Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Kate Greene

Interviewer: Stacy Ahua

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# Table of Contents

- Getting ready for Hurricane Katrina ................................................................. 1
- Falling trees ........................................................................................................ 1, 3
- Creek surge inch from door ............................................................................... 1, 3
- Tree falls on garage ........................................................................................... 2
- Evacuation issues ................................................................................................. 2
- Leaving Hattiesburg after Katrina ........................................................................ 2
- Crane removes fallen trees .................................................................................. 3
- Coast house utterly gone ...................................................................................... 3
- Reconnecting with family on Coast ...................................................................... 4
- First fly-by video of Coast after Katrina on WDAM ........................................... 4
- Lack of media coverage of Mississippi after Katrina ............................................ 4
- Restoration of electrical power ............................................................................ 5
- Neighborhood residents help each other after storm ........................................... 5
- Getting around on bicycle after storm .................................................................. 5
- Police presence after storm ................................................................................ 6
- Rumors of looting .................................................................................................. 6
- Emotional fallout from Katrina ............................................................................. 6
- Hurricane Rita ....................................................................................................... 6
- FEMA ................................................................................................................... 7
- Lessons learned .................................................................................................... 7
- Camp Sister Spirit, Ovett, Mississippi ................................................................. 7
- Red Cross ............................................................................................................. 8
- Loss of phone service ......................................................................................... 8
- Suicides in New Orleans ...................................................................................... 9
- Convention Center, Superdome, New Orleans ..................................................... 9
- National Guard .................................................................................................... 9
- Importance of decompressing after disaster ....................................................... 10
- Honoring loss and grief ....................................................................................... 10, 14
- University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, after Katrina .......................... 11
- Teaching fall classes ............................................................................................ 11
- Katrina’s effects on airlines ................................................................................ 13
- Insurance issues .................................................................................................. 14
- Casino issues ....................................................................................................... 15
- National Flood Insurance Program ..................................................................... 16
- Hurricane Camille, 1969 ..................................................................................... 17
- Rebuilding ............................................................................................................ 17
- Nature reserve/park for mile and a half north of beach ....................................... 17
- Biloxi’s insurance on casino revenue ................................................................. 18
- Global warming, catastrophic climate change issues ........................................... 18
- New Orleans after Katrina .................................................................................. 19
- Race relations, race and class issues .................................................................... 19
Hua: Basically, I just want to start by asking kind of what you did to prepare, if anything, because I know a lot of people didn’t really prepare for [Hurricane Katrina] because they didn’t know. But if anything, how did you prepare?

Greene: Yeah. I always have, like, thirty gallons of water stored in the house in gallon jugs. And so I had water and flashlights, and I made sure I had batteries and a radio. And I filled up the bathtub. I forgot for this one, but for Ivan, I remembered to fill up the washing machine, too, as a source of water basically for flushing toilets, and that’s what the bathtub water was for. And you know, you made sure that everything that could fly around was inside, so there wasn’t anything left in the yard. Like I take my swing down, and I move the picnic table up against the wall, and move the chairs up against the wall. Like my bird feeders and everything, they all had to come down. And that’s pretty much what I did. Put the cars in the garage, as best we could. And so that was kind of how I prepared.

Hua: Were you here? Did you stay here during the entire storm?

Greene: Yeah, stayed here.

Hua: And so you heard when the tree fell on your garage?

Greene: Yeah. Actually, the first tree that fell missed the house, came right across the front of the house, and I watched it fall. We saw it fall, but it missed the house. And we spent most of the hurricane in the hallway. And it was me, my roommate, Bethany, the five cats, and I had also with us my friend, Kathy Clark(?), who, I went to high school with Kathy in Ocean Springs, and her son, Colin(?). So it was the four people and the five cats. Actually, we had six cats because we had another friend’s cat, as well. And we had spent most of the time in the hallway. And it started, you know, the wind started dying down a little bit, so we started kind of going and looking out the windows and everything. Like the backyard, the creek had actually overflowed into the backyard, and it was only like an inch from coming in that door right there. And so we were all kind of like standing there, freaking out over that, and then all of a sudden just wham! And not only did you hear the tree, but the light in the garage, the fluorescent light fell down and broke, so you could hear the shatter of the
fluorescent bulb. And right after it fell, we were just kind of—it was still a little too windy to really go outside, so we just waited, and about five minutes after it fell, I guess, maybe not even that long, my neighbor came running over to the house—Bart Driscoll(?) is his name—to make sure that we were OK. And we were like, “Go home, Bart. We’re OK. You don’t have to come out.” (laughter) Because it just fell on the garage, it didn’t really do any—didn’t put any holes in the house or the living part of the house. So yeah, but it was pretty scary.

Ahua: As far as you know, did most of the people in the neighborhood stay at home, or did they leave?

