Biography

Born and reared in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Mr. John Lindgren Jr. had lived in Pascagoula for forty-five years at the time of this interview. He is the father of two children, a son and a daughter, with whom he enjoys fishing, diving, and hunting. At the time of this interview, he had lived in his home for thirty-three years, and rebuilt after Katrina to new specifications that exceed the required code. He is a technical director in the engineering department at Ingalls Shipbuilding Company, having worked there for seventeen years at the time of this interview.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

JOHN LINDGREN

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with John Lindgren and is taking place on February 21, 2007. The interviewers are Kristen Wallace and Lucy Maynard.

Wallace: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project done in conjunction with the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with John Lindgren, and it is taking place on February 21, 2007, at 3:30 p.m. in Pascagoula, Mississippi, at St. Johns Episcopal Church. The interviewers are Kristin Wallace and Lucy Maynard. So first of all I’d like to thank you, John, for taking the time to talk with us today, and I’d like to get started with some background information about you, which is what we usually do in the oral history interviews. So first I’m going to ask you, for the record, if you could please state and spell your name?

Lindgren: John Lindgren, L-I-N-D-G-R-E-N.

Maynard: So when and where were you born?

Lindgren: I was born here in Pascagoula in 1961.

Wallace: And for the record, what was your father’s name?

Lindgren: My father is John Lindgren Jr.; I’m the third.

Wallace: And what was your mother’s maiden name?

Lindgren: Uvall(?).

Wallace: And where did you grow up?

Lindgren: Right here in Pascagoula.

Maynard: So you’ve lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast your entire life then?

Lindgren: That’s right. Right, forty-five years.
Wallace: And how many generations of your family have lived here?

Lindgren: My father moved here back in the late [19]50s, so there’s two generations, my father and now myself.

Maynard: OK, and why were you living here?

Lindgren: My father moved here to work at Ingalls Shipbuilding, and he worked there for many years, retired, and that’s where I work now.

Maynard: So could you please describe your attachment to this region, and what it means to you?

Lindgren: Born and raised here, I really love the Gulf Coast. I love the water, the islands, fishing, diving, doing a lot of hunting with my son, so, just a perfect place to be, great people. It’s not crowded. It’s everything you want; it’s right here.

Maynard: Um-hm, and how many children do you have?

Lindgren: I have two children; a daughter and a son.

Maynard: OK, great.

Wallace: So where was your neighborhood?

Lindgren: Down Pascagoula Street, this street right here all the way towards the beach. My house was just one, one house up from Beach Boulevard.

Wallace: And could you describe your neighborhood before Katrina?

Lindgren: Yeah. Before Katrina it was a lot of old houses built in the early 1900s. Our house was built in, I think, 1940. But a lot of beautiful, old houses, classic houses, a lot of oak trees, quiet streets. There was a school a couple of blocks away, a little neighborhood school, but—

Maynard: Is that where your kids went?

Lindgren: Yes, they did. That’s an elementary school. It was severely damaged as well. But, yeah, it’s a beautiful neighborhood, a lot of little children, no crime or anything like that. Perfect place to live.

Maynard: Is that where you raised your children?

Lindgren: Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

Wallace: Could you describe your home for us?
Lindgren: The home that I had at the time of the hurricane, I was on two lots, so I had a fairly big yard and two big oak trees in the front yard, two big live oaks, a lot of water oaks in the backyard. I had about a twenty-three-hundred-square-foot home, three bedrooms. And it had been added onto a few times, but it was a nice home and something that we enjoyed living there.

Maynard: How many years did you live in this house?

Lindgren: I moved there. It was my parents’ house. I moved there when I was twelve, and when I graduated college I bought the house from them. So I’ve been there thirty-three years or so.

Wallace: Was it affected by the flood or by wind?

Lindgren: Both. And I was in the house during the entire storm, and at first there was a lot of wind damage, broken windows and stuff like that, doors that were blown open. The doors were sheared off their doorframes. And, but there was a tremendous amount of wind, and that’s one of the—I have rarely stayed in that house for hurricanes. I’m usually somewhere else. Just the winds were phenomenal, never seen winds like that before. But the house was damaged by winds and then later by the floodwaters.

Maynard: Was your family with you at the time?

Lindgren: No, they weren’t. My family, wife and kids, were at her father-in-law’s house, which is on higher ground.

Maynard: OK, and how far away were they?

Lindgren: They were maybe three miles away, in Pascagoula here.

Wallace: And were they affected by the hurricane as well?

Lindgren: No, the water got right up to my father-in-law’s house, didn’t really go into the house, but it just got right up to it. And so they were, you know, freaking out, but they weren’t affected by it.

Wallace: OK, great.

Maynard: So you stayed in your home during Katrina.

Lindgren: Um-hm.

Maynard: So what was that experience like?
Lindgren: Well, like I said, I’ve rarely stayed in the house for hurricanes. At the shipyard, one of the—Ingalls Shipbuilding here—one of the things I do is we take ships—if there’s a ship that we’re building that can get underway and get out of here if there’s a hurricane coming, I usually go on those ships. So that’s what I’m usually doing for hurricanes. So, but this time I wasn’t doing that. We kept our ships here in port. But I stayed there, and it was just unbelievable, watching a whole neighborhood be torn apart by winds and then eventually the flood waters.

Maynard: So why were things different for this hurricane? Why did you decide not to go on the ship, or why did they decide not to send the ships out?

Lindgren: Well, we decided it looked like the hurricane was going to go quite a bit to the west of us, and the decision was just to keep the ships here in port. And we didn’t think we were going to have that much of winds and tidal surge, but you know, at the last minute the storm changed course a bit. And it was devastating for us.

Maynard: Yeah, so this ship—what happened to all the ships?

Lindgren: Oh, the ships, one was damaged severely at the dock. The other ship rode it out real well, but the shipyard itself was really torn up real bad. It was a mess, and we’re still, to this day, trying to rebuild things back in the shipyard.

Wallace: So could you elaborate for us how it was for you during the storm in your home?

Lindgren: Yeah, I got up early in the morning before the sun was up, and I went down to the beach, which is just a short walk, and the winds and waves were out of the east and—

Wallace: Was this the day before?

