

Interviewees: Dolores D. Parker
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[Begin Tape 3342 Side A. Begin Session I.]

NILIMA MWENDO: Interview with Mrs. Dolores D. Parker of New Orleans, Louisiana. Longtime resident of the Lower Ninth Ward. This interview is being conducted on December the second, 2003, at her home [address removed] in New Orleans. The interviewer is Nilima Mwendo. So I want to start off with some background questions, Miss Parker. Just to, you know, to get a sense of who you are, what your life has been like, and that kind of thing. So before this tape started, you said you were from . . .

DOLORES PARKER: [00:47] Bayou Goula, Louisiana. Which is between Plaquemine [Louisiana] and Baton Rouge. It's in that . . . It's just a little small town.

MWENDO: How many people in that town when you were growing up?

PARKER: Well, when I was . . . I didn't grow up there. I was only born there.

MWENDO: Oh.

PARKER: You see, my daddy was a Methodist minister and we traveled all over Louisiana. So, when Mother would get pregnant, she would go back home to have her babies.

MWENDO: And that was home.

PARKER: So we all . . . Yes, my mother and my father's from Bayou Goula. So she would go home and have her babies, and then we'd go back.

MWENDO: And you can't say, like, where you'd go? It was just . . .

PARKER: [1:26] No, because I traveled all over Louisiana, so I grew up in all these little places.

MWENDO: And what was that like?

PARKER: Well, it was fun to me. Because, really, it was my little brother and I. Because I have three older siblings, but they were, like, grown. And we came along way after they . . . after them. So we traveled with my mom and dad. And we went to, like, Angie, Louisiana. Went to Bogalusa [Louisiana]. Then we left from Bogalusa and came to New Orleans. And we stayed. He pastored here for a while. Then we left and went to Bastrop, Louisiana. We stayed there and then we came back to New Orleans. And he pastored uptown in Gertown [neighborhood]. Then we left from there and went across the river. And that was his last pastoring. That was with me.

MWENDO: And how old were you, about, at that time?

PARKER: His last pastoring?

MWENDO: Yes.

PARKER: [2:19] My last year in high school. I was seventeen.

MWENDO: Yes. And all that time, it was really fun. All that moving around didn't bother you?

PARKER: No. Well, when we went to . . . When we left from New Orleans and went to Bastrop, that was like going from the city to the country. And it was kind of like, "I want to go home." And he say, "Well you know, we home. This is home for right now." So after I was there a while, I really enjoyed it. I tell everybody, that's the best three years of my life.

MWENDO: In . . . ?

PARKER: In Bastrop, Louisiana.

MWENDO: Bastrop.

PARKER: That's up north.

MWENDO: And why was that the best time of your life?

PARKER: [2:55] Because we ate from the garden. If we go to the grocery store and spend four or five dollars, my mom would have a fit. Because we didn't have to buy anything. Because our members supplied us with our meat, our butter. My mother raised chickens, so we had eggs. We got milk. Fruit from the fruit trees. She would can stuff. My daddy made a garden. We had everything in that garden that you could imagine.

MWENDO: It was you and your brother, mainly . . .

PARKER: Me and my little brother.

MWENDO: Because the other three had . . .

PARKER: The other ones, they were grown and gone, gone. Because my older brother is eighteen years older than I am. I have a sister, which is deceased now, she was sixteen years older than I. Then I had a brother that was fourteen years older. So they were gone and grown. They were married. It was just my little brother and I.

MWENDO: When you were at . . . Was it difficult to come then back to New Orleans?

PARKER: No, not at all. But I came . . . When we were in Bastrop, I finished the eighth grade there. I was getting ready to go into high school. I told my father, I said, "I don't want to go to high school here. I want to go back home."

MWENDO: And home to you is . . .

PARKER: [4:05] Home was New Orleans. He said, "Little girl, since you so smart and you don't want to stay, and you want to go home, you go home." I came and I stayed with my brother and I started at Joseph S. Clark High School. And they were away! They were still in Bastrop, and I was here by myself. Not by myself, but . . .

MWENDO: With your brother.

PARKER: With my brother.

MWENDO: Where did you all live? Where did you live?

PARKER: On Annette Street.

MWENDO: Is that the Seventh Ward?

PARKER: In the Seventh Ward, yes, right. In the Seventh Ward.

MWENDO: How long were you there?

PARKER: Well, I stayed there until my father was transferred to the church in Gertown, Philip Memorial. Then we lived on Edinburgh Street.

MWENDO: Edinburgh Street?

PARKER: [4:47] Edinburgh Street. This is where we stayed, and that's where . . . And then after . . . I think it was my senior year, and they moved him to St. Matthew across in Algiers [Louisiana]. I didn't want to go to Landry [High School], because that was my last year at Clark, and I wasn't going to Landry. My little brother went to Landry, but I didn't. I crossed that river a whole year. At six-fifteen, I caught that six-fifteen ferry. At that time, it was on platoons.

MWENDO: Platoons?

PARKER: I went to school from seven to twelve and learned just as much as these children are that go all day. Then the other group of us came from twelve to five. For a whole year, I traveled across that Mississippi River on the ferry at Canal Street. Catch the Canal car to, whatever, it was the Claiborne [Avenue] bus then. The Claiborne bus brought us from the [French] Quarter to Clark. I stayed there till I finished.

MWENDO: Where was Clark?

PARKER: Clark was on Dumaine [Street], on Bayou Road.

MWENDO: Bayou Road.

PARKER: [5:52] That was the main building was on Bayou Road. But we started off on Dumaine Street, what was Clark Annex. Now it's Bell [School]. But on Dumaine, it was Clark Annex. It was an old school. It was for white . . . It was for white people. They gave it to us. We stayed there for two years, and then we left from that place, and then we came up on Bayou Road to the main building.

MWENDO: What year, about, was that?

PARKER: I finished Clark in '54. Because we getting ready now to celebrate next year our fiftieth year from high school.

MWENDO: Okay. How long was it for black people when you had gone?

PARKER: I think it opened up in '50. It was given to blacks in '50. It was a white school. We got it in 1950.

MWENDO: This is the one that's on Dumaine, or the one that was on Bayou Road.

PARKER: On Bayou Road.

MWENDO: Bayou Road. You remember any addresses? Do you remember, Bayou Road and what?

PARKER: [6:46] What is it? Bayou Road and Derbigny [Street]? I mean, it's a block off of St. Claude [Avenue]. I mean, off Claiborne. So that's what? That's Derbigny. Derbigny, yeah. Bayou Road and Derbigny. Yeah, that's where it was, right on the corner. Which it still stands. It has been given . . . Well, at one time, little Ben Franklin was using Clark. The alumni raised so much sand until he gave it back to the area, so the children could continue going to Clark.

MWENDO: Okay. So how was high school like?

PARKER: Oh, fun. Fun, fun. I enjoyed my high school days. That's why I don't understand the kids of today. I enjoyed my high school days!

MWENDO: What made it fun? What was good about it?

PARKER: Going to class. Doing my work, which I had to do. We had football games. During that time, we had to walk. Because we only had two places you could play. That was Dillard and Xavier. That was the only two stadiums we could use.

MWENDO: Dillard University.

PARKER: Dillard University stadium. Xavier University stadium is where we held our . . .

MWENDO: [8:00] Now where were these stadiums? Where were Dillard and Xavier stadiums?

PARKER: Back of the school. Back of Xavier School. We couldn't go to City Park. Because we weren't allowed.

MWENDO: Why you weren't allowed?

PARKER: Because it was segregation in those days. We would walk to Dillard for a game. And . . . When we got ready to graduate, the only place we could go to have graduation was at Booker T. [Washington High School]. But in '53 . . . My husband finished from Clark in '53 and we were the first class to use the auditorium for graduation. Then after their class did it, then all other classes followed behind. Then after that, we were able to use the auditorium for graduation.

MWENDO: So in 1953 was when it started.

PARKER: It was the first year that Clark started going to the auditorium. Because the only place you could go was Booker T., and Booker T. had the auditorium.

MWENDO: What happened after that? After high school?

PARKER: [9:10] After high school? I really wanted to go away to school, to college. I wanted to go to Howard University, because I wanted to take up social work. My father told me that I could not go, so I better make up my mind I was going to Dillard, and that was it.

MWENDO: College was always on your mind? College was . . .

PARKER: Oh, yes. Well, I was going to go to college, yeah.

MWENDO: Was it the pushing of the family? Was education a very important part of . . .

PARKER: Well, my family is education . . .

MWENDO: Directed?

PARKER: Right. Because we's a stickler for that. We are sticklers for that, for education. That was my only out, to go to . . . That's how I wound up at Dillard. I went into education. I wound up being a teacher.

MWENDO: That's where you got your degree, your teaching degree.

PARKER: I got my BA in elementary education.

MWENDO: And started teaching . . .

PARKER: [10:07] I started teaching. I taught school for thirty-two years.

MWENDO: Where did you teach?

PARKER: My first assignment was McDonogh 42. That was a white school at one time. When I finished from Dillard, that year it was given over to blacks. We were the first teachers to go to McDonogh 42.

MWENDO: How did that happen? Like you were saying, like the auditorium, “We were able to get into the auditorium.” “Clark, the Bayou Road school, was given to blacks.” This school you were teaching at, it was given to blacks. What was that about? What was going on?

PARKER: [10:49] Well I think what was really happening that we needed more schools. Because we didn’t have that many schools. Because see, when we were in high school, we only had four high schools, and whites had plenty schools. They had Warren Easton [School], they had McDonogh, John McDonogh, they had . . . Oh, shucks. Well, more than we had. We only had four. We had Clark, Booker T., Landry, and [McDonogh] 35. That was the only four high schools that we had to go to. I think the school board might have had something to do with that, too, decided we needed more schools. Eventually they started giving . . . We started getting other schools.

MWENDO: Okay. So your first school was . . .

PARKER: McDonogh 42.

MWENDO: Forty-two. And that’s where?

PARKER: [11:32] It's on Pauger [Street] in the Seventh Ward. Pauger and [?], I think. Between . . . on Pauger between [?] and whatever the next street is over. I stayed there for a year. I left from there and I went to Couvent [School], which is now A.P. Tureaud [Elementary School]. With all these changes of names, I get confused with these schools. But I went to Couvent, and I stayed there for three years. I got pregnant with my last child and when I left from there . . .

MWENDO: How many children?

PARKER: I have four kids. Raymond, Raynelle, Raynette, and Raynard.

