Table of Contents

Personal history ................................................................. 2
Preparations for Hurricane Katrina at Crosby Memorial Hospital .................................. 3
Friday before Katrina arrived on Monday ...................................................... 3
Hurricane Katrina arrives in Picayune, Mississippi ........................................ 3
Tornadoes ........................................................................................................ 3
Rain drives through windows ............................................................................ 4
Comforting employees ..................................................................................... 4
Experience as Green Beret in Vietnam prepared him for Hurricane Katrina ............ 4, 10
Roof blown off of operating room ................................................................. 4
Rain floods hospital ......................................................................................... 4
Loss of electrical power, lights ....................................................................... 4
Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina ..................................................... 4, 6, 7
Visiting children moved across the street to school during Katrina’s eye ................. 5
Generator provides back-up power ................................................................... 5
Loss of phones ................................................................................................. 5
New obstetrics department’s roof held during Katrina ....................................... 5
Moving patients to safer hospitals after Katrina ............................................... 5
No air-conditioning after Katrina .................................................................... 5
Disaster Medical Assistance Team arrives .................................................... 5, 6, 8
Emergency splenectomy .................................................................................. 5
Ambulances arrive ............................................................................................ 6
Security somewhat lacking after Katrina ....................................................... 6
Scarce gasoline .................................................................................................. 6
Going home after Katrina .................................................................................. 6
Downed power lines ......................................................................................... 6
Help from city government .............................................................................. 6
Looters steal gasoline from cars, puncture gas tanks ........................................ 7
Employees performed well under Katrina’s pressure ...................................... 7
Frequent meetings facilitated communication after Katrina ........................... 7
Aftermath of Katrina was challenging ............................................................. 7
Cooperation and support among hospital employees ....................................... 8
Donated food for hospital employees, visitors ................................................. 8
Feeding everyone who needed meals ............................................................. 8
Sharing lessons learned ................................................................................... 8
Feelings of community developed during and after Katrina ........................... 8
Waveland, Mississippi, thirty-foot storm surge tidal wave ............................. 9
Hospital employees did whatever tasks needed to be done ........................... 10
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

STEVE GRIMM

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Steve Grimm and is taking place on June 14, 2006. The interviewers are Sally Ruel and Wanda Jones.

Ruel: This is a [Hurricane] Katrina interview, and it’s June 14, [2006], and my name is Sally Ruel, and Wanda Jones; we are the interviewers, and we are interviewing Steve. And Steve, would you please state your name and spell it, your full name?

Grimm: Yes, ma’am. It’s Steve, S-T-E-V-E, Grimm, G-R-I-M-M, and I’m the administrator of Highlands Community Hospital, and we were Crosby Memorial Hospital at the time of the hurricane.

Jones: Steve, can you tell us where and when you were born?

Grimm: I was born January 13, 1948, in Indianapolis, Indiana; a Yankee gone South. (laughter)

Jones: OK. What are the names of your parents?

Grimm: Norma, my mother, and Frederick Grimm was my father; he died when I was two, so I never really knew him.

Jones: Tell us about your early childhood.

Grimm: Early childhood I had—we grew up economically challenged, which I think is poor, but I never knew that. There were six boys, and my mom raised all six by themselves, and she left a list of things at home, and if you didn’t do them you got in trouble, so I mean very fortunate. She instilled a great work ethic. The brothers that are still alive are very close. And she, I think, just developed a—taught us a great way to live life. She’s certainly my hero.

Jones: Wonderful. And tell us a little bit about school.

Grimm: School, I finished high school and actually went in the service when I was seventeen, went to Vietnam and spent eighteen months there. I was wounded and came home and spent nine months in hospitals and then went to college at Butler University, where I graduated after four years.

Jones: And your early career years?
Grimm: My early career years I actually started off, I went to work—we, my wife and I relocated in Florida and went to work at Disney. I worked in accounting, and she worked in reservations. And my next door neighbor ran a hospital and wanted to know if I’d run the business office, and I said, “I don’t like hospitals very much.” But I’d spent a lot of time on the other side and felt that if there was a way that I could help other people be taken care of better than what I’d thought I’d been taken care of, then maybe that was a good move, and I’ve been doing that ever since. I started off as a business office manager, then went to a CFO [chief financial officer], and then went to a CEO [chief executive officer] for the past twenty-eight years.

