

History
of the
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: Barbara George

Interviewer: John P. Swann, Ph.D.

Date: September 12, 2007

Place: New Orleans District Office
Temporary Relocated to
Nashville, TN



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Interview with Barbara George
New Orleans District Office
Temporarily Relocated to Nashville
September 12, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: The date is September 12th, 2007. This is an interview with Barbara George at the New Orleans District Office, temporarily relocated to Nashville, Tennessee. And we're going to be talking about Barbara's experience during Hurricane Katrina.

Okay, Barbara, let's start with how it is you came, where it is you grew up, and how it is you came to FDA.

BG: Okay, John.

My name is Barbara Ann Mary Liggio -- that's L-i-g-g-i-o -- George, Liggio being my maiden name. I'm Italian, 100 percent, on both sides. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on July 23rd, and I won't say the year. But I am originally from there, born and raised, although everybody thinks I'm from Brooklyn or the New York area because of my accent.

I was raised in Saint Bernard Parish, lived there my entire life, what I used to call God's country. But it was like a spit away from New Orleans because I only lived about two minutes from the Orleans Parish line.

I attended grammar school, middle school, and high school in St. Bernard Parish, graduated in 1969. I have some college background; went to Saint Bernard Community College, which turned into Nunez Community College; the University of New Orleans; and took a semester of Italian at Tulane, a noncredit course.

My background: my parents were both Italian Sicilians. My mom was born in New Orleans; my dad in Lake Charles, Louisiana. My grandparents on my mom's side were born in the United States. My grandparents on my dad's side were from Palermo, Sicily. And I had a brother, David, who was four years older than me. My mom, my dad, and my brother are all deceased. I started with FDA . . .

JS: Before you go into that, what did your father do?

BG: My dad was a laborer. He worked for Kaiser Aluminum in Chalmette, Louisiana. And, actually, where I lived in Saint Bernard Parish was Arabi, Louisiana, A-r-a-b-i. My dad worked at Kaiser for 29 years before retiring.

My mom was a wife and homemaker.

My brother worked for the state Department of Transportation for 30 years and retired at the age of 50. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with colon cancer and passed away the following year.

My mom and dad also passed away of colon cancer; it runs in the family.

Anyway, I graduated high school and started working at some little stores in the downtown area. My uncle, my mom's brother, always worked for the Federal

government, and he always encouraged his nieces and nephews to work for the Federal government, and everybody was like, "Yeah, yeah."

Well, I listened to him and I applied for a job, and I started working at USDA, at Michoud Assembly Facility, in New Orleans East, as a summer hire, and I worked there for about two weeks. Then I was called for an interview for FDA. This was in 1973, and I got the position.

Well, actually, after my interview, I walked out and I said, "Boy, did I mess that up," and I really didn't think I was going to get the job. And then I was called and I was offered the job, and, of course, I grabbed it.

JS: And what was the job?

BG: The job I was interviewed and hired for was a GS-2 receptionist. But when I came on my first day, the lady that was hired maybe a few days before me as the laboratory director's secretary, became the receptionist. She did not want to work for the laboratory director, so they made her receptionist and they made me the laboratory director's secretary. And the laboratory director at that time was Martin Goldstein, a really wonderful man, and we got to be very good friends, very good friends. I worked for him for six years.

We were in the U.S. Customs House building on Canal Street, in the heart of New Orleans right by the French Quarter.

Around, let's see, I guess it was, I want to say '78, the District Director at the time was Robert Bartz. His secretary, Sandy Sellers, transferred to Dallas District. She met

and married and is still married to Dave Root, who was, I believe, the lab director in Denver District. And, again, this is in the late '70s.

Anyway, when she left our office, I was selected. I put in for the position, was selected as the DD secretary, and I've been in that position ever since. Of course it has evolved, and now it's the Program Support Specialist.

JS: You've had a lot of District Directors over the years.

BG: Oh, yeah, went through several that I've had to "train." But, yes. Robert Bartz was the first District Director I worked for, and then it was Edward Esparza, then Jim Gamet, then Carl Draper, and now Tyler Thornburg. I don't think I left anyone out. So .

..

JS: So you've enjoyed working at the agency?

BG: Oh, yeah, I love FDA. It's always been a family.

In New Orleans, my thoughts of New Orleans -- you asked me to give you that -- my hometown area; I've always loved New Orleans.

I especially miss the food because there is just no food like New Orleans food. And here in Nashville, I've gotta tell you, it's an effort here to try to . . . But I cook; I like to cook, so I make up for it. But going out to eat, we're starting to find some good places.

JS: How about seafood? Can you get pretty good seafood with effort?

BG: No. What I do is when I cook seafood, everything's frozen, especially the shrimp. When I cook, instead of throwing the shrimp into the pot and just cooking it with everything (it doesn't pick up the flavor), I season it first and get that flavor into the seafood, and then put it in. Otherwise, it's just bland.

So you have your regular chains like Red Lobster and stuff like that. But we're just starting to find some really nice places. It just takes a little hunting down and getting used to the area. But for the most part, it's still nothing like New Orleans food, really.

JS: Well, New Orleans is certainly a city of gastronomic delight.

Also, obviously, growing up there, you had a vast network of friends and family there, right?

BG: Yes. Well, of course, my mom, my dad, and my brother were there until they passed away. The last was my brother, in 1998. I have some friends there I've known since first grade and I still keep in touch with, and one of them even came up here to help us move into our house when we purchased a house and all. [unclear], I guess.

Family, otherwise, I still have cousins down there on both sides of my family. My husband has his aunts and uncle down there, and I met my husband down there. He's not originally from New Orleans, but he lived down there for about 20 years, never really cared for it that much, doesn't eat all the good seafood.

JS: Where's he from?

BG: Well, he was born in Farmington, New Mexico, grew up pretty much in the Illinois area, Tampico, and Baytown, Texas, and then from Baytown, came over to New Orleans. We met in 1982, and got married in 1983. Then in 1986, my daughter, Tiffany, was born, who also works here at FDA. She's a full-time student at Middle Tennessee State University and loves the university, and now loves living here, as do I. My husband is a teacher at an elementary school. He teaches second grade, and he's loved it here from day one. My daughter and I -- I'll get to that a little later [unclear].

JS: When did your daughter start as I guess a part-time employee at the agency?

BG: She never worked with the agency before. It was once we came here. She's always wanted to work for FDA because I always brought her in to the Take Your Child to Work day, and she just loved it. She knows a lot of the New Orleans people and grew up at the same time their children grew up. But she was hired as a student worker, and of course they work around her college schedule and everything. She'll be in the office later today. FDA is wonderful and the people here are wonderful, working around her schedule and allowing her to have the freedom of going to school, which is the whole idea of the program.

JS: We've depended heavily on student help during the summers in the FDA History

Office, so I agree completely with you about how the agency makes this happen, and that's helpful.

BG: As a matter of fact, she has been working for FDA a year this month. She started last September.

JS: So she must like it.

BG: Yeah.

JS: Now, New Orleans has witnessed many storms over the years, some near-misses, some that have not missed New Orleans over the years -- obviously, none with the impact that Hurricane Katrina had. Share a little bit about your experiences with past hurricanes that have come in or near New Orleans. What was that like?

BG: Well, when you grow up in New Orleans, you're used to hurricanes. Give me a hurricane any day compared to a tornado here. I mean, tornadoes, you just never know when they're coming. A hurricane, you know when they're coming and you can prepare for it.

The major hurricane in my life was Katrina, and, of course, Katrina was the worst, but also Hurricane Betsy back in 1965. I was 14 years old and lived only a couple of blocks from where I lived with Hurricane Katrina. We had to leave our home then also. We went to bed at night. The next morning we woke up, the water had already risen. My

mom and dad tried to pick things up off the floor and they were able to salvage some things. It wasn't as bad, naturally, as Hurricane Katrina. Some things we lost, things that were on the floor, things where the water went up high enough that it got on things. They put things on the bed, and the bed, of course, absorbed the water and stuff like that.

When we did leave, the water was getting ready to enter the house. It was a raised house with three steps. The water rose up to the bottom of the windowsills.

We left there, and my mom, my dad, my brother, and I got on a boat. Someone picked us up, brought us so far. We got off, waded in the water a little bit until a National Guard Duck picked us up, and we went to my grandmother's house, who lived in New Orleans but not that far away from us, but far enough where the water had not risen yet.

The rumor was and still is that the Army Corps of Engineers blew the levee by the bridge, which caused the flooding in the lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans and back into Saint Bernard Parish. There's been a lot of talk about it, but it did happen, to save the New Orleans side of the Industrial Canal.

JS: So they intentionally had allowed water to come over the levee. And which levee are we talking about?

BG: It was, well, supposedly it was where there was a breach for Hurricane Katrina. The hearsay is it's in the exact same spot. Forty years later, they tried to save the city again. This time it really backfired.

But back then, there was a furniture store, Universal. The man who owned it helped a lot of the families. He gave free beds, free bedding out to families who were affected and everything at his cost, I mean, his own loss, I should say, free to everybody.

We eventually had to leave my grandma's house because the water had risen, and there was the threat of flooding in her house. We stayed at my great-aunt's house, who lived in New Orleans, for a couple of weeks, until we were able to return to my grandma's house. My mom and dad would go back to our home and wash the walls and everything. I lived in that house until I got married in 1983.

JS: So you were able to go back. I mean, your house, though damaged, was still repairable.

BG: Yes.

JS: It was still, certainly, habitable when you went back.

BG: Yes, yes. And everybody's was; everybody was able to go back. It wasn't the devastation that Katrina did. This was just, okay, we have mold, we have mildew. You wash it. It was only the lower part of the walls. The water wasn't in the house as long, maybe a couple of weeks, compared to three weeks and more for Katrina. So we were able to return, and we went from there.

JS: But you didn't evacuate.

BG: No, we did not evacuate. My family did not evacuate a lot. Evacuation meant we would go to the levee by the Mississippi River, and park up there on high ground. We never left. As a child growing up, we never left for hurricanes. We withstood the hurricanes.

The threat is the water. New Orleans is surrounded by water. It's like just a sitting duck. You have the Mississippi River, you have Lake Pontchartrain, you have the Gulf of Mexico, and then all of those Gulf outlets. It's just totally surrounded by water.

JS: It's like a bowl.

BG: Yeah, it's like a bowl. To get out of the city was impossible, the congestion of the cars and stuff like that. It was really impossible.

The house I lived in before Hurricane Katrina was under water for Hurricane Betsy, but, of course, they fixed it up, they remodeled it, and everything like that, although when we did some remodeling in that home and pulled out some walls or paneling, because they paneled the walls, you could see the sheetrock underneath was just crumbled. So they didn't really repair it; they just covered it.

We had a brick house. I don't know if it was brick before Hurricane Betsy and they bricked over the wood afterwards. In my neighborhood, there weren't a lot of brick houses. There was wood or vinyl siding.

But anyway, everybody made it through Hurricane Betsy.

It wasn't until we lived in that home, though, after we got married and bought this house, that we evacuated for hurricanes, my husband, my daughter, and I, because of the fact I knew what Hurricane Betsy was like, and Hurricane Camille on the Gulf Coast was devastating, devastated the area also, and that was bad.

