Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Julia W. Caruso

Interviewer: Bethany Klapwyk

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Biography

Julia Ann Williams Caruso was born in December 1928 in Fitzgerald, Georgia. Her father was Royce Williams and her mother was Martiel Paulk. Her father worked as a farmer, a pool hall operator, and a Stuckey candy store owner and manager. Her mother was a homemaker, as well as an owner and manager of a Stuckey candy store. Mrs. Caruso attended Fitzgerald, Georgia, public schools up until her graduation in 1946. She went on to attend the University of Georgia, receiving her bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Mrs. Caruso has worked as an owner and manager of a Stuckey candy store, as well as working as a teacher.

Mrs. Caruso married Luke Caruso in 1964. Together they have three children, Nancy, Royce, and Margaret. Mrs. Caruso and her husband currently live in Waveland, Mississippi. She is now retired, and her interests include traveling, playing cards, good food, and spending time with family and friends. She is a member of Delta Delta Delta sorority.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

JULIA W. CARUSO

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Julia W. Caruso and is taking place on May 7, 2008. The interviewer is Bethany Klapwyk. Also present are Myrt Haas and Luke Caruso.

Klapwyk: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project. The interview is with Julia Caruso and is taking place on May 7, 2008, at 4:25 p.m. in Waveland, Mississippi. The interviewer is Bethany Klapwyk. First, I’d like to thank you for taking the time with me today, and I’d like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you, for the record, could you state your name, please?

Julia Caruso: Julia W. Caruso.

Klapwyk: And could you spell that?


Klapwyk: Thank you. When were you born?

Julia Caruso: I was born on the eighth of December of 1928. I will be eighty years old this year.

Klapwyk: And where were you born?

Julia Caruso: I was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia. I’m not a native of Mississippi. I have lived here for over fifty years though.

Klapwyk: Wow.

Julia Caruso: So I am now transplanted. (laughter)

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

Julia Caruso: My father’s name was Royce, R-O-Y-C-E, Williams, W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S.
Klapwyk: And your mother’s first name and maiden name?

Julia Caruso: My mother’s name was Martiel, M-A-R-T-I-E-L, and her last name was Paulk, P-A-U-L-K.

Klapwyk: OK, and now can you tell me a bit about your childhood in Georgia?

Julia Caruso: Yes, I can. I lived in Fitzgerald, Georgia. I lived at—first, we lived in Fitzgerald until I was about five years old, and then my mother and daddy moved out on the farm with my grandmother, out from Ocilla, Georgia, which is O-C-I-L-L-A. They lived there for several years with my grandmother, and at that time I went back to Fitzgerald and lived with my daddy’s mother in Fitzgerald so that I could go to school. I was a sickly young lady, which you could not believe that by looking at me now. (laughs) But we had a wonderful childhood. We grew up in a town that was a very interesting town; it was located in the central part of south Georgia, and it had quite a history to it. It was inhabited by people that were from the North that had gone to Nebraska and that area, and they couldn’t make it so they came to Fitzgerald. And it’s a most interesting town. It was laid off in a square, and all of trees in Georgia were—the streets were named for the trees in Georgia or the rivers of Georgia. Then the main streets were named Grant and Lee, for the Civil War. The park there was the Blue Gray Park. And the main hotel there was named the Lee-Grant Hotel. So we always had quite a history connected to the Civil War, but it was an interesting town. And then the way that I got to Mississippi was my mother and daddy went into the Stuckey Candy business, and they built a store here in Mississippi in Bay St. Louis, and that’s the way I got transferred out here with them.

Klapwyk: Do you remember when that was?

Julia Caruso: Yes, I do. That was in 1954.

Klapwyk: In 1954.

Julia Caruso: Yeah, we came out here then.

Klapwyk: So you’ve lived there ever since?

Julia Caruso: I have lived here—no, I left and got married and went to Colorado Springs and had my first child in Colorado Springs. I was married to an Army captain. Then I had the second child, but that marriage did not last and I came back here to live, taught school, met my current husband Luke teaching school, and we had one daughter. And actually, the three children are Luke’s because he reared all three of them, and they look on him as their father.

