

MK: – supply you with more information as we go along. What is your full name?

Ruth Ann Toth: Ruth Ann Toth.

MK: Your maiden name?

RAT: Starkey.

MK: Starkey?

RAT: Yes.

MK: How do you spell that?

RAT: S-T-A-R-K-E-Y.

MK: Tell me a little bit about your own people. Where were you raised?

RAT: In Keyser, over in Mineral County. My dad, at that time, worked for a coal company and then for a logging company and for a cleaning company. He did several jobs. There were six of us kids. My mom's working for the Department of Highways now. I think she's going on her twentieth year. She used to take in cleaning or do cleaning and things like that. There are six of us. I forget the ages now. My bad. But my oldest brother, I think, is thirty-six, and my youngest sister is eighteen or nineteen now. She's nineteen now. It goes from that age range –

MK: So, six kids in nineteen years.

RAT: I'm in the middle.

MK: You are in about the middle?

RAT: Yes. There's fourteen months between the sister the next youngest than I am. I'm the third, and she's the fourth child.

MK: So, what is your age now?

RAT: I'll be twenty-nine this fall. Old woman. [laughter]

MK: You are married with –

RAT: One child and two stepchildren.

MK: Two stepchildren?

RAT: Yes. Nineteen-year-old stepson lives with us, Steve. He lived with us since. We were married six months, and then he moved in with us – maybe here six years now, to school up here

and things. The girl still lives with her mother. She's sixteen. So, she's with her mom. Then our baby is three, going on forty, I think.

MK: That is nice.

RAT: She's our pride and joy.

MK: What is your husband's full name?

RAT: Mark (Barron?) Toth.

MK: He is with the power company?

RAT: Yes, as a lineman.

MK: Was he raised here?

RAT: No, he's from down around Shinnston. He transferred up here right before him and his wife separated. Well, he always hunted up here. He's hunted up here since he was twelve, thirteen years old. He hunted in Canaan. He always liked this country. So, when an opening became available at Parsons for the power company, he took it. He's been up here – he'll be eight years, February.

MK: How did you guys meet?

RAT: When I was going to school at Fairmont State, and I stayed with a couple whose parents live next door to my mom and dad. He works for the power company in Fairmont. That's how Mark and I met.

MK: Small world, huh?

RAT: Yes. But I was going to Fairmont State.

MK: What did you take up there?

RAT: I wanted to be an X-ray technician. The first year I was down there, their program was full. So, I took general studies. The program ended – lack of funding or not enough interest or what. But it's ended, so I took medical records – didn't like it. Just pre-medicine, really, as a requirement. A lot of things we took were medically oriented.

MK: Have you gotten any new ideas about what you would like to do in the last year?

RAT: I guess I have two set of feelings on welfare. So, I'm not interested in social work in that respect. But other fields of social work, yes – a lot with the elderly. I think they're easy to work with, and they know, for the most part, what they want. So, kids would just leave them alone. That's what I'm dealing with right now. We've got one that – her dad knows what he wants, but

she knows what he wants, too. But for the most part, the older people in the flood have really – they've done it on their own and come back on their own without a lot of help, and they take a lot of pride in it. I think that's admirable, really. That's something to fashion after. Very few of them are unfriendly. They accepted us a lot easier than some of the young, maybe even middle-aged people. They're sort of, "Well, what do you want? I don't have a mental problem." They just accept you as a person that you came to visit and you're concerned about them and go from there with them. But probably, for now, I'll just go back unless something becomes available. I think about working in the bank. That's what I did while I was going to school, and I liked that too, people. I like being out and seeing people.

MK: Paperwork?

RAT: Yes, paperwork. I enjoyed that at the bank. When I was at Fairmont State, I worked at City National Bank. We were busy all day.

MK: You will probably work here in town then.

RAT: Probably, for now, unless something would become available through the mental health center or something with the elderly, if something like that would come up, or work and take some courses and things related on job, volunteer and get into something like that. So, that's how I got into this, was doing volunteer work. I met Kate.

MK: How did you happen to meet, Kate?

RAT: I was working at the grade school, giving out food. She'd come in with a cleanup crew, and we had a list of people who needed some help. She came, and then would come several times and brought a couple people in who were needing small appliances or whatever or groceries. When they'd go clean their houses, they didn't have anything to eat. So, she'd bring them in for oatmeal, and then we'd pack them a box of groceries or whatever. The one woman she brought in there one night had nothing to cook in. She was just eating stuff cold out of cans and stuff. So, we scrounged around until we found a skillet and a pan and a toaster oven. That was all we could scarf up. It was the first week. That was it. That was all that was there.

MK: Maybe we should go back to the beginning of the story.

RAT: How we got to the grade school to start with?

MK: Well, what you were doing on November 4th.

RAT: What was I doing on November 4th? At 8:30 that morning, I had an appointment uptown for a yearly Pap smear, female checkup, gynecology checkup. It was raining. Of course, the weekend before, we had bought all our groceries. So, I'd gotten everything but bread and milk. So, I thought, "Why don't I go get that?" I didn't, because it was pouring rain down, and I had the baby, Shannon, the little girl I was babysitting at the time then. "Well, I'm not just keeping him out in the rain any longer. We'll just get in the car and we'll go home." Well, it rained all day. When Mark come home a few minutes after 4:00 p.m. – he gets home a little after 4:00

p.m. We had a flash flood in July, and it washed a little bit of the yard away where the ditch didn't hold it off. I kept watching it until it got dark. Well, they made fun of me. They thought it was funny to watch the water. "Oh, big deal. It happened once this summer. So what?" My girlfriend kept calling and she'd say, "Oh, you ought to hear on the scanner." She'd always me what all was going on on the scanner. They were taking people off the top of cars and things on Pennsylvania Avenue. I come back in and I'd tell Mark. He says, "You're crazy." Then Steve called. He had been to the hunting camp, and he said, "Everybody left up here, and we're leaving now too. We should be home a little bit." So, I called Connie back, and I said, "What's the road report now?" She says, "They don't say anything." So, then in a little bit, Steve and his uncle came. His uncle had been up there. He lived in Moorefield, so he didn't think he should go home. So, he'd come down here. Then Connie called to see if they got back. It takes about an hour to come home from up there. She said they just closed the bridge. Steve just pulled in the driveway when she called and said they had just closed Blackfork Bridge. Again, we didn't think anything was too bad, really. Yes, it's raining. The ditch is overflowing, but it did this summer. So what? But about 8:30 she called and said that they had lost a fire truck, and that the guys were crying for help and things. She says, "I don't know what's going on." I didn't hear anything out of her for a while. The three guys were in there watching TV, and I'd just go from one window to the other, looking out, looking out, looking out. It's about 8:30. We started hearing this odd – no one else would go to the window and listen, but we could hear this kaboom, kaboom, kaboom. It would be three in a row, about every fifteen, twenty minutes. Then the neighbor woman called and she said, "What is that noise?" I said, "I think it's transformers blowing up for the –" everything, I guess, in my mind, goes back to the electricity. I said, "I guess it's flooding uptown or something, or there's high water. It sounds to me like a transformer blowing up." Mark says, "Oh, they only blow up one time. They don't keep blowing up, blowing up, blowing up." She said it sounded like it was behind her house. I said, "Well you better not go outside in case there is a line down. If you don't have to, don't go out." Then about 9:30, the lights went off. I went in there and said, "I told you so. It was electric." Well, Mark got ready to go to work. He'd come and called Elkins, the power company, and said, "I guess the water's getting up. We're going to go to work." Well, the guy on the other end there, a supervisor in Elkins, he got on the phone, and he said, "Go to the shop and wait. If you can't get out, just go to the shop, and wait. Be ready to go whenever it quits raining or you can get through," because I guess they knew in Elkins it was flooding in some areas over there. There was a knock at the door then, and it was one of the guys Mark works with, (Delbert?), who lives up the road. He said, "You got a flashlight and some rope and a block tackle –" whatever. It's a pulley, I guess, but he called it something else. Mark said, "Well, yes." He said, "Well, we got to go to work." He said, "Where are you going to do that?" He said, "Well, the (Workmans?) are stuck in their house, and they can't get out because of the water. We're going to try and get to them." Mark said, "Well, who's we?" He said, "Well, the (Hedricks?) and us, and nobody has any rope or not enough, not a long piece of rope." So, Mark said, well, he thought he did, and he got the flashlight and he put his rain gear on and went out. He says, "I don't know when I'll be back, because after we try to get them, we'll go into work." He says, "I don't know when I'll be back." I always tell him to be careful when he goes to work, so I told him that. I kept looking down this way, because the family that's stuck is like a quarter of a mile down the road, just top of the hill out there. I looked for lights. Of course, there's no power or anything, but I kept looking for a light, trying to see if I could see the flashlights or whatever, because I didn't like the idea of him going to go on to work from there and not knowing whether they got them out or

