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4700.1685 T3338
Session II
November 20, 2003

[Begin Tape 3338, Side A. Begin Session II.]

Nilima Mwendo: So this is our part two interview with Lucille D. Duminy, my aunt, who survived Hurricane Betsy in 1965. And we're continuing our discussion, our story about Hurricane Betsy. And we were just now talking about, in St. Bernard Parish, how we're looking at a picture of Carolyn Park in St. Bernard Parish and how the water is up to the roof, literally up to the roof. And I was telling my aunt, I was saying, "Well I didn't know the water went up that high!" She said, "Well, sure! Sure it went up that high!"

Lucille Duminy: [00:47] That's right. It went up that high and we were the last to know.

Mwendo: And you were saying they had a warning, they knew the storm was coming.

Duminy: The warning, yes. They had a warning.

Mwendo: So they had enough time to get out because . . .

Duminy: The National Guard is right down there, Carolyn Park. You just got to cross over . . . over the tracks. And that's Carolyn Park. They knew, so everything . . . we would see big trucks pass before the water came.

Mwendo: Which direction were they going in, the trucks?

Duminy: They were coming . . . they were coming from St. Bernard going over the bridge, I guess. They had to because that was . . . the National Guard was picking up people from their homes.

Mwendo: So the trucks were full of people.

Duminy: With people.

Mwendo: And what did you all think? And this was before the storm?

Duminy: [1:46] That was before the water came. That was before the . . . it was the rain had fell . . . Well, nobody had thought they were going to move out, it was just rain. But it was a funny rain, you can't explain the sound, a different kind of rain. All of a sudden it was totally calm. I mean, everything was still. The lights went out. Everything was just still. That's when like we said in the interview, that my uncle went out, and he just looked in the yard, for a little while and then we came back inside. Then a truck passed, a truck passed, I said that before. A truck passed and he started hollering, "You all got to get out!" Who it was, I don't know. It was one of these big dump trucks like, a big, big one. We got in the . . . We asked, well, "Are you coming back?" We was hollering, "Are you coming back?" And he had people in the truck. So, we didn't know what was happening until somebody hollered and said, "They broke the canal!" The river . . . no the canal, that's the canal. They broke the canal.

Mwendo: Who said that? Was it an official person or somebody in the neighborhood?

Duminy: [3:10] No! No! No! It was as they were going in the truck a man hollered, "Get out the house! Get out the house!" That's all they were saying, "Get out the house! Go to a shelter! Go to a shelter!" "What shelter?" I said, "Where we going to go?" I didn't know which shelter to go to. Everybody started saying, "McCarty School, McCarty School!" So that's how we had gone to McCarty School but we waited a while. Then my uncle went out, he looked at the water and he said, "This is not fresh water. It's flood water."

Mwendo: It's river water.

Duminy: River.

Mwendo: When you all saw all them people in the National Guard trucks going . . .

Duminy: I don't know if all of them was . . . all people was up in there. I know they were going maybe to place them. Not to go and . . . people were stealing. Can you imagine? People were stealing. But we saw some of them, some of the people that was in the truck and as they were going they was hollering, "Get out! Get out!"

Mwendo: After it was all over, Auntie, you were talking about how the people in Chalmette . . . I want to make a comparison about how much you know about what happened with the people in Chalmette and how much actually happened.

Duminy: [4:38] Now that's hearsay. I didn't see that. I didn't hear nobody telling me that. But the people from Chalmette, they had a lot of boats. That's how that night when we were in McCarty School, they came and they assisted us. One thing is there . . . down here they got out and then the other thing is the people was helpful. They would pass . . . They would pass and say "We'll come back to get you."

All during the night they were picking up mothers with babies. One baby was . . . I think, was born there. I'm not sure but I heard somebody say, "This lady is giving birth." I don't know. Then people was hungry. They wanted food. So a couple of the men went down in the kitchen and they got corn in the can, peaches in the can, pineapple in the can, everything that was in the can. One lady said, "My husband got that." She said, "My husband got that and I'm going to feed my children." I said, "We all going to eat honey, not just your children." I said, "We're all going to eat." My neighbor across the street, she called me, she said, "Dorothy, that lady is . . . don't mess with her." I said, "Well I'm going to mess with her." I said, "My children going to eat too."

I went and I opened a can with a knife. Somebody handed a knife and I opened a can and we had little bitty cups like this. We filled the cup and said, "Everybody," I say, "feed the children first, and then you eat. You understand this? Then you going to eat! Not just your children! We all going to eat!" Well I didn't eat; I was so nervous. I didn't know, what was what. I wanted my grandmother to eat and they had Paul Gordon, I wanted him to eat because he had heart problems.

Mwendo: That was your uncle?

Duminy: [6:49] No, no, no, no. He's the one that lived at the corner, you remember? So we all . . . He said, "No. I don't want nothing. Give it to someone else." So I said, "Well, okay." After that, well the people were going out, the little babies with their parents, were going in the boats. They were picking them up in the boat. When darkness came, it was like everything was so quiet . . . the quietness came. You couldn't see nothing. We had no light or anything. I think somebody had a flashlight, would go around looking because I didn't want . . . Hope say, "Mama, I got to go to the bathroom." I said, "Just pee on yourself, whatever you got to do." I said, "There's no bathroom. You can't flush. If you go to the bathroom, you can't use it." So she said, "Okay." Then I calmed them down and then after I sat there we said prayers. I remember one lady say, "What is she doing now?" So I said, "I'm praising the Lord I'm alive, me and my family." That was that at that time.

Mwendo: The boats that were coming, was that white people and black people?

Duminy: [8:14] Black and white together, whoever had boats, they came. But this was a white guy that got us out with his son. When I told him, "you're taking part of my family . . ." I hope I could see him again. I was afraid that the boat was going to turn over. That was my fear. My uncle said, "Don't worry. We going to be all right." I said, "Let's just stick together, and Walter," I said, "you go with them so they know, where they're going to be." Because my uncle and them didn't know, and with the darkness, you couldn't tell where you were. They just drop you off at the corner and that's it. You got to fend for yourself until that big cattle car came. I said, "My goodness," I said, "Well we got to do what we have to do."

Then after that . . . Well, everybody was talking and said, "Now what we going to do?" I was left with Hope and Steve and myself in there. I said, "Lord Jesus, Walter is sick." I say, "Suppose he take sick at the corner of that street?" We was on Poland and St. Claude. He left for a while. When they were bringing me . . . when I could walk in the water, I said, my children could walk in the water to get to the bridge. I said, "Just let me out here and go get some other people," I told the guy. I said, "God bless you. I'll remember you for the whole rest of my life." He told me his name but I can't remember his name. He was an elderly man, a nice man.

[10:05] The little boy helped Steve out, and Steve was big - I don't know why they helped him out - tall. They brought us and I walked by the bridge. That was the longest walk. It looked like I couldn't get to my parents fast enough . . . my people, fast enough. Looked like my feet was just going, hitting the pavement. Steve . . . I think Steve mentioned, said, "Mama, I'm hungry." I said, "Don't worry." I said, "We're going to try to get to Nanny." I didn't know they were going to bring us to City Hall.

