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[Begin Tape 3337, Side A. Begin Session I.]

Nilima Mwendo: This is an interview with Dorothy Duminy . . .

Lucille Duminy: Why don't you say, "Lucille Duminy?"

Mwendo: Lucille, excuse me.

Duminy: You know.

Mwendo: See, I know you as Auntie Dot, so . . .

Duminy: [laughs] I mean, you could always . . .

Mwendo: [00:18] Lucille D. Duminy, my aunt. A career housewife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother. A domestic worker. A person who has gotten her certificate of reading from Operation Mainstream. She is of New Orleans, Louisiana. And Mrs. Duminy and her family lived in the Lower Ninth Ward when Hurricane Betsy hit New Orleans in September of 1965. This interview is being conducted on November 19, 2003, at her home and the interviewer is Nilima Mwendo, her niece. [laughs] Okay, so Auntie, when did you move into the Lower Ninth Ward and why?

Duminy: Well, first I have to go back with Louise.

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: She moved into the Ninth . . .

Mwendo: And who is Louise?

Duminy: [1:22] Louise is my sister-in-law. Louise Simms, okay, my sister-in-law. And she came down here because of your mom was selling her house, and she had no place to go, so she was looking for a house. So they told her that she had . . . they had . . . a development was being built down here. So I came with her, and when I saw it, I said, "Oh, we could get our house." And it was cheap, you see? The house was cheap, it wasn't much.

Mwendo: Like about how much was it?

Duminy: About nine thousand, nine hundred. So, this is . . . We got this. Then, she moved in first, because I was staying with Nanny Lucille, and I moved in after that.

Mwendo: Do you remember the year that was that you moved in?

Duminy: Well that was in . . . Let's see, Steve was five years old when we moved.

Mwendo: Okay, that's your son.

Duminy: Yes, so let's see, that would be in '49 or '50. I'm not good on dates.

Mwendo: And what's the address of this property?

Duminy: [2:40] This is [address removed]. Okay, we moved in. It was a muddy street in the front. A canal right on Claiborne, there was no Claiborne Street. Everything was muddy, and it rained that day I moved. I cried so much, because I said, "Why did I move from Galvez to down here in the Ninth Ward?" I said, the mud, it was horrible, you know? But I liked the house. I said I wanted to own our own home, Walter and I.

Mwendo: How did you all move? How was that physically done, then, with all that mud and stuff?

Duminy: Well it was your Uncle Jimmy, Uncle Richard, and somebody else, one of Richard's friends that help us to move. I don't know if it was Ellis or what, but it was a friend, another friend to move into the house. Because Uncle Walter, at that time, he took sick with kidney stone. So I said, "Oh Lord, what's going to happen next?"

So okay we finally got all the furniture in. Then I came the next morning down here, and I was just crying, that's all I did is cry, because why did I move? I was . . . But then the sun came out, and it was beautiful like today. So I start putting things in places what I'm going to

do. I didn't like the kitchen because the kitchen was smaller than what it is there. They had a hall, so we took that hall away.

[4:18] Okay, then we were here for . . . Uncle Walter needed a car, so we had to get a car for him to go to work, and I hated to see him going to work at night when this was a new place, and it was kind of frightening, they didn't have no light or anything. I said, "Now, if something happens, we don't even have a telephone in the house."

Mwendo: So it was like a country, this was like the country . . .

Duminy: Yes, well, the horses were running in the back yard, because they had a barn on Claiborne Avenue . . . on Claiborne Street it was. It wasn't no avenue. I said, "We have to put a fence up first, that's the most important thing, to get a fence." I did, we put a fence around the house, and Louise put her little fence because the horses and cows . . . It was real country, like the way I was brought up. But we did that, and then after, later on, we start the complaining about when they going to fix the street. When they going to do this.

Mwendo: Did they have plumbing?

Duminy: Oh, they had just the plumbing . . . they had the plumbing, yeah, we had plumbing. But we didn't have . . . the sidewalk was on, because the mailman . . . to deliver the mail . . . I used to get milk and things delivered at my door. Just tell the man how many I want and they would deliver it. I can't remember if it was Gordon or what . . . the name of the delivery. So we had that.

[6:02] And then after . . . Gradually, they finally came and rolled out the mud, put that black stuff on the ground. It was a mess for the house, because I had carpet in the house. I said, "What did I do?" Put carpet down in the house, it was a mess. But anyway, we got through that. Years later, here come . . . they start putting . . . We demanded that we wanted a paved street. Something better than rocks and tar.

Mwendo: So you're saying that the neighbors organized, kind of?

Duminy: The neighbors just got together, and the people that's coming to vote and different things, and we spoke. I don't know who was the guy . . . I've never been in politics before, that was the first time. The ones that lived here before me, then they got together and they asked if I wanted to sign the paper. I said, "Yeah, I'll sign it." I said, "I would like to see streets and lights, more lights." It was pitch dark down here. I was used to it, because I was a country girl. [laughs] I said . . . We finally got it. They dig up the street, it was worse. Oh, when I saw the water, the rain, the mud, oh Jesus, I said, "Oh my God." I said, "Why did I move from Galvez?" Galvez Street always came back to me. Then they fixed it up. It was nice after . . .

Mwendo: Do you remember what year that was when it did look kind of developed, where the street lights were there, the streets were paved?

Duminy: [7:49] It was in the fifties, it was in the fifties. But I said, "Well, I guess this is my house, and maybe I'll buy something else later." It'll be like a starter house. But then I begin to like the neighborhood. I say, "This is a nice neighborhood." Everybody . . . Mr.

Ruth[?] moved in, you know, Ruth Zino[?], the one that just died, you know Robin and them, they moved in. Louise moved in, then somebody else that we knew, I can't remember her name, she died. Mr. Harry, they moved in, and it was people like us that would get together. Mr. Harry was one man that . . . He demanded everything, he was a good speaker and he would go . . . He'd say, "When in the hell are you going to fix the street? We're down here paying our taxes and it needs to come back into our neighborhood." That went on for years, and they didn't do it right away, but that was years before they came and paved the street. They finally did that, and I'm still here. [laughs]

Mwendo: In your starter house. [laughs]

Duminy: In my starter house.

Mwendo: I think I'm going to skip all these background things and go more into the . . . if you . . . You kind of talked about it, Auntie, a little bit, but would you describe the neighborhood prior to Hurricane Betsy? What were the people like? What were . . . What did it look like here? What kind of opportunities were going on? What were the economics? All of that. What was it like before Hurricane Betsy?

Duminy: [9:44] Well, before Hurricane Betsy, we were doing things in our own neighborhood. Fixing up, planting trees. Gardening was my favorite. Out in the yard, right away I started putting flowers and vegetables growing in the back yard, and planting trees.

There was no trees or anything in the area. We got along, we met with each other in the neighborhood and made friends with . . . We knew everybody in the neighborhood.

We would give like little gathering in the back yard and Mr. Harry always would have like a barbeque in his yard, that's the house next to Louise's house. To get to know the people, we got together, all of us in this neighborhood. Nobody was left out in our neighborhood. We invited people from over, and they would come for a little while. "I'm Lucille Duminy," no no, "I'm Dorothy Duminy," and we'd meet each other that way. And that's how we got to know each other.

[10:57] Our children would play together. The children would run in the street. You see, right across the street from my house, there was no house there. It was an empty lot. The children would play ball there. We would get together, and most of the family was working family. I hated to see the kids just dragging the street, so I told them, "Tell your mom to make you a sandwich for twelve o'clock for lunch, and whatever drink she wants to put in a bottle, bring it over here and you all could play in the yard." Because we had a fence, and it was more secure for children. They had little kids. I said, "My God, could they leave their children alone." But we took care of them. We would sit down, we would sing, we would read, and oh, they were tickled pink.