Klapwyk: Do your children live on the Coast or have they moved?
Julia Caruso: No, I have one child that lives in Augusta, Georgia; she’s married to a doctor. Son lives in Huntsville, Alabama; he’s an engineer. The child that Luke and I had together lives in Slidell, Louisiana; she is a kidney transplant coordinator. She’s a nurse. And she and her husband and two sons came from Slidell to stay with us during the hurricane, as well as four other people came and stayed in the house with us when Hurricane Katrina was coming. Oddly enough, if Margaret had left all of her cars in Slidell, she would not have lost any cars. We had nine cars parked right outside this kitchen window.

Klapwyk: This house?

Julia Caruso: This house; we had nine cars out there. So when the water came in, it was just a shock to all of us. And in anything, if you look for it, you can find something funny, so as we stood at the window and saw the water coming in, the car trunks, horns—the trunks went up, the car horns all blew, and the windows on the passenger side, all of them went down. So cars are now made that if you get in water, you can get out. (laughs)

Klapwyk: Emergency escape.

Julia Caruso: Yeah, you can escape, and Luke’s car was parked underneath that carport out there; oddly enough, that carport stayed. It was not blown away. We did have a tornado to hit us here, in this room right there; that whole roof was taken off. We started out sitting right here in this room where you’re sitting now. And we had chairs all around in here, and we just sat and had breakfast. Margaret got up probably about 4:30 on Monday morning and made coffee because our electricity went out about 5:30 that morning. And we sat around and had breakfast, and as the wind started building up, the one window over there had a little limb from a pine tree to blow in it and break it. Margaret took a pillow, stuffed it in there to keep the rain from coming in. All of the dishes and things like that had been moved from here into the dining room where we could sit so that they would not get broken, hopefully. And we sat here, and then when that happened we decided to move to the dining room which is in the middle of the house, and we had just the youngest grandchild that we had was with us, and it was my job to play cards with him and keep him entertained so that he didn’t see and hear everything that was going on around him. Luke and Burt came in probably mid-morning before the water came in and said, “We see daylight in the living room. Is there anything in there you want to save? Because that ceiling is probably going to come down before too long.” And I told them no, there was nothing in there that we had to worry about it if it got broken or torn up, then that was it. It was a material thing; we couldn’t worry about that. And in about two minutes after I said that, the ceiling came down. And it came down just in—the furniture was—

Klapwyk: And where were you?

Julia Caruso: I was sitting in the dining room at that table then. There was not anybody sitting here. The four men—the three grown men and our grandson, oldest
grandson, were standing here looking at it, and it came down. And there were several things that were broken in there, but that’s all right, too. And then after the tornado had hit there, then we decided, OK, when that came down and the tornado had hit, we decided maybe we needed to move out to the room where the big television set is because there was bricks all around it, and we thought, OK, that would be the safest place for all of us. And we were sitting there with the men were holding that door, that back wall, they were holding it to keep the wind from blowing it in. And about that time, Jarrod was looking out of a window that was my office space at that time, and he said, “Uh-oh, Memaw, there goes the pool house.” We had an enclosed pool house out there, and it just went, shoo, flying off piece by piece.

**Klapwyk:** Wow.

**Haas:** That room’s lower, too.

**Klapwyk:** In the water or in the tornado?

**Julia Caruso:** No, water had not come in then. But I guess it was probably, I would think maybe it was around 12:30, one o’clock, early afternoon before the water came in here. And, there again, if you look for something funny, you can find it at some time or another. As the water started coming in that door over there first, Margaret’s husband hollered to her and said, “Margaret, there’s water coming in under the door.” And she said, “Wait a minute. I’ll get some towels.” Greg said, “Margaret, this is not towel water.” And about that time the water started coming in from both ways, so I came up the stairs to get up here and to go—I went to the back because they then pulled the attic steps down, and when they pulled the attic steps down, they sent me to that back room to judge at what point we were going to have to go up in the attic. There again I’m telling you the funny things that you can see and look for when you are in a bad situation; the closet door was open in our bedroom, and as the water started coming in, I’m sitting there judging by the drawer space, you know. There’s the first drawer; it’s come up to that one. It’s come up to the second one. Well, I looked, and here comes Luke’s shoes out of his closet, they were just floating around just like little ducks all in a row. (laughter) And one of the funniest things that was happening then, we’d gotten the steps down, and our son-in-law was running around asking me, “Where is the hatchet, Memaw? Where is the hatchet?” I said, “Greg, the hatchet is outside, and we can’t get out there to get it now.” And he said, “We’ve got to have a hole—we’ve got to have something to make a hole in the roof. We can’t go up in the attic if we don’t.” Well, it took us two days to realize we didn’t need a hatchet; we had a whole roof gone over the [livingroom]. (laughter) We had a tremendous hole already up there. But see, those are the things that you don’t—you know, you’re going through, you are not afraid, you are just reacting to everything that’s going on at the present time. So we live probably three miles from the beach both ways, and we probably live eight to ten miles from the river, so we were a good long way from the water. And as I said, Luke has been here since before 1947. He had been here through all of the hurricanes, and he refused to leave. And he said, “I’ve been here, we’ve never had water in this house. We won’t have water now.” So
when our son came on Wednesday to get us out of here, we were delighted to see him, to go, to go up to Huntsville with him.