Jones: And how long have you been here?

Grimm: Been here for four years.

Jones: OK. Give us a typical day a week or two before Katrina.

Grimm: A week or two before Katrina. The good part of the week or two before Katrina is that it was going somewhere else, and so we really were not giving at the concern or fear that we should have, but there was no reason to. And a typical day, it was just very warm. There was trepidation, but I don’t think any real fear because there really wasn’t any indication. And I believe fear is something, fear or pain are things that you can only go so far in your mind unless you’ve been there. If you’ve been there, you can go further; if you haven’t, you can only go so far. And you’ll learn it by going through whatever you go through. So I mean, a typical day was just working with the docs trying to get things accomplished and keeping the hospital open. And we were constantly fighting for our survival because we’re in a fifty-year-old facility and trying to make sure that, you know, as the things broke, we got them fixed. And we couldn’t really afford to fix them until they broke, so it was always at the last minute if something broke. So I mean, you know, a typical day was survival, was taking care of the patients, and making sure that we met payroll and did the things that we were asked to do.

Jones: OK. Now tell me about Friday before Katrina.

Grimm: Friday, and help me. Was Friday the day it came?

Jones: It came on Monday.

Grimm: It came on Monday. Friday we all got together; we met, and we made our plans to make sure that everybody would come in on Sunday. We would stay in the hospital, and the key people would stay here. We'd have everybody set up for where they were going to be. Everybody had their positions. I was in administration, and I would stay in there. And Melissa Wise and Pam actually were in charge, and we established it that way. And that meant Shirley and I—and you know, Bryan wasn’t here because he was out of town, but that meant we did what they said to. So we made sure they were in charge. They were the leaders for that, so that meant we did
what they asked, also. Now, we were always wandering around getting support, but we didn’t try and confuse the issue as to who’s in charge. I think when you put somebody in charge, they need to stay in charge.

Jones: And then on Sunday?

Grimm: Sunday we—I don’t sleep well at home, so sleeping in my office on the floor was probably a long night, but yeah, I remember waking—and I always wake up about five, with or without an alarm—and remember waking up and going around and talking to people in trying to make sure everybody was OK. And there were kids and family members everywhere, and we were just trying to, you know, just keep calm. And we’d looked on—we met and realized what was going on, and here was our plan as to what we were going to do depending on what the hurricane did. And not knowing what that would be, we just had to wait until that occurred. So you went and had breakfast. We had breakfast and just waited for whatever was going to come along.

Jones: Was your wife here in the hospital or at home?

Grimm: No. I made the mistake of, I asked her to come in, and she wanted to stay at home because the cat was there, and we couldn’t bring the cat in, and she won’t make that mistake again. She’ll leave (laughter) because I don’t want her to—worrying about this was enough, and I don’t want to have to worry about her also. So I mean, I think that we—you learn a lot of things after the first time.

Jones: OK. And then it’s about—well, early morning Monday.

