Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Perry and Bobbye Gibson

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt

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Biography

Perry Gibson was born May 13, 1918. He graduated from Forest High School, and was president of his senior class and captain of the football team. Mr. Gibson attended East Central Junior College until a football injury forced him to drop out, then attended Coyne Electric School in Chicago. After college, Mr. Gibson worked in the electric business for himself, but was also on-call for the Mississippi Power company. He went to work full-time for Mississippi Power in 1940, then was drafted into the armed service in World War II. After the war, he came back to Mississippi Power and remained for twenty-two years, spending much of that time as a local manager of operations for Perry County. Mr. Gibson has also worked for Mississippi Governor William “Bill” Waller, the State Park Commission, and the Bienville Railroad. Among his achievements, Mr. Gibson authored the book, *The Draftee: Island Hopping Sydney to Tokyo Under General Douglas MacArthur*, and has held leadership positions in the Rotary Club, the Red Cross, the school board of Richton, the Hancock County chamber of commerce, and the Hancock County Medical Center board.

Bobbye Gibson also graduated from Forest High School. While her children lived at home, her focus was raising them. Afterward, Mrs. Gibson worked in a hospital office for about two years—including during Hurricane Camille—then at a clinic for five years, eventually retiring due to health reasons. She also worked to help elect Governor Waller through a busy telephone campaign.

Mr. and Mrs. Gibson are both Mississippi natives and long-time residents of Hancock County. They survived two severe hurricanes, Camille and Katrina. Together, they have four children.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. PERRY GIBSON
and
MRS. BOBBYE GIBSON

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Perry Gibson and his wife, Bobbye Gibson, and is taking place on May 9, 2007. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt.

VanZandt: Today is May 9, 2007. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History, and I’m here in Bay St. Louis on State Street with Bobbye and Perry Gibson, ex-residents of Waveland, in this Hancock County area, longtime residents. And they’re going to be very generous with their personal stories and life histories with me today. We may need to continue this, but we’ll get started for a little while, as long as you feel up to sharing today. Thank you so much for being here. I guess can we start, Mr. Gibson, with where you were born; the year and where you were born and where you grew up, a little bit about your background.

Mr. Gibson: OK. I’m a native of Forest, Mississippi, and Bobbye’s a native of Morton. We were both graduates of Forest High School, and I graduated as president of the senior class and captain of the football team.

VanZandt: Oh my goodness, what year was that?

Mr. Gibson: In 1936.

VanZandt: OK. And you were born?

Mr. Gibson: In 1918; May 13, 1918. And after high school I went to Coyne Electric School in Chicago. And when I finished there—well, I went to ECJC, East Central Junior College first, but I got my shoulder injured playing football and I just dropped out of school because of that football injury, and so that’s when I went to the electrical school. And so I graduated from Coyne in 1938, I believe, and I went into the electrical business by myself. And, in the meantime, I also worked part time on-call at the Mississippi Power Company, and they asked me to come to work with them full time in 1940. So I worked with them on a line crew as an apprentice lineman until I was drafted. And then, after the war, I came back with the Mississippi Power Company and they sent me to Richton as a local manager of their operations in Perry County. It included Richton, Beaumont, and New Augusta. And I stayed there for twenty-two years. And as a manager of the company they were high on civic service,
so I became president of the Rotary Club and I was chairman of the Disaster Committee of the Perry County Red Cross. And we worked two major floods during that time.

VanZandt: Where were the floods, Mississippi River Flood?

Mr. Gibson: No, on Leaf River.

VanZandt: OK.

Mr. Gibson: The Leaf River flooded. And I was a deacon in the Baptist church. I was chairman of the [school] board, the governing board of the Richton School District.

VanZandt: Goodness gracious, you were a busy man.

Mr. Gibson: And I was deacon of the church. And I guess there were some other things, but that’s enough. But anyway, I decided I got tired of that job in Richton because I was getting older and it required using tools, and so I was fixing to leave the company if I didn’t find something else to do. So there’s a guy came to our house that worked with the company to see if I was there, and I was not there, but Bobbye told them that I was fixing to leave if they didn’t find something else [that I wanted to do]; that if they wanted to keep me they’d better find something else for me to do, that’s what it was. So they did—I got a call, and they had an opening for a local manager here in Bay St. Louis, or soon it would be open in Biloxi or in Pascagoula, but I chose Bay St. Louis. And here we were met with open arms, and I did not realize why we had such a good reception until some years later. And I found that—you might know of him, you ever heard of Ben Stevens of Richton?

VanZandt: Well, I’m related to Ben Stevens, too, believe it or not.

Mrs. Gibson: Are you really?

VanZandt: Uh-huh, my mother’s family is from—is that New Augusta Stevens?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: Uh-huh.

Mrs. Gibson: OK.

Mr. Gibson: Well, who is your mother?

VanZandt: In fact, I saw—Lelia Ruffin.

Mr. Gibson: Who?
VanZandt: Ruffin.

Mrs. Gibson: Ruffin?

VanZandt: Is the last name.

Mr. Gibson: Bill Ruffin?

VanZandt: Ruffin. No, now, he’s a cousin, but J. F. Ruffin was my granddaddy in Hattiesburg and, boy, let’s see if I can remember, the Stevens—I’m going to have to get back to you on that. But, you know, Susan Stevens, who’s Benjamin [Stevens III’s] wife, I just saw last night. In fact, we’re friends, family; we end up at the same reunions. I was just meant to be here.

Mrs. Gibson: They bought—Ben Jr. and Nan bought part of our land in Richton and they built their house right behind ours, and our kids called it “playing back and forth” because there was no fence, you know, and they just played together all the time. Ben Jr. and our youngest daughter were like that all the time.

VanZandt: Really.

Mrs. Gibson: And Mecklin and—

VanZandt: Mecklin, sure.

Mrs. Gibson: Nanette. Nanette, you know, she was just a toddler, and Ben.

(a brief portion of the transcript unrelated to the interview has been omitted)

Mr. Gibson: I was talking about how well I was received down here. And I found out that Mr. Ben was a big Methodist.

VanZandt: Right.

Mr. Gibson: And he had some Methodist friends down here that were real influential, like Leo Seal, president of the Hancock Bank, and there was John McDonald that was rich, rich in real estate, and Joe Burr(?) who is a banker, and several other people that were Methodists. And Mr. Ben had written letters of recommendation of me and my family to these people ahead of me, and we were just received down here with open arms. Mr. Ben never told me a word about that. It took me years to find that out.

VanZandt: He was plotting to get you here. (laughter)
Mr. Gibson: So, I mean, our transition here was just good. But anyway, we were well received.

VanZandt: Well, can I ask you, I’m sorry to interrupt, but I’m curious why you chose Bay St. Louis over Biloxi or Pascagoula. What attracted you down here? (laughter) Oh no, I’ve hit a nerve. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: I didn’t know whether I could adjust to so many Catholics or not. (laughter) And it turned out Bay St. Louis was the most Catholic of the whole bunch.

VanZandt: You didn’t know.

Mrs. Gibson: I just never did like Pascagoula. I don’t know, my parents lived there for a few years and I just did not like that end of the Coast. And then Biloxi was—well, they were a little Mafia. (laughter)

VanZandt: A lot of action going on there.

Mrs. Gibson: And you know, of the three we just thought Bay St. Louis would be—

VanZandt: Sounds quiet.

Mr. Gibson: Anyway, some of my best friends were Catholic.

VanZandt: Were Catholic, right.

Mr. Gibson: And I never had one minute of trouble with them—

VanZandt: Norton Haas.

Mr. Gibson: —and being a Baptist in the Catholic community. (laughter)

VanZandt: That’s funny. So you were transplanted here in 1968.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: What was the Coast like then? What are some of your memories of how things were?

Mr. Gibson: Well, at that time, the moon program was just closing down at NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], and at that time NASA didn’t have another project going. And there was For Sale signs on houses on every street in Bay St. Louis, and what it was, they had laid so many people off at NASA. And we were really in a state of depression, because—not depression, but recession because of NASA closing down and so many people were out of work. And then the city of Bay St. Louis was torn up with—a company had put in, was putting in underground...
sewage and there was a flaw in the contract that they didn’t have to replace the road after they had torn it up. And the city fathers were in a hassle with the contractor, so it was a terrible year. It was after [Hurricane] Camille before we got our streets traded out. But we liked the area from the beginning so well that we just stayed. And I became—well, Bill Waller, Governor Bill?

VanZandt: Sure.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, Bill Waller was a second cousin of mine.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness!

Mr. Gibson: And, of course, I was active in his campaigns. And when he was elected governor, he wanted to know what position I wanted, and I told him—we had always been family campers, and I told him I’d like an appointment to the State Park Commission, and he gave me a five-year appointment to the State Park Commission. And Buccaneer State Park here in Waveland is one of my projects.

VanZandt: Is it?

Mr. Gibson: And so I served out my five years there.

VanZandt: How did you like that, Perry?

Mr. Gibson: I liked it real good, but I found out a lot about state [government]; money won’t go as far with a state project as it would with a private individual, because everything’s got to be done by certified architects, certified this and certified that, and every one of them rake off a percentage at the top.

VanZandt: Right.

Mr. Gibson: Rather than—like if you’re wanting to build a house, you’d have a little more authority over it. Anyway, it takes about [twice] as much money to build a government project as it does a private project, but we adjusted to that. And I served as chairman of the Park Commission; I was appointed to a five-year period. And I served as vice chairman a couple of years and then as chairman my last year. I wouldn’t serve as chairman as long as Bill was in office because I might be, you know—

VanZandt: It might look a little questionable.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, and somebody might make something of it. So anyway, we vastly improved the State Park Commission those years.

VanZandt: Was Buccaneer State Park already in existence, or did you help build that?
Mr. Gibson: No, well, no. Locally, they had started to try to build a park out on sixteenth section land down here west of Waveland, and they had bought twenty acres of private land. But then they had a local election on(?) the state election, and the supervisor that was pushing this park was not re-elected, so the park was gone until I picked up on it.

VanZandt: OK.

Mr. Gibson: And then I had a lot of local help, mainly from John Longo, the mayor of Waveland; and John Rutherford, who was chancery clerk; and Doff Keller, who was chairman of the board of supervisors, all backed me up. And I was able to talk the governor into approving the Buccaneer site as the park on the Coast. And it has proven, until the storm, to be the most profitable state park that has ever been built.

VanZandt: Is that right?

Mr. Gibson: Because we built that wave pool in there, and it cost close to a million dollars.

VanZandt: Did it? I have actually been there and enjoyed that.

Mr. Gibson: Well, that’s my project. Bobbye and I went to—we met the guy that was the architect on the first wave pool that was built in the United States, and it was at, oh, someplace in north Alabama; I forget where it was then. But Bobbye and I went over there and looked at it, and I went back to the governor and [he] said that he wanted a pyramid in a park. He didn’t know—I don’t know that he knew what a pyramid was, but he—man, he wanted a special attraction. (chuckle) So I went up there and I told Bill that I found his pyramid, so he bought in on that. We had Fred Wagner, who is a—where is Fred? He’s a local architect but he had some connection. Oh, he’s married to Leo Seal’s sister.

VanZandt: OK.

Mr. Gibson: That’s what it is.

VanZandt: That’s that family connection. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: But anyway, we hired him to draw the plans; he was an architect. So it has been real successful.

VanZandt: Absolutely.

Mr. Gibson: But it was destroyed by [Hurricane] Katrina, but I read in here awhile back that they were going to rebuild the wave pool.
VanZandt: Well, they’d be smart to, wouldn’t they—

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm, yeah.

VanZandt: —if it was so successful.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, that’s right.

VanZandt: Good news.

Mr. Gibson: So everything was destroyed out there, except this underground stuff and the roads, but all the buildings were destroyed.

VanZandt: Had they made it through—well, actually, Camille, I’m thinking of the time period; I guess the state park wasn’t in existence then in ’69.

Mrs. Gibson: No, it wasn’t, no.

VanZandt: No, OK, yeah, so this was later on.

Mr. Gibson: But anyway, it’ll be rebuilt.

VanZandt: Sure.

Mr. Gibson: Now, let’s see, I was president of the chamber of commerce a couple of years.

VanZandt: What kind of visions did you have? It sounds like you were such a visionary for this area. What did you see as the future for this area, the benefits and its strengths?

Mr. Gibson: Well, I don’t know how to express this, but I didn’t go into any appointed position—and most of my positions were appointed—with any selfish interest. When I was chairman of the school board in Richton, we built two new schools. And when I was president of the chamber of commerce here, we expanded the services. And I was never greedy. If I was in a position, I’d look at what the position could do and not what it would do for me, and that’s just the honest truth of it.