So with my experience -- of course, my husband had no experience with hurricanes and my daughter didn't either -- we did not leave unless it was a category 3 or higher, because then I knew that it could be a lot worse. It could cause flooding.

Our house where we lived was kind of low. The garage always flooded after a hard rain. We always had to vacuum it out with one of those indoor-outdoor vac things, the water and all that. So we lived in a low-lying area.

We did have flood insurance. It was mandatory to have flood insurance.

JS: Probably not inexpensive either.

BG: Pardon?

JS: The flood insurance probably was not inexpensive either, was it?

BG: Well, flood insurance, compared to other insurance, is not expensive. Flood insurance for the year was two-hundred-and-something dollars, where homeowner's is more expensive. And it was the flood insurance that really helped us out during Katrina. It was really weird because you could pay just the basic flood insurance, or you can pay just, I think it was \$25 more to have better coverage, and sometimes I didn't pay that

extra coverage. But in the past few years, I have done so, and thank goodness, because it made a difference of, like, \$33,000. So the coverage we would have without the premium side of it, was coverage for \$50,000. And then that extra \$25 I had to pay for a whole year of coverage brought it up another \$33,000. It was an inflation thing.

JS: Right. This covered structure, not necessarily contents of your homes, right?

BG: No, contents was separate.

JS: Let's kind of fast-forward here. Now, you've had the Betsy experience.

BG: Yeah.

JS: That was obviously a huge storm.

Let's go forward now to August of 2005, and you're working at FDA and you have a storm that has already hit and moved across Florida in late August, August 25th, and the weekend's coming up. You're working at the district office.

BG: Yes.

JS: It's Friday. So, I mean, at this point, do you recall at this stage, two years after the fact, what were people thinking about this storm, and what preparations, if any, the agency, the district office, was making?

BG: Wow. Some things you block out.

Normally, when we know a hurricane is coming, we cover all our computers. We turn them off, we cover them.

JS: Cover them as in put a piece of plastic on them or something?

BG: Yeah, the plastic covers, because we don't do that every day normally, but we put the plastic covers on them. Our IT person takes home backup stuff for our computer systems. That's the type of things we do. Every year, the District Director issues a memo to all employees about the directions to follow for evacuations, what they need to do. Employees are supposed to have this at all times, but mainly during hurricane season. Hurricane season runs from June through November. So we issue that every year and then, as a reminder, here are your contact numbers, the supervisors' phone numbers, cell phones, and all that, radio stations to listen to, etc.

For this particular hurricane, though, I don't recall the preparation, because it wasn't there yet. Leaving that Friday, it wasn't in our area yet, and we didn't really expect the hit. I don't recall the preparation.

JS: Well, I think some people were thinking this was going to make a turn up to the Florida, over the Florida Panhandle.

BG: Yeah, it wasn't a real threat to us yet. And so I don't think, I don't remember covering my computer. I don't think I did.

JS: So when you left work on Friday, it wasn't necessary . . .

BG: I expected to be back at work on Monday. Yeah. It wasn't necessary to do anything.

You wanted to know something about what we were doing personally.

That summer, we were remodeling our garage ourselves, my husband, my daughter, and I. We were actually pulling down each wall one at a time, supporting the roof, and replacing all the studs, and every stud, every corner had hurricane clips. I even joked about it with my family. I said, "My God, by the time we remodel this garage and get it done, we will be able to move in here for hurricanes, because it's not going to knock this garage down."

JS: Tell us what a hurricane clip is.

BG: Well, it's just a little metal piece. I know you can't -- they won't be able to see this. But you have your stud, your roofline, your flooring, and it's just a little metal clip that supports the stud at each corner of the stud.

JS: It's like an L bracket.

BG: Yeah, yeah, kind of like an L bracket.

JS: And that fastens from either the floor or the ceiling.

BG: From the floor to the stud or your ceiling to the stud, and it's just extra support to make your support stronger so it will stand up to high winds, stuff like that.

So we had replaced, already, all four walls with studs. We had them covered with that silver stuff, Tyvek, whatever they call it, and we were starting to work on our roof. We were doing that every afternoon after work, and weekends. That summer was pretty much devoted to remodeling our garage. We even raised, because our garage flooded a lot, we even laid concrete, raised the chain wall about a foot, and we did that ourselves, laid the concrete and smoothed it out. Yeah, we really worked hard that summer. Wow. And it was Saturday, August . . .

JS: Twenty-seventh.

BG: Yeah, August 27th, and the phone kept ringing. And we have to get off a ladder, go . . . My daughter was sleeping. It was still early, and she was sleeping. And finally she got the phone, figuring we were out there working. She's getting the phone, and we can't make it to it, so she's probably aggravated because somebody's waking her up real early.

So she came out and she said, "Miss Kathy wants to know where we're going."

“What do you mean where we’re going?”

“For the hurricane.”

“What hurricane?”

We weren’t paying any attention to it. We were working on our garage, and it was like full-time work when we got home from work and the weekends and all. We had not listened to the weather or the news or anything, so we were like, “It’s coming our way?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

So she went in and, well, called my girlfriend back and said, “Well, we’re heading to Texas,” because that’s where my mother-in-law lived, lives still, in Baytown, Texas.

So that Saturday, my daughter packed a few things to take with her, mainly shoes -- she’s a shoe person, so a lot of shoes -- and some of her tapes that she had, her movies and DVDs and stuff.

My husband and I worked on the garage because then it was not remodeling it, it was covering it and preparing it for a storm. We had to get plywood. We had a huge bay window on our home, and we had a huge, huge piece of plywood we placed on the bay window and other windows, of course, and a stake we wedged into the ground to hold the plywood up on the bay window, because there was nothing to screw into, really. And so we did that and we worked till 9:00 Saturday night doing nothing but preparing for the storm, and that was covering all the windows. The smaller windows, where the wind does not really hit, were taped. We put tape on the windows, masking tape or whatever. So that was the prep.

They announced there would be a Contraflow this year, which the city badly needed. A Contraflow is when they reverse traffic so more traffic is going out of the city than coming in.

Also, when you left the city, whichever way you decided to go, you had to make sure you were in the correct lane.

TAPE 1, SIDE B

BG: If you were in the far left lane on I-10 going west, which is going where we were heading. Then it would take you, in that Contraflow system, out of the city going west to Texas. If you were in maybe the right lane, and got to where the Contraflow actually forked out, then you were in the flow that had to go across the Causeway which took you north, going into the Covington area and further north.

Well, we knew we had to stay west, so when we left, which was during the Contraflow -- the Contraflow was certain hours, and I don't recall the hours. It was maybe like from 10:00 p.m. Saturday night until sometime the afternoon of Sunday that they did this Contraflow. We left at 3:00 in the morning, Sunday morning, 3:00 a.m. And we knew because it was a very dangerous storm coming in, category, I believe it was already a category 5 when it was coming in, very bad, very bad, and we knew we had to leave. It was no staying. And . . .

JS: Let me just ask this. Obviously, you had every expectation you'd be coming back.

BG: Yes.

JS: So there probably wasn't any thought of, "Gee, what do I need to bring with me?" Or did that go through your mind? Obviously, your daughter was packing up some tapes or DVDs and stuff.

BG: Yes. That was her first evacuation, actually, because when we had evacuated the year before for Ivan, my husband and I, my daughter was away at college in Lafayette, Louisiana, and we evacuated to Lafayette to be with her. And we always, whenever there's an evacuation, a lot of times when a hurricane comes to New Orleans, sometimes it says, they say a direct hit would destroy the city. Well, Katrina was not a direct hit and it destroyed the city. But you take a few things because you go through this all the time: Oh, here we go again. Okay? It's going to miss the city; it's going to bypass the city. You only take maybe two or three days' worth of clothing. You don't take food with you. You're going to get it on the road, you know.

A lot of times when a hurricane's coming, people call sometimes a week ahead of time if they think it's going to come our way, start making hotel reservations, because you're not going to find a hotel, and so you just keep on driving, you keep on driving. You don't find a hotel until you go further north or further west or something like that.

We did call ahead for Ivan and found a hotel in Lafayette, which was a terrible hotel. We did find someplace else to go. It was really a pretty bad place.

We only took a few days of clothes. We were away for three days, mainly for the better part of the weekend. I think we left, I think it was on a Thursday, and we left.

My daughter called and said, "Okay, I'll wait for y'all to go to lunch."

We left around 9:00 that morning, maybe 9:00, 10:00, and it's only like a three-hour drive, two-and-a-half, three-hour drive to Lafayette from where we live.

We did not get there -- at noon, we were still on the Causeway. We did not get to Lafayette until 9:00 that night.

JS: Twelve hours.

BG: Yeah. So it was bad. There was no Contraflow. That's a prime example of how traffic can be.

We sat on the Causeway. The Causeway is like a 24-mile bridge over Lake Pontchartrain, and we just sat there and just looked at water. Not a good thing sometimes when you're sitting there that long.

But anyway, that was Ivan.

For Katrina, when we left at 3:00 a.m. and we knew we wanted to stay west, we stayed in the far left lane just in case. We didn't know exactly how the Contraflow was. It was confusing. We didn't have a Contraflow before. It worked beautifully, and I guess it was different for different people maybe. From the time you left, there was a lot of traffic. Instead of being able to go 70, maybe we went 50 for a while, but it moved. It wasn't a standstill. And where it usually takes us six hours to drive to my mother-in-

law's house, I believe it took us between seven and eight hours. So it wasn't that much longer. And that was really a good thing that the city did for Katrina.

For those who decided to wait till the last minute to leave, then they probably had a lot more problems. Yeah.

We did not take a lot of things because, again, you felt, even though this was a big storm, here we go again. You know, we've had big storms where the FDA closed, the director closed the New Orleans office, and sometimes it turned out to be a sunny day, which was like, oh, this is embarrassing, I'm sure, for the DD, but you never know. You never know what a hurricane's going to do.

For example, Hurricane Betsy originally was not coming toward New Orleans, and when it got in the Gulf, it actually -- I can't tell you the exact route it took, but I know it looped around and came back, and then it hit New Orleans after it looped. So you never know what a hurricane's going to do. They really can only guess.

JS: Well, in your case, did you say your home is one story or two stories?

BG: My home was one story.

JS: Okay. So there probably wasn't any reason to think it was necessary to take things, irreplaceable type things, and put them in a place in the attic or wherever. Water is not necessarily what you think about. Right?

BG: Well, you don't really think about it. Well, that's not really true. You do think

about it. I'd say in a normal situation for us, we probably would have picked things up and tried to put them on higher ground, up in the attic or something like that. But because we were working on our garage and we worked all day boarding it up so nothing would happen to it, we devoted our time to that. And then, all we did that night was listen to the news, because it was constant news, you didn't watch anything else, listening to the weather reports, just preparing. There's only so much you can do. If it's going to hit and if it's going to tear your house up, there's nothing you can do. Like I said, we only took two or three days' worth of clothing.