Uncle Joe would play the accordion at night. In the evening he would come out and play the accordion from work. Oh, those kids said, "Play another song," and "Do this, how did you learn? Could we play it?" And he said, "No, this is a delicate thing," he said, "I can't let you all kids play on it, but I'll play for you all." I had planted an orange tree in the yard, and the orange tree never did bear. I said, "So I'm going to cut it down." The kids said, "Can we help?" I said, "Oh, sure!" I said, "First, dig a hole, a big, big hole." And they all had their little shovel digging

the hole, and they would sit all around after the hole was dug, and it was evening time was coming. I said, "Go home, ask your mom could you come back about six o'clock, seven o'clock." And so the lady came over, she wanted to know who . . . what was going on. I said, "Well, we're going to have a little outing for the children tonight, and they're going to sit on the logs that's not cut, and we're going to have a fire. And we're going to roast weenies, we're going to roast marshmallows." They had a ball, and they thought they could do this every day. [laughs] I said, "Oh, no, no, no, no! Not every day."

[13:23] As I was growing up . . . into marriage life, I always wanted to have children there, because when I was coming up, we were always a bunch of kids. I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be a teacher. I was teaching in one way, the little reading that I knew, they caught on right away. The children, they're just like a sponge, they, "You said we're going to do this." I say, "Well, I couldn't get whatever I wanted, so I have to do the best we can." And that was that.

So we finally got it to vote. Well, I had voted before in the city, we would call this the outskirts. And your mama helped me. We got together, and I think it was Victor Schiro was the mayor at that time and he was very, very nice. We said, "We're tired of living in a neighborhood, no street . . . have nice homes for us, but no street." I don't know if he had any . . . whatever he did, he did it. So we finally got pavement.

Mwendo: What kind of work did most of the men, and if the women worked, what kind of work did they do in this community at that time?

Duminy: [15:00] We had a mailman. We had a preacher, like, next door. We had . . . Mr. William was a truck driver, he would go down my way to [?] a truck delivery. Walter was a nurse assistant. Now who else? Paul was . . . He worked in the post office.

Mwendo: Now who is Paul?

Duminy: That was Barbara, not your Paul, Barbara's husband. He was a mailman, too. One of them worked in the bank. Then we had a lady that was a secretary for some big company. They had people that had good money at the time that were starting out but didn't want to branch out into something fabulous like they have today. But I was satisfied right here. I'm still satisfied right here. I am not leaving my home until they take me out of here in a box. [laughs] I'm not leaving, I'm satisfied right here. I'm doing okay right where I'm at.

Mwendo: Auntie, that was sort of like the fifties you kind of described?

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: Could you describe what was the flavor in the sixties before Hurricane Betsy? Hurricane Betsy came in 1965.

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: What was kind of . . . Was there any difference then between what was in the fifties and what was in the early sixties? What was it like?

Duminy: [16:37] Oh yes. Things were a little better because we had our sidewalk, we bought cars, we could go to the grocery . . .

Mwendo: Where was the grocery?

Duminy: The grocery was . . . the only grocery was Schwegman on the Elysian Fields [Avenue] and St. Claude [Avenue]. And they had Puglia's, that wasn't there always. Puglia's was . . . We usually shopped where it was more economical for us.

Mwendo: Because Puglia's was more money, you mean?

Duminy: Yes, you had to pay more, it was a little more. Whereas the one blacks . . . and white is running it, they're going to charge you more. So that's the way that was. Schwegman, you would go up in there and get your stuff and you came home.

Mwendo: Now Puglia's, you're talking about the one that was on St. Claude right there?

Duminy: [17:27] Yeah, on St. Claude. St. Claude and Caffin [Avenue].

Mwendo: Caffin. Okay.

Duminy: Then I said, "Oh, well, we could go out." I had to find out where were the bus. Because before, we didn't have a car. I had to find out where was the bus. Walter had the car to go . . .

Mwendo: When did bus service come down here, do you remember?

Duminy: Well they had bus service before, but I didn't know where it was at the time, because I never did go on the bus. I found out where the bus would drop you off and where you get off and all of that I had to know, so in case anything would happen, we would get on the bus. So that Caffin bus would go all around. You would get the St. Claude bus from Canal Street, and then you were dropped off right at the bridge, and then you take the Caffin bus, and it would go around. Now, it doesn't go all around two ways. We had the two-way street. We have two-way street now, but the bus just go one way. Up, and that's it.

[18:53] And the neighborhood . . . for some reason, I like my neighborhood. I know everybody in my neighborhood, and they know me. We get together sometime and say, we're going to have to sign a petition because they wanted to build some kind of . . . car . . . to fix cars. We said, "Oh, no, no, no! We don't want this in the neighborhood, no." I said, "We trying to get something nice. Why build a garage right here?" They had St. Claude was cluttered with that, and different part of the city. I said, "Oh, no." So we . . . Now Paul, Paul Gordon, he is the one that drafted everything, said, "Would you like to sign?" I said, "If it's for the neighborhood, yes, I'll sign." So we all signed and sent that petition so they couldn't build the garage. And you know how neighborhood garages are, they have all kind of people hanging out. I said, "Oh no, I don't want that."

But then after it got really nice, and people start building across the street and everything. And soon as they finish building and they're moving in, we would go over there and say, "Welcome to the neighborhood. It's a quiet neighborhood. It's a family neighborhood. We all know each other, we know our children. Now if you see your children or my children in the street hanging around, send them home." That's the way it was.

Mwendo: So let's go to Hurricane Betsy now.

Duminy: Oh, Jesus.

Mwendo: [20:33] Hurricane Betsy came September 9, 1965.

Duminy: Yes, right.

Mwendo: A few days before that, when the storm was coming, because you know it went through Florida and all of that, what was going on for you at the time? What was the family doing at the time? Were you hearing, what were you hearing about Betsy? What was going on at that time?

Duminy: Well, we didn't have TV at the time. We had radios. We heard that a storm was coming. It didn't pay me no mind at the time. It's just a storm. So what? Why worry? So when it got really, really bad, my uncle called us up. Louise had the telephone.

Mwendo: Now what was really, really bad? What do you mean?

Duminy: [21:23] At the mouth of the . . . when it turned and went to the mouth of the river, that's bad. [laughs] Because you right at the mouth of the Gulf [Of Mexico], and the sea could come just right over and that's it. That's just what it did. He called me, he said, "Can my mama, my aunt that was pregnant, my grandmother, and my uncle, could we come at your house for safety reason?" You know, to be safe. [laughs] I said, "Oh Lord, Jesus," I said, "Just y'all come." I said, "Come on in."

Mwendo: Now they were where? Where were they?

Duminy: They were in Empire, Louisiana. They came to New Orleans that same day that Betsy was going to hit them. That evening they came in. When they came, I said, "Mama," I said, "why you brought all that food?" I said, "We have . . ." I had gone to the store and I bought a hindquarter of meat. I stocked up on canned food. I stocked up on everything that we needed, water, and I had that. I said, "In case we have to go by Nanny or something like that." Just through talking, you know?

Mwendo: You were thinking that maybe it just wouldn't be anything bad.

Duminy: Yes, it would be just the wind, yes.

Mwendo: Yes, the electricity would go out.

Duminy: [22:56] And it would have been . . . well, I'm getting too far . . .

Mwendo: That's okay.

Duminy: But anyway, they all came and we sat down and they had roasted chicken and all that. They said, "But you didn't have to cook." I said, "Well, no I didn't cook, because I figured you all had something already." My mama set the little table right there, we sat down and we ate supper, and then . . . Well, before that, your daddy had fixed the TV for me.

Mwendo: Really? On the day before?

Duminy: No, no, no, no, he had fixed the TV for me. I was looking, we were all sitting in the back looking at TV. I went ahead of the story. That's when it came, the flash on the TV saying, it must have been something to nine when everything went out. He said, "The wind is such and such mile per hour." And never mention evacuate, they didn't have no evac . . . They wanted us to die right down here.

