Mr. Richard Chenoweth Jr. was born January 10, 1952, in Hamilton, Bermuda. His parents were Richard E. Chenoweth Sr. and Marilyn Zuill Chenoweth. He was the first of three children born to the couple which consisted of sisters Marilyn (Bitsi) and Andrea (Andy). He also had a stepsister Karina (Kacee), which his dad adopted. The family moved around a lot, living in Indiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Michigan, Illinois; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Havana, Cuba; Pensacola, Florida; and Pascagoula, Mississippi, in 1960. His parents divorced in 1966 and his father moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, to live with his mother while the rest of the family stayed in Pascagoula.

Mr. Chenoweth graduated from high school in 1970 and graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1978. He had to drop out a couple of times to make money to continue his education. After graduation with a degree in business, he worked as an agent for Prudential Insurance Company. He married Kathy McLelland on June 20, 1981, and attended the birth of both of his daughters, Lauren Elizabeth, born November 14, 1983, and Amy Kathryn, born July 24, 1986. In August of 1982, he started Scranton’s Restaurant, which is still operating today in the Old Fire Station in Downtown Pascagoula, Mississippi. In 1995, he, Don Walker, and Brian Peterson established the Longest Jet Ski Journey category in the Guinness Book of World Records for a trip from Pascagoula to Key West, Florida. They followed that with a trip from Pascagoula to New York in 1997 and a trip from New York back to Pascagoula in 1998.

Mr. Chenoweth was selected as Restaurateur of the Year in 2005 for the state of Mississippi and in 2006 was chosen as the Small Business Administration’s Man of the Year for the state of Mississippi. He has served as president of the Gulf Coast Chapter of the Mississippi Hospitality and Restaurant Association (MHRA) and as president of the MHRA from 2005 to 2007. He presently resides in Pascagoula.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

RICHARD ELDON CHENOWETH

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Project of the University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Project. The interview is with Richard Eldon Chenoweth and is taking place on March 14, 2007. A second interview takes place on April 17, 2007. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-Millet.

Scull-Millet: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project. The interview is with Richard Chenoweth, and it is taking place on March 14, 2007, at 2 p.m. We’re actually in Pascagoula, aren’t we?

Chenoweth: Pascagoula, correct.

Scull-Millet: In Pascagoula, Mississippi, at Scranton’s Restaurant. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-Millet. And first I’d like to thank you, Richard, for taking time to talk with me today. And I’d like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. And I’m going to ask you, for the record, if you could state your name, please?

Chenoweth: Richard Eldon Chenoweth Jr.

Scull-Millet: Thank you.

Chenoweth: You want me to spell it? (laughter)

Scull-Millet: And for the record, in case all the labels are lost or damaged, how do you spell your name?

Chenoweth: Richard is self-explanatory; Eldon is. Chenoweth is C-H-E-N-O-W-E-T-H.

Scull-Millet: Why don’t you do Eldon just in case?

Chenoweth: E-L-D-O-N.

Scull-Millet: Great. OK. And when were you born?

Chenoweth: I was born January 10, 1952, in Hamilton, Bermuda.

Scull-Millet: And for the record, what was your father’s name?
Chenoweth: His name was Richard Eldon Chenoweth Sr.

Scull-Millet: And your mother’s maiden name? Her first and maiden name?

Chenoweth: Marilyn Louise Zuill.

Scull-Millet: How do you spell Zuill?

Chenoweth: Z-U-I-L-L.

Scull-Millet: And is Louise L-O-U-I-S-E?

Chenoweth: That’s correct.


Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: Marilyn Louise Zuill.

Chenoweth: Zuill, right.

Scull-Millet: And where did you grow up? A lot (laughter) of different places.

Chenoweth: Yeah, I grew up a lot of different places. You know, we started off in Bermuda; we’ve lived in Ohio, Oklahoma. Each one of my sisters was born in those two states. We lived in Pennsylvania; we lived in Pensacola, Florida. We lived in St. Joe, Michigan; we lived in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We lived in Havana, Cuba. I said, Pensacola, Florida.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm.

Chenoweth: And Pascagoula, and I think, oh, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Scull-Millet: And why? What was the reason that you—

Chenoweth: My father was in the military when he met my mother in Bermuda. And he then moved to the States, and he was born in Indianapolis, Indiana; so that’s where basically they moved back to. And then he got a job with Clark Equipment. He was a salesman, and he worked for different companies. I’m not sure before St. Joe, Michigan, is where my memories start coming. And that was about 1957. And so he worked for Clark Equipment, and they transferred him to San Juan, Puerto Rico. He was in sales, selling these big, huge front-end loaders and stuff like that. And then my mother wasn’t happy in San Juan, so we moved. He was transferred to Havana, Cuba, which was just a wonderful experience for all of us.
Scull-Millet: Sounds like you lived in some really beautiful, beautiful—

Chenoweth: Yeah, we did.

Scull-Millet: Like resort areas, right?

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: And lots of sports and recreation.

Chenoweth: And Bermuda, we’d go back to Bermuda a lot. In fact, I was just back there last summer, and I still have relatives that live in Bermuda that I go back and see, and friends and stuff like that. We just moved around. I can remember taking pictures of my kindergarten classes or my first-grade classes when I was leaving. I’d take their picture so I could remember them. Of course, a lot of those pictures got destroyed in the hurricane.

Scull-Millet: Oh. Hurricane Katrina?

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Well, you and I have talked about how we’ll do another interview about your childhood and your adult life besides Hurricane Katrina, because we’re limited by time today. But I wanted to find out how long you’ve lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast now?

Chenoweth: We moved here April 15, 1960. We lived right over in Belair. My father, after we left Cuba, he taught electrical engineering in Pensacola at Pensacola Junior College. In fact, we went through a couple of hurricanes down there. And then he got a job over here at Ingalls [Shipbuilding] right when they were starting their nuclear submarine program. So he went to nuclear engineering school; I think they had a short version back then. They didn’t know much. They just said, “I guess if it starts glowing, run.” (laughter) So he became a nuclear engineer and worked over here with Westinghouse and everything when they were building these nuclear submarines. So that’s how we ended up here.

Scull-Millet: In Pascagoula.

Chenoweth: Right. My mother and father got a divorce when I was in junior high. So I guess that was, shoot, in the early [19]60s, and he moved back to Indianapolis and stayed with his mother, and then my mother stayed here.

Scull-Millet: And how old were you when you moved here?

Chenoweth: I was eight years old. Yeah.
Scull-Millet: So really your formative years have all been here in Pascagoula.

Chenoweth: Yeah. My friends that I have today, I had back then, basically. My best friend Dale Harkey and my partner Jack Pickett, they were my good friends, and [are] still good friends. I mean, my partner and I, are you know, we’re partners. And then Dale and I are just great friends; he was my best man, and I was his best man. And, shoot, we probably met in 1962.

Scull-Millet: That’s great. So they’re lifelong friends, really.

Chenoweth: Yeah, a lot of lifelong friends. There’s a lot of them here, and I guess that’s what helped make the decision to stay after the hurricane was that, you know, we lived in such a great neighborhood surrounded by such great friends and neighbors that you didn’t want to leave each other. So we kind of clung to each other and helped each other and are still doing that. And it helps knowing that you’re not the only one going through this crap. You know. So that had a lot to do with continuing on, is friends.

Scull-Millet: Rather than just leaving.

Chenoweth: Because when you get right down to it, it’s not about your stuff. It’s about your friends and your family, your family, of course, first, but that’s what it’s all about.

Scull-Millet: Only a person who’s lost a lot has a right to say that, I think.

Chenoweth: Yeah, I guess, but because you know, you go through a disaster, and you think it’s going to be a disaster from then on, but just things actually—I mean for us things have worked out better. And for a lot of my friends, things are better than they were. Nobody wanted to go through what we went through, but it’s better. I don’t know whether it’s better physically because I’m working twice as hard as I was before the hurricane, when I’m wanting to work half as much as I was before the hurricane. (laughter) So you know.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. So you were coming to a time in your life where you would have liked to have been winding down a little.

Chenoweth: Yeah, winding down.

Scull-Millet: But things are heating up instead.

Chenoweth: Still working. I don’t really ever plan on not working, but I plan on working a lot less and traveling a lot more.

Scull-Millet: So you own the restaurant Scranton’s?
Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: And how long have you owned it? When did Scranton’s open?

Chenoweth: We started it in 1982. So we’ve had it for twenty-five years this July.

Scull-Millet: That would be a good time to retire; most people like to retire—

Chenoweth: Yeah, I mean, twenty-five years is the longest I ever did anything. You know. I mean, well, I went to college for eight years. So that was the longest I did anything before then, (laughter) but now I wish I had a scholarship to go back.

Scull-Millet: Oh, yeah.

Chenoweth: For thirty years.

Scull-Millet: Wouldn’t that be fun?

Chenoweth: Wish I could be you, you know, in a university environment. But, yeah, after twenty-five years I was nominated and I got chosen to be the Small Business Administration’s Mississippi’s Small-Business Person of the Year.


Chenoweth: So I just found that out, yeah. So after twenty-five years, they do give you some (laughter) recognition, some reward, you know.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. So if you could kind of think about your attachment to this region, what does attachment mean to you? Describe that.

Chenoweth: You know, I think about it all the time. You think about Mississippi is always last in this and what a lot of people’s view. I traveled; I rode a Wave Runner from Pascagoula to Key West. I rode a Wave Runner from Pascagoula all the way up to New York, all along the East Coast, and you know, you just get people’s different views, and they think of Mississippi as just, you know, backwoods. And it’s just not anything like that, and in a way, you’re glad that they think that way because that keeps them away. (laughter) You know, these casinos are changing everything, bringing people in. So that’s going to change our personality, I guess you’d say. But it has a great personality. It’s just a great place to be, I think. You have the best of both worlds [in] Pascagoula. You’re in between Destin and Fort Walton and Pensacola in Florida, and then two hours the other way, you’re in New Orleans. And you can go right out to the islands here; you can go up the river here. It’s just so many opportunities here. And just the people, you know, just the people are just so nice. And it’s just hard to describe. I guess it’s just the ties, just all the family ties that are here. My wife was born in Pascagoula; so that helps. She was born in the same
hospital that Jimmy Buffet was born in. (laughter) And so her family, basically they moved from Morton to be here.

Scull-Millet: Morton?

Chenoweth: Morton, Mississippi, and Hattiesburg, during World War II when they were building ships down here. Her mother graduated from The University of Southern Mississippi. Her father graduated from The University of Southern Mississippi, and he worked at Ingalls, and she was a schoolteacher. And so she has her ties here. All her aunts—well, her surviving aunt is living here. And so we have those ties. So I guess it’s just family and friends.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. Now, you said you rode a Wave Runner. What’s a Wave Runner?

Chenoweth: A Wave Runner is like a Jet Ski.

Scull-Millet: That’s a long trip to take on a Jet Ski. (laughter)

Chenoweth: Yeah, it was thirteen days, and then we actually went back the next year and rode from New York back to Pascagoula.

Scull-Millet: That’s amazing.

Chenoweth: So we were coming down the Mississippi River and everything like that.


Chenoweth: Yeah, that one took three weeks, and that was probably my most favorite one out of all the trips, just going down the river, just coming through Chicago in the middle of rush hour on a Wave Runner and looking up, seeing all the people and everything like that. It was just, you know, very interesting. And you’d think people would just come up to you and want to know what you were doing. And you looked like you’re a mass murderer almost (laughter) in all this getup that we had to wear because it was so cold in the Great Lakes and everything like that. So we were covered in neoprene.

Scull-Millet: Wetsuits?

Chenoweth: Yeah, hoods and goggles and everything.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. That’s right; you’d be really exposed.

Chenoweth: Yep. So I’ve been all over. I’ve been to Fiji; I’ve been to Hawaii; I’ve been to New Zealand; I’ve been to the Keys. We lived up North. I’ve been out West.

Scull-Millet: Did you keep a journal?
Chenoweth: I tried to, and—

Scull-Millet: Well, you should publish a book.

Chenoweth: I’ve got some in videotapes that went underwater that I’m hoping, like, my Cuba trip and stuff like that and New Zealand and Fiji, but I’m hoping—I didn’t throw them out, and I’m hoping to be able to get a digital camera that I can buy for, like, a hundred bucks and just try to see if I can salvage anything. Put it on hard drive; I put my Hawaii trip on there. But you know, I’ve just been all those places, and I’ve never found any place better than here. I’ve found beautiful places, but I don’t think it’s just about that. I think it’s about your relationships and the people that you’re with. I think that’s what it’s all about. You know? Everybody always says, “Well, if I could take all my friends and family, and we could move to Hawaii, then we’d do it.” But you know, unless some cataclysmic thing spews me out of here, (laughter) I don’t see me leaving.

Scull-Millet: Right. Now, you said that you could go right up the river. Which river were you talking about?

Chenoweth: The Pascagoula River.

Scull-Millet: The Pascagoula River, OK. Can you just tell me—when I asked you where was your neighborhood, I know you have this neighborhood where your restaurant is. How far away do you live?

Chenoweth: Two miles. Two miles, south.

Scull-Millet: So is it the same neighborhood? If you were describing—or are there kind of two neighborhoods?

Chenoweth: Let’s see. This being one neighborhood, yeah; it’d be two neighborhoods.

Scull-Millet: So what is your neighborhood like at home where you live, before Hurricane Katrina? If I said to you, “Describe your neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina,” how would you do that?

Chenoweth: Well, the easiest thing to describe is we basically bought the house that we’re living in about ten years ago, ten, twelve years ago. And it took us two years to remodel it. A lot of it had to do with money. I contracted it and everything like that, and we were able to live—we had sold our house down at the other end of the beach, and we were living in my mother-in-law’s house who had just gotten remarried. And so she was living up in Escatawpa; so we were living in a house that we didn’t have to pay any rent or anything like that. We paid utilities. So we had a house note that we were paying there, so we didn’t have two house notes. So we weren’t in a big hurry,
and we were able to wait for good contractors that were reasonable and everything like that. So we lived in a great neighborhood over there. We had two little girls, and we were living in a neighborhood that was on a dead-end street that didn’t have any kids or anything like that. We moved over to Pinecrest, which is about two miles east of here and lived right next to the school. The girls could just go to school, walk to school and everything like that. So that worked out great. And then we moved; we finally moved into our house. And we had a fence on either side, and when we got there we put a gate in each side of the fence because there was little girls next to us on the north side; there was little girls next to us on the south side. So they basically had the gates going from our yard through the two yards so they could all go to the swimming pool that was over there. And so, you know, we have a great backdoor neighbor; then I have a real good friend that lives next to him. And you know, we just know everybody in the neighborhood, and the neighborhood is probably about four blocks wide.

Scull-Millet: All right. We’re going to take a break for a minute here. (Mr. Chenoweth turned off icemakers.) Richard got rid of that noise. We have to remember to turn it back on, right?

Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: So it sounds like there was a real sense of community.

Chenoweth: Yeah, our block is about four blocks east and west and then three blocks. You know, my partner lives two blocks north of me. Dale lives half a mile from me, a quarter of a mile north of me. So we’re just all kind of intermingled in that neighborhood, and it’s just basically from here, it’s two miles south.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm. OK. So if you described the neighborhood here where your business is, where your restaurant is, how would you describe that?

Chenoweth: A little bit similar. We’ve been here twenty-five years, so we know—I mean, we’re the longest person here, so everybody that’s moved in or been here came after us. You know there’s been people; like, there was a department store here that went out of business and stuff like that. There’s been a lot of places go out of business, so we’re kind of like the old granddad on the block (laughter). So everybody kind of comes to us for advice, or you know, “What’d you do about this?” And different things, so it’s kind of like a neighborhood, too. A little bit more formal, not as—you know, after the hurricane [Katrina], we all helped each other that way. And there’s people that still thank me to this day for helping them. You know, “We couldn’t have done it without you.” And stuff like that. And of course, I didn’t think I was doing anything.

Scull-Millet: And you know they mean it.
**Chenoweth:** Yeah. But I just didn’t think of it as—I don’t even know what I did, to tell you the truth. (laughter) But that’s what they tell me. You know, just gave them advice and helped them and shared things.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, shared what you knew.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah.

**Scull-Millet:** Right, which is very valuable.

**Chenoweth:** So, you know, it is a different neighborhood. It’s a little more formal neighborhood here, you know, business of course.

**Scull-Millet:** Now, is this what you would call Pascagoula’s downtown?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, this is actually the main street.

