Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Mark Currier

Interviewer: Erin Townson,
Jennifer Kaufman

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MARK CURRIER

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mark Currier and is taking place on February 21, 2008. The interviewers are Erin Townson and Jennifer Kaufman.

Townson: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project, done in conjunction with the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with Mark Currier, and it takes place on February 21, 2008, at nine o’clock a.m. in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. The interviewers are Erin Townson—


Townson: I am Erin, and I will begin with the first question. First, I’d like to thank you, Mark, for taking time to talk with me today, and I’d like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you first, for the record, could you state your name, please?

Currier: Mark Francis Currier.

Townson: And for the record, how do you spell your name?

Currier: M-A-R-K, C-U-R-R-I-E-R.

Townson: And when were you born?

Currier: July 5, 1952, Touro Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Townson: OK. And for the record, what was your father’s name?

Currier: Mortimer Francis Currier.

Townson: OK. Can you spell that for us for the record?

Townson: OK. And your mother’s first name and maiden name, please?

Currier: Is Catherine Faye Diet.

Townson: OK, and could you spell that?


Townson: OK. So where did you grow up, and would you tell us a little bit about what that was like.

Currier: Well, I was born in New Orleans, and my father’s a retired physician, family doctor, and he had a residence in Plaquemine, Louisiana; it’s a little, small town on the Mississippi River below Baton Rouge. And he bought a couple of acres of land from this plantation, St. Louis Plantation and built a big two-story house for all the kids. There’s five of us, and I had a wonderful childhood. And when I was in high school, they sent me off to a Catholic boarding school in Covington, Louisiana, called St. Paul’s. Then when I graduated from St. Paul’s in [19]71, I went to LSU [Louisiana State University] and got a degree from LSU in Baton Rouge in business and modern fine arts. And from there I went to work in an electrical supply company for about eleven years, and lived in Baton Rouge for a while. And then I got involved in industrial construction and traveled a bit, and then ended up in Perdido Key, Florida, for a while, and bought a sailboat and sailed down to the Keys and lived on a boat for a couple of years. I moved up to Chicago for one year, and I remember one year my daughter called me and says, “Dad, you’re like a fish out of the water up there. You need to come back down.” So that’s what I did, and still industrial construction. Finally decided to buy a house in Bay St. Louis because I’ve always loved Bay St. Louis, since a kid, because one of my friends’ grandfather had a house right on the beach in Waveland. And so about eleven years ago, I bought a house in Bay St. Louis, and so that’s how I ended up here.

Townson: OK. Could you describe your neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina?

Currier: Oh, it was—well, the neighborhood that I own my house at is in Garden Isle, which is in a flood zone, and it’s mainly, I guess you would say cottages and cabins. Everything’s on stilts because it’s in a flood zone. I’m at sixteen, two elevation; my house is on stilts, and so I always thought I’d never see water in my house. (laughter) But anyway, I had—six years ago—well, actually eight years ago, eight or nine years ago, I met Jenise McCardell, and she and I were married five years ago, and that’s where I moved out of my house and moved to downtown Bay St. Louis on the second block of Main Street. And Jenise and I have two houses and a commercial building on Main Street. And so that’s where we were, and so did you want to know when the storm—where was I when the storm?