Mwendo: What did they say, then? They just said it's coming?

Duminy: [24:05] They just said it's so many miles per hour, it's going to hit New Orleans at such-and-such a time. And it was early, early. The rain came, all of a sudden the rain came, I mean it poured down rain. After that, nothing, just complete quietness. And my uncle been in storm, he said, "This don't sound right." My uncle [?]. He said, "This don't sound right." All of

a sudden, a truck passed by and hollered, "Get out the house, get out the house!" The water was coming from back that way.

Mwendo: What is back that way?

Duminy: That's Florida . . .

Mwendo: From Florida Avenue.

Duminy: Yeah, the back way. You know where the back bridge they had back there?

Mwendo: Yes, the Florida Avenue Bridge?

Duminy: [25:00] Right, right. My uncle said, "Let me go outside." And he called me, he said, "Baby," he said, "come and see." He said, "This is not rain water." He said, "This is river water." I said, "No, I have my aunt that's pregnant with her little boy, my mama, my grandma that can't walk." I said, "Oh Lord, Jesus, my mama with arthritis." I said, "Lord, where we going to go?" We can't walk now, it's too late because the water was by your ankle, you know? And as you walk, it was coming up.

Mwendo: So how fast was it coming up?

Duminy: It was coming fast. I said, "Let's get out . . ." We couldn't take . . . All the food we had here, we couldn't take nothing. We had to, I mean get out. Down that way, the . . . what they call them, the National Guard was telling people to get out the house.

Mwendo: How were they doing it? How were they announcing it?

Duminy: Loud, loudspeakers, you know.

Mwendo: Were they driving around?

Duminy: [26:02] In those big . . . the thing . . . the cars would roll on water, like, something like that. And they was telling people to get out. But what had happened before that, Ernest Frasier called Shirley and Don, that's the Smith family.

Mwendo: Called on St. Maurice?

Duminy: On St. Maurice, way in the back. He said all the army trucks, I said, "Look at this, how they work." Army trucks are telling, on . . . what is the last street near the river?

Mwendo: You mean the last street by the canal?

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: Deslonde.

Duminy: What is the neighborhood? How they would call the neighborhood? They had a name . . . Tennessee Street. He said, "The people are moving out." They let them know before we knew. It was dark when we moved out of this house, because it was about nine o'clock when we moved out of the house.

Mwendo: How did you all move out, because you couldn't drive your car, could you?

Duminy: [27:14] No, I just had my car done all over again, lost the car. Okay, couldn't go in it so we had to walk. All of us got out of our house, I took a blanket and put it on my head for my grandmother not to get wet. By the time we walked from here to Caffin, right there at McCarty School, the water was coming up like this. We had to hold onto the fences as we get to the door. And then a man . . .

Mwendo: And it was dark out there.

Duminy: It was dark, it was dangerous.

Mwendo: You know what time it was?

Duminy: It was after nine.

Mwendo: And then too, Auntie, the canal was there, too. Were you all . . .

Duminy: No, not right here, not right there. The canal was over here.

Mwendo: Okay, see I don't know my sense of direction. [laughs] This is Claiborne Avenue over here?

Duminy: The canal was over here. That's right. That was the canal there.

Mwendo: Okay, and you all walked which direction?

Duminy: We walked the back, on the side street.

Mwendo: Okay, to McCarty School. What street McCarty School is on?

Duminy: [28:13] It's on Caffin.

Mwendo: Caffin and what?

Duminy: Caffin and . . . this is Lamanche? . . . No, no, Caffin and Lamanche, that was, that's where the street . . . where it's situated right now. We finally got there and was hollering for help. They had some guys . . . When I think of that, it hurts . . . they had some guys . . .

Mwendo: It's okay, Auntie. That's why we're doing this.

Duminy: They came and they helped us, and they saw us. Steve had to carry the little boy that was with us, my little cousin, around his neck like this. It was okay for Steve, because Steve was tall. But my uncle was short and Walter took sick with kidney stones. All that was happening at the same time. He helped carry my grandmother and Pa . . . together to carry his mother and we finally got to safety. We stood there and set up.

Mwendo: The men helped you all get in.

Duminy: Get in, yes, we went on the second floor. It was on the first floor, the water was up to the second staircase. I said, "Oh, Lord." You know, the bottom steps. I said, "Well, we're going to have to be here." We were saying prayers. My mama said, "Well all the people, maybe they don't like us." I said, "I don't care what they like, Mama." I said, "We're going to say our rosary." I said, "I don't care what they like." And then Steve and [?] came and said, "Mama, are we going to die?" I said, "Oh, no, baby," I said. "You won't die, we'll be okay."

[30:03] About twelve o'clock that night, the Red Cross people came and asked who was sick, and the elderly, if they needed medication of some kind. Everybody hollered, "We need food!" They never did come back for food. We survived about . . . it must have been about two o'clock that morning, it was like a ghost town. Everything was so still, the people was just . . . everybody was quiet. All of a sudden we see some boats coming around to help and I said that the man come who . . . A family is here, if we take a family to bring to shore, to bring over the bridge. I said, "Well I have my grandmother, I have my whole family with me," I said, "but we

all can't get in that skiff." It was a skiff. And I said, "If you take them," I said, "promise me you're going to come back and get me and my two children and my husband." Walter went with them because they didn't know where it was, so Walter went with them.

Mwendo: Where to go.

Duminy: Yes, I said, "Come back and get me. Please, Mister," I said, "come back and get me." Do you know that man came back? He said, "But it takes so long to get to the bridge," he said, "we're going to . . . it's going to be maybe about two-thirty, three o'clock in the morning." I said, "I don't care what time . . ."

Mwendo: What time was it then?

Duminy: [31:54] It was three o'clock in the morning he came. It was three o'clock when he came to pick us up. He came and he hollered in the place, he got out of his boat, and he had two sons. He said, "Where was the lady that I took the grandmother and the pregnant mother to safety?" I said, "I'm right here, I'm right here," and I could holler, "I'm right here! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, thank you, thank you, God bless you!" We got on the other side.

Mwendo: You're saying like around twelve o'clock they took your mama and your aunt and all that. He came back at about three in the morning to get you.

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: This was like, we're into September the tenth, we're into the next morning.

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: And it was damp, we were all wet. It was cold, we had no . . . to put dry things on. Okay, we waited across the bridge, across the street from the Fifth District Precinct, Uncle Walter started getting sick. I said, "Oh, Lord Jesus, just let him hold on until we get to Nanny." I thought we was going to Nanny. But we couldn't go. If my grandmother would have walked, we would have walked by Lucille's house. But it was too . . .

Mwendo: Right from over the bridge?

Duminy: [33:16] That's right, we would've walked, we were desperate.

Mwendo: And where were you all, exactly?

Duminy: We was right on Poland Street and St. Claude. St. Claude.

Mwendo: Oh, where the old . . .

Duminy: Yes, the old . . .

Mwendo: . . . police station was.

Duminy: Yeah. Well anyway, we waited and waited. Here come a bus, public service bus. We asked the man, could he take us to, he refused.

Mwendo: So there was no water then.

Duminy: No, no water on Poland Street. There was no water at all. That was dry on that side of the . . . and I could understand, because all the vital . . .

Mwendo: Vital statistics?

Duminy: [33:52] Yes, are on the other side. Because anything would have happened, the records and everything would have been destroyed. But anyway, I said, "Why you can't take us a little closer?" He said, "Missus, because of the electricity, the wires, all that was down and there's no place to take you." I said, "We're going to have to sleep on the street." So made my grandmother comfortable. Here come . . . Guess what they sent? A cattle truck. You don't know if it was dirty, I said, "Cattle trucks? We're like slavery in here!" I said, "Taking us . . ." I said, "Mister, they don't have no bus?" I said, "I see people, the other color, in buses, and there's electricity, where you can't take us." Okay.