I wanted to walk and then the policeman said, "No," he said, "I would advise you not to walk because they got wires down; you don't know if it's alive or what." They had light on the other side but they didn't have it on this side. I said, "Well, we'll stay here." He said, "Somebody's going to come and pick you all up." We waited, we waited, we waited, it must have been about maybe two o'clock that morning or maybe three, and looked like the water wasn't going down. Looked like the water was continually coming up.

Mwendo: Now this was on Poland in a police station and you kept seeing water coming up?

Duminy: Well, I mean, I saw that as we were in the boat, in the boat.

Mwendo: Okay, okay.

Duminy: To get to the . . .

Mwendo: To the police station.

Duminy: [11:33] Yeah. When I finally saw my mother and my uncle and especially Bertha, my aunt that was pregnant, I just fell on my knees and kissed the ground, honey! I was so glad to see dry land. In my mind I said, "Well, why couldn't they level the water? Why couldn't they have it on both sides, level the water?" My uncle said, "Because everything . . . We would have no food. We wouldn't have nothing. All that would have been lost by the water."

Mwendo: If it was like in the whole city?

Duminy: City, yeah, yeah. Level . . . That's what I meant.

Mwendo: Right, everybody gets it.

Duminy: Everybody get a little bit and then we wouldn't lose anything. I said . . . So Walter came back and said, "Dorothy," he said, "I don't feel good at all." I said, "Well, Walter what you want me to do? We can't get nobody to come and get us. The telephones are not working." I said, "You went to the police car and tell them that you weren't feeling well?" He

had his prescription with him because we had gone that morning before the storm to Dr. Demattio[?]. He had given him some pills. He said, "Well, that's all you could do, Mr. Duminy, you could just rest yourself in the bed." Who would have thought? Rest in the bed? We was on the floor at City Hall. [laughs] At City Hall. After that . . . The thing is, that was it. When we got by Nanny, and saw all of us were safe, we were so grateful that we had . . . I said, "But Lucille," I said, "how could you take all of us?" I said, "I have a cousin, but she had hardly any room herself." She say, "You stay right here. All of you all, Grandma, stay right here." It was Jimmy and what is Joy's husband?

Mwendo: Ellis.

Duminy: [13:49] Ellis and Richard. He said, "Grandma, you ain't going nowhere but right here. You're going to stay right here in this house till your house is ready for you to go home." So we stood with Lucille all that time. But the hassle was to go to get things . . .

Mwendo: Services.

Duminy: Yeah, right. Some of them were nice and some of them weren't nice. I guess they were all tired, too. But most of the people . . . they had people from Washington that was there, and the people that they hired, I guess, to help. It was mostly white, I saw, where I was at Stalling [Center], right there, it was mostly white. That was a hassle.

Mwendo: For them?

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: Coming to them?

Duminy: Yes.

Mwendo: When you say white, it was the white workers?

Duminy: Workers, workers, [agrees]. Then later . . .

Mwendo: Trying to help people like, the Red Cross.

Duminy: [14:44] [agrees] Then later on they had some blacks that was there too, that came. I guess, like, teachers and thing that was educated. But I happened to get this lady and a man one time came over here and talked to me when we could come to the place.

Mwendo: To the house?

Duminy: To the house.

Mwendo: He came to the house?

Duminy: He came to the house. So . . . and now that . . .

Mwendo: To inspect.

Duminy: Yeah, saying I could fix this and fix that and all that . . . I can't say the word.

[laughs]

Mwendo: [laughs] But it's not a good one.

Duminy: [15:21] No, it's not a good one. Well anyway, Hope and Steve would say, "Mama, when we going home? We want to go home." I say, "Well, we can't. We have no heat." It was getting cold. I said, "We have no heat. We have . . ." The house was all busted from right here. They had to bust the house so the inside could dry out . . . all around in the house. I say, "We can't." I said, "We have to stay here until Uncle Richard and Ellis and Jimmy fix . . ." they the one that put all the thing and then Joe Agulard[?] and his brother came and tiled the floor. Then we moved in. But I still didn't have no heat.

I had put up . . . A lady gave me an old stove that I cleaned, took it apart myself, and Lord Jesus, how I did it, I don't know! I cleaned all those pipes and put them back and we had . . . like you saw the other day, the fire from that and the oven was open. When I had gone to the place to get some assistance, the man said, "I saw you had a stove." I said, "Well I had a stove when I left here." Because he wanted to know . . . Well, I guess the different kind of stove. You see, I had . . . He said, "Well, you don't need a stove . . ." That burned. I just . . . I said, "What did you say?" "You don't need a stove." He said, "And your refrigerator is okay. You don't need that."

I said, "Mister, when you leave maybe tomorrow or a day after or whatever," I said, "the thing could break. It was soaking in water for a whole two . . . a whole week." I said, "We came down here the following week, not the week that it happened. We came the following week in my house to see what I can salvage." I said, "I couldn't salvage nothing. The only thing is pots and pans and the dishes." But nothing else could be salvaged, not even my clothes. Because something was in the water that you couldn't have cleaned it. It would have cost me so much money to have it cleaned. I even took some on Claiborne Avenue uptown, near Broad, there was a laundry there and he was flooded out. The water came from the . . .

Mwendo: Claiborne and Broad []?

Duminy: [18:04] Claiborne and Broad, it was water.

Mwendo: That's parallel streets.

Duminy: Yeah.

Mwendo: Where?

Duminy: The water came from the bayous I guess. From St. John Bayou, I don't know. When I went there the man said all his things were . . . what they used, was soaked in water. Sometimes Claiborne does flood when they'd have a heavy rain. I couldn't believe it, and I said, "Now what we going to do?"

Mwendo: Did anybody talk about . . . well demanding something from the city or talking to your legislator . . .

Duminy: [18:42] Oh yeah, we wanted . . . we were . . . all those people were there and they're going to come and they're going to do, and well, "We're sending the trucks to pick up the trash." We wanted food! The trash could have stood out there until you get the most important thing. You get the food in order to be healthy to do what you have to do in the house. They had . . . They came walking down here, all those people walking, they didn't talk to us though, they just walked. Some of them walked around. Some of them said, "How you doing, Mrs. Duminy?" I said, "I'm not doing well at all." How am I doing with all the stuff . . . disaster all over the neighborhood and everything. You smell rotten stuff and all of that stuff. I said, "Now what are we going to do?" My uncle handle it. He said, "If we can find a store or something to get . . . if it's just bread . . . get something for us to eat." I did have some beans, but they was further up . . . and when I would put my groceries up. I said, "Well I'm going to put the beans . . . just cook it like that." We just creamed it and ate beans like that.

When I would come to spend the day, my mama was . . . they was safe with Gram and stuff and whoever was working here, well I would like to fix something so they could have, but they said, "No, no." They didn't want nothing. I said, "Oh well, okay then." But Walter stood in the hospital for about two weeks or three weeks. I don't know now no more. We were over by . . . he couldn't help, he couldn't do nothing. I just counted on us to do whatever we need to do, clean up stuff.

Mwendo: [20:40] So the whole lower nine didn't have gas? Or you say you couldn't . . .

Duminy: We didn't have gas here, everything was turned off. Everything was turned off in the house until you had the workers to come back and then they turned it on.