Greene: Yeah, Tommy and Alicia(?) across the street, I think, were in Petal with some family, but as soon as the storm was over, they left. They actually left town because they have two very small children, an infant and a two-and-a-half-year-old. But I think the rest of us were here, but most of the people that had kids, or real small kids anyway, left right after the storm.

Ahua: Do you think you would’ve stayed if you had known what it was going to be like?

Greene: Well, I’m not staying next time.

Ahua: Yeah. (laughter)

Greene: Probably not. I’m not going to go far. My plan is actually to camp out in the Liberal Arts building (laughter) because that’s where my office is. But yeah, I’m probably not going to stay in the house. I mean, if it’s going to be a Category Three. I might stay for a Category One, but anything above that, I’m heading somewhere else where I don’t have to worry about trees crashing down on my head.

Ahua: How long did it take for somebody to come and look at the trees and come and get them off your garage?

Greene: It was just a couple of days. Of course, it took a couple of days for the guys to cut us out of the neighborhood, so they had to do that before anybody could come in. But we had the tree off the house by Friday because we left on Saturday to go spend a couple of days in (inaudible) to get gas and to get the cats out of there and get some air-conditioning, too. And Bethany’s parents live up there. So I guess it was like four or five days. A lot of the people got, the guys with their chainsaws, the local neighbors got their trees off their houses, but mine was too big, so I had it approved and had a crane. I’ve got pictures. I know the tape recorder can’t see them. Like that’s the Weather Channel forecast for—

Ahua: God.
**Greene:** But this is the tulip poplar that actually took out my river birch that was right there, and so this is kind of like two trees that had come down. And of course that’s the pine tree right there. See, here’s the backyard. Can you see this? I’ve got more light.

**Ahua:** Oh, that’s—

**Greene:** That’s the creek.

**Ahua:** —that’s there. Oh, my God.

**Greene:** Yeah, that’s the creek that’s behind your house.

**Ahua:** Awesome. Goodness, I thought that was actually inside the house.

**Greene:** Yeah. But this is the tree right there, and this is just what the garage looked like. Of course, we got the cars out and everything. I’ve got some actual pictures of the guy who took the tree off. How come these are all stuck together? This is not good. OK, I’ve got them off. (knocking at door) Just a second. Let’s see if I got the rest of them somewhere. See, there’s the crane lifting the tree off. It must be in the other one, but you can see it was a pretty big tree. Actually, everybody thought that the tree next to it was the one that was going to go. That was Bethany’s car. Eager Beaver Tree Service, I mean, I had to hire them. Now, these are pictures from Bethany’s grandmother’s house on the Coast. As you can see, it no longer exists.

**Ahua:** Wow.

**Greene:** She’s just up—they were just up from the beach.

**Ahua:** Nothing but the foundation.

**Greene:** Nothing but the foundation. She found a few little pieces of stuff that she brought home with her. But, yeah, just gone. And these are all—well, you saw it. And this was during the storm. That’s when the tulip poplar fell, and that’s also down on the Coast. And there’s the tree; that’s the tree on the house.

**Ahua:** (Inaudible)

**Greene:** Yeah.

**Ahua:** How long was it before you got to the Coast?

**Greene:** Actually, Bethany’s mother showed up Tuesday night. I mean, so it was just the day after the storm, and [she] said, “We’re going down to the Coast, and you’re coming with us.” And she didn’t really want to go. But my friends who had come up here, Kathy and Colin, they didn’t actually have a car, and they’d been dropped off by
her family because Kathy’s legally blind. And so Kathy wanted to get home because she had left her cats and dog at home. And so we got Bethany’s mom to take Kathy and Colin home, but Bethany had to go with them. And so that’s when she went down because I haven’t been down there yet. I’m not ready.

Ahua: How long was it before you talked to any of your family?

Greene: Let’s see. Well, my cell phone was working. I mean, you had to, you know do it a lot. But I think I talked to my family by Tuesday, the day after the storm.

Ahua: Pretty fortunate.

Greene: Yeah, yeah.

Ahua: Did they know kind of to what extent we’d gotten damage here?

Greene: Yeah, my brother had actually, beforehand, like Sunday, had tried to talk me into leaving, and I said, “There ain’t no going anywhere at this point.”

Ahua: Right.

Greene: Yeah. And yeah, they were—I mean, they knew that we got hit hard. They knew how strong it was when it hit the Coast, but I mean we, yeah, we kind of had to explain to them, (inaudible).

Ahua: Yeah. When you went to Jackson, did you see on the news any broadcasts of Hattiesburg?

Greene: No, not about Hattiesburg. I mean, that’s what we did not see at all and still haven’t really seen, except the local stuff. But Father Tommy, he had a generator, and so we actually, the day after the storm, we were able to watch WDAM. So we saw that first fly-by video when the helicopter flew by the Coast. And my mother, I think, within a couple of days had seen that. But, yeah, there wasn’t much about Hattiesburg at all.