Mwendo: What they said?

Duminy: They just look at us like we were crazy.

Mwendo: And how many people were there with you all?

Duminy: We had . . . Oh, a whole lot of people.

Mwendo: A whole lot . . . and other black people? All black people?

Duminy: [35:01] They had a few . . . maybe, I don't know who they were, I didn't even worry about color. I just wanted to get to safety. They took us . . . the cattle car took us, and they were driving so fast, I was worried about the one that was pregnant, you know how you're bumping and all of that stuff. I said, "We're not cattles." I guess I should have kept my mouth shut . . . I said, "I ain't saying nothing no more." My uncle said, "Shh." That was Pie, we used to call Pie, "Shh. Shut up, we're in a car. Wherever they bring us, we're going to find out what you said." And so we went to City Hall.

Mwendo: They brought all of you all?

Duminy: All of us to City Hall.

Mwendo: About how many people were in this cattle thing? And was it like . . . it's like . . . like a wagon? Like . . .

Duminy: It was a cattle truck! Big, big . . .

Mwendo: Oh, one of those . . . that's what it was.

Duminy: [35:55] And they had the stalls to keep the cows in. We was in stalls, we were like cattles. That's what we were, cattles. They got us in there, and when we got to City Hall, right away I see Red Cross, if you need help, we'll help you. I go and I knock on the door. I said, "I have my . . . Excuse me, Miss." She said, "Could I help you?" I said, "Yes ma'am," I said, "I just came from the Ninth Ward, if you know where it's at, I don't think you know," because she wasn't from here, and I said, "I have my grandmother that's in her late nineties . . . eighties. And I have my husband that's vomiting blood." I said, "Could I get some help?" She said, "Well, I don't have no way of taking care of that." Just like that. Walter was . . . oh, he was . . . I'm telling you he was sick.

I said, "Well, nobody help us for the storm, so why should I think I'm going to get help from you?" That's how I told her. I said, "Are you here, what are you trying to tell us? You're here, you don't have information, or you can't get anybody to help my husband?" I said, "Well what are you here for? I want information. I want somebody just to take me to Charity Hospital. It's right there, I can't walk over there, I've been up all night long. I walked in water up to my neck." I said, "Now what more do you want, blood?" She called a man, and the man came and he said, "Miss, I'll take you to the Charity Hospital.

Mwendo: Who was the man, do you know?

Duminy: [37:44] Oh, no, I don't even know the man, just took me and [?]

Mwendo: Was he in a uniform or anything?

Duminy: No, no, no, just a man.

Mwendo: Black man? A black man?

Duminy: Well, I don't know who he was, they got all color blacks.

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: There you go. Well, anyway, I told . . . I said, "Mister, that's my husband right here." Walter said, "Oh, my stomach, oh, please help me, somebody." I was crying, and then Hope and Steve came to me and said, "Mama, don't cry, Mama." I said, "Okay, I won't cry." Did all of this, and I said, "Look, Hope," I said, "you're the oldest." I said, "You take care of your little brother. Don't go nowhere without Pie, or Grandma Matille[?], or Bertha." I said, "Don't go nowhere without them." I said, "Stay by this telephone until you get Nanny on the phone." They did just . . . I said . . . and then I had a bunch of nickels, I said, "Just put it in there." But it was free, I said, "Oh, we got something free! We got something free!" No food now, didn't eat for two days. Two days I stood there, didn't eat for two days.

Mwendo: In City Hall.

Duminy: [38:57] Yeah. They got in touch with Nanny. I went to the hospital. When I get to the hospital, the stupid lady said, "Well what's your name?" I said, "My name is Lucille Duminy, and this is my husband that's vomiting blood. Anything else you want to know?" I said, "He is sick, and I'm sick and tired of answering questions that I don't get no answer from." The lady said, "Oh, that's down Chalmette way." I said, "Yeah, that's down Chalmette way." I said, "We were in water for two days." I said, "Don't you think I'm tired?" I got like out of my mind like. A doctor came and he sat me down and he start talking to me. He said, "Just relax," he said, "I'll help you all. Don't worry about anything, your husband's going to be fine."

Walter told me, he said, "You know, Dorothy, you said you have money on you." I said, "Yeah, I have money." He said, "Give me the . . . can I use your phone, sir?" And the man said, "Yeah, you can use the phone." He called Public Health Hospital, and he spoke to the headmaster up there at Public Health Hospital, and he said, "Is Miss Cox there?" The lady said, "This is she." And so she said, "Walter?" He said, "I'm so sick. I'm at Charity Hospital and they're giving us the runaround. I don't know where's my children. I know I left them in City Hall, but those are two little kids." He told the lady. "Honey," she said, "let me talk to such-and-such a people." They was right there and got on the phone, she said, "Make sure Mr. Duminy have a private room with the family." They gave Walter a private room, TV, everything in the thing, Walter wasn't even worrying about that, because he was sick with passing that stone.

Mwendo: That's because he was a nursing assistant over there and he knew Miss Cox.

Duminy: [41:04] [Agrees] So they took care of him. Then I went back to City Hall. I couldn't find the children or Mama. I figured somebody had gotten . . . come then. So what I did, I called Lucille. Before I called Lucille, my cousin that used to live on St. Peter's Street, Janet and her sister, came over to look for me. They knew where I lived down here, but they came . . . to the hospital. They was calling in hospital to see where was the family. They said, "Walter Duminy is in the hospital, but his wife is not here." They thought I had . . . God knows what had happened to us. As I was coming down the elevator, she was standing right there, and I just fell in her arms. I went down, they had to help me. I cried, I cried so much, I said, "Lord, Jesus. Thank you, thank you, Jesus." I said, "Janet, my grandmother is at City Hall. Hope and Steve, please go see about my children." [crying]

Mwendo: Yes indeed.

Duminy: They found them. Hope and them was all right, everybody was all right. And when I walked in Nanny's house... [crying] and saw all those people in the house, all my family. They were well taken care of, but I just went berserk. They were alright. I said, "Thank you Jesus that they're all alright." We stayed there for a while, and Walter was in the hospital for about two weeks. And Richard, he was really, really nice with my grandmother, and your Uncle Jimmy, and Ellis.

Mwendo: And was Auntie Louise's family in there, too?

Duminy: [43:27] Yeah, Auntie Louise was . . . she had gotten out before. She called me, she said, "Dorothy, we're leaving." I said, "Well I can't leave, I have too much people to put in my car." I said, "We'll drown before we get to the . . . St. Claude Street." Because there was no water on St. Claude Street. It didn't cross the . . . over. So even Father where I work called. He said, "Dorothy, why you and your family come over to St. Maurice [Church]?" I said, "Father, I have so many here that I can't get all in the car." I said, "Walter is sick, so I'm the only one would have to drive, and I can't be sure to come back to get them, so I can't move."

That's the way it was. When I got over there, then we divided . . . Noonie . . . Well, I called her Noonie, my Aunt Bertha, she went to Francis' house. She stayed there because she was expecting anytime. I said, "Lord, I hope she don't go into labor, that'll be something else." Anyway, she had her husband in the Public Health Hospital, had surgery. It was a mess. Okay, we managed, everything went all right, I took a bath, I just stood in the tub . . . when you can't get the dirt off of you. I said, "Where's my . . . where's Hope? Where's Steve?" Everybody [makes kissing noises] kissing everybody. I said, "Well thank God we made it this far." But they couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe what we saw. Some people were really, really nice, it was quiet, and some people were angry and cursing . . . doing in the school . . .

Mwendo: [45:33] At McCarty.

Duminy: At McCarty. Some . . . Those winos or whatever . . . dope or whatever they had.

Mwendo: You all were scared.