Townson: Yeah. Did you stay in your home during Hurricane Katrina?
Currier: No, no, no, no. Actually, the storm came in on Monday morning. Yeah, came in on Monday morning. Saturday we were in New Orleans doing a Mid-City art market at a craft show, really good craft show in New Orleans, and I woke up around 5:30 and flipped on the TV, and the whole—of course, the hurricane, it was predicting where they show you the east and the west side, which way the hurricane’s predicted to landfall, and the whole Gulf of Mexico was just one big red dot, and they showed the center of the eye, and they were predicting to go straight toward New Orleans then. And so that’s where we were; of course, we had two days to get out of there. So I told Jenise we weren’t going to do the show, and we ended up going back, coming back to Bay St. Louis, which was Saturday morning. And I’ll never forget the girl at the craft show; just like, you know, we went to tell her, said, “Look, we’re not going to do the show because there’s a storm coming, and we really need to get prepared for it.” She goes, “Well, you know, I’m not going to be able to give you back your fifty-dollar deposit.” I was like, “To hell with fifty dollars! I’m looking at over a half a million dollars in property, and you worried about”—(laughter) So anyway, she laughed; she said, “I know. I can’t believe people are still setting up.” I said, “Well, look, don’t worry about the fifty dollars; I’m going back to Bay St. Louis.” (laughter) So we went back to Bay St. Louis, and I started boarding everything up. And then all these friends started coming over. Anyway, I ended up putting tin on windows and boarding up stuff all day Saturday. So we decided we were going to spend the night Saturday night in the house, just watch, because the storms, it all depends on the high pressure, you know, which way it’s going to push the storm. And we had just had a storm last year, Ivan, which was predicted to hit New Orleans, and right at the last twelve hours, it veered off and ended up in Orange Beach, Alabama, and we were on the good side of it so we didn’t have any problems. So we were just going to wait another twenty-four hours. So Saturday night we ended up at the yacht club, and it was packed. Everybody was in there, and I remember talking to a friend, Joe D. Bienvenutti; I said, “Joe D., you know, if this storm keep coming in the direction it’s at, and we’re in the northeast quadrant, this yacht club’s not going to be here.” “Oh! Don’t say that! It’s not going to”—I said, “Joe D., it’s a Category Five storm right now, man. If this thing hits, this place is going to be destroyed.” “Oh! Don’t talk like that. Don’t talk like”—I said, “Joe D., I’m telling you.” (laughter) So anyway, we had a big party, and everybody, you know, was going to leave Sunday morning, which most normal people did. I have parents in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and so that’s where we decided to go. So we got out Sunday morning, I guess around nine o’clock, and the storm still on the same track been predicting to go straight into New Orleans. So I said, “Well.” And they were doing all the interstates, they were directing people north. You couldn’t go—you couldn’t get on Interstate 10 and go west. You could go either east, or you could go north up [Highway] 55 or [Highway] 49 or [Highway] 59. So I said, “Since we got to go west, we’re going to take the Highway 90, which goes through the Rigolets, through Slidell, through Hammond. Well, we get right to just outside of Pearlington, almost into the Rigolets, and the bridge is broken.” (laughter) So we’re sitting in miles of traffic just right in the Rigolets. Well, I’m not going to sit here. And so I said, “OK, let’s do plan B. We’ll get on I-10 and head west to Interstate 59, which is in Slidell, and they are going to divert me going north. Well, the first exit I’m going to get off and start going down some of these off highways,
heading west, try to hit Baton [Rouge].” So the first exit I got off just north of Slidell, and we started heading west, which was really the best way we could have gone. And ended up going through, what is it? Abita Springs, Covington, Hammond, and then into Baton Rouge, which I was just north of I-12/I-10, you know, running west. It took me about five hours, which is really good. Normally, if you’re on the interstate, it takes two hours to get from Bay St. Louis to Baton Rouge. It took me five hours on all these back highways, which was pretty good. And so we got to Baton Rouge. Fortunately my parents were out of town. They were out west somewhere with some friends that have a ranch, Montana. And I called them, and I said, “Look, Dad, y’all might want to stay over (laughter) there another week.” And they said, “Yeah, we following the storm. Y’all make yourselves at home.” So we rode out the hurricane there, and there were seventy-five-mile-an-hour winds in Baton Rouge. They knocked out the electricity and everything. And so the next day after the storm, nobody had TV or anything. So the second day—actually there was one person on, well, Tuesday, that had a generator, and then we were starting to get some television then. And we saw nothing about Bay St. Louis, because I was in Louisiana, Baton Rouge, so they were talking about New Orleans. And then they started talking about the breakages in the levees and how it was flooded, and it was all about New Orleans. And it was just, absolutely just terrible. And so I guess the second day, was it Wednesday? Another friend of mine [Drew Box] from here, who was in Baton Rouge, we took his truck, and we drove. Said, “Look, we got to come back and see what’s going on.” Because we had no idea if we still had buildings or houses or whatever. Well, we came back on the interstate, and we got all the way in. Came in and got into Waveland, and I mean, there were still shrimp boats and you name it, all kinds of just debris and stuff on the highway. We were weaving around stuff getting in, but we got in. And the National Guard was in there, and they were clearing off the streets and stuff and debris, and you name it, everything was just all over the place. It was like a bomb had just went off, and just everything was destroyed. So the first place we went to was—well, we saw the National Guard, and they were distributing ice and MREs [meals ready to eat] and stuff at the Wal-Mart, K-Mart. And so we got some ice and some water, and then we went to his house, which is down on the Bay. He’s, like, two houses off the Bay, and just everything on this side—well, everything from the Bay all the way to the railroad track was just slabs. It was just debris, just piled up; houses piled up on top of it. And so we got to his place, and the mud was, like, a foot deep. So you’re walking through the mud and stuff, didn’t see too many—I mean, there was nothing really alive, you know, I mean, (laughter) so everybody talks about the snakes and alligators and all that stuff, but everything was dead. And it was starting to get that stench. I’ll never forget that smell; it was terrible, unbelievable. And so we’re walking through it, and we get up to his slab, climbing over debris and stuff, and we finally got in. And of course, you know, he was all emotional and everything. And it was (laughter) a sign or something, says something about, “Do not litter.” (laughter) And he picked up the sign, (laughter) and I took a picture of him with it. It was just unbelievable. So then we went back over, and I’m two blocks off the beach, but I’m in downtown, which is, like, the highest area. I’m at twenty-two foot elevation, and they said that the tidal surge was twenty-four feet, which that’s pretty much about what—some people are saying thirty, but I think the highest, that it was twenty-four
because when we got to my property on the second block of Main Street, I had about nineteen inches of water. I could see where the water line was, and when the water went back out—see, that’s the difference between New Orleans and here. We had a tidal surge that came in, and then as soon as the eye went over Bay St. Louis, the water started going back out. I mean, it took a lot of stuff back out in the Gulf, into the Bay, but it was only here for, you know, nine hours, ten hours, something like that. It went back out. Then you had all that damn Mississippi mud, that silt, because this is the Mississippi Sound, the river empties into the Sound, so there’s a lot of that silt. And being that I grew up on the river in Plaquemine, played behind the levee, I’d smell that mud, and when I walked in—I’ll never forget when I walked into my house, that’s the first scent that I smelled, was the Mississippi mud. It was that scent, like, about six inches in my building. And I was like, “Man!” But I had a building; I was so lucky. I was blessed. Of course, a lot of the roof had blown off. We rented the front half of the commercial building to my buddy Drew who I was with; we’d just been to his house, which was destroyed. And I’ll never forget that first day. We had a curfew, so we had to get out before sunset, or we had to stay where we were. And there was a lot of National Guard; there was a lot of the first responder people walking through buildings and looking for dead people, and they were doing the Xs and writing down on each building and all that kind of stuff. And then we started running into some of my friends that had stayed, and then hearing their stories, which, oh Lord! You don’t want to get into that! And so we talked to some of them, and they were still in shock. And so I said, “All right. We’re leaving. We’re going back to Baton Rouge. What do you want us to bring you back?” And so they would tell us different things that they wanted. Some would just—it’s like, “I can’t bring”—you know, some things they were just—you know, you couldn’t bring back, but mainly generators, gas, some liquor. (laughter) Plenty of liquor. (laughter) And so we started doing that for about, I guess, four days we did. We ran back and forth from Baton Rouge, bringing stuff back in, and every day we had the truck with just so much stuff in it that we finally—I told Drew; I said, “Look. I can’t do this every day. I’m just staying.” And by then I had bought a generator; I had gotten enough provisions to where, I said, “If I’m going to clean up, I got to stay. I can’t keep going back and forth to Baton Rouge.” So I ended up staying; my family stayed with my parents in Baton Rouge another week, and then they finally came down. And I had cleaned it up enough to where I made it where they could come in. But I’ll never forget that first day, this buddy of mine that stayed. And I was like, “Jesse, man, I don’t even know where to start.” And he looked at me; he goes, “Mark, come here.” And he brings me over to this corner, and he says, “Look, give me that squeegee.” And he grabs that squeegee, and we start squeegeeing out the mud, and we clean out this little corner. And we like, “Wow, man! I can see the clean floor.” And he got the mop bucket, and he started bleaching with the mop. Of course there was very little water pressure, and so finally after two weeks, the water pressure finally started getting sealed off; so many leaks all over. And boy, once we got the water pressure there, it was like, yeah! Then we really started cleaning out, you know. And you know, I guess about, it was two months after—well, I had the house, which is a three-story house so the upstairs and the middle layer were fine. You had to take your shoes off to go upstairs. And we had lost some of the roof, but I got out there, and you know with the generator I was able
to recharge my cordless batteries, and I was able to use my tools, and I got, just screwed down the tin that I’d picked up. There was tin everywhere. A lot the buildings downtown had tin roofs, and I just, you know, so that no more water, rain would come in. And it didn’t rain for a while. Well, the next time it rained was Hurricane Rita, (laughter) which was, like, two weeks later. And that was quite an experience. I never want to go through that again. Of course I’ve been through a couple of hurricanes; part of living in the South, you know. You just deal with it, you know. I mean, it’s part of—I’m sure y’all have disasters up there. What?