One thing I did differently for this storm -- and I don't know if it was the Lord talking to me -- something I never do, and that is, I had our passports sitting up on our dresser, and I just hadn't put them away. I usually -- everybody has a junk drawer; I had a bill drawer I threw things in, and I had the passports in there. And then I kept taking them out, and I put them on top of the dresser thinking, "I need to file these away." Well, I had not filed them away, so I grabbed the passports. And then I had this metal box that I kept in my file cabinet that had our birth certificates and my daughter's savings bonds and our wills, something that you're supposed to have in a safe deposit box, but I didn't do that. But I had it, and something told me to take that box. I had never done that before, like the year before when we left for Ivan or when we left for Hurricane Georges. But something told me to take that stuff.

Fortunately, that was a big help to us. So many people, afterwards, did not have account numbers or did not have this or did not have that, and I had things that helped me along the way.

From day one, well, not, yeah, I guess from day one, once we heard of the devastation . . .

JS: You're in Baytown at this point.

BG: Yeah. At this point we're in Baytown.

We arrived at my mother-in-law's house and we put on the news and started listening and started -- it was just something so hard to comprehend.

There was the Red Cross in Baytown. We went to the Red Cross looking . . . My husband was concerned about one of his friends, and we went to try to find information out about him, to see if they could locate people and stuff like that, and they said, "Well, we really can't help you with that right now. Do you need any clothes or anything?"

It had not sunk in of our loss, even though we had seen it on TV, and all the water, we said, "Oh, no, no, we're okay, we're fine. Keep it for people who'll need it." And that was the general feeling at first. There was confusion. You would look at TV, and all you would see were rooftops because the water was up to the roofs. And where are we? I mean, you don't know your house or your area by the roofs. So you're looking at TV and the cameras would go by and there would be street signs, but they would go by them too fast. They didn't focus on the street sign. And you're watching. Where are they? But we didn't find out until later that Saint Bernard Parish, where we lived, was totally cut off and no one could even get in there. So those pictures were not where we lived.

But it was just devastating. It was, “Oh, my God!” and you were glued, really glued to the TV. There was not one minute you wanted to miss. And we didn’t leave the TV. And you just started hearing things.

And then I remember hearing, “You need to go onto, for Saint Bernard Parish, go onto the Saint Bernard website. Here’s the website, here are these websites.”

So you start getting on the computer. And my mother-in-law did not own a computer and still doesn’t own a computer. So we had to go to the local library to try to read and see what was going on. And that’s when you started reading things: You need to register with SBA. You need to do this. I said, “Well, we’re not getting a loan. I mean, we’re going home.” It still didn’t sink in, the loss that occurred.

But I said, I told my husband, “We’d better do this.” I’m the paperwork person in the family, so I did all of this stuff. I said, “We need to do this. Even if we don’t use it, we need to apply, apparently. They’re telling us we need to do this.” So we did it, and you got your number, your application number or case number or whatever they called it.

So we just really hung out for about a week and a half at my mother-in-law’s house just, again, glued to the TV. That’s all we watched. She didn’t even get to watch her programs.

JS: Now, where you were, was there any Federal Emergency Management Administration, FEMA, presence where you were?

BG: Where I was in Baytown? I don’t recall a FEMA presence, just Red Cross.

JS: Okay. That was primarily in New Orleans itself.

BG: Yes.

JS: And Mississippi, of course.

BG: Yeah, Mississippi. Mississippi was devastated. We have a vacation home in Diamondhead, Mississippi. It received . . .

JS: Which is where?

BG: It is, traveling I-10 east, it is east of New Orleans, about 60 miles from where we lived, and it was our weekend place to go and stuff like that. We have a log home there. That area got a lot of damage. We were fortunate because our log home is built eight feet off the ground.

Diamondhead is exit 16 as you're going east on I-10. It is a community that covers both sides of the interstate and was developed in the '70s. They established that area, and it was for retirees, people who wanted to retire to a nice little community. They had golf, they had tennis, you know, one of those little retirement places. Now it's a family place. It's more than just a retirement place.

But my brother and I had invested in property together, and we had this home built in the '80s, which, of course, is not completely done because we had a contractor

who stole our money and blah-blah-blah. That's another story. But anyway, we worked in our house throughout the years, again, doing things ourselves.

But the other side of Diamondhead was totally destroyed. Diamondhead, Mississippi, is right around Bay Saint Louis, totally destroyed, clothes in the trees. It was just like New Orleans. You heard more about New Orleans than the Gulf Coast, the Mississippi Gulf Coast. And, of course, this area is about a half-hour from Gulfport and Biloxi, where they had major damage too, and along the Bay Saint Louis area and all that.

The side where we lived had a lot of damage, but it wasn't totally wiped out like the other side. The other side was closer to the Jordan River that flowed into the Bay.

There was flooding on our side. Again, luckily, we were built up off the ground, eight feet off the ground, so we did not get flooded. We had minor damage. We lost our refrigerator with all the food. The chimney cap came off the chimney to the fireplace. And my husband had a shed down on the ground with a lot of his tools, and we lost all of that. There was a lot of flooding in the area. To go to that area, the first time we went down there, it was a shock because we didn't expect that there. Everybody had their carpets pulled out. Our neighbors were out of town when the hurricane hit, so they were panicked.

Because that was our vacation home like, and we had to move up here to Nashville, we opened up our home to our neighbors, and we told them that they could live there and move their stuff there for as long as they needed while they repaired their home.

They had just inches of water in their home, but by the time, because they were out of town, too, by the time they were allowed to go back into the area, I believe three weeks had gone by, and even though they only had inches of water, the mold was all the way up their walls. So they have had a lot of problems with contractors and stuff, so even though they are now in a FEMA trailer, their home is . . . I'm sure that by now -- we went back there this past June, and I believe they were getting ready to start moving things back in their home.

But they still have a lot of stuff stored in our cabin, and they still use it. They cook in there and all that. That's no problem. They consider that a Godsend, really, and it was also good for us because they kept an eye on our place because of any looting and stuff like that. And they're still using it.

JS: So we left you in Baytown, and this is right after the storm. You're realizing the devastation that is New Orleans now.

BG: Yeah.

JS: And, obviously, work is probably the farthest thing from your mind at this point. You're wondering if you even have a home to go back to.

BG: Yeah.

JS: But at some point you call, I guess, the District Director, or you're called by someone? No one knows where you are necessarily. Right?

BG: Right. No one -- we have a COOP [Continuity of Operations Plan] plan, and in our COOP plan it says, in the event of a disaster or something, or we had to relocate, then the relocation was here in Nashville.

JS: So that was known in advance, that if relocations were necessary . . .

BG: Well, it was known, and that COOP plan was new, okay, so it was known and it was not known, I would say. But in the event of a hurricane, when you evacuate, you're not thinking, "I'm not coming home." So you're going to wherever hotel or whatever relative or wherever you need to go to keep your family safe. And it is your responsibility, if it affects work or the time you're supposed to be at work, then it is your responsibility to contact your supervisor and let him know your whereabouts, and that's what I did.

Let's see. By this point, I don't even know because we were there. So Sunday we were in Baytown. Monday, the hurricane actually hit. I don't know when I called in. I don't recall what day it was.

JS: Where did you call? Because I understand phones were, well, connections were a problem.

BG: I called Tyler's, he's my immediate supervisor, Tyler Thornburg, and I called his cell phone.

JS: You got through.

BG: Yeah. And, as I recall, yeah.

JS: He was up here at the time.

BG: He was here. He came directly here. And I let him know where I was and my phone number, my cell phone number.

And then I said, "Do you want me to go to the Houston Resident Post? I could report there to work."

And he said, "No, just stay put."

I said, "Okay, but I'm not that far from Houston, maybe 25, 30 miles. I can go there if you want me to."

I wasn't thinking that, what am I going to do once I get there? We're not on the same network. It's a different region, so computer-wise, I couldn't do anything really. I couldn't get into our own network. So there was really nothing I could do.

And it was like, "No, just sit tight until we hear further. You're on administrative leave right now."

JS: So at this point in the conversation, there's no discussion about Nashville.

BG: No, not at this point.

JS: It's just, stay where you are.

BG: Because I am one that, you know, coming up through FDA, I've always worked for management, so I know how they operate. So I know what's expected of me, too. And I'm a very conscientious person, so I know that my first duty is to contact my supervisor and let him know where I am, and that was, that had to be on Monday. It had to be. I don't know why I would have waited longer than that, really, just to let him know where I am.

We were there a little over a week, August 29th, through Thursday, I guess, before Labor Day. So Labor Day was the 6th that year, I believe. It was around September 2nd maybe that . . . As a matter of fact, I had to call in every day, actually, and talk to him because, of course, I'm trained. You don't show up for work, you call in every day. That's what I'm trained to do.

JS: The government encourages that, I think.

BG: Yeah. And I'm there with FDA for 34 years, so I'm kind of used to that, you know. So I call in.

And I remember Tyler even saying, “You don’t have to call me every single day. I know where you are.”

And I said, “Okay.” And that was . . .

JS: But it’s probably important to mention also that, among your responsibilities is you make arrangements for the District Director’s travel.

BG: Yes.

JS: You were doing that at the time that this happened, right? Or was this after you moved to Nashville?

BG: You mean, for what travel?

JS: For the District Director.

BG: I always did his travel.

JS: You always did that. Okay.

BG: Yeah, always did that. That was always part of my duties. But his travel up here to Nashville was, everybody was in their own vehicles kind of thing, and it wasn’t, at that point, it wasn’t official.

JS: I guess people weren't concerned about cutting travel orders or things like this at this point.

BG: No, no. That was not in the picture.

But I remember that, though I didn't have to call in, when he told me I didn't have to call in every day, I only skipped one day. And then I called in the following day, and I spoke with Howard Lewis, who was Director of the Nashville Branch at that time, and he . . . I talked to him because I knew Tyler was busy, you know, and had to be taking care of all the stuff, because of course everything was all confusing and everything.

So Howard said to me, "Well, Barbara, you know you have to come up here to Nashville."

I said, "Oh, okay." I mean, I felt totally confused.

He says, "Well, we're making the calls around." He says, "I'm sure Tyler was going to call you. He just hasn't called you yet."

And I said, "Well, okay, but I do need to talk with him now."

And I talked with Tyler, as I remember, and he said, "Yes, you need to report to Nashville the day after Labor Day."

So I said, "Okay." And they gave us the information.

Marie Clendening was the Program Support Specialist here. And I say was. Both Howard and Marie are now retired. That's why I'm saying "was."

And she -- Tyler was working with her, and she started making all the arrangements and all of the logistical stuff for all of us to come up here, finding a hotel

that would take us. I think there was two hotels in particular that they found where they started reserving rooms for us.

And I can remember that I was told, “Okay, here’s the information. There’s the Marriott Residence Inn,” and then there was the other one, which I can’t remember off the top of my head. “And this is the phone number,” blah-blah-blah. Okay.

So as soon as I got off the phone, I was like, “Wow!” My mother-in-law, my husband, and my daughter were there. I said, “I need to go to Nashville, and I need to report directly there,” not thinking, okay, this is our COOP plan, not thinking about that, just, I need to report to Nashville. Okay.

And I just sat there, and I said, “Well, there is information about the hotel and all that.” And that’s all I did at first, was just sit.

And my husband said, “Here’s the phone. You need to call and make a reservation,” because I think I was like just shocked.