**Scull-Millet:** And is the town intact, or is it a town that suffered when the malls came in?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, definitely suffered when the mall, Singing River [Mall] came in. That kind of gutted this. There was a lot of different reasons that this downtown was gutted, and one of them was they closed it for urban renewal. They put the awning overhang and everything like that over it, and then they said, “Well, let’s just keep the street closed.” And so they took all the parking off, and that just choked all the businesses. When we were debating whether to take it off or not, we went to Laurel and talked to them, and there was a druggist up there; I’ll never forget talking to him. And he said, “Did you have a thriving downtown before the thing?” And we said, “Yeah.” And he said, “Go down there tomorrow and get a crane and take it down,” he said, “because that’s what happened in Laurel. We came back.” So that’s—and you’re seeing some of that here. I mean, it’s slowly but surely; there’s so many people that want to gripe about how they took half the parking places and made it into a park and stuff like that. You know, “We need the parking.” You know, they’re just not looking at the total. In twenty-five years, we’re still here. And if we listened to what people were griping about twenty-five years ago, we’d still be there, twenty-five years later. You know, there’s an old saying, “You’ve got one year of experience, twenty-five times.” There’s some people that just don’t change. And you know, I feel sorry for the people that ate here twenty-five years ago, compared to the experience that we have now with what we thought was fine dining back then. But it’s just changing slowly, and getting better, but there’s people that would not change, but I just don’t believe in it. I believe no matter what change it is, it’s going to—as long as it’s managed or whatever—that, don’t be scared of it. That park’s going to be great.

**Scull-Millet:** Sounds like it, yeah.
Chenoweth: But people just think, “Utility. We need those parking places!” OK. We lost eight parking places.

Scull-Millet: That’s not much of a trade-off for a park.

Chenoweth: Let’s walk a little bit farther. There’s 300 parking places right down, 300 yards from there; let’s walk.

Scull-Millet: Right, yeah. That’s right.

Chenoweth: I have two places, one on the corner down there, and I’ve walked as much as I can back and forth, you know, if I don’t have to carry anything.

Scull-Millet: Walking’s good for you, real good. I mean, it’s ironic because you wonder how many of those people are paying a gym fee to go and work out (laughter) in the gym.

Chenoweth: Yeah, no kidding. And then they want to park right there. But yeah, I’d say this is a formal, business neighborhood, but still friendly and friends. But then my neighborhood down there is, you know, we’re just all tied together down there.

Scull-Millet: I’m hoping the train isn’t going to be too much interference on here. I’m not going—we might take a break if we had more time, but it won’t last long, will it?

Chenoweth: Oh, no. It depends on whether he’s going east or west. (train whistle)

Scull-Millet: Let me just turn it off for a second. (brief interruption) So let’s talk a little bit about, just for the record, tell me a little bit about your building, here.

Chenoweth: This building was built in 1924; it took the place of the original fire station that was a wooden structure here. And I’m not sure when that wooden structure was built; I’m sure it was built before or late in the 1800s, I’m sure; in the 1890s, whatever. But there was a bakery across the street, and the bakery caught fire. And the whole downtown burned down (inaudible).

Scull-Millet: And you were saying that was about 1924?

Chenoweth: That was about 1921.

Scull-Millet: Nineteen twenty-one the whole town of Pascagoula burned down.

Chenoweth: Right. And so when they rebuilt the fire station, it was a volunteer fire department that was established in 1883. So when they rebuilt this, they got the bank to finance it, and they got the city to occupy half of it. And the city paid the note and ended up owning the building in ten years. It took them two years to build it; so they
started building it in [19]22, and they finished it in [19]24. And when they did, you know, the mayor had his mayor’s office, the courtroom, that he was the city judge back then, and they had the jail cells in the back. You did your tax business; you did your city business in the front half, and then the other half was the fire station. People, “Where’s the pole?” You know, they want to know where the pole is. And I say, “Well, if you think about it, that’s in Chicago, you know, where they have 300 firefighters living in a building or a hundred or whatever.” And I said, “They only had four here.” (laughter) So they had the truck up front, and they had the—where our kitchen is, is where they lived and where they had their bathrooms and their little kitchen area and stuff like that.

Scull-Millet: So all of that is now your restaurant downstairs.

Chenoweth: Right. And then upstairs where we’re located right now was what we call the civic center of its day. They had wrestling matches up here; they had boxing matches up here. They had dances up here. They had city hall meetings. That was the stage where the band—

Scull-Millet: That’s the original proscenium for the stage?

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: It’s so beautiful.

Chenoweth: It was actually a little bit higher; we cut it down, had it cut down. But we preserved it; we just cut the boards in half and lowered it down. Back in those days you needed the height to get the sound to carry and everything like that.

Scull-Millet: That’s right. (laughter)

Chenoweth: Yeah. And, “I met my husband at the dance upstairs.” (laughter) And stuff like that.

Scull-Millet: Right, yeah. And so this is the original brick.

Chenoweth: Right, yeah. We exposed the brick over here; the walls all looked like that right there. And there used to be there wasn’t a building next-door; so that’s why the windows are right there.

Scull-Millet: And is that plaster that’s over the brick?

Chenoweth: Um-hm, yep.

Scull-Millet: And the windows are all trimmed out in wood; it’s really a beautiful space. I wish I had a camera with me. Well, we are pressed for time today. And so let’s just get to talking about Hurricane Katrina. If you could as much as possible
paint a picture for people who’ll be listening in years to come. Just describe your whole Hurricane Katrina experience.

**Chenoweth:** You know, we’ve been here since 1982; so we’ve been through several hurricanes down here, Georges being the last one that we were actually staying. There’s a group of people that have come to consider this their refuge, and you know, it’s just friends, and they bring friends, and we open it. We tell anybody that wants to that they’re welcome to come down here to ride out the hurricane.

**Scull-Millet:** To the restaurant?

**Chenoweth:** To the restaurant. It’s been here since 1924; we just don’t expect it to, you know, unless it had a direct hit by a tornado, which that can happen anywhere. It’s just not going to go anywhere; it’s just a safe building. It has amenities; like it has food and freezers. It has ice; it has alcohol, which became very important after Katrina. We have generators; you know, we have, like, four or five generators.

**Scull-Millet:** Did people sleep up here?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, we did after the hurricane. Most people—there was eighteen of us during Katrina, here. And there’s always—I come down here, like, the day before. The mandatory evacuation was set for ten o’clock on the night before Katrina. So at about noon I came down here and opened it up.

**Scull-Millet:** On Saturday?

**Chenoweth:** On Saturday.

**Scull-Millet:** The day before.

**Chenoweth:** And, gosh, when did the hurricane hit? I want to say it hit on Monday, though.

**Scull-Millet:** I thought it was a Sunday.

**Chenoweth:** Gosh, for some reason, I had it in my head as Monday.

**Scull-Millet:** It was August 29, right?

**Chenoweth:** So whatever date that was.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, you’re probably right. OK, but the day before, you came down at noon and opened.

**Chenoweth:** Opened it up and just, you know, because the people that were planning on coming down here, friends of mine, Don McKee and his wife Dina McKee and
Libby Thompson and Ben Moore and, let’s see, Liz O’Cain, Dale Harkey, Dan Walker, Billy Walker came with the McKees, Perry Thompson and his wife, Gwen, my mother and my sister. If you’ll notice, I didn’t say my wife or my daughter because my wife said Georges was the last one she was staying down here because the wind causing all these old windows just [rattling and banging], and we’d all be sleeping, and she’d just be wide awake and scared to death. And so she went to stay with her aunt up close to Moss Point. But what’s so curious, the two scares that we had before that, you know, we had a very active season, and the two scares that she experienced, she drove north and went to Starkville. So this time, the third time, she said, “Well, I’m not driving again.” In fact the last time she ended up getting stuck in Starkville an extra day because the hurricane that was supposed to hit us hit Mobile and went up to Starkville. And so she got caught in there; so she said, “I’m just going to stay around here, but I’m not staying in Scranton’s.” And in June and July, I had gone and bought another two generators because I just had a feeling that this was going to be a bad year. And I needed a bigger generator because I had a little bit more equipment to generate and everything like that. So I went and bought two more generators, and it was so ironic that everything that I was going to generate went under water. So I didn’t need any generators; I still have the generators. We saved the generators, but I didn’t have any refrigeration equipment. I had one refrigerator that was still working because it had a top-mount compressor and everything like that. But anyway, so that morning I came down here, and I unlocked it, and people, all these friends of mine, were calling, saying, “Hey, when are you going to go down.”

I said, “I’m not going down till ten o’clock.” I said, “I’ve got to put my boards up on my house and everything like that.” I said, “But it’s open; you’re welcome to go down there and set up your pallet and set up our spot, claim your territory and everything like that.” Because, you know, you were in the mayor’s office; there were people, my mother and my sister had that room.”

Scull-Millet: That’s downstairs.

Chenoweth: Yeah. And Dale and I had the back room, the courtroom downstairs, and then Perry and Gwen were up there, and Don and Liz were up in the dining room portion. And then other people had the bar and everything like that; so they slowly moved in during the day. I helped my friends, my partner. You know, everybody was putting up their windows. I had boards that fit mine; I already had them just where they screwed on and everything like that. So I could cover my house up in twenty minutes. My wife and my daughter left that afternoon and went to Aunt Verne’s. So they left about three o’clock. And Dale and I, Jack, Dale’s wife left and went to Memphis. She went to Memphis and stayed up there; so it was Dale and I and Jack; his wife had left earlier and gone over to her mother’s house. And that’s where Jack was going to stay; they don’t stay here at the restaurant either. But so we kind of met at Jack’s house; we left my house about 9:30 that night after battening down the hatches. And a lot of this stuff like getting supplies and everything like that, we don’t have to do. I don’t have to go get ice; I don’t have to go get water or anything like that because we have—you know, I can just fill up water jugs here. And we have Igloos that we use for catering and everything like that. So we fill all those things up.
We fill ice chests up with ice, and then we get—the ice machine keeps making it. So after the hurricane, you want to shut your water supply down because you don’t know what kind of intrusion you’ve had into the water supply. So you could have bacteria like this happens; you know, this blew everything out of the pipes back up into peoples’ houses. It was shit and mud, and we called it shud. That was what our name was for it, just to put it bluntly.

Scull-Millet: Right. (laughter) That’s great.

Chenoweth: But that gets in the water system. So you want to cut that ice machine off; as soon as the power goes off, then you basically shut your water supply off except for rinsing off and stuff like that. But so we’d already gotten gasoline; I’d been working on that two or three days. We watch them pretty close.

Scull-Millet: What did you put gasoline in?

Chenoweth: You know, I mentioned my Wave Runner trips; so I had extra gas cans from all those. I have, like, twenty gas cans. So I had, like, half of them down at my house and half of them down here. The half at my house ended up floating all over the place. And a lot of people—you know, I kind of ramble a little bit.

Scull-Millet: Of course.

Chenoweth: A lot of people think that you just had a flood. They don’t realize that those houses are getting just demolished. And you think about all the chemicals you have in your house, pesticides, paints, solvents, oils—

Scull-Millet: Drano.

Chenoweth: Gasoline, Drano, detergent, bleach, all those things are just getting, just hammered. And my [forty] gallons of gasoline that I had basically floated around and just dumped in the water and everything like that. So when the water came in, it smelled like diesel. It’s very, very corrosive; very corrosive. I mean just almost ten hours, you know, things would be rusty, just corroded and everything like that. So it’s not just water, and it has the bacteria in it.

Scull-Millet: It’s a toxic mix.

Chenoweth: Yep.

Scull-Millet: But all that toxicity didn’t kill the bacteria.

Chenoweth: No, it doesn’t. And it has vegetation, you know, because leaves were floating in and out of here and everything like that. So it’s not just water, and it’s just very dangerous. But anyway, so a lot of the things, getting ready for a hurricane, I don’t have to do because I have a lot of those supplies here. I have bread. You know,
I don’t have to go to the grocery store because everything’s here. What we do here is we make a decision; we don’t put it off till the last minute. I get my employees to come in. We move everything out of all the coolers. We start in the front of the restaurant, anything that’s got a cooler or freezer; we consolidate it all down.

**Scull-Millet:** Now, by cooler, you don’t mean something that’s portable; you’re talking about a big refrigerator?

**Chenoweth:** No, I’m talking about the reach-in refrigerators, yeah. Bar freezers, I’m talking about. Now, we don’t do the bottled beer or the wine or anything like that, but we do the food. And we take it, and we organize it, and we put it in the freezers. We have a big walk-in cooler, and a walk-in freezer. So we just basically pack those.

**Scull-Millet:** And those are all downstairs?

**Chenoweth:** Those are all downstairs. We pack those up; I get my employees. I just bring them in and say, “OK.” We don’t wait around till, “Well, let’s see what the hurricane’s going [to do.]” We just go ahead and make the decision. If it’s going to hit, like, in this case we closed on Friday. So they come down on Friday, and they clean all these refrigerators out, and they bleach them all out, and we go ahead and leave the doors open, and everything like that because when the electricity goes off, there’s nothing worse than a smelly restaurant. (laughter) Really, you know. It just gets that musty smell. So we pack everything in those coolers because we have a generator that will generate electricity to that walk-in freezer and that walk-in cooler; so everything’s consolidated in there. Well, after the hurricane, you have access to all that food and everything like that. So this one was a little bit different. So that day, that’s the preparations we’d made. We basically boarded up the house; helped everybody board up their house. You know, you kind of just go around in the neighborhood, and you help everybody. Each one of my neighbors has a different responsibility, like my back-door neighbor Paul Leonard, he’s a detective with the police force. So he doesn’t get to help with his house much; so we try to help as much there. My other neighbor behind him who’s a good friend of mine has Colle Towing Company out here. So he works for them; so they’re scrambling around to try to batter down all these huge rigs and everything like that. So I had to do his house for him because he’s working. My partner, we worked on his house. My next-door neighbor, he had iron bars on his house; so we didn’t do anything for him. But everybody just kind of scrambles to help each other, and everybody is constantly on the cell phones, and we’re working out coordinating and everything like that. So it’s a kind of a controlled scramble, but we’ve done it so many times that we kind of—and we’re still the same friends, you know, so we kind of know what each other needs and what each other’s strengths and weaknesses are. So we ended up at Jack’s house at ten o’clock at night. It was Jack and Dale and I just sitting around, having a drink, actually, and smoking cigarettes. I don’t smoke that much, but I used to. And so I just smoke a cigarette, kind of in Man Land right there. (laughter) And so then we all parted, never dreaming, you know, that we were going to come back to what we came
back because Dale lives north of Jack, and Jack lives north of me. And the water came all the way, you know, three miles through all of us.

**Scull-Millet:** At this point, are you thinking anything like this? “Well, this is a Category Three; Camille was a Five. I’m not too worried.”

**Chenoweth:** The thing that confuses me to this day is why I didn’t pay any attention to the flood thing. I did one thing; I took my computers. I have one that has audio, 8000 songs on it. And then I have one that has all my video, that I was transferring all that video over to. I put them up on my desk in my office, and I said, “I just don’t like that.” And I put them in my car, and I moved them downtown.

**Scull-Millet:** You brought them inside here?

**Chenoweth:** I brought them inside at my other location, right down the street. I put them in there because that’s kind of more of like an office that I use down there.

**Scull-Millet:** Is that farther away from water?

**Chenoweth:** Unh-uh, it’s just even with here; it’s actually just in the two blocks from here.

**Scull-Millet:** How close are we to water here?

**Chenoweth:** We’re two miles.

**Scull-Millet:** From?

**Chenoweth:** From the Gulf of Mexico, from the Mississippi Sound right there. We’re two miles and one tenth because my house is two miles, and so it’s about another—I tell people I used to live four houses from the beach, and now I live two houses from the beach because my two neighbors lost their houses. And I’m still living two houses from the beach because they haven’t built back. But so we were sitting there at Jack’s never thinking—well, I took those computers and put them down there, and that’s the only thing that I saved out of my house, but I’m confused to this day why I didn’t understand that, you know, there was going to be this storm surge. It really wasn’t—because I’m Mr. Weather. You know, Nancy that came up here a while ago that works for me, she was saying, “Oh, is it going to rain today?” And I said, “Yeah, it’s going to rain for the next two days.” You know, I’ve been watching it; I’m just Mr. Weather. And I’m going, “Why did I miss that?” And I had a friend of mine, Mahlon McAdams up in Madison, Mississippi, that he was monitoring the buoys out in the Gulf and seeing how high the waves were going and everything like that, and he knew it was going to probably flood. But you heard it so often. You know, “It’s going to flood during Georges,” which it did; it backed up in the bayous and everything. But my house was high and dry, and actually that’s when I decided, “I better go ahead and get flood insurance.” After Georges. So I was one of
94 percent of the town flooded; 6 percent of it had flood insurance. And I was one of the 6 percent. My partner had just dropped his flood insurance right before the hurricane. But we’ve all come out OK.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, well, you’re alive.