**Townson:** Snow storms.

**Currier:** Blizzards. (laughter)

**Townson:** Definitely snow storms, sometimes ice storms.

**Currier:** Yeah, you know, then we had all the problems with the insurance companies, and you know, of course the flood, flood insurance paid off because it’s national. You know, it’s a federally-funded insurance so once their people came in, if it was over 50 percent destroyed, and it didn’t take long to—you know, you walk and see a slab, that’s over 50 percent destroyed. (laughter) And so—

**Townson:** Can you tell us who left with you? You said your family. Who left with you to Baton Rouge?

**Currier:** My wife and her daughter and our animals—my dog—and my neighbors followed us up there. And there was a few people that I tried to convince to get out that stayed. Fortunately all of them are still alive. I left my truck, and we just took one vehicle, and fortunately I had parked the truck in my neighbor’s, under his carport, which didn’t get destroyed. He didn’t even get water in his house. He had it up about two feet above the ground. It got right to the top—

**Townson:** (inaudible)

**Currier:** Yeah. My house in Garden Isles, the water, that I was telling you was sixteen two elevation because it’s in a flood zone?

**Townson:** Um-hm.

**Currier:** The water got all the way up to the ceiling, which is twenty-four feet. And it got right up to the ceiling; nothing in the attic, and there was a thirty-foot steel barge had drifted into my property because there’s a marina across the bayou from my house, and six feet from hitting the house and got wedged between these two big, old pine trees. And I’ll never forget getting over there, and I was looking, and I was like, “How in the world am I going to get this barge out of here?” (laughter) It was, like about three weeks later, these two eighteen-wheelers, flatbed trailers, had a crane on one of them and picked that barge up and swung it back and dropped it on that
eighteen-wheeler, and somebody called me and said, “Mark, your barge is gone.”
(laughter) I’m like, “All right. Man, things are looking better!” But the house did
not—and boy, there was a tornado that blew right behind my house. There were
tornadoes; you could see where tornadoes were blowing through, and just trees twisted
and every—just like a trail where you could see where the tornadoes went right behind
my house. I mean, I was so lucky. And just unbelievable, not one window in my
house blew out, except I got French doors that open up to a balcony. One of the
French doors—and it’s glass panes. The screen, the French door, and the hinges, now
I think what happened is when the water started going out, it blew out the door, and I
found it in the woods behind the house, not one pane broken. And there was just one
hole in one window, and these are double-paned windows. One hole, about that big;
that was it. All my windows were still there. The guy that built this house was a civil
engineer, and he did hurricane straps every twelve inches on the beams that attach to
the house. There are houses that were picked up by the water and just floated off and
just plowed into other houses, tornadoes that blew off the houses. Man, it was a mess.
It was a mess. Anyway.

Kaufman: Could you tell us if you have any vivid memories of the community
before the storm?