Mwendo: Oh, I see. I see.

Duminy: They would come and inspect, the Sewerage and Water Board, the light, gas, and electric, they would come to see . . . to see if everything was okay to be turned on.

Mwendo: I see.

Duminy: [21:14] You see . . . That's how, then we got light . . . Because when I told Richard and Ellis and them, I said, "I don't care how you fix the house as long as it's fixed." I wanted to come home. It was I think in November when I came. In November, the latter part of November.

Mwendo: How was that?

Duminy: Well, I came and we were just there looking at each other. It was Walter, Steve, Hope, and I, because they had gone down to the country already, you see, my uncle and them. We brought them down there because they had that one house that was still standing and they all was in there until the trailers came down. So they were doing fine down there. They had . . . I mean prejudice and all that stuff, but they were doing better than what we were doing here in the city.

Mwendo: The way you were treated here . . .

Duminy: That's right. [agrees]

Mwendo: . . . and the things that you would [?].

Duminy: [22:16] Kindness[?] they needed you as much as we needed them.

Mwendo: How you mean?

Duminy: Because . . . I mean they needed their stuff to be cleaned up. My mother was working and when she got back, Mrs. Hingle[?] asked my mother could she come and help.

Mwendo: And Mrs. Hingle[?] is who?

Duminy: That was my mother's boss.

Mwendo: She was a domestic worker for Mrs. Hingle[?]?

Duminy: Yes, and she was the postmaster down there. Well she did help us, she helped us a lot. I mean, my mother, she helped. My mother said, "I could come maybe just give you a day like that, but I have to take care of my own stuff." When they couldn't understand . . . so I had to

go down there. I don't know how we got down there, because I lost my car. I think Allen, he was the one that came. He said . . . He said, "Dorothy, are you ready? Come on, let's go down."

Mwendo: Who's Allen?

Duminy: [23:19] Allen is my grandmother's nephew. He came . . . he lived on Claiborne. Not Claiborne, on . . . I can't think of the street, Uptown. Well anyway, he came and took us down there. I said, "Now I got to fight my own battle up here with these folks, then I got to go down and fight the battles over there."

Mwendo: And this was in Belle Chasse [Louisiana]?

Duminy: In Belle Chasse, yeah. That was in Belle Chasse, where they had food but they wouldn't feed you. We made sure when we went down the second time, we brought our lunch with us. This one lady said . . . I remember, just saying, "We have some lunch right over here." But she didn't say, "Why did you bring your lunch?" Because I was ready for them. I said, "Oh well, all this, don't worry. The Lord sees and he's going to take care of that one day. You're going to need us." But we all needed each other when the water was there. Everybody was grabbing on or holding on or say, "Please help me!" We all had a helping hand.

Mwendo: And everybody was helping to get . . .

Duminy: [24:36] Everybody was helping no matter who you were, they were helping. When we got to the other side, they were . . . it was mostly white people with boats, big boats they had. I mean big boats. You would get . . . The morning I saw this boat that goes on the water . . . that goes on water, and I mean they had some people in there they took, elderly people, and they brought them to St. Claude General, I guess, or Charity Hospital. I don't know, older people. They were very, very nice. We didn't have no pushing, no shoving. Like the man . . . They were pushing to get in the boat, he said, "Wait a minute. There's room for everybody in here. We're going to come back and get you." That's just what they did. They came back until morning time then the water a little bit was going down, but it took a whole week to get this water out of here. A whole week.

Mwendo: So did the neighborhood change, Auntie, after Hurricane Betsy?

Duminy: The people got closer, you see. They got closer, and said, "Well how much water you had in your house?" I said, "The same amount . . ." just talking, "The same amount you had." We all had the same thing, you see. We all had the same problem. We couldn't help . . . say if their cars were . . . we go to the grocery or something like that, we would ask, "Do you need anything at the grocery? Would you want to come along?" I couldn't leave the children in the house by themselves, because you don't know what was going to go on. I said, "Two could come, maybe one could come and we'll go and get whatever we could salvage." With them, I didn't have no car.

Mwendo: [26:25] Yeah, you would go with somebody in the neighborhood . . .

Duminy: In the neighborhood, yeah.

Mwendo: . . . who had a working car.

Duminy: [Agrees] It was mostly trucks. It was mostly trucks. Then when we would get back . . . When we came back to the house, the lady was there, wanted to know if we got our shot. They're giving tetanus . . .

Mwendo: Tetanus.

Duminy: [26:45] Tetanus shot. I don't know what else they brought, but I know I was . . . I said, "Well we had our shot already." I had gone to Dr. Demattio[?] the next . . . day after with Walter and then he gave us all of our shots. I said, "I already have it." She said, "You sure you got a tetanus?" I said, "Yes I went to my own doctor and got the tetanus shot." I said, "Because my husband took sick and I wanted him . . . to give him the shot." "Where is your husband now?" the lady was asking. I said, "My husband is at Charity Hospital in a private room." I was glad to say that. I said, "He's in a private room." I said, "He's a male nurse at a Public Health Hospital." I said, "Mrs. Cox[?] . . ." I used her, honey, right away they were jumping, [snapping fingers] seeing that he had the best. I was thankful for that.

Mwendo: So he was at Public Health, not at Charity Hospital.

Duminy: Charity Hospital.

Mwendo: He started off at Charity.

Duminy: No, no, no, no, no. He was at Charity Hospital when he took sick.

Mwendo: Right.

Duminy: Yes, but he used to work.

Mwendo: [27:55] Right. Oh, so she called Charity Hospital and got him the private room, when you all called her.

Duminy: Right, that's right.

Mwendo: Oh I got you. I was under the impression that he was transferred over to Public Health and got the private room, but it was at Charity.

Duminy: Charity Hospital. He stood there until about maybe two or three weeks, until he got on his feet. Then when he came down, he just looked, he said, "How did you do it?" I said, "One step at a time. That's all we could do." I said, "And I ain't worrying." Well it made me sick. I cried for so long, when I would come in this house. My pictures . . . I had the movie camera with you little . . . you were dancing the . . . I don't know what, the Twist was going on.

Mwendo: [?], [?] dancing.

Duminy: Hope and all of them were in the back yard by your mama, on how you call it . . .

Mwendo: [28:53] Touro Street.

Duminy: Touro Street. Oh, when I saw that, I said, "Oh, my baby pictures." I had beautiful pictures of Hope. This is stood there, never moved. I said, "I was lucky." But it was right below the picture.

Mwendo: A picture high up on the wall.

Duminy: Yeah. I don't know where I had . . . I think . . . I don't know where I had Steve, I think right here, but I lost his and it fell. You could see it had fallen off the wall. I said, "At least I got that." I said, "But I got the real thing. My children are alive and there's nothing wrong with that. You could always take . . ." But it was the baby pictures, my wedding pictures, some of them were saved. Bertha . . . Aunt Bertha and all of them send me the pictures back. I said, "Oh well, it's no sense crying over that." But when I would think about it, to have it . . . your history, the things you put down. When I had Hope, I used to write the things she would do when she was a baby. Things she would do, her first word, "Ma, Ma, Ma." Her first word. I said, "Now look at this. All of this is gone."