what. The phone went out right after they left, because I tried to use it again, and it was gone too. So, the guys went on to bed, because they said there wasn't no TV, nothing to do. Steve and John went to bed then, his uncle. Then Shannon finally got sleepy, and she went to bed. I just put her to bed and left her a flashlight. She doesn't like sleeping without lights, so we left a little flashlight on to put on her bed for her. About 10:30, quarter to 11:00, Mark came back and was just wet from head to toe. I said, "What happened? How did you get wet? You had your rain gear on." He said, "Well, we went out in that water," and he said, "It was clean up to here," and he pointed to his neck. I said, "You were in water that deep?" He said, "Well, we're trying to get to them." I said, "Well, what happened?" He said that they had got out there, and it was like waist high when they started. They only went ten, fifteen, twenty feet, and it had come up to their necks. He got hit with a log or firewood or something, and he went under. Well, the three of them had tied themselves together, the three that decided to go in the water put life jackets on. Some of the neighbors, somebody only had three life jackets. So, Mark, Dave Hedrick, and Delbert (Carr?) went in the water to go down and to get to the Workmans. There was six of them in the house. Mark got hit and went under, and he pulled the other guys downstream – or down the field. It was really in the middle of the field, but it was all under water. Pulled them down little ways, and they finally got him stood back up. Then they had a talk, and they decided that since it was that high, and there's another ditch they'd have to go through, there was no way they could get over there without probably drowning themselves. Of course the firemen are stuck in the middle of a wave or water too on the truck. So, there's no way they're going to get down. The water's up on the bridge already, too. So, they knew that there was no way they were going to get here. So, he'd come home, and he said they hadn't gotten to them. I said, "What's going to happen to them?" He said, "Well, I don't know." He was real upset, because they couldn't do anything; that they'd been shooting all night, signaling for help, and nobody realized it until 9:00, that that's what that kaboom, kaboom, kaboom was. It was him firing a signal, trying to let people know that they were down there, because they don't have a phone or anything. They don't have a lot of common sense. I don't want to make them sound – but they don't have a lot of common sense, I guess. So, Mark said when they got back to the top of the hill, they all – men, mostly. It was just the neighbor men were there from up the road around here. They had a prayer circle, and they prayed for them. Then he'd come home, and I helped him get his wet clothes off and whatnot. He said he was cold after being in the water, so we built the fire up. He sat there for the longest time. He didn't say anything. I knew he was upset, and I probably wasn't very comforting. I said, "Well, let's pray for them." So, we prayed then. He said, "Well, I'm tired. As soon as it gets daylight later, I'll get back up and I'll go to work. So, let's go to bed." Well, it was so hot because we built the fire up. By the time he got warm and it was warm in the house, it wasn't really cold out. For all the rain and everything, it wasn't that cold. So, we were laying there, and we both had finally fallen asleep, I think just from exhaustion of being up all day that day anyway. Then 3:00, I don't know why, we both, just like a bolt of lightning, sit up, and we could hear that river roaring. Our bedroom's on the backside of the house, and the front side of the house faces the river. You just could hear the trees snapping and I guess houses – what was houses and everything – going down the river. We didn't go back to sleep then and get well rested, dozed off and about 5:00 p.m., he got up. I said, "What time is it?" He said, "A little after 5:00. I'm going to get ready and see if we can cross the bridge now and go to work." He said, "The water sounds quieter now." From what we could hear, it wasn't as loud a roaring. So, he got up then, and he went down. He said he went out here to look down over the hill where the Workmans lived, and they were still there. The house was still there. It's

only a small one-story house in the middle of a field, and it was still there. He'd come back then at 6:00. He was out for about an hour and come back at 6:00. I said, "Well, how come you're not going to work?" He said, "We still can't cross the bridge. Still too much water, and we can't cross it." I said, "What about the Workmans?" He said, "They must be alive, because he said we can see them with a flashlight moving around up in the attic area." He said, "They must be alive." I said, "Well, God watched them then. He took care of them." It's a miracle that that house stood. It's an older house. It has to be a bit over a hundred years old. I know it has to be that old. It's an old house. Oh, it was probably 2:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. before they could go out, Tuesday afternoon. Then when they got uptown, and he'd come back again, he brought back with him – they went out to the field. They didn't go up the road. They went out and up to the field in the four-wheel drive. He'd come back again, and we had went to the bridge in the meantime. Shannon and I and the neighbors across the road, we all rode up to the bridge, and we were looking around. The water was off the bridge then, and we were looking to stuff. There's a roof on top of the bridge, off a house. It was a new house – or what we guessed was off a new house, looked real new, and just stuff lying everywhere. The water wasn't even down enough yet Tuesday. But later, we could see cars. When the water keeps going down, there's cars all over down there. We could see the fire truck out in the field, the one that the men had got stuck on for a while. Well, none of them died or anything, but they got off. Trailers up against the other houses there at the bridge, just all kinds of debris and whatnot. Mark come back in the afternoon, and he had with him a boy from up the hunting camp. He's on work release – or was, at that time. He had to do thirty days for whatever the charge was. But we knew him, and Mark found him wandering around uptown in all the muck and mud. Monday nights had been his night to spend the night in jail. Mark brought him home with us, because he knew he had no way to go home. After Mark walked around uptown and then seen that the bridge was washed out, and they couldn't get to their trucks that way to go to work and start putting electric back on, so he brought Ronnie home. We give Ronnie some of Mark and Steve's clothes and dressed him then. We couldn't cook or anything, because we cooked with electric. So, we fired the stove up again, and we cooked on the wood-burning stove. We had vegetable soup and stuff like that that was canned. I just opened it up and we fixed it like that. Then it was probably 5:00, I guess, and they tried to get out this way, down towards Slip Hill. They finally got out. The water was down out of the road enough. They went out that way and went up the mountain to Sugarlands, come down by the high school, got their trucks, the power company trucks, and drove back up the mountain, come back down to Sugarlands, and went to this end of town so they could put the hospital. I guess they got the hospital on first and the rescue squads, stuff like that, tried to get them power first, worked on that. Then at 9:30 p.m., I got a knock on the door. I didn't expect Mark, because they were expected to work sixteen hours. So, I decided about 9:00 to go to bed. I read by candlelight for a while. That was too hard on my eyes. I got fed up, after he wakes up and in bed again. There's a knock at the door, and it's Delbert, the one guy he works with. He has a hard time telling me that something's happened to Mark, and he's standing there. I said, "Delbert, is Mark all right?" "Well, he's conscious." In my mind, there's more of a fear – well, even while we were dating that he would get electrocuted. Every once in a while, he would come home and tell about people in other areas who've gotten electrocuted. I said, "Oh, my God." So, Delbert said, "Well, he's all right." Then he said, "I'll take you to the hospital." They had him up there at Tucker County. I said, "Well, what's wrong with him?" He said, "Well, he got hit in the head." So, I said, "Well, I'll go get ready. I'll get dressed and I'll be ready." I said, "Can I cross up here?" Because where the water had been on the road, it washed part of the road