Lindgren: This is the morning of the hurricane, the morning of the hurricane. The winds and waves were out of the east. So there was really no, there was no waves that [were] washing up onto the road. They certainly weren’t into the yards or anything. But as the morning wore on, the wind shifted from the east to more the southeast and then eventually to the south. And as that happened, that allowed the waves to build up bigger and bigger. The winds were increasing more and more. But I went down to the beach twice to look at the waves. The second time, the waves were really up high, but they were still not really getting in. They were washing across the road, but they weren’t getting into the yards yet. But, so back at the house, later on in the morning, there were other houses that were being, pieces of their houses were being torn off, roofs and shingles, siding and stuff like that. And there were tree limbs broken off, trees that were laying down, but with all that debris flying around in the neighborhood, it became dangerous to walk or anything. But it was a lot of that debris that blew into my house and broke windows. The wind gusts were something I’ve never seen before. It would blow real hard, and the trees would lay over; the house would shake,
and then it would let up a little bit, and then you would see the trees. When it would
let up, the trees would want to right up again, and then another gust would come
through, and it would just lay them down all over again, and so the trees were doing
this. And the house was rocking back and forth, as well. And the more it did that, the
looser the trees became in the ground, the looser the house became because the house
was bending and racking. But windows started to, windows were cracked and blown
out from debris and just the wind pressure against them. That allowed rain and other
debris to come into the house. I tried to move things out of the rain that was coming
in to protect them. I had a door, a French door that was completely sheared open, and
I put a couch behind it to try to keep it closed. But I did all this and did what I could,
and then noticed eventually that there was water in the yard, but it was not in the
house yet. And then thirty minutes later I had water seeping into the house, and that
just continued to come. The water got higher and higher. There was probably—well,
when I eventually got out of the house, there was about seven feet of water in the
house. And the south side of my house had caved in from other people’s houses that
had—there was a house, a big house in front of me; that house was completely
destroyed, and the big timbers had washed into my house and knocked the south end
of my house, had knocked it down. And those timbers were coming through my
house. And my whole house had shifted, and I’m still inside of it. Then I had a little
dog; I had a little dachshund with me. But I eventually, when I swam out of the house,
it was about seven feet deep with waves coming through it because the house was
completely opened up by then. And my pet dog, a dachshund, we swam out into the
backyard, and I tried to climb a magnolia tree that was in the yard and couldn’t do that
because I only had one hand, the other hand was, I had the dog. But from there I
saw—my pickup truck had a big camper shell on the back of it, and that was just
barely above the water. Sometimes it was—there were waves washing over it. But I
got on top of the pickup truck, and then from there I saw that I had, my boat was
floating around in the backyard. It had disappeared; I thought it was gone, but I saw it
later on. And I swam and got in the boat and spent the rest of the storm in the boat
just watching the neighborhood wash away.

Wallace: So at the time was the wind still blowing?

Lindgren: Yes, it was. Yeah, the winds, at first we had very high winds. That was
the first thing that happened was the high winds and a lot of debris flying through the
neighborhood. And as the winds kept increasing, and the direction was changing more
from the east, changing to the southeast and then to the south; the winds kept
increasing. The gusts were just more and more intense. That was the scary thing were
the gusts, but then the whole time it’s doing that, the water just kept coming up more
and more and more. And I’m guessing that there was about—my property is about
twelve feet above sea level, and there was about seven feet of water on top of the
property. That’s about the worst, I think, it got, was about seven feet there, so. But I
spent the rest of the storm in the boat. I had a cabin, and in the cabin there were some
towels, I dried off. At one time I thought, “Well, I’ll give it a shot and see what
happens.” And I turned on the radio, the marine VHF radio, and the channel that you
call people on is Channel 16, but I was on Channel 16, and I asked if anybody was out

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there, and it’s kind of funny. There was a guy about five miles away at another small shipyard called Halter, and he answered that radio call, and he was somewhere over there at Halter and scared to death because over there it was just as bad. And he made comments; he thought the world was coming to an end, and I think a lot of us did. But I guess that guy did fine. But I stayed in the boat for the rest of the storm. I got out of the cabin quite a few times just to watch and see what was going on. And sitting there watching it, looking at all the houses that had been blown down and then later destroyed by the waves, all those houses, roofs, porches, refrigerators, washing machines, just unbelievable amount of stuff just floating in the water, and it’s just kind of washing back and forth. And to me it looked exactly like the videos that we saw on TV of the tsunami in Sri Lanka. It looked exactly like that to me; the whole place was just completely covered with water and debris, and that was unbelievable. But I stayed in the boat until the water was completely gone, and then the wind started to die down. And then when that happened, I got out of the boat and kind of walked down one street and another and saw some other people who had stayed in their house. It’s not as close to the beach as I am. Their house was OK, but it was a two-story house. And I talked to them a little bit, and then finally somebody came down the road that I knew, in a truck, and picked me up and brought me to my in-law’s house. That was late in the afternoon.

Wallace: So did the boat stay in your yard then?

Lindgren: The boat stayed in the yard. It was pinned up against a couple of trees, and it was damaged some, not too much. But it’s a twenty-six foot boat with a cabin in it, so. And the waves weren’t that big on the property, on the land. You could look out and see the waves that were south of—I don’t know if you’re familiar with that we have a seawall with the beach area there. There’s a concrete seawall, and then there’s the water. But south of the seawall just huge waves rolling in, but there were waves that were hitting the seawall, which is way underwater, but the waves were really confused, and they were bouncing back into each other and shooting up in the air. But those waves were huge, but the waves that were actually washing across onto land were not that high. And I was in the boat for a good bit of that. But, yeah, the waves, the waves weren’t that big, but the water just kept coming up, just didn’t stop coming. And that’s about it. And then I walked the neighborhood a little bit; everything was destroyed. And I think the next day I came back to the house with the wife and kids and showed them what was left, so. But that was about the hurricane there.

Maynard: Did you receive any injuries at all?

Lindgren: I cut my foot real bad when I got out of the boat, but it was no big deal. I just bandaged it up. I got a tetanus shot later, but yeah, I didn’t, didn’t really have any injuries.

Wallace: Why did you decide to stay in your home?
Lindgren: Well, I’ve wondered that. The forecaster that I was listening to is a guy that I know. He’s out of Tampa, and he predicts the weather for the shipyard. And his website was predicting for the hurricane that the shipyard would receive seventy-mile-an-hour winds and an eight- to ten-foot storm surge. And my house was twelve feet above sea level. And seventy-mile-an-hour winds is, we’ve seen much worse than that here. But that’s why I decided to stay because the forecaster I was listening to said it was going to be that bad for us, but then things changed, and I didn’t realize they were changing that much.