Mwendo: [30:23] Did you witness anybody or know of anybody who drowned?

Duminy: I think a child drowned. I heard the mama screaming and I asked one of the . . . what had happened. I think part . . . I didn't see it . . . I think part of McCarty, they had a gallery around in the front on the second floor, around . . . I think the child was leaning like that. They had open bars like this. I don't know if she fell in or if it . . . they said it broke. I don't know. I didn't see no breakage when I came back. They said a little child. I said, "Well why the mother had a baby out there? Why they didn't . . ." I guess other children, they wanted to see, because the boats would come around, "You all need help? My skiff could hold maybe just four people," something like that. A boat could hold about four people, and not the whole family, so I don't know.

[31:29] Then I heard a lot of things, raping, everything was going on in there. That's what I heard. I didn't witness none of those things. I said, "Well how could they do such a thing?" With all the problems you have now. But where we were . . . was in the room, the room we were in, it was quiet. Everybody calmed down and realized, we're in the same boat. Nobody could say anything, because we both was in the same thing. All the same thing was going on in all of our families. I don't know how . . . When we got to Lucille, well everything was settled. And the hardest part was getting help. That was the hardest. You had to wait . . .

Mwendo: Why was that so hard?

Duminy: It was so many people, it was the whole city, especially in the Ninth Ward, down this way. You had a number and you had your . . . how they . . .

Mwendo: Fingerprint?

Duminy: . . . fingerprint. You went one day, it was fingerprinting. Then the next day it was, “Where’s your husband?” They were asking the family to come up, “Where’s the husband?” I said, “My husband is at Charity Hospital. He had kidney stone.” I said, “He wasn’t able to come with me.” I said, “He took sick the night of the storm.”

Mwendo: [33:15] This was at Stalling? This happened when you kept going back and forth to get the help, your area was . . .

Duminy: Well, that was at . . . where Steve work.

Mwendo: Oh, at City Hall.

Duminy: City Hall. It was at City Hall. The man came and talk and every time he would say something, I’d say, “We need food.” [?]

Mwendo: Why they took your fingerprints? Why they did that?

Duminy: Because they was afraid people was going to come and steal. But I wouldn’t care if they stole whatever, but I don’t know why they did that. We were fingerprinted like . . .

Mwendo: Criminals.

Duminy: [33:54] Criminals. I have my fingerprint wherever they bring it at, I have that there. I said, "This is something else." I said, "Now we . . . we're not humiliated enough, that they got to take our fingerprint?" One lady said, "You better shut up your mouth girl, just go ahead and do what they . . ." I said, "No! I want to know why they need it!" The fingerprints. One lady came and she said, "Well, it's because of people going and taking . . ." Well people did come and, not in my house, but they would break in to see what they could get.

Mwendo: I still don't get the connection with the fingerprinting.

Duminy: I don't either. Well they took the fingerprint and that was it. It's for . . . because they didn't want . . . When you came to at the corner of Alabo [Street], I mean Charbonnet Street, the two guards was on each side. "Excuse me, where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to my house." "Do you have identification?" I said, "What kind of identification?" I said, "Everything was lost in my house, all my papers and everything, important papers were lost." So, good thing I had my driver's license. Then they saw, said, "Okay, you can go, but you can't stay too long." Now if I wanted to pick up some stuff, I said, "Well I'm going to see if I can salvage my clothes or something." Because Mr. Levi, Doris Slaughter's husband, he had a truck, and he brought us down there, over here.

[35:46] I said, "I'm going get me my things that I need." "Where are you staying now?" I mean they ask you . . . You was degraded in some manner, you know! "Where are you living now?" I said, "I'm with my sister-in-law. We about nineteen, twenty people in one house, a three bedroom house." She said . . . So, okay . . . Well, they let me come in. Then the next day I

said, "I will be back tomorrow to see if I could pick up some other stuff." Said, "Well make sure you have your identification with you." And that was everywhere.

Mwendo: Did you see that as . . . Well, it sounds like you might have seen it as a hassle, but did you also look at it as maybe protection?

Duminy: Yes it was.

Mwendo: Of your neighborhood, of your house?

Duminy: [36:37] That's true, yeah, yeah. It was, because they had to put people here for safety reasons. Because some people could have come in and maybe I would have walked in and if they didn't have the people they would take what they wanted and they could harm you. When I came here that night, when I came here the first time that night and Walter wasn't with me, just Steve and Hope, it was a frightening thing. I had my telephone put in right away. Lucille called me, she said, "Dot, how are you doing?" I said, "I'm doing all right." She said, "You sure you okay?" I said, "Yes, I'm all right." I said, "The only thing, I don't have heat in the house." The blankets, we had washed. We had went on Miro [Street] or some street in Nanny's neighborhood and washed blankets, so all that was clean. It was hard to do when you have . . . don't know where's the money or nothing like that. Nanny said, "Don't worry about it." You know, and "Okay."

I collect all the quarters I had, it was a quarter to wash the clothes. So a lady was in the washerette and she said, "Oh! You got . . ." and she helped us shake the clothes off and wash it.

She said, "Honey, you're going to have to wash that two, three times." She said, "But don't worry, I'm going to take care of this machine for you." It was . . . They helped. Nanny . . . I said, "Oh, Lucille," I said, "you go ahead home and I'm going to spend the day right here washing." [phone ringing]

Mwendo: That's my cell phone. Sorry. [phone ringing] She's going to turn it off.

Duminy: [38:36] I said, "Well I sure appreciate what you did." I had rollers for my hair, and I was throwing it . . . She said, "Oh no, baby," she said, "don't throw that away." She said, "You'll have to go buy it again." She said, "I'm going to clean them for you." She let the water come in the machine and she put all those rollers and stuff in the machine and let it wash. I said, "Oh, that was great."

Then after we had that, Richard would come over and he'd say, "Grandma, you're going to go home and you're going to be in a nice place, a clean place," and all of that. My grandmother, oh she would sit there, she couldn't wait to see Richard and them there. Then I think little Richard came in before he went to Africa and when he walked in and he saw all those people in the house. He said, "Mother," he said, "I didn't know you had all these people in the house." When it came time to sleep, he said, "Oh don't worry," he said, "I'll sleep on the floor." Uncle Richard had gone and got some mattresses from Xavier University. They gave some mattresses, those thick foam things and put on the floor. He slept there, and Louise was by Mamilie[?] with her gang.

[40:03] But to sleep in . . . they had so many snoring sounds, and different things going on that you could make music. [laughs] I said, "Oh Lord," I said, "I can't sleep." But you were

so tired during the day, coming and going, and doing things that you fell asleep. You didn't hear nothing. Then the morning was something else. My mama would get up and prepare breakfast and things like that. And Uncle Richard, he loved it, honey. "Here Mr. Richard." My mama would call him Mr. Richard. He said, "Don't call Mr. Richard, Mrs. Matille[?]" [laughs] So that's the way it was, the hassle was getting help. And you waited.

Mwendo: So how much help did you say you got?