out. I said, "Can I get my car through that?" I said, "Mark has the Scout. It's a four-wheel drive." He said, "I think you can. But I'll come back and I'll take you." He didn't come, and he didn't come and he didn't come. He went to tell his wife where he was going to be yet. Then Vernon came, the foreman, lead lineman. He came. So, Vernon followed me up then, and he said he didn't see any reason why I couldn't get through that in my car. So, I went through it, and then he took me to the hospital. They already put all this bandage down all over the side of his head. He's sitting up, and they had given him a pop to drink. He's sitting there, and there's all mud from one end to the other. All of these yellow rings, there's just mud, mud, mud. What have they been doing? I didn't realize how deep the mud was in town, what they had to go through to get – at first, what was going on? We're sitting here at home, and I was trying to listen to the radio what's going on and listen to the portable radios and stuff. Elkins Radio Station, Clarksburg, nobody said nothing about a flood. We took Mark then on to Elkins, because Tucker County couldn't X-ray him or anything. The mud level in there was about shoulder high on me. Of course, the water receded, but the water level in the hospital was about shoulder high on me. of course, I'm not very tall, but I think that's a lot of water. They couldn't x-ray him or anything, so they took him to Elkins in a power company vehicle. One of the guys had came over from Elkins when they heard on the radio that they were taking Mark to the hospital. So, (Dick McDowell?) took us to Elkins. Mark almost passed out again on us going over. The nurse had told me how to use the ammonia capsule and whatnot. The ambulances wouldn't come to take him or anything. Well, I knew they lost one, but why they wouldn't come, that was never clear to me. But we took him, and Elkins X-rayed him and things. But at Davis Memorial, the girl at the desk said, "Well, how'd he get hurt?" I said, "Well, he was out trying to put the electric back on from the flood." Mark was telling a little bit of what they'd seen uptown that day, and what I could see when we went through the light. We just went from the hospital through the light. It was dark. You couldn't see anything too much, except the one vehicle overturned at the bank. She said, "What was he doing?" I said, "Well, they were trying to put the electric back on because of the flood." She said, "What flood?" Elkins had no idea. It was Tuesday night, and they had very little word that – I guess maybe some people over there did, but the girl at the hospital had no idea it flooded over here at all. My mouth dropped open, and I said, "Lady, where have you been?" Of course, they said, "Mark had a mild concussion. Bring him home, wake him up every hour, and ask him if he's all right." Well, I didn't have the heart. He hadn't been to bed now, didn't sleep Monday night for worrying about not getting to the Workmans, and it was Tuesday night. He said the doctor said he could go to work Wednesday if he felt like it. But he'd write him a slip for up to a week. He thought he should stay home for up to a week. But Mark had told the doctor what was going on. "I will not stay home." So, the doctor had given him a back-to-work slip. He said he could go, but not to climb on the power poles for a week or anything. Then we'd come home, and I didn't have the heart to wake him. I would just listen to his breathing. I've caught the devil from some nurses and stuff since then. I said, "Well, I know how he sleeps and what it sounds like and what's normal and what's not normal. He sounded restless and rubbing his nose and things like that." I said, "I couldn't wake him up. I left him to sleep." He got up at 6:00 the next morning, and I fixed him some breakfast in there on top of the wood-burning stove again and he went to work. He worked the rest of the time. Then Wednesday, we walked to town, my girlfriend and I. Well, we parked at the hospital and walked on down the other part of town. She had some people she wanted to check on, and I went up to her house. So, we decided to go uptown and nose around. Well, the National Guard came Tuesday night while we were at the hospital in Elkins. We'd come back to the town, and

they're at each of the streets, standing at the head of the streets. They had set up headquarters there at the fire hall. You could see that that's where they were going to camp for a while. We went on and come home. But Wednesday, then we walked to town. We walked up Pennsylvania Avenue, and it was just walking with your mouth open the whole time. You just can't believe all the pavement, the power poles, the trees, the cars. They kept telling us all this and that and this and that. Of course, the rumors were just wild. Everybody passed it. "Oh, did you hear so-and-so died?" I kept saying I won't believe it until I read it in the paper. I couldn't believe that that many people would die. Of course, the nurse says the three. But I kept thinking, "Oh, God, what if we step on a tree or a piece of this pavement and a body is under it and things?" But we did walk to the end of the Blackfork Bridge and look and see where it was going. Someone come up to us and start introducing themselves, said they were feeding out the grade school. They had a soup kitchen. Well, we thought we should do our share of the volunteer work. So, we stopped to offer to help do that. They said they didn't need anybody until 5:00. They had it pretty well booked up with enough people, they thought, until about 5:00. So, we went back and worked from 5:00 to 8:00. But there were so many people in this kitchen serving the soup and sandwiches that it was just too crowded. You couldn't work. So, there was a little bit of food starting to come in, mostly, I guess, from Elkins and or wherever. Sylvia (Rosenhauer?) said would Connie and I take care of that; would we sort it and get it ready to start giving out. People were going to need it. People would start coming in for food. So, we started doing that, and I did that. The next day, on Thursday, we went back. We worked Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and Sunday for about twelve hours all those days. Then Saturday, one truck would pull in and unload, and another truck would pull in and unload. I mean, just as soon as one pulled out, another would pull in, and we'd unload them. They'd have food. They'd have clothes. They'd have whatever. They were just bringing everything in, bedding and everything. Well, for the first two weeks, all we heard was one helicopter after another land. Connie works at the Timber Watershed Lab. So, she got called back to work. They were told they were expected to report back to work once the bridge was fixed next week. So, she went back to work. So, I said, well, I could stay on. I don't mind to do that work. Mark was out working sixteen-hour days, and different people were helping watch Shannon. Some of our friends that had kids said they couldn't leave either, home, and come do work. They'd had more turns than I did. They kept her, and I went and did volunteer work. A couple of days, I took her with me, and they had a nursery there at the school. I would work a while and then go get her and eat lunch with her or whatever there. To see some of these people now, and what they looked like then – a lot of them just walked around, would go through the line, get a plate, maybe sit there and look at it and never eat. Several people, we'd have to really encourage to eat. They would just come in, drink a cup of coffee. They were in shock. One woman said to me a while back – and I was saying something about what happened at the grade school. The ones that were staying there overnight, we would talk and sit down the evening when things slowed down, just talk about what was going on. They had been to clean their house that day, and what they had found and things like that, we were talking about stuff like that. I said something to one woman this summer about it. I said, "Remember when we were laughing about this?" She said, "I don't remember that." I said, "How about this," doing a little bit of mental health work. I said, "How about this?" She said, "No, I don't remember that either." She said, "You know what I decided? I don't remember hardly anything for the first two weeks I lived at that grade school." I said, "But you went and cleaned your house." She said, "I just must have done it." She said, "I had to be in shock. That's all I can decide, that I was just in shock, and I made myself go and clean that