**Klapwyk:** So, where’s Huntsville? Huntsville—

**Julia Caruso:** Huntsville’s in Alabama.

**Klapwyk:** OK.

**Julia Caruso:** He worked for Boeing; he’s an engineer. And he came and took us to Huntsville.

**Klapwyk:** How many people did you say were in the house?

**Julia Caruso:** There were ten people in the house.

**Klapwyk:** All relatives, or?

**Julia Caruso:** No, there was our daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren. And then you met Judy Barrett today.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Julia Caruso:** Judy Barrett and Burt were here. And then another friend and her daughter from New Orleans were here. Betty Holliman lived on the beach about two blocks from you, wasn’t it, Myrt?

**Haas:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Julia Caruso:** Judy and Burt Barrett lived between the railroad track and the beach on Lafitte in Waveland. And late on Monday afternoon, Burt and Judy said, “We’re going to walk over and see what kind of damage we have at our house.” It’s probably from here to the railroad track is probably a mile and a half, two miles. And then Burt said they topped the railroad track and they could see that there was nothing left on that side of the railroad track, so they came back. And, you know, there’s no way to describe the feeling that anyone has that has lost everything. Myrt can tell you that. Betty Holliman’s daughter Beth walked the railroad track down and went over to see their house, and of course everything there was gone, too. So, we had four people out here that just, you know, had nothing left of theirs at all. Our daughter and son-in-law were very fortunate; they did not have any water in their house in Slidell, didn’t have a tree to come down except over the fence which was, you know, that could easily be taken care of. And it was just very lucky for us because as soon as it got to the point where the wind was not blowing, it—well, I told her we lost nine cars here. But if Margaret had left her three cars at home, she would not have lost those. Then—

**Klapwyk:** (laughter) In Slidell?
Julia Caruso: Yeah, in Slidell. The—that—late that afternoon, the men started pulling the rugs out and cutting up the carpet and getting it out. We, none of us thought, “Go pull the drawers, the bottom drawers out that got wet.” We didn’t think about that, and so, of course, those all got, you know, those all were swollen.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Julia Caruso: And we left and went to Huntsville, and then our son came back down in about ten days, I guess, after he took us up there, as soon as they got electricity, and the daughter from Augusta came, and the daughter from Slidell and her two children came over, and then a couple from Hattiesburg that—no, from Jackson came and helped Royce, and they went through this house just taking what they could, getting the water out of everything. You can walk right around here—

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Julia Caruso: —to this door and open this door and look and see where the water came up here.

Klapwyk: How high, how high is it?

Julia Caruso: It shows you just there; it’s about up to here.

Klapwyk: About that high?

Julia Caruso: Um-hm.

Klapwyk: So, you never went in the attic?

Julia Caruso: Didn’t have to get in the attic. (laughter) They kept wondering how they were going to get me up those steps. (laughs) And there’s another thing I thought about. OK, if they put Eloise in a boat and floated her up on top of the house, I can swim, so I can hold on. I could just hold on and floated up and gotten to the attic, so. But you don’t think about those things until it’s all over with. (laughter)

Klapwyk: You think of so many things that you could’ve done.