Duminy: Well, the help I got, it wasn't enough. But we did . . . how they say? I don't know if it's white people or black people . . . but we know how to survive. I know how to survive. I'm a country girl, so I know how to survive. I know how to stretch whatever I got. Add a little more water to it and [?]. But make long stew and all of that stuff until we got the money to go to the grocery. Well I was getting my money anyway from our retirement, you see, at least Walter's money from work.

Mwendo: [41:37] So Uncle Walter was already retired?

Duminy: No, no, no, no. I'm saying retirement now, but Uncle Walter was still working at the hospital, but they gave us some money . . .

Mwendo: Oh, okay.

Duminy: . . . you see, they collected or whatever, gave us some money. It came to maybe two hundred dollars, but anyway, it was a help. I would get money here and there and everywhere but . . .

Mwendo: But the official kind of, like the American Red Cross . . .

Duminy: The official . . . I had to wait. They had to have, almost your birth certificate.

Mwendo: Which you lost.

Duminy: [42:12] Which I lost in the water. You had to . . . your birth certificate, your hand . . . We didn't have . . . Wasn't handcuffed, that's the only thing. We weren't handcuffed or dragged by the neck or something like . . . we were like cattles in the cattle car. So when we got there, to City Hall . . . it was just . . . They was telling you what you need to have. We all would say, "Need to have? How could we have it? It's all lost!" I had to get my birth certificate, my marriage certificate, and what else I had to get? Walter had to get his, and all the children, my two children. We had all of those papers we had, and we had to bring that with us. I had a folder like that with all the papers. I said, "I found some things for the house." The deed to the house. I think I found it. I don't know. All that was lost because it was water soaked. Said, "How could we . . ." I'd try to hang it, it would fall apart, to dry. I said, "I can't do nothing with it."

When we went to SBA [Small Business Administration], we had to go uptown somewhere. They wanted to know how it happened. I said, "Why don't you all go and find out

who busted the levee, then that person could tell you.” I said, “We inside watching television, water go . . . the lights went out.” I said, “Aw, damn it, just when it was getting so good.” Stupid questions they were asking. “Well what came first? The water? The rain? Or the wind?” I said, “I’m not a person . . . I don’t know nothing about the wind, the rain, or the water. It just came. The water just came. We heard *boom* and that was it.” I thought it was a backfire. My uncle said, “That ain’t no backfire. They must have busted something,” he said. When he saw the water, he knew it was they had busted the levee. Okay, we had to go through that whole ordeal again telling the people what came first. I said, “What are they trying to do? We come over here to help.” I said, “Now, my house . . . I was in the insurance.”

Mwendo: [?] insurance.

Duminy: [44:57] Yes, the insurance.

Mwendo: What did the insurance give you? How was that experience?

Duminy: That experience . . . if the people . . . Oh, I moved this . . .

Mwendo: That’s okay.

Duminy: If the people . . . if the insurance would have helped us, we wouldn’t need no SBA. We got in debt. Took us long time to pay, for about ten years it took me, but I would pay double. That’s why I got a job at St. Maurice [Catholic Church]. I said, when Uncle Walter

would get paid sometimes three times in the month, sometimes just two times, mostly two, twice a month. I would double up on the thing. I said, "I don't want to be paying this for the rest of my life." It was fifty dollars a month. But fifty dollars a month at that time was plenty when you don't have it. I said, Lord Jesus, I developed ulcers, nervousness. Then when I saw all my people I said, "If they could survive, I can, too."

Mwendo: The people around here you mean.

Duminy: [46:04] My own people, my family that was here, in Belle Chasse. My mama would take all . . . no matter how . . . and it was disaster. Worse than here, I think. Because they took their clothes out of mud, they washed it, they boiled it, and hang it on a line to dry. One time they came over here with a truckload full of clothes to be . . . We sent it to the laundry. The laundry man said some of the things we'll never get back because it's not worth cleaning, it's going to cost you too much money. I said, "Well throw it away." So we did that.

[End Tape 3338, Side A. Begin Tape 3338, Side B.]

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: Yes, well I saved some of my things. Because I said, "I don't have the money to go be buying this." Then they would tell you, "You can't buy this. You can't buy that." They would want . . . It was like you had to do what they said do. When they gave me money, I had to do what they say to do.

Mwendo: With the money.

Duminy: [47:19] They were giving you that, girl. They were giving it to you and you had to pay it back. But they were giving it to you. I said, "Oh, no." I said, "This has to go." I said, "You mean I got nine thousand seven hundred and something dollars they gave me."

Mwendo: That was the loan?

Duminy: That was the loan. I didn't want it for more because I knew that Walter make X amount of money. And that nine thousand, that was to repair the house, to buy the furniture and buy clothes.

Mwendo: Was it enough?

Duminy: No. It wasn't enough. I did with what I had. I wanted the house. I said, "The money is for the house." And Uncle Walter's car, twenty-nine hundred dollars in those days. [laughs] That was the car. That's the first thing I bought. Now that was a hassle, honey. I bought the car. The man came over to see how I spent the money, had to have a receipt for everything. When he saw, he said, "Mrs. Duminy, you bought a car." I said, "Yes." I said, "we lost a car." They gave a us a little money on the car, maybe about a thousand dollars. Because they don't pay for flood, but they gave us a thousand dollars probably from the goodness of their heart, they gave us a thousand dollars. We going to buy something for a thousand dollars . . . You go to the grocery store and you spend, with the way the food . . .

[49:02] But anyway, the man said, "You had no business buying a car." I said, "Oh yes?" I said, "You going to pay the nine thousand nine hundred dollars every month for me? Then I could see I had no right of buying the car." I said, "But my husband . . . do you know where State Street . . . Do you know the city?" "No." He's from Washington. He don't know where that's at. I said, "That's way down the river." I said, "My husband, he works at night. The bus stop at eleven o'clock or eleven thirty like that at night. He can't walk that. He cannot walk to go to work. It's too dangerous."

I said, "So we are going to pay this loan, or you? Which one of us is going to pay the loan?" He look at me, he said, "You're getting a little distraught." I said, "A little distraught?" [laughs] "Excuse me, a little distraught?!" [laughs] I said, "If you going to pay this damn loan," I said, "then I would say, 'Well, okay. I had no right to do it.'" I said, "But that's the first thing he needs, is a car." He wrote something down on the thing, must have put, "She's a little something," whatever he wrote down. Then he said, "Well I'll be back again to see how everything is coming along." I said, "Fine. My door is always open." I said, "Fine." Okay. Then here come a lady, all dressed, blonde hair, and she says . . .

Mwendo: And what agency she's from?

Duminy: [51:09] That's still government.

Mwendo: Same, the government.

Duminy: The SBA. She says, "Well, Mrs. Duminy, you shouldn't have bought this and you shouldn't have bought that." And different things, the clothing, "Did you get the overcoat for your children?" I said, "Yes, you want to see them? You want to see it?" I took everything out. I didn't have no sofa. I just laid it out like that. I said, "This is what I bought." I said, "They need an overcoat. No matter if you didn't want me to buy it, I would have bought it anyway." I said, "Now, they're going to come up in here and tell me what to do with my money!" I said, "I can't understand it, I really can't." I was crying, I was nervous, and I said, "I'm sick and tired of this S . . ." "Okay." She stood, she said, "Well, Mrs. Duminy, I'm sorry." She said, "Everything is going to turn out to be all right." "Oh," I said, "thank you kindly." Everything is going to turn out to be all right. I wanted to kick her in her A.