mud and everything." But she said, "I had to be in shock, because I don't remember any of this stuff you're telling me." I said, "But it happened. It really did." She said, "I don't doubt you." But she said, "I don't remember it." Well, I stayed out there and worked at the school until they started having school again. We put up with the National Guard and some of their garbage when they told us how to give out food, and the Red Cross when they come in and told us their idea of how we should give out food, and the Randolph County Emergency Service when they come over and told us how we should give out food. Of course, everybody had their idea of how we should do it. One day, when this was going, I guess, late in the second week, and the Red Cross people come down through one day for lunch. They had been in one of the grade school rooms upstairs, and they'd come down through for lunch. "You know, you should do it this way, this way, and this way." I said, "It's yours." I've been working twelve, fourteen hours a day down there, not wanting to get paid, but not getting paid either, and they're getting paid to do what they do. Then they're going to come tell me – I said, "It's yours." I just had my fill of it. I said, "Lady, it is yours." I just walked outside the grade school. Of course, when I get mad, I'll tell people what it's about. Pretty verbal. Then in a little bit, she'd come out and she said, "Well, that's none of my business. You know how people are around here and what they'll accept and what they won't accept and how to treat them. That's none of our business. We just have a little discussion while we ate, and it is none of our business. You people should do that how you feel it is best handled." She said, "We've looked over your system again and we've decided that for the amount of space you have to work with and what you're putting up with, that you're doing the best you can do." The health man was in and he said, "You can't store cleaning stuff with your baby food." Wherever there was a place, when the stuff would come in, we just set it. "Things will slow down. We'll get to sort it when things slow down. But he asked us to move the cleaning supplies, which wasn't – I know better. I don't like when they pack my groceries at the store where they will put cleaning supplies next to the stuff we're going to eat. It wasn't an unrealistic request out of him. Then they fussed about people bringing water in from home, for us to turn around and give them back out – that if someone got sick, we could get sued, and to think about things like that as we did this. I said, "But we're just volunteers." He said, "I'm sorry, but that's something I want you to be aware of, that you can't." So, we had to take all the water we had that people brought in – from other areas, even – that was well water or spring water, and then just give out the bottled water from the mines and the Pepsi and anything – as long as it was sealed, we were all right. So, we gave that out, and we got rid of the other water then. I hate to give it out when people have water. You hate to pour it out, because they just didn't have any water. But that's how I met Kate. One day, she'd come in with a cleanup crew. She was organizing, I guess, cleanup crews down to fire hall and from over in D&E or Charleston, wherever all the – I guess she was sort of in charge of cleanup crews. That's how I met her. Then she called me back in January and she said, "Do you want to go to work?" "Doing what? What kind of job –" she tried to tell me who she was again, because I sort of forgot, because I did very little volunteer work at the food distribution center in December. It was at the church. The women at the church seemed to be – they looked like, every time I was there, they had enough help with things. I felt that since I left Shannon a lot of November, I should stay with her and get ready for Christmas and things. Kate called in January. I said, "Well, I'll think about it." She went and said, "You'll be working with people through mental health projects and be working with flood victims and just letting them talk a lot," and that we would have training as to what to do, that she felt I would be good for it. So, I tried to think about it. Well, she called back. She called back and came to do a job interview and application.

1st of February, I started work.

MK: Before we get into that – that is really the next chapter. Let me ask you a few questions about this. What is a prayer circle?

RAT: I guess they all held hands and one of them prayed. That's what we call prayer circle. We've done that. When someone's been sick before in the family, we'll have whoever happens to be in the ring while take hands – and I guess that's what they did that night. Whoever was there, they all took hands, the men, or whatever women were there.

MK: This was after your husband had been in the water trying to get out to them, and they realized they could not get through.

RAT: They just didn't see any way. A boat they floated, they even had that. They thought, well, they would put them in that and bring them back across. The water was just so swift and there was so much debris coming out, they couldn't use the boat, even.

MK: How high was the water at the Workman home at that point?

RAT: I've never been inside the home, but it's an older home. So, we're guessing it has eight-foot ceilings and another foot and a half, two feet for the attic. They told me later that the water was on their feet. As they sat in the attic, they sat in water, but that their heads were up out of it. Mrs. Workman told me at the grade school, I guess, towards the end of the first week – and I recognized him because I'd seen him walk up and down the road before, and they were together. I asked him how they were and told him about Mark and them trying to get to them. I said, "What did you all do all night?" She said, "Oh, the old man –" she'd kind of sway back and forth as she was talking. She said, "The old man, he'd pray a while. We'd all sing a while. He'd pray a while. We'd sing a while." I said, "What did you sing?" She said, "Gospel." I should have known. What did you sing? Dumb question. I should have known. You wouldn't think of them as religious people, but I guess a lot of people, it's there. They just don't turn to it until they really feel they need it. But they seem to be doing real fine. I really worried as to what would happen. The one girl's crippled. She wears leg braces, and even with them she can't hardly walk. There's three children, and him and her. Then his brother lived with them.

MK: They were all of them in that attic?

RAT: They were up in that attic. Of course, the next day, whenever we went out Tuesday afternoon to go out and look at the bridge, the water still wasn't down enough to where they could bring the one girl out. When they'd seen they were all right, they just was waiting for the water to go completely down before anybody took even a four-wheel drive down. Then you didn't know what you're going to run into. So, I think everybody were sort of waiting for the water to go down once they realized they were all right, and then go in and get them, because there were no fire – or I guess they had one fire truck or whatever. But being that they were all right, I guess they were just going to wait, let them come out on their own. When we walked to the bridge and see what was going on down there, we could see him out there walking around on an area, a little high place that was already dry. He was just walking around, looking around like

he's sort of lost. But you can see him out there, and he still had his gun on his shoulder. When they left, and when they were staying out the grade school then for a while – they went up to the grade school and stayed after that for a while. They had them guns up there. Someone had to go get the sheriff and ask him to come. So, the sheriff, I think, kept their guns for them for a while. But they just didn't realize that they shouldn't be carrying their guns around in the grade school. But of course, I guess it was hunting season. I think, some days, they went squirrel hunting. Instead of sitting around in the grade school, there they'd go, squirrel hunting.

MK: Did you hear other stories about prayer circles in the county?

RAT: Not really a prayer circle. They had a boy that they all separately went in and prayed to be saved and that. But no other, really, prayer circles, and I don't know of any other where individuals tried – and I'm sure there are. Mark's sort of funny. He doesn't like to talk about it very much. Here, lately, he's talked more about – his aunt and uncle were in for Michigan this weekend, and he told them more than I've heard him tell anybody, even me. I learned a few things from that this weekend, from him telling the story to them. Of course, they've had flooding in Michigan recently, and they were interested in sort of comparing the two as to what happened and what didn't.

MK: Why does he hold back?

RAT: I'm not sure. He's a real private-type somebody, anyway. He keeps his feelings to himself a lot. Something upsets me, I tell it. So, that makes it a little hard sometimes for me to accept that in him, but I do. That's his way.

