Biography

Laura Clare Thompson Creel was born December 9, 1920, in Biloxi, Mississippi, to Mr. Christian Armand Thompson (born February 24, 1876, Hancock County, Mississippi) and Mrs. Marie Daudart Cailliavet (born December, 1878, in Biloxi, Mississippi), who were married September 4, 1904. Her father was a general construction contractor. As a young man he lived in New York City for a brief time where he took night classes in engineering and construction at Columbia University. He then returned to Mississippi to work. His father, Mrs. Creel’s Grandfather Thompson, was born in Denmark and came to Mississippi with two uncles who settled in Biloxi and Hancock County, Mississippi. Mrs. Creel’s mother was a musician whose family originated in Bordeaux, France, and came to Biloxi from New Orleans after residing for a time in Martinique. Her mother played the organ at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church. She spoke fluent Parisian French, and after she was graduated from high school, she was a milliner and seamstress in Biloxi for a time.

Mrs. Creel attended Catholic schools in grades one through three, and then she attended Howard I and Lopez Elementary School, and Biloxi High School. On June 26, 1938, she married Mr. Cecil B. Creel (born in Biloxi, Mississippi, on August 18, 1916). They were married in Biloxi, Mississippi. They had four children, Diane born in 1940, Karen Sue born in 1946, Cecil Jr. born in 1950, and Laura Clare born in 1954. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Creel had eighteen grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

During World War II, Mrs. Creel worked as a civilian employee, driving staff cars and trucks for the Army Air Corps. She was a homemaker with four children, and she became a realtor and started selling real estate in 1973, which she continued to do for twenty-five years before retiring. Her principal interests are being a harmony singer in the Sweet Adelines, her Roman Catholicism and membership at St. Thomas Catholic Church in Long Beach, Mississippi, and she is most proud of her four children.
Table of Contents

Family ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Careers ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Education ...................................................................................................................................... 4
Children...................................................................................................................................... 5
Father .......................................................................................................................................... 5
The Hurricane of 1915 .................................................................................................................. 6
Families of parents........................................................................................................................ 6
Caillavet Street history.................................................................................................................. 9
The Hurricane of 1947 .................................................................................................................. 10
The Buena Vista Hotel .................................................................................................................. 10
The Hurricane of 1916 ................................................................................................................ 11, 15
Highway 90 as a shell road ......................................................................................................... 11
Shoreline of Mississippi before the building of the seawall ....................................................... 12
Port of Gulfport, circa 1920s ....................................................................................................... 13
Casinos on the barrier islands ................................................................................................. 13
Construction of the seawall ....................................................................................................... 14
Ocean Springs Bridge, circa 1930 ............................................................................................. 14
Trolley car on Highway 90 ......................................................................................................... 15
Time spent on the waterfront as a child, circa 1920s ............................................................... 15
Hurricane Camille, 1969 ........................................................................................................... 17
Camille’s damage to Long Beach home ................................................................................... 18
Government presence to maintain law after Camille ............................................................. 18
Getting ice after Camille ......................................................................................................... 19
Electricity after Camille .......................................................................................................... 19
Communal meals after Camille .............................................................................................. 20
Memories of Coast’s recovery from Camille .......................................................................... 20
Avery Island, Louisiana ............................................................................................................ 20
Building St. Thomas Catholic Church ..................................................................................... 21
Barge destroys St. Thomas Church, 1969 ................................................................................ 21
Hurricane Katrina, 2005 ........................................................................................................... 22
Evacuation to Mobile, Alabama ............................................................................................... 23
Loss of family homes.................................................................................................................. 24
Coffins in the Mississippi Sound .............................................................................................. 26
Returning to DeLisle from Mobile after Katrina ...................................................................... 26
FEMA .......................................................................................................................................... 27
Amish/Mennonite Christian Aid Ministries ............................................................................ 29
House built two years after Katrina ....................................................................................... 30
Insurance issues ........................................................................................................................ 30
No flood in home during Camille ........................................................................................... 32
Living in a FEMA trailer ......................................................................................................... 36
Communal eating after Katrina ............................................................................................... 37
Church services at St. Thomas after hurricanes ..................................................................... 38
St. Stephen’s Catholic Church ................................................................................................. 38
Deaths of friends........................................................................................................................ 39, 46
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

LAURA CLARE THOMPSON CREEL

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Laura Clare Thompson Creel and is taking place on May 19, 2008. The interviewer is James Pat Smith.

Smith: This is an interview with Mrs. Laura Clare Thompson Creel. The interview’s primary focus will be Hurricane Katrina, but Mrs. Creel is also a resident of Long Beach, who lives within a short distance of the beach and was present in Hurricane Camille in 1969. The interview is conducted on May 19, 2008, at Mrs. Creel’s Katrina cottage, her temporary home at Pass Christian, Mississippi. Actually, the cottage is sitting behind her daughter’s house in the DeLisle Community in Pass Christian. The interview is conducted by James Pat Smith of the USM [University of Southern Mississippi] History Faculty. Mrs. Creel, could you tell us your name and today’s date and where we are?

Creel: Do you want age, Pat?

Smith: I’m going to ask you that in a minute. I’m just getting you warmed up.

Creel: I’m Laura Clare Creel Thompson and—what was the next question?

Smith: What’s the date today? May 19?

Creel: May 19.

Smith: Two thousand eight.

Creel: Two thousand eight.

Smith: OK.

Creel: I need to be prompted.

Smith: There you go. Well, we have too many, too long a list of questions.

Creel: OK.

Smith: Now here’s the question that you didn’t want to answer. What was the date of your birth?
Creel: December 9, 1920.

Smith: And how old does that make you now?

Creel: Eighty-seven.

Smith: And your place of birth?

Creel: Biloxi, Mississippi.

Smith: And your current address?

Creel: [The address of the interviewee has not been included in this transcript in order to protect her privacy.]

Smith: Washed out means that’s where your house was destroyed?

Creel: Right.

Smith: OK.

Creel: And presently, as Pat said, I think I’m in the rear of my daughter’s property, and I’m in a Mississippi cottage.

Smith: Oh, Mississippi cottage, not a Katrina cottage.

Creel: Well, Mississippi Katrina cottage.

Smith: OK. And the address here is?

Creel: [The address of the interviewee has not been included in this transcript in order to protect her privacy.]

Smith: So had you had a cell phone before Katrina?

Creel: No.

Smith: So you were evacuated to Mobile, and you needed a cell phone because that’s the only thing that worked.

Creel: In years to come they will improve upon the cell phone, but for the present I think it’s a marvel.

Smith: Great. What was your spouse’s name?
Creel: Cecil B.

Smith: Cecil B. Creel.

Creel: Creel.

Smith: Do you know the date and place of your marriage?

Creel: Yes, vividly. It was June 26, 1938, in Biloxi.

Smith: Biloxi.

Creel: We’re both Biloxians.

Smith: And where did the wedding take place?

Creel: Let’s see. In the rectory of The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because my husband at the time was not a convert, and we were married by the priest in the priest’s home. Later he did become a convert, too late for us to marry in the edifice.

Smith: OK, he was an ex-Baptist?

Creel: Yes.

Smith: OK, your husband that is, not the priest.

Creel: Yes. (laughter)

Smith: Do you have the date of Mr. Creel’s birth?

Creel: It was on August 18, 1916.

Smith: And where was he born?

Creel: Biloxi.

Smith: What occupations have you pursued during your lifetime? You raised a large family.

Creel: Four children.

Smith: Four children. What other occupations besides that big one?

Creel: I was a very, very young bride and did not work until a period of time during World War II when my husband was in the service. And I worked at Keesler, and I was in the motor pool driving—I drove recon [reconnaissance], whatever recon was,
staff car and a half-ton truck for a period of maybe six months. Then later the next employment was much later in 1973. We’re jumping from 1944 to 1973 was my next job, and it was after my father had died. My father lived with us in his later years, and after he died, I took the real estate course with Harry Joachim. And for almost twenty-five years, twenty-three, twenty-five years I was employed in the real estate and enjoyed the company of my husband after he retired from civil service, and he joined me for the last three years of his life.

Smith: And are you currently retired or are you employed?

Creel: I’m retired.

Smith: You’re not really retired; you’re rebuilding a house.

Creel: True.

Smith: Where did you go to school? Talk to me about your education background.

Creel: Um-hm. Well, I began in the Catholic schools, and then, I think about the fourth grade I went to public school in Biloxi, both the old Howard One, Lopez, and then to Biloxi High.

Smith: Do you have other interests besides your family, the jobs that you described? What activities or organizations have you been in that might help someone understand the way you view the world?

Creel: Hmm, well, I didn’t do any community service to speak of. I guess mine was more of a selfish nature that I enjoyed the singing four-part harmony, a cappella with the singing group that was on the Coast of the branch of Sweet Adeline.

Smith: Oh, I see. That’s great.

Creel: And my daughter, also, joined me at one point and time.

Smith: Very good. Let’s see, your religious affiliation you said is?

Creel: Roman Catholic.

Smith: Do you have any awards or honors that you think would be—that someone should know about?

Creel: Not really. I don’t think I ever received an award or an honor, not scholastically, not socially.

Smith: Oh. What’s the thing in your life—you’ve lived eighty-seven years—what’s the thing in your life that you’re most proud of?
Creel: Children, my children.

Smith: OK. Could you list your children’s name and their date of birth or the year that they were born?

Creel: Yes. Diane is my oldest daughter. She was born in January of 1940; she was the prewar child. Then the postwar child, the next child was also a girl, and her name was Karen Sue. And the next child, she was—

Smith: What is Karen’s date of birth?

Creel: Oh, I’m sorry. September 26, 1946. Next child was born a boy, Cecil Jr., and he was born in Denver on April 25, 1950. And then the youngest child was named, is my name, Laura Clare, and she was born on April 10, 1954.

Smith: Very good.

Creel: Also proud of my grandchildren, who number ten, and great-grandchildren who will soon number nine.

Smith: Great. I won’t ask you to list all of their dates of birth.