**Chenoweth:** They’re just putting cabinets in my house today. I mean, here we are how many months?

**Scull-Millet:** A year and a half, maybe, at least.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, they’re just putting—in fact the guys we saw downstairs, that was my cabinet guys, the one that asked me about the grouper. I don’t know whether you remember that or not.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah. (laughter)

**Chenoweth:** So here we are sitting in Jack’s living room, smoking cigarettes, having a drink, going, “Well, we’ll see you tomorrow or the next day.” And we all left. But if we’d known, I mean, we would have been putting stuff up, or you know, trying to save more stuff. A lot of people took stuff off the walls—

**Scull-Millet:** —that would have been safe.

**Chenoweth:** —that would have been fine if it had stayed on the walls, and they put them under beds because what you worry about is stuff crashing through your windows and everything. So we leave that; we come down here. Everybody’s kind of giddy and excited, and my mother—

**Scull-Millet:** It’s kind of like a party, almost.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah.

**Scull-Millet:** All your friends are here.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, and everybody’s just kind of trying to put their best face forward, but there’s a little nagging, but we’ve been through it together so many times. And you know, normally what happens is you go through the hurricane, and it always happens at night. By the time the morning comes, it’s dying down.

**Scull-Millet:** You’ve been asleep for most of it.

**Chenoweth:** You can sleep. During Elena, or was it Frederick? No, Elena, one of the ones, the eye went right over Pascagoula. And so we went out and stood in the middle of the eye, and then, you know, the calm and everything; I went back in and
slept through the second half of it. You know, Kathy just said—and it was the worst part, you know? And it was just (cracking sound) blowing.

**Scull-Millet:** You were asleep.

**Chenoweth:** Trees falling down, rubbing on the house, and I’m in there (snoring) asleep. (laughter) So you normally can sleep through it. Some people do; some people don’t. And then you go home, and you run the generator until you get electricity back, and you clean up your yard. And that’s basically what you do. And you take your boards down; some people leave the boards up because they’re worried that another one’s going to hit and stuff like that. So everybody understands that. They don’t go, “What’s that nut leaving their boards up for?” So that’s what everybody’s is expecting to do after this one.

Well, I probably went to bed about midnight, and I woke up at 7:30. I slept on an air mattress downstairs; I really slept good. And I woke up, and I said, “Well, damn. This is great.” I thought the hurricane was already over with and everything like that. The wind was barely blowing. And then we didn’t have any electricity, but we started running the generator. We have gas for cooking. So we’re making coffee and stuff like that, and everybody’s kind of moving around. And we start getting these phone calls; the first one we got was from Dee, which is a real good friend of mine, but she also works for me, too. And she said that they’re getting water in their house, and they’re having to go up in the attic. And I said, “Well, Dee, golly, you know you can come down here.” And then we got another call a little bit farther north, you know, somebody else that was in trouble. And then we got a call from the courthouse, which you can see it right there. That’s the courthouse. Tony Lawrence is the district attorney.

**Scull-Millet:** That’s about a block away from us, isn’t it?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah. And Dale, my friend, is a judge. And so Tony called Dale and said, “Dale, I’m looking at a lake south of the courthouse, and it’s heading this way.” And we said, “Well, Tony, come on over here if you need to.” Never dawning on us that this water, if, you know—hello? It’s coming north. And Paul Leonard—

**Scull-Millet:** It’s headed toward you.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah.

**Scull-Millet:** But you didn’t put it together.

**Chenoweth:** Didn’t.

**Scull-Millet:** It’s denial.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah. My neighbor Paul Leonard, the detective that works for the police force, he called us after Dee had called and said, “We’ve got four feet of water
in our houses down there.” And I said, “Oh, Paul. You’re kidding me.” And he said, “No, Richard.” he said, “We’ve got water in our houses.” And so I called my friend Charlie McVea, who had flown out and gone to Houston; the owner of the company that he works for has a plane. And he said, “Let’s just go; we’ll fly out on a plane. I got to protect the plane anyway. We’ll fly to Houston; then we’ll come back.” So I was talking to him on the phone, saying, “Charlie, Paul called and said we got water in our houses.” And Charlie started going, “Well, let’s see, now. I built my house”—you know, he started adding up the inches and everything. I said, “Charlie, you got water in your house. You might as well just quit denying it or whatever.” So about that time Dale was talking to his wife, and we were in my office, the jail cell back there. The generators humming outside the back door, running those walk-in coolers and that walk-in freezer. Dale’s talking to his wife, giving her the news that we had water in our houses. And he opens up the door, and I’m sitting in the jail cell; he’s in the hallway. And he says, “Hey, I just let a little water in here.” I said, “Damn, Dale. That’s the least of our worries! We don’t have to worry about a little water; it’s going to get water in here!” You know, I’m thinking the rain piling up and just seeping in and stuff like that, which is normal. And he said, “No, you need to come here and see this.” So I opened the back door, and the water started swirling in the back door, and it was up, you know, going up above the wheels of the generator. And I said, “We got to save the generator!” And I went back. And I said, “Charlie, I got to go; there’s water coming in the back door.” And he said, “From where?” And I said, “I don’t know.” But what had happened was the water started seeping in the front, too. And I went up front, and somebody looked at me and said, “Is this normal?” And I said—well, I won’t tell you the word I used, but I said, “No. Blank, no!” And by the time, probably within thirty minutes, there was three feet of water in this restaurant.

Scull-Millet: Did you realize, “This is storm surge”?

Chenoweth: Yeah, oh, yeah. And you know, you’re wading around in it; it stinks. It’s dark; it’s got leaves in it; it’s got debris in it. It’s got junk in it, and it’s soaking up all your stuff. And in your head, you know—when Paul Leonard told me that my house was full of water, in your head you think, “The water’s going to rise kind of like a toilet tank. The water’s going to rise up, and then it’s going to go back down, and everything’s going to be in that toilet tank, just right where it was. That sofa is going to be right there.” You don’t think about all the stuff floating around. Well, what happens is, it’s like a big washing machine. You know, you just have that surge going through your house, and it’s just—you know, and then you have that shud that’s, it’s like somebody breaks in your house and mixes your whole house up and then craps on it before they leave.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. Somebody comes in with a fire hose, basically, full off poisonous water.

Chenoweth: Yeah, and everything’s, you know—I mean, I found my neighbor’s Santa Claus head in my bedroom, and it was only one way for it to come in, and it came in that one little—you see how the windows are right there? How the four
windows are right there? Well, just imagine eight windows, and that section was broken; that was the one place I didn’t board up. That’s on the south side, which I never board up. Well, that section of glass came out of the door, and that’s where that Santa Claus came in. I came around, and there was a torso like this, kind of like *Jaws*. You know the girl they find in *Jaws* where she’s just chewed from here down. There’s this torso; I’m holding a flashlight. I came around there and just went (gasp). It scared the hell out of me because it was right there in front of my bedroom.

**Scull-Millet:** And it was Santa.

**Chenoweth:** And it was Santa Claus with no head. Found the head in the backyard a couple of days later. Anyway, I got a little farther ahead, but the water came in, and it starts—there’s just nothing you can do about it. Somebody was opening the door, looking out the door, and I said, “Close the damn door!” (laughter) You know, because it does hold it out. When the water was almost up to my crotch, I was standing right down at the end of these stairs, looking out the glass doors down there. The water was just below my crotch, and it was up above my breast bone outside the door.

**Scull-Millet:** So how tall are you? What are we talking about?

**Chenoweth:** I’m five [feet], nine [inches].

**Scull-Millet:** So to here is?

**Chenoweth:** Probably four and a half feet right here. What? Another thirteen inches maybe.

**Scull-Millet:** Almost five feet.

**Chenoweth:** It was probably two more feet outside, higher than it was inside the restaurant.

**Scull-Millet:** Did you walk outside in it?

**Chenoweth:** No. No, we didn’t.

**Scull-Millet:** You could see it.

**Chenoweth:** I could see it through the glass doors; I was standing there like this. In fact, then I came up here, and I got my video camera, and I taped it down the stairs. You know, you could see the water higher outside than you can inside because I wanted to get that on tape. It lasted forty-five minutes to an hour.

**Scull-Millet:** That high.
Chenoweth: Then it started receding. And when it started receding, it started taking everything out, mayonnaise jars, gallon—anything that was on the smaller shelves started just whooshing out the back doors. And that was fortunate that we were here because we were able to open up and get the water out. “Save the mayonnaise!” You know. “We may need that mayonnaise.” Even though it’s not open or anything like that; it’s just floating away. So everything, all my refrigeration—I mean, refrigerators were crashing down. You know they float up, and then when they were coming down, they were crashing down on all the dishes and everything like that. The microwaves were falling off and everything like that. It was just like being on the Titanic. You know that Leonardo DiCaprio movie of the Titanic when they show the kitchen scenes where all the dishes were crashing. And you just have no control. When it first started, and we said, “We got to save the generator,” it looked like a ship of fools. You know, we were trying to save that generator, and we were trying to get it up. And we didn’t know what to put it on; we ended up putting it on pickle buckets and dishwashing liquid, five-gallon buckets. And I mean, it’s a 12-kW [kilowatt] generator, so.

Scull-Millet: How tall are they?

Chenoweth: They’re about two feet, two feet tall.

Scull-Millet: So it didn’t work?

Chenoweth: No, it worked.

Scull-Millet: It did work.

Chenoweth: Yeah, it worked because the generator, we moved it in the bar, which is about a foot higher than everything else. If you noticed, when we came up, starting going up these stairs, there’s a ramp that you went down. So we brought it in here, into the bar and put it up on those, and I remember when I looked back and saw the water, how high it was outside, and I looked back at my generator, I just went (kiss), “Bye, generator.” (laughter) And I just bought it in July, and it was, like, seven thousand bucks. But it ended up saving, but then I didn’t have anything to generate. You know, we generated some fans, and we generated, but you didn’t want to do that much because you were just chewing up gasoline, you know, just using up gasoline. And a friend of mine asked me, “What can I get you?” And I said, “Get me a siphon pump.” So he got me an electric fuel pump with a long, skinny hose, and all these cars that had drowned out here—that’s another story. I ended up sucking all the gas out of those things.

Scull-Millet: You can take a siphon and pull the gas—

Chenoweth: You can if you’ve got a little hose that you can go through; they have an antitheft hole in there. So you have to hit that hole right, or you can take the backseat off, and you’ll have the fuel gauge right there that you can take it out. But probably in
the middle of the flood, everybody had parked their cars over here on this side. And the parking lot on the north side is sloped up; it’s just a little bit higher. So I ran out, and people were standing out just watching all this going on. And I ran out there, and I said, “I’m going to save my car.” And they said, “Well, it’s not going to do you any good.” I said, “I don’t care; I’m going to fight for my car.” (laughter) So I moved my van, and I moved the Scranton’s van, and I moved the Scranton’s truck.

Scull-Millet: To the higher ground?

Chenoweth: To the higher ground; so then everybody else came out there and started moving theirs around. The last one to come out and move it was my friend Dan Walker; he had a company car, a Crown Victoria. And there wasn’t any parking places left on the north side. So he parked right behind the company truck, and it wasn’t an hour later when the wind came that it blew the roof off of this building next to us and landed right on his company car. (laughter) We were all standing there, watching it, and Dan just goes—but luckily it was a company car. That car ended up staying in that spot for three weeks. I ended up having to tow it out of the way; you know, when we opened up three weeks later, I towed it into a parking place just to get it out of the middle of the parking lot.

Scull-Millet: What about the other cars?

Chenoweth: The other cars, I lost my van.

Scull-Millet: Was it water floating them off?

Chenoweth: No, it didn’t float them off, but it was just high enough to get in there where it gets in your computer system underneath your seats, or it gets in there, you know, just gets high enough just to make the whole thing a mess. So I lost my van; it causes a lot of electrical problems is what it is. My sister lost her brand-new car she had just bought. My father had just died July third, and he’d bought her a car before he died. And I drove it from Kalamazoo, Michigan, all the way down here for her. She lost that. Everybody pretty much lost their car; we saved the Scranton’s van. We saved the Scranton’s truck.

Scull-Millet: Wow, you were lucky.

Chenoweth: And we had a generator in the back of the Scranton’s truck, too, that the police station ended up losing because they lost their generator and lost all their power. They had a motorcycle pulled into the lobby of the police station, and they were using that radio to try to contact people. So we loaned them our generator, and they were able to, you know, get the—you know, it’s little things like that I guess. And that was through my friend Paul Leonard. It’s all friends. Everybody else pretty much, yeah, everybody lost their cars pretty much. One guy had an old Jaguar, you know. He lost that. That was Kim Arnold and Gene Arnold. That was another couple that stayed with us. About four o’clock in the afternoon, I just started getting stir-
crazy. You know, we’d gone through all this and, I mean, the carpet was soaked downstairs. I was just kind of funky, you know. I was just kind of depressed about what was happening to Scranton’s. I mean, upstairs the air conditioners had blown off the roof; the water was just pouring down in here. We had water, you know—the roof was all torn off over here. Water was pouring; we were catching it and everything, which turned out to be fine later on because we ended up using that water to flush the toilets. I mean, you had eighteen people here, and everybody was using the bathrooms and stuff like that, and so it got a little gamey up in here.

Scull-Millet: It still flushed the toilet.

Chenoweth: Yeah, that rainwater flushed the toilets.

Scull-Millet: It wasn’t like the sewerage system had been—

Chenoweth: No, you know, because they opened the sewer system into the Gulf.

Scull-Millet: I didn’t know that.

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Because of the problems from Katrina.

Chenoweth: Yeah, they opened it up, and it was going out into the river. A lot of people don’t know that, but we do. I mean, it was an emergency situation.

Scull-Millet: What else could you do?

Chenoweth: Yeah, they had to.

Scull-Millet: If you hadn’t, it would have been coming back into—

Chenoweth: We were using alleys; you know, going to bathroom in the alleys. We were going to the bathroom on the railroad tracks. You know, we were living up here for a week after the storm.

Scull-Millet: Well, they flush the toilets on the railroad track on the trains, right? (laughter)

Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: So, yeah.

Chenoweth: But it’d be funny, you know; you’d be out there, pitch black and everything like that, and you’re holding onto something over the tracks and everything like that.
Scull-Millet: Why holding onto something?

Chenoweth: Just to keep from—well, you didn’t want to squat on the tracks because then you’re too low; you know, you’re only that high. So I was holding onto the red and green light that signifies whether the train’s passed or not. You didn’t have to worry about a train because all the trains weren’t running for six months afterwards. But about four o’clock in the afternoon, I just got stir-crazy, and I walked out the front door here, and my friend Dale said, “Where the hell are you going?” And I said, “I just got to get out of here.” I said, “This was the longest that a storm had lasted.”

Scull-Millet: It was still going on?

Chenoweth: It was still blowing and going crazy, and I said, “I’m going down to check on my other place,” which is two blocks from here, two blocks east of here. And it’s right on the corner of Pascagoula Street and the railroad tracks. So I walked out. He said, “You can’t [go out in the storm]. Wait for me; I’ll be right there.” (laughter) So we worked our way down in front of the stores, and we got to the corner where my place was. And I was looking in there; the windows were broken in the front and everything like that. I was looking in there; it didn’t get as much water in it because it was a little bit higher, and I think because my neighbor had a delivery entrance that went down, and I think it took a lot of the water into his store.

Scull-Millet: It diverted it?

Chenoweth: Diverted it basically into his store, and I only got a few inches of water down there. It didn’t do as much damage down there as it did down here at Scranton’s. It probably did about $200,000 worth of damage here at Scranton’s, and we had about $40,000 worth of coverage. And then the SBA [Small Business Association] loaned us $80,000, and then business has just doubled since the hurricane.

Scull-Millet: Has it?