Julia Caruso: Yeah, that you could’ve done. We could’ve pulled all of those drawers out and gotten those wet clothes out, but we didn’t think about that. When we left, we—they had put boards and the tarp on this hole here, and our next-door neighbor over here, Alton and Sue, were not leaving, so we just gave them the keys to the house and walked out, just left everything like it was. And we stayed in Huntsville for eight months then while Royce came down every weekend, and he came with the cousins, and we had Charles Oliver—Charles Oliver had shown up for a day or two after the hurricane and told Luke, said, “Don’t worry; I’ll get you back in your house.”
He’s a contractor, and fortunately Luke had taught him in high school. And so we were really well, well cared for.

Klapwyk: What could you salvage of the house?

Julia Caruso: What could we salvage for the house?

Klapwyk: Uh-huh.

Julia Caruso: You’re looking at everything.

Klapwyk: Yeah, wow.

Julia Caruso: You’re looking at a lot of things that—

Haas: Tell her what you did, though, when you took it to Huntsville.

Julia Caruso: Well, you see all that furniture in there?

Klapwyk: Yes.

Julia Caruso: All of that furniture we took to Huntsville, Alabama, and that was a trip to hell and back when we rented the U-Haul that time. (laughs) We rented the U-Haul and took all of that furniture and this furniture. We took everything that was upholstered. Most of it had to be recovered; some of it could just be—where it didn’t show the waterline, we had it cleaned with—

Haas: Did you take your rugs to Jackson or not?

Julia Caruso: Sent my rugs to Jackson. The couple that came down from Brandon to help Royce loaded up all the rugs and took them up there and had them cleaned, and not only did they have them cleaned, they had them wrapped, and they stored them in their garage for a year until we got back in the house.

Klapwyk: Wow.

Julia Caruso: And not only that, when we left Huntsville we had one of those trucks that’s like [Two Men and a Truck] or something like that; there were things that they picked up. They picked up all of the furniture that had been redone, and then they came by Brandon and picked up all the rugs and brought them. And Myrt’s son-in-law had come up. See, all of the floors in the house had to be completely—they had to be taken up; all the floors had to come up and be redone. So, all of those kind of things had to be redone. All the sheetrock had to be redone, and we just painted it. And, you know—

Klapwyk: It looks great.
Julia Caruso: Yeah. The doors, all of the doors had to be replaced, and we probably should’ve replaced the windows but that was something Luke didn’t think about at the time, and now he’s thinking about it and I keep telling him “No, we’re not changing those windows now. We’ll do that later.”

Klapwyk: Yeah, too late.

Julia Caruso: And we had, you know, when we moved back into the house, the inside of the house was complete—was fairly completed. We had to put furniture in that room and furniture in the back room. We could only get into our one bedroom. And then we started working on it, and then we had to have the outside done, and then we had to do the pool outside and get all those things, and the yard, which you can’t do those things when you’re not here, so.

Klapwyk: Did you have volunteers helping you with a lot of this or any of this?

Julia Caruso: No.

Klapwyk: No?

Julia Caruso: No.

Klapwyk: You did it all yourself?

Julia Caruso: The only volunteers we had were Nancy and Royce and Margaret and their children, and the couple from Jackson that came. And I say, no, we didn’t have volunteers, but we did have volunteers.

Klapwyk: But that—

Luke Caruso: The nephews had come down with Royce from, uh—

Julia Caruso: Yeah, the nephews that came.

Luke Caruso: They came.

Julia Caruso: You know, kinfolks. Now—

Klapwyk: Most people that you knew.

Julia Caruso: —while we were gone, after we left, there were some Mormons that came through that the boy next door to us had them to—there were trees that were cut down—I mean, that had come down—he did have them to cut up those trees and move them for us, but those were the only volunteers that we had.
Haas: And you didn’t ask for anybody to.

Julia Caruso: No, no, we didn’t ask for anybody.

Haas: There were too many people that didn’t have anybody.

Julia Caruso: Yeah, there were just too many people that didn’t have anything, that didn’t have any place to stay, so we just took our time and did what we could do. And we were really very fortunate.

Klapwyk: Yeah, your place looks awesome. So, can you maybe describe your attachment to the region before the hurricane and maybe how it’s changed since then?

Julia Caruso: Well.

Klapwyk: The house doesn’t look like it’s changed.