Creel: I don’t remember their dates of birth. I could give you names, but I couldn’t give you the dates of birth exactly.

Smith: You’re proud of them.

Creel: Yes.

Smith: Great.

Creel: I could give you present ages.

Smith: What was your father’s name?

Creel: My father’s name was Christian Armand, A-R-M-A-N-D, Thompson.

Smith: OK. Do you know his date and place of birth?

Creel: Yes. He was born in Hancock County, and he was born in February 24, 187[8].

Smith: Do you know the occupations that he pursued during his lifetime?
Creel: Yes, I do. He was a general contractor. And in his youth, he was about nineteen, I think, when he was involved with the timber being loaded at Ship Island before the Port of Gulfport. And then he met some young men there from Rhode Island, two brothers, and he went with them to Rhode Island and New York. And while in New York for a brief period of time, even though he had a very, very little formal education, he attended night classes at Columbia in engineering and construction, not drafting, but he had been in the militia, Mississippi Militia, before he went to New York with the two brothers, and had he been home, he would’ve been a Spanish-American War veteran, but his sisters wepted and wailed and hollered when he wanted to join the regiment, so he was not with Teddy Roosevelt. However, he lived his life as one of Teddy’s biggest fans; he was his hero.

Smith: Great. And he lived to be?

Creel: He lived to be ninety-four. And his life in Biloxi was totally in construction; he was a general contractor. And first in the harbor-building [in] Biloxi during World War II. And during World War II he did a lot of construction, marine construction for the L and N [Louisville and Nashville] Railroad. And he did, also, some construction such as the fire stations that were built. He was the contractor for the Biloxi Yacht Club that was built in 1916, because I think the [19]15 Hurricane had wiped out the yacht club. I think the yacht club that he was involved with was built in 1916, and it remained intact until Camille.

Smith: Very good. Do you know any general background about your father’s family?

Creel: Ooh, yes. It might take all day. My Grandfather Thompson was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, and came to America with his two uncles. His name was—well, they said his name was Mason Admus Thompson. He was a thirty-third-degree Mason, but we think that the Admus is a contraction of Admussen Thompson. And his two brothers buried—he was buried in the Bay St. Louis Cemetery, he and my grandmother, but his two uncles were buried in the Biloxi Cemetery; they were older than he. And I even went, one time while in Washington, went to the Library of Congress and tried to see the immigration of the Thompson men, and I couldn’t find it, but we had correspondence that he corresponded with the sister who had remained in Denmark. Her name was Dorothea. And he came to Hancock County. He was also in Biloxi with his uncles, owned property there. Nap Cassibry said he was a very successful man and owned quite a bit of property in Biloxi.

Smith: Nap Cassibry’s a local historian—

Creel: Local historian.

Smith: —of some repute, Napoleon Cassibry.

Creel: Napoleon Cassibry.
Smith: What was your mother’s maiden name?

Creel: My mother’s maiden name was Cailliavet, and the Cailliavets go back to Bordeaux. And they were the, the family—

Smith: Bordeaux in France?

Creel: Bordeaux, France. And the family was researched by the brother—what’s his name?

Smith: And there’s a Catholic genealogist that—

Creel: Yeah, he’s done—

Smith: —has done a lot of work; I can’t think of his name this moment.

Creel: I can’t either, right now, I’m sorry. Brother Jerome [Lepre].

Smith: Yes.

Creel: Brother Jerome Lepre, and he researched for the Biloxi Genealogical Society; he researched the Cailliavet Family, and they went back to before the Revolution in France. And my grandfather left France and went to Martinique, the French colony, and then to New Orleans. And his mother came, and sisters, and they settled in New Orleans. And how he got over to be involved with [Margurite], my great-great-great-grandmother, I guess, who was a Fayard, John Fayard—I mean Louis Fayard’s daughter. But he did get over, and then his mother joined him, and it’s an interesting genealogy that Brother Lepre did.

Smith: And your grandmother’s full name was?

Creel: Marie Daudart, D-A-U-D-A-R-T, Daudart Cailliavet, but Daudart. She was a Daudart from New Orleans.

Smith: Your mother’s—that’s your mother or your grandmother?

Creel: My grandmother.

Smith: And your mother’s full name?

Creel: Her name is Laura Clare Thompson.

Smith: OK. And do you know your mother and father’s date and place of birth? Your mother’s date and place?
Creel: My mother’s was the same year as my father, only she was December of [18]78.

Smith: OK. Do you know the date that your parents were married?

Creel: Yes, they were married September 4, [1904].

Smith: And the place they were married?

Creel: In 1904; I’m sorry. They were married in Nativity Church in Biloxi.

Smith: OK. Do you know, did your mother pursue any occupations beyond seeing that you got raised?

Creel: My mother, she told me what she—her occupation. Well, she worked at the old Duelon, which was a department store, when she was very young. After she graduated, she did millinery work, made the hats. But she was mainly a very accomplished musician. She was educated by the nuns, and the classes at that time, I think there were like five girls who had like three nuns teaching them. So she spoke fluent French, and she wrote and read French, and she was the organist all her life at the church. She didn’t sing, but she taught music, she had students.

Smith: Do you recall in the Cailliavet family people speaking French at home during your lifetime?

Creel: My grandmother and my mother conversed in French. I don’t think that the other girls picked it up as much as my mother did, but my grandmother and her maiden sister, who helped raised her children who lived with the family all of her life, the two sisters conversed totally in French with each other. They could speak English. And they were not of the Cajun-French sector.

Smith: They have several different French origins in the South.

Creel: Right, you had the—

Smith: French-French, Cajun-French.

Creel: Right.

Smith: Carolina-French.

Creel: Right; didn’t know about Carolina-French.

Smith: Well, they’re French—

Creel: All right.
Smith: —who went to Carolina before—

Creel: Oh, OK.

Smith: —the West Indies or Louisiana. Just as a curiosity here, many people your age heard French spoken at home as they grew up. Do you remember much French being spoken in Biloxi as you grew up?

Creel: Not too much unless it was possibly the people in North Biloxi, I would say, kept the French. And I guess a lot of them had come from Louisiana, also. But down where I was living, the only people I remember speaking French were my grandmother and her sister.

Smith: OK. And is the Cailliavet Street in Biloxi, is an important boulevard getting bigger every day.

Creel: Yeah. (laughter)

Smith: Does that connect to your family?

Creel: Oh, yes.

Smith: Where did you grow up?

Creel: I grew up just one street away from Cailliavet Street, and it was my great-great-grandfather’s property. He lived across the Bay. He was Louis Fayard’s son-in-law. Louis Fayard owned the stretch that’s Fayard Street, and his son-in-law bought the property next to him that was Cailliavet Street. And in my lifetime, Cailliavet Street went from the Back Bay only to Howard Avenue. It wasn’t till later when they had the urban renewal and sold all the beautiful homes in Biloxi that they shouldn’t have sold that was south of Jackson Street, but that’s when they opened it to the beach, and my aunt cut the ribbon.

Smith: Very good. Well, most of what we’re going to think about today has to do with the storm and storms. How many hurricanes can you remember—

Creel: Well.

Smith: —going through—

Creel: OK.

Smith: —since 1920 when you were born?
Creel: Well, the storm was four years before I was born in 1920. It was the year my husband was born, 1916, so I missed that one. And then the next one was in 1947, so I would’ve been, what? Twenty-seven, twenty-seven when 1947 came. We were living in Biloxi upstairs in my dad’s home, and Diane was seven and Karen, my next daughter, was just walking at one, and we lived very near the Buena Vista [Hotel]. The Buena Vista property and our backyard adjoined, and so we were in the first block off the beach.

Smith: Now, today this area would be in the shadow of the Beau Rivage Hotel near—

Creel: It would be in the shadow of the overpass.

Smith: —near I-110/90—

Creel: I-10.

Smith: —connect, interconnection.

Creel: Right, because they removed the hotel when they did that, did the overpass. I remember part of the Buena Vista being built; that must’ve been, maybe, maybe 1925. I can remember that wing being built. But before then, in my mother’s lifetime, we lived on Cuevas Street and the Cailliavet home, the Dodart home was right behind our home, and that’s where my mother had been born ninety years before urban renewal took that home down. So she often said that where the hotel was, was where my grandmother pastured her cow. It was not—

Smith: Where the Buena Vista was.

Creel: Um-hm. It wasn’t their property, but the cow grazed there. But—

Smith: So now that’s the Beau Rivage parking lot.

Creel: Yes. Well, the Buena Vista, when they sold—when the City sold the property to the Buena Vista, right after they’d taken all of the house down, they put the tennis court there, and it is now the employees’ parking lot.

Smith: And think about the 1947 Hurricane. That’s the first one—

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: —that you really remember?

Creel: Absolutely; that was—

Smith: And you’ve got several to compare to. What was the extent of the damage, and how would it be different than later?
Creel:  I’d say that [19]47 was a dress rehearsal for Camille. Camille was a dress rehearsal for Katrina. But [19]47 Hurricane was—the winds were bad, but we were upstairs.

Smith:  You stayed on the peninsula in Biloxi.

Creel:  We stayed in my father’s home, because in the 1915 Hurricane and [19]16 Hurricane, the neighbors had all come there because we were on a hill, and so there was no thought of evacuating in [19]47. We didn’t have the reports of what the severity would be, but I remember I got alarmed because the night before I saw the lights in the schools for the evacuation, and that was a dramatic thing to see that. You know, like to pass at night and see all the lights in the school, but I—

Smith:  Why were they opening the schools, as storm shelters?

Creel:  Yes, they must’ve been. But as I said, we were on a hill, and the storm happened during the night. And the next morning the butane tank—they had the brown cylinder butane tanks at that time, the restaurants along the beach—this butane tank had washed up and was at the foot of the street, and that was a dramatic thing. It formed a barricade or a bailiwick or whatever, of the debris from the buildings on the waterfront that were washed up, formed this barricade along the beachfront. But the highway patrol, I remember, were having a convention at the Buena Vista. And this shows you how weak, not weak, but the weather system, all of the highway patrol cars were caught in the storm in front of the Buena Vista and destroyed.