Duminy: Was I scared? I said, "Stay in this little corner, do not move." Hope and Steve said, "Mama, we going to die in here. I want to go home." I said, "We can't go home." I said, "Come see by the window." When the light came the first day, because we spent the whole day, then the next . . . that night, that's when they came to get us. I said, "Open your mouth." I gave them each an aspirin, I said, "Anybody want an aspirin?"

Unknown: The tape's about to go out.

Mwendo: Oh, okay then.

Unknown: I didn't want to miss anything that you said.

Mwendo: Should we stop right here?

Unknown: Yes, I'm going to turn the tape over. [46:27]

[End Tape 3337, Side A. Begin Tape 3337, Side B.]

Mwendo: How long did you . . . Well, go ahead.

Duminy: Walter stood in the hospital the whole two weeks. But getting back by Nanny . . . I needed help, we needed food. We didn't have nothing. I said, and Nanny can't take care of all of us, feed us, but she did.

Mwendo: And Nanny's your sister-in-law.

Duminy: Yes, Lucille Vacce[?]. We did the best we can at that time. [?] with her beans and all of that like that. My mama . . . well, they got together, Pie had some money on him, and he had left . . . He had like a strong box, he had left it here. I said, "Well the money's going to be all right. I hope nobody goes in and break . . . go into the house." But nobody came into the house; they had the guard, National Guards.

Like getting for help, we had to go to City Hall, they had a man from Washington that was there with other people. I said, "Well, what we going to do?" I said, "Louise, Louise." Most all of us from down here went to City Hall. I said, "What you do . . ." They was asking questions. I said, "The question is, we need food and clothing." I said, "The only thing we need now . . ." I said, "I don't care to discuss nothing else. We need food." I said, "Yes, I am in a shelter," I said, "and we need food." That's all I was saying [laughs] "Food, the food." I said, "My children, yes, they're taken care of, but we need food." [laughs]

[48:29] They wanted to know where your husband worked, I said, "My husband works for Public Health Hospital, he's an assistant nurse," I said. "Where is he, Mrs. Duminy?" They were very nice. He says . . . the man said, "Well, why he's not here with you?" I said, "Because he is sick! He took sick during Betsy, the night of Betsy." I said, "We stood . . . And you don't know where it's at, because you're from Washington D.C." I told him just like that. But I'm going to tell you, McCarty School down in the Ninth Ward, where the water was like fifteen feet over this house. You didn't see . . . you just saw the tip of the houses. I said, "We need food." I said . . .

“Well were you all treated fairly in the place that you were in?” I said, “No!” I said, “The Red Cross people came over and ask us if we . . . if anybody’s sick. I said, “my husband was sick, but nobody assisted us.” I said, “We just had to stay there and wait till we get somebody else to give us something to eat, we need food.” The man said, “Are you sure it was the Red Cross?” I said, “Yes, she was in one of these little caps, and the clothes that you’re supposed to wear when you’re . . .” I said, “We weren’t treated fairly.” That’s all I said, and I didn’t say nothing no more. The man said, “Well, you come over here tomorrow, all the people that are destituted come over here tomorrow, and we’re going to give you a little assistance.” I said, “Oh, we got to wait till tomorrow to eat.” Tomorrow to eat. Okay, we went, they put us right there Stallings [Center] over the bridge.

Mwendo: On Poland and St. Claude.

Duminy: [50:40] On Poland. Then they sent us to the lakefront.

Mwendo: Now where on the lakefront? Where did you go on the lakefront?

Duminy: There was the soldiers that were there in one of those houses, whatever. The different section of the city had places to go to.

Mwendo: How did y’all get there, because you all didn’t have a car. The bus?

Duminy: We had the buses. Louise had a car. Louise had her car, so I would go, Nanny Louise and I. I went . . . the church came out and gave us money. "Mrs. Duminy . . ." My parish gave me five hundred dollars.

Lucille: That's St. David?

Duminy: Yeah. We needed overcoats because winter was coming and we lost all of our clothes. Then the food. Everybody down here, that's what they needed: the food and warm clothing. I wasn't worried about where we were going to sleep, you sleep in a corner. All that was taken care of. I said . . . The next day we got up, and my cousin, Allen Betholemy[?], he's dead now. He came, he had like a little van, and he came. He said, "Dorothy, I'll bring you to the place to see if you could get assisted."

[51:56] I went to the place. The lady said, "Well, did you lose everything?" I stood and I look at her in the eye like that. I said, "Could you repeat the question, please?" [laughs] You have to laugh at some of the things, how stupid! "Do you need assistance?" I said, "Miss, do you think I would waste my time coming over here to ask to get whatever you're going to give me?" I said, "No, ma'am." I said, "Are you from here?" She said, "No." I said, "Well, you know the Gulf of Mexico, or wherever you're from, do you see the water they have in there?" I was getting, what they say, pissed off. She said, "Yes, I've been to the ocean before." I think she was stupid or something.

I said, "Well that's how much water we had. I could see just the tip, the roof of my house." I said, "That's all I could see. And you're asking me what I need? I need everything! I need a house and everything that goes in a house!" I said, "I lost things that I can never replace,"

I said. Then, when she came . . . I said, "I lost movie pictures of my children, my family." I said, "I lost all of my baby pictures, all of my relatives' pictures." I said, "We had no time to even get papers for the house or anything, because that's how fast the water came." "Well . . . which way did . . ." I said, "Miss, look. I came here for help. I can't tell you which way did it come from. I cannot tell you which way it came from, the water just came. Now where it came from, I don't know, and I don't care about that. I'm worrying about my family." I said, "My husband is in the hospital sick, and you're asking me . . ." Oh! I said, "Oh, no, I refuse to answer those questions."

[54:03] Okay, now I have to go to . . . you leave this place, you have to go to another place. "Well, you think any of your furniture is okay, that it could be done over?" I said, "Where the hell am I going to get the money to have the damn furniture done over?" I said, "Do you know what salt water do to things?" I'm telling you, I got sick. I went by Father Adam, I said, "Father Adam," I said, "if I go over there one more time, I think they're going to put me in jail." He said, "What happened?" I said, "That hell of a woman . . ." I'm in the rectory [laughs]. He said, "Dorothy, look, I have one hundred dollars right now." He said, "Go on and get what you need for right now and later on we'll see about it." I said, "Lord Jesus."

I went again the next day to the place, and they said, "Well, let's see what we going to do. You have to get a bed." I said, "I need three beds." She said, "Three beds?" I said, "Yes, three beds, that's what I need." I said, "The three beds . . . are you going to pay for it? With this five hundred dollars, I cannot buy no bed. I cannot buy a stove. I cannot buy a refrigerator. I cannot buy . . ." I went down just like that, I was bugging her. I said, "I can't get a washing machine." I said, "I have washed clothes on the board, and I'm not doing that no more." I said, "I can't do it." I said, "There's nothing." I said, "I'm not throwing nothing away, I want you all

people to come and see what I had in my house. I didn't have junk in my house, I had furniture in my house. They came, "Well maybe this could be fixed." I said, "Do you have someone that you could recommend to fix these here?" I said, "Do you know how many thousands of people that was affected in this Ninth Ward? I'm going to get somebody to come and fix this?" I said, "No, indeed." I said, "Tomorrow, did you take note of all of this?" I said, "Tomorrow it's going to be out in the junk."

Mwendo: What did it look like in here when you walked in?

Duminy: [56:37] Oh, horrible!

Mwendo: How many days after did you come and step in here?

Duminy: A whole week. A whole week before I came in.

Mwendo: Did it take the water that long to go down, or . . .

Duminy: A whole week . . .

Mwendo: For the water to go down.

Duminy: . . . to go down. Then they didn't want to leave you come in your own neighborhood, your own house. You had to be fingerprinted. All the black thing, I say, "What

else they going to do? You want my footprint?" You had to be fingerprinted. Then when you get to your door, they had the officer, not the police, the National Guard man had to look at your papers. You was just like a . . . they say "Heil Hitler?" You was just like that, like cattles. They had to look and see if this your house, and they would bring you. I said, "Well I got the key to my house." I said, "Thank you, sir." I said, Thank you very much. Thank you very much." When I came in this house, I just sat down on the floor, dirty floor. I said, "All the things that I bought and paid for is gone never to be replaced again."