Currier: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, yeah. I mean, all the beautiful homes. I have a
lot of friends that are members—well, we’re members of the yacht club so we have a
lot of friends that own homes along the beach, and there’s no homes left on the beach.
Somebody told me that 70 percent of all homes in Waveland were destroyed. I know
all the homes that were between the beach and the railroad track are gone, so I can
believe that. One of my friends is an attorney, and I guess he had had his house built
only a couple of years before the storm. He said, “Yeah, this is my last house; I’m not
building another house.” And all this, and of course, it really tore up a lot of people
and scattered a lot of people, a lot of friends, people that—he’s moved his whole
family to Lafayette. You know, they had to get the kids in schools and stuff, and so
what is it? Two and a half years now, and there’s still people that want to come back
that just haven’t been able to do it because it’s just all the children and everything.
He’s coming back, though. (laughter) Just taking a few more years. I saw him last
night. My father-in-law and mother-in-law, they lived in Pass Christian, and they
lived in an area called the Isles, which is, when you go over the bridge, you take a left
in Pass Christian, and they live right on the water, back in this little peninsula. And
Gene Wylett was one of their neighbors. And my father-in-law’s a retired admiral in
the Navy; they built this cute home right on the water, and it was totally destroyed. So
we moved them into our house across the street, and I’ll never forget. Now, he’s
retired Navy, and he was going through one of the last times we went back over there,
and picks up this medal. And I don’t know what—he had a lot of medals. Picks this
up. He goes, “You see this?” “And this is a very strong-minded, retired admiral. He
looks at me, and he goes, “Mark! You see this?” And I go, “Yes, sir.” He goes,
“This is all I got left of thirty-five years in the damn Navy!” (laughter) And I’m like,
“Well, Mr. Jim, at least you got your life. You know? I mean, come on.” He’s like,
“Aw, I know it! You damn right!” (laughter) So we picking up stuff, and Jenise’s
mom also does architectural ceramics. She does switch plates and receptacle plates, and she does, like, French Quarter type buildings on the plates and stuff, very cute. And she’s very talented. So she had lost her kilns and all. Her molds were scattered all over the place, but they’re plaster of Paris, so they didn’t really get ruined. They got a little wet, but they dry out if you put them on a kiln or whatever. And so she says, “I’m retiring.” You know, and she’s in her seventies, and so I can understand that, Miss Nancy. And the last day we were there, I said, “You know, I’m going to pick up these molds and bring them back over to the house.” And so I did that, and Mr. Jim, “She doesn’t want those molds.” I said, “Well, I’m going to pick them up anyway.” So I bring them over, and I said, “Look, Miss Nancy, I got some of your molds.” “Well, I don’t want those molds.” And I said, “Well, I’m just going to—you know, you might one day want to have them; you never know.” So we put them up on the side of the building, and then I guess a few months later, some of the grants and stuff were coming out. And so we qualified for this artist grant; she qualified for an artist grant, too. And she was telling her daughter Jenise, she goes, “You know what? I think I might buy a kiln.” (laughter) And so she gets a kiln, and so then she comes over, and then she says, “Can I borrow some of your slip?” And I said, “Miss Nancy, are you coming out of retirement?” “Well, I might do just a few things.” So now she’s out of retirement. And so every time when she (inaudible), I’ll tease her a little bit. And she goes, “Well, I blame you for getting me out of retirement, Mark.” I said, “Well, Miss Nancy, you know why I really did that?” And she goes, “Why is that?” And I said, “Because I didn’t want you to drive my father-in-law crazy. I want you to be able to do something.” (laughter) So that’s why I did it. And so she’s doing it again. But some of my memories of Bay St. Louis are fine from just a little kid, and I still have them, and you know, they’re there. I don’t have too many photos; I got some photos, I mean, because I didn’t lose my computer, and I got a lot of pictures in my computer, you know. If I would have known what was going to happen to the city, I probably would have taken more pictures (laughter) (inaudible), you know, but that’s just part of life. Everybody goes through disasters in their life; hopefully some of us don’t go through too many. I know I’ve had my fair share, and I’m sure y’all, probably. It’s just part of life, you know. So you just take the punches and try to keep your head up and move along. So that’s where I’m at now. And we were one of the first businesses to reopen in, actually, the whole town of Bay St. Louis. And we had this thing called Second Saturday every second Saturday of every month. It’s called (inaudible) the Art Walk, and then businesses stay open a little longer; they stay open till eight [p.m.] instead of five [p.m.]. And then they have hors d’oeuvres and, you know, some beverages, and we have a live band, and some of the shops have a special artist that they show. And that’s been going on for quite a few years, and so two months after the storm, we had one. We were the only business open, but we had one—and there were more, probably, out-of-town people that showed up than locals because most of the locals still hadn’t—you know, they were just starting to come back and get their lives back together, and so we hired this jazz band; two jazz bands showed up. So the first one goes, “Well, look, you got another band.” “Well, they just showed up, but y’all play one song, and then they’ll play one song.” And I put them across the street from each other. Well, that worked out fine; they would play some, and then by the time it was over, they were all together, all playing together.
And man, the mayor came up to us, all these different government people, said, “Man, this is the best thing y’all could have done for Bay St. Louis, have Second Saturday. So the chamber [of commerce] comes and approaches us and wants us to do it every weekend. So we did that for, I guess about two months. And finally I said, “Look, that’s it. We can’t do this every weekend. It’s just too much.” So we started just doing it every once-a-month again, and that worked out fine. But just trying to get the community, you know, people to get together again and so now, two and a half years later, we’re moving right along, and here you are in the hospital that was flooded, and so I mean business along Highway 90 looks like it’s normal, pretty much normal again. You can still go down in some areas and it looks like it did two and a half years ago. And then you go in some areas, and it really looks nice. And so, like if you go away, and you come back, every time you come back, you see more improvements. And so things are coming back, but it’s going to take a while. It’s a lot slower. You got all your government bureaucracy and nonsense that everybody has to go through. Everybody’s got the insurance problems and all that nonsense, and so you just have to deal with it and go through with it.

Townson: And have you personally had problems with any government—like you said you had to apply to grants. Did you apply personally to grants or not?

Currier: I did get an artist’s grant.

Townson: What is that? Oh, an artist’s grant. OK.

Currier: An artist’s grant.

Townson: OK. So to fund, to help you get started back up?

Currier: Yeah, it’s to get started back up, and it was through the Department of Labor, the Mississippi—it was given to the State of Mississippi for the endowment of the arts. And so that helped us to get rolling again. And that’s the only grant that we got. (laughter) But it helps; it definitely helps.