MWENDO: All "Rs." Okay.

PARKER: Their daddy was Raymond. They all . . . They were all born a year apart, so I couldn't think of no names to give them. I name them the same thing. If you look at the birthdays, you see. Everybody was born the same month.

MWENDO: Wow!

PARKER: The sixth, the seventh, the tenth, the thirteenth.

MWENDO: Wow.

PARKER: [12:32] And their daddy was the thirtieth. That's history for me. When I left Couvent - back to the schools - when I left Couvent, I went out on maternity leave. My oldest was getting ready to go to kindergarten. That was at Lawless Elementary, so I was bringing him there. I met one of the key teachers there who was the ranking teacher. She asked me, she said, [?] "Are you ready to go back to work?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, have you sent your letter in?" I say, "I did." She said, "What schools did you put?" I said, "Well, I had Lawless first." Because my child was there. I had McCarty [School]. And I had Horton [School]. She said . . .

MWENDO: They all down, you wanted to . . .

PARKER: They were all in this area. That was the same area, yes. Because I was staying here. So she said, "Well, come tomorrow, and we going to see the principal." Who was Mr. Isadore Wolf[?] at the time. He's deceased now. But he was a good principal. I came in that morning . . .

MWENDO: Of Lawless?

PARKER: [13:32] At Lawless. He was at Lawless. I came in that morning, went to see him, and he asked me a few questions. He said, "Well, did you send your . . ." I said, "Yes." Well, at that time, Mr. Bison[?] was our personnel director at the school board. He called Mr. Bison. He told him, he said, "Yes, I have Miss Parker's letter right here." He say, "Well, tell her yes, she can start." I think it was January I started. Because I was on that half term. I think I

started in January. I stayed at Lawless until integration and they were sending, I'd say the best black teachers to these white schools. I had the least amount of years on the grade level, so I had to be the one that leave. I went to Palmer [Elementary School].

MWENDO: Where's Palmer?

PARKER: Palmer is on Clouet Street.

MWENDO: What year, about, was this?

PARKER: [14:28] That was in '73. In '73. The year . . . Yes, I stayed there one year. I stayed there one year. So Miss Berenger[?] was the principal. I told her, I said, "Well, Miss Berenger," I say, "I was sent here," I said, "to equalize your faculty." I said, "But I think I'm going back home to Lawless the next year." She said, "Miss Parker, you're not leaving here." I said, "Yes, I am."

MWENDO: This was a white school?

PARKER: It was a white school, white principal. She said, "No." She said, "I want you to stay here." I said, "I'm not staying here." She said, "Well, why you won't stay at my school?" I said, "Number one, I'm not used to walking up steps." Because I had to walk up steps. I'm used to walking flat on the ground. I said, "And the second thing, you don't have no men here." She fell out laughing. She said, "Well, I have to keep you here. I'm going to find some men." I

stayed a year. She said, "Well, I'm not going to sign your transfer." I say, "You don't have to sign. I'm going." I left, and I came back to Lawless. At that time, Albert Victorian[?] was the principal at Lawless. I came back to Lawless, and I stayed there until I retired.

MWENDO: [15:38] Which was what year?

PARKER: I retired in '91.

MWENDO: Wow. That was recent.

PARKER: I was fifty-five years old. Because what happened one day, I was sitting at my desk. All my kids were gone and grown. I'm sitting at my desk, I say, "Why are you working? You have no dependents. Uncle Sam is taking all of your money." I left and I went to the school board. I went to personnel, and I told the lady, I said, "I come to get my papers," I say, "because I'm going to retire." She said, "Well, Miss Parker, this is just January." I said, "I don't care. June the first, I'm out of here! Do you understand? I've been to Baton Rouge, and I've got all my years [?], all my stuff straight." I said, "I need my papers. Give me what I have to have." She gave it to me. I started working on it and June first, I was out of there.

MWENDO: What grades were you teaching?

PARKER: [16:24] I taught first, second and third. But I mainly stuck with my second grade.

MWENDO: Did you enjoy it?

PARKER: Oh yes I . . . Well, during that time, teaching was a pleasure. I can't say that now.

MWENDO: Why . . .

PARKER: I could be still teaching. But it's too . . . it's different. The kids are not like they used to be. The parents are not like they used to be. Because when you called a parent in, a parent came. When you had PTA meetings, the parents were there. When you had report card conference, those parents were there. Now, because my daughter-in-law teaches . . . It's a whole different ballgame from when I started teaching.

[17:03] Teaching was a pleasure when I started. I started in '58 after I graduated. Because I had just had my first child. I got my telegram. I said, "Oh, Jesus, my baby's only three weeks old." I called my doctor and I told him. He said, "Well, you just call and tell them you had the flu, and you had a relapse and you'll see them next week." That's what I did. [laughter] I started working. I had never had a leave. The only leave I had was maternity leave. That was like a half a year. But I never took a leave. Like, some people take R and R, rest and recuperation. I taught straight through. I saved my days so when my kids were sick, I would have days I could take off. I think when I retired, I had like a hundred and some odd days. It helped . . . add on to my retirement.

But I enjoyed teaching, I really did. I really did. Every school I went to, I really enjoyed. I was a Scout leader. Because when I went to Lawless, he asked, he said, "You know anything about Scouts?" I said, "Yes, I was a Girl Scout when I was a little girl." He said, "Well, I want

you to help one of the teachers with the Scouting.” He said, “What about being a coach over my girls’ athletic team?” I said, “Okay.” So we took . . . We won a lot of trophies.

MWENDO: For what? What sport?

PARKER: [18:31] We did basketball, volleyball, softball.

MWENDO: You were coach for all of that?

PARKER: Yes. We had track, and we had intramural sports with different little elementary schools around. I had a little team with our little uniforms and we’d go play in the evening. See, they don’t have that now. The children don’t have anything to do. When I was teaching, we had Girl Patrol, Boy Patrol. We had the Brownies, the Girl Scouts, the Cub Scouts, the Eagle Scouts. We had majorettes. I mean, the children had something to do. But nowadays, they’re focusing so much on this testing and testing till . . . This is where we losing our kids. They have nothing to really keep their interest. They really burning them out with their testing business. We gave tests. Centralized testing, or whatever.

MWENDO: Yes, the standardized.

PARKER: [19:28] The standardized. That’s what I meant, the standardized testing. But it was not like it is now. I enjoyed my teaching career. So what, I had to bring it to an end.

MWENDO: How did you meet your husband?

PARKER: [laughs] My sister-in-law and I went to Dillard together. One day while we were with the Dillard Players Guild, we were in the background. We did the costumes and all this kind of stuff. We had to go for practice or something we had to do at school. She lived around the corner. I walked around the corner to pick her up. She said, "Oh, girl, I can't go right now." She said, "My brother's coming home." He was in the service. In the service. He was discharged.

She said, "My brother's coming home." She said, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. Wait a while." I said, "Look, girl, we're going to be late. Let's go now." "No, no, no. Wait, wait, wait." He happened to come up, and he got out of the cab, and I was there on the porch. He looked at me and I looked at him and he said, "I'm going to see you later." I said, "I don't think so." [laughter] Then he started calling. She said, "My brother want to call you," and he started calling. Well I started . . . I had a boyfriend at the time. I think we . . . No, we had broken up. That's what it was. We had broken up. I really wasn't interested in getting into a relationship with nobody. He just kept calling. I said, "Oh, shoot. I'll deal with this." That's how we got together. We start seeing each other, we start going out and everything.

MWENDO: So his background, tell me a little bit about his background.

PARKER: [21:11] Well, he's from the Lower Nine. He was from the Lower Nine. He went to, I think, McCarty for his elementary. And when he left McCarty, he went to Clark. When he finished from Clark, he went to Southern University in Baton Rouge for a year. Then he decided

he wanted to go into the service. He spent three years in the service. When he came out, this is how we met. And then we got married, we had our first child, which was Raymond, Junior.

MWENDO: Is this the house that you all lived in the whole time?

PARKER: No. When we first got married, we lived uptown. We had an apartment uptown.

MWENDO: Okay. Do you remember the street? Do you remember where you . . .

PARKER: On Third Street. On Third Street.

MWENDO: Okay. Third and what?

PARKER: Third between Danneel [Street] and Saratoga [Street]. My brother and my sister-in-law were staying here at the time. My mother was here by herself. When they were . . .

MWENDO: In this house, you mean?

PARKER: [22:05] Yes, this house right here. When they built out at Pontchartrain Park, they bought a house at Pontchartrain Park, so they left. I said, "Well, shoot, why must I pay rent, I can come over here." [?] so we came here and we were comfortable. He was comfortable. We never really felt . . . He was so comfortable until we really never thought to even go purchase a

house, buy a house. He even could have gotten one on the GI Bill. But we just had the run of the house. Mama's here, whatever, she was just here.

MWENDO: So your mama still lived here.

PARKER: My mama lived right here with us until she passed. I had my first child, and he said, "Well, I'm going back to school." Before then, he had little odds and ends jobs. You say, "Oh, this is not going to make it," because I was teaching. The post office was giving their test. He got some points for being in the military, and he passed the test. He started working in the post office. He was a clerk, and he stayed there. He said, "Well, I'm still going back to school." I got pregnant again the next year and had another baby. He said, "Well, I guess I have to hold off." He held off until the third child came. He said, "I don't care how many more come, I'm going back to school."

[23:18] He went back to Southern on the Lakefront. He finished in accounting. Very smart, very smart man. He finished in accounting. Then he was still working in the post office. He decided to open up a little business of his own. He was doing income tax and business with grocery stores, and stuff like that. But then he had turned . . . well, I may as well just . . .

[portion omitted per restriction] We separated after that. Because, like I told him, "I need an asset, not a liability." I said, "I can raise my children by myself." I waited about three years before I got my divorce. He didn't change, so I said, "Well, me and my children." I raised my children really by myself. Because my oldest was like fifteen when we divorced.

I raised them all the way through high school and everything. They were good children. My children were good children. I mean, we had our little ups and downs. But like I told them,

“I’m Mom and Dad, I’m everything.” I mean, we’ve got to get this thing together, which we did. When they were old enough . . . in high school, and I think the third child was in junior high. And the two oldest, the oldest ones, were in [McDonogh] 35. They all went to 35. We got together and like I told them, we used to have a roundtable discussion every month. Mama threw the bills on the table, I said, “Now, look, this is what I got to do. Anybody need anything, I might not be able to do it now,” I said, “but we’ll get it later.”