Chenoweth: Yeah, so that helped, but so Dale and I were working our way down towards the end, towards the bakery. We got there, and we were standing there, and it was just like fate. Here comes my neighbor Paul Leonard, the detective for the police department. He comes across the railroad tracks and pulls up, and about that time my next-door neighbor John Banahan pulls up on the other—he was coming from his office, pulls up. We all happen to meet right there, Dale, John, Banahan and his wife, Paul Leonard, and another policeman—I can’t remember his name—and myself. And Paul Leonard gets out of his Jeep, and he looks at Dale, and he says, “You got a house.” He looks at John, and he goes, “You got a house.” And he goes, “I got a house.” And he says, “I don’t know whether you have a house,” and he points to me. And I said, “Oh, Paul, you’re shitting me.” And he said, “No.” He said, “Trent Lott’s house is gone; Bruner’s house is gone. Vincent Castigliola’s house is gone.” And
then we started naming off houses, and he’d go, “Gone.” So we came up with the thing, you were either flooded, you were either gutted, or you were gone. So you were either flooded, gutted, or gone. I ended up being flooded. Dale was flooded. My mother was gutted.

**Scull-Millet:** What’s the difference in flooded and gutted?

**Chenoweth:** Gutted is when you go back to your house, and your house is still there, but there’s nothing in it. Gone is when you go to your house, and there’s a slab. And flooded is when you go in there, and your furniture is still in there. So I was flooded; Banahan was flooded; my mother was gutted; Dale was flooded; Paul Leonard was flooded, and Charlie was flooded. And we think what happened was it knocked a house; everything went northwest. When you left your house to go look for stuff that had floated away, you went northwest. You walked in a line northwest, and you started to find those gas cans. My ceramic green egg, which is known as the green egg, which is a barbecue grill, floated two blocks north, and ceramic, and it was fine. It took us six months, but we finally got it back in our yard. You know, a lot of strange things. Another friend of mine, his green egg floated off his porch and around in front of the garage and still survived.

**Scull-Millet:** Stayed there.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah. Now, the stand that my green egg was in was gone; it was a wooden stand. It was just gone, but so we were all standing there. All of us just happened to meet up at that time. That was just so weird. And so Paul started describing what was going on at the police station, and that’s how we knew he needed a generator. So Dan Walker had joined us by then, my other friend, Dan Walker. So the three of us got in the truck, and we drove over to the police station and dropped off the generator that we had and gave them gasoline and a generator, and then Paul took us down to our houses so we could go see it.

**Scull-Millet:** During the hurricane?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, this was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

**Scull-Millet:** You’re driving down to your homes.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, the worst part was over; you know, we were still in—you have winds basically—I guess it was Sunday; I don’t know. But basically you had winds for twenty-four hours, and then after that there’s not a breath of air. So the first night after the hurricane, that night, you know, either that Monday night or Sunday night. (laughter) It was Monday night, I guess.

**Scull-Millet:** You’re right.
Chenoweth: You know, a breeze, we were sleeping out here on the balcony right here; we had a breeze and everything like that. The second night it was just unbearable, hot and not a breath of air. And the third night was like that.

Scull-Millet: Not a breath of air and what kinds of things are out there? Dead pets, dead squirrels starting to smell.

Chenoweth: Dead people. Yeah. I think there was about eight people that died around here, but. What? And no lights. You could lay out there on that deck and just see every star. That was one good thing. And then of course you had eighteen people staying here, too, and everybody has a different tone when they’re sleeping. So some people were snoring like hell, and it was like living in a dormitory, you know, and you weren’t sleeping well.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, in the 1700s. (laughter)

Chenoweth: And so you weren’t sleeping well; so if somebody moved, everybody moved.

Scull-Millet: What kind of communication did you have with the outside world?

Chenoweth: Not a lot. Cell phones were very sporadic, but we were fortunate. I mean, that’s the first time I’ve ever gone through a hurricane with a cell phone. Georges I did a little bit, but you still had phones. We didn’t have phone service here at Scranton’s for three months after the hurricane. I mean, can you imagine being a business and not having a phone?

Scull-Millet: Only in that circumstance.

Chenoweth: Yeah, but you end up getting your—you know, you start putting everybody’s cell phones out. So people call and, “Is this Scranton’s?” Or they knew employees; that’s another thing about these small towns, you know. They’d call Helen, “Helen, is Scranton’s open?” So you were found out. People, it’s like a network, like ants.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm, it gets a little primitive, but it works.

Chenoweth: Yeah, and just think how primitive it was in 1969 with Camille when we didn’t have any phones. I mean, you know, cell phones, thank God we got them. But different companies had different results. Cellular South was the best one, and I had Alltel, which you could get sporadic, but what was weird was you could get text messages in, a lot of text messages in. So if you had texting, then you could get messages out, but if you didn’t, you could only get messages in.

Scull-Millet: Strange.
Chenoweth: So I got a lot of messages from friends, text messages, but I couldn’t let them know that I was OK.

Scull-Millet: Well, OK, you said you got in the cars. The storm’s still going on, but it’s not as intense as it has been. The worst is over, and you drive to your house.

Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: And then what happened?

Chenoweth: Well, first we went to Dale’s house. And Dale didn’t bring his keys to get in his house. And I said, “Well, hell, Dale, just break a window.” And he said, “Oh, no, my wife would kill me.” (laughter) Well, you know since then they’ve had to gut their house, and that window I was telling him to break, it’s no longer there because they turned it into a big porch, but you could see in there. Dale said when he eventually got in his house, he said there was a dining room table. He said Barbie would always have some kind of setting on it and everything like that. And he said, “I could walk by it, and just me walking by it would knock a candle off.” He said, “That whole thing floated, and it looked just like the way Barbie had”——

Scull-Millet: How she left it?

Chenoweth: Can we stop a minute?

Scull-Millet: Yes, we’ll take a break.

(brief interruption)

Chenoweth: So we went to, like I said, Dale, that whole dining room table floated up and came back down, and nothing was disturbed on it. There was a lot of stories like that, just tons of stories. So then we went down to my house, and we were able to get that door where the windows had blown out. I didn’t have my keys, either, but I was going to break into my house. You know, I was going to make that decision. But I didn’t have to, but the thing is, all these people’s houses had disintegrated, and all this debris was around my house. It would be like if you took a matchbox, and then took a pack of crackers and just crumbled them, and it just surrounded that matchbox. I mean, I’m wearing sandals, and you’re having to climb over peoples’ walls and peoples’ stuff and furniture.

Scull-Millet: And nails and jagged wood.

Chenoweth: Nails and glass and just canned goods and clothes. God, I dug clothes out of my yard for weeks. Every time it rains there’s another layer that kind of pops up, but clothes. The clothes, they would just get, like you would iron them; they would just be so compressed, layers and layers. You’d just be pulling people’s clothes, pictures, bills, you know, telephone bills, cancelled checks, decorations,
Christmas decorations, silver, refrigerators, pianos, my neighbor’s piano, my neighbor next to me where, you know, we had the gate going to their yard, the neighbor’s car was in their kitchen, shoved all the way through into their kitchen. Al Frank goes, “Hey, Randy, you seen my car?” And he said, “Yeah, it’s in my kitchen.” You know? But there was a house that got knocked off its foundation and stayed whole, and it happened to wedge between—the corner of the house happened to wedge between these two telephone poles. And it was southeast of my house and John’s house. And we think that that thing kept, you know, going back to the northwest thing I was saying, that that diverted the waves around that house and kept them from just crushing on us.

Scull-Millet: It protected you. Yeah, it protected you somewhat from the full force of that huge push.

Chenoweth: Right. I had an orange tree; I had a tangerine tree, and I had a key lime tree in my yard. I must have had a hundred green oranges on my—and it was just surrounded by debris. It was still there, but there was no way those three trees just got—I had to have three different Bobcats, different versions of Bobcats cleaning all the stuff out of my yard.

Scull-Millet: The trees died?

Chenoweth: They just got run over, basically. There was just no way, you know, just no way. So I’m still going to replace those. So I walk in my house, and the first thing I hear is meow. You know? And then I hear another one, meow, up in the front. And I have four cats; three of them get along with each fine. The fourth one hated all three of them. And so Gracie, I had locked her up in the laundry room, and then the other three had the run of the house. Well, when I got in there, Gracie was still locked up in the laundry room, and she was soaked from about half her body down, you know from her paws all the way up. I mean, just climbing on the shelves and everything like that. I mean, I can’t imagine; I just wish I had a little camera attached to them, whatever, to know what they went through.

Scull-Millet: I know, yeah, what they saw.

Chenoweth: The other cat had survived by floating on the couch, and she was wet halfway down, and the other two cats were gone, but they showed up about a day later.

Scull-Millet: They got washed out!

Chenoweth: I don’t know whether they got washed out or they just took off.

Scull-Millet: Went out the window that was broken.

Chenoweth: They said, “To hell with this!” you know. (laughter) But you know, I just can’t imagine; it was so funny, those cats, you know, because after we had to gut
our house, I mean, those cats could jump in any window, or they could go underneath the house and jump through the house, you know, because we didn’t have any floors in there; they just had the run of it. I just can’t imagine what it was like. But so my two cats, I got them taken care of, and I just walked around. I was just astounded, and I was slipping and sliding; I mean, that shud was just, I mean it’s the slipperiest stuff.

Scull-Millet: Covered all floors.

Chenoweth: Covered all the floors. I didn’t have a flashlight; so I couldn’t really see my bedroom because I had the boards on the window. So everything was dark inside.

Scull-Millet: This was about five p.m., six p.m.?

Chenoweth: Yeah, five p.m.

Scull-Millet: And the boards were intact?

Chenoweth: Yeah. All the windows were fine except they were just full of water. The windows survived except for the one thing I didn’t—and I did have holes in the side of my house where debris had floated and just smashed a hole, like, through my walk-in closet. You could see where when the water came out, all the dresses, my wife’s dresses and everything like that were floating and were just fanned out, you know, from the—she found jewelry outside that hole. She found a few pieces of jewelry. She lost her little Louis Vuitton I had bought for her in New Zealand. I called her up from New Zealand, and I said, “Hey honey, have you ever heard of a Louis Vuitton?” (laughter) You know, they were one of the sponsors. (laughter) I said, “I’m looking at one of these Louis Vuitton purses for you.” She said, “Oh yeah! Get me a Speedo,” or whatever it was. (laughter) You know, so I brought it back from New Zealand for her, and that floated away. She lost several little things. I lost all my—I mean, I lost shoes, but all our clothes ended up having tidal lines in them. You know, they were still hanging there in the closet, what was left. And you might have a white shirt that was brown from here down, you know, halfway down. So, and then I walked out, and then I started looking around the neighborhood, and you know, I had a house. I mean, Bruner’s house was gone. It was just weird. It was just like one numbing experience after another. And the thing that kept you grounded was your friends. And you know we came back here, and we fixed dinner. That was when we started—I made a joke; I said, “We’re going to start with the steaks and work our way down to the boloney. We’re going to eat our way through this freezer as long as it will last.” And I just opened that freezer and grabbed a bunch of stuff, and we made makeshift—we still had the gas to cook. And so we started becoming a Mecca, people (cell phone buzzes)—OK. This is Kathy.

(brief interruption)

Chenoweth: So it was just one mind-numbing experience after another, but what got you through it was your friends. And we started this cooking thing. I’d just reach in
there, and I’d grab something out of the freezer, vegetables or whatever, and we set
up, like, a steamer, and we had a gas griddle, gas grills, and everything like that. So it
ended up being, like, at 5:30, 6:00, everybody would end up back down here, just
anybody that heard about it, and we’d just cook this big meal for everybody.

Scull-Millet: People who might not have gotten food anywhere else.

Chenoweth: Right. We just didn’t know. I mean, we had moved all the tables and
chairs outside, you know, trying to get the restaurant where we could peel everything
out of here and start drying everything. And so we had tables and chairs; it was like
outside dining and everything like that, and of course we had alcohol, and we had ice.

Scull-Millet: Now, is this an icemaker up here?

Chenoweth: Yeah, this is an icemaker.

Scull-Millet: So did this one work? Was it in here?

Chenoweth: Well, this one wasn’t here. This is here after the hurricane.

Scull-Millet: Lesson learned, right?

Chenoweth: Yeah, there’s one just like it downstairs, and then we had another one
down at the bakery.

Scull-Millet: But was it still working, the one downstairs?

Chenoweth: Well, you turned it off. Remember, I was telling you after the water
gets contaminated, you turn everything off.

Scull-Millet: Oh, you couldn’t use it because you were afraid that it would make
contaminated ice?

Chenoweth: But we could use, you know, there was like 600 pounds in there. So
that lasted us; that basically lasted us until the Fairgrounds started handing out ice.

Scull-Millet: How long was that?

Chenoweth: That was about a week. They started before then, but it was such a zoo.
You know, Dale came over and said, “Hey, Police Chief Whitmore told me that
they’re going to be giving ice out at the Fairgrounds, and not many people know about
it.” Well, we got out there, and they were already fighting and everything like that.

Scull-Millet: How far is the Fairgrounds from here?

Chenoweth: The Fairgrounds are about three miles from here.
Scull-Millet: Were you walking? Could you drive?

Chenoweth: No, we had cars; we had the Scranton’s truck.

Scull-Millet: But were the roads open?

Chenoweth: Yeah, except going south. We could get to our house, but you had to drive around all these debris piles and everything like that. It was kind of like they made a trail, almost like the Natchez Trace. You just kind of made a trail through there.

Scull-Millet: Where you saw an opening.

Chenoweth: Yeah. And people started chainsawing trees out of the way and hauling, making it passable for everybody. I had a friend of mine that came back down from Laurel, and they came down all the back roads, down [Highway] 45 through State Line and through Leakesville and Lucedale and everything like that. And basically from Leakesville down to Lucedale, they would come up on a tree that had fallen across the road, and people were—well, they didn’t have a chainsaw, but there were people there with chainsaws already taking it off the road. They were one of the first ones down, so they would have to wait till the tree got removed.

Scull-Millet: Good grief.

Chenoweth: So, you know, that’s a little thing you don’t think about. So we just kind of started—I had to feed my family, and in the restaurant business, if you have to cook for ten, you might as well cook for a hundred because it takes the same amount of effort, especially when you got the big pots and everything like that. And so we would steam with the water, but you couldn’t cook stuff in it. So I’d put these chafing pans under there, and we’d just turn on that gas and get the water boiling, and it would steam vegetables, and we’d grill hamburgers; we’d grill steaks; we’d make soups. We made stews. We just worked our way through, shrimp, fish, fried fish, fried shrimp; you never knew. And it turned out to be, it was really a great experience; for about fourteen days, two weeks, we were able to feed people before we finally had to throw the food away. There wasn’t much we threw away, though; I mean, vegetables, frozen vegetables, after a while—the freezer kept things going for about a week.

Scull-Millet: And were you putting ice in it?

Chenoweth: No, actually that’s a thing. I had a friend of mine that was putting ice in their freezer. And I said, “OK. Think about it. Your freezer’s at zero, and ice is at 32 [degrees]. So you’re actually raising your temperature in your freezer.” (laughter) I said, “The best thing to do is keep your freezer closed as long as you can and then just reach in there and grab something. But when you start throwing ice in there, you’re raising your temperature.”
Scull-Millet: That’s funny.

Chenoweth: So you don’t do it till afterwards basically. So you’re not the only one that thinks that, or thought that. (laughter)

Scull-Millet: Now, I know better.

Chenoweth: It’s just better just to reach in and grab it; just make a decision.

Scull-Millet: Close it quick.

Chenoweth: You’re going to have to make a decision. You’re sitting there, right there. So the freezer lasted about a week, and then we started getting different supplies and everything like that. And people would bring stuff.

Scull-Millet: From where?

Chenoweth: So we would cook that from their freezers and stuff like that, things. Not much, there wasn’t much of that because not many people—like, my freezer was gone, and then my freezer in the back was gone. You know, a lot of people threw away stuff; I threw away a lot of stuff, now, that I shouldn’t have thrown away. I should have seen if it would at least work for a while, like washer and dryers and stuff like that. It’s just a strange thing. But this became a Mecca; at six o’clock at night, people started gathering, and I’m telling you, we drank. Alcohol consumption went up dramatically and, I mean, we didn’t charge anybody for anything. We just let them—you know, I just figured we’re going to have to replace it anyway. The beer bottles, the beer that went underneath the water, I mean, the caps were just corroded and rusted and everything like that. And some people would take a chance and drink it; you know, I wasn’t going to. I’m not much of a beer drinker anyway. But if it was liquid, and it was intoxicating, people were drinking it. And that lasted, like I said, about two weeks, and then things started—you know, people were focused on their houses, and people started getting into these routines and stuff like that. And we were able to open the restaurant within eighteen days of the storm.

Scull-Millet: Wow!

Chenoweth: So, you know, we’ve just been here twenty-five years. The company Mobile Fixture, a real good friend of mine, Pete Garrone, I’ve been doing business with him for twenty-five years. And he said, “Whatever you need, we’ll ship it over there. You can pay us whenever you can.”