Ahua: I’ve talked to other people about it, and you can’t seem to figure out where—we’re at such close proximity with the Coast, why people wouldn’t at least assume that it was damaged.

Greene: Because we’re a hundred miles inland, and that’s not where the big story is. I mean, sure, we have a major catastrophe here, as well, because of the infrastructure being wiped out, but we didn’t have whole houses or the whole beachfront wiped out, the whole town wiped out. We weren’t (inaudible). I mean, what pissed me off was all the coverage that New Orleans got when it flooded, and it’s like they completely forgot about the fact that the entire Mississippi Gulf Coast had been wiped out.
Ahua: Yeah. So you think kind of that because you’re kind of not the Coast—we’re farther inland; we were supposedly safe—that the news focused more—

Greene: Yeah. We weren’t the big storm.

Ahua: Right.

Greene: Yeah.

Ahua: Do you think that that affected a lot of how fast we recovered? Because I know a lot of people have said that, they dispatched people to Hattiesburg and the Coast immediately, but you know it took forever to—

Greene: Well, my friend, Kathy, got her power back in Ocean Springs, her power and her cable and her phone before we did. I mean, she had power by Saturday after the storm, and we didn’t get power until Thursday of the next week. And I just got my phone just this afternoon. Of course I had my cable for a couple of weeks now. But, yeah, I mean, she got stuff down there, but of course she was also in Ocean Springs, right in the heart of town, which probably looked more like Hattiesburg.

Ahua: What do you think was the biggest help during kind of the week after?

Greene: The biggest help for me was just the neighbors in the neighborhood and Father Tommy, feeding us. I mean, he basically fed us for about ten days until the power came back on. That’s one of the things I talk about in my narrative. The guys were cutting us out of the neighborhood with chainsaws, and we couldn’t go that way because of the gas leak. We couldn’t go east, but we got so we could drive out back (inaudible). And then the tree guys started coming in, so we were able to get the trees off the houses and tarps on the roof and that kind of stuff. But just kind of having a neighborhood here because the day, that Wednesday after the storm, Bethany was on the Coast, and so it was just me here with the cats, and you know how hot it was. And I had ridden up to school to feed my feral cat up there, and on the way back, instead of coming a way where I knew I could get through, I tried to come a different way. I also wanted to stop and see if I could find that friend of mine, and I ended up having to kind of bushwhack my way home with my bicycle. So I’m like carrying my bike over big pine trees and stuff like that. And I got back, and I tried working a little bit in the yard, and I just, I hadn’t eaten a lot. And I got faint, and my hands went numb. So Bart, my next-door neighbor, he took me to the hospital. I had (inaudible) plus it was just as hot in the hospital, but I got some ice and was able to cool down a little bit, and the feeling came back in my hands. So I never actually saw a doctor there, but he was concerned. He thought I was having a heart attack. And like Patricia went with us to go get the generator at Sam’s just in case we needed to have a Sam’s card. It turned out we didn’t. And so we just got a lot of help from all the neighbors, and that meant a lot. I was really sad when the power came back on because everybody just went back into their houses.
Ahua: Yeah. You got to know a lot of people when they were outside with their chainsaws and four-wheelers, backhoes. So understandable. I didn’t see a lot of kind of enforcements, police authority or anything like that.

Greene: Oh, yeah. We didn’t see cops in here for a long time. I think it was after they started picking up debris before we saw the police.

Ahua: Why do you think that is? I haven’t figured it out.

Greene: I don’t know because one night—well, you know the DA [district attorney] lives just down the street, and apparently the people on the other side of him had seen people just kind of wandering around the neighborhood at like two o’clock in the morning, and they called the police because it was a curfew. They were breaking the curfew. And the police never showed up.

Ahua: I guess that (inaudible) the next question is how you think they handled it. (laughter)

Greene: I don’t think they handled it well, at all. But I mean I don’t know what else they were doing in other places. But they didn’t show up to check on us.

Ahua: Do you know anybody that had like a problem with people coming to their house and looting?

Greene: No, I don’t, but we heard lots of rumors. But I don’t think I remember anybody saying that they had something missing.

Ahua: It was probably one of the hardest weeks, I think the week after, physically. But emotionally, how did you deal with this, or could you deal with it?

Greene: Well, I guess I was just kind of still numb, and just trying to survive, especially with the heat and everything the week or so after. But I, well, I’m a rape survivor. And that loss of physical security that kind of came with this brought up a lot of old things for me. And I didn’t like drink or anything like that, but I slept a lot, just coping—I needed to be around people. That was kind of why I kind of, when everybody went back in their houses—as long as I was like around people and everything, I could keep it together. But in fact, when [Hurricane] Rita was coming through, I mean it just kicked everything right back into me. I mean, I was a nervous wreck. Well, actually, one of the first things I did was once I knew I was able to get out was, I called and made an appointment with my therapist. I rely on her when I’m stressing and I’m not dealing with (inaudible). That’s who I call. But I tried not to drink because actually the day that I got sick in the heat was I’d had a couple of drinks with Father Tommy, and I think that dehydrated me.