Smith:  The weather service was not good enough to get them—

Creel:  The weather service had not been born yet.

Smith:  So we think of today all the police vehicles lost in Katrina; a lot of state vehicles were lost in 1947.

Creel:  Right there on the beach. And that makes you think, like, from Galveston, you know, it looks like they might’ve had a little more in the weather prediction, but they were—I remember the Highway Patrol lost a lot of their cars right there in front of the hotel. But then the next one, of course, was—

Smith:  Let me—

Creel:  OK.

Smith:  —scratch a little bit on this one. The beachfront, do you remember the construction of Highway 90 and the seawall in the late [19]20s?

Creel:  I remember the shell drive going to Gulfport, vividly.
Smith: So you can remember going from Biloxi to Gulfport on a shell road?

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: And that would’ve been when you were a little girl.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Can you describe the beachfront drive going from Biloxi back to Gulfport on the shell road?

Creel: Yes. As the pictures show, there was the road, then the grassy area, and then the shoreline before the seawall. But then when the seawall was built, it wasn’t—the steps were all visible.

Smith: How did the shoreline look before the seawall? Was there marsh and beach mixed together?

Creel: It was marsh and beach, yes.

Smith: So there were beached places there?

Creel: Well, there was in front of the Buena Vista. I was raised with a white sand beach. (laughter)

Smith: So when people say this is a cultured beach, it doesn’t mean that there wasn’t a beach.

Creel: No.

Smith: There were beachy places.

Creel: There were beachy places, but I don’t think that many because the boat—getting on boats and going swimming were all done from piers, and that was a good thing because that was my father’s business, building piers.

Smith: Very good.

Creel: A pile-driving man.

Smith: What would we have seen along the beach that’s different than what you see today if you took that drive on the shell road?

Creel: Well.
Smith: Other than the storm—well, say pre-Katrina, how would that drive have been different?

Creel: It would’ve been different timewise and also, flat tirewise, because they were, flat tires were prevalent in my early youth. They hadn’t perfected the tires to cope with the sharp shells, things of that type. So flat tires were common. If you made a trip to New Orleans, you were almost sure to have a flat tire, or else the lights would go out. Somebody would get on the running board and hold a flashlight so you could get home. (laughter)

Smith: Did you see a lot of beautiful homes along the shell road?

Creel: I wasn’t that conscious as a child.

Smith: OK. Did you see oak trees?

Creel: Oh, yes.

Smith: So your memory would be like this is a very green place along the shore?

Creel: Oh, yes, beautiful, yes.

Smith: Do you—

Creel: Moss, a lot of moss.

Smith: Do you remember much about the Port of Gulfport, the way it looked or operated?

Creel: My dad worked, had the contract when they built the west pier. And I remember the Constitution coming for a visit, and I can’t remember what year that was that we went on—everybody went to see, go on the Constitution. I remember the Skrmetta(?) family’s boat; the first one was called the Nonpareil, which I later learned was a type of candy, but it would depart from the pier next to the Buena Vista. I guess I was about five or six. Now, this would’ve been during Prohibition, and so—

Smith: Late [19]20s.

Creel: —this little boat was a passenger boat, and they had a jazz band aboard, and they had different colored lights strung on this little boat, and they made both day and night trips like the Skrmettas do, but it went to the Isle of Capri. And the Isle of Capri had—my uncle was involved and Colonel Appeson(?) who had the Buena Vista, and my Uncle Arbo(?) Cailleat and Hunt, his cousin, owned the little island, whatever, and on there they had casinos. I can remember going on the boat, and they had a big wheel. I mean that part of it was lost on me, but there was gambling there, and also
liquor. It was offshore far enough, twelve miles or whatever. And that’s the island that later disappeared, subsidence.

Smith: Do you remember the construction of the seawall?

Creel: Yes, I can remember it, but I was not—I remember mostly my dad talking about it. I was not that much onsite.

Smith: He was a construction man. Did he have any positive or negative evaluation of the construction of the seawall?

Creel: I think he thought it was very good.

Smith: Good idea?

Creel: Um-hm. And I was also brought to mind with the dedication of the Ocean Springs Bridge recently, that in 1930 I was standing there on the bridge that this one replaced; I remember that, vividly, and Back Bay, too.

Smith: Did they make as much of a party out of it?

Creel: (laughter) No, but I remember being there because one of the engineers, my dad had made friends with him, and it was an occasion. I also remember the ferry rides before the bridges in Bay St. Louis and also at Pearl River Rigolets, Chef Menteur.

Smith: So the normal way of going from Biloxi to Ocean Springs when you were very small would’ve been by ferry.

Creel: No. I think we, I think you would’ve gone, you wouldn’t have done that as much as you would have going the other way to New Orleans. I can’t remember the bridge at Ocean Springs. Prior to the bridge, I guess we went through Lemoine, you know, through. Well, that’s a bridge, too, and I know, because we are a peninsula.

Smith: OK. Well, OK, we had a seawall constructed in the late [19]20s and early [19]30s, paved highway—do you remember the paving of the shell road?

Creel: I’m not too knowledgeable about that. I remember my dad talking about the railway went from Biloxi to Pass Christian, and I think it went from Biloxi—well, I remember that. But it went from, like Biloxi and upward Wood Avenue in Gulfport—I didn’t know that until later—and then down like the Pass Road. But I did ride on it only one time, and I rode with them from the Buena Vista to the White House Hotel to go swimming, and that was it.

Smith: Was this on a trolley car?
Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: That used to go down, roughly, the area where the Highway 90 is now?

Creel: Right, but then the—

Smith: So it’s the trolley line that you remember first.

Creel: Yeah, but at that time there was a paved road.

Smith: The road had been paved, so the trolley was working at that time.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Do you remember—OK, let’s go to 1947. You were married and had small children.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: And you said that you saw debris—do you remember the street that you saw the butane tank?

Creel: It was Cuevas Street.

Smith: Cuevas Street?

Creel: Um-hm, where all the—

Smith: All right. Were there a lot of—what was the shoreline like in Biloxi? The buildings that would’ve been taken down, what were they in 1947?

Creel: There were many, not unlike Bay St. Louis prior to [Katrina] because they had the Marietta Café, and they had the swimming piers, and it was like a little mini boardwalk like you’d see in Atlantic City, except our shoreline was a part that was built up, and a lot of restaurants and souvenir shops, and things for the tourist trade, because the people would walk from the Buena Vista. Everybody walked the beach and so at night, even as a little child, I could go with some of my little girlfriends, and we could go up and walk up and down the beach. There was no—it was a different time. There was no—

Smith: So your parents didn’t think it was unsafe or anything?

Creel: No.

Smith: Little girls could walk the beach by themselves?
**Creel:** No, no. I went swimming at the Buena Vista pier and would meet some of my little friends. Somebody would be down there from the neighborhood, and we’d be down there with all the people from the hotel. All the guests would be swimming right in the middle of everybody, not a thought of anything.

**Smith:** So a lot of the debris would’ve been from piers—

**Creel:** Yes.

**Smith:** —and things like that.

**Creel:** From the businesses in the piers.

**Smith:** OK. So what’s the next storm that you remember after 1947?

**Creel:** That was Miss Camille.

**Smith:** Miss Camille. Oh, let’s go back just a second. Do you remember how the government responded to the storm in [19]47?

**Creel:** Hm, let’s see; I’m trying to think.

**Smith:** Did you see the National Guard or anything?

**Creel:** They opened the schools. No, I don’t think so. WLOX, not to do any military, but WLOX had their—

**Smith:** No, that was later. There wasn’t a WLOX in [19]47, was there? Unless it was radio.

**Creel:** Yes, radio then, because my dad was involved with building the tower. Buena Vista had a big dance pavilion in front, and WLOX was erecting a tower, and my dad was involved with the construction of the tower. And I guess it was radio; I don’t know why I’m thinking television.

**Smith:** A little later [we] got our televisions.

**Creel:** Yeah, it was before because I think, yeah, [19]47—I don’t know.

**Smith:** The television, the first television studio was in the Buena Vista Hotel later in the [19]50s. Well, do you remember any government relief activity in [19]47?

**Creel:** No, I don’t think I remember anything being—

**Smith:** No FEMA?
Creel: I don’t remember anything. I don’t remember anything being needed. The things along the shorefront were privately owned, and they did, you know, they did rebuild. But it was not the impact that—now, I think further down the Coast around Clermont Harbor and Bay St. Louis and Long Beach, I think it was felt there. The storm—Deer Island saved Biloxi a lot and probably Chandeleur, too, but it came in from the—seems to me it came in from the southeast blowing north, blowing northwest.

Smith: OK, and then let’s see. What’s the next hurricane that you can remember?

Creel: That’s Camille.

Smith: Camille, OK. And by that time you were living where?

Creel: Oh, living in Long Beach by then.

Smith: Long Beach.

Creel: A block and a half from the beach.

Smith: Block and a half from the beach on Island View?

Creel: Island View, um-hm.

Smith: OK. Can you remember being made aware of the storm?

Creel: Oh, yes.

Smith: This would’ve been 1969.

Creel: Sixty-nine. Prior to that, our esteemed weather predictions had gotten better. We were having a series of storms, not too much in the [19]50s, but in the [19]60s I think it picked up, and we were having different little false alarms. But we left and came out to Diane’s in DeLisle.

Smith: So you left Long Beach, and you came to DeLisle during Hurricane Camille.

Creel: I had my ninety-one-year-old father with me.

Smith: Your ninety-one-year-old father.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: And you rode out the storm in DeLisle.

Creel: Right.
Smith: That’s interesting because DeLisle was so washed through in Katrina.

Creel: Very interesting. There was no, we had no water on our property in Long Beach.

Smith: OK, in 1969 there was no water [on your property] in Long Beach.

Creel: But [19]69 was a very fierce windstorm.

Smith: Yes. What kind of damage to your home did Camille do in [19]69?

