Mississippi Oral History Project

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Ruth J. Horn

Interviewers: Kirsti Piirtoniemi and Vera Santillana

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Ruth Horn: A Life in Community Involvement

Ruth Jean Raymond was born on July 13, 1920, in New York City to traveling vaudeville entertainers Robert and Beryl Raymond. As they were already traveling with their first infant, Virginia, when Ruth was born, they placed her with her paternal grandmother for safekeeping until the end of the vaudeville season. As it happened, Grandmother Julia never returned her, deciding to raise her with the help of a daughter, also named Ruth. After her grandmother’s death, Ruth and her aunt [Ruth] moved to Mamaroneck, New York, with two of Aunt Ruth’s brothers. She began visiting her parents and siblings in New York City (sister: Virginia; younger brothers: Robert, Warren, Bill, Ed, Richard, and Tom), but she never lived with them.

Ruth graduated from Mamaroneck High School in 1938 and attended Hunter College. She enlisted in the newly-formed Women’s Auxiliary Reserve (WAVES) and was sent to Long Beach, California, where she met Lieutenant Karl Barton Horn from Mississippi. Ruth was impressed with Karl, a Navy Epidemiologist. He grew healthy vegetables behind his medical lab and cooked them extremely well, with rabbit, in the lab’s autoclave! They were married on September 23, 1944. After their Navy discharge in 1945, they moved to Mississippi where Ruth began blending her Yankee city knowledge with the easy-going style of the rural south, and Karl began medical school. Karl’s schooling took them to Oxford, Mississippi, where Patti was born in 1947, and later to New Orleans, Louisiana, where Raymond was born in 1949.

Karl established his medical practice in Port Gibson, Mississippi, in 1950, where Ruth became interested in scholarly activities. In 1955, the family moved to Moss Point, Mississippi, where Ruth began a long life in community involvement, including the Medical Auxiliary, the Library Board, Community Concerts, Fortnightly Club, and Moss Point Presbyterian Church, where she taught Sunday school and still serves as treasurer of Women in the Church.

Ruth was active in the Pascagoula (Mississippi) Friends of the Library before the formation of the Moss Point Friends of the Library, where she served as president and still serves as treasurer. The Library Board has always been a major focus in her activities, and she has held various positions during her long association.

Some of Ruth’s other activities have been the Moss Point Garden Club, MPAC (Moss Point Active Citizens) River Jamboree, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Traditional Rug Hooking Guild, where she is beloved as “the oldest hooker in Jackson County.” In 1998, she and Karl were the recipients of the Community Lifetime Achievement Award for their dedication and service to the community. Ruth is a cancer survivor, which led to her counseling other cancer victims as well as participating with Karl in a local hospice program.

Ruth’s only fear seems to be what she calls “idle hands,” and her friends and family know that she has never, nor is she ever likely to, suffer from those. Her family, which now includes two granddaughters and one great-granddaughter, this community, and this library, have all been deeply touched by the dedication and generosity of Ruth Horn.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

RUTH J. HORN

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Ruth J. Horn and is taking place on February 21, 2007. The interviewers are Kirsti Piirtoniemi and Vera Santillana.

Piirtoniemi: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project done in conjunction with the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with Ruth Horn and is taking place on February 21, 2007, at 10:30 a.m. in Moss Point, Mississippi, at the Moss Point Library. The interviewers are Kirsti Piirtoniemi.

Santillana: And Vera Santillana.

Piirtoniemi: First I’d like to thank you, Ruth, for taking the time to talk to us today, and I’d like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do for our oral history interviews. So, I’m going to ask you for the record, could you please state your name?

Horn: Ruth Horn.

Piirtoniemi: And for the record, in case all the labels are lost or damaged, could you please spell your name?

Horn: Last name, H-O-R-N.

Piirtoniemi: OK. Ruth, when were you born?

Horn: I was born in—now, here we go (laughter)—in 1920.

Piirtoniemi: In 1920, wow. And where were you born?

Horn: New York.

Piirtoniemi: City?

Horn: City.

Piirtoniemi: Oh, wow, how did you get here?
Horn: How did I get here? There was something called World War II, (laughter) and I decided to—I wanted to do something. I became a WAVE, and I was stationed in California, met this cute guy from Mississippi—ooh. (laughter) Married him, and that’s how I ended up in Mississippi.

Santillana: Wow, what’s a WAVE?

Horn: Oh, you are young. (laughter) World War II we had—they needed women, you know, to take [over jobs and relieve men for duty], and I was in the Navy. We weren’t allowed to go overseas or board a ship, but we worked in hospitals, which I did. And the Army had what they called the WACs [Women’s Army Corps]; so they did the same with the Army. What was so good about the WAVES, I worked in a hospital, and the nurses in the Navy didn’t do a lot of nursing. We did; we did the nursing, you know, even though we had six weeks training. The nurses became bookkeepers, which was so sad because they wanted to nurse, you know. But anyway, that’s how I met my husband. (laughter)

Piirtoniemi: Wow, so you grew up in New York?

Horn: Oh yes, uh-huh.

Santillana: How long were you there?

Horn: I was—let’s see. Well, I left New York when I was about—joined, got into service when I was about twenty-one years old. They had the college in New York; they had boot camp, Hunter College. So we did the boot camp, and then we were sent out to where, you know, they were going to send us, not any choice. But I ended up in California, which was wonderful.

Santillana: Nice and warm?

Horn: Yeah. (laughter) Good duty. (laughter)

Piirtoniemi: So, how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Horn: Let’s see; we moved here in 1940, I believe. My husband’s a physician, and he came down here to work with a group.

Piirtoniemi: Interesting. Do you have any children?

Horn: I have two children. I’ve got a daughter that I tease; she’s going to be sixty next month, and she looks like twenty, (laughter) and a son that lives in Houston, never married. He’s got a sailboat; he just loves sailing. And I’ve got two—I’ve got a great-grandchild. Well, I’ve got [a] daughter who gave me two girls, and then one of them’s married and gave me another little girl, Emma.
Piirtoniemi: How wonderful.

Horn: Um-hm.

Santillana: Lots of women in your family, that’s great.

(brief interruption)

Piirtoniemi: So why have you stayed here and on the Gulf Coast for so long?

Horn: Because my husband worked here.

Piirtoniemi: Right.