Ahua: Yeah. Kind of from a political aspect, how do you think, for the future if this ever happens again and for some reason you’re not prepared or some other place is not
prepared, how do you think it should be handled as opposed to the way it was handled here and on the Coast?

**Greene:** Well, I mean, I really think politically the biggest problem that we’ve had here is the response, not to like Hattiesburg or the Coast, but to all those other people who live out in the countryside, in between. I think FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] could learn a lot from the power companies because I mean, that’s what we did see. Right? As soon as they were able to come in here, they were in here; they were working. And they were coming from all over the country to do it. And so clearly there was some kind of coordination, some kind of plan, and I don’t think that our government really had a plan. And I really think the people who have been neglected the most are the people who are kind of like out in the counties, in the countryside. My friend, and actually somebody you should interview about all of this is Andie—let me give you her number—out at Camp Sister Spirit. Has Ember ever told you about Camp Sister Spirit?

**Ahua:** Unh-uh.

**Greene:** About twelve years ago, a couple of lesbians from the Coast bought an old hog farm up in Ovett, which is—you know where Ovett is?

**Ahua:** Yes.

**Greene:** And the idea was they were going to hold their annual fundraiser there, the Gulf Coast Womyn’s Music Festival. And when the neighbors found out that Camp Sister Spirit was run by lesbians, they started getting death threats, and the locals tried to sue them as a nuisance, and all kinds of—I mean it was just pretty scary, actually, for a while. And anyway, Andie still lives out at the camp. I mean, it’s still there, and the very same people who were trying to kill them twelve years ago, ended up coming to the camp because Andie had places where they could sleep, had generators, had food, and clothes, and things, because they keep a clothes bank and a food bank at the camp. But anyway, she was very angry because the Red Cross was coming in, once a day into Ovett and serving meals, but they weren’t giving the people—most of the people up in there, nobody really lives in Ovett. Right? You live outside, in the county. A lot of these people were running out of gas and didn’t have money because they couldn’t get [it]. The banks weren’t open, and all that kind of stuff. Not that they needed money for the food, but they didn’t have money to get gas. And so getting into Ovett every day was not really reasonable for them. So one day there was a Red Cross truck driving through Ovett, and Andie pulled the car out in front of it and got out and told them that she wanted whatever was in their truck, (laughter) and that they needed to, instead of just coming in and feeding these people once a day, they needed to give them food that they could take home with them. And the guy was like, “Well, we can’t do that. We’ve been told where to take this food.” And she says, “You’re not moving without running me over.” And so the guys finally decided to just let her have the truck. (laughter) So they just opened it up, and the people that were there were able to actually get food and take it home with them and stuff. So Andie’s somebody
you might want to talk to. I’ll give you her—why can’t I remember her last name? Anyway, you just need to ask for Andie. This is the number for the camp, and I’m pretty sure—I mean, I’ve called her, so I know that—but anyway, so she’s got stories she can tell you about like how the people who were trying to kill her actually came to get food because they were—and water and stuff. But my big thing is learning from her just how the people out in the countryside, it took them a lot longer to get their power back than it took us. A lot of them couldn’t get out of where they were to get to the Red Cross, to get to FEMA, and I think that was the big thing. And politically, I mean FEMA just didn’t seem to have its act together in terms of coordinating and getting things to where they needed to be.

Ahua: (Inaudible)

Greene: Yeah. So like I’ve been telling my students what I think is whoever does the logistics for the power companies needs to get a job with FEMA.

Ahua: (laughter) (Inaudible) I think it was, it was only about two weeks that we were without power.

Greene: Right.

Ahua: And cable came the week after that. (Inaudible)

Greene: Right. Yeah, I was mad at my friend, Kathy, because she got cable like a week before me.

Ahua: (laughter) Well, one of my teachers lives out on Jefferson, and he said he never lost—he lost power, but he never lost his phone line; like he could’ve been making phone calls during the hurricane.

Greene: Yeah. Well, my neighbors, some of my neighbors didn’t lose theirs. I lost my lines because the tree took them down. It disconnected them from the house. But like a lot of my neighbors had phone service until, like, a week ago, and then when they started coming in to—

Ahua: They cut it off.

Greene: Yeah.

Ahua: Yeah, right. There’s a girl that lives up on this street, and they have, everybody in their neighborhood had cable, but when they came to put the cable up, they cut the lines. So nobody else on this street would get it.

Greene: Oh, man.
Ahua: I kind of laugh at it every day, when I come in and listen to my own TV. I forgot what I was going to ask.

Greene: That’s OK. I can’t remember Andie’s last name. (laughter) I’ve know her for years.

Ahua: Oh, that’s it. It was whenever we got back to school, I was talking to one of the teachers that’s helping me do this project, and I didn’t know because I hadn’t been watching the news or reading the paper, that there were suicides by two officers that were working in New Orleans, and they couldn’t—

Greene: They couldn’t cope?