Maynard: At what point had your wife and kids gone to your in-law’s?

Lindgren: They had gone the day before. They helped me secure things around the house, swings and the lawn equipment and that kind of stuff, patio furniture. But late, I guess late that afternoon before the storm, the day before the storm, they had gone. They had packed a suitcase with clothes and stuff and had gone to the father-in-law’s house, and I just stayed there.

Maynard: Were they expecting you to come there, as well?

Lindgren: No, unh-uh. I was going to stay; they knew I was going to stay at the house.

Wallace: Was your wife worried about you during the storm?

Lindgren: Yeah, I think she was. I think she was, especially when my father-in-law’s house—her father, he lives on the water, but he’s on a pretty high piece of ground. And it’s kind of on a lake, so they didn’t see the wave action. But when they realized that the water was as high as it was, they all knew that I was having problems where I was at. If it was that high there, they knew that I was in a mess.

Maynard: Were you worried about them during the storm?

Lindgren: No, not really. The winds were out of the south and east, and then later south; but no, I knew they were OK. They were on a high piece of land. It’s a sturdy house. If the winds had been out of the north, I would’ve worried about it some, but not out of the south, just the way the land is and everything.

Maynard: Did a lot of your neighbors leave?

Lindgren: Yep, they all left; all but me. There was one friend of mine that lives down the street, and he lives directly on the beach; he stayed, and he eventually was washed out of his house, and he’s fine. But I was the—as far as on the beach, I was about the only—one myself and another guy, that’s all, the only ones that we know of. So.

Maynard: And have they come back at all, yet?
Lindgren: A lot of the people have. In my immediate neighborhood, there’s a lot of new houses being built. I have a new house. There’s some people—my next-door neighbor, that house was destroyed, and it was an older lady that was renting, and she just moved back up to North Mississippi where she has family. And she has some family here, but she just moved back up there. But there’s a lot of people whose houses were destroyed, just moved away; moved to Mobile, Fairhope, moved up to the northern part of the county. My parents had a big, beautiful house in Gautier, and it’s gone. We don’t even know where it is, and it was right on the water. But they’ve moved to a house that’s in North Gautier now. But yet in my immediate neighborhood, it’s coming back. There’s new houses going up, like I said. Houses that were repairable are being worked on. Still a lot of trailers around, though, people living in trailers still. But we’re making headway. It’s been almost, well, coming up on two years. I think it’ll still be five, six, seven years before things are somewhat back to normal. It’s a long road, but they’ll get there.

Wallace: Were you able to rebuild your house, or did you have to start anew?

Lindgren: Started all new. We had flood insurance and homeowner’s, and both of those companies declared it a total loss. So what was left we tore down, removed all the debris; my wife and I designed a new house, and we submitted our plans in October, after the hurricane. And we started on that house in January of [20]06, and by June of [20]06 we were in. So we were in pretty quick. I think in Pascagoula we were the second people to build a new house and move into it. There’s one other guy; I think he moved in in late April, and we were late June when we moved in. So we were fortunate to have a contractor who could pretty much get right on it and did a great job with it. In the meantime, we were living in two trailers on the property. My wife and I were in one trailer; our two kids were in another trailer, and it wasn’t all that bad, living in trailers. But we were fortunate to have two. There’s families of four and five that are living in one FEMA trailer, and that, that’s bad. But we were fortunate there, I think.

Maynard: Were you able to find anything in the debris, at all?

Lindgren: Not much at all. Our stuff—when those rooms were damaged from the wind and rain, I had moved everything and tried to central-locate it in the house away from windows, but eventually everything got washed away. There were some things we recovered, but as far as clothes, I think actually I had one pair of shorts and one pair of blue jeans. I didn’t have any shoes; I didn’t have any shirts. My wife’s clothes were scattered all over the neighborhood, and they were—what you knew was yours was ripped up anyway. My wife and kids, their closets eventually were just ripped to shreds from the waves, but I had taken a lot of stuff out of their closets and put them in a part of the house to keep it out of the rain that was coming into those rooms. But you can only do so much with it. But, yeah, as far as stuff left over from the storm, no, I’ve kind of said everything I own is about a year and a half old, no more than that. That includes the vehicles and all that stuff, so everything I had was gone.
Maynard: How long did it take before like stores opened so you could get stuff?

Lindgren: Well, we thought—I really thought gasoline was going to be the very difficult thing, and it was. That seemed to be the longest item to really get back on line. But I had in my boat, there was a hundred gallons of gasoline in it; so we were getting gas out of that and being careful about driving around town and that kind of stuff. We found gas stations in Alabama that were open, so we would go over there and get gas. We had friends that were bringing us gas. But as far as—you hear a lot of complaining that the federal government didn’t do anything; it’s amazing what they did for us. I don’t know—I never would’ve expected it. We never wanted anything; it was there. People helped people here in Mississippi, and I’m not sure what happened in Louisiana. But we had more ice than we needed. We were never low on ice, not really. People were giving us ice. Then the National Guard, they really did a great job of setting up a depot here at the fairgrounds, and they were giving out ice and food, the MREs [meals ready to eat] that our armed services use. Meals ready to eat, they were giving those out by boxes. And they’re good to eat; there’s some good meals in it. There’s steaks, hamburgers.

Wallace: I hear that.