Horn: He was in private practice. He’s a general practitioner, and then there’s much need for emergency physicians. So he became [an] emergency [physician] and started the emergency system here, which has gotten so big. And so this area was good to us; so why would we leave? And, of course, my daughter is here. And that’s probably the main reason. Her husband travels a lot, and we see a lot of her. So it’s wonderful.

Santillana: So did he start the emergency system here in Moss Point?

Horn: No, in Pascagoula, Singing River Hospital is the one that we both use, yeah. It’s in Pascagoula. And so he started with two other doctors, and now it’s just—now, I said it’s a monster. (laughter) It’s so busy, you know; it really is.

Piirtoniemi: When you think of Moss Point, what comes to mind?

Horn: What comes to mind? You know, I don’t know. I hate the fact that it’s not moving along like it should. You know, like we can’t see anything [changing]—we don’t have a grocery store. That’s very upsetting to me. And we have the shipyard workers and all live up the road. And I think the litter bothers me so much, too. It could be beautiful. And when I saw this town, the azaleas were blooming, and it was so beautiful, you know. I didn’t see the litter and all, but, you know, we just have hope. I’m a real optimist. I keep thinking one day, you know, maybe. But now we’ve got a restaurant we’re worried about; is it going to make it? You know. I don’t why Ocean Springs, they get behind everything that’s good, and this town I don’t understand why we have trouble that way.

Santillana: Is Ocean Springs a town nearby?

Horn: Oh, it’s wonderful. You need to go there. Yeah, it’s just down the road a piece, as they say, yeah, um-hm. But anyway, we’ve got—maybe the men, our aldermen, I think they’re trying. And maybe one day it’ll be the town I would wish it was all these years.
Piirtoniemi: Um-hm. Whereabouts is your neighborhood?

Horn: Oh, I live very— I could walk to the library. Well, I tell you; we lost our home, you know. We had five feet of water, and we were surrounded by water. We had the most ideal lot; everybody loved it. And we lived right there where the five feet of water came through it and washed everything out the window. And we decided not to build down there again. We just gave the lot to our children and said, “Here, it’s yours. Here’s your inheritance; do something with it later.” And I found a little house I can walk to it, two blocks up there, Magnolia Street, and it’s a little house. And I completely did it over and got busy doing that and didn’t think about the other house. And in fact, men have trouble with that more so than women; I found that. Men really have trouble.

Piirtoniemi: They have a material attachment?

Horn: Yeah, and I think the head of the household deal, and it’s gone, and I think that—

Santillana: King of his castle?

Horn: Exactly. But anyway, I just refused to let that get me down.

Santillana: Right.

Horn: I’m still a Yankee. (laughter) I keep telling a friend; I keep saying, “I’m getting so Southern.” She said, “No, you’re not.” (laughter) “OK.”

Piirtoniemi: Did you stay in your home during the hurricane?

Horn: No, we always go to our daughter’s house.

Piirtoniemi: You do.

Horn: We’ve always done it. She used to live up the street. Because on the water, we didn’t want to be stupid enough to get, you know, drowned. (laughter) So we’ve always gone to her house. And her husband and my husband always made us feel very secure that, you know, we knew they were going to do right, and we just went up there. And we were at their house, and it was most—we’ve been through all the hurricanes. We thought Camille was the worst ever; well, it turned out that’s nothing. But this one, it was still frightening being in my daughter’s home. We’re up off the water, and it’s a beautiful, sort of a, we call it Creole cottage, built up. But the stuff that went down the river, big telephone poles, and I kept thinking, “Oh, dear.” And you could hear the noise; it was a very frightening experience. But my son-in-law just recorded it all and never—he shows it to people, and they say, “What’s Ruth and Patti doing?” We’re fixing lunch. She said, you know, “OK.” (laughter)
Piirtoniemi: Recorded it on video?

Horn: Yeah, uh-huh, it was a really good recording. It was better than the news had, really. And when you looked at it you really, you know, could not sleep that night. I thought, “That was a bad storm.” And with the noise and everything. Yeah, I hope we never have that again. (laughter) We’ve always stayed; we’ve never left, you know. All our friends leave to go to Hattiesburg. And my husband said, “I’m a doctor. I’m needed. I can’t leave; you don’t leave.” So we’ve always stayed through all the hurricanes, and we probably will if there’s another one. (laughter)

Santillana: So where—how far is your home from the water versus your daughter’s home?

Horn: The one we lost?

Santillana: Yes.

Horn: Oh, it was very close. I mean, I’m not good in yards or anything. Well, let’s see, from here to maybe that second bookcase.

Santillana: Oh, you’re right on the water.

Horn: Yeah, we’re right on the water. The lake went around this way; so, you know, we got it all sides. But it was not much of a house; we bought it, and we just fixed it up and made a home out of it. And we love the outdoors, and we were out there all the time. And you’d keep your boat outside; you didn’t have to put it on a trailer and all that. So it’s an ideal location. And I know people are already looking at it and thinking, “Hm, you know I’d like to buy that.” (laughter) But that’s not all just it. Another reason we didn’t rebuild is because of seawalls. Seawalls are very hard to keep up and expensive.

Santillana: What are seawalls?

Horn: Seawalls keeps your property from falling in the lake.

Santillana: Oh, OK, so built on the side of the lake on [inaudible].

Horn: They’re holding back, yeah. Big seawall. And there’s what we called “pogey ships” come by and the wave of all the ships that go by beating into your property, and you lose hunks of … [inaudible].

Santillana: Land.

Horn: Yeah, you have to have a seawall.
Santillana: What’s a pogey ship?

Horn: Oh, that’s an industry down here; they catch pogies. A pogey ship, they just come—it’s seasonal. They’ll start April, maybe, until fall. And a pogey fish is about so big, and it goes into vitamins. They cook it and vitamins, makeup. It’s a very lucrative thing. Yeah. And then they move to Texas, but there’s quite an odor to it when they cook the fish. (laughter) It’s like the paper mills; I know you [inaudible]. Yeah, that’s right, but you think, “Oh, well, it is, you know, money.” (laughter)

Piirtoniemi: So were you able to salvage any of your belongings from your house?