Mwendo: What did it look like?

Duminy: It looked horrible, like a dump. Things were . . . I had a Blessed Mother statue like this, this is Mamille's[?] one. I had one like this, she must have floated, because the water was way up here in my house.

Mwendo: You could see the marks on the wall.

Duminy: [58:14] [Agrees] And floating, I found her in the middle of the floor, I said, "Mary, you survived." The lady looked at me . . . they had a lady came she said, "Did you get your shot?" They was giving the tetanus shot. I said, "Yeah, we got all of that." I went to my own doctor and got my shot, Dr. Dimattio[?] and he gave us all the . . . I said, "Well how much we owe you?" He said, "No, that's all right." He said, "I'm doing this." I said, "Thank you, Jesus." I said, "Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Dimattio[?]" I said, "Because you're the first kind person I saw." I said, "They're treating us like dogs down there." She said, "That's a shame."

Well anyway, when I . . . Puglia's on St. Claude had . . . not Puglia's, Schwegman. They still had food in the . . . no, that was about two weeks. Two weeks after, they had food. They was bringing food, their trucks with food and water and different things.

Mwendo: And they'd bring it down here? Where were they bringing it?

Duminy: No, it was in the grocery store.

Mwendo: Oh, I see. The trucks were bringing it.

Duminy: Yes, and they gave you a paper, they didn't give you no money. They gave you a book of, like, stamps, and you would go to the store and get the thing and they wouldn't charge you taxes.

Mwendo: This was the Red Cross that would give you this?

Duminy: [59:41] No, that was at the grocery store.

Mwendo: Okay. Oh, so Schwegman was just doing it . . .

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: . . . to help out.

Duminy: They wouldn't . . . Okay, I went over and I made my groceries then the lady tells me, she said . . . I said, "Miss," I said, "Don't put too much in the bag," I said, "because I have no way of getting it to my house." I said, "Don't put it all in one." You know how they would pack things? I was noticing the whites, how they were being taken care of.

Mwendo: How were they being treated? What did they do?

Duminy: Oh, so nicely. They had like sacks they were putting their stuff in, we had bags. Okay, I said, "Well, that's all right." I told the lady, "If you put one more can in this bag," I said, "I'm going to come behind the counter . . ." I was pissed off, and that's just the way I was. Well anyway . . . got the food and Allen, my cousin, came and pick us up with the stuff and brought it to Nanny. Then the . . . Hope had to go back to Xavier [University] Prep[aratory] School , and they gave her a certificate for . . . No, matter of fact, they brought a basket of food and they had put a turkey because it was Thanksgiving that was coming on. I said, "Lou, you don't have to buy turkey." My mama said, "Look, Lucille . . . Miss Lucille." She said, "Don't call me Miss Lucille!" She said, "I'm going to cook the food here in this house, while you do what you have to do." My mama took care of cooking, and Nanny said she enjoyed every bit of it, the cooking.

[1:01:30] But anyway, they were ugly. The people . . . some people were very nice with you, and some people weren't. Getting back, had to go back the next day to the people right there at Stalling, I get another stupid woman. I said . . . She said, "We're going to give you money," and she said, "and you know what you got to do with it." I said, "No, what I have to do with it?" "You know what you have to do with it?" I said, "No, I really don't know." Calmly, too! "I really don't know." She said, "This is to buy . . . I know you got food." I said, "Oh,

yes.” She said . . . I said, “My children need overcoat, my children need shoes, my children going back to school. The sister at Xavier Prep, they think you could just go get the . . . you have to have your uniform. Hope’s uniform was with mud, tar, and all of that.

I had to go up there. I said, “Sister, if you have a uniform here, I’ll be glad to put it on my child.” I said, “It’s a whole week I haven’t been at my house, I don’t know where’s the uniform what . . . Water, water, water, that’s all they had, and I sure couldn’t go down . . .” What I really wanted to tell her, a diving suit. [laughs] Oh no, no, no, no. Well, anyway, it was fun and it was saddening, because how stupid can you get when somebody’s in trouble? Okay, I got, Mamilie[?] had . . . it was like plaid. Mamilie[?] had something.

Anyway, we got a uniform together and sent her to school and all that. She said, “Well about next week or two weeks,” Sister whatever her name was, some name, I forgot the principal’s name. She put . . . so I could get Hope her uniform [?] “She can’t come to school without her uniform.” I said, “Where does charity come in?” I said, “What’s wrong with the people today?” I said, “Where does charity come in? Give me your uniform, your what you got on, and I’ll make one for her! Do you have an old one, Sister? I’ll make this . . .” Oh, I can’t think of her name. I’ll never forget that lady, she spoke French. I said, “I understand what you’re saying, talking to the other lady in French.” She would watch what she was saying.

[1:04:23] Okay, that was taken care of. They went to school and Hope sat down to write what her experience in the storm, and she got an A on it. Some of the sisters didn’t believe it. I said, “Well, you never walked in our shoes, Sister. You don’t know half of the time, never walked in our shoes.” She was a little French sister, I can’t think of her. But things started to progress. I got my business in order. Then after my mama was there, they sent for her to come to Belle Chasse [Louisiana]. We ate breakfast, we went down there with my mama to see what

they could get from the Red Cross. Well they gave them everything down there in the parish. The parish did better than New Orleans did. They got a trailer right away, because for Christmas they spent . . . I think they . . . they didn't spend Christmas by Lucille, they spent Thanksgiving. And then they got a trailer, they gave them trailers.

Mwendo: That's two months, that's two months over by Nanny? You were two months by Nanny.

Duminy: Yeah, me.

Mwendo: Yeah.

Duminy: [1:05:46] Anyway, we . . . my mama, we went to Belle Chasse, hit some other people again. I went up. I saw all the other people getting a sandwich, it was after twelve, we were hungry. Nanny watched my grandmother and all of that. I went up, and I was taking . . . I didn't ask, everybody was taking. I thought it was for everybody. The lady said, "This is not to be eaten, this it not to serve." I said, "What the hell you made the sandwich for, then?" I said, "I am hungry. My grandmother is seventy or eighty years old," I said, "and she needs something to eat." I said, "My uncle have diabetes, and he has to eat." You think she gave it to me? No, indeed. What I did, I took it, and I went and sat down and start eating. That's all I did. It was for the white folks.

Mwendo: That's who was taking it?

Duminy: [1:06:55] Oh yeah, they were taking it. The man just went up there and take it, she didn't say nothing to him. When I went up there, I said "Oh yeah," I put it back. Then after, I said, "Oh, hell no!" I just took it, and said, "Here, eat, eat, eat, eat, eat." They ate, and they got their stuff together. They were served real well. My mother got about five thousand dollars from those people, from the parish. The parish was giving five thousand dollars a family. What they gave here, you had to go through the mill, and you had to pay it back. My mama and them didn't have to pay it back. That was Judge [Leander] Perez, as bad as he was, that's what he gave the people.

Here, you had to go through hell. You couldn't . . . I couldn't get . . . something . . . The lady said, "They're going to come and see what you bought with the money." I said, "First, I want to ask you. Are you going to pay this bill once I buy it?" They was telling you on a piece of paper what you should get and what you can't get. I said, "We got to work for it and pay it back? Well once I get the check," I said, "this is my money, it's not yours. It's on my name, it belongs to me." That's the way it was.

Mwendo: So who was giving the loans out, then?

Duminy: That was the, what is the loan, it was . . .

Mwendo: Was it like a small business loan?

Duminy: Yes, the small business loan, that's what . . .

Mwendo: It was through the city or something?

Duminy: No, that's from the government.

Mwendo: The federal government?