And I’m not sure what I was shocked about, just that point sometimes you get at where you say, “What do I do now?” because, of course, your mind is not clear to begin with because of everything that’s happened. And the realization is by this time setting in: I don’t have a home to go home to. And you realize . . .

And, of course, I didn’t mention our dog. We had our 14-year-old dog with us also, no, 13 at the time. She’s now 15.

But the realization that’s setting in that I have nothing to go back to. Everything’s gone. And that’s still hard, because then they’re starting with the Internet photos, and we did find our house on the Internet. It was difficult to find, but all we could see was the roof, and that was it, because -- that was it. It was covered with water.

And I want to mention, John, that I have, if you're interested, I have something on my computer that's a Katrina timeline that shows the actual way the hurricane came in and the areas it hit and the times it hit all the different locations, if you're interested in that.

JS: That would be great to see and to add to the record.

BG: It's really, the whole thing has gone from something that was a tremendous thing to accept, to a most humbling thing, and the acceptance there is so difficult.

And I think I'm moving really slow in this interview. Am I going too slow?

JS: You're doing great. Don't worry about it.

BG: Okay.

So, anyway, where was I?

JS: You got the call to go to Nashville, which obviously is a shock. It's, "I'm going to Nashville, I'm staying somewhere."

And probably it's worth mentioning for the record that, do you travel much as part of your work in the agency?

BG: No.

JS: Okay.

BG: In a support position, support people just don't travel. It's rare.

JS: But it's important that we hear that.

BG: Yeah. I think the last travel I had done was when I received an award, the Georgia Davis award. I believe it was that year, 2005, when I was up there.

JS: And also, your work in the agency had been at only one station, right? New Orleans.

BG: Yes, just a different office.

JS: So, as an FDA employee, you were not moved around a whole lot.

BG: No.

JS: This was your work site.

BG: My hometown and my work site, and the only move was to different offices. We went from Canal Street. We moved out of there when they started renovating the U.S.

Customs House for Customs because they were in there, U.S. Customs, and we moved to our Elysian Fields office, and we spent, we had a 20-year lease there, but we were there maybe 21 years. And then we moved out to the New Orleans East office, where we were when the hurricane hit.

JS: Which is where?

BG: It was on Plaza Drive right across from the Lake Forest Mall, shopping mall, which doesn't exist anymore either.

JS: Okay.

BG: So it was in the New Orleans East area.

My drive to work, I loved it. It was like 20 minutes, no traffic, because I was going the opposite way from everyone else, and I loved it. And we were on the fourth floor. And it was an all-glass building, all windows.

The other thing we used to do in preparation for a hurricane was, because we were all glass, you'd make sure you closed all the blinds because of the glass, in case of broken glass or something like that.

JS: Right. Did you tape windows?

BG: No, we didn't tape windows. We had floor-to-ceiling . . . Well, the DD's office

and my office and I believe one side of the building was floor-to-ceiling windows, and then the rest was halfway, if I remember. Either they were halfway or they were covered up with cubicle things halfway up, something like that. But it was all windows, yeah, it was all windows.

JS: The description helps.

Now, Tuesday after Labor Day, you and your family have ended up in Nashville, and you've settled in at the Residence Inn, I understand.

BG: Yes. We went to the Residence Inn.

JS: So the three of you are there.

BG: Excuse me a minute because I need to really tell you a little story about that.

Before we get to Nashville, well, of course, I didn't have any clothes, so I had to go buy a few things. That I did. I had an encounter with some shopping people there who were talking about Katrina people coming into their city . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE A

JS: Okay. We're going to go ahead and pick up with your story, your experience in Baytown.

BG: Yes. And I had to buy a few clothes because I had no clothes to really work in. So I went to the store, and there were two salesladies talking about Katrina people coming into their city and possibly taking jobs, where are they going to live, and stuff like that. It wasn't bad things. They were just talking. But for a person who had gone through all of this loss, it was really devastating to hear. It hurt, you know. It was hurtful, and it was like we were called Katrina victims, Katrina refugees, you know. We were just, there were several names for us.

And I had this armful of clothes that I was planning on trying on, and I started putting the clothes back. And one of the ladies said, "Oh, ma'am, can we help you with something?"

I said, "No, no, thank you."

And she said, "Well, don't you want to try on those clothes?"

And I said, "I did, but I no longer want to try them on."

And I was very upset just hearing them talk about things.

Again, the sensitivity is all of a sudden really very hyped, your sensitivity level.

And she said, "Well, why don't you want to try on the clothes?"

And I said, "You know, let me just say this. I know you all are not saying anything bad, but if you want to talk about what went on in New Orleans and about people coming over to your city, you need to do that elsewhere, not in the middle of the sales floor. I came from New Orleans, and I am a "victim" of Katrina, and it really hurts and bothers me and upsets me to hear you talk about this the way you're just so casually talking about something that is really devastating to a lot of people."

And she says, “Oh, I’m so sorry. I really didn’t mean that.”

I said, “I know, I know you didn’t mean it in that fashion. But you’ve got to know how it made me feel.” And I said, “And because of that, you’ve just lost a big sale, because I had to buy clothes so I could go to work and report to my work, where I need to relocate. But I’m sorry, I can’t do that anymore.”

But I started putting them down, wasn’t about to put them back where they belonged, and I just put the clothes down and walked out of the store.

That was probably the first encounter I had where it really hurt to hear things.

And the other thing I want to say, before I forget -- and this can be put at the end of my whole thing; I just want it inserted because I forget sometimes.

I called going through Katrina being born again, but not in a Christian way. That’s how I describe Katrina, being born again, but not in a Christian way, because you have lost everything that you’ve ever saved for, you’ve ever worked for. You’ve lost your memories except what’s inside you, in your heart, in your mind. You’ve lost all those physical , the photos, things that you’ve kept throughout the years, my daughter’s baby book where I put down what her first words were, her first steps, the dates. Those are things you don’t remember 20 years down the road, 21, since she’s 21 now. So that’s why I call it being born again, but not in a Christian way. It’s not -- you’re starting life totally over again with nothing, and it wasn’t pleasant.

So, that being said, once we . . .

Oh, the other story I wanted to tell you was, when I called the hotel to make our reservation, when my husband said, “Here’s the phone, you need to make a call,” I called the hotel to make a reservation.

I said, "What's available for us? What do you have?"

Again, I never traveled a lot and had not been in a Residence Inn. And she said, "Well, we have the ground floor and we have the penthouse."

It was like, "Whoa!" We looked at each other: "Penthouse?" I said, "I'll take the penthouse, the penthouse room." And I was like, "For God's sakes, I can't believe they reserved a penthouse."

So we were just . . .

JS: They understood that you were an FDA official, right?

BG: Yes, yes. It was, the rooms were all reserved already. And we just had to call in and say that we were booked whichever way they booked it under Food and Drug Administration and all that.

So we had a family gathering, because my husband has family in Texas, on Labor Day, and then we left the day after Labor Day. And we drove from Baytown to Nashville, which took us quite a long time. I think it was 13 hours.

And at this point, though, Hurricane Rita also hit, and our house where we lived, even though it mostly affected western Louisiana and into eastern Texas, it also hit the New Orleans area enough that it breached the Tennessee Avenue levee, where it breached for Katrina and flooded my neighborhood again. The Lower Ninth Ward is right over the parish line from my neighborhood. It breached it again. And we got flooded a second time from Rita. It was not named a disaster like Katrina was for that area because it was already flooded by Katrina.

My mother-in-law, though, did have to evacuate from Baytown for Rita. And so she wound up returning home, though. Everything was okay. But it took her like 20 hours to drive just from Baytown to wherever she went, northeastern Texas, I want to say.

JS: Baytown is in which side of eastern Texas?

BG: Baytown is like 20 miles southeast of Houston.

JS: Is it off of the Gulf Freeway or . . .

BG: No. It's off of I-10, I-10 going west. It's off of I-10. And I would say maybe she might have lived 10 miles from the interstate.

JS: So at this point, you've got another storm.

BG: Yeah, another storm.

JS: Just on the heels. And you're wondering, are you cursed.

BG: On our home, you could see that second waterline where Rita went up to, and it wasn't as high as Katrina, but it was high enough. We had 10 ½ feet of water in our house for three weeks or more for Katrina.

So we came to Nashville. We checked in at the Residence Inn, found out the penthouse was only the second floor, and the difference was that the lower level was just one level, you know, kitchenette, the bedroom -- I believe it was a one-bedroom -- and the second floor was two bedrooms. But it was like, I guess a little split-level type thing. You went upstairs, we went in, and there was a Murphy bed in the living room and the kitchenette. And then you went upstairs and there was a second bedroom, and there were two bathrooms, one downstairs and one upstairs. However, there were no doors within, so there was no privacy. My daughter slept in the Murphy bed downstairs, my husband and I slept upstairs. But there were no doors, so there was no privacy except the bathrooms, of course.

And FDA really stepped up. I'm so grateful to FDA. They put us up in a hotel through the first week of January and paid for the hotel.

The only thing we had to pay there was the deposit for my dog. That was out-of-pocket, and I believe that was \$75 or something like that.

At this point, the hotel, of course, our families were with us, the hotel was provided, but the M&IE [meals and incidental expenses] was only for the employee at the time.

JS: Which is \$40 or so in Nashville?

BG: I can't remember now.

JS: It's not a whole lot here in Nashville.

BG: No, but it was something like that, \$40-something. It might have been a little more. I don't recall.

And the Residence Inn had breakfast in the mornings, so we didn't have to go out for breakfast and we didn't have to spend money on breakfast, really.

And they had, in the evenings, it wasn't a dinner, it was just little snack stuff, but a lot of us ate off of the snack stuff.

So we had to report to the office or report to Nashville. I guess it was -- no, we had to report . . . We didn't travel on Labor Day, we traveled the day after. That was the travel day, and then the next day we had to report to the office. So Wednesday was the reporting date that everybody was supposed to show up.

JS: Around the 7th, around September 7th?

BG: It was around, yes, I think it was the 9th. Katrina was on a Monday, the 29th, so Tuesday, 30th; Wednesday, 31st; Thursday, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Monday was Labor Day, the 5th, so it was the 7th when we had to report in the office, so the 6th was a travel day, September 6th.

And we went to the office, which was on Plus Park Boulevard. It wasn't this office, of course, since we have moved. And most people were there that day; some were not.

They had, I think by that time, located everyone. There were a few stragglers that they were worried about that they couldn't connect with, and, for whatever reason, they didn't call in.

So we reported here.

They leased, FDA leased another section of the building.

JS: Which is several buildings arranged almost in sort of a square.

BG: Yeah, connected. So they leased some extra space where, they put us there.

We got new computers. They leased the furniture, but we did get new computers, which is the same computer I have now.

I remember one comment -- and I'm not mentioning anyone's name -- but one comment made to me by a Nashville person was, "Oh, wow, you got a new computer. I've been trying to get a new computer for a long time."

I didn't say anything to the person, but my thought was, "Give me my life back. You can have my computer." That was my thought. I didn't appreciate that comment, but I'm sure the person had no clue the way it sounded.

JS: Well, I'm glad you brought that up, and I know perhaps isn't representative, but what was it like? What was your perception of the Nashville Branch here with having so many employees from the New Orleans District Office move in?