Scull-Millet: So what kinds of things did you get from them?
Chenoweth: Refrigeration, sandwich units. Another friend of mine that I’ve been doing business with, with the air-conditioning, he got my walk-in cooler and my walk-in freezer going back again, got the air-conditioning in.

Scull-Millet: Air-conditioning, you had eighteen days after the storm?

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: That’s amazing.

Chenoweth: One thing was the two air conditioners that we lost were up on the roof here; up above us, in this room. All my other air conditioners were all the way up; you know, they’re all supported and suspended above the water, so none of them went under water. So all we had to do was get electricity.

Scull-Millet: That’s great.

Chenoweth: Yeah. So we were a hot spot for a year after the storm; you couldn’t get in this place.

Scull-Millet: That’s fabulous.

Chenoweth: Yeah. And so we went from being open Monday through Friday for lunch and Wednesday through Saturday for dinner. We ended up being open Monday through Friday for lunch and dinner and closed on Saturday and Sunday because we still did a lot of catering. You just wouldn’t believe the amount of catering that we did.

Scull-Millet: On the weekends?

Chenoweth: Yeah. People were still getting married; people were still doing parties and stuff like that. Chevron, we did a lot of stuff for Chevron. They really helped the community a lot.

Scull-Millet: Oh, that’s good to know.

Chenoweth: They tried to do as much as they could local. We did a catering event for them; when they opened up the refinery, they wanted to reward all their workers, and so they did—we fed 2400 people with two other catering companies. And that was a quarter-of-a-million-dollar job. And they said they wanted to do it with local guys so that the money would stay in this local economy, which it did.

Scull-Millet: Great for them.

Chenoweth: I mean, shoot, we had to hire sixty people. So we paid them an average of [$$]150 a person, and so that money flowed right back into this community.
Scull-Millet: That’s great. We’re getting close; we’re at 3:35 on my watch, and we said we would stop at 3:40 on my watch. So I guess I’ll ask you our standard thing that we do as the last question in an interview, but keep in mind that I’d love to talk to you again.

Chenoweth: Yeah, well, we can set this up in April again, and actually that’ll be better because we can just—I mean, you’ll have my attention. It won’t be like we’ll have to stop for the phones and trains and stuff like that or ice machines.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, but this is what we always ask; it’s standard. Is there anything for the record that we have not talked about that you’d like to get on the record?

Chenoweth: Gosh. That’s a deep question, you know, because I’ve rambled on so much.

Scull-Millet: Oral histories are like that; they don’t go chronologically.

Chenoweth: Yeah, and I’m glad to do it. I wanted to write a journal, and I started writing journals; I started doing tapes and everything like that. I’ve got a lot of it on videotape of those long lines and things like that and of my house before and after. I’m still taping my house. So I always call it my brain. I’ve got all my telephone numbers and this cell phone number; people call me, “What’s so-and-so’s number?” Because I save people’s numbers. You know, a lot of people died after the hurricane. I think that’s one thing; that’s maybe one of the untold stories. You know, they have the thing about the Indians; if you couldn’t keep up with the tribe, they kind of set you outside during the winter, and you froze to death or whatever if you couldn’t keep up. And I noticed that’s what happened a lot; a lot of old people, you know, went ahead and checked out.

Scull-Millet: Stress.

Chenoweth: Stress, not being able to handle it. Dogs, the neighborhood lost five dogs. I mean, and they would just, they’d be playing and just die. That happened twice to my neighbors; it happened to Dale’s dog.

Scull-Millet: So the dogs were probably left at home, thinking they’d be OK.

Chenoweth: Well, they died several months after the storm.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm, but they had been there; they’d been through it.

Chenoweth: Right, they’d been through it.

Scull-Millet: And they must have been scared to death.
Chenoweth: Now, see my cats, I lost one of my cats, but I think she’s living with somebody else. That was the one that doesn’t get along with anybody; I think she just said, “To hell with it.” And she went to live with another family. (laughter) But the cats seem to survive, but these dogs. I think what they do is they go around, and they sniff the ground. And there was so much toxins in the ground, and you know, these dogs, this Great Dane, I mean, you’d find a sock that he’d eaten and digested. And so they would eat anything, and I think that that’s what, you know, basically happened to them. But a lot of old people, it really affected them, and I think the only reason my father-in-law has survived is because my wife really just, we concentrated on getting him back in his house. We concentrated on getting him a trailer; we concentrated on trying to get them back into a normal situation as quick as we could. But I just know a lot of people didn’t make it and still not making it. And I just know, till you see it, you just can’t comprehend that people just, you know, they think, “Oh, y’all back to normal?” And I’m going, “You just don’t know; it’ll never be normal.”

Scull-Millet: No, it’ll never be the same; it won’t be the place where you and I grew up.

Chenoweth: Right, but you know a hundred years ago, the same thing happened. In 1906, a hurricane hit down here and obliterated all these houses. So those houses that were a hundred years old, there was a few that survived, just like this time there was a few that survived. There’ll always be a few that survived, but in a hundred years, those houses that they’re building now will probably be destroyed again.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. There was a hurricane sometime; it was either in the 17[00s] or 1800s that killed 20,000 people on the East Coast. Well, at that time, of course, there was no communication like there is now. They didn’t know it was coming; they didn’t know how bad it would be. They didn’t know a Category what, and most of the population was there. But 20,000 people died in one hurricane, you know?

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, it has happened before; it will happen again.

Chenoweth: Well, you think about the one that hit Galveston, you know, Isaac’s Storm. But you know, it’s just anywhere you go; you got fires, you got earthquakes, you got wars, you got tornadoes.

Scull-Millet: Will you stay for the next one?

Chenoweth: Yeah, I’ll be right here.

Scull-Millet: You’ll stay here. What if it’s a Category Ten? (laughter)
Chenoweth: I tell people; I say, “I’ll still stay here.” The thing is, what happens is it’s hard to get back in. If you’re evacuated, you know, the Highway Patrol closes down the roads or whatever. It’s hard to get back in.

Scull-Millet: Well, just the sheer weight of debris, even if the Highway Patrol didn’t stop you.

Chenoweth: So you’re like my friend that flew to Houston; he didn’t know for three days what his situation was like.

Scull-Millet: Where could they land the plane?

Chenoweth: Right, well, they ended up landing back here at Trent Lott, but for a while they couldn’t get into Trent Lott because it was military only or emergency only. So they had to sit there for three or four days before they could ever get back to his house, and by that time, I was pulling the windows, and opened the windows and trying to dry mine out. His was—

Scull-Millet: Hm, moldy.

Chenoweth: Yep. Even though I had the key to it, I couldn’t help him on his house because I was knee-deep in shud in my house. (laughter)

Scull-Millet: You were busy, yeah, well, and feeding people.

Chenoweth: And you know the thing is, everybody borrowed from everybody; everybody got each other through it.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, you forged alliances that might not have happened any other way. It’s a high price to pay for an alliance, but it’s part of the silver lining, I guess.

Chenoweth: Right, it is.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. Well, thank you so much. And we’ll talk again.

Chenoweth: Certainly. I’ll see you in April.

Scull-Millet: OK.

Chenoweth: What was I going to say? By then, will they have transcribed it by that time?

Scull-Millet: Probably not. I’m going to go ahead and stop the machine.

(end of interview done on March 14, 2007)
Scull-Millet: Today is April 17, 2007. I’m here with Richard Chenoweth at The University of Southern Mississippi, and we’re continuing an interview that we started several weeks ago. This is for the Hurricane Katrina Project. The interviewer is Stephanie [Scull-] Millet, and I think I already said that we’re at The University of Southern Mississippi on April 17, 2007. Thanks for joining me today.

Chenoweth: Thank you.

Scull-Millet: We had talked before about Hurricane Katrina and your restaurant, Scranton’s, in Pascagoula. We had gone through the hurricane but not been able to really get too much to what recovery was like. I remember that you had many people there in the restaurant with you, and you guys were able to eat out of the freezer for something like four weeks?

Chenoweth: No, it was more like three weeks.

Scull-Millet: Three weeks, yeah.

Chenoweth: Probably two and a half weeks because basically we started running out of food, you know, or the food was deteriorating to the point where we were throwing it out. I mean, the vegetables were turning, the frozen vegetables sitting in there were turning soggy and everything like that. But we ate most of the protein. And there was some protein we found that we would have eaten if we’d known it was there.

(laughter)

Scull-Millet: Yeah. Well, so what was it like in those days and weeks following?

Chenoweth: It was, at first there was confusion, and there was a lot of misinformation going around, such as what you should do to your house, you know, different safety measures you needed to take. The mold is coming. How do you stop the mold? Some people didn’t even pay any attention to that. I know people that went ahead and tore all their sheetrock out and put new sheetrock up and started to put the carpet down and everything like that and started living again. And then, you had to dry out those studs. People just didn’t comprehend how long that everything had been under water, which was sometimes as much as eight hours, just depending on where you were located. Of course, the farther south you were located, the sooner the water got to you. So your wood, that cellulose is sucking up that water and everything like that, and if you don’t allow it to dry out, you’re just covering it up, and you know what that means. Darkness, moisture equal mold.

Scull-Millet: It’s growing where they can’t see it.

Chenoweth: Can’t see it, and then eventually if it leaches through the sheetrock, then you’ll start seeing measures of it. So there were people that did that and ended up having to tear it all back out again and letting it dry out. There were people that went, like my neighbor, that went to the extreme where he dried his out; he sprayed it all
down, and then he painted it with a preservative, like a wood preservative and everything like that, that would guarantee that no mold would be able to grow on it. I kind of followed his lead; I didn’t do probably as extensive as he is. I’m not as anal as he is. (laughter) And that’s Charlie McVea; I mean, he’ll be the first to admit it sitting right here. He’s a real good friend of mine. And he lives right behind me. So you had from one extreme to the other and in the middles and everything like that. The problem was that so many people got in a hurry to get back in their house, and it ended up costing them more money in the long run, more time in the long run. If you just waited for a good contractor, if you just took your time, if you just were patient, things worked out a lot better for you, you know, because there were people going around taking advantage of old people, wanting to get that roof covered, and you know, charging ungodly amounts of money, and then the job’s not even worth what they paid, or it just went bad. So you had all kinds of things like that, not as much in our neighborhood because a lot of what was left, we were all pretty bound together, and we communicated. And I mean, there’s educated people; there’s lawyers. There’s doctors; there’s professional people and everything like that. So we probably had the advantage there, as far as being able to get information. We were able to get—I don’t know whether I remember telling you that my neighbor gave me my tetanus shot.

Scull-Millet: No. (laughter)

Chenoweth: Yeah, his daughter’s boyfriend’s father (laughter) Jack Edwards got some vaccine, you know, tetanus vaccine. And so John’s son gave him his shot, and John’s son is going to medical school now. So that was kind of appropriate. John’s a lawyer; he gave his son a shot, and then he gave me the shot, the best shot I ever had. Didn’t hurt or anything like that. (laughter)

Scull-Millet: Were these his first shots that he administered?

Chenoweth: Yeah, but it saved us; you know, you had ties, and it saved you a lot of going and standing in line at the health department. You know, eventually they started coming around and giving you the shots, but there were lines at the hospitals, and there were lines, so anything you could do to avoid a line, we did it. We were able to avoid lines for ice because we had ice. So we had advantages. We had gas stored up, so we didn’t have to do that, and then somebody would go get gas. So the whole point of that was that you didn’t want to tie up your time. You had so much to do that if you’re standing in line, it wasn’t getting done. And by then, I mean, when you walked into your house, it was as if—you know, people think, “My house got flooded. The water rises up to that second or third shelf right there, and then the water goes down and everything’s still on that shelf. Everything’s still going to be just the way it is.” You know, that’s what you kind of think, that this table’s going to be sitting right here. You don’t realize that it all floats. You know, our beds floated. My daughter threw her shoes on top of the bed before she left, and they floated up; so she saved all her shoes. But, like, the bed would get up to the ceiling, and the wooden part would crack; so the headboard and everything like that was broken in two. And then it’s just
like it’s a big washing machine, and things are in different rooms. Our china cabinet floated over, fell over, floated around, floated into the living room and then settled down; didn’t break a piece of china. It ruined the whole cabinet, but it didn’t break any china.

**Scull-Millet:** And how high was the water in your house?

**Chenoweth:** The water was about five feet, two inches in our house.

**Scull-Millet:** Good grief.

**Chenoweth:** And then what happens, too, is that when the water comes in, it backs up the sewer system. And sewer systems are designed to where when you flush, it doesn’t just run right down to that, you know, sewage plant. It sits in there, and it deteriorates, and everything like that; so you have a sludge in there, which we called shud. I think I told you it was a cross between shit and mud. (laughter) Well, that, when that water came in, it got in the sewerage system and spewed all that stuff out of the toilets, out of the bathtubs, and out of the sink, all the drains, anything that was exposed; it came right back in the house. So your house was covered with Mississippi Sound mud and the shud, and you know, when you’re walking through, you could slide down, and just many people injured themselves—

**Scull-Millet:** __—slipping.____

**Chenoweth:** Slipping and sliding. So the first thing you had to do was you had to get all that stuff out of your house and then be able to then take squeegees and get that shud out of your house. And then get the sheetrock out of your house, and then get the flooring out of your house, and anything else that had been exposed to water. Some people only had four feet; so they’d take four feet out. Or they might have three feet, but the minimum that you could take out was four feet because the sheets of sheetrock were four by eight. So you had four feet.

**Scull-Millet:** Got to take the whole sheet.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, you can just take four feet out, and that way you don’t have to replace the whole thing. So that was basically what you wanted to do. I mean that was kind of the order that you wanted to get things done, get the furniture out. Well, we were lucky. Here again, neighbors, friends, our next-door neighbors, they were in the rug business. So they were able to get all our rugs out, all these imported rugs that we had, the neighbors had and everything like that and get those transported over to Mobile.

**Scull-Millet:** To clean.

**Chenoweth:** To get cleaned up and saved and everything like that. The other thing that we were able to do was my next-door neighbor’s, another boyfriend’s parents are
from Taylorsville, Mississippi, and they used a furniture refinisher in Starkville, Mississippi. And so we were able to load up all our antiques and everything like that that we inherited from my grandmother, put them in a truck with our neighbors, and then put them in the van that we had and drove it all up to Starkville and unloaded it. And those people saved 95 percent of our furniture.

**Scull-Millet:** That’s fabulous.

**Chenoweth:** You know, basically we bought our furniture. We inherited it in the first place, and then we bought it back (laughter) from the refinisher, which, but you couldn’t buy this furniture. And it was so much better than it was before the hurricane.

**Scull-Millet:** Oh, how funny.

**Chenoweth:** This man, there’s a group of black people up in Starkville, that there’s families that that’s what they specialize in, you know, refinishing furniture. And so Sylvester, Right Way Upholstery up in Starkville; he was our savior with furniture. And he went through health problems and everything like that where they thought he was going to die. And so I mean, he prayed, and the next day the doctors came in and couldn’t believe that his kidneys started functioning again, and everything like that. And so my wife said, “God saved you to save my furniture.” (laughter) And so our neighbors, the two of us, and then different people, my other neighbor, the anal neighbor I was talking about, he sent his to Baton Rouge. He wasn’t real happy, but they’re from Baton Rouge; so that’s kind of Nirvana for them. They felt like they had their ties in Baton Rouge. And we felt like, even though we didn’t know these people, our neighbor’s daughter’s boyfriend’s mother (laughter) had had a fire and had to use these people. And so that’s how we ended up with them. So you ended up, your neighbors and friends were all in the same miserable pot with you, and so every day you would meet in the afternoon. We didn’t at first do that, but then after about four or five days, we’d start meeting in the afternoons to drink a beer or drink something or whatever and just kind of go through a review of the day. “What did you learn today? What’s working? What tools do you have that we can borrow the next day? What tools are you not using?” Because you wanted flat shovels and squeegees because what you would do is you would put that flat shovel down, and you would shove this liquid shud into that shovel and throw that into a wheelbarrow.

**Scull-Millet:** That is some backbreaking work.

**Chenoweth:** It is, and we hired people to help us. My next-door neighbor, again, had this Mexican woman working for her, and so she brought other Mexicans that were working for Signal, they’re legal aliens and everything like that. They were working for Signal International, which was a shipbuilding oil rig retrofitting company that’s still there that they were out of work, you know, because all these shipyards went under water. All their welding equipment; just think of their equipment, forklifts, trucks, cars, vehicles, cranes, everything went under water. So they were down, and
these guys weren’t able to do anything. So they would collect around the corner every morning, and people would come down, and say, “I need two or three guys to help,” or whatever. And so all the neighbors got together, and we kind of had different groups working for us, helping us get furniture out. And that’s probably one of the most terrible things, is you just wanted the stuff out of your house. You know? Here’s this dirty, nasty stuff, and you just wanted it out of your house, your refrigerators, your washer, your dryer, your TVs.