Julia Caruso: That’s exactly what our children said when they came in. See, that’s—we were so fortunate that the water didn’t come up any higher in the house than it did, so the things that were on the wall, my mother painted. Now, she didn’t do these, but she did—you’ll see the flowers, those kind of things that were done that we had before. The roses behind you, those are soap roses, and they were in the living room. I had two vases of them in the living room; one vase did get broken, but that one is left and just things like that that we were able to salvage that are—and, of course, glass has always been my love, so a lot of it did not get broken, and it could be washed very easily. Things like this; this was my grandmother’s lamp that was a wedding present to her, so we made sure that it was moved into a spot that we felt like it wouldn’t get broken. We did have one gone wind lamp in there that belonged to a friend, that a friend had given to me, and it did get broken; the globe did get broken to it. But that’s, you know, it’s just minor things, so.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Julia Caruso: The community itself, we still have so many friends here. And this is what a community is; it’s not necessarily the buildings, it’s the friendships, and those are still here. And we try to make it so that we get together and that we support each other, and that’s been very important to being in the neighborhood. Now see, being from Georgia and moved around as much as I have, I can be satisfied anywhere I am; Luke could not. He would not have been happy, even though his brother’s family and all of his children lived in Huntsville and we have a son there, he was not happy living in Huntsville.

Klapwyk: This is the place for you?

Julia Caruso: (laughs) This is the place for Luke.
Luke Caruso: This is my home. (laughter) I’m happy here.

Julia Caruso: And see, when you have, you know, when you’ve lived here—we’ve been married now forty-four years, so that’s a long time to live in one spot, and we’ve lived in this house that long, so.

Klapwyk: What sort of things that were taken away by the storm would you like to see come back?

Julia Caruso: You mean in the area?

Klapwyk: Well, even anything like buildings or businesses or something that was maybe something that you liked to see on a day-to-day basis that you can’t anymore?

Julia Caruso: Well, one thing I’d like to see is, of course, I’d like for us to have one more grocery store. And even the—you know, we are so lucky that Wal-Mart did come in and do such a good job of taking care, but you just like to have—women just like to have another place to go shop sometimes, too. And I would very much like to see the area of Bay St. Louis that was so popular with the antique shops and the artwork; I’d just like to see all of that back again. Waveland, itself, out in this area, we really are fortunate, we have so many things that have come back and are still coming back. It’s just going to take time, and it’ll never be like it was before; we know that. And in our lifetime, we’ll never see it completed, but at some point in time, it will be a very viable community just like it has been before. It’s just a way of life that doesn’t—you don’t have to rush, you enjoy visiting, you enjoy just sitting watching the water, you know, just relaxing really.

Klapwyk: And doing interviews. (laughter)

Haas: She’s already gotten that way. She’s had a nap already. (laughter)

Klapwyk: That was you. (laughs)

Luke Caruso: Just the simple things we do.

Haas: That’s right.

Julia Caruso: Right.

Klapwyk: Yeah. What sort of traditions do you have in the community that you like? I know you like Mardi Gras, St. Patrick’s Day.

Julia Caruso: Well, we definitely like the Mardi Gras; we love that. Luke loves it, particularly loves it. He’s been king twice; he was king of Nereids and king of Triton. So, we’ve enjoyed the krewes and the celebrations. And it’s just nice to live in a small community close enough to a town the size of New Orleans that we could go into.
Klapwyk: Um-hm.

Julia Caruso: And it’s going to take New Orleans a long time to reach where they were before, but you still can go there and be entertained. Our main thing is that we love to eat so many good things. We have such marvelous restaurants.

Klapwyk: Have the good restaurants come back, do you think, or?

Julia Caruso: Yeah.

Klapwyk: Yes?

Julia Caruso: I do.

Haas: Yeah, the first thing, though, were the liquor stores.

Julia Caruso: Yeah.

Haas: The second one was the restaurants, and then was our—

Luke Caruso: And the third things were the bars.

Haas: Huh?

Luke Caruso: The third was the bars. (laughter)

Haas: Well, they may have been second, I don’t know. (laughter)

Klapwyk: Same type of priorities.

Haas: The priorities are right in order.