Lindgren: It’s good stuff; it really is. You get tired of eating it, but it’s really good stuff. But we had—people just helped each other. We had generators. I had a friend of mine that had a business, and he had an eighteen-wheeler come in loaded with generators; so everybody that needed one, we got a generator just like that. People whose houses weren’t destroyed, who still had refrigerators, we all ganged together, and nobody had electricity; so we were barbecuing whatever food was in those refrigerators. We were cooking them every night. And it was really, it was like camping, you know. Friends, people came together that were friends of ours that lived elsewhere, like friends in Florida and relatives in Florida, they came in and brought food and gasoline and clothes and shoes, all kinds of stuff for us. The federal government was doing all of that, as well. Their people came together at the parking lots along Highway 90. Of course, the stores weren’t open, but people just unloaded tons and tons of clothes; unbelievable, because nobody had anything. But the way the people came together is phenomenal and especially government; I never would’ve thought the federal government would have done the things they did for us. It was really great. And then the Red Cross was here working on our house trying to get things out of it and just working around the house, what was left of it. The Red Cross—and that area was the most devastated area of Pascagoula, but every day the Red Cross was coming through there in their trucks that make certain noises. And they would stop and give you a hot meal and give you Coca-Colas and Gatorades, ice or anything; it was just great. One day I was working, trying to get some tools out of a shed, and I hit my back on a nail and scratched it pretty good. And my wife said, “Well, you better get a tetanus shot at the shipyard.” I told her, “I’ll get one.”, the next day at work. And so she left. And a couple of minutes later I looked, and here she was coming down the road, a lot of—because of all the dirt and mud on the road, there’s dust all behind her. Here comes her car, and there’s an ambulance right behind
her with the lights going. And she stopped; I’m watching her, and she stopped right at the house and rolled down the window, and she looked at the ambulance and said, “That’s him right there.” And she drove off, and these guys got out of the ambulance. They were from Chicago and came down here to volunteer, and they said, “Are you the man that needs a tetanus shot?” I said, “Yeah, I think so.” And they looked at it and cleaned it up and gave me a tetanus shot. But we had, volunteers came down, church groups; it was just amazing the help that we got down here. It was really neat, really was.

Wallace: When did you first hear about Hurricane Katrina?

Lindgren: You know, I guess it came across Florida. I was watching it for probably four or five days before it hit; we were watching it. But it came across Florida, and then when it comes into the Gulf, we perk up and watch it closely. But, yeah, probably four or five days before it hit.

Maynard: What was your wife and children’s reactions when they saw the house?

Lindgren: They were devastated, of course; they never would’ve thought that—the house had been there for many, many years, and it had been through [Hurricane] Camille and all the other hurricanes, Frederic, Elena, all of that that we’ve had. And nothing had ever happened to the house. We never had water in the yard or anything. So they figured that, as I did, that everything’s going to be OK. But, yeah, they were, they just couldn’t believe it and couldn’t believe the whole neighborhood. The neighborhood was gone, just debris everywhere. But they did fine; we all kind of—we’re from here, family’s here and everything, so we did fine. For a little bit we stayed in my father’s sailboat that has air-conditioning. He was out of town. And that was a big thing, was to have some a-c [air-conditioning] because, boy, it was hot. You just don’t know how spoiled you are with air-conditioning. I guess from Canada that’s not too much of a problem.

Maynard: We use it in the summer.

Lindgren: Yeah.

Wallace: How old are your kids?

Lindgren: My daughter is fifteen, and my son is twelve.

Maynard: So what happened with all their schooling during the whole thing?

Lindgren: They enjoyed it. They were out of school for about three weeks; I think three weeks, a month, something like that. It was just kind of an extended summer for them. We got them together with their friends and everything, so they played, and did their thing. But when they finally went back to school, my son had to go—his school, which was the neighborhood school, it was destroyed. So he had to go to another
school. But all his classmates went there, too; so he was still—and they were really great about this. The children that were displaced from one school to another, they kept that whole class together and the teacher, so there was no different surrounding for them. It was their same teacher, their same buddies and everything. But they did; the school system did a great job with that. Yeah, but they just enjoyed life for a couple of weeks while they were not in school.

Maynard: Did they help with the cleanup and everything?

Lindgren: Yeah, a little bit. It was mainly my wife and I trying to salvage silverware, but they would help a little bit, yeah. They just—we tried to keep them away from it. We knew it was depressing for them. But they wanted to play with their friends and everything, so we let them do that.

Wallace: So were they able to find some of their things in the debris at all?

Lindgren: No, not really. My son had a lot of toys, remote control airplanes and boats and trucks, and all that. He had a little dirt bike, motorcycle; all that was gone. He had bicycles and skateboards. My daughter, clothes, dresses, that kind of stuff, it was all gone. But they slowly—I bought my son a bicycle and bought my daughter things. You start from nothing and kind of work back again, but they knew that they weren’t going to have everything they had before, or they weren’t going to have it just like that.

Wallace: Did you stay on the Gulf Coast the entire time, or did you go away for a little bit?

Lindgren: Stayed here the whole time.

Wallace: Yeah.

Lindgren: I stayed for a while; for a while we stayed, until we had electricity and water back on. We cleared the lot off, got all the debris off of it. And we were staying near my father-in-law’s. There’s a vacant lot there; we stayed there in a trailer, but as soon as we had electricity and water back on, on my street, we moved our trailer there. And then we later got a FEMA trailer, as well. As soon as we could, we moved back there because my wife and I were busy trying to design a house and lay it out where we wanted it and that kind of stuff. But, yeah, we stayed here the whole time.

Maynard: How long did it take to get the water and electricity back?

Lindgren: It was, I’m going to say, probably a month before it was back down to that area of Pascagoula; it was probably a month. And then when we had it, it was kind of hit and miss; they were still working on things, but it was about a month before we got it.
Maynard: Was the water—did you drink the water right away?

Lindgren: We flushed it a good bit. They told us it was OK to drink. And we were getting a lot of bottled water, and the government was giving us that. But we were boiling water, too, and everything so, yeah, we did OK. I guess we probably—we were taking baths in a swimming pool. Just late in the afternoon, we’d all go get in a swimming pool. But it was probably a week before we could really get water that was from the City, water that was OK to bathe in and stuff. There was a lot of concerns about that, staph infections and that kind of stuff. But it was probably a week and a half, maybe, or something before we could really take a good shower.

Maynard: Yeah. That was probably the thing that you really missed.

Lindgren: Yeah, it was, but we’d all, late in the afternoon, we would all go—one neighbor had a swimming pool, so we’d just all go hang out in the swimming pool and just kind of a public bathtub, I guess you’d call it.

Wallace: So what were some of the luxuries that you really missed during the time you couldn’t have them?

Lindgren: Well, I think we were real fortunate. It just seemed like it was hotter than hell, and we only went—you know, in the daytime you’re doing things, but at nighttime to try to sleep when it’s that hot and humid is impossible to do. But I think we only went two nights without air-conditioning, and we were just lucky as can be because of that. We were staying on my father’s sailboat, and then we had the generator going. My father’s sailboat had air-conditioning in it, but then we finally got our trailer and got a generator, and then everything was fine after that. But you know, having to be real careful about gasoline because it’s a couple of miles from where we were staying at to our house. But to go there every day and try to do whatever you could with what was left of the house, you had to be careful about using gas. That was the long thing, was trying to get the gas stations opened up around here.