Grimm: Early, it started to—everything came. You know, I often referred to it as a “hurricanado” because I believed there were little tornadoes all through it, and you could see the trees just cut in half in some places and nothing in other places, so I really do believe it bounced and touched up and down as you see along [Interstate] 59 as you drive along where the trees are fine in one spot and gone in another spot. It started raining, of course, very hard, and in our hospital we had the windows that have three windows, that there’s three sections, so they roll out. And in my office it started pouring, and it was coming with such force that it was coming right through the windows. It was almost—and we had towel after towel, and we had all the medical records, and we had our physician records and all the other things located in my office. So I started—we must’ve emptied twelve or fourteen baskets full of water out the back door so we wouldn’t stay in the area. And it went for, I guess, it seems like three or four hours, and I can’t remember to be exact, but that it just was relentless. And about two and a half hours into it, they called. They said that they had a problem in the OR [operating room]. So I went. Actually, it was about two hours I started going down the hall, and there were little—well, I say little girls—younger girls in their twenties, our workers, who were screaming and very, very frightened of what was occurring and more about what was happening to their family or their home because they weren’t there. And the good part about that is it made me stop thinking about my wife and I
got back into being the boss, and just held her and hugged her and told her everything was OK. And it’s just—I think that people are either able to accept trauma or go through those kind of things without overreacting, and I’ve always been very fortunate, whether it be in combat, or that was close to it, but knowing that you’re going through things and not be frightened by it but be able to just react to it. And fortunately, I was able to help them go through that, and I was very fortunate that I think I had some of that or knew how to handle some of those difficulties. But just terrific people and employees, and they did a great job of trying to survive something that no one knew what it was. And about that time, I went up to the OR because they said there were problems with the roof coming off. I got upstairs, and we were trying to get some of the equipment out, and as we did the roof came off. It was like standing in a brown shower; the ceiling tiles were busting all over our heads, and we were trying, very unsuccessfully, to save as much equipment as possible, but along with the water, it was also saltwater because a lot of that had come up. So there was really not much saving it, and the water just poured down the elevator and poured into the first floor. And we must’ve got anywhere from eight to ten inches of water. And fortunately it kept going down through the elevator, and we’re on an elevated surface throughout the hospital, so it did drain eventually, but it took quite a while. And then the lights, the electric went out. It got very—I think that’s when everybody got—I think people stated to panic more. We didn’t have—well, we could see trees falling, but we didn’t—they weren’t close enough to harm anything. We had an MRI [magnetic resonance imager] set up in the back, and God knows how it didn’t blow away, and we don’t know how, and they hadn’t moved it. So many things that we don’t know that we could’ve prepared for. I don’t know what we would’ve done if we tried to prepare for it because you can’t think of everything. As we’ve gone through it, I think we’ve made many changes as to how we made our approach. But after that occurred, halftime came, and it just stopped, and nothing was going on. We all met and tried to make sure everybody was OK. The kids were getting very frightened; they decided to move them across the street, but we did it rather slowly, and I wasn’t part of that decision, and I was very nervous because then it started reversing. And it came around this way, the winds, and it got very heavy very quick, and the kids were walking across the street. And one of our docs was Dr. Gibson, [who] was helping take them across the street, and I was very frightened that some things were going to hit them. I’m not sure I would’ve—I still wouldn’t have done that if I had say in it again because I knew how quickly it could change and how dramatically, and it did, and very fortunately no one got hurt. Now, that was a center for everybody over there across the street, and I think the—I forget who set it up, but then they got very angry with us because we sent all of our hospital-type patients over there, which we didn’t, but these are people who don’t understand if you have a breathing problem, it doesn’t make you a hospital patient. And if you have, unless you need hospital care we can’t take care of that, and we couldn’t anyway because we had the generator on, back-up generator, almost—I’m not sure, electricity. Phones stayed on the entire first day because it was at the end of the first day they went out. I’m trying to piece this together as we go along. I hadn’t thought about it in a long time. Let me see. After we got everybody, it was probably six hours of—three hours the first time and probably two, two and a half; I don’t think it was as long on the backside, wasn’t near
as much rain, thank goodness, because the roof was already off, and had we had the same amount of rain as we had on the front side, I don’t know what would’ve happened. Now, on OB [obstetrics], we’d just put a new roof on the OB, and it’s a white roof, and it’s like, it’s called reflect-tex). So it’s like—a—I don’t know what you would call it. It’s a material that’s about yea thick, and it’s put in by screws that are almost ten inches, and it goes into concrete that our engineer said was as hard as concrete because years ago, forty years ago when they poured it—actually that was built in [19]72, so it was—but it was older, and they really made concrete even harder. As the wind was coming around the first time, during that first part, the whole first set of screws came undone, unscrewed. And the second set was about half off by the time, and had it gone any longer, and we’d lost the OB roof, I don’t know what we would’ve done. It would’ve been—but I mean, that’s how powerful that turning motion was, and we were able to save OB. And, well, the Good Lord saved us. Who knows? I mean, but we didn’t—but I mean, it stopped. That saved that, and then we were able to go ahead, and we were trying to get—we had about four or five patients, I believe, that we were trying to get transferred. Everybody had accepted it; we had everything all ready, and then we got notified that they got hit, also. So we couldn’t get anybody transferred; pretty wild trying to figure out how to get people out of here. We got together; we made sure that we had a plan to make sure we took care of the remaining patients. We were going to keep OB open strictly for emergency mamas that came in, and we were going to work at trying to get a DMAT [Disaster Medical Assistant Team] in here to give ER care. And that all occurred on the second day, and while all that was occurring on the second day, we lost electricity. The backup power does not do any kind of air-conditioning, so even though we had backup power, it was strictly on a small scale. We had a splenectomy that came in. Dr. Johnson took him down to the OB because that was the only OR that we had available because the other one was a swimming area. And they went in and did the surgery, Dr. Blunt and Dr. Johnson, in over a hundred-degree temperature, and he was very quick, thank goodness, or I’m not sure they would’ve been able to get through the entire surgery. That occurred. We got ambulances. There were groups of ambulances that came from certain—St. John’s I think it was, and which was Florida, I think. But some of the problems that we saw was that we got ambulances that nobody was in charge of, and nobody knew how to control—there wasn’t one person in charge of the whole thing. We could not get protection. We wanted National Guard, at least somebody, back on the outside because we have pharmacies; we have drugs on the inside. We have employees inside, and our concern was for those people, and we couldn’t get anybody. The police were totally occupied, so therefore security had to be provided by ourselves, and we did the best we could. It was really between the city, between everybody. There was a lack of the ability to try and get all the resources and put them together. We were at the point where we couldn’t get gasoline for our own employees to get back and forth. I think that was a grave concern because they’ve got enough destruction at home. Shirley’s husband was gone over to the Baton Rouge area, and so she decided to stay because she had no water at home. I at least had water at home, and Beth at home; so I went home the first night, and it was trees everywhere. I don’t know why you do it, but as I drove over the electrical lines, I raised my feet like that would stop something, but it’s just a reaction. And obviously