Horn: Well, we—my son came from Houston, and I couldn’t have lived without him. We went in that day, and the mud was so bad that you couldn’t walk. I was afraid of falling, “Oh, break a hip now.” (laughter) But all the dishes, things all turned over, and with all that water, I don’t think we broke a glass. It all floated. And then, of course then you had to wash it. And after a while you think, “Oh, I wish I’d gone back to a slab.” You know you get to that point. People had said, “Nothing left.” I thought, “In a way, you’re lucky.” (laughter) We had decisions to make, and you’d throw the thing back on that pile. I realize I threw away things that maybe I shouldn’t, but you’re in that state of, you know. And all the while I kept thinking of George Carlin, that comedian.

Piirtoniemi: The comedian with the ponytail, right?

Horn: Yeah.

Piirtoniemi: OK.

Horn: Filthy now. (laughter) Move that. But anyway, he did this—he can do an hour show on “stuff,” you know that people have, stuff. And I just kept saying, “Our stuff went in the lake. It’s stuff, you know. We’re safe. We’re lucky, really.” So that got me through and not crying over—I guess I miss my books the most. But, oh dear, and things, you know, but it was stuff, and we salvaged some things that are really battered up. Really, like an armoire, and I kept saying, “Throw it away.” And my son said, “Wait, Mom.” So he was good, or I would’ve thrown more away. And this house is small, so I didn’t need much, really, for this house, and what we have is sufficient.

Santillana: When you left your home to go to your daughter’s, did you pack any belongings with you?

Horn: No, we didn’t. Oh, I (whispering) took a pair of pants, underpants. (laughter) No, because, you know, we’ve always gone back. Well, anyway, I took a—I do rug hooking. I took the project I was working on and probably a little cosmetics or so, and other than that, not much because you just felt lucky. But my husband and son-in-law knew what was happening down at our house, when we were at his house. They knew
the direction of the wind and all that, that we had water. I didn’t; you know, I didn’t. But anyway, I can remember walking down the hill, this big hill. They had a lot of people and friends there, and I was just, I looked at it; I was just numb, absolutely numb. You know, I thought, “Oh, well.” I remember walking in the living room thinking, “Oh, dear.” I grabbed a picture of my daughter, my granddaughter’s wedding picture that’s floating on a table in a silver frame, and I picked it up, and I thought, “Hm, hm.” I walked out. I remember going to my good neighbor and said, “Will you keep this for me?” (laughter) But I feel sorrier for the neighbors, our good friends that would watch things float out of our house, you know. And they didn’t have damage. The water just came up and didn’t get in their house. But I think they were so upset seeing what was coming. Windows were broken, you know, and stuff was coming out and what have you, baskets and what have you, but like I say it was really a storm to remember.

Piirtoniemi: How does that compare to your Camille experience?

Horn: Camille we thought was really bad because we went up the street to stay with friends, and I think the worst thing is her sister’s house next door, there was this tree that fell on it and opened it up like a cracker box, you know. And we didn’t—the water came right up to the living room door, you know, and then went out fast. And George was another bad one; the water came in and was up in the boathouse for a long time.

Santillana: What year was that?

Horn: George, you know, it’s ten years or more. I’m not sure. But anyway, we—what was the question?

Piirtoniemi: Just how your experience with Camille was, maybe how you can compare it with Katrina?

Horn: Oh, compare. Well, with Camille, you know, we did more cooking outside and hot.

Piirtoniemi: Hot weather?

Horn: Yeah, and we’d all get together, and you see more of your neighbors then. It’s really, in a way, it’s fun. (laughter) And I said, “Oh, I’m thawing out the fish—the shrimp are thawing out; so I’m going to cook shrimp tonight.” And you say, “Oh, we had that the last night.” “All right, you’re going to have it again.” But that’s what we did. We didn’t have generators, use generators back then. We eliminated all that now but we have a generator, and you can—it helps keep the food frozen, and then at night you can have, maybe, two lights on in the house, you know, the bedroom and bathroom till you go to bed. But now where my daughter lives, all their things are underground. It’s a newer deal. So they—I think we got electricity about the third day.
Piirtoniemi: Wow.

Horn: So, I mean, it’s really—and then my son-in-law went out and bought window units, and so we didn’t suffer with the heat. And we stayed with him to the winter. Now, we suffered almost through the winter because all his work for the air condition, the vents and all that, washed away. And during the worst of the storm, the water was splashing up through the vents, you know, the heating vents, and we were covering them with towels. You’re so busy, you know; you don’t have time to be frightened. We were trying to save the floors and all that, and she has a lot of towels, luckily. And we had towels over all the vents and running around, but anyway. Well, we stayed with Patti and Chuck; she’s got a nice fireplace, and then they got these heaters, propane heaters, which I was really afraid of. I got used to them, though, but anyway, we got through the winter. And then we found—I found this little house, and my husband said he was not going to build down there again. And so I said, “Really?” I thought, “Well, what am I going to do?” So I was lucky to find this little house, and the guy was fixing it up to sell. Because everything was rented; you couldn’t rent a thing. So when I talked to him, no, he wouldn’t rent it out; he was going to sell it. So we said, “Stop what you’re doing,” and we bought it. So we had it gutted, finally; the bathrooms and the kitchen we gutted, and I enjoyed doing it over. I am just a—I guess I love decorating. I really do love to do that. So I got my mind on that. My husband, he was having a hard time; he really was. He’s just—depression, you know, and I found out so many of our friends, the men, it was the men that were suffering. I just thought, you know—and some of them are smart enough to ask for help, go get help. My husband snapped out of it, though. I got him back—we got the garage and got all his power tools, and he started making things and getting busy; so he’s in pretty good shape.

Santillana: Did he build a lot of your old home that was lost?

Horn: No, he didn’t build, but he had lots of things in it. And this one, I really kept him busy. I had a whole wall of blue plates, you know, about the size of this room, and I thought, “I don’t want to go through that, measuring plates.” So he made some wonderful plate racks, and I just put them in the plate racks, you know. (laughter) I’ve got some other ideas for him to do, too; I need a little, skinny coffee table. But anyway, he enjoys working with wood. I’m lucky. There’s some men can’t hang a picture. (laughter) Really, I’m not kidding. (laughter)

Santillana: So Katrina was the end of October, or sorry, end of August.

Horn: August, yeah.