MK: When you were working at the school, they were feeding a lot of people?

RAT: For the first couple of days, they didn't count them. Then someone said, "Well, we're using government surplus food, and we should count the people we were feeding and how many people were taking groceries and how many families were being served." So, that was done for two reasons, so we could say how much more we needed and how many we helped the day before. Then they did start calling from Charleston, wanting to know how many people were still coming in for groceries and how many people were eating hot meals. Then one day, they fed two thousand people. That was three meals. They were serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. At the end of the week –

MK: Two-thousand for each meal?

RAT: No, for the day.

MK: Two-thousand total?

RAT: For the day. I guess they'd start at 5:00. For a while, the soup kitchen was open for twenty-hours at the grade school. Of course, there were feedings at the church and the fire hall. I don't know where else. Well, in St. George, they were doing some hot meals too.

MK: It sounds, from the way you talk about it, like it was pretty chaotic –

RAT: For a while.

MK: – with the power down and the phone. How long were the phones out? How long was the power out?

RAT: By Wednesday, the power was back on. When we come home from town, Wednesday, from looking around Pennsylvania Avenue and stuff, the power was on here. Then of course, the grade school was on. They tried to get the church and the grade school and places that were shelters on. When people come and say, "Hey, we're operating a shelter here in the fire hall –" because it was the command center for everybody almost, and they tried to get places like that first. Then the next thing they'd do – and they were working down here at the bridge when Mark got hit in the head Tuesday night – they'll put on something that will pick up a lot of people. Even though it looks like it won't pick up – what Mark was working on Tuesday night and he got hit in the head would have picked up Holly Meadows, St. George, Lead Mine, would have picked up a lot of it, except maybe where poles were stuck, wherever it was. It would pick up a lot of homes. Instead of concentrating on the center of town, well, they just ain't going to do just downtown. It would take weeks to do downtown. They tried to pick up areas that weren't so highly affected with the water that were like us, back up way from the river and down St. George way, and along the highway and whatnot to fix stuff like that back up.

MK: But it was really hard for people to communicate for a while, anyway, huh, except police scanners.

RAT: Scanners or their CBs. Bill Rosenhauer, who's the director of Emergency Services here, and John Lambert and they come in one day. It was Thursday, I guess, and that's when they asked me how long I could stay and do that type of work. I said, "Well, several weeks or however long is needed," I said. I laughed. I said, "As long as it doesn't take years. We don't give food out for years." How long could it take them to get the (MP?) back? Well, I hadn't seen the MP, that it was –

MK: The what?

RAT: The MP, the grocery store. I hadn't seen it. How long could it take? It's got a hole in it. How long can that take to put the hole back and fill it up, truck groceries in here? Took until January the 19th before they reopened. It's a lot of work they did. I went in several times while they were working. They worked to send us groceries. They said, if we needed stuff, to come down to the store, and they would try to get it. There was no phones late until Saturday. My dad came Wednesday from our home, because I called home and said that I didn't know what was going on, but it looked like – the electric was off, and I hurried up and called them. I said, "I don't know what's going on, but we're all right here, and Mark's gone to work. But I guess it's pretty bad uptown." I said, "I better get off here." Then I got off the phone. They said it was flooding over there, and my sister had to leave her trailer. Her and her family had to be taken out in the fire truck. They had to leave their home.

MK: Where was that?

RAT: In Keyser. Well, in New Creek. They live on right on New Creek. My dad's a volunteer fireman. Several times, right there in front of the fire hall, my mom watched, and she said that the lights of the fire truck would go completely out of sight when he was driving through the water. Then in a little bit here, they'd come up out of the water. She said she'd just hold her breath. I guess she's upstairs at the fire hall, watching them bring in. That was the evacuation center over there for that area, and there was my daddy driving that truck. She thought, "Well, there he goes." By trying to go out and save people too, they have a feel for how these guys feel up here that did that that night. Those guys don't talk much about it. I tried to get them a time or two through my job, the mental health work. I've tried a couple of times to get them to talk about that night. "We made it. We're fine, and we don't want to talk about it." I guess that's this macho image of men, that they just won't talk about it.

MK: What actually happened to Mark when he got hit in the head? What hit him?

RAT: A chain hoist. They were bringing a line back up across the river, from one pole on one side of the river to the other pole on the other side. It was in a bind. So, they were bringing I guess the boom or the bucket truck. They must've had a bucket truck or something. Anyway, the other guy was going to come around and help, because then he couldn't get it cranked around by himself. That chain hoist is in a bind. It was too much, maybe, too much wires to bring across the river. It's a pretty wide span. It snapped in and come around, hit him in the head.

MK: Hi, honey.

RAT: What are you doing, Sissy? Did you wake up?

MK: Did you have a nice nap? Cute thing. She is pretty.

RAT: Mark said, "Did you ever wake up and you're hanging upside down, you're looking up in the sky, and everything's black?" I said, "Oh, my God, that would be a weird feeling." Because see, they climb with spikes on their boots or climbers, whatever they call them. I forget again. But they put a safety belt on around the pole. We've seen guys hang on a pole with that belt. Well, how do you not use that belt? You'd have went clean to the ground. When it knocked him out, his feet cut out, hanging upside down, bent over backwards. He must have been out, they said, probably no more than two minutes. They put a rope around him, his waist, to do what they call pole top rescue. They're trained in this every year, how to bring a fellow worker down if they're electrocuted or whatever. Mark made them take the rope off of him. He stood up right on the pole and made him take the rope off of him. He said, "That hurts. That rope hurts." He said that last week. He said, "That rope hurts when it's around your waist." He said, "I stood upright for a while," and the other guy guesses up the pole. He said, "I stood there for a while, and then I come down." He said, "I'll come down." He said, "I don't have any trouble coming down." But then later, he started getting woozy again on them. Of course, they made him go. That's, of course, company policy that they go get checked out any time when –

MK: Has he dreamed about that at all?

RAT: Doesn't seem to. I even thought, at night, Tuesday night, when we'd come back home, and I didn't want to wake him, he was a little restless. But to dream about not getting to the Workmans or anything, I don't think so. When he doesn't sleep, I don't sleep. He used to dream a lot. I don't know what he dreamed about that time either. But he had thrashed around the bed one night, and he hit me when he was having a nightmare of some kind. I think he said it was a squirrel or a fox or something. It was a real dumb dream. But I know, when he has dreams and nightmares, that he does thrash more around the bed. I really watched for that, because I thought he was so upset by it that he would have dreams, and he didn't. I kept telling him, that Monday night, I said, "You did what you could. All of you did what you could. You tried. No one can ask you to do any more than that. You tried, and we'll just pray for the best and accept. You did try. It's not that you didn't try. If you didn't try, yes, you could feel guilty. But you did try. If you could have gotten to them, you would have." Several times that night, he just would sit there. "But we didn't get to them. We didn't get to them. We couldn't get to them." I said, "But you tried. It's not your fault the water is the way it is tonight." That, I think, was the hardest thing for him to accept. Had people realized earlier – even the people that lived right there who first called and asked for the power company to come down and help him with them, the shots were going on right in front of their house all night, five hundred yards down over the hill. It's that far, and they didn't realize. They'd been out in the barn, they said, milking the calves. They kept hearing that, and they didn't –

MK: – could not comprehend. That is a good way of –

RAT: I guess it just didn't ring a bell. What is that? Because to me, it was transformers blowing up. It wasn't transformers. Lord knows enough of them probably blew it up that night. But that's not what was.