VanZandt: Community service.

Mr. Gibson: Is that right, Bobbye?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, that’s right, um-hm. Well, I think what she’s asking, Honey—what goals did you have for this community?
VanZandt: Yeah, I’m just curious back then in that time period—things have changed so much and you could see, of course, at the east end of the Coast how casinos have moved in and tourism has been such a big push. But I just wondered in that time period what your goals were.

Mr. Gibson: Well, I think it was to improve the community.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, I think—can I just butt in here?

VanZandt: Please.

Mrs. Gibson: He was—we are against the casinos, because we feel like that even though it brings in a lot of revenue to the cities, on one hand, it tears families apart on the other. And, you know, we just can’t stand to think of little kids having to go without food and clothes and all because their parents waste their money on things like that. But I think, from what I’ve heard him talk about, is that he wanted to improve the whole community, you know, wherever the strength could be brought in, schools and just wherever, that’s what he wanted to work on.

Mr. Gibson: But before the casinos came in, I was against it, along with my pastor, Nathan Barber; I was against the casino. And I went to a meeting that the chamber of commerce held with all of the former presidents, and I was the only former president of the chamber of commerce that was against the casinos.

VanZandt: Really?

Mr. Gibson: And I told them that they—they were wanting to borrow money from the board of supervisors to get an allotment of county money from the supervisors to promote the casino, and I was against that. And I told them I would petition the board of supervisors if they did, so they just went around me and created a subcommittee with a bland name that got the money they wanted. I had a lifetime membership in the chamber of commerce, but I just quit. And from my stand against the casinos, I was just useless from then on as a public servant, so.

VanZandt: What year was that, do you remember, or time period?

Mrs. Gibson: Was that before you went on the hospital board, or after?

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah, I forgot about being on the hospital board.

VanZandt: Yeah, you haven’t mentioned that. The casinos really came in, in what, late ’80s?

Mr. Gibson: I’m trying to think.

VanZandt: Yeah, it’s hard—
Mrs. Gibson: Years just run together—

VanZandt: Sure.

Mrs. Gibson: —especially since the storm. I can’t remember last week, much less back then.

VanZandt: I know it. So that must’ve been very difficult, I’m sure, the time period.

Mr. Gibson: I would say it was around the year 2000.

VanZandt: Oh, OK, that recent.

Mrs. Gibson: Was it that late?

Mr. Gibson: Huh?

Mrs. Gibson: Was it that late?

Mr. Gibson: Well, this is 2007.

Mrs. Gibson: I know, but it just seems like it was further back than that.

Mr. Gibson: It could’ve been. Let’s see, we bought that camper in 1988 and sold it. We traveled for six years. We bought a motor home.

VanZandt: Oh, how fun.

Mr. Gibson: We traveled this United States for six years. Yeah, and then sold it in [19]94.

VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: But you resigned from the hospital board when we bought that.

Mr. Gibson: When I bought the camper.


VanZandt: Hm, OK.

Mrs. Gibson: And you were on the park, the, um, not the park, I mean, you told her about the Park Commission, but you were on the hospital [board]. I don’t know if that was before.
VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: Before then he was, well, maybe during that time.

Mr. Gibson: Oh, I was on the Port and Harbor Commission.

Mrs. Gibson: Port and Harbor Commission.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Mrs. Gibson: He was president of the railroad after that. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh my.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, president of the Bienville Railroad; we had two engines. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, I bet that was keeping you busy, huh?

Mr. Gibson: And about twenty miles of track and two engines. (laughter) Port Bienville Railroad.

VanZandt: Didn’t go too many places, huh?

Mr. Gibson: What?

VanZandt: It didn’t go too many places, huh? (laughter) Boy, it sounds like you have done a little bit of everything.

Mr. Gibson: I have.

VanZandt: You really have.

Mr. Gibson: I really have.

VanZandt: Between the hos[pital]—tell me about, when you say the hospital board, was that Hancock County Medical Center?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: At the time.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. I didn’t know if that name had changed.
Mrs. Gibson: The old hospital and then they built the new one.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Right, OK.

Mr. Gibson: I was vice-chairman of the board when it was built.

VanZandt: Were you? And before that point, where did people go for hospital services?

Mr. Gibson: Oh, we had an old hospital up here on Dunbar.

VanZandt: OK.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: That’s where I worked when we first came down here; in the office.

VanZandt: Oh, did you? All right.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And so tell me a little bit, Bobbye, about when you first moved down here. It sounds like Perry took to it well. Did you feel the same way?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, yeah—we had four children and two of them—our son had already moved away from home and was working over, at that time called Ingalls Shipbuilding, and our oldest daughter went to Southern [The University of Southern Mississippi]. When we moved down here she, well, let’s see, she was going to, what did they call Ellisville Junior College at that time? Anyway, she was just finishing up there and she went to Southern, started Southern for her last two years. And so Paige was a junior in high school, and Leisa was in sixth grade. So I felt free of home duties to be able to work away from home, so I went to work in the office at the hospital. And I worked there from April of [19]68 till January of [19]69, I mean [19]70, when I changed and started working at a clinic for two doctors. And I worked there for five years and then I had to retire because of my health, and so I’ve been at home ever since then.

VanZandt: So you worked at the hospital during Camille, then.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: You were there.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, I was working there.
VanZandt: Well, and there’s so much we can talk about, too, Perry, with your different experiences. You were such an active leader in the community. Can we talk about Camille a little bit?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Since we’re here—

Mr. Gibson: Talk about what?


Mrs. Gibson: Camille.

VanZandt: Hurricane Camille. You were working for Mississippi Power at that point.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: As the local manager here.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.


Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: You must’ve been integral to the recovery and first response of that.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Tell me about Camille, just—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, I was nothing; they put me in the hospital with pneumonia. (laughter)

VanZandt: You might not have taken that job if you knew what was coming.

Mr. Gibson: Well, we didn’t have too much warning that Hurricane Camille was coming. But, I can’t remember his name, but there was a man—was he in New Orleans, Bobbye? That guy that was such a—

VanZandt: Nash Roberts?

Mrs. Gibson: Nash Roberts.
Mr. Gibson: Nash Roberts. I mean, he was the best one I’ve known yet, but he predicted the thing. And we sent the girls—our son had already moved to Pascagoula, where he still lives—and we sent our three daughters upstate (laughter), but they loaded everything, so much in their cars, they couldn’t hardly get in themselves.

VanZandt: Is this before the hurricane hit?

Mr. Gibson: It’s a good thing they did, because that’s all they had left. So, anyway—

VanZandt: Where did you send them, to family that lived further?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, to Forest.

VanZandt: Out of state? Oh, Forest [Mississippi], OK.

Mr. Gibson: Camille was an entirely different kind of storm than this. It was a small storm, and tight. My office was—

Mrs. Gibson: Right up there on (inaudible).

Mr. Gibson: Right there in front of the courthouse.

VanZandt: One block over from where we’re sitting right now. Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, so it’s been torn down now; just a slab there, but that’s where it was. And I thought Bobbye could stay at the office with me that night, but the power company men kept coming in to be there in case, after the storm, so she went to the junior high school building and spent the night of Camille.

Mrs. Gibson: Down on, right down here on Second Street.

Mr. Gibson: But Camille came in, and it—we didn’t get but about a half a day’s warning on Camille.

VanZandt: Right.

Mr. Gibson: And it started getting rough just about dark. I remember I got in one of the pickups of one of my men and rode down the beach road. And the wind—just about before dark—was pushing that big old pickup over to the side, so we called everybody in. And in those days, we tried to pick up lines as long as we could pick them up.

VanZandt: Well, that’s what I wondered. What were your first priorities, knowing that this storm is coming? What were you trying to do?
Mr. Gibson: Well, in a storm, you have a priority list of things to put back first. You’ve got to put the distribution lines in, and then—

Mrs. Gibson: She was asking what you do beforehand, Honey, before the storm?

VanZandt: And I’d like to know afterwards, too.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: But before, in preparation, knowing that was coming and you might lose power, what kind of things would you do?

Mr. Gibson: Oh, well, the first thing you’d do is to alert the crews upstate that can come down and help you, and they’ll be on—well, we learned a big lesson in Camille about where to station the crews, because one of our crews was stationed along the beach at a motel in—

Mrs. Gibson: It’s Gulfport.

Mr. Gibson: No, it was this town, this side of—

Mrs. Gibson: Long Beach.

Mr. Gibson: Long Beach. Long Beach, and they had to bust their way out of the roof.

VanZandt: Oh my, and the water came down?

Mr. Gibson: And it ruined all the equipment in the truck and their equipment, we just lost the crew. So, the company’s learned since then to keep their crews back—

VanZandt: Head inland.

Mr. Gibson: —say up in the Hattiesburg area, when it’s over, and then they can shovel them down here. And then the company has a—Southern Company is a big company and, but then they have agreements with other utilities, and the men were back in here the next night. I mean, I sent Bobbye, she went up—didn’t you go up to the—did you ever go upstate?

Mrs. Gibson: Later.

VanZandt: Afterwards?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, when you got your—
Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: —finger—

Mrs. Gibson: I got my foot smashed.

Mr. Gibson: —mashed up.

Mrs. Gibson: But talking about getting ready for it, we had been to New Orleans on Saturday, before the storm on Sunday, shopping. And on the way home, we had the car radio on, and the WWL announcer said, “Folks, they say that there’s not much chance of that storm doing any damage here, but,” he said, “that barometer is dropping and I’m worried.” And so we came on home and, you know, just our usual Saturday night stuff, but the next morning, early, I got up and went on a walk to the beach. We lived about three blocks north of the beach. And on the way down, I mean, while I was on the beach walking, I saw this cloud bank coming up and it covered the sun. And I came home and got Perry out of bed, and the girls out of bed, and I said, “Look, we’re going to have a storm; y’all get up and let’s get started to getting things ready.” And his sister and her husband and daughter had been camping up at Wiggins that weekend, and they were coming by to pick up our youngest daughter to carry her home with them for a week or so. So the rest of us were busy, you know, getting things together, and by the time his sister got there, well, his brother-in-law and Perry put the—let’s see, he had been enlarging our utility room and he had two sawhorses out there, so they brought them in the living room and they put the living room couch on those sawhorses, and two chairs, two living room chairs—

Mr. Gibson: And a table.

Mrs. Gibson: —and a round cocktail table, and that’s all it would hold. (laughter) And that’s what we saved; that was the furniture that we saved. And so they took our youngest daughter, Lisa, back with them. And the two other girls started packing their car, and they packed and they packed, and we kept saying, “Y’all go, go, go. You’re going to get”—we were envisioning this bay backing up and cutting them off, you know. And they, “Just one more thing. We’ve got to have this, we’ve got to have that.” (laughter)

VanZandt: Always one more thing.

Mrs. Gibson: And they finally left. And so then Perry had to go to work then. He had to, you know, start getting things ready at his office, and he had two crews coming in there, so they had to get food and, you know, everything ready for them. And he called me and said, “I know you’d be miserable up here with all these men and you’re the only woman up here, so why don’t you go to that shelter down there?” So the hospital administrator had wanted me to come out there to help. They were bringing in old people from the nursing homes that needed to be close to a doctor. And I said, “No, I want to stay as close to Perry as I can, so I’ll stay at the shelter and then come
out there as soon as I can get there.” Well, the next morning I couldn’t get there (chuckle) but at the shelter, the lady—there were some people, a couple of people that were supposed to stay at the shelter to see after things, you know. They came and registered everybody, and then they left and went back to their families, so there was nobody there except refugees like me. And there was one lady from our church who was a heart patient, and I don’t know what she thought I could do for her, but just because I worked at the hospital she wanted to stay close to me. So I had carried a small ice chest with a little bit of ice in it and some drinks, sodas, and some potato chips and cookies, you know, and candy bars and things like that, and left some food and some jugs of water in the car. And when I left home, I had—I don’t remember the name of this lady that used to make predictions about what was going to happen.

Mr. Gibson: Jean Dixon?

Mrs. Gibson: What? Jean Dixon?

VanZandt: Oh, Jean Dixon, uh-huh.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. She had been to Hattiesburg and made a talk, and one of her predictions was that there was going to be a tidal wave on the Coast. Well, that stuck in my mind, and so when I was getting the house ready to leave, I closed the bedroom doors and I took towels and bath cloths and dish towels and stuffed them around the door. I don’t know why I did that. But anyway—

VanZandt: Right, that’s a common impulse, though, to do that. I’ve heard that a lot from people.