Duminy: The federal government. You had to pay it back every cent.

Mwendo: Did you know anything about any grants? Like what happened in Belle Chasse, just grant being given . . .

Duminy: [1:08:49] Well they just gave us the money like that for emergency. That's the grant they gave you, outright money. Like they gave me five hundred dollars. Then they gave me I think . . . It wasn't the money, it was like a book of stamps. When I went to Cross[?] I got my mattress there, and I went back there in Gentilly, got my beds. I just had to pay it with whatever the book they have, I can't remember. It was like a coupon book. It was five, ten, fifteen, twenty, up to a hundred dollars. They gave me maybe about nine hundred dollars.

Then I had to borrow from the SBA [Small Business Administration] to finish this house. I got seven thousand, five hundred dollars. That's what they gave me to replace . . . That's just the appliance. They didn't care. We did the best we can, we got it on our own, and I said, "Walter, I'm sick and tired going to those people." I said, "I'm just going to make a bill just like we're paying, how you're going to make a bill. Sears . . . I got everything from Sears. I paid it out. When I finished Sears, I finished the SBA, right away.

That's why I got a job at St. Maurice rectory. I said, "The money I make, I'll pay double to get it out. Just get it out." I worked there for ten years, and I said, "Don't tell me nothing about this loan, if you didn't [?] in it, you don't know nothing. There's nothing you know what I've been through. Nobody could say, 'Yeah I know how you feel.'" I said, "You don't know nothing how I feel, because you never been in it."

Mwendo: How long did it take you all to get the house back to . . .

Duminy: [1:10:57] It must've took about, maybe a year. Because Ellis was working on Patsy's[?], your auntie's house. Ellis and Richard and Jimmy, and working on other people's house, a little bit here and a little bit there. But they would come at night and work in my house. They got it, I said, "Just, look, the only thing I want you to make different, is to take the hall out to make the kitchen larger and to put this . . .the doors like that." I said, "But fix the house as is, except the kitchen." That was it.

Mwendo: Was it back to like it was before, or was it just like . . .

Duminy: Oh no, I had, in the living room I had hardwood floors, and . . .

Mwendo: You lost that?

Duminy: Oh, yeah, couldn't use . . . It's down there, but I mean, you couldn't use it. It was all buckled up, they had to nail, and they had to wait until it dry. It was busted all over right

here, all over the . . . they had to open for the air to dry all of that. It took about two weeks. I'm telling you, God was good. The sun, no rain, no nothing, everything dried out. But I lost everything. Then Father said, "How are you coming along?" I said, "Well, Father," I said, "we're doing the best we can." He said, "Well that's all we can do," because St. David was in a hell of a mess, too. The school, and all of this stuff, and they needed things, too. But they gave us five hundred dollars, and he said if you needed more. I said, "Well, Father, I need more, but just help somebody else. I'll do the best I can." We used up a little money. I did that.

[1:12:52] But when I had gone back to the country with my grandmother and them, I said, "Those people was so joyful." My uncle's house was on the ground, there was no . . . I don't understand how the flooring was in there. But the house like came down, like somebody came and just . . . it was ground, just the mud. It brought me back to my childhood, because we lived in a mud house. I walk up in there, they had fixed the stove in the house. They had the old beds they got, and put that . . . they had the mattress, but they didn't have . . . They put that on that before they got the trailer. I said, "This look like Daniel Boone out in the woods." I said, and it was the woods. Everybody was . . . like nothing had happened. They just got into it. Oh Lord, Jesus, how could they live like that? My grandmother was happy to get home, they all was happy. Nanny came, we had to get in a little . . . no that was with [Hurricane] Camille. But it, people were just happy. "Oh, how you doing?" You can't go over there to those people, say, "How you doing?" They say, "Oh well . . ." I said, "I'm doing fine, I'm doing fine, everybody's alive." I said, "I'm doing fine."

But going back to the hospital. Okay, Walter was there two weeks. Then my uncle took sick by Nanny. Nanny went one day, took him to the hospital. I went to work, Steve was in school, Steve got sick, he got like a boil on his leg was hurt, and so I had to take him to the

doctor to get a tetanus shot and things. Well, Dr. Dimatio[?], he did all of that for nothing, so I was grateful. Pie . . . Nanny took . . . She stood all day long in the hospital, she was so tired when she came back. I had no car. Richard had a little bitty car, something, I think he had a little bitty car. Didn't he have a little black car? I had to use it one time to go to St. Maurice to see Father, he wanted to see me. I said, "Father, I can't come now until I get back to work," I said, "because I have to be with my family. I have to get things . . ." They call you, "Here, come get this, get that." I wouldn't refuse nothing, whatever they gave me, that was . . . I would take it, because I said "If you refuse," they going to say, "well what she think she is?" I took it and share it around the neighborhood. Father was . . . he understood. I said, "Well if he don't understand, I could care less." Because I was going to leave if he would say, "Well, you got a job, and you got . . ." No, nothing, he was really, really nice.

[1:16:26] Well anyway, we got clothes galore. Now what they did in the country, that's the only thing I didn't like. I went to the country and know most of those people, they would put the best of everything for the whites. We took the junk, we had to patch things. They had . . . the lady across the street, she say, "My uncle have . . . Would you like some clothes, Dorothy?" Said, "I know," she said, "it's not all the best of clothes," she said, "but I can bring some clothes over here, for you to take what you want, and then what you don't want, you leave it, put it back in the box, and I'll take it to somewhere else." She brought clothes here, honey; they were beautiful clothes [laughs] you hear? We had some good clothes! I said, "Look at this!" Her cousin had a . . . what they call it, a cleaning business. So he brought . . .the people didn't want the clothes, so he'd donate it to charity.

Mwendo: These are people from Belle Chasse that gave you all . . .

Duminy: No, those are the people that lived in the neighborhood, in the neighborhood. It was the Backis[?] used to live in the brick house. She said her uncle had it, and she said . . . it was clothes like my Mama could get in . . . for big people. We had a lot of clothes.

Mwendo: Now, before Betsy you were saying how the neighbors all knew each other . . .

Duminy: Oh, yeah.

Mwendo: . . . and you all kind of pulled together when you all wanted something done. What happened as a result of Betsy, did you all pull together to kind of help raise . . . help out each other?

Duminy: [1:18:08] We helped each other like if they were giving something, you would tell your neighbor, "Look, they're giving such and such a thing, go right now, don't wait till the last, because you might not get it." That's the way we pulled together. We let each other know where to go. If you can't go, we would help each other to go. Whoever had a car, they would come and pick us up and we would go. But it was a hard struggle, because it was discrimination, they put you outside in a hot tent, and then they come in sections and call you by name. "The Duminys, please come up front." Some wouldn't say please. "Duminy, come up front!" Like you're a cow or something. Then they would . . . You would stay, and once you get into the building, you would stand there, I mean sit down, they had chairs, because I would sat on the floor if I was [?]. You would just sit there, and wait till they call you. It would be all day long, and hot, woo! Especially in the tent, only in the place where you're going to go be to interview.

Mwendo: What was this interview for? To find out what help you needed? That's when you . . . and so where were the white people then, that needed help?

Duminy: They were there. They were there.

Mwendo: They had to go through the same thing?

Duminy: [1:19:38] They have to go through the same thing. But when they get up there, they . . . you was getting the . . . telling them what you want, and you may get less than what they would get, you understand? People was buying cars like crazy when they got their money. Me, I tried to fix my car. I couldn't, I said, "But later on, we will get a car," because Walter was working at night. That was hard, going catching the bus and all that stuff for work. But anyway, the people was okay. They had their little attitude . . . Wait a while, here come another lady, "I was here yesterday, and you said for me to come back. Now, you're interviewing this lady, and I'm supposed to be there," you know, "la-da-da-da-da". I look at the lady, I said, "Well who are you?" She said, "Well she told me to come at this time" and she said, "and I had my children out there." Well, she did, she had her children in her car, they were crying, little bitty kids. I said, "Well go ahead, just go ahead." I could wait.

