

Ruth Ann Toth: She wasn't really interested in selling, but that she could have added to it. It was still meaningful. He said, "Oh, yes." He said even if there was anything left on them at all, any of the picture at all. There she got a reminder of getting the flow. But then she's dealt with it. She's decided to start again. She's going to start her collection all over again. God help her. She said stuff came back, when they first – she had come on to some rare stamps somehow through her travels.

Michael Kline: When you would hear so much sorrow and bitterness and heartache, you have to listen to that day after day, day in and day out. Where did you put it all? What did you do with it? In a sense, you were lifting a burden from other people by listening to their stories. But what did you do with all that trash?

RAT: No. It's not trash. It's their feelings.

MK: Well, it is that burden now. What did you do with it?

RAT: If people were bitter, before I left – when I get there, if I see they were bitter and they were stuck on something, maybe so and so got money from the foundation they didn't deserve but try to get them to see why. Of course, that came from some of the training, too. Why are you so bitter? What is at the root of this bitterness? If they could get to it, then it was okay for me. I could leave it with them that they got to see that bitterness. But then maybe someone who doesn't have any family, or they don't get along. One, that she doesn't get along with their family, and so, she keeps telling me everything that's wrong. I listen. I don't want to say I close them out. But I try not to bring it home, I really don't. Maybe that's not good. To me, if I can listen to them and get them to accept it or deal with it and go on, then it's okay. But for me to bring it home, it's not going to do them any good. It's not going to do me any good even if I sit and dwell on it. Some nights, I don't go to sleep. Like with this deal lately over the daughter and the father and FEMA. This vicious circle that's going on as to what's best for this man. I lay there. Where can I go with him? How can I get her to accept what he wants? How can I get FEMA to leave him alone and let him do what he wants? Some nights, I don't go to sleep. Sometimes, I do bring it home, but then I try not to take it out. In the early days, I took it out on Shannon. I caught myself losing my temper with her. That's why I said, after some of the training, then I was better able to deal with it. If you've done all you can do with them and they don't deal with it, then go back and do it again. If you still can't get them to deal with it, then they need more help than what our temporary program can do for them. I try not to bring him home. Like I said, this one, I brought home. But I knew him before. His grandson used to come down here all the time. This man is really – to me, I admire him because his wife had Alzheimer's for years, and he took care of her. She was an ambulant when the flood hit, and fifteen days afterwards, she died. He's really had to do a lot. Maybe that's why I brought his troubles home with me in trying to sort that out. To me, make a couple of plans for him and then present options to him. That was another thing that they encouraged us. If we felt that people were overwhelmed, if we made in our mind, looked at everything and said, "Have you thought about this?" So, maybe that's why I'm trying to get his down to something more realistic for him. He's not in the best of health and everything. Maybe that's why I brought him home with me. But for the most part, most people I don't bring home. Now, there will be a few things that people will mark it on now. I'll say, "Did you know that they lost this and they lost that or

whatever? But then after what – you don't break the confidence. I don't go into anything that they bring out into a session. I don't think of it as therapy because I really don't think I'm trained enough to do therapy. But if they get to talk, I guess it is therapy. If they get it out of their system, then it was therapeutic to get rid of it. But I sat there, and I did listen, and then I did understand. But then I don't think of it as therapy. But then to bring someone home, these homies, people you just can't do anything with. I just like to take them and slap them around. Boy, it's just so wonderful. This old ninety-nine-year-old man, he's just bound and determined by God. He's going to buy that cement trailer or else. Of course, I try not to bring names home, but you know this old man. "I'm going to stay right here," and whatever. Things like that. Just like I say anybody that would bring their work home from the bank or wherever, A&P or whatever, wherever they would bring their work home, I've done that. But to bring it home and dwell on it, I haven't done that.

MK: Where do you put it? How do you lay it down?

RAT: I write it down. If you go back and look at my time sheets, a lot of it's on my time sheets, that they've vented. I need to make another home visit. I don't feel that I made progress with them. They're making progress. I feel better about this one. This one is still so bitter. I use initials so that for my reference when I go back. Some of it's on paper. Some of it is still back here. When I go back, I can say, "Well, the last time I was here you were upset about this or that. How's that for you now?" I don't know. I don't carry around – like if I'm mad at Mark for example or something, he done and piss me off about something, I'll tell him about it maybe for two hours. If I'm mad, that's where my temper comes out according to him. I'll tell you about it, but then if I see I can't change it, then I just forget about it. Oh, well, that's life. I don't bring it home though. I don't think I do. But early on, I was upset about how the system worked, how FEMA worked, how our hands were tied as to how much we could do. Then I'd be real upset about that maybe, and I'd say, "Get out of my face. I need my own time or something." But then I learned that if I'm going to do this job and do it right, I can't bring it home either. My God, if I was doing real counseling and getting into people's real, real emotional, or if we had run onto somebody, I'm glad we haven't. But I think FEMA, to me, I think they seemed disappointed when they came around and critiqued us that we hadn't run onto suicidal people. They questioned that. "How come you have not dealt with anybody who's suicidal?" I said, "That's not the way people are here. That's not how they answer their problems." It's just very rare to hear of suicide in this region, probably the whole state. It would be very rare to hear of suicide. Someone who has a lot of pressure from work, maybe business, the people don't do that. That's not how they deal with their problems. They've had probably harder setbacks financially through their life and whatever than a flood in some cases. They've been out of work before. They've not had food in the cupboard before. They've dealt with things like this before. I think that's the older people, I guess. Of course, they've been through the Depression and everything. So, what's a flood – but I accept things for what they are I think, for the most part. That I can't change everything. What's it going to help if I bring the problems home with me?