Mwendo: Well how long they kept coming around?

Duminy: [52:21] They kept coming until the house was finished.

Mwendo: And that was . . . you said how many months that was?

Duminy: That must have been about a year.

Mwendo: Oh a year.

Duminy: Yes. They came to see if you bought . . . Well some people were taking the money and buying cars, you see. They were buying things that wasn't necessary to buy. I said,

“I’m not that way. I know my husband need a car, because he lost . . .” We had just had our car done over by Curtis. Not Curtis, what is the . . . Is it Maceo[?], Mascio[?] or something?

Mwendo: I don’t know.

Duminy: [52:56] Yeah, he had a car shop. He had a car shop. It’s related to your daddy, the guy. Well anyway, he had just put . . . We had new tires, everything done over, paint job, everything done over on the car. Here come Betsy. She came with a ding-a-ling. [laughs] She came with her whip, honey, to clean the place out. But then some people . . . as long as this was happening at that time, they were breaking in people’s houses. Why? I don’t know why. I couldn’t have my things in here. I had to come here to just be in here. I don’t know. I thought of it after, it was dangerous for me to come over here by myself.

Mwendo: How long did the National Guard or whoever those uniform people . . .

Duminy: They stood here for quite a while. They stood here for quite a while.

Mwendo: For like a month, maybe?

Duminy: Oh no, longer than that. Longer, maybe about three months, they stayed. Because they would pass around in that car. They weren’t standing at the . . . street by street, but they were around. The police would come down here and everything. Well, anyway, everything

was going nicely to be settled and all. And the only thing that made me mad was you could fix this and you could fix that and all that stuff. I said, "Go to hell." "Go to hell."

Mwendo: [54:26] So did you end up buying new things?

Duminy: I ended up buying . . .

Mwendo: Like you fixed the . . . You got a stove, you said, and you took it apart and cleaned it.

Duminy: I kept that stove until later on. I said since . . . it baked right, it cooked right. I had no problem with it. I said, "As long as this stove lasts, I'm going to use it." I used it. Heather . . . I mean, Heather . . . Hope, on her sixteenth birthday, that's when I got a stove. I got a stove, but I had . . . I think your daddy gave me . . . He fixed a washing machine for me, but I didn't have the dryer. But I said, "That's okay, Harold." I said, "That's all right. I'll manage. I dried clothes before." We dried and Walter had ropes going here and there and it would rain and I would put the clothes, and before you know it, it was a dryer, you see. So I did that. He even got a secondhand TV. He fixed that. He said, "You just got to pay for the tools." Whatever I needed . . .and I had a television from your father. So I said . . .

Mwendo: [55:41] So it sounds like it took about a year to get . . .

Duminy: Yeah. To get . . . Well, I didn't buy everything at one time. I say, "Suppose we take sick or something like that?" We didn't have Medicare and then they didn't have Medicaid at that time. I said . . . They had it, but we weren't old enough to get it. So Walter could go to the hospital, Charity Hospital, was our main place. Sometimes they treated you like a dog. Because one time I brought . . . Hope was five years old, and she was so hard to . . . she was going to the doctor all the time. She would fall out in like a fit, like, convulsion. Stevie did the same thing too. The doctor wanted to give her a shot or something and Hope was cutting up, she went under the desk and all that.

I had to go in there and the doctor looked at me and said, "What are you trying to do?" I said, "This is my child." I said, "Now, don't touch her." I said, "Do not touch her." I took Hope and I consoled her. He wanted me to let him handle her the way he wanted to. I said, "Oh no, Doctor," I said, "this is my child." I said, "If you married and have children, you wouldn't want this to be happening to your kid, you understand?" He said, "You're a sassy one, aren't you?" I said, "You . . . you're right." [laughs] "You're right." Here come the nurse. She said, "You have to apologize to the doctor." The sister, the nun was coming out at the same time and she said, "Oh yes, you have to . . . Now, you know you have to apologize. The doctor works so hard." All that stuff. I can't say what I told the nun and I can't say what I told the nurse. The same day a baby died in the line, it was drizzling.

Mwendo: [57:50] In the line?

Duminy: In the line out . . . You couldn't go inside. You were outside in the street. They made a line for you to go into the hospital.

Mwendo: Oh, Charity Hospital?

Duminy: Charity Hospital, that's right.

Mwendo: And they just let one person come in?

Duminy: And I was . . . One person, maybe about four or five come at a time. Okay, all that was happening.

Mwendo: And the baby died while waiting?

Duminy: [58:11] The baby died while waiting, pneumonia.

Mwendo: So there was no emergency room . . .

Duminy: Honey, I walked up in there and I just went and laid my baby on the table and I said, "My baby's in convulsion." They saw me, one, two, three, they saw me. But when I would go for her visit, you know how you had to go.

Mwendo: The follow up.

Duminy: The follow up. The doctor, he put his elbow like this and wanted to open her mouth and she's crying and I said, "Oh, no. Enough is enough. This is my child. It's not

yours.” I said, “If it was yours, we would be fighting.” But the nurse come and the nun come and I told her what I had to tell her. I said, “He has to apologize to me.” I said, “One thing I have, my rights, is freedom of speech and I’m going to tell you what I think of all of y’all in here.” Here come a black nurse. She say, “What happened?” I said, “Were you there when it happened?” She didn’t want to say, she was there. I said, “Were you there when it happened?” She said, “No.” I said, “Well it’s none of your damn business.” I told her, “It’s none of your business. You wasn’t there, you don’t need to know.” Because they was just as ugly, blacks were ugly against black. She couldn’t say nothing because she would probably be fired. I said, “This is too much.”

[59:48] All this happened . . . All this happened maybe about a year and something after Betsy. No, it couldn’t . . . because Hope made her sixteenth birthday, that was before. I’m getting ahead of myself. But anyway, Hope was a good little trooper during the storm. She’d say, “Mother,” she would put her arm around me and she’d say, “Mother, we’re going to be okay.” She said, “I’m going to get a job and I’ll help you.” Now little . . . “I’ll help you.” Even Steve would say . . . and they did. Look what . . . after everything was clear, Mr. Obert[?] was a . . . voter registration, would take the kids and let them go door to door with an adult and register the people to vote. Steve would cut grass and they all would help and say, “Mama, we got a quarter.” I say, “You cut that big yard and a quarter the lady gave you!” But they were two or three people with them, I said, “Well that’s good.” I say, “That is good.”

Mwendo: Now, Mr. Hebert[?] was somebody in the neighborhood?

Duminy: Oh yeah, he was like a . . . he would see . . . go help people. He was a helper.

Mwendo: [1:01:05] Like an activist in the community?

Duminy: Yes, if people needed something he would go to the church, he was always with the mayor. That was . . . Victor Schiro was the mayor at that time. I can't remember who was the president, because he came . . . We could see him in the morning. He came with the helicopter.

Mwendo: President of the United States?

Duminy: Yeah, the president of the United States.

Mwendo: I think it was Lyndon Johnson. I think.