Mrs. Gibson: The next morning Perry went down there first, and he came back and came to the shelter and told me what condition the house was in. And when I got home, those doors had burst in, door jams and all, you know, it took the facings of the doors with it. It was just thirty inches of water, but it was so strong that all the furniture was just whirled around like it had been in a whirlpool, you know, turned over. I had put our son’s guitar and amplifier on top of the chest-of-drawers; I had put the encyclopedias on top of something, the refrigerator or something, I don’t know. Anyway, it was all turned over in the mud, you know, and in the water. And those doors burst open like that, and the house full of debris of every kind, and frogs and limbs and everything. And so—

VanZandt: Had the windows blown out, too?

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: Or did you have them boarded up?
Mrs. Gibson: You know, we had taped them up inside with tape and they didn’t blow in. Of course, they were high windows, they were—you know, it was a ranch-style house with those high windows.

VanZandt: Uh-huh, sure.

Mrs. Gibson: It was not like these. But anyway, we lost some screens, and the roof of the house was picked up on one corner and set back down, and the chimney rocked, so that the roof was, you know, soft around it. But the water damage was the main thing, and it just ruined all the furniture and all the appliances and everything. But in trying to, the next day, in trying to drag out some of that furniture that was all to pieces, well, some tacks fell out of something, some of those long upholstery tacks, and I stepped on them and in the mud, and they went through my shoe and into my foot. So that gave me problems; it got infected, and I finally had to have surgery on it. But that’s the reason I had to leave and go to Forest to get medical attention, because I couldn’t even get to the hospital that was a mile in between Highway 90 and the old hospital, and it was full of water and, you know, I just couldn’t get there. But I first—I got to Hattiesburg, and there was a line of people outside the emergency room door there at the hospital.

VanZandt: Forrest General?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. So I said, “I’m going to Richton.” So I went over there, and a doctor gave me some shots, and told me to stay there, though, until four o’clock in the afternoon because he was afraid I’d have a reaction from some of the shots. And I stayed there until four and then went on to Forest, and stayed up there for—hmm, I don’t know, a week or two till Perry called me and said, “You’ve got to come back down here; I don’t have time to go to Red Cross and sign up, and I need you here to,” you know, “go do that.” So I did that and he was working. He would work till ten or eleven o’clock at night, come home, go to sleep, just fall asleep, and all we had to sleep on was that couch there.

VanZandt: Well, that’s what I was trying to envision, what your house must’ve looked like.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, well.

VanZandt: The water had gone out, obviously, by now.

Mrs. Gibson: The water went out, yeah. And the day of the storm, while I was there looking around, two black girls came by and wanted to know if I needed any help, and I hired them to help me. And we used the—we had filled up the bathtubs, of course, with water. But, of course, that water overflowed, I mean, the bad water overflowed into the bathtub and it was not used for anything except washing down the walls, you know. We’d just take pans and throw it up against the wall to scrub them down and
sweep the water out. But they helped me with that, and helped drag out a lot of the furniture.

VanZandt: Well, can I ask you, Bobbye, to back up a little bit? During the storm you were at the shelter?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: What was that like? What did you hear? Just paint that picture for me.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh my goodness, that was—I still hear that wind shrieking. You just can’t imagine. Perry said he was—his office was a one-story, and they were down between the church and the courthouse and some of the other buildings, so the wind didn’t hit them as hard as it did. I was on the second floor—

VanZandt: OK.

Mr. Gibson: —of the building. I thought, “First floor, OK, if a tidal wave came in, that wouldn’t be a good place to be.” There was a city water tank on the outside of the building, and I thought, “Well, that tank was going to fall on that building and I wouldn’t want to be on the third floor.” So I chose the second floor. But that wind shrieked, you just couldn’t imagine the scream, and it would just screeeeeam until you thought absolutely it would not stop. And then it would die down and then here it would come screeeeaming again. And then when the eye came, and the eye went up the bay, it was a very small storm but they said it was just a mass of tornadoes. And so when the eye passed and the wind then started coming from the other direction, that’s when I really got worried, because I thought that tank was going to come down on the building, but thankfully it didn’t. It damaged it so much, it had to be taken down, but it didn’t fall.

VanZandt: Where were you? Did you—were you with other people—

Mrs. Gibson: Well, yes.

VanZandt: —and were you in a room laying low?

Mrs. Gibson: They wanted us to stay in, they had an auditorium/gym together—I’ve forgotten what they called it—but they wanted us to stay in there. But I’d always heard that you didn’t stay in a space where it had no support under the roofs, and so I told that lady, “Y’all come on, let’s go in one of the classrooms.” Well, we did, on the second floor and there was just one small end of it that was open. One end was stacked with old teachers’ desks that had been put there for—I guess they didn’t need them anymore or something, but they were just stacked to the ceiling, just several layers of them in there. And I thought, “Oh my goodness, the wind will probably blow them on us.”
VanZandt: Well, right.

Mrs. Gibson: But there was no other place to go, so that’s where we stayed. And two or three other people were in that area with us. But most people that went, I found out, were not prepared to stay in a shelter. I mean, people with small babies came around wanting to know if we had any water for the baby’s bottles. I said, “I’ve got soda pop and I’ve got ice, but I don’t have any water; I left that in the car.”

VanZandt: Where was the Red Cross?

Mrs. Gibson: Where was the Red Cross? I don’t know. Apparently they had asked these people that were there in the beginning that registered us, apparently they had been sent there by the Red Cross, but we didn’t have anybody.

VanZandt: So there was no real organization that supplied things?

Mrs. Gibson: No, and the water that I had—

Mr. Gibson: I guess it was about a week later that the Red Cross and those—

Mrs. Gibson: Before we were aware that they were here—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: —but, you know, they were not where we could see them.

VanZandt: Doing much good [for you].

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: So you were on your own, basically?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. About 10:30 the lights went out and the water went off, so there we were, you know, the bathrooms were overflowing. And there must’ve been two hundred-or-so people there of all ages; old, young, babies, in between. But anyway, we had to stay—the next morning, they made us stay there. There were men patrolling with guns, you know, police patrolling with guns that wouldn’t let us leave, because the gas mains were broken and blowing raw gas, and debris was everywhere that you could get hurt on and everything. And finally Perry came down. He came down about daylight, and I had finally gone to sleep, and he said, “I just wanted to know that you were all right.” I had gone into the auditorium then and stretched out on one of the bleachers, and so then he went back to the office. And about ten o’clock then he came down with a permit to get me. Some of the other people had to stay there, but he was able to get me out because he had a permit.

VanZandt: Why did you have to have a permit to leave?
Mrs. Gibson: Because he was utility.

VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: He worked with utilities. And so he put a notice on my car so I could go home.

VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: And so he said, “I don’t know how you can get there, you’ll just have to find your way because the trees and power poles and everything, buildings, are all in the streets.” So I went from Second Street, I found my way up to the highway and I saw some people, several people just wandering around on the highway, and I looked and it was my front-door neighbors. A man and wife and five children.

VanZandt: That must’ve been good to see them.

Mrs. Gibson: (chuckle) Yes. But they had spent the night with his brother up in Cedar Point, north part of town. So I said, “Well, y’all get in if you can and we’ll try to get home.” So, they were a big family; I mean, besides that many of them, they were heavy people. (laughter)

VanZandt: Couldn’t get them in.

Mrs. Gibson: Those springs went down. (laughter) But I wouldn’t have found my way home without them, because they were natives, and they knew streets that I didn’t know. So they just—

VanZandt: Wow, you’d just been here a year, right?

Mrs. Gibson: So they said, “Go this way,” and then we’d be blocked and turn around and go another way, and another way, and another way, and finally got home. And so then that’s where I took up awhile ago.

VanZandt: And I was thinking about communication between the two of you.

Mrs. Gibson: Nothing.

VanZandt: You didn’t know—

Mrs. Gibson: No, uh-uh.

VanZandt: —if you’d made it through, and here you [Perry] were downtown.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.
VanZandt: And tell me about your experience, when it actually came?

Mr. Gibson: Well, the office was small, and the plate glass windows—the wind was so strong that those plate glass windows were weaving. You wouldn’t believe this, but that glass was weaving. And we had some refrigerators on display in the sales room, so we put the refrigerators up against that, the walls, and the front glass didn’t blow out. But the—I guess it was because the barometer was dropping so low that it just put you in a stupor. I mean, you just—everybody was just in a stupor. I mean, just not doing anything.

Mrs. Gibson: My ears popped, like being on a plane, you know.

VanZandt: Right, sure.

Mrs. Gibson: And I couldn’t hear. It was like you were just deaf for a while, that barometer was so low.

Mr. Gibson: And then—

Mrs. Gibson: In fact, they said that the barometer was lower during Camille than any other place on earth.

VanZandt: That is what I read.

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh, and the wind velocity out at the test site was 225 miles an hour when it broke.

VanZandt: Off the chart, that’s right.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: And the eye passed over in the middle of the night and it was, I guess, about an hour it took—

Mrs. Gibson: Half an hour.

Mr. Gibson: A half hour?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Is that all?

Mr. Gibson: And then it started from the other way, but anyway. The debris—there was buildings on the far side of the beach road, and all those were destroyed and piled
up right at the entrance of Hancock Bank. And it was that way all up and down the beach road. The debris was all right in the first block.

**VanZandt:** Just pushed up against the middle there.

**Mr. Gibson:** Yeah, and all of it as you get to the first block. And—

**VanZandt:** It must’ve looked like *The Wizard of Oz.*

**Mrs. Gibson:** Uh-huh. (laughter)

**Mr. Gibson:** I hate to tell this on the ole guy, he’s gone now, but anyway, there was one of those engineers and he hadn’t said anything all night long, but early the next morning he said, “Perry, now do you think you could take a blue slip—” a blue slip is, anytime you bought anything on company business, you would—

**VanZandt:** Fill out a blue [slip].

**Mr. Gibson:** —get them to sign a blue slip of what you’d bought and the amount so you could get reimbursed. He said, “Perry, would you take a blue slip and go down to McDonald’s and see if (laughter) they have any tree saws?” (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Tree saws?

**Mr. Gibson:** Tree saw. But I said (laughter)—

**VanZandt:** Was there a McDonald’s left?

**Mr. Gibson:** I told him, I said, “You done looked outside?” And I said, “We’re going to need a lot more than tree saws.” (laughter) A tree saw was just a little saw that you cut limbs with, you know.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness.

**Mrs. Gibson:** Oh, and one thing I forgot to say, that just broke my heart; some of the men that were staying with Perry that night were from—you know, well, *all* of them were from somewhere else, but Pass Christian and Long Beach, and they couldn’t get in touch with their families and they were just frantic because they didn’t know what had happened to them. And, by the way, one of the girls that worked in the Pass Christian office got killed during Camille.

**VanZandt:** Worked in which office in Pass Christian?

**Mrs. Gibson:** In the power company office.

**VanZandt:** The Mississippi Power office?
Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh. But anyway, when I had to leave to go get treatment for my foot, they gave me their families’ upstate, they gave me their telephone numbers so I could call their families and let them know that they were all right, you know, so I did that. And the families were just—

Mr. Gibson: But I had about four thousand metered customers before Camille, and after Camille I had three thousand. And it took about ten years to regain those thousand customers. But there wasn’t near as much destruction of Camille as Katrina, but it was what we gauged the hurricanes by, by Camille.

VanZandt: That’s right.

Mr. Gibson: And that’s what we prepared for. (laughter)

VanZandt: That’s called the Camille Syndrome, right?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: They made it through Camille [so they’d make it through Katrina].

Mr. Gibson: We had the Camille Syndrome when we were getting ready for Katrina.

VanZandt: Well, I guess—and there’s a lot more about Camille you could talk about, your recovery afterwards, working for the power company; you must’ve gotten very little sleep. How long did it take to get the majority of power back, going, was it a few days, weeks?

Mr. Gibson: I think we got the first customer back, and our first customer was not a Mississippi Power customer. We sold—still do—sold Coast Electric, furnished their power wholesale. And their Turner Street sub was the first one that we made hot, so we had that in about a week. And Hardin Shaddock was president of the Coast Electric, and he said he couldn’t believe that I let him have electric service before we got it.

VanZandt: Aww. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: So, I made a few points there because I didn’t think about him getting—

VanZandt: Well, “It might come back around to me another time, you never know.”

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. But anyway—
VanZandt: What were some of the differences in technology that you had between Katrina—I know that you were retired during Katrina, but as far as Camille versus Katrina, in that capacity working for the power company? How much more difficult was it to do your job in Camille?