BG: They were wonderful. They welcomed us with open arms, no questions asked.

They had to take care of us, and they did, and they knew it. There was never, even with that statement that I said, there was never anything that I ever heard that was a putdown that was like, “Oh, God, you’re here,” or anything. It was nothing like that. They were wonderful then, they are wonderful now. I really have no problems with being here in Nashville.

My one problem with being here in Nashville was it wasn’t by choice. It was a forced issue. And there’s so many mixed feelings about that because it wasn’t FDA’s fault that we were forced to be here; it wasn’t my boss’s fault, Tyler’s fault, that we had to be here. Even though he probably took the brunt of emotions from everybody -- he didn’t probably, he did; he got the brunt of it. And when I say the brunt of it, he probably got the blame because he was the one that had to say, “This is where you all need to be, and this is where the District Office is located for the time being.” So I believe Tyler got the brunt of that a lot simply because he was the messenger.

So we came here and we were in the leased space, and it was nice.

A lot of people, New Orleans people, were very depressed and it was difficult to concentrate. At first I wasn’t depressed. I was kind of like, okay, we need to make the best of it. That’s how I think I had to make myself feel. And I was like, okay, we move forward. That’s what we have to do, move forward. This is what has been dealt to us. We’ve got to move forward. And I really told people that a lot at first. But people were, you know. But even with me thinking that, I could not concentrate. If I had something to do, it was like I would stare at it, and I would have to read it over and over again for it to sink in. And this is work.

Now, when I look back, I think differently about things now than I did then. Back then, Tyler didn't focus on me, giving me a lot of work. He depended on Marie Clendening. She was my counterpart over here, the Program Support Specialist over here.

JS: In the Nashville Branch.

BG: In the Nashville Branch. And so she's the one that did all the logistics for hotels, and she was doing a lot for us, and she worked hard on that, and we really appreciated that.

And all Nashville people, like I was saying before, they were all wonderful. They took us in with open arms. They were just, we need to be there for them, and they were.

But then, we went on our little side. All the New Orleans people were in this leased side. And Compliance Branch, they had to get going, so they had to focus on what they needed to do. I felt I was in limbo, personally. Tyler didn't send a lot of work my way. He was more depending on Marie.

I brought that issue up with him. I said, "Tyler, you have anything you want me to do?" stuff like that.

And he would say, "Well, no, I don't have a whole lot. I'm taking care of it." And he does a lot of his own stuff too. So he was doing a lot, and he had other people doing things for him.

And at the time, that hurt me because I felt like, well, I wasn't being utilized to my full capacity, and I felt, okay, well, he's depending more on Marie, so what am I

doing here? I felt a little like an outcast. I was in a different section of the building, I wasn't near him, where we always had our offices right next to each other, and I was used to . . .

When clothes started come in to us, when the gift cards started coming in to us, I was the person that handled issuing those out and keeping track that everybody got what they were supposed to be getting.

The office I had was a huge office because nobody wanted it, so I said, "I'll take it." But it had shelving, so all the clothes were hung on hangers and put in there, and coat racks and on the shelves. And so I kind of handled that, making sure everybody got what they needed, and keeping track of, okay, which sizes do you need, here's one. And other people worked with me on that also. But that was mainly what I was doing.

And then the CFC came along, so I was the chairperson for both New Orleans and Nashville because it was two separate ones, and the New Orleans people really still wanted to contribute to the New Orleans CFC, which became a delayed process, but I still handled both. But I felt, work-wise, I was not doing my part, and I felt like he was no longer depending on me and I felt a little left out.

Now, when I look back on it, I can see that he was probably giving me my space, and others were given space too, because there were so many personal things we had to handle that FDA allowed us to use work time to handle personal items. That was changing the post office stuff; stopping mail because, of course, people are still delivering. You had to contact all your credit card companies. You had to contact your insurance. You had to contact your banking. You had to, all the mail being forwarded.

All of this was so tedious in minds that had a hard time concentrating and focusing. And I can speak for everybody on that because that's one thing everybody talked about, was, I have a hard time concentrating. So what work I did -- and I did do work, but it was not a lot. I'm used to staying busy all the time. It was not a lot, and I was taking more care of things coming in to the office than I was, you know, to help us, than I was with my work. But when I was doing my work, I was like, did I do this? But I had to read it. Okay? I would read something. I'd say, absolutely did not sink in, no concentration, so . . .

JS: How long was it like that?

BG: For some people, it's still a little like that. It was like that for a long time.

JS: For you?

BG: Yes. I'd say . . .

JS: Months?

BG: Months, yeah.

But as work started coming in more and more, it was just getting organized again. I didn't have my desk. I didn't have my work structure, my work, the thing that I had back home where I had, okay, here was my deadline log. I had to establish everything

new again because there was not -- at least hard-copy stuff -- there was not anything to work with. I had no files, not my own. Whatever I had electronically was what I had. I had nothing to work from -- again, a starting-over practice, being born again kind of thing, but in the office. And so you had to just reestablish yourself, and it was hard to do that.

JS: Now, in the midst of this, you and your family, I guess together, go down to New Orleans and see what's left of your home.

BG: Well, we had a plan to go down toward the end of September, and then in watching the news, reading the websites, because we always had to constantly read the website to see what was going on, what did we have to do, they delayed our return. You were not allowed to go into the parish where I lived, in Saint Bernard Parish, until a certain block of time, and that time was somewhere like the last week of or the second-to-last-week of September. That was the original time. So we made a plan. Okay?

FDA got us respirators and trained us in using respirators so we could . . . And got us Tyvek suits and other masks and stuff; boots, no, not boots, we bought our own boots; but the Tyvek suits to go into our homes, because of the chemicals in the area where we lived. I told you Kaiser Aluminum was there, even though that shut down a long time ago. We had a lot of refineries, gas refineries and all. And one of the refineries there, Murphy Oil, we had an oil spill and a lot of oil got into employees' homes too.

So there wasn't a lot of employees that lived in Saint Bernard Parish. I did, Marion Ferrante, and Mary Ann Bigner. So there was really only three of us that lived in

Saint Bernard Parish, and we relied on each other if we needed to, if our cars broke down and we needed a ride into work.

So that was delayed, and you had to show I.D. that you, or proof that you lived in the parish, in Saint Bernard, in order to enter into Saint Bernard. They had the guards, police stopping you to check your I.D.s, because that's the one thing they did not want, was the looting and all going on. And Saint Bernard really laid it on the line. You know, if you don't belong here, you can get shot. And that was actually the president of the parish that said that: If you don't belong here, don't come.

If you brought somebody in with you or if you wanted somebody to work on it, help you work on your house, they had to be with you. That was in the beginning because, of course, they didn't have proof that they lived in the parish.

So we were delayed, and we were still in the hotel at the time. My daughter stayed up here with our dog, and my husband and I went down. It was the very end of September, beginning of October. And we couldn't even get down our street. We had to kind of find our way because houses were in the middle of the street.

JS: They'd come off their foundations, hadn't they?

BG: They'd come off their foundations and moved, floated to the street, and a lot of debris all over the place that you had to find your way around, just maneuver around.

When we did get to our house, it was much worse than anything we expected to see. We cried. We just -- to see . . . I'm getting really emotional. To see something that

my daughter was two years old when we moved in, all of her life was there, and just so many memories.

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JS: It's something you can only appreciate if you've experienced it.

BG: Yeah.

You know, I compare it to people who went through the tsunami, and you feel for people. You say, "Oh, God, that's awful." Oh, you donate money to help them. But until you have been in those shoes, you have no clue whatsoever. And that was hard.

We got there, and, as a matter of fact, my girlfriend was with us. She lived across the lake. Even though there was flooding a lot around her, her house was not flooded, and she went with us to try to salvage what we could.

Well, we went through so much. My husband and I put on those Tyvek suits, and I believe we even had one for her. And I had the respirator, he had the mask, the 3D mask thing, so I could stay longer in the house. The smell was awful. Of course, the waters receded by then because you couldn't get in otherwise.

The furniture was all over the place. It was outside the house. The door was caved in because the National Guard had to go in, and FEMA people or whomever had to go in and check all the houses to make sure there were no bodies, no dead bodies. So every house was marked. It was like a cross and then something in each corner of the cross, like the date that the house was checked, if any bodies were found, stuff like that.

JS: This was on the door?

BG: On the house.

JS: On the house.

BG: It could be anywhere, on the door, on the house. It was marked whether it was -- what's the word I'm looking for -- it's whether it's . . . Oh, goddang it.

JS: Habitable?

BG: It's that word, but it's the other word when you -- condemned, you know, whether it's like a condemned thing where you cannot enter, stuff like that. So different markings meant different things.

It turned out that the day they went into our house happened to be my husband's birthday. My husband made a funny remark. He always looks for humor. He's more the optimist, I'm more the pessimist. And he said, "Oh, they came for my birthday, but I wasn't home." Sometimes you've got to do funny things to get past the intensity of all of it.

So we salvage what we can. My main focus was jewelry, And my daughter, we would talk to her on our cell phones and she'd say, "But, mama, this is right here in my room."

"But, Tiffany, you don't understand. Nothing is in its place."

The refrigerator was knocked over.

My husband was a very avid -- well, still is -- a very avid bowler, and we all bowled. We had tons of bowling balls. They moved from our bedroom into the kitchen in the bags. He had a bag that was a four-ball bag that was connected. The top came off and was in a different room.

Yet the lightest things never moved. We had keys on the wall that were still there. We had some light things, like I had a ceramic dish on a wall that hung on a ribbon. That was still on the wall, yet the heavy things were moved, were fallen over, or whatever.

My daughter had just bought a dress. It was still in its bag. We had hung it. We had a large archway, if you want to call it, not really an arch, a rounded arch, but an archway that led from the front room into the kitchen, and she had just bought the dress and just hung it there, hadn't even moved it to her room yet. That dress was still hanging in its bag.

And some light things didn't move, but it was unreal, it was just weird.

We had our sectional that, when you walked in the house, and on the far wall, the sectional came around from that far wall onto the side wall. Yet when we walked in, it had moved this way and turned so it was against where the bay window was. And it was still all in one piece. You know, a sectional separates, but it was still all in one piece. So if you can imagine the force of the water that came in, that could come into your house and move heavy things like this.

All the fans, ceiling fans, were tilted downwards because when the water hit your ceiling tiles, and all that fell out of your attic, and all the insulation fell on top of your ceiling fans and bent the blades so that they all hung down. And we had ceiling tiles and

insulation all over our kitchen table, our kitchen table was turned, things fell out of cabinets, dishes . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE B

BG: And dishes, the dishes that fell out of cabinets and things on the floor. It was really, really something.

And then we went up in the attic and tried to get some things in the attic. We got very few things. Things that were in plastic tubs, like the Rubbermaid totes and stuff like that, if it was stored in there, it floated, because that's what the water went up to, into the attic.

JS: It went up to the attic.

BG: Yeah. It was in the attic, but those things floated. Or even if they didn't float, the water didn't get inside. But if anything was stored in a cardboard box, then yes, you lost that.