they turned all the power off. But I didn’t know whether I’d be able to make it home or not, and I was able to, and she was fine, and we’d lost about forty trees at the house and not on our home, thank goodness. And we’ve had very little damage compared to many other people. So I was very—we were in a little dip going down, and in that little dip every other house had blue roofs, and we didn’t. So we felt like we were really spared by that little dip. But homewise compared to what other people had, we were just so fortunate, and don’t even want to go there. But after that night, we came in the next day and started to make our plans again as to how to recover, trying to make sure we sat down with the city and made plans to get gas, to get diesel, to make sure that we’re able—then had problems with the city saying that—had all those things happen. And we’ve since taken care of that, but you know, “Oh, OK. We’re going to give policemen and everybody else gas, but not your employees.” And I’m going, “Well, guys, fine. We’re going to have to send anybody injured to the city hall, also, because we aren’t going to have anybody that’ll take care of them.” And everybody worries about their own concerns, and that’s pretty normal, so I mean we have now made sure that we’ve arranged to work with the city and the county. But we’ve taken care of ourselves; we’re going to have contracts to make sure we get our own gasoline, our own diesel, and take care of ourselves, and that’s what you really have to do because in panic as bad as that is, people take care of just what’s within their grasp and don’t look at the whole picture. We’ve tried to, but you couldn’t get them to do that then. And we just did the best we could. We did get the DMAT team in. The employees—he came in and says, “You’re all just—stand down; you’re all dismissed.” And you only go, “We’re fired?” (laughter) And you know that’s not what they meant. They were trying to be nice so you could go home and be with your families, but good gosh, that sent on another wave of panic. And we got them all back together and said, “Look. Don’t misunderstand that. What they’re trying to say is now you can go home and see what’s happening to your home and not panic. It’s all right. You still have your jobs. We don’t know what’s going on. We will update you on an ongoing basis. If we have a message, we’ll try and get it out to the radio station. If you have a radio, then you can hear it, but check in X amount of time.” We told them when to check in. And then we just had very few people that stayed here after the DMAT team was here. We always—well, most of us came in on a daily basis, but it started to—you had a lot of strange people were going around stealing gas. They were punching screwdrivers through the back of gasoline [tanks] and stealing the gas. Everybody was trying to get—a panic for gas, a panic for everything. I mean, it was amazing to watch people at their best and people at their worst, and you get both, and fortunately, more of the best. And our people that were supposed to be here were just great; the nucleus was, and hopefully, because of what you’re doing, maybe we’ll be able to get that again because unfortunately FEMA came and paid two thousand dollars to everybody who left, and if you stayed and went through that, you got nothing. So the incentive, as several employees have told me, “If you expect me to be here next time, you’re wrong.” And they don’t say it out of anger; I mean they say it out of anger of the fact that they were ignored, and I don’t take it personal at all because I somewhat, I certainly agree with them. I have no choice; I’d be here again. But if it wasn’t the fact that I have the ultimate responsibility. I wouldn’t because of the same reason they wouldn’t, because that was insulting. So I don’t know how you
can undo that or if you possibly can. I know what we can do and what you’re attempting to do is honor the people that did stay and did go through all that and put their selves at risk, at great risk. And with that type of honoring, hopefully they’ll feel that it wasn’t done in vain. So hopefully I think that’s what, why we do what we do, and I think part of this job, I hope a lot of this job, but still it’s—you’ve got to have a dedication. You’ve got to have a—I really believe in those people that were here, and our strength was through all of us, and by having everybody get together and meet—we’d meet every, gosh, four hours. I don’t remember, but it was very often to make sure that everybody understood where we were. And the idea was to make sure communications stayed constant and, “What I know, you [also] know.” And if there’s an update, we’ll call another meeting. But it got to the point where we were housing a lot of people, and it was very warm in here, and I think within five days or three or four days, we went back on power here. Now, my wife says we were thirteen days, twenty-two hours and four minutes without power because she remembers exactly. You remember. (laughter) You don’t realize it until so many people have told me, it’s not just the storm; it’s the aftermath, and it’s that lack of power. It’s all those other things. And boy, they’re right. But you don’t believe, or you don’t understand that until you’ve been there and done that. And so I think that we were very fortunate to have survived. So many more things could’ve happened. The problems that we encountered, whether it be buildingwise, or whether it be city, county, we’ve already corrected it all. We’ve done what we have to do to be prepared for the next, whether it be a hurricane, a tornado or whatever it may be, we feel like we’re prepared. We’re better, and we feel like we did a good job; so we’re very proud of the fact that we were able to keep everything under control in a [panic] situation and avoid the panic because I think we saw very little of that, and there were just a bunch of very, very courageous people that went through something for the first times in their lives and stood right up to it. So I mean, I think that’s my recollection. I don’t know what else you’re looking [for.] We had several bad injuries come into the DMAT. We had, on a daily basis we would try—I would try and drive people out to the places I’ve—employees to their home because as long as I could try and get there—I mean, some places you just couldn’t get to, but we tried to be there for each other. And I think that’s when—we had several restaurants and what have you, that came by and dropped off food and says—we ate like kings, I mean, simply because it was going to go bad if they didn’t get rid of it. So we had to eat it right away because we didn’t have the space, and so we were feeding the DMAT people and feeding everybody, and if somebody came in, we fed them, too. But it was—I think we did as well as we could, but we—I think when you debrief from coming on anything, you can always find a better way to have done something. And I think we prevailed in doing that, whereas I believe that we are poised to do a better job for the next whatever incident occurs. And I think that by our prior training and setting up for the ones who didn’t happen, we were more prepared because you only know as far as you go. Well, now we’ve gone pretty far, so we’re ready for whatever we get dealt.