Townson: Good. Why did you decide to leave? Just from the strength of the storm? Because you said when you were in New Orleans—

Currier: Because of the size of the storm. I’ve been through a couple of storms, and don’t want to—you know, I’ve done it before, and I don’t want to do it again.

Townson: You rode out the other ones here?

Currier: No, not here. I rode out one in Plaquemines, Hurricane Betsy. But you know, when you get anything over a [Category] Three, you’re putting your life in jeopardy by staying in the path of a storm that’s that massive. You know, it’s just ridiculous to stay.
Townson: What was Betsy? What hurricane size was Betsy? Hurricane Betsy you said you rode out?

Currier: Hurricane Betsy, yeah.

Townson: What Category?

Currier: It was a Category Three.

Townson: Three?

Currier: Yeah.

Kaufman: You said when you had come back, you had seen some of the first responders doing the Xs on the buildings and stuff. What was that like, seeing that and knowing that, you know, there were people that had passed on in the storm and animals and other things? What was that like to see the markings and things being done?

Currier: It was quite impressive. I mean, these guys, you know, when they’d come by, I would always offer them water or whatever I had. Of course, they always had everything they needed, you know. (laughter) And I’d thank them and cheer them on and try to have conversation with them. And I said, “Where are you guys from?” And these guys, one group I met was from New York. But they were definitely well-prepared. They all had their backpacks on and life support stuff. They were quite impressive. And the National Guard, too. I mean, they were—when they started coming in, boy, [there were] so many helicopters. Unbelievable. (laughter) That was something. And I was impressed the way they came in and cleared out the streets, and then they would even going down, and they were offering ice and water and MREs. I mean, at first you had to go up to the [K-Mart] area. And then they started coming down, and you know, dispersing it in different areas, just driving down some of the main roads and stuff. And they were quite helpful.

Kaufman: Um-hm. We’ve heard a lot that, especially in this city, a lot of volunteer groups coming down and helping. Would you agree with that?

Currier: Yeah. I guess after about six months. Boy, I cannot tell you all the volunteer groups that have come through this state and this area. The church groups and mainly church groups and volunteer groups, and if it wouldn’t be for all the church groups and stuff that came in and helped just cleaning out the debris and helping with everything and bringing just all the clothes and just everything, food and stuff, it was unbelievable. Unbelievable. Just volunteers. You know, God bless American, man, because I tell you what; if the volunteer people came through, it was unbelievable. It was absolutely unbelievable. And then Red Cross came in, and they were driving around for a couple of months passing out hot food and stuff. And they had this—they’re blowing their horns. (sound like blowing horn) And then the
loudspeaker, you know, it’s like, “Hot meals! Hot meals! The Red Cross. Hot Meals.” And after, about a couple of months after the storm, and they were still driving around, and I remember this neighbor, somebody walked up to the Red Cross van, and they go, “Well, what you got today?” And I remember telling this friend of mine; (laughter) I said, “You know what? When people start walking up to the Red Cross van and asking them what they got today, it’s time for them to go.” (laughter) If they got to ask you what you got. So anyway, it was so many, the volunteer groups were just amazing. Everybody was so giving.

Townson: What can you say that you’ve missed most? I know you said the beautiful homes along the beach and that. Is there anything else that you miss most that you guys had before in this community that you don’t have now?

Currier: Well, all the restaurants and bars that were downtown, I miss them because I could just walk to them. I was on the second block of Main Street. So all my little restaurants and bars there, I miss that. I miss my pier. We had a beautiful pier that was down between the bridge and downtown, right on the beach, and I miss a lot of my friends that used to live here. And I guess that’s about it.

Townson: Just a question about, how old is your wife’s daughter that was with you?

Currier: Devon is sixteen now; so she was thirteen and a half, fourteen back in—

Townson: And how long was she back in school right away in this area?

Currier: Boy, that’s funny because boy, Jenise was all concerned about that because, I mean, the school got blown out pretty bad, and she goes to OLA [Our Lady Academy]. And so Jenise was going to put her in school in Baton Rouge, and she had registered and gave them money and made it all ready to set up, and we were going to rent an apartment in Baton Rouge and all this, and then finally I got back over here and started talking to people and it’s like, you know, they’re going to do something in a couple of months. And so we decided that we would just keep her out and wait on what the school system was going to do here. So she was out of school probably about three months, and then they opened it. They had trailers and stuff like that, and they got back in school, and so it worked out.

Townson: Did you ever—well, you just mentioned about renting an apartment, maybe, in Baton Rouge. But did it ever cross your mind to never come back here? Or what was your decision to come back, I guess is the question?