Mr. Gibson: Well, it was a lot worse in Camille, because the company didn’t have many bucket trucks. We still climbed every pole.

VanZandt: You did?

Mr. Gibson: I mean, I think there was one bucket truck in that whole Coast division. So, I mean, you just had to do it the hard way. And (laughter) these people from other utilities came in with these big old bucket trucks, and I think it made our management feel ashamed of themselves, so after then we modernized and got bucket trucks that made it a lot easier. But the main problem that we had, or I had, was that people were stealing. All these lines were copper before Camille, and just a few of them were aluminum, and people were stealing that copper wire off the ground before we could get it picked up.

VanZandt: To turn it in for some money?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, I mean, copper was valuable. And, my goodness, they even stole, out there where Buccaneer [State Park] is now, they stole that whole line. And we’d call it up and take it out inside the substation yard, and people were stealing it. So I went to the sheriff and I told him, and the sheriff was running a detective agency on the side, and I told him about—

Mrs. Gibson: Security, security agency.

Mr. Gibson: —yeah, security—about people stealing the copper wiring. And he didn’t give me a chance to say that I wanted him to keep a watch on it because he was running a separate detective agency, so he suggested that I hire one of his men to look after the sub. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, good grief.

Mr. Gibson: So, I didn’t get much help there.

VanZandt: Right, yeah, looking out for his business. Oh my. What would you say—because, of course, no cell phones back then—I’m thinking of all the differences between Katrina and [Camille]. What about as far as the federal response during Camille?

Mr. Gibson: The what?
Mrs. Gibson: Federal response.

VanZandt: Federal response; National Guard—

Mr. Gibson: Well, the National Guard came down.

Mrs. Gibson: National Guard, yes.

VanZandt: Pretty quickly?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes. They were good.

Mr. Gibson: And they came down and patrolled the areas.

VanZandt: Did they? Um-hm.

Mr. Gibson: And did what they were told to do.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, they were good. One thing—we’re talking about communication—when I was on my way out the next day, I had the car radio on WWL and all they had on there was people from New Orleans saying, “Tell so and so to call home.” No way to call home, you know.

VanZandt: Right.

Mrs. Gibson: You know?

VanZandt: Right. (laughter) “How are we going to do that?”

Mrs. Gibson: For two or three hours, that’s all I listened to, “Tell so and so to call home.” They just didn’t have—but people from New Orleans responded with help, you know.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, I mean they helped.

VanZandt: Did they?

Mrs. Gibson: I remember one night we heard somebody yelling out front and looked out the door, and there was a big truck out there full of cleaning supplies, you know, they had brought over.

Mr. Gibson: And one truck was full of water.

Mrs. Gibson: One truck was full of water. And when I’d be off from work, and home working at the house, the—who is the church-based people that go [around]?
VanZandt: Oh, there’s so many.

Mr. Gibson: What are you asking, now?

Mrs. Gibson: The church-based people that help out in emergencies like this; I can’t think of the name of them.

VanZandt: Which denomination are you—

Mrs. Gibson: Well, it’s not a church as such, it’s a, it’s—

Mr. Gibson: Salvation Army?

Mrs. Gibson: Salvation Army.

VanZandt: That’s what I was thinking of, OK.

Mrs. Gibson: I just could not think of it. Anyway, they had a little cart, a little three-wheeled cart with a cab on it, and they would come up and down the street and hand out sandwiches and canned water, you know, a can of water. And the sandwich would be nothing but bread and a piece of ham or a piece of meat.

VanZandt: If you were lucky.

Mrs. Gibson: With nothing, no mayonnaise or nothing, but just that—

VanZandt: Happy to have it.

Mrs. Gibson: But that was all we had and it was good. I mean, it came in handy. And people helped, just like they’re doing now.

VanZandt: Just like now.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: Like faith-based groups—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: —I imagine.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: And individuals.
Mrs. Gibson: Absolutely.

VanZandt: Right, private citizens.

Mrs. Gibson: The Red Cross. Now, when I got back down here and was able to go sign up for us, they gave us box springs and mattresses for four beds, uh, three beds; I take that back, three beds.

VanZandt: Boy, that’s great.

Mrs. Gibson: Is that all? Oh, towels, towels and bath cloths, I believe, and linens for the beds, you know, sheets and pillowcases for the beds.

Mr. Gibson: And that’s all we got until about two weeks before Christmas.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: We were able to go to New Orleans and buy furniture.

VanZandt: A week just before Christmas, that’s a long time.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, several months like that. But, you know, he was working seven days a week, and I was working constantly at the hospital, and there just wasn’t any time to go, you know.

VanZandt: Sure.

Mrs. Gibson: But the girls kept saying, “Please, let’s get furniture for Christmas.” (laughter) So we took a day. I think we did it all in one day. We just went, went, went, went, went and furnished it all. Another experience: when I got back and the first day that we had power—and by the way, our house was on the corner and our house power came from a transformer on one street, and all of the rest of the street got power from another transformer—that transformer that fed our house was made hot before it was the rest of the street, you know, out of the street that our house faced. And Perry wouldn’t let me turn on the power (laughing) until the other of our neighbors got their power. (laughter)

VanZandt: I was thinking that, “Don’t you dare have lights on in your house!”

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, that’s it.

Mrs. Gibson: But we got water that same day. And so when I came in from work I had water and I was washing dishes, and he had said that everything was OK. He had checked it out and he thought it was all right. But the range started humming. Well, it already—the clock on there always had a little hum to it, you know, and I didn’t pay any attention at first, but it got louder and louder and louder. It was humming, you
know, and I didn’t know what to do. And we had taken—there was a drawer underneath there that, you know, you kept pots and pans in, and we had taken it out and set it on the other side of the kitchen while we were cleaning. And so I got down on my hands and knees and reached under that stove as far as I could and pulled the—

Mr. Gibson: Plug.

Mrs. Gibson: —plug out of the socket, and it quit humming like that. But when he got home from work and I told him what had happened, he turned white as a sheet. And he said, “If you had touched that stove, you would’ve been electrocuted immediately.”

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Mrs. Gibson: Because it was hot. And so—

VanZandt: So many dangers.

Mrs. Gibson: He had ordered new appliances as soon as the storm, as soon as he could. And the day they came in, the washing machine quit working and the refrigerator quit working. (laughter)

VanZandt: Perfect timing.

Mrs. Gibson: So we had that. And another thing was that while I was gone, they were bussing the crews to New Orleans to sleep, because there was no place for them over here to eat and sleep, and they would bus them to New Orleans to sleep. And then over there they would fix them bag lunches to bring back over here, and then they would eat breakfast before they came and then eat dinner when they got back over there, so.

VanZandt: Well, thank you. I was curious about that, because you mentioned how small your office was.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: And I can imagine how many—

Mrs. Gibson: Our grocery stores—

VanZandt: —crews had to come in.

Mrs. Gibson: —got washed away and, you know, and nobody could buy groceries.

VanZandt: Right. So you really, and I’m thinking about that time period, too, was when, well, desegregation, school desegregation had just hit.
Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: You’ve got divisions over the Vietnam War. And did people tend to come together during that period like you see, you know, happened in Katrina as far as—you know, I’ve heard stories that blacks and whites really came together to help one another, and students who had protested and kind of—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Do you remember that feeling?

Mr. Gibson: I don’t know what you’re asking, because there are not very many blacks in Hancock County, and what we have are very high class, I mean, high-class people. And there’s practically no integration problem here. Saint Claire’s church out there is a black—

Mrs. Gibson: Saint Rose [de Lima]. I think you mean Saint Rose, don’t you? Saint Rose instead of Saint Claire’s.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, on Nicholson Avenue.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: Anyway, it was a predominantly black Catholic church. Now there are more whites in the church than blacks. And we have integrated services in our Baptist church over here, and not more than a month ago there was a black pastor [who preached in our church].

VanZandt: So this area really didn’t experience those divisions? Well, that’s one thing I’ve heard, particularly about this area of Bay St. Louis and Waveland that it’s just a very accepting—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: —type of people and community, more so than others; just very welcoming and accepting.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter) Well, every now and then we’ll have an integrated service with a black church. But I told (laughing) the preacher awhile back that, you know, we were going to have to quit it if we didn’t start dressing up, because blacks are so much better dressed than we were. (laughter)

Mrs. Gibson: Since the storm, we just dress very casually.

VanZandt: Sure.
Mrs. Gibson: We went in in casual shirts, you know. We went in with jeans or whatever we had.

Mr. Gibson: Just whatever. (laughter)

VanZandt: Just happy to have clothes.

Mr. Gibson: Sunday best. (laughter) But they were showing us up.

Mrs. Gibson: But they were wanting to dress up with their hats.

VanZandt: Yes, absolutely. Well, what kind of condition was the hospital in during Camille? Was it in bad shape?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, the water came up into the emergency room area and, of course, all underneath, you know, into the floor of the emergency room, so it was pretty odorous for a long time. But the National Guard took over. They did the cooking and, of course, the doctors that could, you know, worked. Some of them were washed away and, you know, they had to leave, but we managed. But I was on crutches and I’d sit at my typewriter with my foot propped up on a chair with a hot pad, you know, a wet towel and a hot pad on that, and then when I had to go down on the floor to see about something, well, I’d go on my crutches still hopping along.

VanZandt: What a sight.

Mrs. Gibson: But then we had no lights, except they had wires strung down the corridors and, you know, just a dim light on. And the hospital switchboard was manned by the National Guard till the—I went to work, I went to work one day and two of the National Guardsmen were laying on a cot there playing cards. And I needed to get to the switchboard, and the administrator came in and he said, “Get out of here.” And he was talking to those men, you know, “Get out of here now, get out of here!” And they scooted and they didn’t come back. (laughter) From then on the office was mine, I didn’t have to worry about it. But they evacuated the hospital, the day after the storm, by helicopter. They sent all those older patients—there was nobody in there except the ones that had been sent down from the nursing home.

VanZandt: Nursing home. But they made it through OK?

Mrs. Gibson: They made it through but, for some of them, and I wasn’t there, but for some reason they gave them, you know, when they put a patient on the helicopter they’d give them their chart to take with them, and didn’t make a record of where they were sending them. And for weeks after then we had people coming in wanting to know where Grandma so and so, or Aunt so and so was, and I didn’t know. I couldn’t tell them because they were evacuated to several different places, you know, and so all
I could do was just give them a list of where and just let them check up on them, but I guess they were just in a state of panic or something, trying to get them out of there.

VanZandt: Right, just acting quickly.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, I guess let’s move on to Katrina. And then if, you know, if any comparisons come up with Camille, you know, feel free to share those. Tell me about, I understand you evacuated during Katrina, so I guess there were some lessons learned. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. I guess I should not have any complaints. But this was the third time we had evacuated for a storm.

Mrs. Gibson: That summer.

Mr. Gibson: Huh?

Mrs. Gibson: That summer.

Mr. Gibson: That summer.

VanZandt: That summer, right.

Mr. Gibson: The third time we evacuated up to Hattiesburg twice and it took—the second time, it took us eight hours to go from here to Hattiesburg.

VanZandt: What normally should be about an-hour-and-a-half drive—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: —was eight hours.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, that’s how [long]. And Katrina, we left pretty early and it was just smooth sailing till we got to Gulfport, and then it was just urnh, urnh, urnh, urnh.

VanZandt: Inching along.

Mr. Gibson: And it was pitch dark. Well, in fact, it was worse than that, because I got lost.

VanZandt: Oh no.

Mr. Gibson: And—
VanZandt: What day did you leave, now, because Katrina hit on Monday?

Mrs. Gibson: So, you know, they kept saying all week, they’d say, “Category One, Category Two, Category Three, Category Four.” And then Sunday morning, it was Category Five. And we had made reservations at a motel on Highway 90 for a couple of nights, but then you know, the worse it got we thought, “Well, we better not plan to stay there,” and we thought about coming to the church. A few of our friends were going to stay there in that part of the building. And then as it got to Category Five, Perry said, “No, we better go on to our sons over in Jackson County.” So, but we spent so much time preparing the house for a Camille storm, and always, every time we had evacuated before, the first thing I did was put in my pictures, in the car, put our—we had spent years on our family history, and I put that in. This time, I didn’t have time. We were both exhausted by the time it came time to do that and, you know, we realized we were going to have to do it. And so we just sealed everything as well as we could and left it. Except I did bring two or three things of our family history that, you know the most important, the most important, but I didn’t bring any of the pictures and so we lost all that, just lost it.