Jones: Tell me what sharing you’ve done with other hospitals or other hospital associations in regard to preparation.
**Grimm:** I think that we have met as a group of hospitals, the Mississippi Hospital Association; there’s a more of a southern group of hospitals that have gotten together. And what we’ve learned is to try and pool what resources we have. We’ve realized that there’s a lot of post-Katrina effect trying to make sure people are aware that you’re going to have a hard—people react, when they finally go, “Phew, it’s over.” Now they’re going to react a lot differently. When you’ve put yourself in harm’s way, you’re wanting family ahead of job or ahead of everything; everything changes. And doctors, a lot of the doctors changed; a lot of the employees changed as far as, “Oh, yeah. The job’s great.” It became their family because they felt like they could’ve lost that. So we tried to study and understand the effect of looking at the devastation, working on the devastation, what we can do to try and help people work through those things that we didn’t even know how to work through. And some you just did as you could. Those we could do where we could provide people or people who are trained to help people out, going through these kinds of things; we brought people in. I know Forrest General [Hospital] did that. I’m not sure. I think we did everything we could. And we continue to meet as an association and try and pass along anything that will be more helpful for us as a group of facilities, too. But you really can’t communicate during those things, and no matter what we come up with, I’m not sure—I’m sure we know how to take care of ourselves now, and that’s the most important. We have developed things we think that are going to help us communicate, but I’m not positive that Mother Nature is going to allow that. So if it does, then we’re ready, and we’ve made the—we’ve taken advantage of it, so we can better take care of the patients we have, and we know we will get them out of here quicker simply because we know we’re not going to have employees. “Go ahead; fire me.” They’re not very frightened by that anymore because most hospitals said if you didn’t come in and show, you’d lose your job, and some did. That didn’t occur here because the people we needed were here. I just think that we need to continue to figure out better ways of trying to do things. The DMAT that come in, we could’ve done other things. The second team, we didn’t realize how good the first team was until we got the second team, and they weren’t as trained. And you get spoiled, I guess, and we were because they were very, very good. And like, and then the next team wasn’t as good, so we do whatever we need to do.