Currier: Well, it definitely crossed my wife’s mind that, “What do we have to come back to?” And our main market is New Orleans, and it was totally destroyed. I thought I was going to have to go back into industrial construction. And Jenise, she didn’t know what she was going to do. So we were really concerned, (laughter) there for a while, all our wholesale businesses were shut down. And so we didn’t know what we were going to do. And fortunately I got the shop reopened in about a month
in a half; I had the shop reopened. We still had stuff on the shelves, and a lot of out-of-towners, you know, governmental people and stuff, and they were coming in and they were buying stuff. And my wife being as creative as she is, the FEMA trailers were starting to come in, and she looked at this trailer that was across the street from our house. She says, “You know what? I think that I could sell that.” So she made a FEMA trailer. We make these little five-by-eight plaques; take a picture of the front of the building and make it in clay, and so she saw that FEMA trailer. She goes, “I’m going to make that.” She made this FEMA trailer; it’s got an umbrella with a little heart, and it says, “Home sweet FEMA home.” (laughter) And they started selling like hot cakes. And so you know, our business just—people would come in there, and it was selling again. Once we got the electricity going, you know, I got my kilns. The first time I turned the kilns on—it’s in a room, we call the kiln room, and it’s got four kilns in it. And I started—you know, I finally got the electrical boxes, the timers all—they had gotten wet so I had to replace all of them and everything. And I turned them on, and these are stainless steel elements inside the kilns, and the water had soaked up into the firebrick, which is very absorbent. And man, when those bricks started heating up, that steam started coming out of these kilns. And they got this little hole on the top; it was like a geyser blowing that steam, that water out of there. I mean, you walked in; it was like taking a sauna. I’m like, “Good Lord!” (laughter) And finally it dried up everything. And then the damn elements, and these were stainless steel elements, but that salt water got in, and it corroded all those damn elements. So I had to pull all those damn elements out; I finally got those kilns running. And it’s like, “Yeah, we rolling now, man!” (laughter) So we got going again, and then slowly but surely, some of our businesses, wholesale accounts started calling. “Are y’all back open?” And you know, people’d call me. “Yeah, we’re back open.” “We need some stuff.” And so we started slowly selling some stuff to our wholesale customers, and you know, things are going back again.

Townson: Getting set back up, do you guys still have the same, like, cable companies, phone companies, or did new companies come in, take over? Still the same ones?

Currier: The same ones.

Townson: Same.

Currier: Yeah. I don’t think—well, AT&T took over Bell South. (laughter) But same cable company, Mediacom. Same thing, same people.

Townson: Yeah, I just wondered just if it had been wiped out as well, and then new company—

Currier: Oh, they got wiped out bad. Whooe. Especially the telephone company. Man, they had more telephone people coming in. They’ve rebuilt all the boxes, put them up higher, their main distribution areas and stuff. Man, telephone people (inaudible), we had a big box outside of our building, which they moved it; they
moved it down a block. Now, they got companies, the city is getting money to redo the infrastructure. And they redoing the sewage and water and gas and digging up the roads. So now we got to (laughter) deal with all that. (laughter) But it’s for the better, you know? I mean you got to deal with the bad to get better sometimes. We’ll see what happens.

Townson: How do you feel the government, like local and federal, worked after the hurricane? Like with FEMA trailers and that kind of stuff?

Currier: Well, I think they could have responded a little better. You know, but it was just such an overwhelming—nobody, I mean nobody had any idea that we were going to see the destruction that we saw. I don’t think anybody who was in the government, the federal or the state or the city, were prepared for what happened. I mean, the city of Waveland’s police department ended up on the roof of their building—

Townson: We talked to one of them yesterday.

Currier: You know. I mean, it was just totally unbelievable, and some of the people that stayed, which are total idiots, and I’ve talked to a couple of them. I said, “Well, would you do that again?” They just like, “Are you crazy?” (laughter) I said, “Well, you’re the one that stayed.” (laughter) Just like, these two guys that stayed at this bed and breakfast on the beach, Bay Town Inn. Has anybody talked to y’all about them?

Kaufman: No.

Townson: No.

Currier: These two friends of mine, I’m not going to say their names because I don’t want to (laughter) be—but they rode it out. And I’m not even going to say what one of them does for a living because that’ll really blow you away. (laughter) He rode it out on the beach with this other friend of his, and when the waves started coming into the downstairs, and they went upstairs, and then the waves kept coming up and getting higher and higher, and then the building was shaking. So they climbed out the back window, climbing over the debris and got into a live oak tree and rode it out in this live oak tree for about five hours. The guy at the highest point, he’d see the wave roll in; fortunately, that’s the other thing that really saved a lot of people, was that this storm came through in the daytime so it was kind of like this kind of darkness. You can still see, I mean, but if it were at night, it probably would have been a lot more people lost.

Townson: We have heard that; that definitely that saved a lot of people, too, to see—

Currier: He was able to see the wave roll in; he’d say, “(Inaudible) another one.” And they’d hold onto the branches and (inaudible). So after, when the water went back out, then they walked up to my house, which this guy used to own, broke into the
house, you know. They got everything out of the freezers and stuff and ate it and all that, which was fine. I’m glad that they—we (inaudible) stuff for them, and then they saw my truck, which is a long-bed F150 pickup truck. And they started—there were people all over the place. Well, not a lot of people, but there were people that had gotten hurt. And so they started using my truck as an ambulance, running people up here to the hospital.

**Townson:** To this hospital?

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

**Kaufman:** Did they tell you why they decided to stay? Was it just that they wanted to? They had nowhere else to go?

**Currier:** Now, get this. “The house made it through Hurricane Camille.” Which actually went a little farther east of here, not too much farther east. (laughter) That was a major storm, too, but this one was a storm of a hundred years, they say. It was the worst; it was terrible. And you know, actually, we’re really lucky that it did go through Plaquemines Parish before hitting the Mississippi Coast because it dropped down to a Category Three by the time it hit here. When it hit Plaquemines Parish, it was a Five; when it went through Plaquemines Parish, that slowed it down.

**Townson:** Where is that? Sorry.

**Currier:** In Louisiana, Plaquemines Parish, it’s below New Orleans, where the river runs down into the Gulf [of Mexico]. That’s all down—that’s right; you from Canada.

**Townson:** Right. (laughter)

**Currier:** So I’m telling you things you don’t know anything about, huh? (laughter) I forgot about that. I’m sorry.

**Townson:** So we’re asking where all these places are (laughter) just so we can understand where it went.

**Currier:** I should have brought a map.

**Townson:** I’ll look it up, for sure, definitely, yeah. We’ve seen so much coverage of different areas that we’ve never stayed. What would you like to see rebuilt in your community or along, like, the Gulf Coast here?