Chenoweth: Just completely ruined, at least that’s what you think, but some people found out that they could get their washer and dryer going again. They could get their refrigerator going again. One guy I knew threw his—he was a neighbor down the street—threw his subzero refrigerator out and then realized that his compressor was on top. So he grabbed it back up and put it back in, and when the power came back on, it worked just fine.

Scull-Millet: Wow, but could he get it clean?

Chenoweth: Well, I was just about to say that. Then you’d hear things, “All that mud went inside the insulation,” and everything like that. So a lot of people made a lot of personal judgments, and some of it were made on money, you know, judgments, and some of them were made on ignorance. “Oh, that ain’t going to hurt me.” But anyway, I was in the group that threw mine out, but I could have used the washer and dryer for a while.

Scull-Millet: For a while.

Chenoweth: You know, till it [was] gone because we ended up going and buying these scratched and dent washer and dryer because my wife didn’t want new washer and dryer in her house until the floors were down, and it was enclosed. So for, gosh—luckily we ended up with a trailer. We were living with Cathy’s aunt whose house did not go under water, did not sustain any damage other than some roof damage. And so there were eight of us living there. I lived at Scranton’s for the first week and a half, and then Cathy evacuated to her aunt’s, Cathy and my daughter, because Cathy said she wasn’t ever going to stay down at Scranton’s again because of the windows going like this (rattling), and we’d all be sitting there sleeping, and she’s just scared to death listening to all the plate-glass windows crashing downtown. So she said, “I’m not staying at Scranton’s anymore.” But didn’t stop them from eating. I would basically work all day at the house. You didn’t have any power, so you had to work during the day. So you would start working all day, getting everything arranged and everything like that, then go out and try to find what you needed. Gosh, you know, examples of what you needed, of course, were just tools basically. I mean things to take up the carpet with, things to take up the carpet foam with, things to—you know, razor blades. Anything like that was—
Scull-Millet: Not available in stores?

Chenoweth: You know, you could get them at Lowe’s eventually; you could get them, but mainly you know, like, we had some neighbors down the street that owned a carpet store that I borrowed their tools from, to get your tack strips up and to get that foam off the concrete floor or whatever. And then you had to make decisions, “Do I try to save this tile floor? Has the stuff seeped into it?” Well, we made the decision to save our tile floors, which came out fine. My anal neighbor, he had brick, split-brick on his, and he took his up because he found some right underneath the edges and everything like that. So he just took all his up. Well, we ended up cleaning our grout and everything like that. So it came out fine, and he came out fine; he didn’t put split-brick back down. So that was your whole thing; you woke up early in the morning because you went to bed, even though it was late, probably 10:00 or whatever, you still got up early because you had to get started and use the daylight, kind of like back in the farming days and everything like that. And you would go out and eventually they got things under control at the Civic Center, and so you could get in line to get ice and MREs and stuff like that in the mornings, and you could go through the line pretty quick because they had it organized so well. And so that was one of your first outs was to go get food and ice in the morning. And then there was people that would bring ice around to you. The Red Cross would bring meals to you in the afternoon, and you know, at first it was so funny because you’d see the neighbors go, “No, that’s all right. Take it to somebody that needs it.” And eventually, everybody needed it. And you were—people that were not used to taking charity were taking it, you know, just because it was just so convenient.

Scull-Millet: Sure, yeah, never underestimate the value of convenience.

Chenoweth: And then there were neighborhoods with just, you know, all your possessions were piled up in big piles in the front yard. And I mean you would drive down Pascagoula Street, and then you would kind of be like weaving through a snake. You know, sometimes somebody’d have to wait for you to go by so they could go by because there was so much debris piled out on the streets, you know, carpet and furniture. And it was funny because you’d see pieces of furniture there, and then somebody’d come by, and they’d grab the piece of furniture. And so there was a lot of shifting resources. You know, even my wife stopped and picked up a chair out of a pile, and months later this girl came over and said, “That’s my chair.” (laughter)

Scull-Millet: Did she want it back?

Chenoweth: No, she didn’t want it back; they’d thrown it out on a pile and everything like that.

Scull-Millet: Funny, yeah.

Chenoweth: So I mean, like I said, neighbors, we’d all get together about 5:00 in the afternoon, and we’d start kind of swapping stories, things that we learned, things that
we heard, what was working to get this mess up or get this mess done, what you
needed to do to treat your studs so that you wouldn’t get any mold coming back.

**Scull-Millet:** How did you dry? You said you dried your studs out. How did you do
that?

**Chenoweth:** You just basically, once you had the sheetrock removed, you’d set up fans.

**Scull-Millet:** You had them in generators, plugged in?

**Chenoweth:** No, by this time you could get electricity. This was probably about
three or four weeks later. And once you got approved by the city, you could get your
meter turned back on.

**Scull-Millet:** Did they have to look at your wiring?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, they would come in to make sure that you replaced all your
sockets, plugs. What happens is the water gets in those plugs; that salt water gets in
there, and salt is a conductor. You know, sodium chloride, it is a conductor if you get
enough of it; so it could short things out and cause a fire to start in that plug. And so
they had to make sure that you replaced all your plugs or had at least taken them out.

**Scull-Millet:** Was it hard to get those replacement plugs?

**Chenoweth:** No, because, I mean, believe me, you know American capitalism, “They
need plugs down on the Gulf Coast, and we can sell them for maybe fifty cents more a
plug. Just think how many plugs we’re going to make money off of.” So you were
able to get them. Just finding people to replace all the plugs for you, you know, that
was the hardest thing. And that’s where you had to be patient; I mean, this was [a
couple of] months later that you finally got electricity put back up in your house. And
you know, I had generators that I would use if I had to have something, but mainly
you just used flashlights. We lived with our Aunt Verne with Cathy’s sister and her
husband and son, and then Cathy and I and Amy lived in one room, and they lived in
another one. And Aunt Verne, actually she is old enough now; she’s almost ninety
years old, and she sleeps in a chair. So it worked out fine. And then Ed, my father-in-
law, he stayed in another room.

**Scull-Millet:** And you guys had power there?

**Chenoweth:** No, they didn’t have power for a while; we ran generators and
everything like that.

**Scull-Millet:** So what were you feeling like during that time? It’s hot. Did anybody
get dehydrated?
Chenoweth: No, because the water was one thing that was plentiful and everything like that after the storm.

Scull-Millet: How did it get there?

Chenoweth: They brought it in; the National Guard brought it in and everything.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm, and bottled?

Chenoweth: Bottles of water, either jugs; some of it was in cans.

Scull-Millet: Cans?

Chenoweth: Yeah, aluminum cans.

Scull-Millet: Oh, I think I saw some of those after the storm, just like a Coca-Cola can, pop-top.

Chenoweth: So like the beer companies, they would run these cans through without labels and just put water in them, and canned water. Canned water doesn’t taste very good, though; I can tell you that, just something about it, that metal or whatever. But you just felt—you know, you were hot and miserable, and I mean, the good thing about it is if nobody had air-conditioning, everybody was fine. It was kind of like the old days, you know; (laughter) you didn’t realize how hot it was until you went into an air-conditioned building.

Scull-Millet: Oh, that’s funny.

Chenoweth: You know, nothing was air-conditioned, so after a while you got acclimated to it, and you would freeze underneath a fan.

Scull-Millet: We’re so adaptable, aren’t we?

Chenoweth: And that is one thing you notice, that people do adapt. You know. I’m trying to think; so we were staying at Aunt Verne’s till we got our trailer. And you know, after the hurricane, like I said, we would all meet in the afternoon, and then I would go down to the restaurant, and there was a group of us that would go down to the restaurant, and we’d start cooking and everything like that.

Scull-Millet: After your meeting?

Chenoweth: Right, after the meetings, after the neighborhood meetings.

Scull-Millet: So that would be what? Six or seven p.m.?

Chenoweth: Yeah.
Scull-Millet: What kind of power did you have at the restaurant?

Chenoweth: Generator power. You know, we had generators, but we had gas cooking. So we cooked with gas.

Scull-Millet: But you still needed fans and lights.

Chenoweth: Yeah. And so, you know, you had flashlights. I mean, that was one thing, “Where’s my flashlight!” (laughter)

Scull-Millet: Did you guys have those lights you can wear on your head, you can get at Wal-Mart?

Chenoweth: Some of us did; some of us didn’t. Yep. Some of us did, and some of us didn’t. I’m a real big fan of these LED flashlights, you know, because they use very little power, and they put out a lot of light.

Scull-Millet: Do LEDs run on batteries, though?

Chenoweth: Yeah. And it’s light-emitting diodes is what they’re called.

Scull-Millet: Oh, I was about to ask you. I was trying to think. What does LED stand for?

Chenoweth: Yeah, light-emitting diodes, and they’re real—we use them a lot in catering, when we’re kind of lighting up, running lights and stuff like that. So I mean, I’m just a big fan of those things because they use very little power, and they put out a decent amount of light.

Scull-Millet: So you’d go down there and cook.

Chenoweth: We’d go down there and cook, and we might not eat till 8:00. Well, then all my family that was staying down at Aunt Verne’s, not all of them, but they’d come by and get their go-boxes, you know. They wouldn’t eat with us, (laughter) you know, because we all stunk (laughter) and dirty. I mean, I wore these sandals or a pair of sandals like these so long that I had tan lines (laughter) where these straps are.

Scull-Millet: That’s what we had when we were kids.

Chenoweth: All I wore was a pair of shorts, no underwear, and a pair of sandals because you know, it was just dirty.

Scull-Millet: Yeah. What’s the point?
Chenoweth: Yeah. And then, you know, the first time that Dale and I found a—all the way down at the end of the beach there was a faucet that was running, like, you know, and you could stick a bowl underneath there and take that water. And that was—

Scull-Millet: And just put it over your head. Just turn it up over your head.

Chenoweth: Oh gosh, yeah, Dale, you know, he got in there first. Of course, there’s traffic driving by and everything like that, and you’re just standing there. So he’s kind of modest and everything like that; I just get in there and start dumping water down my pants, (laughter). Just, I didn’t care, you know. I was just so thankful to find water that I could wash that mud off, that shud and everything like that. My partner, he was squeegeeing that stuff out, and some of it sopped into the corner and spewed back and went right into his mouth.

Scull-Millet: Oh!

Chenoweth: So he was, “Argh.” So you learn not to do that; you know, that came up in a meeting. So we wouldn’t eat till about 8:00, and then we’d be drinking and sitting around talking about the—you know, everybody was swapping tales about what they went through that day and what’s the newest rumor, what’s the newest way to do something.

Scull-Millet: What kind of rumors were floating around?

Chenoweth: Mainly about how your house, how to, what? How to clean your house. You know, you’d hear a rumor, “Well, they’re coming around; they won’t let you—you’d better not put any sheetrock up, because they’ll make you tear it all out. Just a lot of misinformation going around. How you’re going to get your electricity turned back on, how you were going to get your building permit. Are they going to make us tear our houses down? “Yeah, they’re going to make you tear your house down.” Well, then you’d hear another version, “No, if you only had 50 percent, they can’t make you tear your house down.” So it was all kinds of information, but that was mainly about it. It was always concerning your home.

Scull-Millet: So did people change their behavior because of that, or did they just kind of have an idea, “This is what I’m going to do; it doesn’t matter what these rumors are.”

Chenoweth: Kind of, “It doesn’t matter; this is what I’m going to do.” Or, we’d try to find out from our contacts and everything like that. And so, “No, I talked to so-and-so, and he said that’s not true.” And some of them came out to be true; it’s hard to tell you which ones. But I’m trying to think of an example. A lot of it had to do with raising your house, whether you were going to have to raise your house, and if you had so much damage during the hurricane. Let’s say you had 45 percent during the
hurricane, and then your house happened to catch fire five years later and caused 20 percent, then you were going to have to tear it down, you know, type thing.

**Scull-Millet:** Of the appraised value?

**Chenoweth:** Just, yeah, the appraised value, mainly. And see, that’s why it didn’t make a lot of sense because that’s the exact question: what value are they talking about? Are they talking about the value in 2005? Are they talking about the value in 2010 when it burns down? You know, your house should appreciate by then. It was just—

**Scull-Millet:** Is it that your insurance company will only pay so much money, kind of like health insurance, that it’s got a limit?

**Chenoweth:** No, it wasn’t that. What they’re trying to do is get rid of these old structures. You know, you have to bring everything up to code, and if you couldn’t bring—

**Scull-Millet:** Current code, whereas if it were an old house that might have been grandfathered in, didn’t have to bring it up to code until this disaster happened.

**Chenoweth:** Um-hm. In fact, I talked to a real estate agent, and I asked him; I said, “Why does property values rise up?” I mean, I would think that after a disaster, your property values would go down. And he said, “Well, can I be honest with you?” And I said, “Yeah.” And he said, “Because they don’t”—oh, how’d he put it—“rebuild slums.” He said, “It flushes all the crap away.” That’s what he said; he said, “If you got a low-income housing project”—he said, “It flushes all the crap away.” So they’re not going to rebuild the slums; they’re not going to rebuild low-income housing projects; they’re not going to rebuild these old, dilapidated houses that people have been living in that are—and it’s true.

**Scull-Millet:** So it’s kind of like your comps change, the comparable buildings that might have been bringing your value down are gone. You know, I think I’ve noticed that in Hattiesburg, even.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, you’ll notice it down there on the Coast. It’s so true. Where my mother lived was called the Chipley Project. And it was, you know; she had a wonderful house, which she ended up tearing down. But they look back now, that’s another one of those things that, my mother even said, “I shouldn’t have torn it down.” But you know you get so emotional about it, and you know, I think I told you, you were either flooded, gutted, or gone. And my mother was one of those that was gutted; when she came back, there wasn’t a thing inside her house, one table, one little table that I found; everything else had just washed out, windows, doors.

**Scull-Millet:** Now, where was she relative to the water?
Chenoweth: She was two blocks north of the water. And she was up on a huge hill; she was on the corner of Eleventh Street and Chickasaw.

Scull-Millet: You know what kind of happens, though, is the water’s going, going, going; when it comes to a hill that’s an obstacle, it makes it [go up]; it gives it more force somehow.

Chenoweth: Well, that’s what probably happened to her, but all that neighborhood, basically that whole thing’s changing. You know, that’s probably one of the biggest question marks in Pascagoula about what eventually that’s going to shake out to look like.

Scull-Millet: Why did she regret tearing it down?

Chenoweth: Because the structure was so sound on it. It was one of these old houses; it was a brick house. It could have just been redone.

(brief interruption)

Scull-Millet: Oh, yeah, the property values and your mom’s house.

Chenoweth: Yeah, and what’s so funny, you know, the insurance, of course.

Scull-Millet: What was that like?

Chenoweth: Well, just like in my restaurant, my insurance went from $13,000 a year to $30,000 a year.

Scull-Millet: Your premiums?

Chenoweth: My premiums, yeah. And so in other words, the price of your hamburger went up, and that’s affecting whether a lot of people rebuild. There was a restaurant over in Long Beach called The Blue Rose, and they’re talking about becoming a private residence instead of a commercial establishment just because of the insurance. The insurance is a lot cheaper when it’s not commercial.

Scull-Millet: So the restaurant would be gone.

Chenoweth: Right. So a lot of people’s lives were just, you know, affected in many different ways.

Scull-Millet: So some businesses are lost because they can’t afford the insurance premiums.

Chenoweth: There was a thing, and it’s true—I forget who told me this—that if you were a good business before the hurricane, you know, you took care of your
employees, you paid them well, you were a responsible businessman, you took care of
your bills and everything like that, you weren’t behind, you were caught up, that your
business after the hurricane just shot up like a rocket.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, you were one of the few who survived.