Ahua: Yeah. I don’t know that anybody really has an answer for it, but how do you think that, especially like law enforcement and the people that are working with the power companies, and everything, should be better, I guess, prepared emotionally for it?

Greene: Yeah. I mean, you can try to get people trained and get them prepared a little more, but they weren’t ready for New Orleans. I mean, I think they all kind of knew that it might flood. Right? I mean, we’ve been watching things on the Discovery Channel for years about if a big hurricane hits New Orleans, it’s going underwater. I think what they weren’t prepared for was the fact that the Convention Center wasn’t even supposed to be a shelter, and all these people were there, and then the mess at the Superdome, and then the crazy people going out and looting and all that kind of stuff. And the fact that you (inaudible) that on top of the fact that they probably lost everything, as well, then emotionally—I don’t know. I don’t know how you prepare somebody for something like that. I think we should try, but you’d have to talk to a psychologist about that.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: And maybe if we were a little better prepared for the possibility of social unrest and all that kind of stuff, it might’ve been easier for them. I think that—what I don’t understand is why it took the National Guard so long to get in because I was in Ocean Springs for Hurricane Fredrick, 1979, and I can remember the day after Fredrick—this was a Category Four, but we were on the west side, so we were on the easier side. I can remember the day after Frederick that the National Guard [was] in Ocean Springs, not a lot of them. You maybe only saw two or three, but you knew that they were there.

Ahua: It took a while (laughter) for us to see anyone (inaudible).

Greene: Oh, I know. We didn’t see police. Yeah.

Ahua: One guy drove down our street one day, and that was it.
Greene: Yeah.

Ahua: We didn’t see anybody else.

Greene: I never saw any military coming through Hattiesburg.

Ahua: What do you say, or would you say to the people that live in rural Mississippi or that lived on the Coast or that lived in New Orleans, in the Superdome or still in the Astrodome, that have lost everything, that they don’t know where their family is, that they don’t know what (inaudible)? What do you say to them, as someone who’s been through the same thing that they have but—

Greene: Just not as bad?

Ahua: Right.

Greene: Well, to find somebody to talk to. I mean, that’s what my therapist is for, is somebody I can talk to. And then one of the things I’ve learned in all the experiences that I’ve had over the years is that—and I really haven’t even done it for this experience yet; I have not done the crying that I need to do. I’ve done some crying, but I haven’t done all my crying, yet. You got to let your emotions out, and you got to talk about it, and you can’t pretend like it didn’t happen, or pretend that’s not going to happen.

Ahua: Right. (laughter)

Greene: But you can’t pretend like it didn’t happen. And I mean, it doesn’t have to be a therapist. It can be your friends. It can be your family, but you need to talk about, and you need to recognize that whether you’re just like me and you just had a tree on your garage, or if you’ve lost everything, that that is a loss, and it’s something that you got to grieve, and you got to let yourself do it. And so that’s what I would say is, you got to talk about it, you got to cry about it, you got to find a way to laugh about it, too, but you don’t really heal until you do those things. It’s like my therapist after my rape; I’d go in every week, and she would go, “OK. Tell me what happened; tell me the story.” And I’d go, “What?” She goes, “Every detail, tell me what happened. Walk me through it.” And for weeks we did this, and I finally, I’m like, “Why are you making me do this?” And it’s because I had refused to cry. OK? But I had walked around feeling, like, completely dislocated. I’m trying to make a long story short, but I was kind of disassociated during the rape, but not completely. And I was for, like, months after the rape, it felt like I was kind of, my body was here, but kind of, I was over here. And finally one day as I was telling the story, I finally broke down and cried and admitted, “Something bad has happened to me, and I have the right to feel sad about it.” And I cried. And when I walked out of that session, I was back in my body, and then I began to heal. So you got to let the stuff out, and it’s going to come out.
in that you’re going to be frustrated, and you’re going to be bitchy (inaudible). (laughter) You know?

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: So you got to get it out; that’s what I’d say. And just acknowledge that this is an awful—(brief interruption)

Ahua: Since you work at USM [The University of Southern Mississippi] and you’ve been back, how organized do you think they’ve been so far as just getting things back on track or back on schedule?

Greene: Well, you know, USM Hattiesburg hasn’t had much of a problem because, I mean, they had power back on before Forrest General [Hospital] had power. And everything’s pretty much back to normal up there, but I just spoke actually yesterday with one of my colleagues from the Coast, and they’re supposed to start classes on Monday. The administration all has offices and stuff, but the faculty have no offices and have lost a lot of their stuff. And he’s just kind of like, “What are we supposed to do? We can’t hold office hours because we don’t have any offices. They don’t even have a place where we can hold office hours, if we needed to.” And apparently it’s all pretty crazy down there. Of course there’s a lot going back to the campus than going to the hospital than we thought. (laughter) Those are the good things now, but apparently what they’ve done is they’ve taken care to make sure that all the administrators have what they need and not really to make sure that the faculty and the students have what they need, so. But that’s just a (inaudible). I can’t believe they’re actually going to try to have (inaudible).