MK: Tell me more about what you saw in town when you first went in. You went in for the first time when?

RAT: Wednesday.

MK: Wednesday?

RAT: Wednesday, yes. Well, yes, around noon. Then when dad came with my brother, they came down the Sugarlands. They'd stopped in Davis, and I took him up to show him a little bit of – because I said it would take months to clean this up and things. But it's just mud, cars. Those trees would just – one would go one way and one another. Of course, I was looking at the power poles and the lines laying all over. I said, "We shouldn't be in here. Nobody should be in here. What if they turn it on, or it is still live? Nobody should be walking up and down that street." Then passed (Marilyn Smith?) and (George See?) – I guess she'd stay that night in the house. They surely have been out sooner than Wednesday. Maybe they went back for some things, and we passed them. She was sort of impatient with George. (Johnny Wilson?) was wanting to talk to George. So, she said, "Come on. You can talk to Johnny Wilson anytime." I remember that real well. That's been eleven months ago now. Here comes John Warner down over. They said, "Oh, look they're on the railroad tracks. So, here's John Warner. I can't see it

far away. I said, "How can you see and tell that that's John Warner walking there?" Because there was hubbub of activity sort of across that bridge that was on – the train rail trestle's the only way across back and forth across the town. He'd come down the ladder and cross the rocks, and back up in front of us. Sure enough, it's John Warner and all these cameras. I've heard he goes barefoot all the time – or he was barefoot that day. Now, I'm not sure I've seen him a lot and he's barefoot. But I can't remember if he was barefoot that day or not. But for some reason, I think he was. I just thought that was – "John, that weirdo. You're going to step on glass or live electric water or whatever. Don't go anywhere barefoot." The house that was down in the hole, just that one house in the picture, is where it just went down in the hole. Now, it still looks pretty much intact. I'm sure there's a lot of stuff torn up inside. I was just down in that hole, and set it up on street levels down in that hole, and trying to comprehend that water could do that. Then hearing that so-and-so's house washed away, and then looking for something that – you've been in their home, looking for something you recognize out of their home, because people that lived on Pennsylvania Avenue were walking around, looking for their stuff, trying to find things that – people were trying to get clothes that was still savable and things like that – and to look at Lambert's and no cars, to have drove down through there the day before and looked in there, admired a car or whatever the week before, a new car, and no cars. Just no cars at all. It was hard to believe that that much stuff could wash away. I didn't know anybody really that lived on Pennsylvania Avenue except George and Marilyn. I know a lot of them now, but I didn't then. The Penn Avenue Dairy, that was always sort of a dream of ours. If it ever was for sale, we were going to try and buy it and make it our mom and pop like they had, an ice cream store, like when (Dorothy Phillips?) owned that. I've worked with them now since February. They live in a FEMA trailer right now. Him and I talked about that one day about me wanting to buy that. But just a look, and I said, "Oh, no. My ice cream store is gone. I can't buy it." Someone says, "Oh, yes. Since they were there in the gym, it washed up in the old – I guess it was a Parsons gym or whatever. Footwear used it for storage. But it's just unreal – pots, pans, everything in the street, dressers.

MK: Did you notice any more of what you mentioned a while ago, the people being dazed or –

RAT: Somewhat. Now, different people like (Phil Carr?), who works for the phone company, now, they were flooded. He was very business-like – I mean, looking around, trying to figure out what they had to do to get the phones back in. He was very business-like. Of course, we would see them in the evening at the grade school. They tried to keep themselves real up. I mean, he would do some of the silliest things and make some of the silliest requests out of us for stuff he knew we didn't have. Some people stayed up like that themselves, kept themselves in a good humor and tried to keep those around them in a good humor. Then the others would just come in, "I'll take whatever you'll give me." Then one woman said, "Oh, I need a can of soup." I said, "When can you come back?" She said, "I won't be back for a week." I said, "You just can't take one can of soup." I mean, to her, one can of soup, at that time, I think she thought it would last her a week. She said, "Someone needs it worse than me." I said, "Lady, you just told me you lost everything you had. How can anybody need it any worse than you?" They were cooking upstairs in their bedroom. The electric, I don't even know if they'd checked it out. Thinking about things like that now, how many people really checked stuff out like that before they started trying to cook in their home again? Did they know about it themselves? Did they have enough common knowledge about that to do it themselves, or did they just go ahead and do

it and take a chance? I said, "What do you have to cook in?" We realized that we needed to start asking that. "What do you have to cook in?" We were giving people soup and stuff until someone said, "Well, I don't have anything to cook it." We never thought about it. They would just ask us for stuff. So, what we should've had really early on is just all dry goods and non-perishable stuff, which we didn't have very much stuff that would – but we should've had all stuff that could have been ate without – how much of that stuff can you get? How much food is there in a grocery store that you don't have to heat to eat or have to have some kind of preparation? But she said, "Well, I'm cooking in an electric skillet." I said, "How many of you are in the home?" She said, "Just my son and I." I said, "You guys can't live off a can of soup. Are you going to come back in here and eat?" "Oh, no. No." I said, "I want to see you in here tomorrow, noon time, for a meal." She couldn't even drink a cup of coffee that day. She was just so upset. I think two things that upset her, that she had lost everything she had, and that she had to come in and ask for stuff. I guess she's been very prideful. She's taking care of her and her son and things. Of course, then there were others who came every day, and they just hollered out there and hollered out there. The ones that really hollered out there are those who didn't have any way. Some of the volunteers thought – that upset them, that they came every day. I said, "Well, they really don't have any way." "Yes, but now, they're going to be better off than what they were before." I said, "So, who cares? As long as we have enough for those who need, and if we can take care of everybody's needs in a day's time and more food comes in tomorrow and we give it out again, who cares if they go out of here with more than they can eat today? They'll be back again tomorrow, and they'll take another fifty-pound bag of potato. Who cares as long as we take care of those who do come in?" Some of them wanted to set in judgment. My mom and dad worked hard when I was a kid. My mom scrubbed floors and things like that. I know it was hard for them to raise six kids back then. We wore hand-me-downs, and we accepted stuff out of people's gardens and things. A lot of times, that's what we had to eat. We always raised a garden. I don't look down on people because I guess – we were never on welfare or anything like that, but I accept people for what they are. Of course, like I said, I couldn't work social work with people. But there are young people who are capable of working and who don't. But in a situation like that, I didn't feel it was my place to pass judgment on who got food and who didn't. There were people in there I knew that couldn't have been flooded and probably had their shelves stocked just as full as mine were and came in there and took stuff. But I don't care what kind of a thing you had. If someone was giving them out free, they'd be there.

MK: They are the one that would have to live with it though. So, what happened after you started to work on this job? What was the job?