**Chenoweth:** Right, and our business tripled, you know, because we were one of the
few places still open and everything like that, you know—and I still have most of
my employees. The ones that didn’t get displaced by the storm, I was able to keep and
actually started paying them even more after the hurricane. If your business, if you
were behind, if you had a high turnover in employees because you didn’t pay them,
didn’t treat them well and stuff like that, your business went the opposite; it shot right
into the ground, you know, three times as fast as it would have done. And you might
have only had three more months to go in your business before you had to close it, but
after the hurricane, you could do that in a month. And it was—

**Scull-Millet:** Only the strong survived; I guess it’s social Darwinism in a way.

**Chenoweth:** It really is. And we’re still doing double the business we were [before]
the hurricane.

**Scull-Millet:** Well, that’s great.

**Chenoweth:** And a lot of that has to do with people didn’t come back; competition
didn’t come back. It’s just slowly eking back. And actually we’re trying to help it
come back because you can’t eat at Scranton’s every day. You need variety; you need
other places to go, and so that puts you in your mind, “Well, there’s other places to go
in Pascagoula; I’ll go eat in one.” Well, if there’s no places, then you go out of town.
So let’s say you make the decision to go out of town and then decide where to go eat.
Well, we’ve lost you; whereas if you make the decision to stay in Pascagoula and then
deck where to eat, we’ve got a chance to get you. So the only way that’s going to
happen is if more competition comes in; people just don’t realize that.

**Scull-Millet:** Well, is it coming in?

**Chenoweth:** A little bit, but not very quickly, and a lot of it has to do with still not
being able to get contractors and plumbers, everything that you need.

**Scull-Millet:** Is there too much competition for those people, not enough of them?

**Chenoweth:** Oh, yeah. (inaudible), gosh, I hope there’s going to be enough of them
for a few more years, and then insurance, all the—and now you got to bring this old
building up to current code standards and everything like that. And so then you turn
around, and what are you going to need to bring it up to code? You’re going to need
plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and stuff like that, which are at a premium. So
whereas you might have been able to start a business; we started our business with
$37,000 twenty-five years ago; $37,000 wouldn’t get you the air-conditioning, you know, in it.

Scull-Millet: Well, and with gas prices going up, too, anything that has to be driven in, materials, whatever, it’s just making it more expensive now.

Chenoweth: You know, one thing that came out of it, too, was that I was nominated to be the Small Businessman of the Year for the State of Mississippi, and I got the nomination. So I’m going to Washington this Saturday to accept the award on Tuesday.

Scull-Millet: Well, congratulations; that’s great.

Chenoweth: So that came out of the hurricane, too. You know, it’s just little things. And then I was asked to serve on a committee because of that, I’m sure, because that was in the newspaper; I was asked to serve on a committee, talking about convention facilities and trying to make the Gulf Coast a third-tier convention facility.

Scull-Millet: Now, what does that mean, third-tier?

Chenoweth: First-tier would be Las Vegas, New York, Chicago, places like that; second-tier would be, like, Boston, Philadelphia, Nashville, Atlanta, places like that. Third-tier would be basically us; I think New Orleans is probably in the third-tier now.

Scull-Millet: Wow, if there?

Chenoweth: If there. You know, that’s a case study in itself.

Scull-Millet: I know.

Chenoweth: You can look at what’s happening to New Orleans and kind of extrapolate that over to Mississippi, but New Orleans brought a lot of their problems on themselves, you know.

Scull-Millet: Like what are you thinking of?

Chenoweth: I’m just—you know, their political problems with [New Orleans Mayor Ray] Nagin and everything like that, [Louisiana Governor Kathleen] Blanco. You know, Mississippi had [Governor] Haley Barbour in there with all these Republican ties and everything like that. That helped us dramatically and everything like that; I don’t think the publicity helped New Orleans, the negative publicity of the people on the roofs, the people, you know—I think that showed the underbelly to a lot of the country that would go down and party in New Orleans and not even think about anything like that.
Scull-Millet: And all those people in the [Superdome]. Yeah. Wow, that was just unbelievable.

Chenoweth: And they trashed it.

Scull-Millet: And those people, you know, no food, no water, no way out. It boggles my mind still when I think about it; people dying in there, and you know, I can still see those photographs in my head where they had just a hall or corner where they put the dead people and covered them up for four days.

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Unbelievable. Yeah, that kind of publicity takes probably a generation—

Chenoweth: Do I want to go and invest in New Orleans if I think that it’s going to go under water? You know, a lot of stuff came out; they’re trying to hide as much as they can, but publicity, I mean, New Orleans has always been like that. I mean, if you read about the Great Flood where they blew up the levees and stuff like that and flooded all these people out in the name of trying to save the city of New Orleans, you know, there’s plenty of other places to open up a business that you don’t have all those—

Scull-Millet: You’re not below sea-level and surrounded by water.

Chenoweth: Right.

Scull-Millet: Yeah.

Chenoweth: And what’s so funny is New Orleans didn’t get any of the wind, basically; they just got—the levees broke.

Scull-Millet: We have an interview with someone who was near one of the levees that didn’t break, and the water came up in their neighborhood seven feet from just going over the levee. I was surprised at that. That’s what happened, though. Well, you said that you guys were in a trailer. Was it a FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] trailer?

Chenoweth: It was a FEMA trailer; it was in our front yard.

Scull-Millet: How many of you in it?

Chenoweth: There was three of us in it, and then sometimes there were four of us in it. And basically, you know, it sleeps, according to them, eight people. But what it is, you have a double bed in the front, the end that you would tow. Then you have a foldout couch, you know, that’s as wide as this.
Scull-Millet: So about two feet wide.

Chenoweth: Two feet wide that two people are supposed—

Scull-Millet: Two people are supposed to sleep in that?

Chenoweth: Right. And then you have the dining room table that folds down to make another bed.

Scull-Millet: And it’s what? About four feet square?

Chenoweth: Yeah. Luckily we had small children, so, you know.

Scull-Millet: What ages are your children?

Chenoweth: Well, when I say small children, I mean small in stature. Amy will be twenty-one, she’ll remind us many times, July 24, and Lauren’s twenty-three. So at the time Amy was nineteen and twenty going through this, and Lauren was going to school at university in Starkville at Mississippi State. And Amy was going to junior college.

Scull-Millet: On the Coast?

Chenoweth: On the Coast. And so we got our FEMA trailer.

Scull-Millet: Now, they have bunk beds, too, don’t they?

Chenoweth: Well, it depends which style you get. You know, of course my stepfather that lives all by himself, he gets this big, huge, you know, FEMA trailer with bunk beds at the end that Amy could have had that room all to herself. But instead she—

Scull-Millet: But you guys didn’t get bunk beds.

Chenoweth: No, we got what I just described to you. Amy slept basically at our feet on that couch; that’s how close it was. And then you have the air conditioner, which thank God you have the air conditioner, but it’s one of these ceiling units that when it comes on, nobody can talk to each other.

Scull-Millet: Loud.

Chenoweth: Loud, which is fine at night because you’re laying there, and all the traffic going down the street, you’re listening to that.

**Chenoweth:** Paper-thin walls.

**Scull-Millet:** Nothing muffled.

**Chenoweth:** But believe me, it may sound like I’m complaining, but it was wonderful to be able to live in front of your house and be able to stay on top of it when your contractors, or be there when the contractors come instead of living somewhere else and then having to come down to your house. You know, that was a tremendous advantage. I had a deck in the backyard that when Katrina came through, it floated up; it actually floated across my driveway, and we had to break it into three sections to get it out of the way. And so I took those three sections, and I pulled them out to the front of the house with a Bobcat; a friend of mine came by with a Bobcat. And he arranged them in front of the trailer where the trailer was going to be. Of course my wife’s going, “What do we need this for?” You know she looked at is as we’re hauling all this junk in the front yard and everything. And so when the trailer got there, and you know, I used the deck as our living room because October and November, it was really nice sitting outside. I’d watch TV outside and just hard kind of like a living room until it got too cold to sit out there. And so that kind of gave us some extra room. And of course we had a slide-out [trailer]; everybody was real jealous if you got a slide-out, which meant that part of it slid out to give you a little bit more room. The FEMA trailers they eventually started bringing in droves were just the square boxes, square, white boxes that didn’t have slide-outs. So you were really uptown if you got a slide-out. (laughter)

**Scull-Millet:** All just the luck of the draw, I guess.

**Chenoweth:** And then you started dealing with propane, you know.

**Scull-Millet:** To heat?

**Chenoweth:** To heat and everything like that. I have experience with propane and actually had extra tanks down at the restaurant that we use in a pressure washer that we have. So I always had propane; I had an account set up and everything like that already. So I was able to charge the propane, or you know, you’d write your name on them and go down there and leave them, and they refilled them during the day, and you’d go back and pick them up. So there was all kinds of new ways of living. And the biggest way of living was living with a holding tank for your waste, the solid waste and the liquid waste that you would generate.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah? So what do you do when it’s filled up, when your holding tank is full?

**Chenoweth:** What happens is, they would hook up to your sewer system, and so you would go out and get underneath the trailer and pull these two handles. And one of them would dump the holding tank where you had what they call gray water, and then you had black water. Gray water was anything that was used in the sink or in the
bathtub, anything like that. And then the black water was water that was flushed out of the toilet. Well, the first night I got in there and took a shower in that shower, I mean—

**Scull-Millet:** How big is the shower?

**Chenoweth:** It was as big as that piece of poster, almost, right there.

**Scull-Millet:** What is that? About three feet square?

**Chenoweth:** Yeah.

**Scull-Millet:** Four feet square maybe?

**Chenoweth:** Maybe four by two, four by three, probably. You know, and it’s fiberglass, so it’s all kind of rippling underneath you. It’s real thin fiberglass, and this stream of water’s coming out; it’s just, like, you know, like somebody spitting on you.

**Scull-Millet:** A trickle. (cell phone rings)

**Chenoweth:** Excuse me; that’s my phone.

(brief interruption)

**Chenoweth:** What were we talking about?

**Scull-Millet:** In the shower.

**Chenoweth:** In the shower. So the first night I took a shower, I just said, “There ain’t no way. If we end up living in this bathroom”—you know, I was making a joke, “Daddy’s going to the bathroom; everybody out of the trailer.” You know, because, I mean, the smell would be, you know, you might as well just leave the door open because you’re in this little trailer. (laughter) So I took a shower in there, and I said, “OK. We’ve got two bathrooms in the house that are still working.”

**Scull-Millet:** The real house?

**Chenoweth:** “The real house, that I can get working.” I said, “They’re covered in shud.” No matter how much you squeegeed it out, you still had residue. There was just no way to get it all out. Well, we had this pressure washer down at Scranton’s that uses propane that can generate 200 degree water under high pressure. So the next day I went down and got that thing, and I moved it to my house, and I went into my daughter’s bathroom, Amy’s bathroom in the front of the house, and completely just—you know, I mean I couldn’t even see out of my glasses. I just got in there, between the steam, I mean I was just pressure-washing these bathtubs, and they’d just stop up
from all the mud and everything, and I’d just jam that thing down in there and blow that drain out again.

Scull-Millet: Roto-rooter.

Chenoweth: And keep going. And so just everything, I mean, the sinks, anything that had it, I just sanitized it.

Scull-Millet: And you could hook it up to the propane that was running some of the stuff in the trailer.

Chenoweth: Right, plus we had electricity by then because we had the trailer. You had to have electricity for your trailer. So I got all that done, and then I went into the other daughter’s bathroom. And the youngest daughter’s bathroom was on the original house; so it was on piers. My other daughter’s bathroom was in the new section that we’d added on, so it was on concrete. So I did her bathroom, too, at the same time. So then I went and got a friend of mine down at another place, and he came down, and we ended up hooking up the sinks. All the cabinets were gone because we’d had to throw those out. So we took the sink, and then we made a two by four frame to hold it up, so you could have a sink, you could have a toilet, and you could have a shower. So that’s what we used for a bathroom. I mean, when you had to do number two, (laughter) or when you had to take a shower, you went in the house. You know, you could go number one in the outside bathroom. And believe me it paid off because my neighbor, that they didn’t do that, their trailer just started really stinking, you know, because they’re not designed for everyday use. They’re designed for a weekend. And you know how it is; you get it, you use it the first few weekends, then it turns into being a chore; so then you might only use it twice during the summer or something like that. Well, here you are using this thing every day, day in and day out, and living in it, cooking in it, cleaning in it. So I mean, we wouldn’t have survived if we hadn’t had those bathrooms in the house. Eventually they ripped out all the flooring in the main, old part of the house. So we lost that bathroom, but we were able to move into Lauren’s bathroom, permanently because it was on a slab. And then we had to replace the shower, so we would do one, and then when we lost the other one, you know, we never lost a bathroom inside the house.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, you had one or the other.

Chenoweth: One or the other, so that really helped save our family and marriage and everything like that. (laughter) Just all kinds of things that you made, you know, accommodations, that living room, getting the bathrooms working in the house, you know, all those made life a lot more bearable. And then there were some people at the same time I’m worried about getting a bathroom working, that are still living in tents. You know? But I think you make your own path; I think fear is a great motivator: it either moves you forward, freezes you, or moves you backwards. And you know, people still living in tents may not—I don’t know. I hate to say that they couldn’t
have maybe worked something else out or whatever. But I think they were just frozen with fear.

Scull-Millet: Some people just aren’t savvy, you know. They may be educated and intellectual, but just not have street smarts enough to figure things out.

Chenoweth: Well, see, my best friend’s wife when she evacuated, she went to Memphis, and she said, “What are you going to do?” I said, “Well, I’m going to stay with Scranton’s, stay with Richard.” She said, “Stay with Richard! He always survives.” And the reason why, I’m not scared to walk over and work on that light right there. If it’s not working, I’m going to go try to figure out why it’s not working. If I need it, I’m going to try to make it work. You know, it just doesn’t scare me, and I have just enough knowledge to be dangerous. (laughter) And you know, like one time I found that this building next-door to us had a water heater upstairs. That water heater to me meant that there was water in that water heater, and so I was able to get forty gallons of water out of that building.

Scull-Millet: Was it potable? Is that what they call it? Usable? You could drink it if you had to?

Chenoweth: Yeah, potable. We caught water upstairs during the hurricane from the roof just trying to protect the floors and ended up using it to flush the toilets, you know? And even in our little community of eighteen, those toilets, boy, they started getting rank, and if you couldn’t flush them, they were bad. Of course, you know, the city, they couldn’t treat the sewage, so I think I told you that they were letting the sewage go off into the river and just go on out into the Sound, which, you know—

Scull-Millet: What else could you do?

Chenoweth: Yeah. I’m glad they did because if not, then we wouldn’t have had anywhere to go.

Scull-Millet: It would have been a worse health risk if not.

Chenoweth: Yeah, we were going in alleys; we were going on the railroad tracks.

Scull-Millet: Sure, yeah.

Chenoweth: Just anywhere you could go.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, you know, I’ll bet there are some people who wouldn’t know how to flush a toilet just using water. Did you pour it in the tank part?

Chenoweth: Poured it in the tank part, or you can also pour it into the bowl, you know, because it equalizes there.
Scull-Millet: Put enough in there and it will flush. Did you guys think about putting, like, bricks or something in to displace water and use less?

Chenoweth: We never got to that point because eventually they got the water on.

Scull-Millet: So it wasn’t necessary.

Chenoweth: It wasn’t necessary, but just those early days, just being able to take a shower was a wonderful feeling. My neighbors got water, and so I was taking a shower. And I mean, you didn’t have electricity, but you could have water, and all the windows are open, and you’re just walking around naked or whatever, and it just didn’t matter if anybody saw you or not because you weren’t going to close the windows. You weren’t trying to be an exhibitionist or anything like that, but you just—that wasn’t a worry; that wasn’t a concern.

Scull-Millet: Right. It was cold water, then, for a long time, not heated.

Chenoweth: Yeah, which was fine because it was hot.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, you wanted to cool off.

Chenoweth: This was in August, and so, you know, September, October.

Scull-Millet: What were the temperatures like in August?

Chenoweth: Ninety degrees.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, humid.

Chenoweth: Humid.

Scull-Millet: Didn’t rain for a long time.

Chenoweth: Didn’t rain for, gosh, two months, and I mean, think about all that mud that you took out of your house, and then you poured it out on the street, and it just dried up. And so you’re sitting there breathing that; I don’t know what my health concerns are going to be years from now from being exposed to that.

Scull-Millet: Because it turns into dust; it might not even be dust that you can see.

Chenoweth: Right, and you’re breathing it, and in that dust is everything that was in the house.

Scull-Millet: A little bit of everything in the whole community. Yeah.
Chenoweth: So you know, you’d wear those masks, and you’d keep your windows closed as much as possible in your car and stuff like that. And even though you didn’t want to use air-conditioning because you were using more fuel, you still did it.

Scull-Millet: You had to.

Chenoweth: You know, just for health concerns.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, get a break from the air.