Mr. Gibson: Well, I can’t complain because we got what, I got what I said I wanted. I told Bobbye when we locked the front door, I said, “Bobbye, we cannot go through another Camille.” I said, “I hope this is another false alarm or I hope there’s nothing to come back to.”

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, really.

Mr. Gibson: And we didn’t have anything to come back to.

VanZandt: No reason to come back.

Mr. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: You just stay away.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: We had thirty inches [of storm surge] in Camille and we had thirty feet in this storm.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. Well, we left about 3:30 that afternoon because I told him, we were going to bring two cars, and I said, “I can’t drive if we don’t go now, because I’m already exhausted.” So I told him to go first and I’d follow him. And, like he said, we got to Gulfport and—

VanZandt: So you were each alone—I’m sorry to interrupt—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.
VanZandt: —in your separate cars?

Mrs. Gibson: In our car. And we had a few changes of clothes, and his wheel chair, and my breathing machine, and, you know, that’s all we left with. And so we just inched along from Gulfport on till we got to Gautier, and we had to go to the bathroom. So he pulled off, and we finally found a bathroom. And then when we got there—well, we were on I-10 [Interstate 10] up to that point because they had on the radio or the television, they were saying that Highway 90 was too crowded. And, but when we got to Gautier and we started leaving, he said, “Well, you know, it looks like Highway 90 is clear now, let’s stay on 90.” So we went on till we got to Pascagoula, and in the meantime somebody got in between us. And so when we got to the place where we were supposed to turn north to go to our son’s house, he couldn’t see the sign on the opposite side of the road, and it was dark and the traffic was jammed, and so he went on and I couldn’t get his attention. I thought surely that we were already in Alabama, but it turned out it was only about seven miles out of Gulfport that he couldn’t see. He was in the old car, and he couldn’t get the defroster to work, and so he needed to pull off so he could pull off his shirt to wipe off the windshield. And so I saw him, I saw what happened, so I pulled off behind him. And it was pouring down rain. I mean, just pouring down. And he pulled into a driveway, and I pulled in behind him and found out what had happened and all. And so he told me, “This time you get ahead.” So I pulled out and another car got in between us.

VanZandt: Oh goodness.

Mrs. Gibson: It was on a curve and he, you know, he couldn’t see me and I couldn’t see him, and I didn’t know whether he had pulled out or not. And so I crept along and crept along, and I couldn’t tell anything. So, finally, I said, “Well, the only point of reference we had was our son’s house,” so I kept going and went to his house, which was about ten miles north of Moss Point, I think. And when he pulled out, though, he turned toward Mobile, and when he realized he was on the wrong road, well, he stopped and turned around. And he saw a church that had a lighted sign out front and he pulled in front of that. He thought, “Well, if they come looking for me, they can see the car here.” But after sitting there a while he thought, “Well, I’m feeling better now, I’ll drive on.” And so he did, and when I got to our son’s house he called the highway patrol and he called his son-in-law, who is a fireman, because they’re out and around, you know, and he told him to be watching. And then he got in his pickup and started out looking for him, and he got to the Trent Lott Airport and found him creeping along, but he was coming. So when Perry got home, got there and I saw he was all right, I said, “Nothing else matters. It’s OK, we’re all right.” But we were so exhausted we just slept through the storm.

VanZandt: Did you—you weren’t glued to the TV and watching to see what was happening?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, they were. I mean, our son and daughter-in-law were but—
Mr. Gibson: We were given out.

Mrs. Gibson: We just came to, every now and then, to eat and go to the bathroom.

VanZandt: Right, “Wake me when it’s over.” (laughter)

Mrs. Gibson: But then the following morning, Tuesday morning, our daughter who lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, and her husband walked in just about daylight. They had been so worried that her boss said, “Go home. Go home. You’re not doing anything good here.” So they walked in with a van full of supplies and we came over here and saw, you know, the place. And it was, our house was flat and two houses on top of that, so, you know, we knew it was gone and that was it.

VanZandt: What was your—I guess I wasn’t sure how much you had seen from the news or heard before you got to Waveland. What did you know?

Mrs. Gibson: We didn’t have any idea.

VanZandt: So you had no idea—

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: —what it was going to be like.

Mrs. Gibson: We knew it would be bad but, you know, we just, we didn’t know how bad.

Mr. Gibson: All the news was shut down.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. In fact, yeah, he had a—

VanZandt: Well, was power out at your son’s house then in Jackson County, had he lost power?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, it was out and the water was off—

VanZandt: OK, so you didn’t have TV.

Mrs. Gibson: —for a while. And you couldn’t—we had cell phones but the towers were out, you know. Every now and then you could get a call through but not much.

VanZandt: When you drove back, were you driving I-10?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.
VanZandt: And then to [Highway] 603?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Were you able to get down 603? At what point did you—were you able to get all the way through to your house in a car?

Mrs. Gibson: We got through. They had come through with bulldozers and cleared 603.

Mr. Gibson: We went to Diamondhead first.

VanZandt: Did you?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: And because, see, we checked on whatchacallit’s house.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, Tom’s folks, our son-in-law’s folks lived at Diamondhead, so we stopped there—

VanZandt: How were they?

Mrs. Gibson: —to check on them. They were OK. Part of the roof had blown off but, you know, it wasn’t too bad. But we went by another place where their grandson was and he was showing us where a tornado hit. He said he watched this tornado just go right along the street out there, but the house where he was was OK. And then we came on down here and they had cleared the streets, just had stuff piled on each side of the street, you know.

VanZandt: But this was just the day after? On Tuesday they had already cleared the streets?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, but later I got in touch with our next-door neighbor, on the south, through her son who had—her son had stayed in their house with the two dogs, and he said that when that wave came in, it just lifted him up and down, and the dogs and down and under, and they almost drowned but he somehow got out.

VanZandt: And you must’ve—did you see neighbors around and people walking around at that point when you returned, or not?

Mr. Gibson: No.

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: You were one of the first ones back?
Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, uh-huh.

Mr. Gibson: And Katherine Trappleby(?).

Mrs. Gibson: Regis—not Trappleby, but Regis Philbin’s first wife Katherine lived in front of us, across the street in front of us.

Mr. Gibson: That radio, I mean TV guy.

VanZandt: Right, uh-huh.

Mr. Gibson: Do you know him?

VanZandt: Regis Philbin; I know who he is.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, Regis.

VanZandt: I didn’t realize—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, Regis.

VanZandt: —his first wife lived in Waveland.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, his first wife lived right in front of us.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, and she was packing to leave when we left, and we just waved and went on, and we haven’t heard from her since. I’m sure she’s OK. And, I mean, we know she left. But then, like I said, we got in touch with the lady south of us and the one cattycorner across the street from us. And since then, we’ve seen some of the others, but some we still haven’t seen. I guess they’re all right, you know, they were not in the list of missing.

VanZandt: What was your reaction? I mean, having lived through Camille and not expecting what Katrina could bring—no one did—what was your reaction when you saw the devastation?

Mrs. Gibson: I guess I was just sort of dazed. (laughter) I didn’t, I don’t—

Mr. Gibson: Well—

Mrs. Gibson: Perry, what did you think?

Mr. Gibson: I was just glad to be alive.
VanZandt: Glad you got out.

Mr. Gibson: The main thing that I learned from this thing is how unimportant things are.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Mr. Gibson: How unimportant stuff is. Now, we’ve stayed for months in a Katrina trailer over there, and we rented this little place here, and it’s just all I want. (laughter)

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: That’s all you need.

Mrs. Gibson: All we need.

Mr. Gibson: I mean—

Mrs. Gibson: And this house had water in it, but the church had four—well, actually it was eight feet of water there but, you know, the floor itself was about four feet above the ground, so they had about four feet inside, and I really don’t know exactly how much water this had in it, but the man that owns this house said that he and another man were out on State Street here and they saw water coming in from that way and from this way, and it met right out there.

VanZandt: So he stayed in this house?

Mrs. Gibson: No, he stayed over at the church.

VanZandt: Oh, the church, which is right across the street there.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, right across the street, yeah.

VanZandt: So they saw the water coming from both directions?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: Two directions.

Mr. Gibson: This is the highest point in the county—I’m saying the county. I mean, along the Coast right here.

Mrs. Gibson: Along the Coast. They say Indian mounds, you know—
VanZandt: Right.

Mrs. Gibson: —are right up there.

VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: And so, but anyway, they—

VanZandt: So he watched it.

Mrs. Gibson: He watched it come in.

VanZandt: Um-hm, but they were OK? Because the church has sustained quite a bit of damage.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: But they were all right.

Mrs. Gibson: We had just finished this all-purpose building here, so that’s what we’re having church in now, and Sunday school, too, for a while, you know, till we got some rooms where we could get in. But they used volunteer labor to fix this house up, and [that’s] the reason it took so long.

VanZandt: The front of the church that is taken off—

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: —was that wind or water?

Mrs. Gibson: No.

Mr. Gibson: No, no, no, it was torn down.

Mrs. Gibson: No, they tore it down.

VanZandt: Oh, they tore it down.

Mr. Gibson: You know they said it wasn’t worth—

Mrs. Gibson: Wasn’t usable.

Mr. Gibson: —worth fixing it. There was an old chapel from—

Mrs. Gibson: Army chapel.
Mr. Gibson: —World War I. Not World War I, World War II. And it had been moved from a military camp, purchased and moved from a military camp after World War II and just bricked in.

VanZandt: What a shame that was lost.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Were you able to find many things?

Mrs. Gibson: A few things.

VanZandt: Well, what kind of things did you find?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, I found mostly pieces of my china and crystal. (chuckle) You wouldn’t think so. But some of the things that you—I had an iron pot in the living room by the fireplace that we used to put wood in, that my great-grandfather had brought home from the Civil War. They didn’t know at that time that all these domes of salt, that was underneath Louisiana and Mississippi, and so he was sent to Florida to boil seawater for salt. He had pots and pots and pots.

VanZandt: Isn’t that ironic?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: It was just sitting on top of it.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, and to condense seawater to get the salt, and he brought one of them home. I don’t know how he managed that but he did, and so they used it in the barnyard to water the stock for years. And my daddy rescued it when the old place was sold and asked me if I wanted it, so you would’ve thought that would’ve turned up somewhere, and maybe it did, maybe scavengers got it.

Mr. Gibson: We had it in the living room right by one side of the, in a little nook right beside the fireplace—

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: —and we kept the wood for the fireplace in it.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, the living room had (inaudible).

Mr. Gibson: But anyway, we don’t know where that thing is.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, I imagine somebody got it. Surely it survived.
VanZandt: Um-hm. Well, what were your first thoughts, right afterwards? You know, I’m sure, “Where do we begin? What’s step one?”

Mrs. Gibson: Well, step—we didn’t have any steps to make because everything was just gone. Now, in February following the storm, we celebrated our sixty-fifth wedding anniversary.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Mrs. Gibson: And all the family came home, you know, all the kids came home. And some of them went down to the house and got up under there, and that’s when they got out the few things that we did save.

Mr. Gibson: I’m going get my [medals].

VanZandt: Wonderful. (brief interruption) I just turned the tape recorder back on and Mr. Gibson brought out his medals. Tell me about these. I see—

Mr. Gibson: Well, that’s all I have.

VanZandt: But these made it through the storm.

Mr. Gibson: That was all I had left.

VanZandt: Where were they, Perry? Were they in a trunk or—

Mr. Gibson: These were on the wall in the dining room.

VanZandt: On the wall, OK.

Mr. Gibson: And I had my military commissions and political appointments, you know, those things that you frame and put up there and nobody cares anything about except you. And this is the only thing we salvaged.

VanZandt: That made it.

Mr. Gibson: And that was the patch. I was under Governor Waller there.

VanZandt: So this patch—I’m going to describe it for the record—says, “Bill Waller, Governor’s Staff 1972 to 1976,” with the Mississippi flag.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, and I was on a staff with [Charles Clifton] Finch, too, and that’s it.

VanZandt: And who was Finch?
Mr. Gibson: He was a governor.

VanZandt: Oh, this is Governor Finch’s staff you were with?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. I was under the governor. He followed Waller.

VanZandt: Right. And this is—

Mr. Gibson: And that’s just my badge of the commission.

VanZandt: For the Park Commission.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. And that’s a Mississippi flag.

VanZandt: It sure is.

Mr. Gibson: Let me see, I think that’s Bill Waller’s flag. Yeah, Waller.

VanZandt: Tell me about Governor Waller. What did you think about Governor Waller?

Mr. Gibson: Well, like I said, I didn’t know I had a cousin named Bill Waller until he ran for governor.