RAT: FEMA's term for us is crisis counselors, but we like to term ourselves outreach workers on the flood recovery project. What we've done is – in the beginning, a lot of people were still confused. Some people weren't even in a trailer. They didn't have a home. We got referrals from people saying, "You should go check on so-and-so," and we'd go. The one we found was living in an apartment that the floor was falling in. The downstairs of the apartment building was just full of sand and everything, and then they're living upstairs. So, we called FEMA and asked them to consider, "Well, are there any trailers left," and helped her to make an application for that. Of course, the disaster assistance center to courthouses was then closed, but someone should have been there. Hindsight, someone should be there. When those people come through in the very early days, they needed the crisis counseling, November the 5th, when they were



coming through. I know FEMA can't – they'll have to wait until it's declared a national disaster area. But even a town like Parsons could've had its own. I guess we did, in a way. When I sat down with that woman and she couldn't drink that cup of coffee, I did mental health work with her then, just by being a friend to her. But when they opened the disaster assistance center to courthouse two weeks later, people should have been there. When someone got so upset with the system or didn't understand the system or couldn't read and couldn't write or were so confused, someone should have been there. Of course, that's hindsight. It's easy for you to say now and look back and say, "Ha, ha, ha." You can pick everything that's wrong. Of course, a lot of things were right, but they needed help to get through those centers.

MK: Did you have any formal counseling training for this job?

RAT: No, and we worked.

MK: Did that worry you?

RAT: I was afraid I'd do something wrong. Of course, Gary was there, and he is a trained counselor and has had a private counseling practice and things.

MK: Gary?

RAT: (Bookout?). He's our supervisor. Kate encouraged just – she had seen me at the school. She said, "You just do what you've done, and just let people tell you their feelings and things. We would go in and sometimes just help them fill out forms or encourage them to sign up for whatever aid might still be available, or as it became available and things. When we had training in March at Huttonsville through the program. They had arranged training for us, but no formal training. I'd had psych and sociology and what was required at school, with college, but no. In high school, I worked with – we called them slow learners. I don't know what the term is now, but the one girl was crippled and she couldn't go around the school good and didn't adjust good. I had a high school level of them, and I did that for my junior and senior year in high school instead of taking vo-tech, which didn't have anything I was really interested in. I was the teacher's helper and I worked with the – some of them were semi-retarded. Some were just plain out slow learners. Looking back now and all the things you hear about abused children, I think some came from abused – they were abused children. Therefore, they didn't do well in school, and the teacher put them out in the special ed. That's how the special ed class is. But for the most part, those kids weren't retarded. But I'd worked with them like that, and have then been a for-age leader in homemakers, had that type of social contact. They worked with the band boosters at the high school and had contacts like that, which really helped as far as to make – and the people Mark and I have met through his work and people I know have met around town and helped a lot in November. Then we'd get some volunteers in there, or just to know a little bit about the people, when they come in, if this was normal for them. That's been the hardest thing. Some people are really bitter and angry, but is that normal for them? Were they that way? How did they act before the flood? But for training, that's what – we've had, I think, four training sessions at Huttonsville.

MK: What were they like? What did you learn from those? Were they helpful?

RAT: At times. Some of them were a little late. We've done picked it up on our own. If I didn't know how to handle a situation sometimes or I wasn't sure what to do on the next visit, I'd just go to Gary and say, "This is what happened and this is what I think where it's leading and what's going on," and he would read some. Then there were some that we just – when we'd get a referral and say they're really wacko or whatever and they're just not like they were before, Gary would take, or someone would try to take that knew these people before. We tried to work with people as much as we could, divided up with people we knew before the flood so we could tell better. There were a lot of people I worked with in that tape recorder that I don't know. A few were casual, you meet on the street, "Hi, how are you," type of thing. But now, it's a lot different. But for training, not really, just every day – and maybe having five brothers and sisters or two brothers and three younger sisters, that type training. When I was at home, I helped clean for a woman, an older woman – things that I've learned like that, and how people are and how older people are set in their ways, and to just take your time with them. A lot of people have trouble with this, I think, too. But I think that's what we like about Tucker County in some ways is, of course, its people are there. They leave you alone if you want to be left alone, and they're friendly if you want them to be friendly to you. But they don't accept change readily. Even though the flood came in and changed their life all around, maybe took their house, they'd like to get back to as near as that as they could or back into the senior citizens going to the senior center every day. "So what if I don't have a house to live in? Just so I can go to the senior center every day, I don't care." That's the type of attitude some of them have had. I want people to accept me for what I am. So, therefore, I tend to accept people for what they are.

MK: But it was a lot about the way you were raised –

RAT: I think so.

MK: – and a lot about just your dealings in everyday community life, which prepared you to do this job.

RAT: I think that, to me, to do the outreach work we've done is all you need. Don't go in and try to change them. Just like the one fellow in his FEMA trailer, the family wants him to do one thing, and FEMA wants him to do one thing. Then I asked him, I said, "What is it you want?" He said, "I just want my own table to put my feet under." I praised him, that he knew what he wanted. Of course, that's been reinforced for us in these trainings, to ask the people what they want, not what does FEMA want for them and not what does their family want for them. What do they want? With the older people, that's been the problem. "What do I do that's right for my kids, and my kids will be happy?" But then there are those who, – my God, they don't care what their kids want for them. I'm going to do what I want. Those are the kind I like to see, because I'm afraid that when I get older, I don't care what my kids want for me. If I don't want it, I'm not going to do it. I'll have to be old and senile, and they'll have to declare me incompetent before they'll get to do it for me. But I think that's a lot of it, is that we were brought up to be what you want, do what you want. Mother and daddy, even though the money wasn't always there, they still encouraged and did what they could to let us pursue our interests and be interested in the things we wanted to be interested in and join what clubs we wanted to join at school – and for the most part, accepted our friends, brought them home. They welcomed our friends, rich, poor, or

otherwise.

MK: Just a real accepting kind of environment. Did you feel pretty good about yourself throughout this experience, that somehow, you had naturally acquired the kind of skills which were so useful now in this particular tragedy? Did that make you feel good about yourself?

RAT: Yes, I take pride in the job I've done. I think, given the circumstances and the different things that are happening and have happened and the setbacks people have had, that I've done the best that I could with what was given me to work with in each situation. Now, there have been a couple cases I've just backed off on, and I said, "Gary, I would prefer if you took them over," just like with the one young mother – she's a single mother, but she has a live-in boyfriend, and they're on welfare and –

MK: What did you say that they were on welfare, but they had not –

RAT: They were living in a FEMA trailer. They were pre-disaster renters. So, FEMA expects them to look for alternative housing. They were sitting there waiting for FEMA just to sell that trailer for a dollar and give it to them, waiting for a handout. She's capable of working. I didn't have much contact with him, but he is, too. Then they want everything handed to them. I don't have much patience for that, I guess, is the word I want to – to me, that's a waste. If you can't work for some reason, or you were never taught how or you don't have the opportunity to find work and it's not available, then sometimes, that's different. But when you just sit there and wait for handouts, I don't have any patience with people like that. So, I just I went out and I talked to her and did what FEMA asked. She was real uncooperative. "Well, I'll just wait, and they'll sell it to me for a dollar." I said, "No, they won't. If you want to maintain that attitude, that's up to you. I can't change your mind." I said, "Someone else in the office will probably be back to see you." Gary ran on the same thing, but "I'll just stay here and wait." Then FEMA would come, and they'd ask her to go look and she wouldn't go look. Well, they served her an eviction there. She's no longer living in that trailer because she didn't try to find – and she sat on her duff and waited too long.

MK: But is there alternative housing in your county?

RAT: Somewhat. Very little. But if they'd go out and look – see, there were several who got to buy theirs, because when we would go and say, "FEMA says you got to look. We know there's nothing available, but call –"

MK: It was a question of attitude more than results.