Santillana: And then, when did you move out of your daughter’s and into your new home?
**Horn:** We got this young man that really had done some work for us before, and he started on it. And we moved in; I think it was February. Um-hm. Yeah, we were with Patti, what? August, it went all through the Christmas, and he started working on this little house, and we could get in and stay in the guest room. It’s not—I mean our quarters were better than our house now. She’s got a gorgeous home. We had the bedroom; we had an upstairs living room. We had a wonderful bath. But, you know, you just need your own, your own place. Even though we got along and had a great time. We cooked together, and we’ve always good association there, relationship. But you just, you know, we’re getting old, and we—I laugh; I think this is funny. One guy was saying he had to move in with his brother. And he said, “Yeah, I love my brother all right, but you know, he has control of the clicker.” (laughter) That’s true. We didn’t have control of the clicker. (laughter)

**Piirtoniemi:** Yeah. How has the storm changed the way you feel about your community, like Pascagoula?

**Horn:** Say that again.

**Piirtoniemi:** How has it changed since the storm?

**Horn:** Has it changed?

**Piirtoniemi:** Like your idea of the community, has anything—

**Horn:** Well, I’ve got high hopes.

**Piirtoniemi:** Yeah.

**Horn:** And I think we had a wonderful gal here that got us in what we call Pelican Center. She got us a boardwalk. She knows how to write grants; that’s the name of the game. If you can write grants, and Linda could. And with Linda in charge, I think she could turn it around. She’s really helped so much. And now, Pascagoula I think is jealous of some of the things we’ve done, but they’re beginning to get on a roll now. And there’s a new bank, and they’re going to turn more green; that’s the whole thing now, get more green area, parks, and what have you, a waterfront. They’re talking about knocking all those down, all the public buildings, the Rec[reation] Center, and that’s what got flooded, the police department and all that, moving them inland and then turning where they are now into parks. That’s the big plan. I won’t live to see that, but I hope it follows through. We had architects that came down and met right after Katrina and worked, laying out all this wonderful plan. Now, whether or not the city fathers, you know, whether they’ll do it. The money’s out there, and, really, I can’t believe the money that’s available. Every day you say, “Oh, a million for this, and here’s a million for that.” It’s flowing in here if you know how to use it, and it doesn’t fall in the wrong hands.
**Santillana:** Right. So all the public buildings that were on the Coast, like right there on the water, were they able to go back into them, or were they completely destroyed?

**Horn:** Well, it’s still—you need to go down the Coast; you really do. Now, Pascagoula, they are already building houses on the Pascagoula beach. Well, the houses—our home was just a, you know, a nice, comfortable, little home compared to the ones in Pascagoula that were ruined; they were mansions, beautiful homes. And I mean, they were just wiped out, you know; the top stories, down on the top and just, you had to—we felt sorry for ourselves till we made the tour down there and said, “Golly, we are really lucky.” We didn’t lose that what they’ve lost and the money they had in those homes. But then when you go down to Biloxi and Waveland and all, there’s nothing. You have to see it to believe it. You can send pictures. I have family in New York that said, “Well, how are things? Back to normal?” Back to normal? Maybe in ten years; you know, it’ll take that long. And where the money’s going to come from, for the governments, you know, like Waveland, and all. People have moved away, and there’s no jobs. But to me, the biggest problem is housing for people that’s modest, that they can afford to pay.

**Piirtoniemi:** How’s your ideas about, like, local and state and federal politicians changed since the hurricane happened?

**Horn:** Well, I think we were lucky. I thought we got a good mayor. And then we have—I don’t know. I think that’s all about the same.

**Piirtoniemi:** About the same?

**Horn:** Or maybe a little better. Who knows? We’ve got one of our senators trying to increase the cigarette tax and lower the tax on food, which is high. But it’s just going no place, you know. And the governor doesn’t like it, which, that’s politics. (laughter)

**Piirtoniemi:** Yeah.

**Santillana:** Has FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] had a lot of involvement in your community?

**Horn:** Oh yes. And you know, people, in a way—because I didn’t have to go live in a trailer—but I think people are so impatient. They want it yesterday. You know, it takes a while. We were lucky. Now, the National Guard came in; I mean, you could drive down there; you got ice; you got one of these military meals, which are very interesting, and water, and then you drove on. I thought it was done beautifully. But you hear people, and you can’t make some people happy, they’re going to gripe about everything. But as I say, they have all these FEMA parks are a worry deal now with the crime and so forth going on, but maybe it’d go on if it wasn’t FEMA.

**Santillana:** What’s a FEMA park? Is that where the FEMA trailers are?
Horn: Yeah. Now we have this big Wal-Mart in Pascagoula.

Piirtoniemi: We saw it, yeah.

Horn: The road, and all those trailers right across the street.

Santillana: Oh, OK.

Horn: So they can walk to Wal-Mart. And I notice there’s just a few vacant spots, but they don’t have any place to go. They’re saying, “You’ve got to leave.” “OK, give me affordable housing. I don’t make any money.” So I think affordable housing for people that are making the, uh, what? Seven dollars [an hour] now. What it is, they raised that. But that creates—see, they’re building high-rises, condominiums, but they’re, you know, six figures. I just think until we get that kind of housing, it’s going to be really hard.

Piirtoniemi: Oh, have you had any contact, like, with volunteers?

Horn: Listen, they are the most wonderful things ever. I mean, volunteers, they came down here, and like, they’d live in our church and just sleep in sleeping bags. They’d bring their own cook sometimes. The volunteers, I don’t know how we could get along without [them], and, you know, they keep coming back. They’re not through yet. And we’ve had, you know, young people come down, and instead of going to the beach and having fun, you know, and beer and what have you, they came and worked. You know, it’s really been amazing, and I think that sort of helped. There’s a couple we met from Ohio, and they came down because they wanted to see Mardi Gras because they were here working, and they realized the South is pretty nice. You know, we do wear shoes, (laughter) and some of them had strange ideas about Mississippi. (laughter) But anyway, no, the volunteers, you couldn’t do without them, really couldn’t. And they’re still coming and probably will.

Santillana: Hopefully. Maybe we should, maybe rewind it a little bit, and how about you tell us about your experience, like hearing about the storm while it was building up, like what you did to leave, and maybe a little bit of what happened during the storm itself.