**Jones:** How do you feel personally, right now, as we’ve entered the new hurricane season?

**Grimm:** Already having the first one come by? I feel like you just got to know that, I think the global warming or whatever you want to call it is certainly changing everything. And already the Gulf is as warm as it, warmer than it should be, and no telling what could grow, and we’re prepared to go through whatever we have to go through. I think once you’ve survived it, you get a little cocky and think that you can, “If that’s the best you got, we can take it.” And I’m not inviting one by any means, but I do believe that we’re not frightened by it now because we—it may be an old building, but it held up pretty—had it not been for that roof, we’d have been really in good shape, and yet we were able to replace a lot of equipment and fix a lot of things that probably we couldn’t have done without that, so I mean there was—(Side two)—
no one wants to—it’s not for filing insurance; it’s not for doing a lot of things. I think that FEMA came along or other groups came along and just gave money out, and all you had to do was stand in line, and that’s probably some of the worst things that can occur because the honesty of all people just isn’t always, isn’t there. And a lot of people signed up for things that they shouldn’t have gotten, and I don’t know. I don’t know how you can control all that and actually take care of those who need it. Hopefully they’ve learned a lot of lessons, too. But I think that we’re prepared; don’t know what’s going to be delivered next, but we do know that we’re the highest ground. Slidell is at about six feet, six to ten feet above sea level; we’re at eighty feet above sea level. That’s why we changed the name to Highland Community Hospital because we’re the high land. I think there’s a—if it’s broken, let’s just fix it, and we were fortunate because we didn’t have as much to fix. If you’ve been to Waveland and seen what a thirty-foot wave does, and some of those people I—until you go there and see that, you just don’t understand. You can see all the pictures you want, but actually looking and staring at that devastation is breathtaking. So there’s a certain amount of trepidation with the new season. There are certain—I don’t know; I’ve always respected scuba diving and skydiving, you name it. They’re all dangerous, but you learn to have respect for whatever you deal with, and I only thought I had respect for hurricanes. And I really do now. So I mean, I think we know what one can cause. We know we wouldn’t want the kids to go out across the street again. We learned a lot of things that we didn’t think we were doing wrong, but in retrospect we would’ve done differently. But overall I thought we did—I’d give us a B+ to B-, and certainly there’s things we could’ve done better.