Julia Caruso: I would very much like to see, and that will happen at some time, is when our streets are where they’re back in shape. That it’s not—you’re not running through holes and your car’s falling into things like that, but that takes time when you have the infrastructure that has to be replaced; things have to be torn up.

Haas: And low income housing.

Julia Caruso: Yeah.

Klapwyk: Um-hm.

Julia Caruso: Yeah.
**Haas:** I think that’s one of them.

**Julia Caruso:** We’ve got to have the low-income housing. I have a colored lady that works for me, and she has been with me for—

**Luke Caruso:** Forty years.

**Julia Caruso:** —forty years, probably. She’s part of my family; I mean really part of my family. And she is now seventy-four years old, and so—

**Luke Caruso:** She raised the kids.

**Julia Caruso:** Yeah. She has a sister that’s ten years younger than her, and what they do is the two of them come now, and they don’t come every day, but one of them, Betty Lee, does the cooking if we have some cooking to do; she keeps up with the washing and ironing. And then Eloise does the vacuuming and the dusting because Betty Lee’s not able to do that. But she has—she lived in the housing project, and she had lived there from the time they built them, and that was very upsetting to me and to her, both, that when those—when the storm came in, all of those were covered with water and—

**Haas:** But they were brick.

**Julia Caruso:** They were brick, and they had just been redone. And because there was not anybody here, all of that area of Waveland was being put up in housing up in north Mississippi. Then they came, the government or someone came in and just tore those down without giving them a chance to go back in and see if there was anything that they could save. And she is now—of course, FEMA is doing this for her, but the housing that she is in now is $875 a month; FEMA is paying that for her to live in a two-bedroom apartment, and that’s going to last until next March. But there’s no way that Betty Lee could pay that on her Social Security.

**Haas:** No, she couldn’t.

**Julia Caruso:** Uh-uh, she just couldn’t do that. That’s why the low-income housing is needed for this area, so that they can be charged on what they have or how much they have coming in.

**Haas:** They probably don’t know that they charge—

**Luke Caruso:** By what you make.

**Haas:** —by a percentage of your income, whatever your income is.

**Julia Caruso:** Yeah.
**Haas:** If you make $400—

**Klapwyk:** Kind of like taxes, is that—

**Julia Caruso:** No.

**Haas:** No, it’s just whatever you have for income, they charge you a percentage of that for your rent, whatever would be a normal average.

**Klapwyk:** Oh.

**Luke Caruso:** See, like maybe—

**Haas:** So that you’re not stuck with an $800 rent when you only have $400—

**Luke Caruso:** —fifteen to twenty percent—

**Haas:** —to live on.

**Luke Caruso:** —of your total income.

**Klapwyk:** OK.

**Luke Caruso:** To go to, you know, they figure out on a chart how much should go for rent, how much should go for food.

**Julia Caruso:** Actually, actually the way that they did that in that low housing thing for the people was—suppose your income was, we’ll just take $800 a month.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Julia Caruso:** Then your housing was one-fourth; they took twenty-five percent of your income, which would be like $200 a month. But there’s a lot of difference between $200 and $875.

**Klapwyk:** Yeah.

**Luke Caruso:** Yes.

**Julia Caruso:** See, so—

**Luke Caruso:** That’s like an extra $675.

**Julia Caruso:** Right.

**Klapwyk:** That sounds like a lot of money for rent.
Julia Caruso: Well, it is, but that’s exactly what’s going on. And at the Circle K—

Haas: And so far they haven’t made any move towards—

Julia Caruso: No, and see, I took Betty Lee over to—well, it’s not HUD [Housing and Urban Development]; it’s called DMHA or HP or something like that, and they told her—

Luke Caruso: That FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] was stopping—

Julia Caruso: —FEMA was through paying for it and that this program would pick up; it’s a HUD program, and this program would pick up until the first of March next year.

Klapwyk: Next year.

Julia Caruso: But that there would be no more—there would be nothing else coming in after that. So, I’m wondering what’s going to happen to all those people.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Julia Caruso: And then the Katrina houses, they’re saying by then that they’re going to pick up the Katrina houses.

Klapwyk: Um-hm.

Julia Caruso: I don’t know whether it’s Bay St. Louis and Waveland that are against the Katrina houses, but, you know, they are like the shotgun houses that were here for years.