Duminy: Lyndon Johnson, that was the before . . .

Mwendo: [1:01:33] Because Kennedy was shot in '64.

Duminy: Yes, that's what it was. He was telling the people to be calm and have patience and blah, blah, and all that shit. Oh, you going to take that out?

Mwendo: No, it's okay. It's okay. It really is okay. Whatever . . . However you want to say. Okay Auntie, it took you about . . . it sounds like over a year for just to kind of get some normalcy back in your life.

Duminy: That's right. [Agrees]

Mwendo: Then you talked about the community and how the community pulled together and everything like that. Well after that year or so, then how was the community? What was it like?

Duminy: [1:02:17] We were fine, because look like everybody would say, "How you doing this morning?" Years after. "Mrs. Duminy, are you all right? Your family?" They were concerned. They wanted to know how was my family in the country. "How is your grandma in the country?" I say, "She's doing fine." I said, "But thanks for asking." Some of them I couldn't remember their name. They would ask. They would want to know, "You need any help or anything?" I say, "No," I said, "I don't need any help." One time the machine broke, my machine broke, and the man came and fix it. I say, "Well how much I owe you?" He say, "Oh, nothing." I said, "I sure appreciate it. Thank you very kindly." They were helpful and we would help each other.

Mwendo: Did a lot of people move out after Betsy?

Duminy: Well, not . . . At the time, not in this neighborhood, but maybe some people did.

Mwendo: So most of the same people . . .

Duminy: Most of the same people are here. Now, Mrs. Brooks, she was the one . . . she rolled out, but it was a couple of years after.

Mwendo: It wasn't necessarily because of the storm that they left?

Duminy: [1:03:31] No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Mwendo: I know Mrs. Slaughter left.

Duminy: No. Who . . .

Mwendo: Doris Slaughter.

Duminy: No, she live . . .

Mwendo: That house is still . . . she still . . .

Duminy: No, Lois. She lives over there on Claiborne Street.

Mwendo: Oh. Right, on Claiborne. She's still there?

Duminy: She's still there. You talking about the old Mrs. Slaughter?

Mwendo: No. I'm talking about Doris Slaughter. Just fiery like you.

Duminy: Doris, yes, yes, yes.

Mwendo: She's still over there?

Duminy: She's still there.

Mwendo: Okay.

Duminy: [1:03:56] And all her people is still . . . Not all her people, her in-laws are down here and some of them have moved to the east, moving on up to the east side. Some of them were still in the neighborhood. Some of them is across town. But I had thought of moving myself at the time. When I came in here and saw all of this, I said, "But where will I go around here, all that water?" Only when you cross the tracks on Claiborne Avenue, there was just a little water, like rain, it wasn't flooded where you was.

Mwendo: That's the Holy Cross area.

Duminy: Right, right there wasn't flooded. I said, "Why couldn't it be equally divided, the water?" [Laughs] But you see this? This is the way right down here was.

Mwendo: Okay, so if you had to make comparisons the way the neighborhood was before Betsy and the way the neighborhood is now.

Duminy: Now. Well, before Betsy, I hardly knew the people, you see. But when I would see them I would introduce myself. I said, "I'm going to be your neighbor across the street and my name is Dorothy Duminy." Everybody . . . Well Louise, we knew Louise. I made friends with her neighbor, Mr. Harry Johnson. I made friends with his family and Barbara Gordon, I made friends with her . . . Their family, because they had all the children were the same age, they grew up together. And Ruzino[?], she lived in the house . . . not this house, but the next one, that was her house. We had three families that we knew of that we were all in the club and all that stuff.

Mwendo: [1:05:50] So in the club and stuff, that was before Betsy.

Duminy: Oh yeah, we had started before Betsy. No. It was before Betsy we had gotten into the club. Because when they came down . . . The first time I came down here, it was my time to have the dinner, the meeting, and I didn't have no curtains up and I said, "Well I don't care. We can still have the meeting." I had the meeting or whatever we had, it was nice.

But we got to know each other because everybody had children my children's age. So they would come in the yard and they would play. They had an open field across the street, they would play ball in the evening. When they would do something wrong they would come over and their mama wasn't there, "Mrs. Duminy, he did such and such a thing." I say, "You sit it out." "Sit it out. No fuss. I don't want to . . . Don't explain nothing to me. Sit. You're not

supposed to do that. If you want to play with our children in this neighborhood . . . Where you come from, son?" They would say, "Down Marais[?] Street." Or something like that. I said, "Well, just forget about it. Just sit there and cool yourself." "Well, I'm going to be able to play again?" I said, "If you're quiet, yeah, you're going to be able to play again. That's it, understand?" When the mama would come, they would send like oranges or apples or something like that, because they knew I wasn't working at the time, so that was that. They took care of the family.

Mwendo: [1:07:25] What kind of stories have you heard from like your neighbors? How are they about . . . Does it ever still come up, Hurricane Betsy?

Duminy: Oh, yeah! Yeah.

Mwendo: What kind of things you all . . .

Duminy: We see . . . like when they had . . . what that was? When Glenn got married, that was . . . was it [Hurricane] Camille? Yes, Camille. Right after Betsy, Camille came. I went through the same thing again. My mother, my uncle, they all came here. I said, "Lord, help me, Jesus."

Mwendo: So all the memories come back.

Duminy: [1:08:02] All the memories come back. When I had gone down there to see the disaster, I thought Betsy had did a lot. It done . . . It was worse, because it was so close to the Gulf [of Mexico]. You see the water came from the Gulf. Ship works on the . . . clean across, now you know that was bad, the highway. So that was horrible. Houses was on top of houses. My uncle had a brand new house he built with everything in it, and still today can't find it. Took the house, like on . . . I guess just took it. It must have been a tornado or something. So many people lost everything, worse.

But they did get help. The people, for some reason . . . I said, "Well, that's Judge [Leander] Perez' parish." But for some reason, he gave the money. He helped everybody. My mother . . . each one in my family: my uncle got five thousand dollars, my mama got five thousand dollars, and that's how they put their money together and rebuilt the house. The house was there, our house was there, but it was off the foundation. Because they had a bar room right next door that came over and pushed our house off the foundation. It was . . . it was horrible. Hope say, "Mama, is it going to come here?" I said, "I hope not, baby." I said, "I hope not."

[1:09:40] Then Linda called and she said, "Why don't you let Hope come to Washington?" She said, "We're going to send a ticket, and she could stay with Ben." She needed somebody for something she had to do that Ben would have been alone. So Hope went out there and stood until Christmas. She said, "Mother, I want to be home for Christmas." I said, "Okay, I'll send you your money for Christmas . . . for the ticket." Ben say, "No, no. Don't send the money. We're paying her to come back home." So that was from one disaster to another. How I got through it . . .

Mwendo: Living through that over again.

Duminy: How I got through it? With the help of God. That's the only way, because it wasn't easy to go through it. Then after that, Steve, I think fell in convulsion and I had to bring him to Charity Hospital. They didn't know who I was, so he was on the white side. When I went to the black side, they said, "What are you doing on this side?" I said, "Just help my baby. Don't ask me what race I am or who I am. I come here for help, Doctor, please!" He said, "Okay. Be calm." Because I was crying. He was like he was dying. So okay, he stood in there two weeks in the hospital.