Creel: The magnolia tree in the back, we lost several pine trees, one of which landed on the carport and demolished our carport. The magnolia tree saved two other pines from hitting the house because they landed in the fork of the tree. The top of the huge magnolia blew over the house and landed in the front yard.

Smith: Did it take long to get the house back in livable condition?

Creel: Not, not too long, no.

Smith: Mostly roof damage?

Creel: Yeah, mostly roof damage.

Smith: Do you recall how you knew that Camille was going to be such a bad storm?

Creel: Yes, by the weather reports, TV, radio.

Smith: And after Camille, can you recall government activity trying to help recover from the storm?

Creel: After Camille?

Smith: After Camille. National Guard, CBs [Naval Construction Battalion, Seabees], Airmen or others?

Creel: I’m sure they were there, but since we were over here in DeLisle, we didn’t go back for, you know, for a few days. But I don’t—yes, I do remember. Now I do, Pat. We had no lights, and the—it’s coming back to me now—the National Guard was on the railroad. We were just five houses from the railroad, between the beach and the railroad. And the National Guard had live ammunition and were patrolling on the railroad, and occasionally we’d hear shots. And this was due to the watch for the looters.

Smith: And this was in 1969?
Creel: In 1969. And the jeeps would go up and down the street, patrolling. And our neighbors, two of our neighbors across the street were so phobic, spooked, that they took turns; one night one would sit on the steps, and the next night the other neighbor would sit on the steps. So we slept peacefully, because both neighbors were overseeing the neighborhood. But I remember my husband sleeping in the living room as if he were protecting the family. Everybody was so unnerved, not from the storm, but from the—we were afraid of citizens, a certain segment of our citizens. But one of the children slept with me, and I remember it was so very hot; it was August. And I remember a branch was sticking through the screen, and we broke it off where it was right over the bed. (laughter)

Smith: This was a tree that had fallen, and the branch came through the window?

Creel: Yeah, and we slept that way until eventually it was fixed. But you could hear it was so very silent. Other than the patrols, there was not a sound. When darkness came, there was not a sound. Everybody went to bed. Of course you’d hear an occasional radio; we kept our radio on. But we had no lights. I guess, I don’t know whether it was three weeks that we were without electricity and water. We’d go up to the railroad, because they had railroad cars come in with ice, and we’d have to go up and get the ice. And the schools had donations of clothing and so forth. But it was a wild time.

Smith: Do you remember with the electricity off for so many weeks—you said you thought at least three weeks?

Creel: It might not have been that long; I’m not sure, Pat.

Smith: Do you remember how you coped with things like groceries?

Creel: Yes. We had gotten groceries when it was predicted that the storm was coming. Of course—(brief interruption) Also, we still had those groceries at home, and the stores opened; they weren’t that damaged.

Smith: Didn’t have so much electronic.

Creel: No.

Smith: People had the old-fashioned adding machines that didn’t require electricity still around; they could pull them out.

Creel: They managed, right.

Smith: So that was 1969. Is there anything else that sticks out about Camille, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, any of those helping groups?
Creel: I remember the Salvation Army truck coming down the street one time, and I think they gave us cold drinks or something. But a nice thing about Camille, Pat, I don’t know if it happened in Katrina. I guess everything was so destroyed in Katrina, but in Camille the neighborhoods would—whoever—because the food was going to be spoiled, whoever had the deep freezers did the cooking, and the whole neighborhood would gather under somebody’s carport and have an evening meal together. And that way we met neighbors we had and didn’t even know. It was very, very primitive but nice. And after the air-conditioning came on and the lights, we all went like little conchs; we all went back in our shells, but for that period of time we were one community.

Smith: Do you remember the recovery from Camille? All this is 1969, and later, here we are a good, almost, two and a half, almost three years from Katrina, and it seems like it’s every day on most people’s minds to some extent. Do you remember the Camille recovery being this weighty, long process?

Creel: It was long, especially along the beachfront. I mean a lot of property was destroyed in Camille, and people spoke of Camille because [19]47 had been a minimal occurrence. But people, even when Katrina came, I think Camille was still vivid in people’s minds who’d experienced it.

Smith: Is there anything else about Camille that stands out that would be notable in your mind in that experience? You mentioned the community kind of coming together, and then it broke down when the air-conditioning came back on and people just stopped visiting with each other.

Creel: That’s true.

Smith: Anything else?

Creel: I don’t recall anything right now.

Smith: How did your church weather the storm?

Creel: Oh, that’s an interesting topic. My parents were married in 1904, and my father had a contract to build the living quarters for the people on Avery Island, the McIlhenny pepper family, pepper sauce.

Smith: Louisiana?

Creel: Um-hm. And Avery Island, Avery people were salt people, because that’s where the salt mine is, Avery Island. If you’ve never been there, you should go. And so they were there for their honeymoon. They married in Biloxi and stayed the night in New Orleans and went on down a whole long trip to get to Avery Island, and they were there for the first year of their marriage, almost. And when they came back, my uncle, my father’s brother was fourteen years older than he was. He was an architect.
His name was O.E. Thompson, Ole Thompson. Then Ole was a contractor who built St. Thomas Church. In 1905, it was dedicated, so when my dad and mother first got back, they would—I don’t know whether they took the trolley or whether they came—how—or maybe—I know he had a horse and buggy that he kept at Lang’s Livery Stable in Gulfport to oversee his work building St. Thomas Church. And so St. Thomas then, as we pass, go by going to New Orleans, my dad said, “That’s the church that Ole built.” But anyhow, it went down in Camille.

Smith: St. Thomas is in Long Beach, the church—

Creel: On the beach.

Smith: —that was beside Gulf Park—

Creel: Right.

Smith: —College Campus—

Creel: That’s right.

Smith: —USM Campus—

Creel: Right next to it.

Smith: —on [Highway] 90.

Creel: And they said it would have withstood the storm, but a barge had come into it, barge in Camille, and destroyed the front of it. Then they built a new church.

Smith: Do you remember how the decision was made to rebuild on the beach—

Creel: Yes.

Smith: —at St. Thomas and after Camille in [19]69?

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: How was that decided?

Creel: Just like it is now; it’s going to go back again after Katrina.

Smith: Do you remember the process by which it was decided?

Creel: I remember it was a long process to find the right architect, and I don’t know if I should be quoted on this, but the man later must’ve had the architect—it was built with steel beams, and they did stand. The steel beams had washed away, but he later
was in the news. He must’ve had a breakdown, because he was running for president; I won’t name names, but he was the architect. And after he was running for president, without any announcement other than he was going to be president, then we wondered about the structure, but it stood well until Katrina. But that was an interesting story.

**Smith:** So there was really, so far as you know, no real debate about rebuilding all that side on the beach. That’s where St. Thomas was.

**Creel:** No. They polled the congregation as to the style of architecture, and later, of course, all these people who don’t go to meetings who said they didn’t like the style, because it looked like a pyramid. And I thought it looked like something out of the Holy Land, personally, but other people thought it was too drastic looking.

**Smith:** So that was 1969. The church was rebuilt and no particular controversy about rebuilding it on that spot—

**Creel:** Right.

**Smith:** —where you look out over the ocean in Long Beach. OK. Let’s think about the next storm on your mind, which would be the one that affected you the most.

**Creel:** Yes.

**Smith:** Would you say?

**Creel:** Absolutely.

**Smith:** That’s Katrina?

**Creel:** Right. We would have, again, as was our custom, we all would have come to DeLisle and been at Diane and John’s in their home. All the children would come, and it would be like a big, big party, and generally nothing happened, and we all went home.

**Smith:** What would be the reason for coming to DeLisle? Some people fifty years from now might not understand that.

**Creel:** Right. It was—

**Smith:** Can you see the water from here?

**Creel:** No, no.

**Smith:** So it makes you think you’re safe.

**Creel:** Makes you think you’re safe, absolutely.
Smith: And it’s a brick—

Creel: Brick home.

Smith: —home.

Creel: Absolutely.

Smith: Makes you think you’re safe.

Creel: And being together was wonderful. But this time we didn’t come to DeLisle, because Diane and John were on a cruise. So my daughter who lived with me, Karen, it was Karen and the cat and I. And we were going to—I called to make—she was at work. She worked at the Beau Rivage, and she had a bad experience in Camille; she was expecting her baby, and she was in her eighth month and was on the beach in Pass Christian. And so she has a bad phobic reaction to weather.

Smith: Pass Christian was really hit hard in [19]69 in Camille.

Creel: Yes, it was. And so she didn’t want to talk about it, didn’t want to think about it; she was already in a crisis mode of denial. So I made reservations at the hotel right off of [I-]10 to have a room for us, so we could go there. And then I called and told her, and then later she called and said that my grandson, her son, had a big home in Mobile, an old home they’d bought, and he wanted his mother and I to come there. So she and I and the cat evacuated to Mobile, and the cat got out of the cage. He was on top of Karen’s head, and so the last mile she drove, and I held the cat off her head because he was going berserk, crying. The cat’s still in Mobile; they adopted him. (laughter) We go and visit him. But we were there, and of course I knew Diane and John were safe; they were on their cruise. And I had one child with me, and my son was in Ocean Springs; he felt relatively safe. And the other little daughter was with me, too. So instead of being together in DeLisle, we were together in Mobile. But the storm was not that bad where we were in Mobile, except for the ambulances going up and down Spring Hill because it was near the hospital. So that night was, you know, was bad; windy and this, that, and the other, but after going through Camille, it, you know, was just not that bad. And so we had no television; we had the radio. But it wasn’t until my son called the night afterwards, when daylight came and then night, he was at the Ocean Springs Middle School. I called him before you came to ask him how he got his information, but he said from the first responders who—since he’s involved with the school, he was there helping. And he got his information from the first responders. So we were all together in Mobile. In the kitchen that night when he called, he had a cell phone, and he gave us an account of everything that had happened on the Coast, because that was the first news that we had how severe it was. And so there was a rumor in Camille that the Biloxi Lighthouse had gone down, and that’s the first thing I asked him, “Did the lighthouse go down?” And he said, “No. They said the lighthouse is standing.” So, but anyhow, it wasn’t till the next day that my
youngest daughter came and told me, she said, “I have to tell you something.” And she said, “Anthony’s house is gone.” And Anthony was my youngest grandson of the DeLisle family, and he had two little girls, and they just built a home he was so proud of, and that was the first time that I cried. And, you know, it just was inconceivable that they had lost their home. I mean, how could that happen? Here they were in DeLisle; they weren’t by the beach. But of course, we have such a thing as Bayou DeLisle, and Bayou DeLisle had wiped Anthony out. But I didn’t get the connection with Diane and John. I mean it just didn’t even register, even though they’re within, what?