VanZandt: Really?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, his mother and my mother were first cousins. But he was reared in north Mississippi, up around Oxford.

Mrs. Gibson: Oxford.

Mr. Gibson: And his mother died when he was young, so we just—I didn’t know I had any Waller kinfolk, but when he started to run for governor the first time, he called me and introduced himself and asked for my help. So I invited him down to speak at our Rotary Club. And he made a good non-political speech at the Rotary Club and met a lot of local people, so I acted as his campaign manager in Perry County the first time he ran.

VanZandt: Isn’t that amazing? And you didn’t even know that before.

Mr. Gibson: And then in the meantime, we moved down here. And there was a fellow named Ruble Griffin that had been an assistant attorney general of Mississippi, and he moved down here to take Judge Dan Russell’s place, who was in the law business with Sam Favre here. But when Dan was made a federal judge, Ruble came down here to take his place. And Ruble was a friend of Bill. So down here, Ruble...
and Bill and three other local men from around here formed the Committee for Waller in Hancock County, and we got a good vote here.

VanZandt: What were your campaigning days like? Were you going door-to-door? What did you do to campaign for Mr. Waller?

Mr. Gibson: No, we didn’t do any of that. Mainly it was financial.

Mrs. Gibson: Telephoning. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: And telephoning. And I (chuckle), I don’t want to forget the telephoning because, depending on how many telephone calls Bobbye made, depended on how many votes Bill Waller got. (laughter)

VanZandt: Right, so you were integral in that.

Mr. Gibson: So I credited Bobbye for getting the votes.

VanZandt: Oh, that’s great.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, I stayed on the phone weeks and weeks.

VanZandt: Did you? Till your ear was sore, huh? Well, it sounds like y’all had some common visions and common interests and beliefs, values—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: —for you to campaign for him.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: That’s great.

Mr. Gibson: And Carol, his wife, is just the sweetest thing you’ll ever see.

Mrs. Gibson: She’s a wonderful person.

Mr. Gibson: And his son, Bill Jr., is chief justice of the state supreme court now.

VanZandt: Right, not too shabby. (laughter) Well, I am just so glad that you had these. I know that there was a lot that you did lose, but isn’t it nice to have these?

Mr. Gibson: But that’s all that’s left. I had a whole wall full of commissions and stuff like that, but that’s it.
VanZandt: It was just stuff. You’ve got the memories, right, that you can share. Well, how were your children? Did they—I know your son was in Jackson County, and he just had a little wind damage.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: Did you have any other family in the area who were affected?

Mrs. Gibson: No. Well, Perry had two cousins, young men, they were sons of his first cousin.

Mr. Gibson: But they lived in Diamondhead.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, one lived in Diamondhead and one lives in Long Beach, but they were OK.

VanZandt: Good. Well, I’m curious about what you—all think about these different agencies, the coordination of the federal response, the local government, state government, Governor Barbour’s commission, these charrettes that have been going on, or were going on early on, to try to include people in the decision making. Any thoughts about that?

Mr. Gibson: Now, I don’t know the governor, but I think he has been just about the best man we could’ve had in this position at this time. And I think he has done a real good job.

VanZandt: Do you?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, I’m a personal friend, been a long-time personal friend of— what’s George Dale?

Mrs. Gibson: George Dale, insurance commissioner.

Mr. Gibson: Insurance commissioner.

VanZandt: Really?

Mr. Gibson: We’ve been friends a long time, and he’s a good man, but he’s been under a lot of pressure.

VanZandt: He sure has.

Mr. Gibson: And I don’t know why in the world he wants to even run again, but I guess he thinks he’s doing right.
VanZandt: What do you think about that? Did you-all have insurance that covered your losses?

Mr. Gibson: Well, that’s where we were real fortunate, because we had flood insurance on our building and on our property. And I went out with the—our secondary insurance was with—somebody.

Mrs. Gibson: Hancock Bank?

Mr. Gibson: No.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, the flood insurance you’re talking about.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, what was the name of that company?

Mr. Gibson: It’s a national company. But anyway, we’ve got a—Bobbye, we’ve got something with that company. (laughter) We’ve got a bunch of money in that company.

Mrs. Gibson: I can’t think of it.

VanZandt: You’ve got stock in that company? What is it?

Mr. Gibson: (laughter) I can’t think of the name of it. Met Life.

VanZandt: Met Life, OK.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK, but they covered your losses and you came through all right, insurance-wise?

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: So many people didn’t.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: They’re struggling still.

Mr. Gibson: The only thing we’re taking a licking on, and I had a good adjuster in Laurel, he was from Laurel. I told him, I said, “Now, when I got it up to forty thousand dollars on the furnishings, I just quit because I know you’re not going to
cover more than that.” He said, “You go back and you itemize every little thing you’ve got, because I’m going to deduct 75 percent of that on account of age.”

VanZandt: Really?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, and I didn’t have any idea of that.

VanZandt: I hadn’t heard that either.

Mr. Gibson: So I wound up—we got full coverage on the house. And we got about, I think, about thirty-five thousand dollars on the contents. And so with the loss we got from the contents, and the devaluation of the lots—we had two lots out there—

VanZandt: Oh, did you? OK.

Mr. Gibson: —and (laughter) we went out there yesterday, there’s nothing but a—they just removed the slabs and it was all in a mess. But there was thirty-nine houses on Lafitte Drive, where we lived.

VanZandt: Lafitte Drive.

Mr. Gibson: And there’s been one house built back. One house.

VanZandt: Only one.

Mr. Gibson: All this time. And there’s For Sale signs all up and down, so I probably couldn’t give the lot away. So I figure we’re out of pocket about sixty thousand dollars, which is good, considering everybody else.

VanZandt: Sure.

Mr. Gibson: I mean, we’re not hurt financially at all.

VanZandt: Well, do you expect that to change, that maybe it’s still a little early, that people still are waiting to get reimbursed—

Mr. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: —and maybe they will start building back and coming out?

Mr. Gibson: What’s got the—they have raised the elevation. Our house to the front floor level was six—our elevation was sixteen foot, one inch above the main sea level, and we were not in a flood zone.

VanZandt: You were not.
Mr. Gibson: But we had flood insurance anyway. OK.

VanZandt: You were smart.

Mr. Gibson: And one of the insurance adjusters showed us, on one of the trees thirty foot above the ground, where the water level was. So the Met Life, they gave us $2500, I think, that was just a gift up front. When they saw what happened they called us and they just sent out $2500, but that’s all we got.

VanZandt: That’s all you got.

Mr. Gibson: So, we got full value from the flood insurance. So we were not hurt financially like so many people.

VanZandt: So many people were, right.

Mr. Gibson: So when, actually, when this was over, we didn’t have anything to hold us back. We didn’t have anything but money and two old cars, and we could’ve gone anywhere in the world we wanted to go.

VanZandt: Well, that’s what I—

Mr. Gibson: And we came right back here and got in a FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] trailer in a mud hole over there, because this is where we wanted to be, and it’s still where we want to be.

VanZandt: Well, I’m glad you were able to find this house and you can—

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: —be back here with your friends and people who are still around.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: What was that FEMA trailer like?

Mr. Gibson: Well, we had a good one.

VanZandt: Did you, you had a handicapped one?

Mr. Gibson: We had an all-electric handicap trailer, and I guess it was about as good as you can make one. Wouldn’t you say Bobbye?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: Comparatively.
Mr. Gibson: I mean, we don’t have any complaints about it, except the front door never would lock.

VanZandt: Wouldn’t lock? (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: Or if you locked it you couldn’t unlock it.

VanZandt: Right, or couldn’t get out. Well, how long were you in that FEMA trailer?

Mr. Gibson: Oh, I—

Mrs. Gibson: Till just a few weeks ago.

VanZandt: Until just a few weeks ago.

Mrs. Gibson: From December—let’s see, December of this past, December would’ve been a year and four months.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, something like that. We’ve just been in this thing a little less than a month. She hasn’t got her curtains up yet.

VanZandt: And were there other friends of yours in trailers as well?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yeah.

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: Lots of people still in trailers.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter) Just about every friend—

VanZandt: What’s the FEMA trailer living like? You hear about FEMA trailer recipes for the, you know, the oven’s so small and people trying to cook their turkeys for Thanksgiving, and do you have any crazy stories?

Mr. Gibson: We know how to lick that, we just eat out. (laughter)

VanZandt: You didn’t even try to use that oven.

Mrs. Gibson: We had a double sink, and a nice electric stove, and a nice refrigerator, but there was no place to set anything.

VanZandt: Right, no counter space, huh?
Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, the dining table that we had about this big around, Perry used for a desk and we had the little tiny television on it, you know. And so there was just no place to set anything, so I didn’t cook much.

VanZandt: Right. Well, were there places to eat early on? Where did you go?

Mrs. Gibson: Sicily’s, you know, this place up here, Sicily’s?

VanZandt: Right.

Mrs. Gibson: We (laughter) had—

VanZandt: Had many a meal there.

Mrs. Gibson: (Inaudible) (laughter) Well—

VanZandt: And then a lot of the local businesses have reopened.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And new ones opening up.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, they’re opening up everywhere.

VanZandt: Isn’t that great?

Mr. Gibson: We try them out.

Mrs. Gibson: The thing about is that our cholesterol went so high and Perry saw, he got, he had congestive heart failure and had to cut out salt, so we’ve had to start eating at home.

VanZandt: Well, I guess that would be real—

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: —because you’re doing fast food and that restaurant food, and not eating healthy like—

Mrs. Gibson: That’s right.

VanZandt: —you need to be.

Mrs. Gibson: But, and everybody—

Mr. Gibson: Aw, Sicily’s is healthy.
Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: (laughter) Yeah, we don’t want to say anything against Sicily’s.

Mrs. Gibson: You know, that’s one of the things that, I mean, volunteers have been so wonderful. I mean, we have had—before they tore the sanctuary down, we had bunk beds in there for volunteers to sleep in and then some in the Sunday school rooms, and in this old house over here they put bunk beds in that. And so we’ve just had thousands of volunteers and they have just been so, such wonderful people, I mean, and they, you know, helped so much.

VanZandt: What are some of the groups, the names of the groups, do you remember, who’ve been in and out here?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, Eight Day—no, wait a minute, no, that was where they—another place we ate was at the kitchens, you know, where they’d set up Eight Days of Hope and those places that occasionally we would go. But mostly people that have stayed here have been from churches, you know, they didn’t have a name, actually, they just—they just would be a group from a church that would come, and some have been several times, not just once, but several times. But the young people are so polite and so helpful, and just, just nothing—of course, this house, what was done here it was before we moved in but, you know, just anything that we have needed. Like a week before last, Perry was trying to do something out there on the other side of the trailer, and he couldn’t see what he wanted to look at, and so he was looking up and he thought, “Well, if I get down on my foot rest and look up, I can see what I want to see.” But he couldn’t get back in his chair when he got finished, and so he couldn’t make me hear him, so he crawled around on his hands and knees till he got beside the ramp out there, and then he was too tired, too exhausted to make me hear him. But the volunteers across the street saw him down and they came over, and got him up, you know, and helped him inside. But, oh, I was scared to death.

VanZandt: Boy, it’s convenient living right across the street from this church, right?

Mrs. Gibson: He was scared. I mean, he was white as a sheet.

Mr. Gibson: And I was hollering at her. I was hollering at Bobbye, but they heard me.

VanZandt: Hoping somebody would, right.

Mrs. Gibson: And I didn’t hear him. This house just eats noise; you can’t hear from one room to the other, hardly. But just anything we need at all.

VanZandt: Did you have help cleaning up the debris and things—
Mrs. Gibson: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: —of your home?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, yes, the Corps of Engineers cleared it off, did that and all. Then just this week—well, there was an outfit that was cleaning off the, taking up the slabs, but we didn’t know about it in time to sign up for it. And so we heard about—a barber, in fact, told us about somebody that was clearing it off just for the use of the concrete. They could sell the concrete for rip-rap and so just this week they cleared ours off. And the lot is a mess; they didn’t take it all and I don’t know what we’re going to do with those chunks of concrete that are left, but I guess eventually we’ll find somebody to do that.

Mr. Gibson: I think about the only thing to do is haul in fill-dirt and fill it up.

VanZandt: Um-hm, probably. You’re right.

Mr. Gibson: And I figure it would cost about $5,000, but it’ll—that’s about what we’ll need to do.

Mrs. Gibson: One thing that everybody had to contend with was black widow spiders, and brown widow spiders which I didn’t know existed. But they live—you know that debris pile, those debris piles, just thousands—

VanZandt: Sure, made their nest there.