Horn: OK, I thought I did that, but I’ll tell you and start over again. Well, you know, we watched the Weather Channel. You get to know everybody on the Weather Channel. And we get so sick and tired of them out there in the rain, with their raincoats, and they’re telling you about how bad it is. “Go inside.” I mean, I said, “Don’t send them out there because some fellow will get an award for this.” You know, but I hate that part. (laughter) But we watch it, and we just give ourselves enough time to—now, with Camille, we taped our windows. I see a lot of people do that. Well, then I thought we’d never get the tape off. And the friend that was doing it, I said, “Does that help?” He said, “No, but it gives you something to do.”
OK, he didn’t come back when I had to take it off, though. (laughter) But anyway, but we watch the Weather Channel and we have just enough time to leave and gather the few things we had to and go to—as I said, we’ve always gone to our daughter’s house. As I say—now, one storm, Ivan, Ivan was what? Three or four years ago, and it was supposed to hit here, and they board all the windows, big plywood, at their house. So it’s hard to look out; there’s just one window you’re looking out, or you have to open the door. But we went up there at about ten o’clock. My husband says, “OK, let’s go to bed and try to get some sleep.” And I went upstairs, and I looked out the window and saw that big tree, and I thought, “Hm, that tree kind of worries me.” (laughter) But anyway, we woke up at six-thirty, and I said, “What happened?” What it did, it was coming our way, and it made one little turn and went to Pensacola. So, I mean those are the surprises you really don’t know. You know it’s predicted to come, but you keep thinking, “Make the little turn.” And it will sometimes, and you’re spared, but you still have to get ready for it’s going to hit, and that’s what we always did. And let’s see, I guess, oh, what was so good about Katrina, it was daytime. When this happens at night, you would’ve lost a lot more people, a lot more people die, can’t see anything, and it’s so much scarier at night, you know. So, Katrina was all daylight, and that really helps.

Piirtoniemi: Is it bright out like it is now, or how would you—like, I’ve never been in a hurricane. What’s the lighting; like, what would you compare it to? Is it like dusk in the middle of the day or bright like it is now?

Horn: Well, yes, it would be like now, really, yeah, um-hm, gray day. We had a—you know, we lived in [our] house for many years, and we had many small hurricanes that your kids wouldn’t go to school, and you’d bring things in from the porch, and you’re just watching. You watch things blowing. And they were mild storms; they were hurricanes, but nothing frightening. Well, the first one frightened me because I’d never been through one, you know. I thought, “Well, the trees can bend just so far without breaking.” And then you get used to those little ones because we never thought—and it’s over in a day, but these others we’ve had have gotten worse. They really have.

Piirtoniemi: So, in a sense, are you always kind of preparing for the next storm?

Horn: Well, we always say, we’ve said we’re going to go to—we’re going to leave, (laughter) and we never do.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah, never do?

Horn: We were on vacation down at Gulf Shores, and one was coming in. So I mean, we packed up, and we always have a boat. The men went—had a big boat; the men went home with the big boat, and daughter and I have to pull the trailer with the other boat and get on home. And that one turned out, it wasn’t a hurricane, and we thought we got everything packed away from the water. And we put it all back, and that was the strangest hurricane. I forget which one it was. It just bypassed us, and
then it came, took a turn and came back—almost unheard of—and hit us. And it was amazing. We got the stuff back from the pier so much faster (laughter) the second time, like I’d pick up heavy things, but they’re so unpredictable in a way. They’ve made progress, you know, but still they could make that little turn and surprise you.

Santillana: So you guys have always stayed. For Katrina, did people evacuate and leave and never come back, or what did most people do?

Horn: Well, you know, the sad thing about New Orleans—I don’t know if you-all read about New Orleans, how bad. A lot of those people are just stashed out in Houston and all over the place. Of course, I guess they may dribble back a little bit, you know, but that’s housing again, you know, good, old housing. But I just—leaving is such a problem. We could look at the highway, and we see the cars. If you don’t leave real early before you’re sure, or if you wait to the very last, you’re in traffic that is so miserable. You know, you’re crawling along; you really are. Of course, the people with dogs and children, you know, I can’t imagine like that. There was one little storm we had before Katrina, Cindy or something like that, and the men took the boat home, and Patti and I drove the car. And we crawled; for what would take two hours, it took us six hours. And then we got to Mobile, the tunnel, came out of the tunnel and people just took off. We put on some music, and we said, “Aren’t we lucky we don’t have a child or dog with us?” (laughter) It didn’t matter; we just said, “Let’s slide and listen to the music.” But leaving, I don’t think we’ll ever leave; really don’t. The thought of being in the car—that’s how my husband feels. He said, “I don’t think I could handle that car deal.” And he’s an old man. (laughter)

Piirtoniemi: Do you think living through these storms together, you and your husband has, you know, created some kind of special bond?

Horn: Oh, up to a point I’m sure we do. And we did, you know. Now, as I say, I—oh, I’m sure we have, really, um-hm.

Piirtoniemi: I mean, you’re able to relate to each other, I guess, obviously living through it and [inaudible] together.

Horn: Yeah, well, I really—see, I really worried about him after Katrina. In fact, I’ve never known him to be that depressed. And he’s a pessimist anyway, and being me, the blooming optimist that I am, (laughter) I felt like over the years it rubbed on him enough that he was a little bit better, (laughter) not that much of a pessimist. But after Katrina, I said, “Fleh!” (laughter) “He’s still a pessimist.” But he’s a keeper, though. Sixty-one years, keep him. (laughter)

Piirtoniemi: [Inaudible] that’s fantastic. Do you think that the hurricanes, the intensity of the hurricanes, Katrina especially, can be tied to the global warming?

Horn: Well, I’m not a believer of global warming.
Piirtoniemi: No?

Horn: No, I think it’s so political.

Piirtoniemi: Do you?

Horn: And, yes, I really do. And I’m listening to more and more of the people that explain all about this that’s happening, but no, I don’t believe in global warming; really don’t.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah. I mean, how would you interpret or justify these storms getting, you know, [inaudible]?

Horn: Oh, well, I don’t know about that, really. I don’t know, really don’t. I know the ice is melting in some places and, you know, I’m sure a little part, but you know you go back and look at the records of the years when this happened, and so much has happened before. And there I am; I’m an optimist. (laughter) That’s how I look at things. My husband doesn’t believe in global warming, either.