**Currier:** I’d love to see, and there’s a bunch of people like myself that are involved, and some of the people that have businesses in Bay St. Louis have gotten together and talked about some of the things that we’d like to see the city rebuilt. And a lot of us are hoping that we could get a city marina downtown, and then have some of the, like, some of these buildings that you see, these three-, four-story buildings with balconies
on them, you know, where you have the shops down on the first two levels, and then apartments above where the people that own the shops live, and then, you know, the balconies, overlooking this beautiful marina because, you know, we’re just right off the Intracoastal Waterway, which runs all the way from New York, all the way down the East Coast and back up Florida, all the way through to Texas. There are a lot of nice pleasure boats that run up along the Intracoastal there, always looking for a new marina. I think it would be just a wonderful idea to bring money into the city, but first you got to have the shops, the restaurants. This would give these investors that I hear there are lots of them in other states that are dying to come in here and invest money in, but they got to see some incentive from the city to give them the incentive to invest. And I think that would be a wonderful incentive for these investors to come in. It’s like, “Oh, wow, we could build a city marina. Man, this would give me an opportunity to build a nice restaurant, a four-story building downtown.” So hopefully—and the mayor’s behind it now. We met with the city council, and they agreed to do a feasibility study on it so the ball’s in motion. So hopefully that will happen. Maybe next time y’all come back down here, you’ll see it.

**Townson:** Yeah. Good luck for that.

**Currier:** I’ll take y’all downtown; we’ll go have a drink. (laughter)

**Townson:** We’ve heard, too—

**Currier:** On me! (laughter) Of course, then you have to buy something. (laughter)

**Townson:** We’ve heard, too, a lack of grocery stores, too, here. People were hoping that—

**Currier:** Girl, I’d *love* to see another grocery store besides Wal-Mart. I am so tired—I love Wal-Mart; don’t get me wrong. We call it Wally World.

**Townson:** Yeah, I used to work for Wal-Mart.

**Currier:** Oh, did you?

**Townson:** Yeah, Wally World, too, that’s what we’d call it.

**Currier:** Well, I hope they didn’t mistreat you, being a woman.

**Townson:** No.

**Currier:** Oh, well, good; that’s good. But anyway, Wal-Mart right after the storm was, for having all these people that stayed, looting Wal-Mart, and then the police and the National Guard just backing off and letting them do it and all that, you know, and then them come back so fast is, I mean, my hat off to them. You know, I mean, they were really instrumental in being there for—and I know the manager at the time when
all this was going on, and he was right in there helping the National Guard throw ice out for people and stuff. And then he came back and helped to get Wal-Mart back on. And that helped the whole community. I mean, just getting these businesses back open was the key to getting this community rolling again. So.

Townson: Do you have any fears of the future here in Bay St. Louis?

Currier: No, not at all. Not at all. You know, so many people when—who was it? CNN [Cable News Network] or one of the MSNBC [Microsoft Network and National Broadcasting Company] or one of them came and interviewed my wife and I about it because everybody was complaining about the insurance rates and how that was going to slow down business because nobody could afford insurance, and (inaudible) three times Mississippi (inaudible) was charging just outrageous money, you know, to reinsure, and people just like, “How can I afford to stay here?” And stuff. And this was, like, a national interview. And boy, did we get some of these terrible e-mails from people that don’t know anything about the Mississippi Gulf Coast or comparing us to New Orleans, which is below sea level. We’re at twenty-foot elevation here. They don’t have a clue where we live. It’s like, “If you can’t deal with it, get out of the soup bowl.” And all this, I mean, just ridiculous; I mean, hateful, hateful e-mails from people in Minnesota and Idaho that don’t have a clue what’s going on down here. It was ridiculous. Unbelievable the hate e-mails that we were getting from people that don’t have a clue what we have here. You know? I’m at twenty-two foot elevation. So I’m not afraid, and like I said earlier, I’ve been through some other storms. I’ve been through a lot of tropical storms and hurricanes and at least I have enough common sense to move to—to get the hell out of here (laughter) when they warn me that there’s a storm approaching. So.

Townson: Now, did anybody come around to give you, like, the warning, like, there is a storm coming besides, like, when you were in New Orleans or anything? Like, did anybody come around and say—I know the police department said that they did go around twenty-four hours, I think, beforehand.

Currier: Yeah, they drive up and down the streets and tell you, they [use] loudspeakers, the mandatory evacuation. And so there’s plenty warning. I tell you what, from when I was just a kid—I’m fifty-five now, and hell, in the just twenty-five years from when I was a kid to now, the Weather Channel, you know, with the Doppler radars and stuff, and the way they can track storms, they getting a lot better at predicting where the storms are going to hit and everything. And I mean, there’s still that, you know, hundred-mile differential, but they can predict pretty close where these storms are going to hit, now, better than twenty-five years ago. You know, so technology is definitely improving. Just wait till 2050. (laughter) I won’t be here, but man, can you imagine? Goodness gracious. (laughter)

Townson: How long was it that the storm—like, you said it took a turn for its course, right? Started heading more towards this area? Did you say? I don’t know—
Currier: Yeah, yeah. It veered a little bit more east than they were predicting.

Townson: Right, they were predicting. How much from the (inaudible)?

Currier: Which was, really, I mean, even though New Orleans took a major hit, they were actually on the better side of the storm; the northeast quadrant is your worst side of the storm. That’s right where we were. (laughter) So it actually ended up going between New Orleans—when it started moving inland, it veered out, like, right along in Pearl River, which is right Louisiana-Mississippi border, and going through Pearlington and then going up north in Hattiesburg, up in that area. Hattiesburg really got popped bad; I mean, there were tornadoes blowing around up in there, just like unbelievable.