Mrs. Gibson: —made their nest in there. And we had all kinds of insects that we’d never seen before and even had, we had fire ants in our trailer. I don’t know whether they were attracted by the material that it was made out of or what, but I woke up one night and ants were all over me, and big ants.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Mrs. Gibson: And I was afraid to move, because I didn’t know whether they were fire ants or not, you know, and finally I did, but they didn’t bite me, didn’t sting me. And I didn’t have anything in the trailer but a can of flying insect spray and I sprayed them, and they died and they left, and we weren’t bothered with them anymore.

VanZandt: Made themselves at home.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, I hear that so many unusual things [have been] popping up.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.
VanZandt: And that’s a whole nother study, ecological study of different plants and things—

Mrs. Gibson: That’s right.

VanZandt: —that have seeded.

Mrs. Gibson: That’s right.

VanZandt: Fascinating.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, and I was going to show you these pictures.

VanZandt: I see you’ve pulled out some pictures here, great.

Mrs. Gibson: I don’t have any of the front of the house because these pictures that we made were for insurance purposes before the storm, so.

VanZandt: Before. How great that you did this.

Mr. Gibson: But this is our neighbor’s house and that’s one of the ones that was on top of our house when it was over. This is our house. That’s our flagpole. And that’s our mailbox.

VanZandt: And this is it behind here, the brick?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: So it was all brick?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: For the most part?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And was it disorienting when you drove back to find your house?

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: Landmarks are gone.

Mrs. Gibson: We could tell—

VanZandt: You could tell, uh-huh.
Mrs. Gibson: —where it was. Well, we knew where our mailbox was. I’m going to come on the other side.

VanZandt: OK. It’s a beautiful place. And I see—are these the railroad tracks right here?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, we were right by the railroad.

VanZandt: So you were right by the track.

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Just south of the tracks.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. And that’s, again, a different view and this is a different view here.

VanZandt: So this house was lifted off its foundation and landed—

Mrs. Gibson: It was washed that way.

VanZandt: —it was washed over here.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter)

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: I don’t now how it got off, but it was gone.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, in fact, here—let’s see. This is—

VanZandt: Before and after.

Mrs. Gibson: —this is it. This is it.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. This is the house on top of yours?

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Goodness gracious. I don’t know how you found it, (laughter) because you’re looking for your house and there’s another one on top of it.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. Well, they—

Mr. Gibson: We knew it was on the corner.
Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Uh-huh, right. And this is your lot, as well.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, well, this is ours with her house on top. This is her house here.

VanZandt: Have they moved back?

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: Are they rebuilding?

Mrs. Gibson: She’s living with her son in south Florida. And see here, there’s this little peek of ours back there.

VanZandt: And were there a lot of trees around here that are gone?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, this was our lot. We had a wooded lot that backed [up to our house lot that] we bought just for a bird sanctuary, you know, and it was full of trees, but. See here—

VanZandt: It looks stripped.

Mrs. Gibson: —this is what it looked like.

VanZandt: OK. Oh, my goodness.

Mrs. Gibson: And this, this is another view. This is the mailbox, see, right here.

VanZandt: OK. Are we looking—now, did your street run north-south?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, from the railroad to the beach.

VanZandt: To the beach, OK.

Mrs. Gibson: It didn’t have any cross streets.

VanZandt: And it looks like everything on that street was gone.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, everything was knocked down.

Mr. Gibson: On both sides.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, both sides.

Mr. Gibson: From the railroad to the beach.
Mrs. Gibson: See, this is a close-up. This is our house back here.

VanZandt: OK, this is another roof?

Mrs. Gibson: I’m not sure what that is. Perry, what is that? And here’s another view of that—

Mr. Gibson: That’s our wood lot, Bobbye.

Mrs. Gibson: I know, but what’s in front of it, the roofs, is that ours?

Mr. Gibson: That’s—

VanZandt: Part of your roof, or it’s from another one?

Mr. Gibson: That’s—whatchamacallit—

Mrs. Gibson: Is that Yvonne’s house?

Mr. Gibson: Yvonne, yeah; that’s Yvonne’s roof.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, see this bush right here was right beside our kitchen window, see.

VanZandt: OK, um-hm.

Mrs. Gibson: No, that was next to the street. I’m sorry, that’s next to the driveway. These trees were next to our kitchen windows, right here.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And these look like mainly pine trees—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: —that were around.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: You didn’t have any oaks?

Mr. Gibson: We had three beautiful magnolia trees.

Mrs. Gibson: Magnolias.

VanZandt: Did you?
Mrs. Gibson: Oh, we had beautiful magnolias, yes.

VanZandt: And they’re gone.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. Now, see, this is our mailbox and that picture has gone all over the world because that’s the only thing standing there.

VanZandt: Standing up. Look, with the bird on top.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, we had a—yeah.

VanZandt: Now, did you put that up there or was that still remaining?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: OK.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, that was there. This was the way it was before the storm, and the kids found it and brought it back.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Mrs. Gibson: But it’s normally by the steps. Let’s see, that’s all of that one. And, of course, these others are just—like I said, we took them for insurance purposes. This is the dog’s grave.

VanZandt: Aw.

Mrs. Gibson: And I don’t know whether it’s still there or not.

VanZandt: How beautiful. What was the dog’s name?

Mr. Gibson: Duke.

Mrs. Gibson: Duke.

VanZandt: Duke. Were you able to find that?

Mrs. Gibson: I haven’t been out there, I don’t know. Did you see it?

Mr. Gibson: I couldn’t find it.

Mrs. Gibson: OK. That’s just Perry’s tool house.

VanZandt: You had a great little tool house there.
Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, that’s his tool house.

VanZandt: I guess—did you find any of your tools?

Mrs. Gibson: He had enough tools to have a sale at a hardware store.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter)

VanZandt: And they were still there? I’m surprised those weren’t looted.

Mrs. Gibson: Every one of them. Well, they could’ve been but I doubt if they were any good after that saltwater got to them.

VanZandt: It’s beautiful; you’ve got some banana trees there.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, this is great. Well, so you’re kind of just waiting to see what happens? You’re not sure what you’re going to do with that lot—

Mrs. Gibson: Well, we’ll just sell it because we’re too old. I just can’t possibly think about—

Mr. Gibson: Building.

Mrs. Gibson: —building.

VanZandt: Beginning to build again, yeah. Well, you’ve got this great place here. And I know that you’ll be in that car on your way out—

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yes.

VanZandt: —if anything happens.

Mr. Gibson: Well, I’m not going to be around very long. (laughter)

VanZandt: What do you mean?

Mr. Gibson: If I last another week, I’m going to be eighty-nine years old.

VanZandt: Are you, next week?

Mr. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: On Sunday.
Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: On Mother’s Day.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, happy birthday early.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, I thought it was Sunday. Sunday the thirteenth, whenever that is, that’s his birthday.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, May 13.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Did you ever imagine you’d make it to eighty-nine?

Mr. Gibson: No, I didn’t think I’d make it to twenty-five. (laughter)

VanZandt: Well, you didn’t think you’d make it through that war, I bet, either, (chuckle) which we’ll have to talk about next time. (looking at more photographs) Oh, how lovely.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, that was mine. I wanted—after Camille that was one of the first things we bought, because I wanted a table big enough to seat my whole family. And, of course, we grew, so; (laughter) it didn’t.

VanZandt: Do you have grandchildren?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yes.

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: We have four great grandchildren.

VanZandt: You do?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, do they get down here very often to visit?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yeah. Yes, they do. There’s my pot back there. See that?

VanZandt: Oh, OK. Yes.

Mrs. Gibson: See that pot?
Mr. Gibson: Well, our daughters, they’re scattered; one’s in California, one in North Carolina, and one in Florida.

VanZandt: Boy, they are scattered. (laughter) They kind of spread out. That makes it tough.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, yeah.

VanZandt: Wow, this is a great place. And they really grew up—well, their ages were spread out.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes—

VanZandt: So some really grew up more—

Mrs. Gibson: —ten years.

VanZandt: —in Forest—

Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: —and that area and then some down here.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah—no, in Richton, at Richton.

VanZandt: So lived in Richton. I wondered when you worked there. You moved from Forest to Richton.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah. Gibby was already through college, and Angela was almost through with junior college, and Paige was a junior in high school, and Leisa was in—and that was an antique that we lost.

VanZandt: Oh, great rocking chair.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, Perry, what do you think about Mississippi Power and how they handled things during Katrina and afterwards? Did you play Monday morning quarterback? Glad you weren’t still with the company, I’m sure, having to work those hours.

Mr. Gibson: Well, I’m still with the company. I still draw a monthly pension.

VanZandt: You’ve got some pension, yeah.
Mr. Gibson: But the Mississippi Power Company is an affiliate company of the Southern Company.

VanZandt: Right.

Mr. Gibson: And the Southern Company is one of the leading electric suppliers in the United States. And the Mississippi Power Company is one of the best operated of the Southern Company’s system. So I’m—

VanZandt: You were proud of the job they did after Katrina?

Mrs. Gibson: Oh.

Mr. Gibson: Oh, my goodness, yes. I mean—

Mrs. Gibson: We had lights on in three weeks.

Mr. Gibson: When we went upstate and when we were coming back, that was just a few days after the storm, we went up to Richton and then we took a back road back to around Wiggins so we’d get out of traffic.

VanZandt: Right.

Mr. Gibson: And we were held up there for about thirty minutes, but with just one line truck after another coming from places all out coming to the Coast. I mean, the company has a storm reserve. And the company spares no expense in getting service back to its customers.

VanZandt: They were mobilized in no time.

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: I remember that in Hattiesburg, seeing them line after line going down [Highway] 49.

Mr. Gibson: I mean, these hurricane preparedness exercises that take place during the year. I mean, the Southern Company and Mississippi Power Company were very conscious of giving good service.

VanZandt: They take it seriously.

Mr. Gibson: Absolutely.

VanZandt: And as far as the coordination, I think about when you were working for the company during Camille. What kind of coordination was there as far as chain of command with these agencies? The National Hurricane Center, which was fairly
new—did you get a lot of communication with other agencies? Who did you work most closely with during that?

**Mr. Gibson:** Well, at the local level, you just work with the division level. And there are assigned positions, I mean, for a storm or for hurricanes. I mean, the company’s ready for a hurricane because they know they’re coming, just don’t know when.

**VanZandt:** When, um-hm. It’s inevitable.

**Mr. Gibson:** I mean, that’s just one of the things. And they’re not making any money when the lights are not on.

**VanZandt:** Right, that’s right. That’s right, that’s an incentive, isn’t it, to get them back on.

**Mrs. Gibson:** You see that little chair right there?

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Mrs. Gibson:** Perry’s grandfather made that chair and gave it to him when he was about two years old.

**VanZandt:** Aw.

**Mr. Gibson:** It was gone.

**Mrs. Gibson:** Yeah, it’s gone.

**VanZandt:** Aw, goodness gracious. Was he a master carpenter? He enjoyed building? Ah, what a great gift. This is just beautiful. And your fireplace.

**Mrs. Gibson:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** The entire wall bricked like that, it’s beautiful.

**Mrs. Gibson:** When we bought the house it had shelves, you know, bookshelves—

**VanZandt:** Did it?

**Mrs. Gibson:** —set in there, but I didn’t like the way they were built, and never did have any more, really, to put in there, so we just used it another way.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm, had it bricked in. Well, what percentage of Waveland has come back? Would you say half, half the residents are back—

**Mr. Gibson:** I don’t know.
VanZandt: Less than? Hard to know?

Mr. Gibson: I don’t know. I don’t know. South of the railroad, and that’s where the most affluent homes were, most of them. And the closer you got to the beach, the more property that—but all of that tax base is gone. I mean, that’s just gone. And they’re putting on a good front, but I don’t see how we’re going to survive, because I mean, I just don’t see how we’re going to do it, in the long haul. I just don’t see how they’re going to do it.

VanZandt: Well, you hear about—like I think in the front page of the paper today this, what is it, PSL Company, a pipe manufacturing company that’s supposedly coming in, maybe by next spring.

Mrs. Gibson: That’s out at Port Harbor.

VanZandt: Port Bienville, I think.

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: And so, some big industry, hopefully, will come. But I guess it will just, as far as, you’re right, the tax base in getting enough residents to come back to spend their money here.

Mr. Gibson: But there’s been so much, you know, if they hadn’t fooled and fooled with this flood elevation and just let everybody take their chance, if they hadn’t fooled with the flood elevation and had it where you could get insurance, I mean, there’d be people building back.