Maynard: Was it hard to find other items like toilet paper and that kind of stuff?

Lindgren: No, I don’t remember that really being an issue. I don’t remember that from the—as soon as they could, the grocery stores were opening up, and we had friends in Alabama that weren’t affected, so they were getting those kind of things for us. But I don’t remember; I don’t ever remember a shortage of toilet paper or toothpaste or soap or anything like that. I’m sure that the government with FEMA, they had just a tremendous setup over here handing out—you’d drive your truck in there and just tell them what you wanted, and they’d fill up the back of your truck. And I’ve got a big truck; they filled it up several times. I said, “Whoa, stop it. That’s enough.” But there was—all you had to do was let them know that you needed something and they would get it for you. But, no, we never really—we wanted a lot of things, but we never needed a lot of things. It was there; we had everything we really needed. It was pretty good.
Wallace: And what about communications, like phone and stuff like that?

Lindgren: That was awful.

Wallace: Did you have a hard time?

Lindgren: Yeah. Cell phones, that’s all everybody had. All the phone lines were down, so everybody’s on the cell phones; calls wouldn’t go through because everybody’s jamming it. And I remember one day; there’s an overpass that goes over Highway 90, which is right over here, and it’s kind of the highest point in Pascagoula. And everybody was on that overpass, a couple of hundred people, with their cell phones, trying to dial out and everything. But communications was tough. Yeah, the cell phones just didn’t work that well, with everybody trying to use them; I’m sure that was the problem. But, and I had relatives that were in Florida; they knew I stayed at the house, and they knew the house was gone, and they hadn’t heard from me, and they were pretty worried. But within three or four days, we were able to get word that everybody was OK.

Maynard: Were there some people that you lost touch with during the hurricane that you still haven’t been able to find out where they went?

Lindgren: No, everybody—it’s a close community, and we all know where everybody went, and everybody’s accounted for. I know one person who passed away in the storm, and he had a heart attack in his house. He had about three feet of water in his house, but he died of a heart attack. And that’s the only person that I personally know that was hurt or died in the storm.

Wallace: What have you missed most about your community?

Lindgren: Well, it’s coming back, but driving down Beach Boulevard, there were a lot of old, classic houses; that’s all gone. Every bit of that is gone. And so what’s coming back now are all modern, nice-looking houses, but the classic look of Pascagoula is gone. It’s just not there anymore, along the beach, anyway. But I miss that. In my yard I had a lot of trees that I really liked, and a lot of those died. I had a lot of water oaks that didn’t make it and some magnolias. But there’s a lot of trees that are gone; still driving around town, it looks like a disaster. There’s neighborhoods that not much has been done, weeds grown up; people aren’t trying. There’s still some of that. But for the most part, it’s coming back together.

Maynard: So when people are rebuilding their houses, are they building them in a new style, or are they trying to build them in the fashion that they were in before?

Lindgren: Everybody’s going back new style, it looks like. Everybody, because the government changed the minimum elevation for houses, everybody’s building up pretty much on pilings. But they’re doing what—so, everybody was afraid that it
would look, along the beach area, it would look like a bunch of fishing camps. But everybody that’s building is doing a good job of building on pilings, and then enclosing that so it really looks like a two-story house, and that’s how mine is. It’s up on concrete pilings, but it’s enclosed on the bottom, and that’s all garage and everything, and it’s living up on top of that. But, yeah, I do miss the classic houses; that’s gone, never see that [again.]

**Wallace:** What are pilings?

**Lindgren:** Instead of building a house right on the ground, my house is built on twenty-two columns that stick up, concrete columns, and that’s what everybody’s doing nowadays because you can’t build them right on the ground. So they have to be elevated, and the pilings are the things that hold them up.

**Wallace:** OK.

**Lindgren:** But then you build walls around that, and it kind of looks like a two-story house.

**Maynard:** Is the elevation to keep the water like from coming in?

**Lindgren:** Yeah, with this storm, FEMA has raised the minimum elevation for a house. If you’re building a new house, it has to be—it went from twelve feet to sixteen feet above sea level. And my house was right at twelve feet, and so everybody—if you’re building a new house, it has to be at least sixteen feet above sea level. So it kind of depends on where you live as to how high if you put it on pilings or not. But yeah, that was one of the big changes, and I think it’s the right thing to do. It really is.

**Maynard:** Yeah.

**Lindgren:** It really is.

**Wallace:** Are you pleased with your new house?

**Lindgren:** Oh, yes, yeah. The contractor did a great job. It’s something that my wife and I designed, so it’s what we want versus what we bought, what was available. So yeah, we started fresh, and we like it; it’s a nice house.

**Wallace:** How did not having a home affect you?

**Lindgren:** Having to live in a trailer, it made us work very hard to get a new house designed. The family became closer. We had dinners every night. If we were living in a house, my son would be over here, and my daughter’s over there, and you know, wife’s doing something, and I’m—you know, it was kind of hit and miss as to whether or not we had a dinner or not together. But the family got closer, I think; had to. And
I think the kids, the kids enjoyed it, I think, and that was the one thing that my wife and I are trying to make sure is that they weren’t down in the dumps about losing everything they had. But they all, the kids are resilient; I don’t think it affected them at all; really didn’t. They’re fine.

**Maynard:** Did you take a lot of pictures of your house after the hurricane?

**Lindgren:** Yes, we did, and I didn’t bring those. But, yes, we did take pictures, and it’s kind of depressing. It was a nice house that we had, and after the hurricane, it had fallen on the ground and debris everywhere; just looked like junk. But the whole neighborhood looked like that. But it’s starting to come back now, so we’re happy with that.

**Wallace:** Did it ever cross your mind to leave Pascagoula?

**Lindgren:** No, it didn’t. Lived here all my life. I’ve worked at the shipyard now for almost seventeen years. My wife was born and raised here. I was born and raised here. The kids—no, this is home. We had no intentions of leaving.