Ahua: That’s what I was going to say. Do you really think it’s a wise idea to try to go back in that kind of a situation?

Greene: I actually feel like we came back about a week too soon. My first week back, especially then when we also had Rita coming, was just—I wasn’t ready. In fact I tried to teach on the first day. I did actually go in and teach. I only have one class. And I just walked out of it going, “That just wasn’t right.” And I realized that what I should’ve done was just gone in and talked to the class and just let them—so the second day, when I met my Tuesday/Thursday classes, that’s what I did. We just talked about the storm, and I told them about how I felt about it. And I also, well, I’m always encouraging them, “You’ve got to go talk to someone over there. If you need somebody to talk to, if you don’t want to talk to your friends or your family, then talk to them.” And then so when I went back to my Monday/Wednesday/Friday class, on Wednesday, instead of teaching, I did what I did with my other classes on Tuesday, and that really helped. It kind of allowed me to—just trying to get back into teaching didn’t work. So talking about it, that helped. So I was able to kind of, to get back into teaching. And now I’m pretty much into it.

Ahua: Yeah. Did you have a lot of new students, or have you seen a lot?
**Greene:** I’ve got two or three students who are Coast students that have just moved up here, but that’s about it.

**Ahua:** And do you know—

**Greene:** But they don’t wear signs. (laughter)

**Ahua:** “I used to live on the Coast.”

**Greene:** Yeah.

**Ahua:** Do you know if the schedule for the year, the rest of the year is pretty much the same, or did they—

**Greene:** Well, they took away our fall break, and we have to go like an extra week and a half. So classes don’t really get out until—or your last exam is on the twenty-first of December.

**Ahua:** Are the (inaudible) the same?

**Greene:** They’re still working out (inaudible), like we don’t even have an exam schedule yet.

**Ahua:** (Inaudible)

**Greene:** Of course, I haven’t looked on the Web site. They may have put that back now (inaudible).

**Ahua:** (Inaudible) Were the high schools in the district that have lost the three weeks or fourteen days—how do you think they should handle that? Because I know there was—

**Greene:** Some of those days are built in (inaudible).

**Ahua:** Yeah.

**Greene:** I don’t know. Maybe go an extra week, but I don’t think you should make them go an extra three.

**Ahua:** Yeah, because I know Laurel has already taken away a week of their Christmas Break. So it was pretty well right up until—

**Greene:** Yeah, they’re going to (inaudible).

**Ahua:** Um-hm.
Greene: Yeah. I mean, I get out of class; my last exam is—or I don’t know when my last exam is, but the last exam scheduled (inaudible) is the twenty-first, and I’ve got to go pick up my mother who’s coming for Christmas on the twenty-second. So I don’t get a break. (laughter)

Ahua: Does she live in Hattiesburg?

Greene: She lives in Toronto.

Ahua: Oh.

Greene: Yeah.

Ahua: Wow. You drive to pick her up?

Greene: No. I drive to Jackson to the airport to pick her up. (laughter)

Ahua: Oh, I know, yeah, that would work, but—

Greene: She was going to fly into New Orleans, but no, that’s not going to happen. Well, maybe by then New Orleans Airport, I mean it’s open, but I was supposed to fly out of New Orleans next week—I’m going up to Chicago—but I changed it. Well, actually I was just about to change my reservations when I got the e-mail thing from Southwest saying, “We canceled your flight.” (laughter) And I’m like, “Well, gee, no kidding.” (laughter) So I just had to switch my flight to out of Jackson.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: Instead of New Orleans.

Ahua: But do you go out of Jackson normally?

Greene: Well, normally I would’ve flown out of Jackson, but I was meeting my friend. Kathy’s going up with me. We’re going to my brother’s wedding.

Ahua: Oh.

Greene: And so it was going to be easier because she would go to, she just had to get herself to New Orleans from Ocean Springs, and I would go down and meet up with her, but now I’ve got to get her up here, so I can get her to Jackson.

Ahua: You mentioned something earlier about having (inaudible) and somehow in the whole situation, and that being part of the kind of healing process for everybody.

Greene: Um-hm.
Ahua: Where do you think that people can find that? Because I know just for days, it was nothing but you work, you work, you work until you’ve got everything done, and you go to sleep, and you do the same thing and—

Greene: Right.

Ahua: —there’s no room emotion, really, just—

Greene: Well, Father Tommy tried to keep things kind of lighthearted. And I don’t know. I mean, I’ve only been able to really laugh in about the last couple of weeks, and this week, only once I started feeling better. I’ve been feeling bad (inaudible). (laughter) When I get sick, you might as well just lock me in a room. But it’s hard to find humor, but you do the best you can, wherever you can find it.