[25:04] But they were the kind of children they didn’t say, “Well, Mama, you promised me this and you didn’t do it.” I didn’t have that. If I told them I was going to get it, that was it. They forgot about it. When everybody got to be fifteen years old, they decided they wanted to go to work. That’s when Lincoln . . . Pontchartrain Beach was open. All the kids were going out there working. My kids would go . . . They would go to school, and I think they went over on Thursday. Then Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, they worked those three days. The youngest one, some kind of way we did up her birth certificate. She was working, too, so that all three of us at the beach. But the older . . . first two was sisters and brothers, but the third one, she was a cousin. She wasn’t . . . so they [?] up the way they want. They worked out at the beach for oh, a good little while.

MWENDO: Now what year range was that?

PARKER: Oh, that was in ’75. Yes, ’75. Because he finished high school . . . The oldest one finished high school in ’77 . . . ’76. Then the next one finished in ’77, and the next one finished in ’78. Then the last child, poor little thing, he was a loner. He was all by himself. He had no . . . because they were all . . . They stuck together, those three. He was, like, five years

younger than the oldest child. He was three years younger than the last, the third child. So that meant he didn't fit in. He had to make his own way by himself.

[26:37] Everybody went to work. They used to make they little money. I told them, I said, "Now, look. I want twenty dollars on the table from everybody." I said, "You're not paying your way, because that's not taking care of your food, or taking care of your clothes, it ain't taking care of electricity or looking at TV and all this kind of stuff." I said, "But I want you to know that when you work, you're supposed to contribute to the house." What I would do, take their money and keep it. The oldest one, I gave him a station wagon to bring the girls back and forth to school. He'd run short on his little money, say, "Mama, my allowance ran short." I'd go get their own money and give them their own money right back. I taught them . . .

MWENDO: [laughs] That was so smart.

PARKER: Yeah! I taught them how to . . . This is what I did. I kept their little money, and when they needed something . . . I didn't tell them that, though. I mean, [?], I say, "Oh wait a minute, let me see what I can find." Go get their money, give them their own money. This is how we did. I mean, I didn't have no problem. I told them, "Meet me halfway. Be decent. If you be decent . . ." I say, "You got five senses. Sometimes the Lord gives you six." And I said, "Now you go acting like a fool, you're going to be out there on your own." I said, "But as long as you're doing right and keeping your grades up in school, whatever you want to do, I'll back you up."

The girls decided they wanted to be majorettes for 35, which they were. One was captain, one was co-captain. That same year, they made their debut with the Deltas. That same

year, they were in the . . . They were Maids of the Zulu. So I mean . . . This was what they wanted to do. They were decent kids. I couldn't say, "Well, no, you can't do this."

[28:09] Whatever I asked them to do . . . and like I told them . . . Well, at the time, I was working three jobs. That meant I couldn't cook, I couldn't wash, I couldn't iron, I couldn't clean up. "So you decide on who going to do what," I said. "Mama got to work," I said. In order to keep food on the table, keep you clothed, and that you participate in activities that you want to do, school-orientated. Now, they did well in school, and they were in all kind of activities. This kept their little minds . . . they didn't have to go out there and do other things.

MWENDO: What's the other two jobs you had?

PARKER: I worked . . . I had a tutoring program. When I left my regular day school, I had a tutoring program from three-thirty to six-thirty in the afternoon at Lawless Junior High. We had a community school at that time.

MWENDO: Community school, tell me about that. What year, about, was that?

PARKER: Well, that was in sixty . . . In the '60s. I can't give you a . . . In the '60s. I worked there ten years, because I worked with adult education first, when the kids were younger. Then after the community school's development, Mr. Kilbert[?] was our director. I told him, I said, "Mr. Kilbert," I said, "my kids now are of the age I need to be home with them." I said, "We need another kind of program." He said, "Well, you get something." So we got a tutoring program.

MWENDO: Now tell me about the community school. What is that?

PARKER [29:34] The community school was held at Lawless Senior . . . at Lawless Junior High at the time. They . . . It was for the community. They had classes for people who wanted to do their GED. They had classes for people who . . . like the class I had, adult education with my little people, they couldn't read. I taught them how to read. They were elderly people. They said all they wanted to do was learn how to read the Bible. I taught them how to read. They had hat making, they had sewing, they had small gas engine, refrigeration. And the people were there. I was sorry when the community . . . when they closed.

MWENDO: What happened? Why did it close?

PARKER: Now, I don't know. It had something to do with the school . . . I don't know. With the school board, I don't know what happened. But it was a flourishing thing. The people were really going.

MWENDO: How long did it last?

PARKER: About ten years, maybe more. Maybe more, because I did the adult education for ten years. But then after I went into the tutoring program, so that was . . . that last about . . . maybe about five more years. But after that, the community school just dwindled, just dwindled away. But it was a good asset for the community, it was. Because those people were coming. They wanted those . . . the men . . . they even had carpentry. The men wanted to learn about

small gas engines. Things that they could do to help themselves . . . and refrigeration. The ladies were making beautiful hats in millinery and sewing class and stuff. It was really nice, and those people were there. It was from six-thirty to nine-thirty. They really enjoyed it.

MWENDO: [31:14] So the tutoring was what age? When you did the tutoring . . .

PARKER: I had children in grades one, two and three. I used senior and junior high school tutors to tutor these kids. We had math, we had reading, we had English. But they had other teachers that were there helping . . . to teach these kids.

MWENDO: Was that . . . That was through the public school system that you started that tutoring program?

PARKER: Yes. The public school, right, right, right.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: With Mr. Kilbert, who was over the adult education part.

MWENDO: Was that all part of the community school?

PARKER: Yeah. That was part of the . . . That was for the kids in the evening. See, the adults came later and did what they had to do.

MWENDO: It was all kids from this neighborhood?

PARKER: From the neighborhood. From the different schools.

MWENDO: So what was your third job?

PARKER: [32:02] My third job, my daughter was working at the Holiday Inn Rhodes [?] Center. She was a desk clerk. Something happened to the PBX operator, I don't know, and I never . . . I didn't even know nothing about no PBX. She called one day, she said, "Mama," she said, "we need a PBX operator." I said, "Baby, I don't know nothing." She said, "We need a PBX operator! Come on in." I say, "Okay." I went in, I met the man in charge. He said, "Well, we can pay you . . ." I say, "Child, pay me five dollars an hour. That's enough." I learned how to use the PBX.

MWENDO: What year was this?

PARKER: That was in . . . in '87, something like that.

MWENDO: Eighty-seven?

PARKER: Yeah. I worked . . . yeah, '87. I learned how to use . . . how to operate a PBX.

MWENDO: Not [?].

PARKER: Excuse me? Yeah, they got married in '80, so that was like in seventy . . . '78, '79, something like that. But that was my weekend job.

MWENDO: Yes. On a weekend. Now where was this Holiday Inn?

PARKER: [33:12] Well, right now it's closed. It was the Holiday Inn Rhodes Center. You know where the Mark Essex thing was?

MWENDO: Yes.

PARKER: And the Rhodes Center was? Right there.

MWENDO: Okay, that's on . . . Is that Basin [Street]? Is that Loyola [Avenue]?

PARKER: Loyola.

MWENDO: Loyola. Gravier [Street] and Loyola.

PARKER: Gravier. Right, right, right. It was the Rhodes Center, yes.

MWENDO: Were you around . . . Were you working there when the . . .

PARKER: No, I was at church that Sunday when that happened. Somebody called us at home . . . at church, and was telling us what was going on. But no, I wasn't working there then.

MWENDO: Okay. That was your third job.

PARKER: That was my third job.

MWENDO: And how long did you do that one?

PARKER: [33:50] I think till she left to go to California.

MWENDO: Which was . . .

PARKER: She left in '79.

MWENDO: So just about a year, maybe, you were working . . .

PARKER: Yeah, I was there about a year, yeah. Then my second daughter decided she wanted to get married. Not that . . . I said, "Well, okay, sister girl, you getting married, I'll give you a beautiful wedding." [dog barking] I cut my . . . because they were going to school then, I cut my time down, so I kept that one job. But I did work three jobs for a long time.

MWENDO: It sounds like a long time.

PARKER: For ten years I didn't have a vacation. I didn't go nowhere. I didn't do nothing but work.

MWENDO: That's why you got the results you got.

PARKER: [34:37] Right. I got a daughter right now who's doing the same identical thing. She works the same way. She say, "Well, Mama, all I know you ever was doing was working." She said, "That's what I'm doing." So that's . . .

MWENDO: When you and your husband came to live in this house, what year was it? And then what was the community like then? Describe how the neighborhood was, how the community was.

PARKER: The neighborhood, it was family orientated.

MWENDO: What year . . . What year was it?

PARKER: We came here in '59.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: I mean, I was living here before I got married.

MWENDO: Oh, you came here before you got married.

PARKER: Oh, Lord, I was [?]. What happened was, when my daddy was across the river . . . Well, my mama had traveled all over Louisiana. We moved across the river, he told her . . . he said . . . He used to call her honey. He said, "Well, honey," he said, "it's going to be your last move," he said, "because I'm going to build you a house and you won't have to move anymore." That's when he built this house.

MWENDO: This house.

PARKER: [35:34] This house. And we stayed . . . we moved . . . What happened was, we stayed across the river until I finished high school. We moved here in '54. He built this house in '53.

MWENDO: Now why did he choose this neighborhood?

PARKER: Because his nephew lived next door. He told him that there was a lot for sale next to him and my daddy bought the lot. He put this house up on this lot.

MWENDO: How did he build the house? Did he build it himself, or he got contract . . .

PARKER: Well, he drew . . . He drew the plans for it. He had a contractor to build it for him. He told him what he wanted. We stayed over there and I finished high school in '54.

After I finished, then we moved over here. We had been here all the while. I went to college and everything, I was still right here. When I got married, that's when I moved out for a year. Had my own little place. Then after, we came back, so I been here forty-nine years.

MWENDO: Well tell me, then, about this neighborhood forty-nine years ago.

PARKER: [36:32] Forty-nine years ago? When I first moved here?

MWENDO: Yes.

PARKER: It was families. Wasn't no transient, no people moving in and out. It was just the same . . . Right now, we still have some of the same families in this neighborhood, with the exception of maybe three houses. But all the kids play together. When they all grew up, they all left together. Right now, we don't have too many children in the neighborhood. Because we had . . . At one time, we had like thirty kids in just this one block. They'd get out there and play ball and just have a good time. Everybody was close-knitted. This mama could tell this one something, and that mama could tell that one something, no problem.