Mwendo: How long, Auntie, would you say that this neighborhood . . . What happened to the neighborhood? Would you say that it has ever gotten back to how it was before?

Duminy: No.

Mwendo: Why is that?

Duminy: [1:21:00] Because we have different people in the neighborhood now. But at first we all was together. We all needed . . . They have trucks would pass, and they would come and pick up the . . . I would cry when I would see my furniture go . . . would pick up the stuff. Some people that know how to fix furniture, they benefit in it, you see? They wouldn't give you hardly anything for furniture. The most important thing was a stove you need, and heat. We had a floor furnace, that's the same floor furnace that I had there, we repair it instead of getting a new one, but we didn't have enough money to get the new thing. You had to do with the old thing. You had to take it out, buy the parts. How stupid that can be? You had to buy the parts in order to make your old . . . that soaked in water for a whole week.

So everything . . . the stove . . . When I got the stove, we bought it ourselves. They didn't give your money for stove. They gave you the money, but I had to use it for things that was more important to us. We needed food at the time. We needed clothing because it was wintertime. Blankets and all of that stuff. We would go . . . we went to Sears, they gave me some blankets. It wasn't the best of everything, but we had blankets. We did with what we have. When I walked in Nanny's house and saw all them laying on the floor at night, I had Pie, Walter, Steve, Joe, Paul, Jim between Mamille and . . . all sleeping on the floor, and I said, "This got to go. This is sad." If Lucille had no room, where would we have gone?

Mwendo: So Auntie, why did it even happen this way? Where did that water come from? What was that all about?

Duminy: [1:23:14] Because they burst the levy. We heard a *boom*.

Mwendo: You heard like an explosion?

Duminy: Right, right. Because . . .

Mwendo: Right before the water started coming through.

Duminy: [?] pay no mind, something backfired. That's what we thought it was. It was water. My uncle knew river water, because he worked all his life in the water. He said, "This is river . . ." It was dirty like. It wasn't rain, they said it was rain. Like we're stupid. Rain water. That wasn't rain water.

Mwendo: Why you think they did that?

Duminy: [1:23:54] To save the city. I think they did . . . Because everything was on the other side. If the city would've been flooded, I think we would've been lost, we wouldn't have had nothing. We would have less than what we have today. Because everything was on the other side: the hospitals, the doctors, the food and all of that stuff. That was on the other side, so you wouldn't have had nothing. Some people were really nice, especially some of the soldiers, our own, they were very nice. They would come, "You need any help?" I said, "Yes." We needed help with a lot of stuff, like taking the trash out. They had the people take the trash out right down the street here and pick up . . . They had the trucks go picking up the trash.

But the thing is it wasn't only that, it was the children. Hope would wake up at night, and say, "Mama, it's raining outside!" Or Steve would say, "Mama, we got to go again?" When they would see rain. I said, "No, this is the heavenly rain, this is God blessing us." They would understand. They wanted to be secured in the home. You had to talk . . . had to talk to the children and tell . . .

Mwendo: How long did it take them before they were able to calm down an emotional upset? Nightmares?

Duminy: [1:25:30] Well, sometime when there were nightmares. You would look at them, you could tell. I said, "What you thinking about, Steve?" Or Hope, I said, "What you thinking about?" She said, "Mama, you know they got people worse off than us." I said, "Yes, [?] worse than us." She said, "In school, Sister was talking to us about that." She said, "Don't hold nothing in, she said, just come out and talk about it." They got counseled, they took the children and then after they had to meet at Xavier Prep and they came and cleaned up at McCarty School. They washed the desks in there. I said, "Now Hope, remember you can't put your hand in nothing." Because she would break out allergic to whatever it was. I said, "Make sure you have gloves on." They got together and they had the [?] and the sisters, and everything, and I said, "I'm going to see what they're putting those kids through."

When I went, they was having . . . "Hi, Mom, what you doing?" I said, "Oh, everything's going to be fine." I said, "The mind," I said, "It's going to be fine." But some things she said she'd never forget. I said, "Well like what?" She said, "All my things I lost." That was, they had personal things. Little things mean a lot. I lost all my pictures. And oh, the people. I could

see the ugliness with some people. Instead of getting together, they were driven far apart. Some people were angry. Some people were getting more than the other. If you needed something else and you can't get it, you had to stay without it. You had no money, so you had to stay without those things. But we survived. I said, "Thank God for that."

[1:27:35] Then my uncle, he knew how to do a little thing. He came up in here, and if it wasn't for my uncle, I had all that food in the refrigerator. He said, "Oh, no your refrigerator still works." He said, "We're going to clean it out." He took the hose from the outside, he said, "Everything is wet in here, so we're going to wet it some more." He would always make a little joke. He cleaned the . . . talk about an odor. Woo, Jesus! He dug a hole in the backyard, and put all that meat and stuff in the . . . He said, "But you had some food in there." I said, "But you all brought half of it." I said, "I had some food, just for a couple of days. I never thought this would have happened." He cleaned the stove . . . my old stove out. Cecily is getting sleepy.

Unknown: I am sleepy.

Duminy: Excuse me?

Unknown: I am sleepy.

Duminy: He cleaned the stove out for me, and put our old stove . . . Then they wanted us to keep the stove. How the door broke, I don't know. I said, "No." I said, "Bye-bye, you gave me the check." [laughs] I'm going to use the check . . .

Mwendo: [laughs] You said, "But we survived."

Duminy: We sure did.

Mwendo: Why? Why did you all survive?

Duminy: [1:28:58] Because we were a close-knit family. We were strong, and nothing was going to put us down. We were going to keep on going. If you have that faith, you going to stick together. Walter was working, and I was . . . I had to take care of all of the business. When he was off one day, they needed him, they gave him the time off to go to the lake. Had to sign papers, federal papers saying we were bound to pay this loan, and whatever . . . legal thing, so I had to have Walter there. But I went and do all, like the money business, like go to meetings and all of that, and do those things. I did it because he couldn't do it, he had to work, somebody had to work, so we just kept on going. You got more strength. When you saw this, and saw all what was happening, this was nothing. I just imagine other people worse off than me, that's all.

Mwendo: What stories you heard after Betsy? What stories did you hear? Especially about why this happened, how this happened, this Lower Nine, the water coming through.

Unknown: Before you answer that question, the tape is about to run out, and I'd like to change it.

Duminy: Okay.

Mwendo: So how much time have we . . .

Unknown: This is a ninety minute tape, so it's been ninety minutes.

Mwendo: So that's about the end of our time.

Unknown: Okay.

Mwendo: Yeah. Okay, so do you want to continue this conversation at another time?

Duminy: [1:30:46] Yeah, that would be okay.

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: But let's see now, what's coming up?

Mwendo: You can stop the tape.

Unknown: I was wondering if you might want to put on the tape that Auntie Dot is signing the release form? Did you want to put that on the tape?

Mwendo: No, but I do want to say that we're talking about . . . I want to say what we just finished talking about so that we don't . . . so that we remember where to begin next time. But

we talking about, now we've passed Hurricane Betsy and kind of talking about what's happening with the neighborhood now. What the stories might have been, what's in people's minds still about Betsy, and then how are they feelings about that. I'm thinking . . . and then I probably will talk a little bit more background information next time, and that would be it. That would be it for next time.

Duminy: All right, yes, we'll keep it for next time, then.

Mwendo: [1:31:37] Okay, okay that sounds good. I thank you so much, Auntie.

Duminy: Okay, that's good.

Mwendo: This is healing for me too. [laughs]

Duminy: Yes indeed, honey. It's like a song they sing, "I Came this Far by Faith. Without it, you have nothing." Sign off.

[1:32:05]

[End Tape 3337, Side B. End Session I.]