Smith: Half a mile, quarter of a mile.

Creel: Quarter of a mile away. Didn’t even register. And then finally, sometime during the shock, well, that was over. I wasn’t thinking of my home, and I said, “Well, what about Diane and John?” And she said, “Mama, their house is gone, too.” And I mean that just—that was it. So losing my home when my son went by and said that it was standing; it was wrecked, but it was standing, and it’s a frame home. That didn’t impact me. It still hasn’t. It hasn’t impacted me at all, with my children losing their homes. But everything’s coming back now, so I can start thinking about me.

Smith: Did Cecil’s house, the son’s house—

Creel: No trouble in Ocean Springs.

Smith: No trouble. So he’s the school nurse, and so he had no—

Creel: Right.

Smith: —no big personal loss there. OK. So you’ve lost your home, your daughter, Diane, lost her home, washed through, and your grandson—

Creel: Um-hm, Anthony.

Smith: —Anthony lost his home.

Creel: Right.

Smith: Washed through.

Creel: Right.

Smith: And you cried for Anthony.

Creel: Right.

Smith: But you didn’t cry for yourself.
Creel: Didn’t cry, and I didn’t cry for Diane.

Smith: You didn’t cry for Diane.

Creel: I did; I did.

Smith: You cried for your grandson.

Creel: I did.

Smith: And his little children.

Creel: Well, that was the initial shock. I had time, I guess, before I saw Anthony’s.

Smith: How long was it before you knew that he and his family were OK?

Creel: I’m trying to think. No, that was what she told me; they had lost their home, but that they were all right. They were at his sister’s house. Otherwise, we would’ve all been here.

Smith: His wife’s sister’s house?

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: OK. So, so you knew that—

Creel: I knew where she lived at.

Smith: —even though the house was destroyed, you knew that they were safe.

Creel: They were safe, yeah.

Smith: And did you have any fears for any other relatives or close friends during that time when you were just finding out they were safe?

Creel: No, but I have a very macabre thing. I had lost a friend, oh, I guess maybe two years before, and she was interred in the mausoleum on the beach, Southern Memorial.

Smith: Southern Gardens, Southern Memorial Gardens near Treasure Bay.

Creel: Right, and that, you know, I mean they didn’t come to mind. They live on Tchoutacabouffa, and he was all—they were always very high, so that, they didn’t even enter my mind until the very first shot on the TV, when it was restored in Mobile,
the very first shot from the Coast was a picture of the coffins on the sand bars in front of the Memorial Park.

**Smith:** The washout of the mausoleums.

**Creel:** That, now that really, really got to me, and the first thought was, “I wonder”—thinking of her husband, but when he selected that place, that site, he came home and said, “Oh,” he said, “I have a good place for us. We’re on the very bottom.” She said, “I don’t want to be on the bottom; I want to be on the top.” So consequently, she survived intact. And that’s Fabian, Dr. Husley’s mother and father; they’re Little Cecil’s godparents.

**Smith:** Al Husley.

**Creel:** Um-hm, so this was Evelyn. Evelyn was high and dry.

**Smith:** OK. When did you make the first visit back over here to see for yourself your property?

**Creel:** OK. Well, I don’t think we went to the property; I came directly to DeLisle.

**Smith:** You came to DeLisle first?

**Creel:** Oh, yeah.

**Smith:** Talk to me about that drive in. What was going through your mind? How did you feel?

**Creel:** I wanted to see my daughter and her family, but I was very reluctant to see the wreckage, the damage, and it was even worse than I had imagined, and the state of despair that they were in. They had left their home intact and came back. The cars were all mangled in the carport. And she was sitting outside, just sitting out in the sun, just nothing else to do.

**Smith:** This is Diane?

**Creel:** Um-hm.

**Smith:** What did you see around the community? You saw Diane’s house had been wrecked; the cars were wrecked. What else did you see around the community?

**Creel:** Pass Christian was so very sad when you went through Pass Christian. But being exposed to the pictures from the TV of New Orleans, and the people in Point Cadet in Biloxi and all along, it was just, it was just everywhere, Pat. Just it was very depressing.
Smith: How long was it after the storm until you came to DeLisle to see Diane?

Creel: It was two weeks, I think, in Mobile and two months—oh, before I came to see her?

Smith: Um-hm.

Creel: I think maybe the I-10, that once it cleared, whatever, so I think some of the freight, some of the freight had closed it for a while. As soon as they opened I-10, we came; we came out, say like, maybe two days afterwards.

Smith: So you were right in the immediate aftermath of things. How long did you stay in the community?

Creel: I stayed two weeks in Mobile, and I think two, or a month and a half, two months in Ocean Springs with my son before I was able to get the camper.

Smith: The FEMA camper?

Creel: Um-hm. I stayed a week, I think, with Diane and John waiting for the camper.

Smith: And where were they staying?

Creel: They were staying in a camper, too.

Smith: OK. So John worked for the power company, and he’d gotten a camper pretty quickly because of the work there.

Creel: No, he was retired. I think he went to work—I don’t know if he went to work after the storm.

Smith: Well, he was working with the power crews.

Creel: Yeah, right. And they were staying with their son.

Smith: OK, and so you stayed up in the country—

Creel: Until they came home and we each were going to get our camper.

Smith: OK. Can you talk to me about your dealings with FEMA, the people that got you the trailer?

Creel: I can’t. I can’t; I can’t—of course I had a nice one, Pat. I had a little travel trailer, and I understand that was one of the better ones. I didn’t have the trauma that some of the people had with the Cavaliers that were the bad type. So I can’t complain
of anything. I’ve had all kind of help, and I was taken care of; the government took care of me.

**Smith:** How did you get the trailer? Did you go and apply, personally, and fill out paperwork?

**Creel:** My daughter-in-law [Alyson] in [Ocean Springs] did all that for me.

**Smith:** OK. So you had someone helping you.

**Creel:** Yeah.

**Smith:** Did you have any worries or anxieties about the paperwork for the trailer?

**Creel:** Why would I have anxiety about paperwork, period, (laughter) at my age? But she is so very efficient, and she just took care of it. Mostly, she just, almost had the telephone glued to her ear. It was a matter, I think, of communicating through these agencies with perseverance. And I wouldn’t have had the patience that she had. She just walked around with it, the cell phone, and eventually they answered. And she—you know, I had all my material, and she just did the whole thing; she was just wonderful.

**Smith:** Did you have any government agency lose your paperwork, that you know of? Had to redo it?

**Creel:** I don’t think so. I mean, it was slow in coming; everything was very slow, but I have no complaints. I was comfortable in my little camper, and I’m comfortable in my little cottage, and God willing, I’ll be in my house, but I won’t know how that feels. I’ve been here three years in these little quarters.

**Smith:** OK. So your experience of FEMA, you think, was better than a lot of people?

**Creel:** They were good to me, yes.

**Smith:** They were good to you.

**Creel:** Yes.

**Smith:** So how long did it take you to get the camper?

**Creel:** But I had a lot of help, you know.

**Smith:** How long did it take you to get the camper?

**Creel:** Let’s see; I’m trying to think. I can’t remember from the time of the paperwork. Maybe a month, six weeks.
Smith: A month or six weeks.

Creel: Something like that.

Smith: OK. And so you were staying with Cecil or Diane or others during that time.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Did you have any dealings with other government agencies? Some people got SBA loans.

Creel: No.

Smith: And had to do paperwork with the SBA.

Creel: No, I didn’t do that. I just waited. Instead of, like, people getting in homes quickly, I just waited, and I did get the grant, the first grant.

Smith: You got the Mississippi Development Grant?

Creel: Um-hm, right.

Smith: One of the—

Creel: And then I applied for the second one, and I’ve been approved for it. And the rationale there was that from what I got from the insurance, and even when I had the first grant, I still didn’t have enough to purchase a home. And my son, we tried to find them, but the prices were so exorbitant. So we decided to build only when we made contact, and the Mennonite, Amish community have what’s called CAM [Christian Aid Ministries]. I never thought I’d remember that, but it’s a disaster response part that they have established all over the world. It’s international for helping disasters. And through a contact in Biloxi, we called, made a phone call, and the gentleman got the information from us, and because of my age and because of the lack of funds, I qualified for their assistance. And so they came; we met with the gentleman on the empty lot. The house had been removed. And we met with him, a Mr. Miller. We met with him at the end of the summer, and he said that—

Smith: Do you remember what year this was? Was this a year ago?

Creel: Yeah, a year ago.

Smith: So that would’ve been almost two years after the storm.

Creel: Um-hm.
Smith: Before you finally could get—

Creel: Right.

Smith: —get moving with construction.

Creel: Yeah, and he said that they were leaving. They had finished on the Coast, and they were coming back in November, and if we had the foundation, the raised foundation, that they would build the house. We told them we had the funds, but we didn’t have enough for material and labor. So he said, “Since you have the funds,” he said, “we’ll provide the labor.” And sure enough in November, here they came; just marvelous people. And they—I’d bring them lunch, not every day. But when I was able, I’d bring them lunch, and we helped with their gasoline. We’d occasionally make a donation for their transportation because they were located between Picayune and Bay St. Louis.

Smith: So they were traveling to Long Beach from—

Creel: Yes, right. And I think they also, in the brochure here, they also were going as far as Pascagoula and New Orleans in there. And they’re from Ohio and Pennsylvania, and just wonderful, wonderful people. They’re Christian Aid Ministries.