**Wallace:** Can you tell us about your work before Katrina?

**Lindgren:** About the same as it is now. I’m a technical director in the engineering department at Ingalls Shipbuilding. I’m responsible for—the project I was doing was a Coast Guard project—but responsible for designing and building a class of ships for the Coast Guard. The company, Ingalls did a great job. The shipyard was just demolished. But the shipyard, Northrop Grumman, did a great job of nobody missed a paycheck. We didn’t work for several weeks. They had us come in and work to clean up the yard. They could’ve laid us off for a period of time, but they knew that everybody needed paychecks, and they did a great job of nobody, nobody missed a paycheck. And then the corporation helped out with grants and loans. It’s a huge company, so a lot of the other divisions gathered up money and materials and stuff like that and donated that to the people down here. But now, the Northrop Grumman Corporation did a great job of keeping everybody taken care of.

**Wallace:** Has anything changed with your work at all?

**Lindgren:** No, not really; just seems I’ve got more work to do now, with the shipyard. The shipyard’s coming back together. It’s come a long way, and we’re doing real good now, but we’re making some improvements on things that were completely destroyed. But no, everybody that I know is back at work; they’ve been back at work. I really don’t know of anybody that lost jobs over this. The industry around here jumped through hoops to help people, and right now there’s more jobs here. Even if you just want to flip a burger, that’s ten bucks an hour. But building houses and doing any kind of work, the federal government has a lot of people here with FEMA, but nobody I know lost jobs. I don’t know anybody that lost a paycheck.
Wallace: Did going through this experience affect the way you did your job or the way you looked at it? Because you said you’re building boats for the Coast Guard, right? Did that like affect the way you did it all?

Lindgren: No, not really. It’s kind of—yeah, you know, professionally I work hard. I go in early; I leave late. I work weekends. None of that really changed. Everybody just kept on going. It seems like you’ve got to work a little bit harder these days, but no, none of that really changed.

Maynard: So what was some of the interesting or horrible or funny experiences you had during the hurricane?

Lindgren: There were, yeah, during the hurricane there was nothing funny. One story, there were a lot of rumors about people were dead; they haven’t seen them, and they got to be dead and that kind of stuff. There were rumors, just all kinds of rumors. And a buddy of mine, he told a good one; he said that there was a rumor that I had died, and somebody told a friend of mine that, and he said, “No, he’s not dead.” And they said, “Well, yeah he is because he stayed at his house; his house is gone, and nobody’s seen him.” And he said, “Well, his house is gone, and I have not seen him, but I know he’s not dead.” And he said, “Well, how do you know he’s not dead?” He said, “I went by the house; it’s gone. His boat’s in the backyard, and there’s five empty beer cans in the boat; he’s around here somewhere.” (laughter) That was the only funny thing about the storm, I think.

Wallace: So we’ve heard a lot of stories about cars being in swimming pools and bathtubs in trees. What were some of the other things that you saw?

Lindgren: Well, there was—yeah, the insurance companies are saying that we only had thirty-five-mile-an-hour winds, and that this was all flood, therefore the flood insurance should pay for everything, and that kind of stuff. If driving down Beach Boulevard in my neighborhood, there were pieces of roofs that were like forty feet up in trees, how did that get there if the wind was only blowing thirty-five miles an hour.

Wallace: Well, and you were there. You know.

Lindgren: Yeah. Yeah, and they weren’t. And I remember seeing a charger for a cell phone—you know the thing that plugs in the wall and then you have a cord on it—that was wrapped around the telephone line; it was probably thirty feet in the air, but things like that. A friend of mine found his boat a couple of miles from his house, and it was like, I think he said fifteen feet up in a tree, and it’s things like that.

Wallace: But how do you feel when they are telling you that the winds are thirty-five miles an hour, but you know that they’re not? How does that make you feel?

Lindgren: Very angry. The insurance company, I wish that it was controlled by the federal government after what they’ve done. My insurance company, I told them
everything that happened. And I understand that there’s a fine line between wind and rain damage, which is your homeowner’s. And then the flood damage is your flood insurance company. But I was in my house; well, my insurance company gave me $260, and I said, “What about all these windows that were blown in, everything in the rooms that were destroyed, the Sheetrock, the carpet, the beds, and all that?” “Well, no, here’s $260.” The insurance company, there’s all kind of lawsuits. I’m involved in that, as well. They’re horrible, and I wish the federal government would step in and do something about that. They did things that are criminal.

**Wallace:** They’re trying to get out of a lot of their responsibilities.

**Lindgren:** Absolutely. They’re trying to walk out of this. And they’ve made comments to me that, “Why should I help you with that when the federal government came in here and did that?” And my policy says that if my house is damaged by wind or rain, which it was, and I can’t live in, which I couldn’t, that they would put me in a house similar to what I was in before, for a period of time until my house can be rebuilt. And they said, “We’re not going to do that because the federal government gave you a FEMA trailer.” Well, a FEMA trailer’s not what I was living in before. And I don’t know. But there’s all kind of investigations going on. Congress was looking into it, but with everybody’s homeowner’s insurance, nothing went right down here. It was a disaster. Congress is looking into it. Yeah, it’s—everybody’s mad at them, and I’m angry with them, too. They did absolutely nothing for me.

**Wallace:** Yeah. So what would you like to see in the rebuilding of your community and the Gulf Coast?

**Lindgren:** Well, in Pascagoula—and it looks like it’s going to happen—I would like to see the beachfront developed more. Right now it’s just a concrete seawall. But there has been some grant money approved to turn that into a nice walkway and beach and everything, and there’s—the west end of the beach, a place that we call the Point, is going to be developed into a park and a river-walk and everything. So with this, there’s federal dollars. The federal government’s just been great to help out with rebuilding the communities. And Pascagoula is doing a good job of a lot of meetings about, “What do you want the city to look like going forward?” And we’re getting the dollars appropriated to help us rebuild the city. So I would like to see the beachfront—that’s where I live. I’d like to see that come back, community centers, and they’re doing that as well. So it’s all coming together, really is.

**Maynard:** So was everything pretty much destroyed in the city, like your city hall and everything?

**Lindgren:** I think 90 percent of Pascagoula was underwater; 90 percent of the buildings had water in them, or 90 percent of the area was covered with water. This is what I’ve heard. No, not everything. A lot of it—where I was at, because close to the beach we had the wind and then the rising water, tremendous rising water with the waves, but there are a lot of the communities, they just, three feet of water, and the
water just came up and just ruined everything and then left. So you just have a flooded house, but structurally the houses are OK. It was just on the beach where everything was demolished, but inland from there everything was just saturated with mud, and some houses were so badly saturated that they just tore them down. But a lot of houses are just rebuilt. They just cut the Sheetrock out and carpet and everything and kind of started all over again.