Santillana: I’m interested in your role here in Moss Point. So, you said that they dedicated a room in the library here to you.

Horn: Well, I tell you, when I moved to the South, this little town of Port Gibson, my husband practiced medicine in this little town. It’s between Natchez and Vicksburg; it’s the Old South. Some of the people don’t realize there’s a Civil War; I think they just have, still have a lot of servants and things like that. But when we came to Moss Point, I decided—oh, they started giving you jobs. You know, “A doctor’s wife. Oh, she has nothing to do; let’s give her this job. Do this.” You know? But I made this statement; I said, “Listen, I want to do what I want to do. I’m interested in the library. I’ll do anything. Get me off the Cancer Committee and all this other stuff. Library!” So, library is my thing. I love it. I really love it. As a child I thought I could read every book in the library; I started, you know, every day (laughter) down there, and I’ve just been a reader and a library person. And I’ve just supported the library. We have a good Friends of the Library, used to be in Pascagoula, and now we have our own. And we just are hardworking, making money for the things that, you know, the system can’t buy. And you’re so lucky when you have a leader like we have Carol Hewlett, our librarian. We have a great staff here. But I just, as I say, I guess for years I just worked everywhere I could. And the old library had a plaque with my name on; so I thought, “Well, I’ve been at this a long time.” So the surprise—everyone knew I was going to get this room named after me. My family came, and I didn’t think it strange that my granddaughter came. She said, “Oh, I think we can’t come that weekend.” And so my daughter said, “I just about went crazy keeping the secret and not letting you know.” (laughter) And anyway, and then the day of the opening—I was in charge of—we were all in charge of food, and I really goofed on it. I didn’t have enough punch; so they gave me a hard time about the punch. (laughter) I said, “Put water in the punch bowl; they’re thirsty. And forget it.” (laughter) But
anyway, we were out there, and they had the speeches and the ribbon cutting and all that. And my three—well, Emma was probably a year old then, my great-grandchild, and I was more interested in her. And then I heard something, “And her name is on the plaque in the old library.” And I thought, “What could that be?” You know. I was so surprised. I could not believe. And my son was here and he—I said, “What are you doing here?” (laughter) He said, “I was invited.” I said, “OK, I believe that.” I mean, I was really dense; I’m usually not that dense. But anyway, it was a wonderful day, as I say. And Carol keeps telling people that, “No, Ruth’s still alive. You don’t have to wait until people die to do this.” She said, “We just hope she doesn’t do anything and make the newspaper.” (laughter)

**Piirtoniemi:** What day was the opening?

**Horn:** Oh, I don’t know.

**Piirtoniemi:** You don’t remember?

**Horn:** It was in the summer; I know it was hot. Yeah.

**Piirtoniemi:** This past summer?

**Horn:** Oh no, I think it’s three years; got to be three years, yeah.

**Piirtoniemi:** So did this library suffer any damage from the hurricane?

**Horn:** We were so lucky. Oh, we were lucky. We worried about our roof; we’ve always worried. But they, you know, they cover everything with plastic and all, and we were the luckiest because the other libraries, especially down—Pascagoula is still unbelievable that the water came from the Gulf down those many, many blocks of Highway 90. And even though Pascagoula Library might’ve had a foot of water; well, there’s all the mold and all that, you know, gets the books. And as I say, they just opened a week, about ten days ago.

**Santillana:** Reopened?

**Horn:** Yeah, reopened. So, all of a sudden—now, maybe we’ll be as busy up here, but they handled the crowd, and some of the people, I think, liked it here so much we probably captured them and keep coming. (laughter) You know, the town is not that big.

**Santillana:** So what is the Friends of the Library?

**Horn:** Friends of the Library, we’re a little organization, and we get together. We meet once a month, and we have a meeting, and we decide what we can do to help the library. And we help with children’s programs and have a good many children’s programs, and help every way we can. And we buy things that they don’t get. We’d
buy a refrigerator for this room and, you know, the kitchen and all that. Now we’re needing a—we told them not to put carpet down in my room, the meeting room, but they did it. Now, carpet gets bad when you have people eating and drinking coffee, and so we’re going to have tile similar to what we’ve got other places. We’ll pay for that. And we have money; we’re always raising money for something. We had—oh, we have art shows, and we get a percentage of the art. And we have an artist that did a picture of a woman in town that’s been riding her bicycle for sixty years, just about. And she did a picture of Jane, and we’re selling that and little note cards. So, it’s all this, you know, raising money that way. That’s what you do, and I’m not good—I hate to ask people for money. I’m not good about that, but you manage. (laughter)

Santillana: It’s easier when you’re giving them something.

Horn: Well, that’s it. And the same people get hit. You know, I’d hate to be in business because every day someone walks in the door and “Well, would you buy this?” And they sit down, and it goes on and on, but they are hit quite a bit.

Piirtoniemi: So would you say this is a fairly, like, close-knit community?

Horn: Oh, I think so.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah.

Horn: I think it is, um-hm.

Piirtoniemi: Like you were saying, there’s the one woman everybody would see; she’s been riding her bicycle for sixty years.

Horn: That’s right.

Piirtoniemi: Everybody knows.

Horn: Uh-huh. Yeah, and it was so neat to have her daughter come and unveil it. In fact, it’s out there; you need to look at it. And her skirt [inaudible], was a skirt and a hat. And she’s one of the Friends of the Library; we got her busy. But her daughter unveiled it, and she said, “Can you imagine how embarrassed I was to be in school, you know, high school, junior high, and they’d say ‘Is that your mother going by on a bicycle? Don’t you have car?’” (laughter) I could understand a teenage deal, you know, but Jane’s just really nice. And I was trying to think what other fundraising we had, before that. There was something, and I know I’m having a senior moment. (laughter) But anyway.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah, that’s great to be involved.

Horn: Um-hm, I think so.
Santillana: If you wanted the water, that’s for you.

Horn: No, I’m all right, fine, um-hm.

Santillana: I have so much stuff to find out about. What about, what are some traditions that go on here in Moss Point, like some [inaudible]?