Smith: CAM, Christian Aid Ministries.

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: So this is a combined Mennonite and Amish cooperative aid group.

Creel: Right, all over the world.

Smith: OK. Let me ask you about your insurance situation on your house in Long Beach. Did you have flood insurance?

Creel: No, because I was not in a flood area, and being not in a flood area and suffering flood was what entitled me to the grant.

Smith: The first grant?

Creel: Yes.

Smith: You didn’t know you were in a flood zone.

Creel: No.
Smith: Never had been any indication that, even though it’s a block and a half from the beach, it rises, and no one ever thought that area was flooded.

Creel: Well, the maps, we’re right outside the flood zone.

Smith: OK. So you didn’t buy flood insurance. Did you have wind insurance?

Creel: Oh, I had—yes, I had homeowner’s insurance.

Smith: Was your house paid for? Did you own the house?

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: So it was yours free and clear?

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Do you know what the value of the house was that was insured for the wind insurance policy?

Creel: I think it was around, I think something around seventy-five, eighty [thousand dollars].

Smith: About what size was the house? Do you know how many square feet?

Creel: It was about, I think about 1300.

Smith: Thirteen hundred square feet?

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: What was it made of?

Creel: It was frame.

Smith: Wood-frame construction.

Creel: And it was fifty, fifty-four years old.

Smith: Fifty-four years old.

Creel: And the reason that—

Smith: And there were many houses like that in the neighborhood?

Creel: Yes.
Smith: OK. So these were not really rich people’s houses.

Creel: No.

Smith: Ordinary, working folks’ houses.

Creel: Right. But the reason they gave me the grant above the old, fifty-four-year-old whatever was that they based that recovery on what it would cost to build the house like that now, to put you back in it.

Smith: Which is usually what insurance does; the value keeps going up on the policy based on their guess of reconstruction.

Creel: I wish. (laughter)

Smith: OK. So you had wind insurance, but you didn’t buy flood insurance. Did the house flood during Camille?

Creel: No, oh, no.

Smith: The worst storm anybody had ever heard of, it didn’t flood.

Creel: No.

Smith: So it flooded in Katrina. How deep was the water in the house?

Creel: I don’t know; I wasn’t there, Pat. But—

Smith: Did you go in it after?

Creel: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Did you go in the house?

Creel: Oh, yeah, but they were already removing the—

Smith: Had already removed the sheetrock?

Creel: Um-hm, yeah.

Smith: How did you feel when you went into your house for the first time?

Creel: I didn’t feel as bad. As I said, the children had—I mean, I had lived there, and it had been shelter for me and for my husband; we’d raised four children there. But I wasn’t that nostalgic. Maybe I would’ve been in Camille; I was younger, and my
children were not completely grown, and I had my husband with me. But after he died and the children were gone, I didn’t have the same feeling that I had when my children were little and when he was living, about the edifice.

**Smith:** Um-hm. Did you lose your—how much of your clothing did you lose?

**Creel:** Oh, now, that was—

**Smith:** Was any of it salvageable?

**Creel:** Not much, (laughter) just almost what I had on.

**Smith:** How about the furniture, was it all—

**Creel:** The furniture was damaged.

**Smith:** It had to be—

**Creel:** Yeah. So the boys kind of cleaned it off a little bit.

**Smith:** Cleaned off some of the furniture, so it wasn’t all a total loss.

**Creel:** Well, it is because I’ll never be able to use it. I’d have to have it all reupholstered and everything. We kept some of it for sentimental reasons; still in storage. And it was a mistake; I’m still paying. But among the things that, the pictures that I was able to save and things that mean things to me, that justified holding on.

**Smith:** So you didn’t see the house until it had been sort of cleaned out?

**Creel:** Yeah, um-hm.

**Smith:** That’s interesting because that’s the way we did—

**Creel:** Really?

**Smith:** —Jeanette’s sister, too.

**Creel:** Really, hm.

**Smith:** “You don’t go until we get it cleaned out.”

**Creel:** Yeah.

**Smith:** So your house is washed through by the storm. You had wind insurance. Do you know how much the policy paid off for wind damage?
Creel: Very little; I’ll say maybe—I’m trying to think—maybe half of that and then—

Smith: Were there any trees or anything that fell on the house as they did in Camille?

Creel: Yeah, but not as bad as—I mean in Camille we just had the carport, but a lot of trees down is what I’m trying to say. But in this one, I think, Katrina, I think there’s maybe one or two trees hit the house.

Smith: So you think that the wind insurance might’ve paid half of the face value of the policy?

Creel: Half of what—

Smith: And the face value of the policy was about?

Creel: Seventy-five, eighty.

Smith: Seventy-five.

Creel: Something like that.

Smith: So you got a good—they basically rebuilt a roof.

Creel: Right.

Smith: A little more from that.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: So if you were building a thirteen-hundred-square-foot house, rebuilding it today, it would be very expensive, probably above $100 a square foot, maybe more.

Creel: Oh, I couldn’t have built it if it hadn’t been for the for the volunteers.

Smith: So you managed to put together the insurance money that you got and a grant. How did the grant process work? You got a certain amount from the insurance.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: And then you applied for this Mississippi Development Authority Grant that was federal money that runs through the governor’s office in Mississippi.

Creel: Right.
Smith: How did they determine how much you had received in the grant money?

Creel: All right. That’s very interesting. That was explained to me today when I went for the second grant. That to build a house, the house that I had, to build it again, they figured it would be like, I think she said [[$135,000], $137,000. And I had received between the grant and the—roughly approaching maybe [$95,000] or $100,000.

Smith: So your insurance plus the first grant was about $95,000.

Creel: So that’s why they determined that I would be eligible for the second grant. And we had already elevated the house, for them to build it, but that’s how they arrived at that. It was all broken down, the proceeds, and so hopefully, they’d said it would be maybe six to ten weeks.

Smith: Before the—

Creel: Before the second grant comes.

Smith: OK. So six to ten weeks; that’ll put you about three years from the storm—

Creel: I know.

Smith: —before the second—

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: —the second grant.

Creel: Right.

Smith: Do you have any observation about how the grant process worked, the paperwork involved in it? You’ve waited a long time. What’s your feelings about all of that?

Creel: My daughter-in-law helped me with all that, Pat. I don’t know. If I hadn’t had help at my age—I can recall things, but I’m not that functional with—not that sharp with paperwork and so forth anymore. (laughter) Rather dull.

Smith: Well, if you had any reflection about how these government aid processes—you went through the process of getting the FEMA trailer, which you were glad to have that.

Creel: Very glad.
Smith: You’ve gotten the Mississippi Katrina Cottage to get out of the trailer; a little bit better construction, a little stronger, little roomier. And you’ve gotten the grant. Is there anything that you can put your mind to that you would say ought to be changed, ought to be improved the next time around?

Creel: I can see, not personally—and maybe that’s why I’m so grateful—but I can see where other people have waited and waited and waited, and you don’t know the circumstances but a lot of them seem legitimate that they’re still waiting, a lot of them, to get into a cottage, even. So all in all, I guess, I guess I approach things by how very fortunate I am; then I couldn’t, I don’t want to complain about anything.

Smith: You’ve got a grandson that works for a congressman, though, don’t you?

Creel: Yes.

Smith: What would you tell him needs to happen differently with these government programs?

Creel: I’m not that knowledgeable about the government, Pat.

Smith: OK. Let’s think a little bit about the way people have lived. You were in that FEMA trailer; let’s think about the little camper, the little trailer. Now, what’s it like to live in one of those?

Creel: Well, I’ve always wanted to go camping, (laughter) and my husband was not the outdoor type. And I don’t know that—I guess I’d be happy, if I could travel in one, to travel. I wouldn’t want to live in it forever.

Smith: And how long did you live in it?

Creel: What? Two years.

Smith: Two years.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Why would you not want to live in it?

Creel: Well, I think had I not been here by my daughter and grandson, had I been in a trailer park—

Smith: Yeah, you had a little trailer park back on the property with your family.

Creel: That’s different than if I had been in a trailer park. Having to cope with strangers or something like that, this whole perspective of mine would be different. So I’m not a very good case in point because I’ve been so happy to be by my children.
Smith: OK. So you’ve been involved with children.

Creel: Yes.

Smith: And grandchildren.

Creel: And grandchildren.

Smith: Since, really, the storm.

Creel: That’s correct, yeah.

Smith: You’ve been camping out with—

Creel: I’ve been camping out with all the privileges.

Smith: OK. How did your cooking and eating and daily necessities get cared for during this time?

Creel: That’s interesting. The camper was equipped with butane, and I was raised in Biloxi by the Buena Vista. I don’t know anything about butane. And so we were very—and I don’t think Diane and John used it, either. We were apprehensive. We weren’t thinking formaldehyde. We were thinking butane, so we didn’t use the butane. John set up a Katrina kitchen in his carport, and they did the cooking in there, and I used mostly the microwave. I didn’t use the little stove in the camper for two years. I used just the microwave.

Smith: Did you ever go and take any meals with the whole community at places around here?

Creel: I did. I did with Diane and John just twice in all of the two years, and it was very nice.

Smith: So if you want, describe that.

Creel: Under the tent. It was in Pass Christian, and we went to the tent, and it was like buffet style, and the food was good. It wasn’t the one like where they have all the entertainment. It was a smaller, small group. Some of them had like singing and music and all of that. But it was very nice.

Smith: Have you been attending church since the storm, your St. Thomas Church? What happened to it?

Creel: St. Thomas Church, during Camille, we had lost our church, but the gymnasium was standing, so we held mass in the gymnasium.
Smith: There was a school associated with St. Thomas Church.

Creel: Uh-huh, the school gymnasium, and the service was far enough spaced out, like early and midmorning and late and evening. Then in between, the Lutherans used our facility for their Sunday service.

Smith: This was in 1969?

Creel: Um-hm. So in turn, the first church service for its mass I went to was in the Lutheran Church.