Ahua: I heard recently, more so than I did three or four weeks ago, about people donating, celebrities donating all this money to all these causes, and a lot of the time I kind of doubt how that money is used. How do you think that it’s going to be used? Or now that they know that things like this happen in places like Hattiesburg and Ovett and small towns, how do you think they will have to reroute?

Greene: I don’t know. I mean, I was wondering about that myself, about how that money is going to be used, and what it’s going to be useful. I mean, do you just find somebody who’s lost everything and hand them a check?

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: I mean, I don’t know. I mean, like me, I haven’t gone for, I haven’t applied for any aid because I have money, and my insurance is rebuilding my house. That’s what insurance is for.

Ahua: Right.

Greene: But I mean for the people who don’t have insurance, I mean, what do you do? I mean, even if you give them thirty thousand dollars, that doesn’t rebuild their house. I mean, I don’t know. I don’t know where the money’s going to go. I don’t know how they’re going to get it to people. I think that’s something that is a debate that needs to take place politically among the American people. I mean, we’ve heard a lot of people out there who’ve said, “Oh, well, you should just forget about New Orleans.”

Ahua: Right.

Greene: And that’s not going to happen.

Ahua: Yeah.
Greene: You can’t do that.

Ahua: (Inaudible) (laughter)

Greene: Well, nobody just forgot about Chicago when it burned down.

Ahua: Right.

Greene: We’re not really prepared. I mean, we go through questions that we have to ask ourselves. I mean, the state is dealing with it a little bit; like they’ve decided now that we could put the casinos on land.

Ahua: Yes.

Greene: Of course, I’m mad at the casinos because what they should’ve done with those barges, they knew those barges were not going to survive those hurricanes. They should’ve sunk them, and then they wouldn’t have ended up where they ended up. They would’ve sat in the water.

Ahua: Right.

Greene: Because I mean, they’ve lost everything in them anyway. What difference does it make whether you’re pulling it off of the Holiday Inn, or whether you’re pumping the water out and closing it?

Ahua: Who knows how much damage they did to other things when they—

Greene: Right. I mean like Holiday Inn might’ve actually been there. (laughter) And you know the Grand [Hotel and Casino] came really close to taking out that Catholic Church [St. Michael’s], that wonderful Catholic church on the Coast.

Ahua: (Inaudible)

Greene: Yeah, well, because like if you look in the pictures, you know that clamshell church? Have you seen the pictures of it? I mean, the Grand is like kind of right behind it. I mean, it could’ve easily just taken it out.

Ahua: I’m so amazed that they’re actually not in the water. [They’re on] the highway there. Kind of surreal.

Greene: I know, and they had them tied.

Ahua: There was a lot of talk last week, maybe, that I was watching about how a lot of insurance companies aren’t covering the flood damages or the surges for a lot of people on the Coast.
Greene: Right.

Ahua: And that the attorney general—

Greene: Yeah, that’s something we also need to—that’s a debate we need. Well, I mean, we need to decide. I suppose if you live—we do have the National Flood Insurance Program.

Ahua: Um-hm.

Greene: I suppose if you live where a hurricane comes, then you should have flood insurance even if you’re not right on the water. But at the same time, why is it that they’ll pay if a tornado comes along and blows your house down? If the hurricane just blows your house down? But they won’t pay when the water from the hurricane takes your [house]. I mean that doesn’t make any sense to me.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: And that’s a debate we need to have. But I also think that the insurance companies are the spawn of the devil, so. (laughter) The insurance companies and Wal-Mart. (laughter) I mean, I use them because I need them.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: And actually my insurance company, State Farm, has always been, they’ve been very good to me. I had a house fire when I lived over on Jamestown Road, they took good care of me then, and it’s been a little slow this time. When I had the house fire, I was probably (inaudible) that week, whereas (inaudible).

Ahua: Everybody was, yeah. Well, what do you think makes the insurance companies and the tree companies, and everybody else that’s supplying the people, the victims, what do you think makes them—I mean, I know it’s for profit because they know that we’re willing to pay whatever it takes to have certain things, but why, in times like this when people are at their worst, when things are at their worst, that they would do the things that they did?

Greene: Well, I mean part of it is because when you have storm like this, OK, that is so catastrophic, I mean, when you have all—there’s the full length of the Mississippi Gulf Coast pretty much wiped out. Insurance companies, I mean, the sums of money that they’re going to be expected to pay out is unbelievable. And if you cover all that stuff, it’s just going to bankrupt them, and that’s not good for them, and it’s not good for us.

Ahua: Right.
Greene: And they’ve learned that lesson from the hurricanes in Florida. I mean, State Farm will not insure houses in Florida anymore because they can’t afford it. So I mean, I can see their perspective on it, and that’s where I think the government comes in, but you’ve got to remember I’m a socialist, anyway. I think that we should have a National Flood Insurance Program that’s actually a good program, that isn’t expensive. I mean, it’s to everybody’s benefit to be able to rebuild, and if you don’t have the insurance to do that, you’re not going to be able to rebuild, so.