MWENDO: They looked after the kids. Everybody looked after . . .

PARKER: They looked after the kids. Right, right, right. We all worked together, we all watched out for each other.

MWENDO: What was the infrastructure like? What were the streets looking like? Was it . . . Did they have streetlights? Did they . . .

PARKER: Dirt. Yes, streetlights.

MWENDO: Canal? There were canals?

PARKER: [37:32] They had a canal on Claiborne Street. Claiborne was a canal from the bridge all the way to Alabo [Street]. Because that . . . in fact, when we first moved here, Claiborne Street stopped at Alabo. You couldn't go no further. The only way you get down to St. Bernard Parish, you had to go to St. Claude.

MWENDO: What was there?

PARKER: It was like a hill, a mountain, or whatever. A barricade, like. That's where Claiborne stopped.

MWENDO: Made of dirt?

PARKER: Yes. In order for you to get out of the parish, we'd have to go St. Claude.

MWENDO: How far back that hill, or that barricade went?

PARKER: To Alabo. That was as far you could go Claiborne Street, and there was a canal.

MWENDO: That stopped at . . .

PARKER: [38:18] That ran from that all the way to the bridge. Well, they didn't have no bridge. When we first moved here, they didn't have a Claiborne bridge. There was no bridge.

MWENDO: Nothing was there? Nothing but ground?

PARKER: Nothing but the river. The river.

MWENDO: So it was straight, it was all connected to the city.

PARKER: Yes. It was connected. But it was a levee.

MWENDO: Where the . . .

PARKER: Where that bridge stop, where that bridge is now. That was a levee there.

MWENDO: That was a levee.

PARKER: Yeah. Didn't have no bridge on Claiborne. When was the Claiborne . . . The Claiborne bridge was built in '59? Fifty-nine. [correction:1957]

MWENDO: Why was the levee right across . . . You mean exactly where the bridge is? From the river to what was the levee? To Florida?

PARKER: Yes. Yeah.

MWENDO: Why was there a levee? What were they trying to protect the city from?

PARKER: This is the way the Ninth Ward was.

MWENDO: That's interesting.

PARKER: [39:11] When we moved down here they had . . . this was nothing but a blood weed . . . looked like a forest. The streets were cut . . . like some of the people who lived down here before we moved. When we came down it was a little better than when the original people . . . some of these people that was living in the block was here before us. We had a dirt street. We had streetlights. We had a dirt street. We had a dirt street for a long time. Then in '59 [correction: 1957] when they built that bridge, that's when things started changing [?] because when we first moved here, we had a septic tank. We didn't have sewage. [dog barking]

MWENDO: How long did you have that? Before they started putting in sewer systems?

PARKER: Maybe five years after we moved here. Because we moved here in fifty . . . When they started building that bridge, that's when all this stuff happened.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: They start having sewage and connecting it all. But when we first moved here, we had to have a septic tank. I had the people to come out here to clean it and all this kind of stuff. But then things started getting better and better and better.

MWENDO: Was it the community that made it better? Or was it the administration?

PARKER: [40:29] Administration . . . They looked down and they saw that this was an area that needed to be developed.

MWENDO: Was it late in being developed, compared to the rest of the city?

PARKER: Yes, yes, yes. Because a lot of people didn't even know nothing about the Ninth Ward. Because my kids . . . Even when my children were going in the '70s, going to school, and they would tell the people, "We live in the Lower Nine." They'd say, "Lower Nine! Where is that?" They didn't even . . . They had some people never even crossed that bridge. Had never been down in this area. I used to call it God's country, myself.

MWENDO: Why?

PARKER: It was just . . . When we first moved here, I didn't want to move. My daddy built this house. I told him I wasn't coming. I've always been a little rebellious [?]. I said, "Daddy,

I'm not going down there to live." He said, "Where you going to live?" I said, "I don't know, but I'm not going to live down in no Ninth Ward. I don't want to live in no Ninth Ward." After I got down here, I never left. Worked, go to church in the Ninth Ward.

MWENDO: What you liked about it?

PARKER: [41:31] I liked my neighborhood! I like my neighbor, I like the people in the area. Everybody was cordial to each other. That's what I liked, and I still do. Although things have changed, but we still keep it going.

MWENDO: You still have people that's been here for a long time.

PARKER: We still have people . . . Like I say, it's about four houses where there are new . . . I call them new people in the neighborhood. But the majority of us, we have been here. I came and found some of these same people.

MWENDO: Do you all still look out for each other and that kind of thing?

PARKER: Yes, we sure do.

MWENDO: So it's still that old-time . . .

PARKER: It's still the same. Because I'd say our little neighborhood, just this little block right here, we have no problem. The whole Andry Street really there ain't no problems that I know of. But our little block, we all . . . we might not be in each other's house every day, but if we need each other, we can call on each other.

MWENDO: How's the new people? Are they becoming more like that?

PARKER: [42:36] They fell right on in, fell right on in. Because they've been here like about ten years. About ten years. They fell right on in and we all get along. There's no bickering. Nobody have no problems and all this kind of stuff.

MWENDO: Now let's go over to Betsy, now that we got all your background. [laughs]

PARKER: Betsy . . . Betsy was in, what?

MWENDO: Sixty-five.

PARKER: Sixty-five.

MWENDO: Sixty-five. It came here September ninth, '65. So give me an idea what was happening right before . . . a day or so before. What were you doing, what was your family doing? What was going on?

PARKER: We were looking at TV. They were saying about a storm was coming, and we would say, okay, we're going to get ready in case we had to get out.

MWENDO: It's going to soon . . . You can keep talking, but we soon going to stop.

PARKER: [43:32] Well, the day . . . I say the day before, we went and got some canned goods and stuff, just got things ready. My husband say, "Well, I'm going to go to work and we'll see what's going to happen from then." It was on my daughter's birthday. She talks about it now, she says, "Yeah, Mom, you went out and got me a blue raincoat and an umbrella. And you bought my sister a red raincoat and an umbrella. You know we must have need it." That's what I bought for their gift.

So we. . . The day of the storm, we were at school. The wind was rising, and we was watching the news on the television. [dog barking] We was wondering what the school board was going to do: let the children go home or what. We went to the office, our principal told us, he said, "No, what you all do is get the garbage cans and put them in. Close the doors, close the windows. We going to be here till three o'clock." At three o'clock, we left and came home. Then it started getting worse. I called my husband at work. I said, "Look, you better come on home," I say, "because I don't know what's going to happen." That night my neighbor, bless her soul, she dead, and the one across the street, she dead, too. We were in here and my mama, she said, "You all put your clothes on. Take your clothes off. We might have to leave out of here because you know these winds." Oh, the wind was just blowing, woo, woo, woo.

MWENDO: Had you all ever been in a storm before?

PARKER: [44:58] Yeah! But the storm, to me, wasn't so devastating as that water. Because the only thing that . . . I mean, a few things were blowing around and everything. But about nine o'clock, I went to the door and I looked out. I said, "The street is mighty glassy." I say, "The street ain't supposed to look like that." My mama, she came and she looked. I say, "That's water out there." I said, "Well, that water's going to go down."

My neighbor across the street called me. She said, "Dee," she said, "I think we better leave and get out of here," she said, "because that water's coming." I ain't going to say on the tape what I said, but I said I wasn't going to listen to what she talking about. She doesn't know what she's talking about. My neighbor next door called. She said, [?] But I said, "Oh, she doesn't know what she's talking about. That water going to be gone."

We looking at TV, and the kids all . . . eating popcorn and all that kind of stuff. I said, "Daddy going to be home soon." He came home. At about eleven o'clock, I look outside, that water was at the first step. I say, "Don't look like that water going anywhere." I said, "Look like it's coming up." I said, "Well, it might just be a little bit of flooding." At that time, we didn't have no subsurface draining and all this kind of stuff like we got now. About, oh, twelve o'clock, one of the kids holler, "Mama! Water coming in the house! Water coming in the house!" I say, "Oh, Lord!" Well this . . . I don't know what. We just start running around like somebody crazy.

MWENDO: Okay, I'm going to stop it.

[End Tape 3342, Side A. Begin Tape 3342, Side B.]

MWENDO: [46:52] Let it go a little bit. Okay.

PARKER: And, so . . .

MWENDO: This is twelve midnight

PARKER: This is twelve! This is twelve midnight. My husband say, “Well, I’m going to start putting stuff up,” he said, “and we might have a little water, couple of inches of water in the house. That might be all of it.” He says, “I’m going to start putting some things that’s on the floor, like your shoes and stuff, put them up on the bed and do this, that and the other.” He said, “Take the television . . .” We had a little portable TV. He said, “Put it up in the dining room. Put it up on top the china closet.” We start putting stuff up . . . up in the top of the closet. I say, “Oh, this going to be . . .” I say, “It ain’t going to get in the drawers or nothing like that.”

About one o’clock, my neighbor calls. She says, “Girl!” She says, “Look outside.” When I looked outside, I said, “Girl!” I said, “Oh, Lord! What are we going to do? What are we going to do?” We started panicking. My husband say, “Well, okay. The house next door . . .” Our house . . . Ours was lower than what it is now. I had to have it raised up after Betsy. It was lower. They didn’t get water, they didn’t have water over there, by my cousin. So we did, we got the kids and we went across, [?] in the water, and put them over there next door.

We stayed over there, still trying to put stuff up. The water was still coming. He said, “Well, babe,” he say, “I think it’s better . . . you better go on over there. I’ll still do what I can do.” So the water got up. It start coming up and up. We went next door. The kids, we put them

on a mattress and they were floating around. They thought it was fun. Well, in them days, we had our dress, we tucked them in our under . . . and we walk around in the water.

MWENDO: How high was it?

PARKER: [48:40] That water was over . . . it was over the windowsill.

MWENDO: Over this windowsill.

PARKER: When we got left out of here, it was over this windowsill.

MWENDO: Wow.

PARKER: And so we went . . .

MWENDO: You all were holding the children . . .

PARKER: Put them on a mattress.

MWENDO: You floated them out this front door?

PARKER: No. I'll tell you about that.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: So they was floating next door. Because over here, we left over here from over here.

MWENDO: Okay, you were next door.