Smith: In Long Beach?

Creel: Reciprocal. Um-hm.

Smith: After Katrina?

Creel: After Katrina. And they welcomed us there for. I don’t know just how long before the Knights of Columbus heard about the skating rink that was vacant and up for sale. Then they heard and bought it for the KC [Knights of Columbus] Hall and with the understanding that we would have mass there until such time as St. Thomas was rebuilt. So we’d call ourselves the Holy Rollers. (laughter)

Smith: And what happened to the Knights of Columbus Hall in Long Beach in Katrina?

Creel: It was destroyed, I think.

Smith: It was washed through. So the Catholic Church has become more charismatic in Long Beach in the roller rink?

Creel: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Smith: Have you been able to go to mass regularly over there?

Creel: Oh, yes. Well, I’ve been attending St. Stephen’s very, maybe not even a half a mile from where we are. Right straight through here is St. Stephen’s Catholic Church. It’s a Josephite Community; it’s the black church, and it’s integrated about half and half. And then occasionally I go to St. Thomas; it all depends. We have masses, sometimes St. John. Wherever I’m passing, I’ll go to mass. It’s not the building; it’s the presence. (brief interruption)

Smith: OK. So your church is taken care of. What’s been the impact of Katrina on your social life, or the social life of elderly people, in general, in Long Beach? You had a very active life, didn’t you?
Creel: Well, I did. I did, literally, because I was going to the Memorial gym with the senior class Wednesdays and Fridays and had made some new friends.

Smith: At the Memorial Hospital?

Creel: Um-hm, in their gymnasium.

Smith: Exercise for—

Creel: Yeah, school gymnasium. And it was nice; I made some friends, but several of them, it was sad because some of them, their health was so bad, they died. You know it’s a traumatic thing to make friends and then have them die.

Smith: They died in the aftermath of Katrina?

Creel: No. Just generally.

Smith: Just during the class.

Creel: Like Bubba Lang.

Smith: Yeah.

Creel: And Miss Denicola, just different people that were so very nice. So I’ve gone down physically, I guess, (laughter) as well as mentally. But it did destroy that, because we’d go to lunch. On Wednesdays and Fridays we’d go to different places and have lunch or something. So that part, being out here in the county, you know, is more or less gone. They did reassemble, but I didn’t. It’s a distance to go from here twice a week just to exercise, so maybe when I’m back home, I’ll probably regenerate.

Smith: OK. Were there any church groups that you were able to be active in before Katrina?

Creel: Yes. Well, the ones that I belong to, more or less the younger people are in those. They have an active youth program, and we had a senior program. We went on trips to Bellingrath [Gardens] and so forth, but that’s kind of slowed down now, for the time being.

Smith: So there hasn’t been much of that possible since Katrina.

Creel: Yeah, true.

Smith: You started talking about the reconstruction of your house.

Creel: Um-hm.
Smith: And at the time your reconstruction started, there was a sizable gap in finances between what your insurance and the Mississippi Development Grant—

Creel: Big one, yes.

Smith: —was made available to you.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: And you talked about getting connected with this Amish/Mennonite group.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Have you had a chance to observe them working over the last seven or eight months now that you’re at your home? Have you been over there to see—

Creel: Oh, yes.

Smith: —the kind of people that are working?

Creel: Well, I would bring—well, they’re through now. They’ve gone back to—I guess, they’ve been gone, I guess, maybe a month now. And they would bring different, they’d have different supervisors. And then the supervisor, during the construction—let’s see, November, what? Six? Six, seven months, they had these volunteers would come as a group from different areas, different churches, I presume, and so they would change. They’d be like, maybe, a week or two, but the supervisor would stay there. And then the supervisor would change, and then so during the time, I didn’t get to know each one individually, but got to know the supervisors because they were there each time I’d bring lunch or something; they would be there. Then you work through them, the arrangements. Of course my son handled everything for me. But we were in contact with the gentleman who was in charge of these young people. But a wonderful thing, when they were through, Pat, was that we were invited to—I had asked them where their encampment was, and they always said Picayune. And I said, “Well, where in Picayune?” They said, “Well, before you get to Picayune.” He said, “Well, why don’t you come? You and your son come.” He said, “Every Thursday night,” he said, “we have our prayer meeting.” He said, “And this next one coming up is the last one before we leave.” So I told Cecil, and he said, “By all means, we’ll go.” So he and I went and had a meal with them, and we got to pray with them and sing with them, and it was so interesting. They had, maybe, I’ll say eight or ten trailers where the families were, and then they had like a, almost a dormitory where the very young, young men were. Almost like a bachelor quarters. Then they had this great, big trailer that they used for their meals and prayer meeting. And the interesting thing was one of the church members worked with some trailer manufacturing, and he came up with this trailer, Pat, that could go down the highway, be pulled, I guess, by a huge truck, but it folded onto itself and expanded. It folded out in all these directions to where they had like a very sizable room and a kitchen.
And then when they were ready to leave, it all was compacted back. But we did have a wonderful experience. We got the chance to thank them. And of course we made a donation, and like I said, we’d help with the expenses when we could, and we told them at the end that we would try to make another donation. But they were just wonderful.

**Smith:** How does an Amish/Mennonite prayer service differ from a Catholic service?

**Creel:** It was just—after we had the meal—now, I don’t know if this was their actual worship, or whether this was a social. You know, it may not have been as involved as an actual prayer service; it may have been just after their meal once a week they did this. I don’t know. But they put the chairs in a circle after they were through eating. They folded the tables and put the chairs in a circle. And one would say—they had this little prayer book, a little Psalm book, and one of them would say, “Number so-and-so.” And everybody would be quiet. Then one would start singing. Then everybody would sing. It was nice.

**Smith:** This was a cappella?

**Creel:** Yeah, and I don’t know if it was, I don’t know if it was out of order. I don’t know. There’s some, I think there’s some might be the Quakers where the women don’t verbalize or something. But anyhow, at the end, Cecil said, “Well, I would love to, if I may, I’d love to say a few words.” And he’s like Diane. He can verbalize. He gave the most beautiful talk, Pat, just made one man cry. And then at the end, he said, “Well,” he said, “there’s one thing,” he said, “that we can all join in.” He said that, “If we’ll hold hands and say the Lord’s Prayer.” Then he led off, and we were holding hands, and I don’t know if they do that in their church, but anyhow, it was a wonderful experience that we got to go thank them. And one of the, the secretary, Ruth, one of the supervisors was a young man named Paul. Paul was waiting for his first baby. His wife had come down with him, and they went back to Ohio, and so I asked Ruth, I said, “Will you let me know when Paul’s baby’s born?” She said, “I sure will.” So sure enough, she called and said that Paul’s baby had been born, so I gave him a call and sent him a little gift. And it was nice to talk to him again. So an interesting thing is that someone up the street, a man in bad health, is living, his wife and her daughter are living in the house. He’s been there for years, and his health is getting very, very bad. And so the daughter told me that she had come by the house and talked to the man, made contact, and they’re going to come next year. When they come down, they’re going to help build an addition to the house up the street. So I don’t know if it’ll be the same group, but at least I’ll get to see. I’ll get, I mean, you know, same people, but at least I’ll get to see them again. I’ll be living there, and they’ll be working right up the street, so that’s good.

**Smith:** You said sometimes you had taken lunch to the group.

**Creel:** I would go. I’d go to maybe like once or twice a week; I’d go to Pirates Cove and get po-boys. And I’d bring po-boys and root beers and potato chips for the—I’d
ask how many were going to be there the next day because the ladies would fix their lunches, and to keep them from fixing lunches if I was going to do it, then I’d call to see how many. One time there was eleven, and so I’d call the order in to Pirates Cove and pick it up and bring it to them for lunch. And they’d all sit on the porch like little chickens and eat their lunch, and quiet. I think all they did was just like pray and sing; they didn’t communicate a whole lot.

Smith: Did they have a prayer meeting with their lunch? Did they sing with their lunch?

Creel: No, they weren’t singing then. Well, I didn’t stay; I’d bring their lunch, and then I’d leave. But I think one of the neighbors said they heard them singing.

Smith: Anything else that strikes you about that experience? Why do you think people, so many people have come to this community from across the country to help on projects like your house?

Creel: Would we do that, Pat? Would we?

Smith: I hope we would.

Creel: I hope we would, too, but have we ever? Think about it. That’s crossed my mind. You know, we have good intentions, and we get donations, but we don’t leave our homes and our families; nobody that I know of. Well, people go down to Saltillo, you know, from this church, my church.

Smith: Mission trips to the churches.

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: This is a similar kind of thing.

Creel: It is, but it’s labor intensive. You know, you get up in the morning, and you go do your, bend your back and nail and hammer. Of course, [Habitat for] Humanity does that. President Carter’s doing it. But there are far and few between, I think, compared to this, to these people. I don’t know; maybe I’m wrong.

Smith: What do you think motivates them? Did you talk to any of them? Did they share their motivation with you?

Creel: Oh, no. Like I told them, I said, “I know you”—every time I’d thank them, I’d say, “I know you’re doing this for me, but I know ultimately you’re doing it for the Lord.” And that’s what it amounted to. And another factor I didn’t discuss with them, but in here—

Smith: You’re looking at their CAM magazine.
Creel: And they sent it to me every—

Smith: This is called the annual report—

Creel: The annual report, uh-huh.

Smith: —of Christian Aid Ministries.

Creel: Um-hm. But among this thing, and I think the program—now, they’ve had this Christian Aid Disaster, I’m sure. Looking at the map, you can see where they’ve gone. But I think it’s not too-old a program, if I read in one of the brochures. They started this program for young men with the understanding, like you and I would understand, that they’re conscientious objectors, and in the event—they even mention—that in the event of a war, these young men are trained to do what the Seabees do. And that’s their purpose, too, as well as helping people, is that they will have a reason not to go into the service. Now, you have different feelings about that. I mean, this is their country, and our boys are dying for them, too. But on the other hand, you can’t overlook their way of life, the peaceful—I mean, they’re removed from all of that. You know, their eyes are on the Lord; that’s what it is, and they just don’t have it in their souls to be combative. But this program—I wish I could find (cell phone rings) it to show you. I hope you didn’t record about me saying that they—(brief interruption)

Smith: I stopped it for the telephone.