Horn: Oh, we have—one of the things, we have the soapbox derby deal. I mean you know get them ready to go to Ohio. We have a lot of the young, some of the doctors with their children. And we have a good hill, and they have that, you know, to see who’s going to go to the main thing. And we’ve had some winners. Well, we have a wonderful Christmas program. It started where the boats are all decorated, you know, and we gather way out from where we lived in Beardslee Lake. And when it gets dark, that’s the signal. And you get in line, and you come down to the—now, we have the boardwalk and city hall and all that. We have a Christmas parade, and they end up down there. And now they’re doing things like hot chocolate and selling popcorn, or what have you. When it gets dark the boats come and wander around, make this big turn in the Lake and then anchor and have fireworks. And Santa Claus, one of the boats carries Santa Claus. (laughter) Our boat used to carry Santa Claus. And there used to be maybe eight or ten boats; we did that for years. And now we have this young woman that came to town, and she’s a pharmacist, and she started calling people. And I said, “You know, that’s the secret.” No one ever called; they assumed you’re going to be in it, and you have to call. So we have forty, fifty boats now. And some of them are big boats, really big, you know. And there’s some of them just little, tiny boats, you know, with the lights, and they have given an award for the best-decorated boat and so forth. So that’s gotten bigger and bigger each year, um-hm, since the woman took over. (laughter) But that’s [inaudible]. Of course, you know, on the Coast we’ve always had opening homes for pilgrimage; we call it the pilgrimage. And each town would open one or two homes. It’d start down around Waveland and all these places. Well, now, since the storm, we haven’t been able to do that. The Garden Club would open two of the homes, and people, you’d be surprised the people that come. It’s in the spring, oh, you know, maybe April, and people come from all over. You know, you meet these people, “Where are you from?” “Minnesota.” “Oh, OK.” (laughter) And they open some of the prettier, well, some of the newer, beautiful homes plus the old homes. I think people like the old homes better, but of course there’s some beautiful homes. But I don’t know when we’ll ever do that again, you know, until there’s some homes in Biloxi and Gulfport. Of course, most of them were on the water, and they’re no longer there. Now, some of the old houses, you know, they were so well-built, they would survive. But now Katrina knocked out the old ones, too.

Piirtoniemi: Um-hm. Is there much new building or is it like—

Horn: Well, that surprises me. We haven’t gone down the Coast too much to look because nothing was going on. But Pascagoula now, we went down there last Sunday, and it’s surprising. They’re trying to have to decide how far you have to build up. All

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the houses have got to be up on pilings and whatever, and then you’re going to disguise that with lattice work. And people say they’re going to look like camps, you know, fishing camps they build up there.

Piirtoniemi: Yep.

Horn: But I mean Pascagoula, I bet there must be twenty, thirty houses, maybe, that are already started. and they’re up there, and they’re all, you know, way up there, you know. And if you want to make money, go in the elevator business because a lot of people are going to have to have (laughter) an elevator to go up there. And I noticed in the paper somebody is selling elevators (laughter) for the home. But I was surprised that Pascagoula’s bouncing back now; of course some people are never going to build back. But I remember, after Camille, the empty lots we used to see down there. No one ever built again; they just kept the property. But, uh, and it’s the modular housing now; they drop it all half made, and that’s going to help.

Santillana: Like the mobile homes?

Horn: Yeah, um-hm. So that’s encouraging to see Pascagoula doing that.

Santillana: When you said opening homes, is that like [inaudible]?

Horn: Yeah, where the Garden Club would say, “Could we open your home for it.” And you know, some places, you know, it would kind of be dangerous, people walking through your home, getting their eye full. In fact, in Baton Rouge a friend of mine opened a gorgeous home, and I think a few days later, they came, and they robbed her, you know. So a lot of people don’t like to do that. But here in this area, we’ll ask, “Would you mind—would you like to have your home opened?” And the Garden Club then has to do arrangements in all the rooms; that’s to show what we can do. So it’s that sort of—and then we open it up, and there’s a brochure that people get. If you’re going through the Welcome Center, they’ll give you the brochure, and that’s how we get people from all over to come. And they go through room by room, and it’s very nice. You get some good ideas, maybe, to take home with you.

Santillana: Um-hm, yeah.

Piirtoniemi: Is there anything that hasn’t been rebuilt that you think should be, that you’d like to see happen?

Horn: Well, no, I can’t think of anything.

Piirtoniemi: No.

Horn: There’s a big thing going on about the Biloxi lighthouse, which survived, and you know it’s right there, with the highway, right in the middle there. Now they want to do a park there. They’re going to have to get—to move the highway way back to
take care of all this, you know. So that’s Biloxi’s big project right now. But other than if we, uh—the big project here, whether or not they’re going to—they’re in trailers now, they’re going to move all the buildings that are on the water up to, close to maybe six or eight blocks away, if they find property and rebuild. And that’s going to take a long time. Nothing like that moves fast.

Piirtoniemi: No. Is that everything?

Santillana: This is our first time, by the way, doing this.

Horn: Well, are you enjoying it?

Santillana: So you’re our guinea pig. Yes, it’s interesting.

Horn: Oh, am I the first person?

Piirtoniemi: You are.

Santillana: Yes.

Horn: Oh boy, poor you-all.

Piirtoniemi: You’re our guinea pig. (laughter)

Horn: I don’t mind. (laughter) They said, “She talked too much.” (laughter)

(inaudible)

Piirtoniemi: What about the—I mean, I think it’s fantastic that you’ve maintained this optimistic, you know, view on everything.

Horn: I guess I’m lucky.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah.

Horn: Somebody gave me that gene, if there’s an optimistic gene that’s out there. Yeah, I just—you know, life is good. My husband was—the night, the day we knocked our house down, you know, said, “OK.” We were all standing around, and that was his worse night. We went back to my daughter’s house, and he said, “You didn’t shed a tear.” I said, “No.” I said, “You know, I guess I’m tough.” And I said, “I’m blind in one eye; I’ve had two bouts of cancer, and I’m racked with arthritis, and I’m not going to let a house ruin the rest of my life.”