PARKER: [49:04] We left from over here. We went next door. They was hollering about, “We want to eat, we’re hungry.” We gave them some cereal. My daughter, my oldest daughter said, “Oh, Mama, I got to go to the bathroom.” You can’t go to the bathroom, because the toilet was covered with water! I said, “Do that over off the mattress and use the toilet in the water.” They were just . . . oh, they just thought that was fun. I said, “Babe, you all don’t know how serious this was.”

I had four old people, my mama and my three cousins over there. I had four children. None of us could swim. I couldn’t swim. My husband was the only one could swim. I said, “Lord, I cannot drink all this water. How am I going to get out of here?” The people was passing in their little skiffs. “Oh, we coming back. We coming back.” My husband say, “Look, just be calm.” He said, “We going to get out of here.” I said, “Okay.” So about . . . We stayed in that water until one o’clock the next day.

MWENDO: Not in the morning.

PARKER: One o'clock that morning. The night, then the early part of the morning, then one o'clock that day.

MWENDO: Wow.

PARKER: So the helicopters . . .

MWENDO: What were you doing?

PARKER: [50:10] Walking around in the water.

MWENDO: And how high was it up to you?

PARKER: Up here.

MWENDO: Your waist.

PARKER: Yes. The kids were all on the mattress, so they were dry.

MWENDO: Okay. So they stayed on the mattress. They were like floating around the whole time in the . . .

PARKER: Yes, thought this was fun. So what happened was, well . . .

MWENDO: What were you all doing all day?

PARKER: Talking, eating. Talking and eating what we could eat.

MWENDO: Were you afraid that the water would keep coming up high? Or did it kind of stop by then?

PARKER: [50:35] It stopped. It might have . . . It did get higher after we got out of here. But what happened was, the helicopters start passing. We got out there with white handkerchiefs and start waving them. "We need help! We need help!" So the guys from the yacht club came in.

MWENDO: Now where's the yacht club? What yacht club?

PARKER: Out on the lake . . . Lakefront. The Lakefront Arena. West End.

MWENDO: West End.

PARKER: West End. That's where, it was West End.

MWENDO: Are these white guys?

PARKER: Yeah! Yes, because that's the only way boats . . . us people had skiffs. But I wasn't trusting myself in those skiffs to overturn. My mama used to always fuss about me not closing the gates to the driveway. I left them open. If I hadn't left those gates open, ain't no way I could have walked out there with my children and them old people, eight foot of water, eight feet of water, to get on the boats.

When the man came, they had a nice sized boat. He said . . . We had a fence. You couldn't see the fence, because the water was above the fence out there. He said, "You have a driveway?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You got gates?" I said, "No, it's open." They came in through my gate around this way, and landed over there by the porch, by the house next door.

MWENDO: [51:50] They went through the driveway, came in front of the house . . .

PARKER: And landed.

MWENDO: . . . and went to the house next door.

PARKER: Right. This is how we got in the boat. But in the meantime, I had packed a change of clothes for my children, but I hadn't packed none for myself. When I left out of here, I left out with the clothes I had on soaking wet. When they got us in the boat and we got out . . . We had to go down the canal, because we couldn't go down the side of the street because the cars were parked there. A man say his propeller on his motor might hit one of them cars and then that's another thing. He said, "Now we going to go down the middle of this canal on Claiborne Street." He took us down canal . . . down Claiborne Street to Reynes [Street].

MWENDO: How many people were in the boat? It was just your family? Just . . .

PARKER: Just my family. Just my . . . four old people, my four children, which is eight, me and my husband. That's ten people . . .

MWENDO: Okay, okay.

PARKER: . . . was in the boat. They took us out. What happened was, after we went down Claiborne Street, we went up Reynes Street to the bridge, to St. Claude [Avenue] bridge. The Red Cross truck was there. We got in the Red Cross truck and they brought us all the way to Washington Elementary School on St. Claude Street, because you had to go in there and register.

MWENDO: [53:05] St. Claude and what? Where was that?

RAYMOND PARKER, JR.: Alabo [Street].

PARKER: St. Claude and Alabo.

MWENDO: Okay. That's right on the other side.

PARKER: See what they did? They put us out at the bridge and the Red Cross trucks were there.

MWENDO: Oh, I see.

PARKER: They took us . . . took us across on the other side. Because, see, there was no water over there. Believe it or not, the water was not on St. Claude Street.

MWENDO: What, down here?

PARKER: Down here. The people on the other side of St. Claude did not have water.

MWENDO: So what that's about?

PARKER: [53:38] I don't know. What we heard . . . Now, when the water started coming, the people that lived on Deslonde Street say it look like a tidal wave. They heard a boom sound. What happened, we got the Intercoastal Canal water from back . . . parish . . .

MWENDO: The parish road down there.

PARKER: The Intercoastal Canal back there, that's where we got the water from.

MWENDO: Where did they break it? You saying they had an explosion.

PARKER: Well, that's what the people tell . . . They say they broke the levee.

MWENDO: Where did they break it? Do you know?

PARKER: I don't know where it was. But they say when that water was coming, the people on Deslonde Street say it looked like a tidal wave. Because they got the water first.

MWENDO: It must have been by the Florida . . .

PARKER: Came through that way.

MWENDO: Through Florida.

PARKER: [54:23] Through that way.

MWENDO: Okay, okay. So did it . . . did it come fast? You was saying how it was moving up every hour.

PARKER: No, it wasn't it was just moving up, just inching up. When we left out . . . Like I said, we left out here, the water was up to here.

MWENDO: Around your waist.

PARKER: But when the water settled, it settled halfway the walls.

MWENDO: It was halfway up your walls.

PARKER: Halfway up the walls. Because in my bedroom, we got half paneling where the water . . . where that waterline stopped. We had to wash all that down, and mildew and stuff. That's why in the bedrooms they got half paneling. But in here we put paneling here all the way.

MWENDO: So when you went over the bridge, or were brought by the yacht club over the bridge and you all over the bridge, were they . . .

PARKER: [55:04] No. They brought us at the bridge. Red Cross trucks took us to Washington School.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: Because we had to register.

MWENDO: Okay. So you walked over the bridge?

PARKER: No. The Red Cross trucks was right there waiting for us.

MWENDO: Waiting for you by the boat.

PARKER: By the boat. Yes.

MWENDO: The boat came up, then the Red Cross was right . . . There was no water right there.

PARKER: They had water. But it wasn't like where we came from. It was just . . .

MWENDO: Right, Okay. So that was still on this side of the Lower Ninth Ward?

PARKER: On this side of the canal, right.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: [55:33] Because all the water was on this side.

MWENDO: What was . . . what was going on with people? Like was it wild and crazy?

PARKER: Everybody was in a . . . Oh, yes indeed! Everybody was in a frantic, you know? I mean, we all out. I mean, all the people and neighbors out, we was looking at all this water. Like I say, I said, "Lord I can't drink this water. How we going to get out of here?" A lot of people, some of them didn't get out until the next day. But we were lucky for those guys who came in and got us out. So what happened was, my brother who lived on Annette [Street] and Pleasure [Street] up in Gentilly [neighborhood] area, he was watching the news and stuff. He couldn't come no further than Elysian Fields [Avenue].

MWENDO: Because . . .

PARKER: Because of the wires, the electrical wires and everything, all that was blowing down from the storm. The tree limbs and all that kind of stuff. He couldn't come down in this area. He went back home and got his bicycle. He pedaled on down and came on down until he found us. He said, "What we going to have do is . . ." I said, "Well, take the older people." I said, "My husband and I, we'll stay here." I say, "Take them and the children."

MWENDO: You all were at Washington?

PARKER: [56:41] At Washington School. We went and we signed in and told them where we lived and all this kind of stuff, and they recorded all this.

MWENDO: What other kind of information they ask you?

PARKER: How many was in the family. Like I said, we was two . . . they would say two families, because they were one and we were one.

MWENDO: These are the Red Cross workers that's asking you these questions?

PARKER: They must have been, yeah. They were housed in the school. Because a lot of people, like I said, didn't get out until the next day. A lot of people, some drowned. They set up a makeshift morgue up underneath the Claiborne Bridge. Everybody was just going wild. They

took some of them across the river to the Naval Base. Those who had family members like we did came in and got us. I went over by my brother. We went to my brother's house, and my cousin and them went by a friend of theirs. They stayed there. We couldn't come down here till . . . Oh, Lord, it was about two weeks before we could come in the area to see what we could do.

MWENDO: The water was up here for two weeks?

PARKER: The water stayed . . . the water stayed halfway, it settled. Where that water settled. For two weeks.

MWENDO: Why did it take so long to drain out?

PARKER: [57:59] Well, I mean, the pumpings wasn't pumping like they're supposed to be, I guess. You see, what happened to people down in the parish was worse off than us. Because they . . . if you've ever been down in the parish, when you leave . . . if you watch when you're going down Claiborne Street, you're doing this.

MWENDO: Going down. It's deeper.

PARKER: Their water was all the way to their roof. Some people had to . . . Yes, the water went down in St. Bernard. Their water went up to the rooftop. They had to break in to get out. But we were lucky, like I said. We got out of there before that water really start coming out.

MWENDO: When you were describing what was going on, you were looking out your door and you say, “Oh, it look glassy out there.” And you look . . .

PARKER: [?] it did. I said, “It’s not [?] shiny like that!”

MWENDO: Right.

PARKER: But that was water.

MWENDO: Then next thing, it was up to your step.

PARKER: And it start creeping.

MWENDO: You didn’t hear . . . There was no warnings? There was no . . . no nothing?

PARKER: [58:59] Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope. No warning.

MWENDO: You had no idea. You just thought it was going to be a storm for y’all to sit through?

PARKER: A storm, and you had the water, and it was going like normal when you have a little storm, a little rain, and it drain off. That water kept on coming. No! It didn’t rain. It wasn’t raining. It was that water from that Intercoastal Canal, that’s what came on us. Then

after we got out . . . Like I said, I went by my brother's house and my cousin went by their friends. That's where we stayed. Now, when we did get a chance to come back in here, we had mud about this deep.

MWENDO: That's what? That look like about two inches. No, that look like a foot!

PARKER: When that water . . . after the water really went down and settled down. We came in, we had to take . . . We took all the baseboards, and we got a hose pipe with a power pressure on it, like you was washing the street. This is how we had to wash this house out. Like you're washing the street. We didn't have . . . When we came in here, everything was just ruined. The only thing we had left was a top bunk bed in the kids' room. I had a television set up on the china closet. I took the television down off the china closet. The china closet [makes crumbling noise]

MWENDO: [laughs] It fell apart.