VanZandt: Um-hm, tell me about that. For people who don’t know about that, they’ve changed these levels, flood elevation levels.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And what are they now set at, thirteen or fourteen feet, maybe?

Mrs. Gibson: I don’t know.

Mr. Gibson: Well, we were sixteen foot. And what we would need to do would be to raise it to twenty-two feet. I mean, that’s where the floor started, twenty-two feet. Well, that’s—you couldn’t do anything with six foot, so you needed to do two more so you could have a carport underneath it, so. And that just raises the cost of things. And then in a case like me, I’d have to have another expense of about $25,000 for an elevator.

VanZandt: Right.
Mr. Gibson: And we’re just not going to build back. I’m not going to be here—at eighty-nine years old, I’m not going to be here long.

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: And then the insurance costs have gone up so much.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh yeah.

VanZandt: So that’s one of the big issues, isn’t it?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: People can’t afford to keep the insurance up.

Mrs. Gibson: And a lot of people lost their jobs, you know, lost their livelihood and it’s just—we feel, because our children are gone, that we have been very blessed not to have been hurt any worse than we were. But I feel so sorry for these people that have young children, because I know as old as our children were during Camille, they came home and they’d just go all over town. And debris was everywhere, and nails, and, oh.

VanZandt: (laughter) Didn’t think about it, did you?

Mrs. Gibson: And you couldn’t keep up with them because of no phones, you know.

VanZandt: Right. (laughter) “Just go out and play and come back before dark.”

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: You never knew what was going on.

Mrs. Gibson: That’s right.

VanZandt: It was a different world.

Mrs. Gibson: And people living in these little trailers, you know, with several children—that’s just been terrible.

VanZandt: I don’t know how they’re doing it with families.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, a lot of them have broken up.

VanZandt: And mental—yeah, that’s right, there are so many issues as a result. Mental health issues and physical issues, people with rashes—
Mrs. Gibson: Yes.

VanZandt: —that they never had before.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, Perry had his finger—he went out one day. He had his, he was in his wheelchair and there was something out there he wanted to move, and he’d bend over and he’d move it this way and move it that way. And apparently, now, we don’t know for sure, but he got a place on his finger that just started and we couldn’t, doctors couldn’t stop it. And they kept changing the medication, changing the medication, and it almost went to the bone.

VanZandt: Good grief.

Mrs. Gibson: And we assumed that he scratched it somewhere, you know, in that debris. Because it was—oh, this place stunk; you wouldn’t believe. It was like a sewer for months and months until it rained enough to wash some of it off, you know.

VanZandt: Those are the things that stay with you, don’t they?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: I remember going down to Biloxi, early on, and the stench was just—

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: —you know, and the heat combined with that, and the insects.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And, you know, was not a safe place to be.

Mrs. Gibson: All those gnats. Ooh, the gnats. (laughter)

VanZandt: And spiders.

Mrs. Gibson: (laughter) Yeah, the spiders. Oh, gracious.

VanZandt: Well, so you don’t have a lot of hope for the city of Waveland as far as enough—

Mr. Gibson: I have hope.

VanZandt: You have hope.
Mr. Gibson: I have hope, but I don’t see how it’s going to happen. And Waveland is really in better shape than Bay St. Louis, because we’ve got that Wal-Mart that’s got a tremendous—and then Lowe’s was put in right by it, so.

Mrs. Gibson: Of course, Bay St. Louis has the casino that has a lot of revenue there.

Mr. Gibson: And of course, I guess, Bay St. Louis has the casino.

VanZandt: Right. Well, that’s what I wondered. Is that next for Waveland? Is that going to happen in Waveland? Are they going to have a casino, too?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, there is one down at the end of Beach Road, but it’s not in Waveland itself, it’s just in the county.

Mr. Gibson: No, Waveland doesn’t have a casino. The county’s got one and Bay St. Louis has got one.

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm, and I don’t know how well it’s doing, actually.

VanZandt: Well, what about talk of becoming more regionally focused, rather than each distinct community, and is that—would that be a helpful, beneficial thing for some of these cities to be annexed together and focus more regionally? I hear that’s kind of a trend.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter) Yeah, you’re getting into a political hot potato.

VanZandt: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: I think it would be beneficial, myself, personally. I think it would be beneficial.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah, that ought to be done. (laughter)

VanZandt: There’s some strong opinions about that.

Mr. Gibson: But getting it done (laughter), I mean—

Mrs. Gibson: And I also think that if it happens—

VanZandt: That’s a mess. Talk about a mess of ants. (laughter)

Mr. Gibson: Yeah. (laughter)

Mrs. Gibson: And I think if it happens that it should stay Bay St. Louis, because this has been a city since 1699. And Waveland was just a bedroom community for New Orleans, you know—
Mr. Gibson: When we came here.

Mrs. Gibson: When we came here. So that’s my feeling because I’m a history buff, I just love history and I just—that’s my feelings, but you just can’t hardly say that around here because some people feel so strongly one way and the other.

VanZandt: Sure. Well, do you feel like the community’s divided, or does it feel like everyone’s trying to work together, for the most part?

Mrs. Gibson: I think everybody’s working together. I do.

VanZandt: That’s good.

Mrs. Gibson: I was disappointed that the judge ruled that Bay St. Louis got both sides of [Highway] 603, because he thought Bay St. Louis was more able to give city services and everything than Waveland. And he might’ve been right, I don’t know, but I just felt like that wasn’t quite fair.

VanZandt: How have you felt about the local leadership in Waveland? The mayor, board of supervisors, of course, for the county, but—

Mr. Gibson: They are overwhelmed. I mean, they’re doing the best they can. I’ll just say that they’re doing the best they can. But we’re talking about long range. And this is just my opinion, without any official thing to go on, but all I see is you can’t—this is not going to come back by just wishing it to come back; it’s got to come back with some outside assistance. It’s just not going to be able to come back on its own. It’s just too, too much.

Mrs. Gibson: Earlier in the week there was some—

Mr. Gibson: It’s too much destruction.

Mrs. Gibson: —the headlines in the paper was that neither Waveland or Bay St. Louis could meet their payments on the grants, you know.

VanZandt: I saw that.

Mrs. Gibson: And unless they, you know, just dismiss those, I don’t know how they can—

VanZandt: Let’s hope they will.

Mrs. Gibson: I just don’t see how we’ve got enough revenue in either town to pay it back.
Mr. Gibson: And we’re fixing to go about a million and a half in debt here on the church.

VanZandt: Right. Well, JoAnn was telling me a little bit about it. Not JoAnn, Barbara was telling me a little bit about that. It’s going to take two million to really build back the way you want to.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And you’ve raised almost a million, it sounds like.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: Right. Do you feel that’s important, that it kind of serves as a beacon in the community?

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, I do. We had prayed for years. See, we were boxed in here, and we prayed for years to be able to get more land to expand, and we were just ready to vote to go into an expansion program before the storm. But anyway, like I said, we had prayed for years for more land and this land over here became available. And there was an old house on it and they didn’t want to sell for years, just didn’t want to sell. And then all of a sudden, OK, they wanted to sell, at a reasonable price. And then this became available over here, with this old gray house on it. So all that, and then we had built this all-purpose building, and that gave us a place to worship and have Sunday school since the storm. So we feel like the Lord is saying, “Go ahead.”

VanZandt: Right. That sounds like the green light, doesn’t it?

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: That you’ve been able to continue.

Mrs. Gibson: And if we wait, prices just, you know, they’re already just going out of sight.

VanZandt: They really are.

Mrs. Gibson: And if we don’t do it now, well, we’ll be just as far behind in two or three years.

VanZandt: That’s right, no telling what it will cost.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.
VanZandt: Yeah, so it sounds like the right thing to do.

Mr. Gibson: Inflation is going to hurt us worse than anything.

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm. Of course, Perry and I, at our age and our health and everything, we know we’re not going to be here to help pay for it, so we’re not saying yea or nay, you know. I mean, we’re praying about it, but we’re not going to stick our foot out and say—

Mr. Gibson: We’re not going to try to influence it.

Mrs. Gibson: Not going to try to influence it one way or the other.

VanZandt: Sure.

Mrs. Gibson: Because we just—if we can’t help pay for it, then we don’t want to interfere, you know. But we’ll do what we can while we are here.

VanZandt: That’s understandable. Well, I have taken up a lot of your time today.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, I’ve enjoyed it.

VanZandt: It’s just been so, so educational.

Mr. Gibson: We’ve taken up your time, too.

VanZandt: Well, that’s what I’m here for, but the thing is we’re not finished. We’ll finish for today.

Mrs. Gibson: OK.

VanZandt: If that’s OK. But I would love, Perry, to come back and record some of your stories about your service during World War II, if that’s all right.

Mr. Gibson: You read that first (referring to the book he wrote about his World War II service titled The Draftee: Island Hopping Sydney to Tokyo Under General Douglas MacArthur).

VanZandt: I’m going to. I’ve got to bone up, and then I’ll know—yeah, I know a lot of it is there, all of it.

Mr. Gibson: OK.

VanZandt: But anything that you might feel like sharing.

Mr. Gibson: OK.
VanZandt: To have on a recording.

Mr. Gibson: OK.

VanZandt: For those young 'uns.

Mr. Gibson: You see we’ve got plenty of time to talk, don’t we? (laughter)

VanZandt: You do, and that’s the great thing. And that’s the great thing about this book. Before, you never had time to do such a thing.

Mrs. Gibson: No.

VanZandt: This labor of love. But, you know, that’s the time when hopefully you still have your health and wits about you enough to remember all of that.

Mr. Gibson: (laughter)

VanZandt: That’s what just amazes me; my memory’s gone already, but that’s just a great gift.

Mrs. Gibson: And if you see Benjamin or Sonny or any of that family, you tell them that we sure do miss them.

Mr. Gibson: Do you know Ben?

VanZandt: Yes.

Mrs. Gibson: She’s a cousin of his wife.

VanZandt: Last night—well, to the Stevens, to Ben. Last night we were in a restaurant eating dinner, and Ben and Susan were sitting there with their children.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, my gosh, OK.

VanZandt: And their son just had the lead in the school play.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh.

VanZandt: I think he’s in eighth grade now.

Mrs. Gibson: Oh, my goodness.

VanZandt: And so, yeah, I see them around town quite often.
Mrs. Gibson: Well, good.

VanZandt: So, Richton Tie and Timber.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: I’ve been around that town many times, and just a beautiful area.

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah.

VanZandt: And talking about the salt dome, there’s a big project that’s going to be—

Mrs. Gibson: I mean, that’s right on our property.

VanZandt: Is it really?

Mrs. Gibson: Well, yeah, we bought twelve and a half acres, which is right—it was a triangle right on the edge of town, and like I told you, we had a little house there, and then Sonny and them had the back of us, and then Forrest bought the triangle, the triangle part. And so we just—

VanZandt: Wow, that’s going to really change that area, isn’t it?

Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Do you think that’s a good thing?

Mr. Gibson: Yeah.

Mrs. Gibson: You know, when a person—when a dog or a person walked across our yard it would sound like they were walking across a drum.

VanZandt: Really?

Mrs. Gibson: Yeah, that’s true. One night we heard a noise out back—there was the kids’ playhouse, the girls’ playhouse was out in the back yard—we heard a noise out there and I called Perry, and he took the gun and went out there, and he said, “Well,” he called me from out there and he said, “I don’t see anything out here.” And just about that time, somebody burst out of that playhouse and went running around the side of the house and across the yard, and it sounded like boom, boom, boom boom, just like a drum. (laughter) Somebody had been hiding in there.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness, they couldn’t get away, yeah; that’s pretty obvious, isn’t it? Well, I just had no idea that was out there.
Mrs. Gibson: Um-hm, yeah.

VanZandt: So, it’s going to be interesting to see the growth they have coming from that area.

Mrs. Gibson: Yes, that’s right.

VanZandt: There’s a lot of growth in Petal, in that direction—

Mrs. Gibson: Uh-huh, yes.

VanZandt: —toward Hattiesburg, so.

Mrs. Gibson: Well, Richton is just a bedroom community now.

VanZandt: It is.

Mrs. Gibson: The part that was a town is gone.

VanZandt: Right, that’s right. Laurel, that whole area, Jones County is growing so much. Well, thank you so much for your time today.

Mr. Gibson: Well, we enjoyed it, too.

VanZandt: We’ll have to schedule a time to pick up after I read your book.

Mr. Gibson: OK.

VanZandt: OK, thank you for that.

(end of interview)