All these years, believe it or not, I had my wedding dress . . . I've been married going on 24 years, and all of these years, I had my wedding dress downstairs in my closet. And I had just put it in one of these totes and my husband, he had just put it, after all these years, just put it in the attic, and we salvaged that. Had it stayed downstairs, even in that tote, it would have been under water.

The door to the bathroom was off its hinges and sitting in our hallway. The bathroom, the curtain, the shower curtain was down. There was just stuff all over the place.

Everything was black from the mud, the sewage, because where we lived on our street, across the street was a row of houses and then there was a canal. So we -- and, again, being surrounded by water, all this water that rushed in and just stayed in your house for all these weeks, and when we walked it was very slimy and slippery. You had to be very careful.

To get into our kitchen, to get into the bedrooms, we had to climb over our entertainment center, which fell down, and the TV was down. We had to climb over all of this stuff to get into a different room.

Again, getting back to salvaging jewelry, I found my daughter's jewelry box and got her jewelry, except for her watches. She had three or four different watches, didn't find those.

I had jewelry in my room that I had on the side to be fixed, repaired, so I knew where they would have fallen, and I had to lay across my bed, which, it was a queen-size bed which had turned, and I was laying all over this insulation.

And let me mention here, too, no water, no electricity, so you had no way to see. You're in 90-degree weather, 100 percent humidity, and it was stifling. You could stay in the house for a little while, and then you had to walk outside. It was just too hot. We actually broke windows to let in some kind of air.

JS: By the way, did you have a limit on how much time you could spend in the neighborhood when they finally let the folks in the parish in?

BG: Yes. We had to be out by dusk. You were not allowed in the parish by dusk, after dusk. And at that point, the only people there, I guess, was the parish president, officials, stuff like that. But you could not be in the parish. I guess if you had a home that maybe wasn't affected, but then that's not true, because all of Saint Bernard was under water. So, really, nobody could have stayed in the parish except maybe the parish officials.

JS: So you had a pretty strict timeframe that you had to do all of this in.

BG: Yeah. We would get there early in the morning. We, fortunately for us, we had our place in Mississippi that was our home base, and we stayed there, and we had that hour drive or 45-minute drive over, which really was a little longer because now all the traffic is all congested and everything. And because, of course, the twin span going over Lake Pontchartrain was affected and only one side was open because the other side had caved in. So you couldn't cross that side. So you had the causeway, which was far away from our house, and we couldn't really get to the house going that way, in a very good manner, I guess you could say. And we had that twin span. And then there was the old Highway 90, but that was closed. So you only had, or we, our only option was to come over Lake Pontchartrain over the twin span, and that was a very slow process.

So we would try to come in early, and we would stay as long as we could.

We went through all kinds of stuff, things that we even lost. We went through records, you know, look at it and say, "Okay, this is no good, toss it, toss it."

My front lawn, the sheriff passed by and jokingly said, "Hey, what are you all doing over here? You're making an eyesore." Now, of course, houses are in the middle of the street. There's debris all over the place. And we stopped and talked with him for a minute. And he said, "You really need to clean up your front yard." But, of course, there's all that stuff in the area, and you're just throwing everything around because you're tossing it because, okay, I'm not taking this, there's no need to take this, it's ruined, all of that stuff.

So I did salvage most jewelry, the majority of it, although we had bought my daughter her name necklace that had a diamond in it, and I never did find that. But we salvaged a lot of the jewelry, stuff that could be cleaned.

Some people tried to salvage clothes, and actually did, and you had them cleaned, but there was no way. Our clothes were just saturated and they were black, so we didn't bother with them. We just left the clothes.

When I was digging for the jewelry that time, because we were there for a few days and we would go back every day, my husband, it was getting dusk and my husband kept calling me, saying, "Barbara, that's enough. We have to leave. We have to get out of the parish," because they would have arrested us. That was what they told you, at least. And our parish president was pretty strict about his rules. And I was glad, really, because it kept out the people that didn't need to be there.

It was getting to be dusk, and he said, “We need to leave.” And I think it was actually our last day there.

And I said, “Okay, okay, I’ll come out.”

“You need to come up for a breath of air.”

My respirator was very much used up, those little filters and all of that, HEPA filters, whatever, by the time I was done.

But I worked hard digging and digging and digging and trying to reach things, and broken glass from your light fixtures and stuff like that, and all kinds of stuff.

And when we did leave, we had to hightail it out of there because it was past dusk, and we were the only vehicle on the road, the only. It was a ghost town. It was like, it was the devastation.

That was the first time we went.

The second time I went was in November, and I was on a team to go back to the office to try to get . . . Actually, it was -- before that happened, Tyler went down. And I can remember him saying to me, “Is there anything you want me to get from the office?” This was before I actually went down.

And I said, “My pictures,” because we were on the fourth floor, we didn’t get flooded, and we had the mold damage, you know, and windows were broken, so there was water damage from the rain getting inside.

The first floor, they had to go up the back stairs of our building, outside stairs, to go all the way up. There was no elevators, of course, and there was still water in the building, and so they had to go up the back stairs to get, go up the stairs to get to our office.

He brought me back my pictures, and that meant so much to me and I was very appreciative of him doing that, because those are the only photos I have, which I have here still, except for one that my daughter took since we've been here. But the rest were ones I had there.

So the second time I went down was with the team to go down to the office, and we were packing up people's, well, it was kind of a mix of personal things and work things. It was mainly work things, but if you saw things that you know the person would want, or we asked people, "Is there anything you want us to get?" because not everybody could go down. It was just a team.

And, "Yeah, I want you to pack my stuff," or something like that. Or "This is where I have this if you can get it for me."

We developed like a brigade where we handed, we packed boxes, we labeled boxes, but yet they had to get downstairs to travel, so we had a brigade that started on the fourth floor that we had flashlights lined up on the stairs because there's no electricity, it was dark, and we had to wear respirators in there and everything, and our suits, Tyvek suits. So we passed down the stairs to everybody to go downstairs with the boxes, and kind of had them up on the second floor by those back stairs, so that's where we kind of, was our holding point where we were starting to label them to go for shipment up here or whatever was being carried by vehicles, or whatever offices they were going to.

And we also had a couple of people from OCI [Office of Criminal Investigation] help us. And here I've got to say that Mike Niemiec was absolutely exceptional in helping us throughout the whole time we were there and thereafter.

JS: OCI had an office in New Orleans?

BG: Yes. And they were there to help us. And he, I think, was the, did the most of the people in his office. And we actually got an award for him – the Award of Merit.

And he really kept us organized, I want to say, and said, “Okay, let’s do this,” and organized us, and he did a great job doing that. I mean, because, of course, when you get down there, there’s some confusion in the beginning. Okay, what do we do first? We knew we had to pack. We did inspections of the office. I went to my office. I started packing up files that I knew I would have to have up here. And then I grabbed some of my personal things that I wanted, too. So it was stuff like that. We packed for people, packed their office stuff, the files they needed. And we were in the office for two days doing that.

Having no water running, I’ve got to say using the bathroom was absolutely awful. You really had to hold your nose. It was, let’s just say, the first time I went to the bathroom, I had to walk out because I was ready to throw up. You can’t flush anything.

I won’t go into details right now. My boss always says TMI, TMI, TMI -- too much information -- so I’ll probably edit it out.

That was the first time, the second time.

The next time I went down there with my husband was in March of ’06. Again my daughter did not go. She, as a matter of fact, has never been back to where our home was. She’s been down to the New Orleans area. She’s been down to our house in Mississippi. But she has not been back to the parish where we lived or to where we lived

in our home because she has not wanted to see it that way. Family, friends, everyone told her, “You’ll be sorry you didn’t go.” And she says, “I’m an adult. I know what I want to do and what I don’t want to do, and I don’t want to go to see it that way. I’ve seen the pictures, and that’s all I need to see.” At some point she might do it.

But we went down in March, and, again, it was just as devastating.

Oh, and by the way, when I did go down in November with the team, after work hours, a friend of mine brought me to my house, and I was able to go in the attic, which my husband and my daughter said, “Mom, climb up the steps to the attic?” because I have bad knees and everything. But you do what you’ve got to do sometimes, when you’ve got to do it. And I got up in that attic and I got other things that I could salvage: my daughter’s baby books, books that, not baby books like we [unclear] little things in, but “We Help Mommy” book and just storybooks and some games and stuffed animals, things like that that I was able to get.

When we went down in March, my daughter did go down, but she stayed in Mississippi. My husband and I went back to the house. It was just as traumatic. We took a lot of photos. The times we were down there, we called the insurance company and said, “Hey, look, we’re here.” They had trailers where the Wal-Mart used to be so they could meet with people. “We’re here now if you want to meet with us.” They never met with us; they just, you know, on their own time, just when they were ready.

We went again to the house and tried to salvage what we could, which was very little at that point. There was really nothing left. It was just going back one more time. My husband is like, “Why do you want to go back again?” Well, I had a statue. I’m

Catholic, and I had a religious statue in the yard that I really wanted, and I guess that, for me to have peace, I had to have my statue, and I told my husband that.

Well, this statue was about this tall, but it was all . . .

JS: That's about three feet.

BG: Yeah, concrete, and it was in the yard behind us. So it had, the water actually, like I told you, it left light things alone but moved heavy things -- picked it up and put it over the fence into the yard behind us.

My husband knocked down our fence and really, by the grace of God, got that and put it in our truck, because I saw it. He struggled with it so much because it was so heavy. And I said, "David, don't worry about it. Leave it alone. It's not worth killing yourself over or hurting yourself bad."

"No, no, I'm going to get it, because I know if I don't get it, I'll never hear the end of it," kind of thing.

But he got it for me, and at that point I felt peace, like, okay, I have done everything I need to do here.

Our home was demolished on Memorial Day, May 29th, 2006, and I wanted to try to go back and salvage things out of my garage, the garage that we were working on that had so much stuff in it from my mom, my dad, and my brother that I had stored out there. But the walls were still up that we had all those hurricane clips on, but they were slanted, so the garage had moved, and because of that movement . . . And a tree had fallen on it. The roof caved in. So my husband wanted to try to climb into the garage, and that nice

chain wall we built up to keep water out also kept water in, so it still had water in it. And I thought about that canal behind us with snakes and everything, and I said no. You have the chance of, you hit, you know, a two-by-four or something inside that makes the roof fall on you, come down all the way, and it's not worth it to me. We've just got to deal.

That was very difficult because of just the things I had, the memories I have from my family and everything, and the things that my daughter was saving from my family for her household when she eventually got her own, would get her own home.

And I tried to contact the parish officials, the people that were demolishing my house, going to demolish, and I told them, "I would like to be there when you do it because I want to try to get things out of my garage." Well, they couldn't do that because our garage roof . . . My house was built in the '50s, so we had an asbestos roof on the garage still -- not on the house because that had been changed. And, of course, we were going to take care of all that while we were remodeling. But because it was an asbestos roof, they had to go crush it from the top down and remove it to a facility where they could remove asbestos, take the asbestos stuff. So that was difficult to deal with, losing all of that and not being able to get to it. So that was in March.

Move up a few months. We, even though FDA -- well, we move back a few months, actually.