PARKER: [1:00:20] Just fell apart. After we clean the house out . . . but we didn't stay . . . we didn't stay in it. We tried to clean it out, dry it out and stuff and . . .

MWENDO: What . . . When you walked in your house and saw your house, what did you . . .

PARKER: It was . . . I was just . . . I was just devastated because we lost everything. Because everything was water soaked.

MWENDO: Did you cry? Did you scream? Did you . . .

PARKER: No. No. No.

MWENDO: Were you angry?

PARKER: I was mad because I had to clean all this mess up! Yeah, I was mad because I had to clean it up. I had to tote all that stuff out. We had to put it out for the trash people to come and get it. We had so much stuff. Like I said, we lost everything. Some things right now, I don't have. Because I had a console sewing machine that I don't have. I had a mixmaster that I still don't have. I got a portable mixer. I lost all my kids' baby pictures that I'll never, never get. All the clothes, just everything! Televisions . . . all . . . everything, whatever.

MWENDO: Now most of these things could be replaced.

PARKER: Yeah.

MWENDO: [1:01:33] But like you said, the photographs and what other kinds of things that are irreplaceable?

PARKER: I lost all my report cards that I kept from going to school. My report cards. I lost all of that.

MWENDO: Oh, from your . . . your . . .

PARKER: From my years, from first grade on, yes. I kept all my stuff. I lost all that in Betsy. I would have lost the important stuff, but what I did, we packed insurance papers and house papers . . . stuff that's really important. I packed all that and took it with me. But like my pictures and stuff and all that I'd never get back again. Then after . . . After we washed the house out, we stayed away for about a month, letting everything just dry out.

MWENDO: Where did you all stay?

PARKER: At my brother's.

MWENDO: Brother that came on the bicycle?

PARKER: [1:02:16] On the bicycle [agrees]. What happened was, when he came on the bicycle . . . When he found us and he was satisfied, then he went back and got the car. We had to walk to Elysian Fields to get in the car to go to his house.

MWENDO: Now where did he live?

PARKER: He lived on Annette [Street]. Between Pleasure [Street], and whatever street in Gentilly. So we stayed there. Now, people who didn't have nothing, like junk in their house, the Red Cross really helped them plenty. But like us? They told us we could rehabilitate ourselves.

The Red Cross gave me money for food and money for clothing and that was it. We had to go get a SBA [Small Business Administration] loan to buy more furniture and fix our house.

MWENDO: Was everybody treated like that? I mean, everybody who had money, who had some income coming in, were they all treated that way?

PARKER: Probably so. I guess according to your income, that's how much money you could borrow from SBA, small business loan.

MWENDO: Okay. But also in terms of given . . . being given things, if you had a job, if you had a decent paying job . . .

PARKER: [1:03:27] Yes. Well I know that's what they told my husband and I. Because he was in the post office and I was teaching. They told us we could rehabilitate ourselves. But they would give us money for clothes and food. I got vouchers for that.

MWENDO: Where did you go to . . .

PARKER: We had to go to Stallings Center, right down St. Claude [Avenue].

MWENDO: And Poland [Avenue].

PARKER: And Poland. Baby, the lines was long. You had to stand there, and just tell what you lost. If they could help you, and this, that, and the other.

MWENDO: How long did that process take, just the standing? Was it an all day thing, because you were in a line?

PARKER: Oh, yes, indeed.

MWENDO: Was it more than one day? How long did you . . .

PARKER: [1:04:04] I don't know how long the other people did, but we went and we stayed in line until we were served and found out what we had to do and they told us where we could go. That was it. But it went on for a period of time, so they could accommodate all these people that needed help.

MWENDO: How long did it take you all to get what you all . . . You say you got food and you got some clothes.

PARKER: I got food. They gave me money for food and money for clothing.

MWENDO: So they give it to you right there? Like you come up in line . . .

PARKER: No, they give you a voucher. They give you a voucher.

MWENDO: They give you a voucher. For certain stores?

PARKER: Yeah.

MWENDO: Certain stores, certain items.

PARKER: [Agrees] You go and you purchase that. But then, when . . . Then they told you, said, "This is where you go to apply for your SBA loan." We went there, we applied for the loan, we got our money.

MWENDO: So where you have to go for that?

PARKER: [1:04:50] I can't remember, child. Uptown somewhere, I don't know where it was. Some office up there. Wherever they were housed, that's where we went. We came back, we was able to come back, everything was dried out. We were able to come back.

MWENDO: That's like a month later.

PARKER: We slept on . . . well, before we got . . . We had to wait for the money. But before we got the money, we slept on the floors. We had no bed. The only bed we had was a bed my brother brought for my mama to sleep in. But me and my kids, we slept on the floor. Ironing clothes, we didn't have no ironing board, we didn't have nothing. I went out in the backyard and I found a piece of board and I made me an ironing board. I put it between two chairs. [laughs]

That's how I had to iron. We didn't have no chairs. We had to stand at the table to eat because we had a card table and a couple of chairs my brother brought.

MWENDO: So you was starting from scratch.

PARKER: [1:05:46] We had to start from scratch. When the SBA loan money came in, then we went to Universal [Furniture] and was able to buy a bedroom set, living room set, stuff like that. But let me tell you, it was a mess. My poor auntie, she said, "Maybe we can save some of your clothes." She tried washing them. I said . . . I told her, I said, "Aunt [?], throw that in the garbage can, baby Don't even worry about it." I said, "We'll get back. We'll get more clothes." Then she . . . when we was by my brother . . . the only time I cried was, I was by my brother and she was over there. We all walked in and I said, "Oh, Lord, here come the refugees." And what I say that for? She bust out and start crying. Everybody started crying. [laughs] That was the only time.

MWENDO: It was a hard time.

PARKER: Was it a hard time. Because then we had to go to the schools and walk through mud and stuff to try to get records in order for . . . to get the kids back in school.

MWENDO: So they didn't recognize that a storm might have happened.

PARKER: When we got finished with all this mess and they reopened the schools, we had to go down to Lawless and go dig through all that stuff to try to find records and stuff for kids so we could, so they can go to school. What happened was, we couldn't go to Lawless, because Lawless was done up so bad. We had to go to Hardin [School], so that meant they put us on platoons.

MWENDO: Hardin's on St. Maurice [Avenue].

PARKER: [1:07:12] On St. Maurice. Hardin's children went in the morning, and we went in the evening. Went from twelve to five. We had to catch the school bus and we had to do bus duty and all this kind of stuff.

MWENDO: You're talking about the teachers.

PARKER: The teachers, right. The schools had reopened after all this. But it was . . . It was a trying time. It was really a trying time. Because if you look out your door and see all that water, you say, "Well, Lord, where . . . Just where all this water come?" I mean, the whole lower area was just saturated with water.

MWENDO: Do you think they really did blow up the levee?

PARKER: That's what the people were saying, in order for that water to get over here. Something was done for that water to get over this way. Now a girlfriend of mine told me that

her husband was coming from in town. He said it looked like the water was coming toward the business district. In order to keep that water from coming over there, they sent it back on us.

That's what they told me. Now, I don't know, because I wasn't out there. I didn't see it.

R. PARKER, JR.: Betsy went up the river.

MWENDO: [1:08:20] Betsy did what? Say it.

PARKER: The eye . . . up the river.

R. PARKER, JR.: The eye was up the river. It brought . . . bring that water.

PARKER: Brought that water.

MWENDO: With it.

PARKER: [agrees]

R. PARKER, JR.: So they bust the levee. I feel they bust the levee so it would overflow.

PARKER: To come over on us.

MWENDO: Because it was going to go right into the French Quarter.

PARKER: It was going to ruin the business district.

R. PARKER, JR.: [?] hit that curve, that would have been it.

MWENDO: [Agrees]

R. PARKER, JR.: [?] I heard . . . I was small but I heard the man say he didn't know they had that many people down there.

MWENDO: In the Lower Nine?

R. PARKER, JR.: So something had to have been done for the water to get down here.

MWENDO: So he . . . He didn't admit . . . Nobody admitted to where that water came from?

PARKER: No.

R. PARKER, JR.: I never heard nothing. All the stories and TV reports, I've never heard nothing, just flood.

PARKER: [1:09:17] Because if you see . . . When they show it on TV, back in them days all you see is water, flood. They don't say nothing, just say, "There was a flood, Betsy flood, Betsy took over. Betsy sent the water in on us." That's what they say.

R. PARKER, JR.: When the rain flooded differently, what that was.

PARKER: That was salt water.

R. PARKER, JR.: I was seven years old. I remember.

PARKER: That ruined our cars because it was salt water.

MWENDO: It ruined your cars?

PARKER: [1:09:40] When we left out of here, you couldn't tell what color my car was. That's how high the water was. But then when we came back, we drive the car out. [laughs] It was drivable after we cleaned it out and everything. But you had to take your battery cables . . . You stopped, you had to get battery cables off. That's how you turned your car off. When you'd get ready to go, you'd put your battery cables back on your car. [laughs]

MWENDO: But it's a wonder that it even worked!

PARKER: It worked!

MWENDO: The engine . . .

PARKER: It worked. It worked.

MWENDO: The transmission and all of that was underwater.

PARKER: Right, right. But we cleaned it. My husband and I, some way we got in there and cleaned it out. Changed the oil and all that kind of stuff. One day I went to the store. Puglia's [Grocery Store] was open out there. I got out the car and I opened the hood, and I took my battery, my cables off. A man was in a truck parked next to me. I went in the store, I came back, and I opened the hood, I put it . . . He say, "Miss," he said, "I was going to sit here and see just how you was going to start that car." [laughs] [?] these cables over here. Then you came and you put them cables back on and got in, start my car, and I left. We had a '63 Chevrolet. We traded that thing, we traded it in. We traded it in but . . .

MWENDO: Did you see anyone who had drowned?

PARKER: [1:11:01] No. We were told stories about people that drowned and they was tying them against the post and all this kind of stuff. But I never . . . We didn't ever see anybody.

MWENDO: Okay. You didn't know of anybody?

PARKER: No.

MWENDO: [to Raymond, Jr.] What do you . . . What do you remember? You want to pull your chair up a little closer and . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: Like she was saying, I remember we was floating around in . . . on a . . . twin bed, [?] floating around.

MWENDO: Come a little closer . . .

PARKER: Come closer.

MWENDO: . . . so that the mic[rophone] can get you.