Chenoweth: We ended up having a great contractor whereas our neighbors, they didn’t want to wait for this guy that had done their work before. And so they ended up, I mean they would get a plumber, or they would get a carpenter in that would do something, and then the next week it would be bad. And somebody else would come in, and they’d get somebody else, and they’d come in and tear out everything that these other people had done. So they were just taking money and throwing it away; we called it the money pit next door. So they end up, finally a year later, they end up with the contractor that they couldn’t wait for. He’s finally getting them, moving them forward. We got—we were fortunate; we got a great contractor, and he got us—I mean, we’re still waiting on countertops; we just got our cabinets in three weeks ago, three or four weeks ago.

Scull-Millet: Goodness gracious.

Chenoweth: So this is April 17; so what? First of March we had our cabinets in.

Scull-Millet: That’s a long time.

Chenoweth: Yeah, but I mean, I was living in my house, and that was wonderful. I mean our marriage probably wouldn’t have survived another year in that trailer just because you’re so close. You know, and I’m used to coming home; my hours are so weird, I’m used to coming home at 11:30 at night and sitting there watching TV for an hour or so decompressing before I go to bed.

Scull-Millet: Wakes everybody else up when you’re in a trailer like that.

Chenoweth: Wakes everybody up in the trailer. And then I’m sitting on the couch, and here comes Amy in the door wanting to go to sleep in her bed, and I’m sitting on her bed. So I’d have to get up and get in bed, and then when Lauren would come home from college, we’d look at her and say, “Well, when are you going back?” (laughter) Because, you know, we’d lose the dining room table. So it really changes things. One thing about Amy was, she was always a slob before the hurricane; you’d go in her room, and clothes are strewn all over the place, shoes strewn all over the place. But when she lived in the trailer she had to make her bed every day because that was our couch; she had to pick everything up every day. Well, after we got back
in the house, you’d go in her room: the bed would be made, everything’s off the floor and everything like that. So it really kind of changed her in that—

Scull-Millet: She formed new habits.

Chenoweth: Yeah, she formed new habits. She started taking pride in her room and everything, and I think that was part of it, too, getting her room back. And she realized how good she had it in that room as compared to that trailer. She was really wonderful; I’m glad it was my youngest daughter that went through it with us and not my oldest because the oldest is the princess, you know. My youngest is more like me; she adapted and everything like that. You know, it was just a crazy time. You know, finding your clothes every day; I mean, my dresser drawer was underneath the bed. You’d lift up the end of the bed, and there was just a hole down there, and I’d just reach in there and start to grab something; I’d have to get a flashlight or whatever. (laughter)

Scull-Millet: You had to get a flashlight to see your clothes.

Chenoweth: And you just ended up living a lot simpler than you did before the hurricane.

Scull-Millet: What happened to your clothes?

Chenoweth: A lot of them were still hanging in the closet; they had tidal lines on them. It might have mud from here down.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm, but you could get them clean enough to—

Chenoweth: We stored them for a long time and cleaned them, and I got rid of a bunch of them that weren’t worth—stuff, you know. What is it Jerry Seinfeld said? “Your dad gets to one point where he quits buying clothes; he’s wearing those clothes he was wearing in the [19]30s and [19]40s.” You know?

Scull-Millet: I do that. Yeah, and I guess there would be that feeling, too, kind of like, “Well, did I really get all of the shud out of here?”

Chenoweth: Yeah, I feel good about ours because we basically took out all our floors and all our walls and—

Scull-Millet: I think you probably formed some networks during your recovery period. One of the things we’ve been asking people is, “How do those networks affect your future?”

Chenoweth: I think they affected it for the good. I mean, you know, I was doing things just naturally, you know, feeding people and just taking care of people. It didn’t matter who they were; I didn’t care. You know, if you needed something, if we
could help you, we’d help you because it would always come back. You know, if you helped somebody, or it’s so funny how, we all know that it’s a real small world, that you might be helping somebody that you find out later, you know somebody that’s related to them or real good friends with them and stuff like that. And they’ll come up and tell you, “So-and-so told me that you fed them.” And we ended up in a magazine; Danny Goodgame works for Forbes Business Magazine, and we ended up in an editorial in his magazine talking about if they’d given everybody the money that they spent, the federal government, trying to rescue everybody, that everybody would have been a lot better off if they’d just split it up and say, “Here, just let us know how it goes,” because they wasted so much money. And he was talking about us feeding people because he came in and ended up eating with us. So you just never know how things are going to affect people, until, you know, a year later I got that award for small business. Well, a lot of people wrote letters on my behalf that I’d fed or taken care of; that I wasn’t even thinking, “Well, I’m going to do this because I’m going to get nominated for this SBA award, and I’m going to need these people to write these letters.” That isn’t what—that wasn’t the motivation, or that wasn’t even a thought.

Scull-Millet: Um-hm, it’s that they’re hungry.

Chenoweth: But that’s what happened; you developed those networks, and you affected people, and it’s going to affect you for the rest of your life, you know.

Scull-Millet: And what about that community in your neighborhood?

Chenoweth: Well, we all agree basically that the only reason we’re still there is because of each other. And of course everybody says, “Next time my house is going to be burning when the hurricane hits, so we don’t have to go through the flood insurance problem.”

Scull-Millet: Are they going to set it on fire? (laughter)

Chenoweth: Yeah, you’re just going to burn it.

Scull-Millet: Lightning. (laughter)

Chenoweth: You know, or they’re going to just, “Forget it; I’ll never do this again. I’m going to put a for-sale sign up and sell it as it is.”

Scull-Millet: Sell it as it is, yeah.

Chenoweth: I don’t know whether that would happen or not, but you found out who your neighbors were. I have a friend of mine that—she told me she’ll never forget when she was walking down the street, crying, and I came up to talk to her. I said, “What happened?” And she’d just found her cat was dead in the backyard that she had left at the house and everything like that, and she was just feeling so terrible about it. And I was telling her you can’t take on that burden. I left four cats at my house,
and all four survived; one of them eventually died or ran away. We don’t know, but you just can’t—you didn’t know. Nobody had any idea that this was going to be like this, so you can’t take on that responsibility and that burden. And just tried to comfort her, got her a beer and everything like that. And she said she’ll never forget me for that. You know? And she’s just two neighbors, and I’d even forgotten about it. And she said, “I bet you forgot about when I was crying.” And I said, “You know, I did, but I remember now when you tell me about it.”

**Scull-Millet:** Well, do you still meet? Do you have your neighborhood meetings at all?

**Chenoweth:** You know, we just had a kind of a New Year’s Eve dinner party, which we had before the hurricane, and it’s all just neighbors and everything like that. And so we’re starting to kind of do that again, but everybody’s, like my next-door neighbors, they were gone all week. He was in trial in Jackson, Mississippi; they were gone all week. And when I saw them Sunday right before I was leaving to come up to Hattiesburg, and it’s kind of like, that’s what’s starting to happen.

**Scull-Millet:** Everybody’s busy.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, everybody’s—it’s so much busier. It’s so much stress, and it’s so much responsibility. You’re trying to get your house back; you’re trying to make the right decisions about that. We’re going around and around about granite countertops and what color. And you have to make all these decisions all over again, and when you were just snug as a bug in a rug in your house. You know, I was just so happy with it; now, I’m even happier with it.

**Scull-Millet:** But it’s really like buying a new house, almost, and that’s one of the big stressors on relationships. (laughter)

**Chenoweth:** It really is, and the way Kathy and I have been able to deal with it is, I’m technology, and she’s decorator.

**Scull-Millet:** That’s good.

**Chenoweth:** So she asked me my opinion about a piece of granite the other day, and I said, “Does it have a switch on it?” I said, “If it doesn’t have a switch on it”—she said, “I know, but it’s going to go in your kitchen.” And I’ll tell her if I like something or don’t like it, but I told her; I said, “I can live with whatever you choose. I can cook with whatever you choose. I’m not going to hound you for the rest of your life because you picked this color.”

**Scull-Millet:** So is that a way that your priorities changed from Katrina, or were you always like that?
Chenoweth: I think it changed from Katrina because before we were more of a team trying to decide on everything. And I mean, after Katrina, we just kind of knew where the flashpoints are going to be, and we try to avoid those, and you learn through Katrina that all this crap doesn’t matter; all this stuff doesn’t matter. It’s the two of you that matter; it’s your neighbors. It’s your relationships with your family and friends that matter because if it didn’t matter, then we wouldn’t be there. You know, we developed some great relationships in that neighborhood that I didn’t want to lose and Cathy didn’t want to lose.

Scull-Millet: And even though you’re not meeting, those relationships have changed and the bond is stronger?

Chenoweth: Oh yeah, a lot stronger. Yeah. You know, you understand each other a lot more, and you know, you just laugh at each other’s foibles, weaknesses, and you know, “You chose that?” (laughter) You know, Debra went over to her window in her kitchen, and she was going, “Golly, whose house is that?” She was looking next-door, you know, and she didn’t realize that they had moved her trailer; they were through with her trailer, and they’d moved her trailer, so for the first time she was able to look out a window and see the neighborhood. And here’s this house that Ben had built over there, this huge birdhouse so far up in the air, and she’s seeing it for the first time.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, funny. Big surprise.

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Well, in an ideal world, when you look at rebuilding your community and the Gulf Coast, what are sort of your hopes, and what would you see as the best things that could happen?

Chenoweth: Well, I think a lot of the best things that have happened is, you know, that people realize it is just stuff. You would hope that everybody would still carry those lessons on and stuff like that, but I find myself buying stuff I don’t need again. And I hate that, but I’m thinking about it; before, I never would have thought about it. I try to limit myself. I think the best thing that I could see, and it worked for a while, would be if the whole Coast, those three counties, worked together, you know, instead of so many fiefdoms and supervisors and city councilmen. You know, we’re just so fragmented; the governments, if they would just work together. And you have A.J. Holloway the mayor of Biloxi against the mayor of Ocean Springs, fighting over a bridge, how the concrete’s going to be formed and everything like that. And that delays that bridge. And here’s Bay St. Louis, they’re going to open part of their section in May or November.

Scull-Millet: Is that right?
**Chenoweth:** Yeah. And you know, here we are; we were delayed because of what I’d say, egos, or politics or power.

**Scull-Millet:** Turf fight.

**Chenoweth:** It’s just trying to get everybody to—I mean, that would be wonderful if everybody was just working towards the same goal.

**Scull-Millet:** Cooperating and not competing.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah, but you can see it; it’s starting to fragment again. And you know, what’s so weird is in fifty years, nobody will remember.

**Scull-Millet:** You think?

**Chenoweth:** Well, they’ll be people—you know, I’ll be dead; I should be 106. I’ll probably be dead by then, but—

**Scull-Millet:** At least, maybe, you won’t be out there, working as you are now.

**Chenoweth:** Right.

**Scull-Millet:** You’d be laying back and just watching everybody.

**Chenoweth:** At 106 I think I’ll be laying underneath the ground, (laughter) or I’m going to be scattered, so. But you know, I went over to my partner’s house one night, and his mother had saved a scrapbook out of their house, and we were looking through the scrapbook. And there was an article; they were writing about a hurricane that hit in 1906 that destroyed Pascagoula, most of the houses along the beach on the Pascagoula, and here it was a hundred years later that the same thing happened. A few houses survived, but the majority of them were gone. Same thing happened here; a few houses survived, but a majority of them are gone. And so they made it, and we didn’t even know about it. You know, we don’t know about it until you go on the Internet today, and it says, it lists the five top campus killings, five worst campus disasters, or you know, whatever. That’s when it comes up. And we’re talking about the killings at Virginia Tech; thirty-three people killed, and it takes something like that to dredge all the—I didn’t even look at it, but I’m sure that Texas, you know the guy that shot everybody from the tower, I’m sure that’s on there. And there’s no telling what else is on there, but that’s what’s going to happen is, if another Katrina comes by and destroys it again, then we’ll hear about the hurricane in 1906; then we’ll hear about the hurricane in 2005. You know, that’s the way we tend to—it’s amazing when I look around my town, and I read stories about what was in the past, you know, it’s amazing what was there and is now gone. And I use examples like the Isle of Capri, you know, the island that used to be out there where they had a gambling casino, amusement park, and everything like that, that was just right off the Gulf Coast. And it was only seventy years ago, seventy, eighty years ago that it was out there. And
there’s probably 5 percent of the people that even know about it. That’s what happens is—I can see it; we’re getting back in our everyday lives—

**Scull-Millet:** Where our memories are real short.

**Chenoweth:** Right. And you still have that nagging in your head; every hurricane season for the rest of my life, my rear end’s going to pucker when there’s a hurricane in the Gulf because, God, you know, I fought my way back into that house, and I don’t want to do it again.

**Scull-Millet:** I’m worried. I’m worried. I am worried about it, about global warming and the oceans expanding. You know, warm water expands, and they think that the storms will be worse because the water is warmer. I’m just thinking we’re all going to be moving into the heartland.

**Chenoweth:** Yeah. See, I’m three houses from the beach, four houses from the beach. I’m going, “Should I sell now while I can—before somebody, ‘Hey, I don’t think we’d better buy down there.’” You know, is it going to be fifty years? Is it going to be thirty years? Is it going to be twenty years?

**Scull-Millet:** Ten years, yeah. Somebody was on television, a scientist, last week saying, “We’ve got to make big changes in the next ten years, or it’s going to be out of our control.” What do you think about global warming?

**Chenoweth:** I think they’ll wait nine years before they’ll try to do something. (laughter)

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah. Do you think it’s valid, a valid concern?

**Chenoweth:** Oh yeah, yeah, definitely. I mean, I’ve been on those glaciers in New Zealand and stuff like that, they talk about how they’ve shrunk and everything like that. Well, there’s got to be a reason for that. And they’re going to shrink anyway, but not as dramatic. I mean, there’s going to be shrinkage; then it’s going to build back up and everything like that, but when you get as warm as it’s getting, and it shrinks, builds back up, but it always shrinks farther than it builds back up, then we’re losing them. When you have a scientist standing there, “This glacier used to be here, and now it’s a half a mile over there,” that’s dramatic.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, that is dramatic; it is. It’s easy for us to think, “Well, we didn’t cause it; it might be a natural thing in the earth.” But even if it is a natural thing in the earth, we probably ought to be concerned about how much land there is on the earth.

**Chenoweth:** Well, it can’t be natural because, I mean, we’re belching fumes and smoke, and just think of what we did belch before we even tried to get it under control.

**Scull-Millet:** Yeah, and what the rest of the world is starting to belch as China—
Chenoweth: It’s just amazing to me that politicians can deny it, too, when it’s going to be their legacy, that they, “Oh, there’s no such thing as global warming,” or, “There’s no scientific proof of it.”

Scull-Millet: And I wonder, “Do these people have children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren?”

Chenoweth: Yeah.

Scull-Millet: Well, I know you’ve got other things to do today.

Chenoweth: Yeah. I mean, can you think of anything else because I’ve still got a few minutes? If there’s any other questions.

Scull-Millet: Maybe I’ll just [ask] how did Hurricane Katrina change you?

Chenoweth: Like I said, I don’t think of stuff as much as I used to. You know, I might think of trying to have fun and explore and travel more. I always kid my wife because I said, “Well, you want to travel more every since you lived in that travel trailer.” Because she doesn’t like to fly; she gets high anxiety and has to take a Xanax before she gets on board and whatever. But she’s more willing to do it. You know? We’re going to go to—she’s going with me to Washington. You know, normally I make a lot of trips by myself, but she’s going to go with me to Washington. We’re going to Tuscany, Italy, in September and just more willing to stop and smell the roses, I guess.

Scull-Millet: Do you think Katrina changed her in that way?

Chenoweth: I think it changed her a little bit, yeah. I mean, it changed everybody in realizing that your family and friends is what it’s all about. Sometimes not necessarily in that order. You know? It can be friends and then family.

Scull-Millet: Yeah, on any given day. Yeah.

Chenoweth: You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family. So. (laughter)

Scull-Millet: Not after that first marriage or that first child is born; that’s going to be your child forever. (laughter)

Chenoweth: I just think, you know, that’s how it’s changed me, just wanting to take advantage of what I got and just realize that—I mean, you know, I don’t get as upset at the restaurant about things if they don’t go right because I just go, “If this were gone, I’d still have my family and friends.”
Scull-Millet: Um-hm, don’t sweat the small stuff, and everything’s gotten to be smaller stuff. (laughter)

Chenoweth: Yeah, definitely.

Scull-Millet: Well, thanks so much for coming by today.

Chenoweth: Well, I hope I’ve filled in the blanks.

Scull-Millet: Yeah.

(end of interview)