Santillana: Oh, wow.
Horn: “Because I’ve got a life to live.” And I hope I have a few more years. That’s my attitude. I mean, that’s how I feel. I’m tough, and my mother was tough. (laughter) But anyway, no, I just feel so lucky, you know. It was a good day when I joined the service and met that guy and ended up in Mississippi. I used to go to North Carolina when I lived in New York; I had a friend that moved to North Carolina. I thought, “Wow, I’m in the South, and I’m fine.” (laughter) And then when I saw my husband, I said, “Who’s the cute little sailor over there?” They said, “He only lives in Mississippi.” I thought, “Mississippi, way down there, way down there,” not knowing I’d end up here. Yeah. And I say I love New York to [visit]. I’d like to go for—the only reason I want to go back—I used to say I was going to miss the theater; I still do, and cheesecake. Well, I learned to make cheesecake; you know, I can even buy cheesecake, but I can’t make theater. But anyway, but I just, I don’t know, it’s—I forget what I started to say. (laughter) It’s time to shut up.

Santillana: Why you like Mississippi.

Horn: Oh really, I hate the summers; you know really, but that’s why I read a lot in the air-conditioning, anyway. And I look forward to colder weather, but I’m even thinking, “I don’t know about this cold weather.” It’s just so much colder. But I—it’s the people, you know, they’re just really wonderful people. But I’d like to go to New York for a week in the fall and do all the theater. The food doesn’t interest me. In fact, I think Southern cooking is so much better. Our influence, New Orleans, good food. New York is meat and potatoes; you know, really, to me it’s just meat and potatoes. And they don’t know how to—because when I came here, I didn’t know how to cook, fry okra, knew nothing about it. And my husband would say, “What about these green beans that are so crunchy?” I said, “Oh, I don’t know.” Here they cook them all day with a ham hock, you know, until all the vitamins are gone. (laughter) But anyway, you know, really good Southern cooking. [They] do a lot of frying.

Piirtoniemi: Yeah.

Horn: Yeah, a lot of frying.

Santillana: How old were you when you got married?

Horn: I was twenty-four.

Santillana: Twenty-four.

Horn: Yeah, um-hm, twenty-four, um-hm.

Piirtoniemi: Did you move around at all before you got here?
Horn: No, when we got married, we both were in San Diego, and they were phasing the—I forget what they called that when you got out of the service. I got out of the service because I got pregnant.

Santillana: Oh, OK.

Horn: I tried to get out of the service, and I tried to get pregnant. (laughter) That was the aim; get pregnant, get out of the service. (laughter) I was only in for two years. But anyway, I got out of the service, and we came back to Mississippi and moved in with my husband’s family. They were in this little Southern town out from Jackson, Mississippi, and he wanted to get into medical school. That was what he wanted. He graduated; he had his degree. He was in public health, doing public health service. He thought, “Oh, you know, I don’t think this is for me.” So we had a hard—he had a hard time getting into medical school because just about everybody decided after the war—we had the GI bill that would help you get through. So, anyway, he had a good professor. We wrote to every school. Had a good professor that remembered him; he was such a good student, and he got into school, medical school. Mississippi only had a two-year medical school then, and after the two years you had to transfer. So then you started all over again. He ended up going to LSU [Louisiana State University], and we lived there. That’s where we had our children. We lived in the housing projects, you know, probably just like a FEMA trailer, but you know, it doesn’t matter when you’re young. And you had a, what you call a crate was your bookcase, all that thing, you know, didn’t matter.

Santillana: LSU is Louisiana State University.

Horn: Yeah, big university, good university, yeah.

Santillana: Good basketball.

Horn: But now—yeah—but Mississippi now has a four-year school, of course. And it took them a while to get started, but they don’t have to transfer any more. You know I think that he even thought about going to Harvard. I didn’t know how to drive when I came down here. You know New York, you don’t drive a car, you know. So but anyway, I had to learn to drive, and our marriage survived that. (laughter) You see, it’s a good way, you know, if it survives being taught to drive by your husband and your mother-in-law in the back seat going, (gasping). (laughter) Yeah, and his father would take a little—she got in the car and had this whisk broom that sort of whisked you off. And I thought, “God almighty! Am I driving his car?” But we survived anyway.

Piirtoniemi: What’s your husband’s name?

Horn: Karl, Karl B., Karl Barton Horn, Karl with a K. He doesn’t—I said, “You know, where’d that come from?” And he said, “I don’t know.” (laughter) His mother’s name was Etoile.
Santillana: How do you spell that?

Horn: E-T-O-I-L-E, Etoile.

Santillana: Oh, like a star.

Horn: Star, exactly. Yeah, that’s right. Where her mother, you know, simple country folks, where she got that I don’t know; she didn’t read novels. But we were in Japan, and we were going—now, we’re in a bus tour, and they had this big sign said “Etoile.” I said, “Look at that. You know, why in Japan?” (laughter) Yeah.

Santillana: Wow, that’s funny. Just for people who might be reading or listening to this interview, what, can you just talk about the GI Bill a little bit?

Horn: Oh, the GI Bill, it was a wonderful thing. I think everybody that’s in World War II, you know, you could apply for the GI Bill, which got you through school. I mean, it paid for your tuition, your books, and it was something like we made $125 a month. We lived on that; you could back then. You really could. And we found housing that’s very inexpensive housing, like New Orleans was when we were at LSU, it was called “the project.” And it’s people like taxi drivers and things that, you know, didn’t have a steady income and just—well, that was a little exciting. So then there was some sweet little old ladies on retirement that could live down there. But it was really, I think we paid maybe $11 a month.

Santillana: Wow.

Horn: Which helped, you know, and had food and so forth. But it’s amazing, they say—every time they say, “No inflation,” I said, “Oh, come on now.” (laughter) I can remember when. But things have changed. I told my daughter; I said, “You know, I used to buy a blouse from Ship and Shore for three dollars.” “Mother, I don’t want to hear about that, OK.” (laughter) Better made than they are now for forty dollars. All right, well, I’ve said enough?

Santillana: Sure.

Piirtoniemi: Is there anything that you wanted to add that we haven’t talked about?

Horn: No, I think you’ve hit it all.

Santillana: Good to go. OK.

Piirtoniemi: Thank you very much for talking with us.

Horn: Oh, you’re welcome. Thank you for putting up with me. (laughter) That’s a cute little—
Piirtoniemi: Oh, my pin?

Santillana: Oh, we have one for you.

Horn: Oh, really? Oh, OK.

Piirtoniemi: Canadian flag.

Horn: Oh, oh, how wonderful, thank you so much. How long you think you’re going to be here?

Santillana: Here? I’m just going to stop this now.

(end of interview)