RAT: Non-cooperation. FEMA writes it up as non-cooperation. "You won't cooperate with us, we're not going to do anything for you either." They're sort of adamant about that attitude right now. I'm both ways of that. If people cooperate, I've seen them get to buy their trailers for what is a reasonable price for that person. They bring the price down. These people went out and they looked and proved to FEMA, "My God, it isn't here. We can't take it if it's not here. So, therefore, you need to sell us this trailer and a half." But when they just refuse to cooperate, and when we go out and ask them to cooperate and they still don't want to cooperate, there's not a

whole lot – I'm guessing on this, but I bet her mother was on welfare. She's probably a typical welfare person – born on welfare, raised on welfare, and now, I'm going to have a bunch of kids and raise them on welfare. As long as welfare takes care of me, I don't have to do anything. It might have been very easy for mom and daddy to go on welfare with six kids, and nobody would have qualified any more than they did. They never even ever got food stamps or anything. I mean, they found people who needed cleaning and wanted cleaning done and did whatever work was available for as long as it lasted. So, I guess that's why I don't have any – because I know, looking back now, how easy it would have been for them to go on welfare. It would have been so easy, and they never. My God, if they could do it with six kids, somebody with one kid could surely do it. Then when the kids were young, then yes, the mother needs to be home, and that's one thing. I have no qualms with assistance, but it can't go on forever.

MK: What were some of the positive things you were able to do with people?

RAT: Oh, back in May, we had West Virginia Housing come in and have a public meeting and educated people as to what their program was about. Then several people signed up, and now, they're in homes or building homes. The opportunity was there, but no one really knew what it was about. So, we were trained on how to take their applications and what it was about. But we felt we were one-on-one. We're not reaching enough people. So, we had a public meeting of it. We had them come in and talk what it's about and who qualifies and who doesn't qualify and go from there. Then back in early February, when we first started, there was another fellow from up at the hunting camp who didn't have a permanent home. He was living in a hunting camp of some family. It was a hunting camp, really wasn't equipped for winter use. I questioned how come he didn't get a FEMA trailer, and they said, "Well, he's down here. He is living." I said, "But it's really not suitable for winter use." So, they sent him a trailer. He got a trailer. Now, he's bought it, and he's just going to make it his permanent home. He's in his early sixties, so that'll probably be his home for his lifetime. To see someone I knew a little better like that – of course, that was supposed to be my ulterior motive, but I would have treated anybody that would've come in and said, "Hey, same situation." Of course, I think he got the last trailer that they let out for the whole state. I think he was one of the last ones to go in once. So, I felt that that was pretty positive to call and say, "Hey, I think you should consider this guy," and whatnot, and that they did. The people can come back. Early on, in February, March, when we first started, a lot of people were still in shock. It was winter, and I guess they were somewhat depressed. It's just easier to stay in this trailer right now and not go out and find a house to buy or a lot to build on or a loan or anything. But now, more houses are just going up left and right, and people, their attitude changes. The Carters, they took me up to their house to show it to me last Tuesday. Two weeks ago, they didn't even know if their loan had been approved. Now, it's under a roof and they're finishing the drywall. Last week, they were working on it. So, to see how far they've come, and like that – they were real upset in the beginning that they had just retired, and then lived in the house two months and had paid for it – I guess bought it a couple years ago and paid for it, and just retired and had finished fixing it up and been in it two months. For it to wash away, something they'd worked for all their life, just to come back to this area and retire, and then to have it wash out a couple hours' time and they lost it all and have to live in a FEMA trailer – and they just, I think, had decided, well, they would be content in that trailer and they'd just buy it. Then they decided they weren't content in it, and they're building a home now. They're real excited. They're just like in a young couple's building instead of their retirement

home. They're just like a young couple building. I enjoyed that last week, going up there. Of course, the people from the gazette was there to see them and they were doing a story on them. I thought they were a good example of how people can come back, can be depressed for a while and get through that time, can be upset, and then go on. For the most part, that's what most of the whole county or – of course, this end of the county's done, is take all these setbacks and deal with them. A lot of people, their attitude is, "I'll take one day at a time." When I get through this day then I'll get through the next day and the next day. They've set small goals. Some people were trying to make these big plans. "I can be in a house in a month's time," and it wasn't realistic if they were going to do a lot of their work themselves and save on labor – and worked with them to say, "Set a goal that this week you'll put an X number of doors in, and next week, you'll get an X number of windows in," and to help them to set smaller goals that were achievable so they wouldn't become depressed when they weren't where they thought they ought to be too soon. Several people seemed to – that has worked for them, to bring their goals down to something more achievable. So, that was one of the training sessions, to help people set – work with them to set achievable goals. So, the one step at a time, I like that. That's what we did to replace what we lost in the flood. We lost our hunting camp. We just took it one step at a time, waited until spring when we could get up there and see where we could buy a piece of property, and we bought it. Then we'd seen about getting the money to build the cabin with and just took it in steps. Now, it's done. So, I sort of have a sense of how these people feel when they can get to get in a home. It's our hunting camp, and it's not the same. It's not the same loss, but it meant as much to us as some of these people's homes did or whatever. So, for us to be able to achieve that now and whatnot, and to have taken our time getting there, it's more fun to go up there now. I think that that's why I've tried to use things that have happened to us in the last year and say, "Well, we did this, and we went one step, one step, one step. Yes, it takes a while, but you appreciate it more when you get there." On a home visit yesterday, the women seemed a little depressed that they weren't done even with their drywall yet. They're doing a large home. I said, "Well, look what you've accomplished so far. You come from losing two homes –" they had a home and a rental – "Come from losing two homes to at least having this, and then the roof and the drywall. You're almost done with it. You're through the hardest stuff now. Now, you're going to have just a tough decision just picking out what kind of carpet you want," and tried to get her on an up thing. She said, "I guess." She's still sort of inching a little bit. She looked around and she said, "We have done a lot. We didn't start on this house until July or whatever, and we've done it all ourselves, most of it, except the men I used to put on the roof." She said, "We have done this ourselves." He was laid off all summer. I said, "You guys have done a lot." Praise, I think people need that. Of course, Kate wrote several articles and things on that, and we've had training on that, praise them from what they've done and not how far they have to go. Don't point that out. It's helped me personally, this job. I used to have a terrible, terrible temper. Now, I've learned to go –

MK: You?

RAT: Me, yes. [laughter] Yes, I have a very bad temper – bad, bad, bad, bad. But I've learned to go [exhales]. Some people, you have a sense, sort of from talking to them, where they ought to be, and you don't feel they're quite there. So, you're trying to help them get there. But maybe what I know is not best for them, and I'll have to just go [exhales], and help them see what their goals are and set their goals and then slowly achieve them, if that's what it takes, if it takes a lot

to get there.

MK: Quite early on, you were still listening to some real hard stories that were about the people telling you stuff.

RAT: What they lost and how many years they'd had this, that still comes out in home visits, even though you're talking about how far they are. "Did you know I used to collect stamps?" This woman was telling me about this humongous stamp collection she had, and how she'd thrown it out because she thought it wasn't any good. The guy at the post office asked her if she still collected stamps the other day. She bought them. She said, "Well no. They got wet, and I just threw the album out." He said that the post office would have bought them from her for what she paid for them. She was just sick. She was sick. He said if there had been anything on them at all – and people to be still upset with the things that could have been saved that they threw away in the early days, because they thought it was contaminated or this or that, and some things that wouldn't have mattered, just like that. She said, "You mean it was still of some value, and I could have still added –"

[end of transcript]