MK: I know but...

RAT: Would it be hard for you?

MK: I think it is a real achievement to learn how to lay things aside, lay them down. Whether it is your own personal resentments or whether it is – if you are a professional listener and somebody is unloading to you day after day after day. What do you do with that? Where do you put it?

RAT: Leave it in the office in that Sunday school room at St. John's Church. It's off the wall.

MK: Some people do that better than others.

RAT: Though, sometimes when I'm real upset, I feel I haven't been able to get where I wanted to be by the end of that session, that person. Then Gary's sitting in the office or comes in before I leave. I'm putting part of it down, and I'll say, "I've got to talk to you." He's been a good listener. Maybe he's carrying them around.

MK: So, you have unloaded some on him?

RAT: Somewhat on him or Don or even in some cases a member of that family or a friend who can get to you without breaking by saying, "Hey, why don't you go see so and so?" But to bring it home, no, I don't think so. Because that wasn't my idea of what the job was. It's to help people accept what's been dealt to them and to get through it and to verbalize it. I think they feel better once they do verbalize it. There's a lot of sadness and tragedy. Like with the fellow whose wife had Alzheimer's and for her to die and him to have taken care of her all these years. He has an eye problem now from that. See, I can remember all of it. I haven't forgotten it about him. I know it, but I don't carry it around with me all day either. I hope I'm not cold hearted because I don't carry it around with me. Maybe think of something. You can make things better if you want to. There's a lot out there that these people could do. Maybe those that are sitting wallowing in it, but I don't even have anybody wallowing in their troubles because of the flood, very little.

MK: Most people are moving on past that now.

RAT: I really think so. Now, I'm a little leery of what the anniversary will bring. What the weekend of November the fourth will bring or that week?

MK: Why are you worried about that?

RAT: Well, because you've heard so much garbage, now that's trash and garbage. What we've heard about how people will feel. They say it's the same thing like with the anniversary of a death or whatever. I did see a woman go through that recently and worked with her on that, that her dad died. He died after the flood, but not because of the flood. But he died after the flood. His birthday was not too long ago. The depression she felt from that anniversary and seeing that and reinforcing all this stuff we hear about anniversaries of deaths or tragedies and disasters. How hard they are on people. How are these people going to deal with this? Then we're supposed to be gone.

MK: Where do we hear that from?

RAT: Well, you hear it from FEMA and the NIMH, National Institute of Mental Health. That the anniversary of a disaster people will really have a time. They treat it just like the anniversary of a loved one dying. We've not had anybody in our immediate family real close. I've had aunts die.

MK: So, you think that what the professionals are saying about anniversaries and...

RAT: It's been reinforced.

MK: It is creating more of a problem than the actual anniversary, it says?

RAT: People are changing now. As October comes on, things remind them of things that they were doing a year ago before the flood. I can see it changing people. They're different. Some of them are depressed. Some of them are sort of anxious. When it rains, sometimes people get – this last rain I wasn't out and around. I was home. I happened to be off. So, I didn't see much of people. But the time before when it really rained and things, they really got sort of antsy, I guess, is the word. You could see a little difference in them, a different look in their eyes and somewhat distracted sometimes. To me, if an anniversary of a death of a loved one can bring up memories, what would an anniversary of the disaster where they lost everything that they had –

MK: So, when we think of where Tucker County is a year later, there is a certain feeling of accomplishment and a certain dread about this, what the anniversary will bring.

RAT: Yes. I think this has helped my acceptance of people and their feelings. This one woman is very adamant about this thing that on October or November the first, that thing that Camp Kidd, she wants no part of it. She says, "It'll be hard enough to go through it without people talking about it." I tried to tell her that as from what we've been working on it and things, that it was to be uplifting and to praise people on how far they'd come and to thank the people who came in and helped and whatnot. It was all going to focus on the positive and that, yes, I lost. But this is how far I am now. I praised her on her accomplishments. She said, "I don't care. I don't want to be with a bunch of people. That's private for me." That reinforced all this other garbage we heard. That people have different feelings about it just like anything else. She's usually not a very verbal person. I've known her since I've lived here. That was real hard to take because she's really a group-oriented person. She's a people person and to see her turn away from that. But I said, "You don't have to go. If you want to stay at home with your family and you all want to deal with the day in whatever fashion you seem fit. If you want to treat it as an ordinary day and it's not November the fourth, then we just skip November the fourth and went to November the fifth then that's..."

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