R. PARKER, JR.: I remember when the boat came. We had two big peach trees in the backyard. We had to hop over the railing. I remember looking down the alley out there. "Look at all this!" I had never seen so much water. It looked like the lake.

PARKER: Yes, that's what it looked like.

MWENDO: Coming from where? Where did you see it?

PARKER: [1:11:49] In the backyard!

MWENDO: Just in the backyard.

R. PARKER, JR.: Looking down the alley.

PARKER: Looking down the alley, yeah.

R. PARKER, JR.: I remember looking down the alley. "Look at how much water!" It was everywhere. I'm glad I was seven. If not, I would have panicked. But that's what I remember. I remember the boat ride. I remember the Red Cross truck.

MWENDO: Was it fun or were you scared?

R. PARKER, JR.: I guess it was fun, because I was small. If I was like I am now, I would have been scared. But it come to the top . . . Water was on top of the cars. But we had fun, something like that, crazy. [laughs] But that's what I remember. Like I say, I'm glad I was seven years old, because if I was older, I would have . . . because I can't swim now!

PARKER: [1:12:43] That was my thing, worrying about how I'm going to get my children out and my mama, and my cousins over there. That was my thing. Me and my husband got into it for a while. He said, "Woman, why don't you just go somewhere and just shut up! We going to get out of here." I was telling him, I say, "You ain't trying to help us to get out." I was just running my mouth. He said, "I wish you'd just shut up and go sit down somewhere. Or float around." He said, "Just go float in the water. Go swimming."

R. PARKER, JR.: [?] got drowned.

PARKER: He said, “We going to get out of here,” and we did. Got out. The thing was . . .
The hardest thing was rehabilitating ourselves, getting back to normal.

MWENDO: Talk about that.

PARKER: Getting back to normal. Like I said, a lot of stuff that we lost it took us a while.
It really took us a while.

MWENDO: How long, about?

PARKER: Oh, a good two, three, four years.

MWENDO: How long did it take . . . If you don’t mind my asking, how long did it take to
repay back the loan? Was it that length of time?

PARKER: [1:13:48] What happened was . . . that wasn’t . . . we were paying . . . I think we
were paying the loan back. Somebody, the goodness of their heart, they gave us a seventeen-
hundred dollar forgiveness that we didn’t have to pay. That was the end of that.

MWENDO: You all know who it was? You say somebody . . .

PARKER: No, I don’t know. Well, I guess . . . I don’t know if it was the SBA people or who
it was. But we were given . . . I guess they call themselves helping . . . They know the struggle

that we was going through so they took seventeen-hundred dollars off the loan that we didn't have to pay back.

MWENDO: Can you tell me how much the loan was for?

PARKER: Mine was for . . . I think we got one for about thirty-five hundred or four thousand dollars, something like that. What we did, we got what we thought we needed. We didn't overdo it, because we'd have to pay all this money back. We got . . . We sat down and talked about it. We said, "We need X amount of dollars. This will take care of getting this, this, this, this, this, this." And get us . . . get us started. I say . . . Because then after that, we working or we can purchase our own stuff. I think we got like about four thousand something like that. We paid back three thousand something, and when we got to that part, that's when they wrote us and told us they were giving us that seventeen-hundred dollar forgiveness, and that squared it off.

MWENDO: What was it like being by your brother for that month? All of y'all being by your brother?

PARKER: [1:15:12] I love my brother. I love my sister-in-law. It ain't nothing like being at your own house.

MWENDO: Is this the same sister-in-law that introduced you to your . . .

PARKER: No, this is my brother.

MWENDO: Oh, this is your brother. That's right. You said your brother.

PARKER: That was my husband's sister. No, it was alright. It was okay. But there was some things that you wanted to do, you just couldn't do because you're in somebody else's house.

R. PARKER, JR.: I remember we had to put the mattress on the floor. So we could sleep on a mattress, on the box springs. We slept on a mattress on the floor. I remember that. We slept there regularly.

MWENDO: Because there wasn't enough beds.

PARKER: No, it wasn't enough beds. No.

R. PARKER, JR.: It was just three bedrooms, and it was four children, you . . .

PARKER: [1:15:55] And my mama.

R. PARKER, JR.: Mammie[?] and Dad.

MWENDO: You all were tight in there, then.

PARKER: Were we tight.

R. PARKER, JR.: It was a shotgun!

PARKER: Yeah, straight through.

MWENDO: So no privacy.

PARKER: So we stuck it out. We stuck it out.

MWENDO: Were you all like biting at each other by the time it was . . .

PARKER: No, we were . . . we were . . . I think we stayed with them a month. After that month, then we came back and we stayed on the floor, laid on the floor. We was happy on the floor because we were together. Like I said, we stood up to eat, because we had no chairs. We had maybe the one chair. We tried to make things comfortable for my mama because she was a old lady. But like for them, they enjoyed it. But we just made fun of ourselves.

MWENDO: So talk some more about the rehabilitation part. You say that was the hardest.

PARKER: [1:16:46] Oh, yes. Because we had to fix this house up. My mama say, "Oh, Lord, how . . ." I say, "Child, don't even worry about it. We going to do it." At that time, paneling was cheap. My brother said, "You know what we can do? We can go get some paneling with the chips and stuff that ain't going to make no difference." That's what we did.

MWENDO: And now what's the . . . What's the paneling with the chips? What do you mean?

PARKER: Oh, not . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: Nicks in it.

PARKER: Nicks, little nicks and [?]

MWENDO: Oh, oh, okay. But nobody would really see it.

PARKER: But nobody could see it, no. I said, "That's a good idea." That's what we did. We went to whatever was down there, Wes Brothers[?] We found some paneling that . . . They were helping people that was in Betsy and stuff. They were giving stuff away.

MWENDO: Would you say there was a lot of support for people who had gone through this?

PARKER: [1:17:40] Yeah. A lot, yeah. We did.

MWENDO: Or it wasn't enough, or what?

PARKER: Well, I said . . . like for us . . . I mean, people who can help themselves, they gave us what they thought we needed. But some people that were worse off than us, they got more stuff than . . . Because they knew they couldn't do no better. The Red Cross did help them a

little bit better than they did us. Some people didn't like the idea too well. "How they can get this, that . . ." Well, they didn't have nothing in the beginning.

[1:18:12] That was . . . I say, "Well, don't worry about it." I said, "The Lord will provide. We'll make it." We got here and we fixed up, painted and stuff. We fared[?] out. My floors . . . I had hardwood floors, my floors was ruined. We had to knock them down. That's how we wound up with carpet. We put carpet on the floors because I didn't feel like going through sanding, all that kind of stuff. I just . . . We just nailed them down and threw some carpet on top of it. We kept the carpet for years.

MWENDO: Did you all do the work yourself?

PARKER: Yes.

MWENDO: Or you all got people to . . .

PARKER: No. My brother who had never hung a piece of paneling in his life did this. He did the whole house. He did the whole house.

MWENDO: By himself, or he had help?

PARKER: With my cousin and my uncle. My cousin and my uncle and us. We did the painting and they did the work.

MWENDO: So little by little.

PARKER: Little by little. We took it room by room until we finished it. We took it room by room. [?] the kitchen. You can just see a little bit. See right where that . . . behind that microwave?

MWENDO: I see the microwave.

PARKER: [1:19:30] See that counter, it stop right there?

MWENDO: Yeah.

PARKER: Well that's where that water stopped.

MWENDO: Let me see if I can see better with my eyeglasses[?]

PARKER: That little bitty piece there. See straight back behind there?

MWENDO: It looks like that's all paneling.

PARKER: No, all the way behind the hot water.

MWENDO: Oh, I see. Behind, on the left hand side.

PARKER: You see way back there by the door? Yeah, by the door.

MWENDO: Okay.

PARKER: Okay. Well, that's how the bedrooms over there have paneling.

MWENDO: Alright. Alright.

R. PARKER, JR.: Like right here.

PARKER: [1:19:54] Because that's where the water stopped. That's where they chopped to get in here.

R. PARKER, JR.: Get . . . check, make sure everybody's out of the house. So they kept [?]

MWENDO: Oh. Now what is this?

R. PARKER, JR.: They went to each house . . .

PARKER: Just check it out.

R. PARKER, JR.: . . . to break in. This is a little break in mark they did.

MWENDO: Who broke in?

R. PARKER, JR.: I guess the city.

PARKER: City, the police, the . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: To make sure nobody wasn't here.

PARKER: The civil defense.

MWENDO: Oh, when they were . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: Not in a robbery. Just to make sure.

PARKER: [1:20:17] Make sure that there was nobody left in the house.

R. PARKER, JR.: We just keep it.

PARKER: We kept the door.

R. PARKER, JR.: This door [?]

PARKER: We never did change the door.

MWENDO: Wow.

PARKER: That door was in Betsy.

R. PARKER, JR.: All we did was change the lock.

MWENDO: You know, I didn't bring my camera this time. But I'd like to come back and take a picture. Take a picture of you.

PARKER: Yeah.

MWENDO: Take a picture of your son.

R. PARKER, JR.: They did it five times, right there.

PARKER: And they broke in . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: Had to break the lock.

PARKER: . . . to see if anybody was left in here.

MWENDO: [1:20:42] Wow.

PARKER: Turn that light on, baby. So we kept that same door.

R. PARKER, JR.: Oh, yeah. We can't get rid of that.

MWENDO: So it's like a . . . it's really like a significant event in your life.

R. PARKER, JR.: Oh, yes, it is.

PARKER: Yes.

MWENDO: And how so? Like what would you say about Betsy?

PARKER: I know one thing, it sent me back to church. Because I was playing hooky from church. I told . . . I promised the Lord, I said, "Lord, if you get me out of here, you ain't going to have no trouble with me going to church and doing what I'm supposed to do. Working and paying my tithes and all. You ain't going to have no trouble out of me." I kept my promise. I sure did. That's one thing. Betsy sent me back to . . . Sent me back to the Lord. [laughs]

MWENDO: What did it do for this community?

PARKER: [1:21:33] It brought us closer together. Because then we started helping each other.

MWENDO: In what kind of ways were you all helping?

PARKER: Like fixing up. We cooked food. Some of us cooked food. What happened was, the men in the neighborhood, they came back before we did. To keep whatever little stuff we had left that people would come in and start stealing. Because they said on TV that if they catch anybody looting and everything . . . What they did, each man who lived in one of these houses, the menfolks stayed. My husband stayed over here. Mr. Butler stayed over there and Mr. Richard stayed over there, and Sam stayed over there.