Creel: No, but I didn’t want you to—I didn’t want to say that about the young men.

Smith: Well, I think most everybody knows that Mennonites are conscientious objectors. (cell phone rings)

Creel: I don’t think I should say that, Pat.

Smith: Oh, I thought it was beautiful.

Creel: No, about them being conscientious objectors?

Smith: I think it’s beautiful what you said about them. I thought that was beautiful, a beautiful summary. I think they would not—they would—the way you said it I think would make anyone—

Creel: I hope so.

Smith: —proud. So your home is getting close to being reconstructed.

Creel: Getting close, um-hm.
Smith: And do you know, do you have an idea what’s left to be done on the house?

Creel: Yeah, they’re connecting the plumbing. Mainly I have to go find furniture and appliances, I think. And that’s another thing they said when we made that donation, they said—they thanked us profusely for it—but they said, when I said, “Will we be able to come to this meeting?” their farewell meeting, they said, “Well, that’s wonderful because maybe you’ll be able to see the people.” They said, “We used your donation—(cell phone rings; brief interruption) [I should have] done that the first time. What was I saying, Pat?

Smith: You were talking about the making the donation.

Creel: Oh, yeah, OK.

Smith: We were talking about getting furniture—

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: —for your house in a few months.

Creel: They said that—the furniture brought it to mind—when they said, “If you come, when you come to the meeting, possibly you’ll be able to—what we did was we took your donation and had a conference on where we would place it, because there’s all kind of programs in here.” They said, “But there was a family we were helping build a house for, and they didn’t have enough to get, finish out the furnishings, so we thought that that would be a good place to put it; just locally here. Maybe you’ll be able to see the”—and I didn’t want to see the people, but they weren’t there so that worked out all right. But they—

Smith: So they took your gift and put it back in the community on another project that they were doing.

Creel: Put it back, yeah, they sure did. Instead of sending it like to any of these foreign things or something, they used right here, so that was wonderful.

Smith: Let me ask you is there anything on this list that you—you made a little list—

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: —that we need to talk about?

Creel: OK, let’s see. Mobile, Ocean Springs, trailer, cottage.

Smith: By the way, what’s the difference in this cottage and the trailer?
Creel: Oh, a world of difference, a world of difference.

Smith: Do you think this is a good idea for the next round of disasters?

Creel: I think so. I think so, Pat. I think if they could have these on hand, or whatever, it would be wonderful, yes. Put them on high ground, and they’re supposed to withstand the wind. They’re well anchored into the ground; it took forever. I think someone said it costs $6,000 to transport and erect these; I’m not sure, but I can see where it would take up a lot because it took a long time, maybe a day or two for two men working to anchor this into the ground. They put all kind of things in the ground, and they anchored this. So in the little camper, I think one night we went into the newly-enclosed part before Diane and John moved in. She was in Jackson, but Anthony brought the babies out of bed, and we went in because one night it was really going to be bad, but it blew over, but that was the only thing.

Smith: So John had constructed a kind of a safe room—

Creel: Yes, um-hm, yes.

Smith: —that was better than the trailers—

Creel: That was—right.

Smith: —out of a piece of the house that survived.

Creel: Enclosed like the carport, um-hm.

Smith: Like the enclosed carport to make something strong and soft.

Creel: And made a little kitchen in there, also.

Smith: Right.

Creel: So we call it the Katrina kitchen, but it really worked well. It’s very nice.

Smith: So you were only afraid when you were in the camper one night—

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: —that you spent, actually—

Creel: Right.

Smith: —in that more solid structure.
Creel: Well, now a lot of times, a lot of times on weekends, I’d be with either Cecil or Karen. On weekends I’d go visit with them and maybe spend the night, but that’s the only night I remember leaving. But I wouldn’t have left here in that same weather. I feel that secure in this building.

Smith: This is so much better.

Creel: Um-hm.

Smith: Anything else on the list that we need to talk about?

Creel: Can’t think of, honey. Sometime I’ll tell you about the Depression.

Smith: Well?

Creel: I’m enjoying that Roosevelt thing on there.

Smith: On DVD?

Creel: On the Depression. I’d like to send and get that tape.

Smith: What are the lessons that should be learned out of what you’ve been through the last few years, since Katrina?

Creel: As far as preparation?

Smith: Anything. What does somebody fifty years from now want to know out of your mind about this?

Creel: Well, you know if you lived through the Depression years, and you’ve lived through World War II, that affected me personally—I know there’ve been Vietnam and Korea, and horrible, but those didn’t affect me as personally, lifestyle, as World War II did. But when you’ve lived through those and through a couple of the minor hurricanes, it just—personally, you know, I’ve been just, like I told you, I’ve been blessed. I can’t think that anything terrible has happened to me other than my children losing their homes.

Smith: If you were to think back to Camille in 1969, and then come forward to 2005, what should they have learned in Camille to have made the Katrina recovery better? What might they have know that might’ve made this better?

Creel: I think in the mind-set they thought that nothing like that could ever happen as bad or worse that would’ve prepared them mentally. I think now they know; you don’t know what’s going to happen.
Smith: I didn’t ask you this. Did you lose any friends in Katrina in the storm, as far as you know?

Creel: As a result?

Smith: Um-hm.

Creel: No, I don’t think so. I think—

Smith: The lower end of your street was very—

Creel: Right.

Smith: —badly damaged.

Creel: Right.

Smith: So as far as you know, everyone survived on that street during the storm.

Creel: Now, in [19]47—we’re very near Boggsdale, and in [19]47, there were two members of the—well, one member drowned.

Smith: Of the Boggs family in Long Beach?

Creel: Um-hm, and one died as a result; so there were two deaths in [19]47. Of course we weren’t here in [19]47. And in [19]50 in Biloxi, I knew two of the people George Brown and his wife, who had been neighbors of ours at one time. They were near the beach; they drowned in Camille. And, yes, I’d forgotten, in Katrina—(cell phone rings) I’m sorry. I’m not too swift on these things. In Katrina, word reached us. I don’t know if it was in Ocean Springs or was it Mobile that the Rainers, Dr. Rainer and his wife had drowned. And, oh, that was a terrible shock. But then when we got home we found out better; it was Hanetha and her husband—

Smith: Hanetha Maxie

Creel: —that drowned, and she was a member of my church and the sweetest, sweetest lady.

Smith: Her husband was a medical doctor, Dr. Maxie.

Creel: Oh, yeah. They were a wonderful couple. So we lost them. And also in Biloxi down at Point Cadet, there was a little lady I hadn’t seen in years, I mean since I was a child, but it was someone I knew and she had, she had drowned. I think she might’ve been the first one that they found down at the Point.

Smith: Who was that?
Creel: That was Odessa; she was Odessa Bess, maiden name, but I don’t know what her married name was, so.

Smith: What’s your worst memory of Katrina, the worst thing?

Creel: Well, I guess when my daughter told me about Anthony, and then later, Diane.

Smith: The loss of your grandson and your daughter’s house?

Creel: Right, and disrupting their little family. They had just attained that. It was so very sad, but.

Smith: What’s your best memory about Katrina and the aftermath, recovery?

Creel: Oh, the best—well, I told you being here with my children and grandchildren.

Smith: What’s the most—go ahead.

Creel: I’ve got a closed mind there, Pat. I mean my mind is small around my family, and I can’t expand too much on it.

Smith: So you’ve just enjoyed the family being—

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: —more physically closely connected.

Creel: Right.

Smith: As a result of the storm.

Creel: Yeah, right.

Smith: What’s the most important thing, looking around you, that still needs to be done in this community? The thing that if you could kick them in the pants to do something, what’s really needed in Long Beach and Pass Christian?

Creel: Well, I think they’re doing the best they can, Pat, with what’s available, but I’d like to see the businesses come back. And you miss the restaurants on the beach and different things. Other than that, I think the services are pretty good. I’d like to see a transit system along the beach. It worked with that little railway system.

Smith: You still remember the trolley cars, the trams?
Creel: Yeah, I didn’t ride it but that one time, but it seems to me that that’s so feasible rather than moving railroads and everything. And if it’s destroyed, it’s just a railroad track. I don’t imagine that the construction would be that involved. But I’d like to see it. I’d like to be able to drive the car down like they do in the cities and park it at a certain spot and take the rail to Ocean Springs, Bay St. Louis or something. Of course there are busses; I know that.

Smith: You’re still driving, right?

Creel: Yes, um-hm.

Smith: You look very fit and vigorous for—

Creel: Well, thank you.

Smith: —eighty-seven. Eighty-seven?

Creel: Eighty-seven.

Smith: Are you sure?

Creel: Yeah.

Smith: OK. What else should I have asked you about that I didn’t ask you about?

Creel: I can’t think of anything, honey; I think you’ve hit on everything. I did a lot of reading the materials after the storm about New Orleans, The [Great] Deluge that [Douglas] Brinkley wrote, and all the different publications. I still have a hard time; I don’t know the name of it, but the disc is about Biloxi. I still have a hard time playing that.

Smith: You don’t want to look at it.

Creel: Well, I do, and I don’t. You know how those things are. But it’s very, very emotional.

Smith: You were playing something when I came in. What was that?

Creel: That was the Amish/Mennonite “Amazing Grace.” It’s the Interim Mennonite Choir, and they’re singing “Amazing Grace,” “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” “In the Rifted Rock I’m Resting,” “Abide with Me,” “The Lord is My Shepherd,” “Is Not Dismayed,” “What Are Big Tide(?).” That must be, you think that’d be Dutch right here? It looks like it’s in a dialect.

Smith: May be. Well, OK, I appreciate the time that you’ve given to us.
Creel: Well, I’ve enjoyed talking my head off, Pat.

Smith: Well, I’m so glad that you did.

(end of interview)