Even though FDA had us in a hotel to maybe the first week of January, my family moved out November 1st. We were getting on each others' nerves and we didn't have that privacy, and my daughter was older. I mean, we didn't have a young child where they don't remember things or notice things or whatever. We had a grown woman with us. And she's still a dependent; she's in college, of course, and everything. But there

was no privacy for her or for us. So we were starting to get on each others' nerves, and our administrative specialist here was starting to look at apartments for us.

Well, we decided to move out, and when we did, of course, the FDA no longer paid for our lodging. We had to pay for that ourselves. That's when FEMA kicked in, and FEMA picked up our rent.

The people at the apartment building, everybody started moving . . . Two of us moved out earlier, then, at the end of the term that FDA was paying the rest of, we then moved into the same apartment area, apartment complex. And they waived the up-front fees for us and stuff like that.

And there was also a Tennessee firm, assistance agency, Mid-Cumberland, that we could get free furniture from. Unfortunately, my family was not registered with them, so we did not get the free furniture. We got registered with them after the fact. So we rented the furniture from the apartment building. So even though FEMA was picking up our rent, we were still paying over \$700 for furniture. It was a two-bedroom, had a kitchen and two bathrooms and a living room, and a little porch area. It was very nice.

Actually, though, when you look at it, even that money that we got from FEMA, it was for rental assistance, and even though we weren't using it on rent, we still weren't paying, actually, out-of-pocket expenses because that money we paid for the furniture, we used FEMA money. That still went toward our lodging. So we figured, well, if FEMA comes back at a later date and says, "You have to prove that this went for rental assistance," it was rental; it was rental of our furniture for the apartment.

And from day one -- I'm a very detail person, and once I knew that we had a loss, I kind of backtracked myself. I started a notebook of, okay, we left at 3:00 in the

morning from our home; we arrived here at this point; we did this. That -- I have two notebooks, Katrina #1 and Katrina #2, that I have relied on so heavily. And it had our claim numbers, it had our insurance policy numbers, it had -- anything that we did from that date, I have written down. All receipts -- I never used to keep receipts; every receipt, because I said at some point, we're going to have to account for things. And still, to this day, we have kept every single receipt and gas receipts. If you want to buy a candy bar, we keep that receipt.

And, actually, for tax purposes, keeping that receipt is a pain in the butt, but it helps out. It makes a difference in that general sales tax and what you actually spent. But what also helped is because we did purchase a home last year, we had a house built, and because of all the furniture and everything we had to replace because we had nothing, starting from scratch, that was a lot of taxes in that. So that raised that general tax, made it much higher.

Everything that I did -- canceling the phone, canceling the newspaper, forwarding mail, paying this bill, paying that bill, contacting the cell phone thing, contacting insurance -- anything, any phone call I ever made, I wrote it in that book, every person I talked to. And, again, I can't tell you how many times -- and I still look back at those notes and say, "What did I do back then? Who did I talk to? Who do I need to contact again?" because, believe it or not, we're still dealing with a lot of issues.

And we -- I'm going to fast-forward, believe it or not.

And August 29th came along, a year, 2006, and we signed our closing papers for our new home.

After we visited our home in March, we were still determined to go home. My husband, from day one, coming to Nashville, was fine living here. He wasn't originally from New Orleans. But my daughter and I were so determined to go back home. We had a home in Mississippi we could live in. I could work in an office down there, whatever office they were going to open. I told . . .

JS: Could you? Because you worked for the district Director.

BG: Well, that was the problem; that was the problem.

And I also went, I started to tell you that in the beginning, I tried to look forward and say, "Okay, we need to do this," but there was a point in time when everything hit, and it was a weekend. And right now, off the top of my head, I can't remember what it was that triggered it. But I came back to work, and after that weekend I was a different person. All my anger was starting to come out, my anger at the system; the federal government; the way things were handled; the assistance that nobody was getting back home.

I have to say that, if you stayed home, if your house had minor damage, or if you could return home, if you left but could return home, if you were able to be in Louisiana, you did not receive the same assistance as those of us who left. I guess it's because of where you wound up. Us winding up here in Nashville, we were fortunate. I mean, we were blessed. And it was very humbling, the people that took care of us, the people we met along the way.

For Thanksgiving in 2005, we went back to Texas to my mother-in-law's house. And one morning -- we went there for that long weekend, Thanksgiving weekend -- and one morning we went to Cracker Barrel to eat breakfast. Her friend was going to treat us, and there was about nine of us. And we were there eating our breakfast, and there was a couple at another table. They heard us talking about the hurricane, and we heard them. We started talking. They were not far from where we lived, a different area, but they were also there. And then it came time to pay the bill, for my mother-in-law's friend to pay the bill. The waitress said, "Oh, no, no problem, it's paid for."

And I looked around like, "What, what happened?"

And she said, "That gentleman back there paid for you all, and also paid for that couple." And I was like, whoa.

Well, this man was there with his sister having breakfast. We got up immediately, my husband and I and my daughter, and we went over to him to thank him. You know, "Thank you for paying for our breakfast." And then, when the other couple learned of it, they went over there too.

The man gave the other couple and us, besides paying for our breakfast, gave us a hundred-dollar bill.

And then the other couple thanked them, and they had left.

Well, we kept talking, and then it turned out my husband went to school with his son, or it may have been his grandson. So it turned out he really knew some part of his family, so we were talking for a while. Well, we were just amazed at the outpouring of so many people wanting to help us.

Another time, here in Nashville, my husband, my daughter, and I went to the Opry. It was a charity thing for Hurricane Katrina victims. But we wanted to go because we wanted to go see the show, and we went to it. And my husband really wanted to get my daughter backstage to meet LeAnn Rimes and Alan Jackson and . . . Who is it she really likes, the one that's married to Nicole Kidman?

JS: Chesney?

BG: No, it's not -- that's Kenny Chesney; that's not him. Is it Kevin?

JS: We can fill that in later.

BG: Yeah. I'll think of it later. [Keith Urban]

But anyway, well, the lady said, no, you can't get backstage and all that. My husband said, "Well, she lost a lot of her stuff," because the movies and DVDs and stuff, she took with her, things that she actually taped off of TV herself. So all the other stuff, she had left behind.

So the lady said, "Well, I can't get her backstage." She says, "But write down her name, write down your address where you're staying, and we'll see what we can do."

Okay. We didn't think anything of it.

Well, that was that charity event.

And also at that charity event, my daughter and I had gone downstairs. We were taking pictures of this guy who was the one who had been singing at the time, and this

lady that was sitting next to us started talking with my husband and got on the subject about the hurricane, and he explained, well, yeah, we were from New Orleans and stuff like that.

After it was over, the concert was over and we were leaving, she looked at me because I was sitting next to her, she says, “Here, honey,” and she slipped some money in my hand.

I didn’t look at it. I just said, “Oh, no, thank you. We can’t take it.”

She says, “No, keep it.” Well, I just slipped it in my pocket.

And we got to the car and I took it out. It was another hundred-dollar bill. And we were just, “Oh, my God!” It’s very humbling, really very humbling, and very amazing the people who really want to help and were so willing to help.

And the people here in our Nashville office, they have never done anything or said anything to make us feel unwelcome. They have always made us feel welcome, and that is -- that meant so much to us. It really, really did. And all the work they did to . . . And all the new things we were getting, you know, the new equipment, the new computers, the new things, and stuff that they weren’t getting replaced. So, it was good. It still is good.

JS: Well, now, we’ve just passed the two-year anniversary or milestone, whatever you want to call it. But anyway, it’s been over two years now since the hurricane.

BG: Yeah.

JS: And you've been in Nashville now for almost two years, actually over two years now.

BG: Yup.

JS: You have a home now . . .

TAPE 3, SIDE A

BG: And you want me to go back and say some things I wanted to, or you were getting ready to ask me something about the two-year . . .

JS: Well, go ahead and tell me about what you wanted to pick up on.

BG: Well, it was, I started to say, back in March of '06, it was after that visit then that, it was April when we decided we needed to think about staying here in Nashville. We were so determined to go home, my daughter and I, and I did. I went back and forth with Tyler, and I would say, "But I have a home I can return to."

And he'd say, "But your job is here."

And I argued with him. And I have never been -- I'm a very outspoken person, but I've never been insubordinate. But I really was very forceful, and I would say . . . I knew I was going home so much that when I -- I lost my vehicle in the hurricane -- that

when I bought a new vehicle, I registered it in Mississippi because I knew that's where I was going to be returning to and living because I had a home still there. So that's where I registered my truck because I knew that's where I was going to return to.

Well, so anyway, I did go back and forth with Tyler a lot, a lot, and he was very patient with me. And he said, "You know, you had a plan. You said that you were going to retire and you were going to move to Mississippi, and there you were going to live in your retirement and all that, so you delay it a little bit."

I could have retired in June of 2006. That's when I made my age. I had the years, but I didn't have the age. And I always said, "Well, maybe I'll just work a couple years longer." Two thousand six? Yeah, 2006. But I wanted to be able to retire and move to Mississippi, and the house in Louisiana, we were just going to turn over to my daughter and let her stay there so she would have her own place.

And so we did go back and forth a lot, and he would have some meetings and he would say, "Everybody who has a home to return to is home," and I would just cringe.

JS: Say that again. Tyler would have a meeting with the staff?

BG: Oh, yeah. We had daily meetings in the beginning. We had daily meetings that, there was updates on what was going on down there, work-wise, OEI [Official Establishment Inventory]-wise . . .

JS: OEI?

BG: OEI-wise because they were, what firms were coming back. We had people down there trying to find out what was going on. We had people that did not have damage to their homes or had such minor damage that they could be down there, investigators and all that.

So he said in the meeting, everybody, after everybody did return -- now, this was months later, yeah -- everybody that could return home is home, that has a home to return to. Those of us that were still here, of course, were the ones that lost our homes totally, you know, totaled, demolished, or whatever.

JS: Right. But what if, I mean, what if it were a situation where you had a home that was not severely damaged? Would there be a new job for you? Because you worked for the District Director, and the District Director is up here. What would happen if you did have a home?

BG: In my case, there wasn't a job for me down there.

He would say this in a meeting, and afterwards I would tell him, "Tyler, you say that, but I have a home to go to, and you won't let me go home."

And he said, "Your job is here. You work for me." And my job is here.

And he was, he was very patient with me. And I was, by this point, past that, again, past that time where I felt like we've just got to move forward, this is what we were dealt, and this is when I was very angry and all the stuff was really hitting home.

He was really right, because he said, “You know, establish yourself here while you have to be here, until such time you can return home. Deal with what you need to deal with right now. You’ve got to think out of the box,” and I wasn’t.

I just had this tunnel vision: I want to go home. That’s my home. I never lived other than, outside of Saint Bernard Parish in Louisiana. That was my home, and that’s where I intended to be. But if I had to be in Mississippi, that was fine too.

Again, he was very patient. And all of that, though, was before April of ’06. That was before that because that’s when we made our decision we need to stay here.

And my daughter was like, “I’ve got to finish college somewhere. I don’t know what I’ll be able to do down there,” you know. “Look at the places here.” And like I said, my husband was hunky-dory with being here.

And I said, “You know, I’ve been to Nashville” -- not to Nashville. Well, I hadn’t been to Nashville before. I said, “But I’ve been to Tennessee before.” I love the area, but it was always visit, go home. It was by choice.