Haas: She just picked up on that.

Julia Caruso: Uh-huh.

Klapwyk: Um-hm.

Julia Caruso: And that really has been very helpful to a lot of the people that are here, so.


Julia Caruso: Yeah, it looks just exactly like a shotgun house.

Klapwyk: Yeah.
Luke Caruso: You could put a little lattice work around the bottom.

Haas: Yeah.

Klapwyk: There you go.

Luke Caruso: Tie them down.

Klapwyk: This is relating to what we were just talking about, but what’s your opinion—this is a fun one—of local, state, and federal politicians after the hurricane?

Julia Caruso: Well, you cannot, unless you were here and could see the things that were going on, you really could not judge. I think, in my opinion, and that simply is because we were—everything that we did worked out well for us. I think that they did as much as they could possibly do under the circumstances. You know, there was just—this was such a catastrophe that no one ever anticipated what would be needed here or anywhere else as far as that goes. There again, as I said, we were very fortunate to have our daughter and her children and son-in-law that were with us, because when the water came in, the water that we had saved to use—of course it was—it all had the river water that got into it. I had said we don’t have to worry about taking baths, we’ve got a tub—a swimming pool out there that’s full of water that if we have to take a bath, we just get out there, but we couldn’t use that water. We could not use that water for anything but flushing the toilets. All of the drinks that we had sitting in the coolers, they all got contaminated. But our daughter Margaret knew, and her son, who happens to be an Eagle Scout, knew what to do about sanitizing, so we were very lucky on that. There were a lot of people that weren’t. But you could see that all of the neighbors were coming together and helping out with everything that they could possibly help out with.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. Was anyone in the house injured—

Luke Caruso: Well—

Julia Caruso: No.

Klapwyk: —when it happened? No.

(phone ringing)

Julia Caruso: Excuse me just a minute.

Klapwyk: Yep.

(There is a brief interruption and telephone conversation not recorded as part of this interview.)
Klapwyk: What problems do you anticipate in the rebuilding of the city?

Julia Caruso: I think that we covered that when we talked about the low housing.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Julia Caruso: And I do think that we need to do something about the flood level, the FEMA flood map that they’ve got that so that the houses are going to be entirely too high because—

Haas: Unnecessarily.

Julia Caruso: Yes, very much so unnecessarily. You can ride around and see those studs that are there, the top of the houses are gone, so it didn’t make any difference how high you put them up if the wind’s coming in, which it’s going to; it’s going to take those houses.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. Were you here in 1969 when Hurricane Camille hit?

Julia Caruso: Yes, ma’am, in this very house. And oddly enough, we only had one window broken in it. It was not that window; it was a window in our bedroom.

Klapwyk: And that’s all that happened, really?

Julia Caruso: Well.

Klapwyk: Well.

Julia Caruso: We didn’t have water.

Klapwyk: OK.

Julia Caruso: Of course we lost shingles, and we had—my mother lived across the street in that red brick house. She had twenty-seven pine trees down in her yard, not a one of them hit her house. We had two pine trees out in the front here at that time, and I had told Luke before Camille came in, I said, “Luke, I think we need to have those trees cut down, they may hit this house.” And he said, “Julie Ann, pine trees bend. You don’t have to worry about that.” So when the eye of the hurricane passed directly over our house, we opened the doors and walked out there. Luke said, “Come see your bending pine trees.” They were laying right there. (laughter) And one of them went right by the corner of that house, did not hit the house.

Haas: Oh, you were lucky.

Julia Caruso: And the other one was right in the front door. (laughter)
Luke Caruso: Missed it by a good six inches.

Julia Caruso: Yeah.

Klapwyk: So, is there any last things you’d like to share?

Julia Caruso: I just am so glad that I got to meet you, and I can tell you this, we have all told Luke Caruso (laughter) that if we’re living and we have another hurricane, that he will have to stay here by himself. There will be no one with him. That he can either come go with us, or he can stay by himself. (laughter) And since he has congestive heart failure, I think he’ll go with us or die. (laughter)

Luke Caruso: And I’ve been in every one since 1932; no use in breaking the string now.

Julia Caruso: Yeah, uh-huh, we hear you. (laughter)

Klapwyk: All right, well, I think that’s it.

(end of interview)