MWENDO: Just to protect the house.

PARKER: And the old people that was there, Raymond took care of this house and that house. Because they couldn't do nothing.

MWENDO: Were there any guards out here? National Guard or any . . .

PARKER: [1:22:24] National Guard came in with the big trucks. Then they got a lot of people out of those . . . what you call them big old trucks that can tread through water? They got a lot of people out, too.

MWENDO: But even after . . . after Hurricane Betsy was over and they evacuated everybody, I'm understanding from one of the other interviewees that there were guards here, and you had to prove who you were.

PARKER: Plus, you had to get shots, on Claiborne Street. When I came back, I had to stop over there on Claiborne Street. They gave us immunization shots for, I guess, typhoid. Because it was just [?], nasty. When the kids came back, they had to get shots, too. But they did. They had guards like . . .

MWENDO: They had a center there? Set up somewhere?

PARKER: Yeah, right over there on Claiborne Street.

MWENDO: On Claiborne and Caffin [Avenue]? Or . . .

PARKER: No, Claiborne and Forstall [Street]. That's where we got our shots from when we came back.

MWENDO: Free? It was free shots?

PARKER: [1:23:26] Yes. Because in order for us to come back in here to work. So nobody would get sick or anything because we had to clean all that mud. My husband say he found a snake in here. Which I was glad he found, I didn't find. We just [?], we heard a lot of tall tales about how they found people underneath their sofa that had drowned. One couple went off and left a baby in the house. Some . . . They thought they had the baby, the other one thought they had the baby, and they went across there by Holy Cross [High School] across the river, and the nuns came in and they found the baby. The baby was alive. He had sense enough not to fall off

that mattress in the water. They found the baby alive. The baby was in the house for three days when they realized they didn't . . . nobody had the child. That was one of the stories that we heard.

A lot of people drowned, too. They panicked, because they tried to get out. Now when the water started coming, they tread the water and went over there to McCarty School. Now could you see me walking with all these old people and three, four, walk over there in all that water to McCarty? And a lot of us trying to get over there and get upstairs. Which they did, some went to 19.

MWENDO: McDonogh 19?

PARKER: McDonogh, yes. But I thought . . . my husband said, "No, you wait. We going to get out. We're going to get out. You watch." Sure enough, we did, they came in. They were very nice. The guys were very nice. They took us out.

R. PARKER, JR.: We were still safer over there.

PARKER: [1:25:03] Oh, yeah, because the house was . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: It was higher.

PARKER: It was higher. Because this house here . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: It was on the ground this house [?]

PARKER: It was low, low, low. After Betsy, it had sunk more and we had to have it raised up.

MWENDO: So how did most of the people around here get out? Y'all got out by the yacht club.

PARKER: We got out by the yacht club. Some of them . . . Now my neighbor with the camelback [house] over there, he had some people over there. I don't know how they got . . . guess they all . . . They came back, I guess, and got some more people. All I was doing was getting myself out of here. They probably got out. Because after everything was over, we all met back. Everybody came back to the neighborhood. Everybody was safe. So they probably did. They got out. Like I said, I can't say what I want to say on the tape, but our people was going up and down in a skiff, and they was charging to take you out.

MWENDO: Oh, oh [agrees].

PARKER: [1:25:56] I said, "No, that's okay." "We'll be back!" They never come back. But that's how he got out. After that . . .

MWENDO: You didn't have to pay for the yacht club.

PARKER: No, no. Those guys, they gave their time. They gave their time to take us out.

MWENDO: So if Hurricane Betsy hadn't happened . . . You said after Hurricane Betsy, the community got closer. So if Hurricane Betsy hadn't happened, what you think would have happened to the neighborhood? Anything different?

PARKER: I don't think so. It would have still been the same. Like we are. I don't think nothing . . . Because we've had some storms that come through here, not as . . . we thought might hurt us. But we all stayed and stuck it out. Nobody left. Everybody stayed. "You going to stay?" "Yeah, I'm going to stay." [laughs]

MWENDO: You all check . . . You all still check with each other?

PARKER: [1:26:53] Yes. "If you stay, we going to stay." I say, "We ain't going nowhere." Because the last was [Hurricane] George[s] and everybody running. Everybody in the neighborhood stayed right here. Stayed right here.

MWENDO: Betsy didn't frighten you all enough to get you all out. [laughs]

PARKER: The thing about Betsy, it wasn't the storm, the water was the thing that devastated us. The storm was . . . I mean, it had things blowing and trees falling. Normal, in a normal storm. But the water is the thing that done us in, not the storm. I had no shingles off my house. I had no lawn furniture flying all over. It was the water. That's what ruined us, the water.

MWENDO: So when storms do come, is your behavior different than it was before? Like before, you all kind of were looking at TV but . . .

PARKER: Yeah. We keep a close eye on it now. If I've got to get out, I'm going. Like right after Betsy, [Hurricane] Camille?

R. PARKER, JR.: Camille.

PARKER: Camille came and the man told us to evacuate. We couldn't get no further than Holy Cross over there on the other side.

MWENDO: Holy Cross School?

PARKER: [1:28:07] [agrees] We went over there by Holy Cross. Now some people . . . I mean, the traffic was so bad. My husband say, "Well, no. Let's . . .we just go over there to Holy Cross." That's where we went, by Holy Cross. We stayed there until they gave the all clear signal that we could come back. We all came back home. But we was packed down this time, though. Oh, yes. We had food, clothes, everything else when he say get out. We left and went over there.

MWENDO: [laughs] What year was Camille?

R. PARKER, JR.: Sixty-nine.

PARKER: Sixty-nine. Right after Betsy.

R. PARKER, JR.: I remember that.

PARKER: But we stayed over at the gym[?], had food and stuff. We stayed there. When he gave the all clear that . . . everybody could return back to their homes. Then we came back. But right now, we be a little edgy when the hurricane . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: [?] packed already.

PARKER: We keep . . . We old, child. We learn from Betsy. [laughter]

MWENDO: What you learn?

PARKER: We learned to keep food packed, water packed, clothes packed.

R. PARKER, JR.: All the important papers [?]

PARKER: [1:29:10] All the important papers put in one little . . . When it's time to go, we gone. Now since they done gave us a route to get out of here when a storm comes, my daughter lives in Jackson, Mississippi. We going to stay to that right, take that [Interstate] 55.

R. PARKER, JR.: Long gone.

PARKER: Jackson, we gone.

R. PARKER, JR.: [?] going to leave the [?]

PARKER: I ain't worried about all that. He better [?], say we better prepared now. If another hurricane comes and we get enough warning to get out, but I'm going to leave before. I've learned that. I'm going to leave before.

R. PARKER, JR.: But, see, when Betsy . . . Betsy was in '65. They didn't have that much technology like they have now.

PARKER: [1:29:56] Right, about tracing them.

R. PARKER, JR.: But still, I don't think Betsy would have brought no water if they hadn't done anything to that canal like they say they bust that levee.

MWENDO: So you believe . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: I really believe.

PARKER: I really . . . yeah, because we . . . like I said, the water is the thing did us in.

R. PARKER, JR.: I really believe they bust up that levee.

PARKER: Not the storm. Not the storm, baby. Everybody talk about . . .

R. PARKER, JR.: It wasn't the storm.

PARKER: It was not Betsy.

R. PARKER, JR.: It wasn't Betsy that was doing that.

PARKER: It was the water.

R. PARKER, JR.: We went to school that day, I remember that.

PARKER: [1:30:21] And the storm was still out there.

R. PARKER, JR.: I remember, we walked home from school.

PARKER: Like I said, Mr. Wilbert told us to put the garbage cans in, close up, because you ain't leaving here until three o'clock.

R. PARKER, JR.: It wasn't that bad.

PARKER: No.

MWENDO: It was the water.

PARKER: It was the water that really ruined us.

MWENDO: We got a few more minutes. It's about to come to the end of the . . .

PARKER: But all I can say is that Betsy has prepared . . . taught me be prepared. Like I said, I still got my stuff packed. Canned goods, stuff that you can eat out of the can.

MWENDO: Anything you would have done differently?

PARKER: [1:30:58] What?

MWENDO: In Betsy. Now that you . . . In hindsight.

PARKER: No. Because we got caught off guard. We got caught off guard.

MWENDO: So you all did well.

PARKER: We wasn't prepared for that. I think we did very well to get out and to redo our . . . put our lives back together.

MWENDO: Do you think there could have been greater support from the city or from . . .

PARKER: I don't think they were even prepared, per se. I don't think they . . . now like you said, with the technology and stuff they got now, they can tell you what's what. I don't think they were . . . They wasn't ready. I don't think they were ready.

MWENDO: What about for support for people who went through it? [dog barking]

PARKER: From the city?

MWENDO: Yeah.

PARKER: [1:31:49] I guess they did as much as they could do. That's when . . . I know one thing. The streets . . . Most streets we got subsurface draining now. When it rain now, you ain't got no water on the street. You ain't got to worry about no flood. Like it floods uptown . . . around like Napoleon [Avenue] all that, flooding up in there, we don't have that. Because when it rain here, that water just runs right off.

MWENDO: Is it a result of Betsy, do you think? [dog barking]

PARKER: I think so. I think they tried to fix it up, yes. [?] it came through here.

MWENDO: Well before this runs all the way out, I want to thank you all, both of you all, for this interview. This has really been . . . it's been a . . . it's been a good experience, everybody that I interviewed. It's been very informative, really informative, to hear people's stories. The

hope of this is that some of the healing happens. That telling a story and at least acknowledging what you've gone through is part of the beginning of the healing. Hopefully that happens. Do you want to add anything? Do you want to . . .

PARKER: No, nothing much. Like I said, from Betsy, I learned how to be ready. When there's another one coming, I'm out of here.

MWENDO: Raymond, you want to say anything?

R. PARKER, JR.: I'm ready to go, too. [laughter]

MWENDO: You all be ready to go.

PARKER: [1:33:13] We be ready to book.

R. PARKER, JR.: And [?]

PARKER: We are prepared.

R. PARKER, JR.: We will be prepared. Because we know what could happen.

PARKER: Right. Since we've gone through this.

R. PARKER, JR.: Because that river could overflow . . .

PARKER: Or either if the storm come up through the lake. That hits us.

R. PARKER, JR.: The lake is a whole [?] We getting out of here. We getting out . . .

[1:33:38]

[End Tape 3342, Side B. End Session I.]