Ahua: How long do you think it’s going to take to actually rebuild? I mean, I know a lot of places in Hattiesburg is already, they’re up and running.

Greene: You mean like the Coast?

Ahua: Right, and even the smaller towns.

Greene: Well, when I moved to Ocean Springs it was 1970, the year after [Hurricane] Camille. And I mean, it was still recovering then. It probably took ten or fifteen years before it was really kind of, before there were really no signs of Camille left except for the tugboat in Gulfport. It’s going to take that long, and there’s a part of me that thinks we should just (inaudible). “Here’s the beach.” OK? “Let’s have a huge park that runs the length of the beach, and you can’t build a thing.” (laughter) Let’s just have a big park (inaudible) along the beach, and you can build north of that.” Right? But that’s crazy socialism. (laughter) Nobody’s going to do that because we all want to live on the beach. But that’s what I would do. I would just say, “OK. No building within half a mile of the beach. We’re just going to have a big, huge covered park, so we can all use the beach and enjoy the beach, but you can’t put a building on it.” And then when the hurricane comes, we’d just have to plant new trees.

Ahua: I’ve never understood why people stay in Florida during all these hurricanes. What makes people stay like they did on the Coast? They build on the Coast when they know that even though—

Greene: Because it happens so rarely. I mean, like it’s been thirty-something, thirty-five years since Camille. Right? So that’s half a lifetime before we get our next one. We hope.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: Though that’s not what the weathermen are saying.

Ahua: Yeah.

Greene: So if it does turn out that we are going to have more and more, and they’re going to be worse and worse, then I think that (inaudible) start thinking about moving, just not developing the coastline.
Ahua: How do you think that’s going to affect kind of Mississippi’s economy considering that that’s a lot of—the profit that they get from casinos?

Greene: Well, nobody’s ever going to go with that. (laughter)

Ahua: Right.

Greene: Yeah. The casinos will rebuild. The city of Biloxi—I don’t know if you saw it in the paper—were smart enough. A couple of months ago, they bought an insurance policy just in case the casino revenue was wiped out.

Ahua: How can you do that? (laughter)

Greene: Isn’t that convenient? But the casinos are going to come back. It didn’t take them that long to build that place up. It’s not going to take them that long to build it back. The Beau Rivage is apparently pretty much OK. So probably what they ought to do is hire the guys who (inaudible) the Beau Rivage, and they’re going to rebuild, and now, they’re going to let them rebuild on land. Now, see I liked Biloxi when it was just a sleepy, little shrimping town. The only advantage of Biloxi the way it is right now is that we get more entertainment. More bands will come and shows and things like that. We’re (inaudible), and we’re Americans. We’re going to rebuild it. I asked that question in my narrative. When are we going to figure out that sometimes rebuilding isn’t the answer?

Ahua: Yeah. Any final words just kind of retrospectively on the whole experience? It’s been quite, quite an experience.

Greene: Well, I hope that, I just really hope that we learned something, that we take the time to kind of think about all the different things that, like, our use of fossil fuel and that it’s causing global warming, causing the bigger hurricanes. I mean I became very conscious. I mean I’ve always been conscious. That’s why I ride my bike is burning fossil fuel, gasoline and oil and all of that kind of stuff, and I try not to do it. I even feel bad about using a powered lawn mower. But we need to think about that. But I also air-condition my house. I wish that we would think a little bit more about the community and the neighborhood and that we didn’t just lock ourselves in our houses. I liked it when I was hanging out with my neighbors.

Ahua: Um-hm. You met some of them. (laughter)

Greene: I think this storm has clearly brought up, we got to figure out what the government needs to do. We got to figure out what we expect the government to do, and how they can do it. And we need to think. I do believe that race and class aren’t things that we often think of. A lot of people were saying, “It didn’t have anything to do with race in New Orleans.” Well, you can’t really separate race and class. It was a class thing. Right? I mean it’s the poor people who couldn’t get out of New
Orleans, who suffered, and it’s mostly the poor people who lost everything because the rich people who live in the Garden District, they didn’t get flooded.

Ahua: Right.

Greene: A lot of the other areas where the whites live didn’t get (inaudible). I mean, so we need to think about those things, and we need to think about the rebuilding of the city. What are we building on? What are the consequences? We do things for money, without thinking about the long-term consequences. And I hope what Katrina and Rita have done is get us to think about those things a little bit more.

Ahua: Well, thank you.

Greene: You’re welcome.

Ahua: For taking time and sharing this with us.

Greene: Well, I’ve got other people I’ll send your way.

Ahua: That would be wonderful.

Greene: OK.

Ahua: Thank you.

Greene: You’re welcome.

(End of interview)