This wasn’t by choice. We were forced to move here. Not FDA’s fault, not Tyler’s fault. It was Mother Nature. And we were forced to be here. And it was because we were forced that made it so difficult, because . . . But we weren’t being realistic. There was nothing to return to. But you don’t see that then. All you see is, I want to go home. And it’s kind of like Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz”: There’s no place like home.

But once we decided to stay here and we decided to build and everything, Tyler and I were talking one day, and I have to laugh because I said, “You know, you were right.” I said, “We needed to establish ourselves here, and this is where we are, this is

where the Lord brought us, and he brought us here for a reason. And you were right. We had to do things that way.”

He said, “What? What? Say that again.”

I said, “You won’t hear me say that again.”

But I did. I had a lot of anger for a while, and I was, and it was anger that was built up for the system, things going on that should not have gone on in the city, the way the city was portrayed on the news all the time. That’s not the way we all are. And the looting, you know, it was stupid. People would go and steal plasma TVs. What are you going to do with it? There’s no place to plug it in. You’re in New Orleans, where it’s flooded. There was just no logic in anything. I can say that I can understand having to steal food, clothing, shoes, baby formula, whatever you had to do for survival. I can understand looting a place to do what you have to do to feed your family and survive the elements. But I don’t condone the stealing of anything more than that, whether it be TVs, beer, liquor. Those are not -- those are luxuries. That’s not what you need to survive. And they showed a lot of that, and it’s a shame because not everybody was like that.

Fast-forward to the two-year thing now. Here in Nashville, they’ve had an acknowledgement of the two-year anniversary, if you want to call it that, since Katrina. And they had in town, in Nashville, downtown Nashville, they did a second-line parade. They encouraged New Orleans people to gather and to meet and talk about things and “where are we now” kind of thing, and I chose not to do that.

I chose not to do that because I felt that since we closed on our new home on August 29th, 2006, the same day as Katrina a year before that, that I would rather celebrate our new home and go forward. And my family has gone forward; we have

moved forward. We were settled here, we were happy here. We're very happy here now, and we probably are here to stay.

Will we ever go back to Louisiana? No. Even though that's my life and was my life for so many years, I won't go back to it, to dirty politics that's always been there that I was blind to or did not choose to see. It's still there. I mean, everybody has dirty politics somewhat.

JS: That's right.

BG: But my area, the last time we went back was the end of June, beginning of July this year to see that now all the homes in my area were demolished, so we had a very hard time finding our property.

We registered with the Louisiana Road Home People, which was a program to try to get the residents of Louisiana to return to their communities, and if you returned to repair, rebuild your home, then they awarded you grant money plus elevation money to raise your home. If you relocated within the state of Louisiana, they provided you some grant money only. But if you moved out of state, and if you were older than 65, you received a penalty; I'm sorry, if you were under 65. If you were 65 or older, you didn't get a penalty if you moved out of state. This is only under the Louisiana Road Home Program. But if you moved out of state and you were under 65, you were penalized 40 percent off the top of whatever the grant money you were going to get. So as it turned out for our property, to relocate out of state, they were offering us zero.

So this was a program that would buy your property, in other words. If you either returned to repair or rebuild, if you move to another part of Louisiana, they bought out your property and they gave you grant money. That was the grant money to build somewhere else. But if you moved out of the state, depending on, they minused off flood insurance, homeowner's insurance, any assistance you got, all that was minused out of this ceiling figure of \$150,000. But, actually, it wasn't \$150,000. They took what they estimated your house was worth, and that was your starting figure. And then they minused off flood insurance, homeowner's insurance, FEMA assistance. For us, it was only flood insurance and homeowner's insurance. Flood insurance -- the federal government paid 100 percent flood insurance. Homeowner's -- I can't say this on tape, I can't say it, but it was terrible, terrible, terrible.

JS: Who was your insurance company?

BG: Allstate, which we have since dropped. And you're in good hands with Allstate?
No!

JS: So you had homeowner's insurance.

BG: I had homeowner's insurance with Allstate. We purchased flood insurance through Allstate. They tried to pull the wool over people's eyes and tell them, "Oh, but we can't pay for your homeowner's because there was no wind damage. It was all water damage. But you've got your flood insurance. We paid you your flood insurance."

Well, I'm sorry, I'm not a stupid person, I'm not illiterate, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. You can try. Sometimes you can, but I'm pretty savvy. And I told this person with the homeowner's insurance, I said, "Let me tell you something, buddy." And I was not a nice person at this point because it was tough dealing with these people. "You didn't pay me anything for flood insurance. We purchased our flood insurance through Allstate, but it's the federal government that has paid people their flood insurance. Allstate has not paid one penny, and if you all are telling everybody that Allstate paid for their flood insurance, then you are out-and-out lying, and that's fraud." And I was incensed by that. I was so mad, I was fit to be tied.

My husband actually said -- it was a Sunday when I talked to these people -- my husband said, "I'm going to church to get back my religion, because after listening to you, this is too much." I was up one side and down the other with this guy, I was that upset. And to this day, I'm still fighting with the insurance stuff.

Anyway, where was I?

JS: Well, what's the status of your property and parish now?

BG: Well, because we moved out of state and they have offered us zero -- and when I say zero, I mean the number zero is on the paperwork for moving out of state -- we have decided to opt out of the program, because I'm certainly not going to sign over papers just to give you my property for nothing, for you to develop and resell it. So we have opted out of the program and we will keep our property. It has nothing on it, but it's just

green space. And at some point in time when my area starts rebuilding, because our area really has not . . .

My neighbor has returned, the guy that lived right next to us. His house was demolished. He is now living in a prefab home, a very nice home. And that was, by the way, the only way we found our property, was because we knew he had rebuilt and we knew where he lived and how the house looked because we had seen it. And that was the way we found our property because it's right next to his.

And so we are going to . . . And he has two young children and one on the way, but those children are [unclear] they have no one to play with because there's no one else in the area, because even though down the road in Chalmette they were rebuilding, in Arabi, where I lived, on my street at least, they are not starting to really do that. So we're still . . .

JS: So your neighbor's house is one of the few houses actually on the street.

BG: Yes. And it's all gone. It's just green space pretty much.

And so, we're going to wait till such time that that area builds up more and then property value goes up again and sell it; or we'll just keep it and it'll be my daughter's one day for whatever she wants to do with it. So that's what it's amounted to.

JS: So I guess you still have to pay tax on the property, on the lot, I suppose.

BG: Well, actually, yes, we do. Where we lived, because our house was under that tax-exempt limit, we were, we didn't pay property tax. We were exempt.

Now, though, we do pay property tax in Mississippi, and, of course, here we pay property tax. And now, though that's not our primary location, we do have to pay property tax to Louisiana.

This year is the first year that they are making us pay property tax. We were still exempt last year, for 2005, 2006. And I found out we have to pay it by December 31st, and for our property, it's like \$190 or something like that. So it's not a lot, but we still have to pay it.

And, of course here, it's built into our mortgage, so we don't have to worry about that being out of pocket. But we do have to pay Mississippi taxes too.

JS: So you and your family are settled in Nashville now, and you still have a vacation home in Mississippi that you may or may not eventually retire to. But for the time being, you're settled in Nashville. You have your job here in Nashville, and, actually, you still have property in the parish.

BG: Yup.

JS: Is there -- I guess looking back on things, what have we not covered that you would like to talk about?

BG: Well, I do want to say that, if it wasn't for FDA, if it wasn't for the agency taking care of us in the beginning, moving us here, paying moving expenses, the Nashville Branch people helping us, accepting us -- and I know that had to be hard on them, it had to be hard on them. I felt like we intruded. You know, they didn't make us feel that way, though. But it's -- I know we all were, but me in particular, and my family, I know we're so grateful for what FDA has done for us. It's been a big challenge on everybody's side. But FDA met the challenge, Nashville Branch met the challenge, we met the challenge.

We still have our difficulties. It's still hard to look back. As you saw earlier, I had to try to control my emotions. I try to put those things in the back of my mind so that they're not there to bother me all the time. And we have moved forward, my family, and we are happy here. But there's still days that you get where you think about the loss and so many memories left behind there. But you have to not entirely close the chapter, just put it in its own little space so that every once in a while you can take it out and renew it, review it, be sad over it, cry about it, but then close it up again and put it in that little space, and then continue to move forward, because I truly believe that the Lord brought us here for a reason.

Why such vast devastation, I don't know. Only God knows that. Why to so many people? And what is their story, and why to them?

I think, for my family, my husband's happier in the school system here that was a terrible school system in Orleans Parish, where he worked, the Orleans Parish School Board. He actually had a student break his nose one time. He had to have surgery. He

got punched in the nose. It was a terrible system down there. The pay for teachers here is better than it was in New Orleans.

For my daughter, who wanted to return, we have -- she and I talked a lot about this. It mainly affected her and I because we were both born there and had those kind of ties. Leaving her friends was very difficult. But we talked about, if we did go back home, she would stagnate. And being a young adult -- you know, she just turned 21 this year -- all her friends were scattered. Who would she meet, you know, to meet a guy? She was dating before that, but she had broken up with this guy, so she wasn't really attached to anyone at the time of the hurricane.

So it was a chance to -- I felt, you know, now that I've left Louisiana, which I always felt like, oh, my God, I could never leave Louisiana, I really felt that way -- now I feel, even now that we have a house and we're settled here in Tennessee, I don't feel like the roots are there that I had before. It's, I can pick up and go anywhere I want. You can start a new life. You can do anything.

But the thing that's changed most for me is -- and I still am to a certain extent -- but I used to be a person that, "Oh, we can't do this, we can't do that. We have this to pay, we have that to pay." We always watched how we spent money, and I was always the devil's advocate with that, like, "No, no, we can't do this. What if we do this, what if we do that? We can't," always that we can't, we can't, we can't, and I really drove my family nuts. But I'm also the budget person in the family, so I knew what we could do and couldn't do.

But to have things paid for, our house was paid for. We have one credit card, so we pay cash for a lot of stuff. To be in that category that we didn't have to worry about so many things was a good feeling.

But in a split second, all that changed. Everything you ever worked hard for and saved for and scrimped and saved and said you can't do this and you can't do that, it was like, wow, for what? What was all that struggle for?

So, now I don't feel that way. I feel, hey, you know something? It could all be gone again in a split second, so I'm not going to worry about, we have to pay this off. I'll be dead long before my mortgage is paid off. I've got another 30-year mortgage again. And even though I try to pay extra on it, because I'd like to see it go down, am I really worried about it like I used to worry? No. Because it's, to me, like God is saying, "You know, those material possessions really don't mean a thing. There's more important things in life." And that's why you have to move forward, because there's more important things in life. It's not your material possessions, it's not your house, it's not your cars, it's not your clothes. It's your family and your faith and what's ahead for you. And I believe in faith, so this has all been in the books. I truly believe that.

JS: Well, Barbara, thank you so much for sharing this with us.

BG: You're welcome.

JS: And I think the people who will read this transcript will learn a lot about how

people have been affected by Hurricane Katrina, that they have been able to move forward and find a new life in FDA.

BG: Yeah. Thank you, John.

END OF INTERVIEW