses, whatever we could find that we could find keys to. The ambulance that we had at the Emergency Operations Center went under six feet of water, and where it was at, it was in the low part of the parking lot, and it had six feet of water in it, so that ambulance was drowned. The ambulance that was at the hospital had six feet of water in it, too. So just in the Bay St. Louis/Waveland area there was three ambulances that went underwater. So our ambulance supplies was gone. So that was all we had, was just using personal vehicles.

**Morgan:** And how long did that go on, just dredging for people?

**Ellzie:** It felt like an eternity, but I really—it was all night that we just rode up and down, up and down. To be honest, I really don’t know. Everything started running to—because we’d been up since three o’clock Sunday morning.

**Morgan:** Having those two hours of sleep must’ve helped out.

**Ellzie:** And I’d been up like thirty hours prior because I was up all day Friday, all day Saturday, and slept those two hours. And then here comes the storm. And everything just started running together. It was like one huge day, and I couldn’t, I don’t even recall it
being whether it was day or night when I did something. There were certain things I don’t—I remember doing it, but I couldn’t tell you if it was day or night or whatever. Everything just started running together. At one point we were able to get out. Rick Fayard and I and another guy, John Kinsey, we commandeered a big vehicle, and we were determined—this was at night I know. Everything had calmed down. There wasn’t too much going on, and there was no lights. There was no electricity, and basically everything had gone underwater—very, very few cars except ours. Actually, the big vehicles that we were able to get were the only things that were running, so it wasn’t like anybody was out riding around or anything like that. So we was like, “We’re going to see if we can find a way out.” And there’s only three ways out of this area, and it’s either Bay St. Louis Bridge which doesn’t exist. There’s Highway 603 to I-10, which was under ten feet of water, and Highway 90, which we knew was underwater at one point and still was. We just didn’t know how deep. So we rode out on Highway 90, and we got out to where the water was just outside of Waveland. And I got out of the vehicle and walked in front of the vehicle down the road for about two miles, wading in the water to make sure either the road was there or the bridge was there, as we were driving across it, to see if we could get out. And after about an hour or so, we finally were able to get out of the water on the other side and was able to get to, at that point be able to get to Gulfport and say, “Hey, we’re alive.” And we walked in the building at Gulfport, and it had been like thirty-six hours since we had talked to anybody from over there since that last phone call. And when we walked in the building people started crying and hugging us, and they called us “walking ghosts.” And they really, they literally thought we were dead. And that’s when it really hit again, but at that point we’d been too busy to even think about it. That’s when it really hit again, is they really thought we were dead.

**Morgan:** How soon were you able to get news down to your wife that you were OK?

**Ellzie:** (sigh) Friday after the storm is when I finally got in touch with them.

**Morgan:** Did your wife spend those five days wondering if you had survived?

**Ellzie:** Well, they had heard through the grapevine that everybody in Hancock County south of I-10 had died. And she said she had called AMR, and this was before they even knew anything about us, and that they were still trying to get in touch with us. So they wasn’t saying, “Yeah, they’re dead.” They just wasn’t saying we were alive either. So it took a while. And once we was able to get out and we got to Gulfport, we knew we was going to live through the storm. We was OK. That’s when I started worrying about, “Are they OK?” And, “If my own people at work think I’m dead, what does she think?” So I was really concerned about her, not only their safety, but I hope she’s not planning to write no obituary either, so. (laughter)

**Morgan:** Yeah, planning a funeral, getting a spray.

**Ellzie:** Yeah.

**Morgan:** How about your house in Ocean Springs, any damage?
Ellzie: My contractor estimated about $60,000 worth of damage, and I live north of I-10, (laughter) in Ocean Springs.

Morgan: And that was water damage and—

Ellzie: The roof come off, and the rain come right on in. So it tore the roof up, just ruined the walls in the house and the carpet and furniture and stuff like that.

Morgan: And your family is still in Laurel?

Ellzie: No. They actually came back. I was able to get it cleaned up to the point that I’ll stay in it until it gets fixed. It’s not completely destroyed.

Morgan: Well, the new phrase is “the new normal” down here. What is the new normal? What’s a normal day now? So for you, what is your new normal? Are you even close to new normal?

Ellzie: No.

Morgan: Or is everyday still just—

Ellzie: Everyday there’s still—you don’t know what still to expect. There is nothing normal. (brief interruption) Normalcy in other parts of the Gulf Coast and Jackson County and somewhat in Biloxi, and my youngest going back to school, so there’s some normalcy over there. There’s no such thing over here in Hancock County at this point. Not two months later. I mean, it’s still, still nothing is operational over here.

Morgan: So your main duty right now is what?