Maynard: So were there any services or stores or businesses that you had before the hurricane that you still don’t have yet?

Lindgren: Yeah, there’s some hardware, smaller stores, hardware stores, little gas stations that aren’t open. There are some, but for the most part the big guys, like Lowe’s and the Wal-Mart’s, grocery stores, they came back as quickly as they could, but there are still small businesses that aren’t coming back; they just abandoned buildings and stuff.

Maynard: You don’t think they’ll ever come back?

Lindgren: No. Somebody will buy it eventually; somebody will buy like a—there’s a gas station I know the owner of, and they’re not going to do anything with it, and but somebody will buy the building from them and turn it into another gas station. But I think for a while we’re going to have a lot of abandoned buildings around here.

Maynard: Um-hm. That must be strange to see.

Lindgren: Yeah, it looks bad, an abandoned building; the grass is grown up and looks bad; windows are boarded up; windows are broken. You’d like to see people do something with every piece of property, and that just takes time. But there’s still a lot of that, a lot of abandoned small stuff.

Wallace: So if another hurricane came through, what do you think you would do this time?

Lindgren: I’ll stay right there.

Wallace: Yeah.

Lindgren: That all depends on the hurricane. But the house we built, it’s up much higher, and it’s much sturdier, and I designed it, and I’m confident that we put a lot of steel in this one and not just wood. So yeah, I think it’s strong, and it’ll stand. So it all depends on the hurricane, but yeah, I plan to stay.

Wallace: What issues do you anticipate in rebuilding Pascagoula and the Coast?

Lindgren: Well, the issues, there’s been a lot. Everybody’s trying to rebuild; a lot of people are trying to rebuild, I should say. And there’s issues with contractors that
aren’t licensed that are ripping people off, taking money and then not showing up. There’s been some of that. I know a few people that have been scammed.

Maynard: We heard that, as well. A lady said that her friend, it was like nine thousand dollars, and the guy just took off.

Lindgren: Yeah.

Wallace: Then they found out that he was like on bail or on parole or something like that and was just making the rounds going to other communities, scamming.

Lindgren: Yeah, that should be a hanging offense. You’ve got people that are down on their luck, and then you got con artists like that, that are just trying to take advantage of it. That really, really gets me. But yeah, the challenges going forward. There’s that, and people are underinsured and didn’t get all the insurance money they thought they should have. Then you have—everybody’s having issues with the homeowner’s insurance; they’re not paying. I know the federal government’s looking into all that. But then, they did, the federal government, with what we called a grant; they’ve done a great job of that. If you qualify for it anywhere from—I know people that have gotten—well, you can get up to a hundred fifty dollars in grant if you were just totally devastated and didn’t have insurance and that kind of stuff. So the government’s helping; they really are. But the insurance company did not—just can’t say enough about that.

Maynard: What was the general attitude of people that were around here right after?

Lindgren: There was a lot of confusion, not knowing what to do next. It was tough to get in touch with insurance companies. Do they give you money to rebuild your house, or do they total it? You’re at their mercy; you don’t know what to do. The flood insurance companies did a great job of getting in here and helping everybody out. But there was just a tremendous amount of unfinished business with the insurance companies, and you can’t go forward without it. You need that money from them that you’ve been paying a policy on the whole time, and they’ve given just about everybody a bad time about it. They’ve just walked away from it. So that’s left a lot of people just confused about what to do, where to go, because these companies walked away.

Wallace: Well, also, like isn’t it illegal not to have insurance?

Lindgren: Yes, it is.

Wallace: And then even if you do, you get nothing anyway.

Lindgren: Yeah. Well, for homeowners, if you have a mortgage, then the mortgage company is going to mandate that you have insurance. If you own your house outright, you can not have it if you don’t want it. But insurance companies, where
even people that had mortgages and stuff like that after this hurricane, like in my case and many others, they paid me $260 and then cancelled me. And gave me—and it’s not that I was in arrears on my policy; they gave me a refund check for the unused portion of the policy. They paid me $260 and said, “You’re paid up until next year. Well, here’s your money back.” And that’s illegal. There was just all kinds of stuff they did, and it just really infuriated everybody.

**Maynard:** Did they think that they could get away with that?

**Lindgren:** I have no idea what they were thinking; that’s up to a judge and a jury now. I have no idea.

**Wallace:** So what have you done about your insurance for your new house?

**Lindgren:** I have insurance with another company. In fact, I have three policies now; I have flood, homeowners, and they call it the Mississippi Wind Pool that covers any wind damage from hurricanes and stuff like that. You can—insurance, for me anyway, I have a good friend who’s an agent who lives right around the corner from me. So for getting insurance, getting new insurance was not really an issue, but it just costs a lot more.

**Wallace:** Yeah.

**Lindgren:** A lot more.

**Maynard:** So do you think people are more skeptical about these things?

**Lindgren:** Yeah, there’s a lot of rumors about what insurance is going to cost in the future and stuff, and people are hesitant to build back because of that. But yeah, right now insurance is pretty hefty, but I don’t think it’ll get any worse than it is right now.

**Wallace:** How did Hurricane Katrina change you?

**Lindgren:** I don’t know. My wife says I get agitated easily. Probably so, just everything that’s happened with trying to get your life going again. The companies that you’d been paying insurance premiums, that company just walked away, and that’s made me very, very angry. But it was a tough road. The City, nothing like this has ever happened to the City, so when it came to everybody wanting to build houses again, and the City was overloaded, not sure how to do it. What are the proper houses going forward after something like this? And that was a little bit aggravating, but I think all in all the City did a good job of—they did with me, anyway—of helping to build a proper house that meets the codes. And the way we designed it, it exceeds the codes. I certainly don’t want this to happen again.