Jones: Tell me how the roles changed during or after the hurricane. I understand—

Grimm: The roles?

Jones: Like that you learned—no, not that you learned how to mop, but you took on the mop and—

Grimm: Got you. Well, I think many people think of bosses as somebody who will just give orders. And I think that, to me, you’ve got to lead by doing, example. And we would go out, and I’d try to keep sweeping down the area outside of ER simply because it’s all rock and everything else, and anytime the helicopter came in, it was going to come into that area and only make it worse. Mopping, you’re just emptying the trash. I mean, I don’t think that—that’s something my mother taught us, that if there’s work to be done, just do it. And I think as a Green Beret—we had to work as teams of twelve, and everybody was equal. I mean you had to have three MOSs [military occupational specialties]. You had to make sure that you could pull your weight and somebody else’s weight. And I think that that’s what we—I think that I’ve never been above any job. If I’m going to tell somebody to do something I would’ve done—they asked me, they said, “You’re the boss. Is that why you”—I parked further away. I parked out on the street, all the time, and all of us in administration do, just to kind of set the example. And they said, “Well, do you pick up trash on the way in because we see you do that? Is that because you’re the boss?” “No. Actually, that’s
my mother’s fault because if I ever walked by it, she’d hit me in the back of the head, so to this day, I either duck or pick it up.” So I think some of my ability to believe that, that there’s no work that I can’t do, I think that, and I got taught by my mother; that’s just always there. And plus I really do believe that. Do I think that all the employees will start picking up trash because I picked up trash? No. Do I think that maybe one or two and eventually some more will? Yes. So I mean, do you do some things on purpose? Yes. But I would’ve picked that up—and I’m not doing it at Wal-Mart, and I will do it at my house, but I mean I’m not doing it for everybody, but if it’s just something that I feel I can help, I’m going to do that. So I mean, I felt like it was so important that we send a message to every employee that we’re only as strong as our weakest link, and if I’m the weak link, goodness gracious, that sends a horrible message. So I think that we, as leaders, have got to be the ones who are out there showing them that we are willing to do whatever it takes.

**Jones:** Give me some examples of some of the—as you mentioned, tough situations bring out the best in some people.

**Grimm:** And I think that as we saw panicky situations with employees, we would get them calmed down and then get calmer people. It’s amazing how one person panicking can set off many others, but by the way you handled the first panic and then you put somebody who isn’t as panicky but who’s starting, you put them in control of that. Then they stop panicking and start doing what they’re supposed to do. So you have to put people in different roles. I think we were very, very fortunate to have very few people that got into a panic situation, but I believe that what we were able to do was to be that team and to be there for each other. And that overcame a lot of the fear in the panic situations. Every time they’d come to us and say, “Well, geez, we need this on backup power.” And I’d say, “Steve,”—Steve’s the engineer who did just about everything—“is there any chance of doing that?” And sure enough he made it happen. So I mean, I don’t believe we believe that there’s anything that could’ve happened that we couldn’t handle. We had the accidents where people had the tree limb go through his neck and out his eye, and he came in. We airlifted him. We got him stabilized and airlifted him to Forrest General who, “We don’t want any part of that,” and sent him on to Jackson because it was more than they could handle. And yet a month later, a month and a half later, he came in, in a halo to thank everybody, and it was just, “whoa,” because I don’t think many people thought he would live. And it’s amazing what you can do, and I think that we saved and took care of a lot of people that probably aren’t as grateful, but you don’t make people grateful, either, or certainly that person, that one person chose to be grateful, but that doesn’t mean that everyone will be.

**Jones:** Is there anything that we haven’t asked you that you would want to share?

**Grimm:** Probably just the respect I have for all those employees who actually gave everything they had and more, and really toughed it out and did what I think they should do, but not—people don’t always do. And they were terrific at it. And you don’t know that you can do it until you have to, until you’ve been put in that position.
They accepted that role and stood up and stood tall, so I mean that’s important to me to know that. I think that we helped them achieve that, but they achieved it.

Jones: Thank you.

Ruel: Thank you.

(end of interview)