Ellzie: Just making sure that we have ambulances on the road to run emergency calls, that’s there enough of them, and that we keep our response times down even with the bridge being out. And the hospital here at Hancock Medical Center, due to its limited capacity, they can do very, very little. So it’s just making sure that the ambulance service continues to run and functions as much as normal as possible.

Morgan: I saw some of the damage to the Hancock Medical Center. Can you tell me a little bit about what the rest of the damage was?

Ellzie: Yeah, they had three foot of water throughout the first floor.

Morgan: Were patients totally evacuated, or were there—

Ellzie: No.

Morgan: —patients on upper floors?
Ellzie: There was patients in the—well, initially what happened was the roof on part of the third floor come off. So they evacuated the patients off of there down to the emergency room, and then the storm surge came, so they had to reevacuate people to the second floor, the emergency room patients and all. So when we were able to finally reach them, that’s where they were. But there was throughout the hospital, every room on the first floor throughout the hospital had three, at least three foot of water in it.

Morgan: Did they maintain electricity? Did they have—

Ellzie: No. The generators went underwater, so it put those out. AMR had a, we had a mechanic over here with us, and after twelve hours or so, he was able to get the generator back up and running on a limited, very limited capacity, so.

Morgan: Are you driving back to Ocean Springs every day?

Ellzie: No. Come to work—at this point I’m working seventy-two hours on, seventy-two hours off. So I was in the county, stayed in the county, other than our little, quick trip to Gulfport to get our supplies or to have a meeting or if I was summoned for whatever reason. I didn’t make it back to my house. I was here for—I think it was the twentieth day, the twenty-first day after the storm, I finally made it home. Three weeks is when I finally saw my—

Morgan: Where are you being housed?

Ellzie: Right now I’m staying at a—it was either sleep on a cot at the Emergency Operations Center, or I had a friend that works at AMR offered to let me sleep on the couch at her and her husband’s place. So I took them up on that. (laughter) It’s a lot better than sleeping on a cot.

Morgan: I was going to ask you, is AMR providing any place for people to live who lost their homes?

Ellzie: As far as providing it, no. Now, they are as far as—during the storm and during the initial phase of it, everybody stayed at AMR. That was over there. The ones that are assigned here to Emergency Operations Center, Rick Fayard and I, we stayed here. So it was twenty-one days before I got home, and it was after the storm, it was Thursday morning before I went to sleep, from Sunday morning to Thursday morning when I finally got to sleep.

Morgan: Tell me a little bit about the spirit of the people in the area. How are the people in general doing?

Ellzie: As far as the—the spirit is good. I don’t think we have to worry about them being complacent anymore. I think at the drop of a hat, more than likely, a lot more of them will get out next time. So they are wanting to rebuild. They can’t wait to get it rebuilt, so.
And after losing everything—I didn’t lose everything. I mean, I lost my car and had major damage to the house, but it’s still there. I’m still able to live in it. I can’t imagine what it would be like to live in a tent for this long. It drove me nuts just going out camping for a weekend, so I couldn’t (laughter) imagine two months later, still living in a tent. I like Sports Center too much. (laughter)

**Morgan:** Were you raised on the Gulf Coast?

**Ellzie:** No, ma’am. I was raised in Soso, Mississippi, in Jones County.

**Morgan:** Any thoughts about moving further inland than Ocean Springs?

**Ellzie:** I’m going to stay right here. I’m just like the rest of them, hardheaded, but I love the Gulf Coast. I moved down here nine years ago, and I just love it down here, and I love the company I work for. So what I’ve got, I wouldn’t have gotten up there. So I’m going to stay for a while.

**Morgan:** I would ask, what is the biggest challenge, but that’s ridiculous. So I’ll say give me the top three [challenges] in no particular order, of your job right now.

**Ellzie:** (long pause) I really—I don’t know. (laughter)

**Morgan:** It’s whatever next challenge you get assigned?

**Ellzie:** Yeah. Somebody sent me an e-mail today, “What are you planning for next?” And I was like, “I’m planning for the next hurricane. It is not a matter of if, it’s when because, you know, welcome to the Coast.”

**Morgan:** Well, how did you feel when Rita started queuing up in the Coast?

**Ellzie:** If you move to the Coast, this is something you have to live with. If you move up north, snow and ice is something you have to live with. If you move to California, earthquakes is what you have to deal with. So I mean, wherever you move there’s something you have to deal with. It’s what are you prepared to deal with and move to that area. So (laughter) in the Midwest, live with a tornado. I mean, no matter where you go, something’s going to happen. It’s just, “Can you prepare yourself for it?” I don’t think I ever prepared myself for this, and I don’t think anybody did. But this is, if you’re going to live close to the Gulf Coast or the Atlantic Ocean, that’s something you have to prepare for.

(end of interview)