**Maynard:** Were there some people that you would say stepped up beyond their call of duty to help?
Lindgren: Yeah, there were a lot; the whole community did that, I think. For me, I was out of work for a couple of weeks, although the company paid me. But I was out of work for a couple of weeks, and during that time I had my things to do, and I needed help from other people every now and then. And they would come and offer, neighbors and friends and relatives, and they all did the same. This whole community here, everybody seemed to pitch in, and everybody wanted a lot more than what they got, but they didn’t need it. I think everything turned out pretty good for us here, eventually did. But a lot of people stepped up to the plate, especially the mayor here; he did a lot of things to help us out. If you look at things that happened here on the Gulf Coast and compare that to what’s been happening in New Orleans, it’s just night and day. It’s a disaster in New Orleans. But the leadership that we’ve had here has been phenomenal.

Wallace: Has Hurricane Katrina strengthened your community?

Lindgren: Yeah, I think it has. We’ve had people rallying together in town meetings to figure out, to propose, and vote on new parks and new community centers and that kind of stuff. And the federal government’s helping us with dollars to make those things come true, and they are. But yeah, I think as a result, the community’s a bit closer, and everybody’s working together to try to turn Pascagoula into something that’s really nice instead of something that, “Yeah, it was just Pascagoula.” But we have a chance to really update the whole community, and everybody seems to be working real well at doing that.

Maynard: Um-hm. Some people say that Mississippi was really forgotten in the whole thing, and New Orleans got a lot of the attention. Did you ever feel that at the time?

Lindgren: Yeah, I did, and that was fine with me. New Orleans got all the attention and it was, to me it was all bad. Over here in Mississippi it was, we were—a lot of people, said, “Well, their houses were just flooded; ours were destroyed.” Well, that’s, I think it’s all the same, whether it was flooded, or flooded and destroyed. But around here we just got up and said, “Well, what do we need to do here?” And we all started helping each other and had no idea the federal government was going to come in here and start helping out. So we were working hard and prepared to continue working very hard to put things back together and clear the mess up and start over again. But it seems like in Louisiana, they couldn’t do that. They just couldn’t do it. They just sat around wanting to know, “What’s the federal government going to do for us?” And over here we had no idea the federal government was going to do anything; we just went to work, I think, for the most of us, and started clearing it up and starting over again.

Wallace: There’s a lot of stories of looting and rioting, and did you ever see that, or hear about that in your own community?
Lindgren: Heard about it and kind of saw one incident, but it was no big deal, just a person who was in the neighborhood that didn’t need to be there. But there was—well, somebody stole some gas out of my boat one day, and if somebody wanted some gas, I wish they would’ve just said something to me or left a note, if it was a neighbor or something like that, just a left a note, “Hey, John, I took five gallons of gas out of your boat.” That would’ve been fine, but somebody did steal some gas out of the boat, but we had plenty. But looting, I really don’t know of that much in my neighborhood. I’m sure in others it was bad, but just not that much in mine. Now, we had National Guard and the police and everything patrolling; we had curfews, and they did a great job of that. So I really just—the only thing I know of is somebody taking gas out of the boat, and that’s no big deal.

Wallace: That’s pretty lucky.

Lindgren: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

Maynard: Did you ever feel—I think some people have described it as being martial law. Did you ever feel restricted?

Lindgren: Mm-mm, no, never did. They wanted you off the streets by like ten o’clock at night, I guess, but we would get up in the mornings and do whatever we had to do that day, just work, and by eight o’clock we were back. Before then really, we were cooking dinner; we’re tired. We’d get in the pool and cool down, take a bath in the pool, and then we’re barbecuing and drinking a beer and having wine. We had no reason to be running around at ten o’clock at night, didn’t want to. But the people that were, had no business being out that late; you really didn’t. All the stores were closed; there was no need to be out there, [without] stores open. So yeah, it was not like we were locked down. I never felt like that at all.

Maynard: So the overall mood after was pretty positive?

Lindgren: At least, yeah, I think it was. At least it was for me and my family and relatives and friends. I’m sure it was tough for other people that weren’t as fortunate as we were, whose houses were destroyed and didn’t have a place to live, had to pitch a tent, or just sleep on the ground or try to find a shelter that could take them in that wasn’t flooded. I’m sure it was tough for some people. But I really—the federal government came in here just as soon as they could and helped us out. It was just unbelievable what they did. I never expected it.

Maynard: Did you hear stories about people in shelters, at all, at the time?

Lindgren: No, I don’t know anybody. I knew people that left their houses and stayed in hotels and stuff like that, but I don’t know of anybody that stayed in a shelter. I think people that were completely wiped out stayed with friends and relatives and things like that. Everybody just helped each other. But I don’t know anybody—and I’m sure that—I personally don’t know anybody that stayed in a shelter, but I’m sure
there were quite a few that did. And that was, I’m sure, tough to stay in a shelter, but it was better than nothing, I guess.

**Maynard:** Um-hm. And were there long lines to get things?

**Lindgren:** Yeah, gas. Once the gas stations opened—one or two would open up here and there—there were long lines for that. But more gas stations would open and then, but then it all—traffic was backed up on Highway 90 pretty bad. It was just tough for the first couple of weeks, and then everything started coming back together again. But you had to plan it; it wasn’t like it used to be. You had to, you’re going to go get gas at five o’clock in the morning and before anybody else gets there; you had to do things like that because in the middle of the day would be just long lines.

**Wallace:** And did people get frustrated, or were they pretty calm?

**Lindgren:** It was a lot of frustration, I think, with the traffic and the long lines, and it was hot, but I don’t know of any fights or anything like that. I don’t think we had—I’m sure there were, but I just don’t know of any. Yeah, I don’t know of any arguments in lines. My wife was at the store a lot, and I don’t remember her talking about that. But I think everybody kind of had a cool head, as much as they could.

**Wallace:** Yeah. We’ve heard that from other people, as well, and they said that everybody was pretty polite and that they worked really hard to stay calm.

**Lindgren:** Yeah, I think they did. I think they did. It was something you had to—you had to work at it.

**Wallace:** Is there anything that we haven’t asked you that you would like to say?

**Lindgren:** No, I think that about summed it up. I would like to say that the local, the state, and the federal government did a great job of coming in and helping us. Really did. It was just unbelievable. I’m not sure what’s going on in New Orleans, but that’s their problem. But what’s happened around here is pretty good, pretty good, places coming back together. I think if everybody looks back on it, there’s people that are still complaining, but if they really sit back and look back at what’s happened, I think they’re pretty—everybody’s pretty lucky here, pretty darned lucky.

**Wallace:** OK.

(end of interview)