Townson: How long would you say then, I guess forewarning that the storm had taken a turn for its course?

Currier: Say that again, now.

Townson: How long between the time that—well, you said the storm moved more east.

Currier: Yeah.

Townson: Like, how much time was there between them telling you that and the storm actually hitting? Because I know for a lot of people that I talked to said there just wasn’t enough time to get out because they thought the storm was taking a different course. Is that true?

Currier: No, that’s not true. I mean, they pretty much predicted within twenty-five miles of where it hit, where it actually did hit. So that’s pretty accurate. I mean, if you know that a Category Five hurricane is coming at you, we’d been watching that storm for a week, and I mean, there’s a lot of people that don’t have transportation, but they do have friends. A lot of people that stayed could have made arrangements to get the hell out of there, you know. I think that the government and the media gave everybody plenty enough time for them to make plans to get the hell out town. (laughter) So if you stayed, that was your own damn fault. You know.

Townson: How would you say—your business, you said, was up and running, and now it’s doing well?

Currier: We’re doing well, yeah. Fortunately, what we do, what we sell is memorabilia, and so our business is doing well. But we were really concerned, like I said earlier, right after the storm, we didn’t know what we were going to do. But thank God we hung in there, and had the right attitude about getting things back together, and there’s a lot of mental health problems in this area, you know, from the storm. And you know, a lot of people have been dispersed, and so it’s definitely not
the same. But I think it’s going to get better. Yeah. And I’m just starting to see some friends that have rebuilt their houses, and they’re back in. They’re having housewarming parties, and when I walk in, I’m like, “My God! You got all new stuff?” (laughter) And they go, “Yeah.” I said, “Man, you never had any of this! Look at all this new stuff! Look at this brand-new icebox! Man, you even got the ice thing and everything there.” (laughter) You know. So it’s pretty neat, you know. So I think when the people finally start coming back, and if we don’t have any more major storms come through in this area for the next couple of years, insurance is going to go back down, too. It’ll get back; it’ll never be the same, but it’ll start slowly coming back around.

**Kaufman:** Do you find that any people in this area, this community, had resentment or negative feelings toward the media coverage as far as it mostly being on New Orleans versus this area? Do you find that there’s that kind of—

**Currier:** Yeah, but I don’t know. I mean, New Orleans, if you compare it to per capita, then New Orleans deserved all the media coverage. You know? We’re not a major city; so just look at it that way. I mean, people in New Orleans compared to Bay St. Louis, (laughter) we just a little, small, little coastal community. We’re lucky we got any media coverage. You know?

**Townson:** You’ve had a couple of interviews, you said, already with—

**Currier:** Oh, Lord, girl. I’m just (inaudible) to see them go. (laughter) I was ready to see them go, I mean. But some of them are pretty interesting. I met a lot of media. And we been in a bunch of magazines and stuff, too. Who would have thought I’d ever be in all these—be interviewed, all this. (laughter) It’s like, good Lord, I’m just a small-town business, you know.

**Townson:** That was for your business, the interviews?

**Currier:** Yeah.

**Townson:** Interesting.

**Currier:** It wasn’t for me! (laughter) I’m nobody, man. Oh, me.

**Townson:** It’s interesting. The last question we have here is just about [Hurricane] Camille, which you said you were a part of, too.

**Currier:** I was living in Plaquemines, Louisiana, when Camille came through.

**Townson:** Right, and it was a Category Five storm, as well?

**Currier:** Yeah, um-hm.
Townson: OK. And did you—you rode that one out, correct?

Currier: Yeah, but I was in Plaquemines, Louisiana. It was—we didn’t even hardly feel anything from it. We got a little rain from it.

Townson: OK. Yeah because we’ve heard definitely that people—a lot of the story was—who rode out Camille, “Katrina can’t compare” kind of thing. And now people are like, there’s no way; it’s the other way around definitely, like, there’ll be nothing like Katrina.

Currier: Yeah, a lot of people that did go through Camille thought, “This was the storm of the century.” And then they went through Katrina, and they’re like, “Camille ain’t got tiddly-squat on Katrina.” (laughter) Yeah. Like, another guy that rode out the storm, right on the beach, again, and he was in his wife’s house on Washington Street, and it’d be right next to, across from Charles Gray, and when the water started coming in, he was like, “Man, I can’t believe the water’s coming.” He thought it was just from the rain, all the rain and everything. And then he sticks his head out and sees the Bay, the waves are rolling in, and it’s not just the rainwater. So he had a kayak in the back of the house, and he gets in—well, he was going to get in his truck, but right before he did that, a pecan tree fell into the truck and took the cab out. So he couldn’t drive the truck. So he gets in the kayak, and he paddles the kayak through all the wind and stuff flying all around. He maneuvers up to the railroad track, which is, like, the highest point, you know, from the waves going in, and made it back up over there and ended up finally on his business up on Main Street, which is, I guess, it’s like on about the ninth block, rode it out there. But he was lucky.

Townson: I think that’s it. Those are the questions that we have. If you have anything you’d like to share, to go on the record?

Currier: No.

Townson: Or if you have questions for us?

Currier: I think this is the first time I didn’t break down and start crying.

Townson: Really?

Currier: Yeah.

Townson: Wow.

Currier: So I guess I’m getting over it, huh? (laughter) I’ll never get over it, but anyway. You know. Well, thank y’all.

Kaufman: Yeah, thank you for coming down and sharing your story with us.
Townson: Thank you so much.

Currier: Yeah, no problem.

Kaufman: We really appreciate it.

Currier: You’re quite welcome. Y’all need to come down and see us down in our shop.

Kaufman: Yes, for sure, very much.

Townson: Thank you so much.

Currier: You’re quite welcome. Y’all have a good day.

(end of interview)