Mwendo: [1:11:04] Now what time . . . When was this?

Duminy: That was right after.

Mwendo: Right after Betsy?

Duminy: No, no, no, no. Camille.

Mwendo: Camille?

Duminy: Camille. I said, "Oh this is too much. This has to go."

Mwendo: They still had . . . I don't know if they had the white side and the black side with Camille. Maybe you're talking of another storm?

Duminy: Yes they did.

Mwendo: Okay, okay.

Duminy: That's the only time I could remember. But, well maybe you don't need this.

Mwendo: No, go ahead.

Duminy: [1:11:37] My family . . .

Mwendo: What you mean, your family?

Duminy: The children's sickness and all that stuff, that's not going for the same thing.

Mwendo: Yes.

Duminy: What you think?

Mwendo: Well you can say whatever you want to say.

Duminy: And you're going to fix it up?

Mwendo: And we're going to keep it all.

Duminy: Oh really? [laughs]

Mwendo: Yeah, we keep it all.

Duminy: Oh Lord.

Mwendo: All this stuff, because actually, Auntie, this is life history, this is life stories.

Duminy: It is a history.

Mwendo: [1:12:00] Now, I'm concentrating on Hurricane Betsy, but if you . . . and we have to kind of watch the tape to see, but we're just gathering stories. Our concentration is on Betsy, but if there's other things you want to talk about it, if there's other things that need . . .

Duminy: No, I think Betsy is okay. I think I better stick to Betsy.

Mwendo: [laughs]

Duminy: Well anyway . . .

Mwendo: What I want to know is like, does it come up every year?

Duminy: Every year it comes up when the weather comes up, say, it's a storm.

Mwendo: With a potential . . .

Duminy: I think of the mouth of the river. I think of my grandparents down there, my grandmother at least, because my grandfather died when I was a baby. But I think of all my aunts and uncles that was down there and they came over here for shelter.

Mwendo: Yes. Now who you still got down there now?

Duminy: [1:12:56] I have my Uncle Justin and his family. That's all I have. And cousins, I have a lot of cousins down there.

Mwendo: Would they come here if something happened?

Duminy: No, not all of them. They go . . . They have their brother that lives in Belle Chasse somewhere, and in Harvey, Louisiana. Most likely they go out of town. This is the first time I went out of town when this last storm they had . . . What was the name of that?

Mwendo: Was that George or . . . ?

Duminy: George?

Mwendo: I don't know.

Duminy: It was at the tip of New Orleans.

Mwendo: Yes, yes.

Duminy: We thought sure we were going to get it.

Mwendo: And it hit Mississippi? Or something like that?

Duminy: [1:13:37] Yes, yes.

Mwendo: I think it was George.

Duminy: Was it Florida that it did a lot of damage?

Mwendo: I'm not remembering.

Duminy: Well, anyway, a storm like that . . . We were in Tennessee. We had gotten in Tennessee and I hope I never have to do that trip again because it was horrible on the highway.

Mwendo: Because it was back to back?

Duminy: It was back to back and we got there maybe about eleven o'clock the next day. I was so exhausted. I couldn't drive. I couldn't do nothing. I didn't want to do nothing. I wasn't

driving at night. It's horrible to see all these cars and all those . . . Bumper to bumper. It was horrible. I think I'd rather be here in Betsy. Really, it was really tough. As you go down the line, some people were nice and some people were ugly. "What the hell? You cut into this?" Things like that, they would holler at you. I said we went too far. We could have . . . Baton Rouge, they didn't have no room for you to rent. Everything was rented out already.

[1:14:53] Then come after, after we came back I said, "You know, even during Betsy, I had my insurance pay for a hotel and never used it!" You think the insurance man would . . . to me look like if I went somewhere else and I had my paper saying that I rented a room, they should give you the money for it! Pay you back! But no, never thought of that until after it was all over with. I said, "Oh Lord!" But I wouldn't have stayed in the city anyway because the way that storm was coming, the whole city would be underwater if it would have hit that would have been it for New Orleans.

But Betsy, I'll never forget Betsy. That was the ninth, '65. Because the following month was my anniversary on the ninth and I'll never forget it. I said, "Oh Lord Jesus." Walter was in the hospital. I said . . . "When it rains, it pours." "When Daddy's going to come home?" They would ask, "When Daddy's going to come home?" I said, "Well when the doctor say he's okay to come home." So Mamille[?] had it hard herself with Louise. That was hard with the children. Louise came down . . . left earlier. She came in her house before it was finished because Joe wanted to come home regardless of what. He wanted to come home, so her house wasn't finished. They had to do her house while she was there.

But I couldn't come in my house before it was finished because I had no heat. I don't know what Louise did. She must have heat or something. I don't know why. I stood there

because I didn't have the things for my mother and my grandmother, because all this was busted all around, all through the house. So cold weather was coming in.

Mwendo: [1:17:08] Well, Auntie, I think we about covered it all.

Duminy: Yeah.

Mwendo: What you think?

Duminy: That was it. I think, if I would think of something . . . No, I think this covered all. Because that was the total . . . What you see right there, those pictures tell you.

Mwendo: Yeah, yeah.

Duminy: It was the same way, just like this here. All of our cars right here, cars and boats. Not boats. Cars, down there . . . only . . . No, Robin had already left. He was in California. That's Robin Zeno[?], Ruth's husband. They moved to California way before Betsy.

Unknown: Could I ask you some clarifying questions?

Mwendo: She's got some clarification questions she's going to ask you.

Duminy: Yeah.

Unknown: [1:17:48] Now, you said “Obert[?]” and Nilima said “Hebert.” How do you spell that name?

Duminy: Obert[?].

Unknown: How do you spell that name?

Duminy: Oh, I don’t know. Obert[?]

Unknown: Okay. All right, and then you also said something about . . . I don’t know if I understood correctly, did you say long stew? When you was cooking and you was making do.

Duminy: Oh, yes, I was making . . .

Unknown: What you mean when you say long . . .

Duminy: When you make long stew and you have plenty of people to feed, you add a little more water to it.

Unknown: Yes, that’s long stew.

Duminy: [1:18:12] That’s long stew.

Mwendo: All right.

Duminy: Stew meat, potato, or potato stew. You ever had potato stew? Just potato stew. I didn't have no meat so I just made potato stew, put the onion and all the seasoning up in there, say it was like a potato salad, but it was a gravy to put over the rice. That's how you survived.

Mwendo: And then from last week I have a couple of things I want to check with you about.

Duminy: Okay, go ahead.

Mwendo: You had made a comment, Auntie, about how . . . Something about how the people that lived on Tennessee, they knew before the people over here knew.

Duminy: Right.

Unknown: What is it about Tennessee Street that they knew?

Duminy: [1:18:56] Well because it was only white on Tennessee Street. And Ernest Frasier . . . Remember I said that Ernest Frasier, he heard what was going on and saw what was going on. He lived on Flood Street and he was coming from work and he had to walk somewhere, he said, to see somebody or whatever. He saw . . . He said, "Well why are all those people getting in those things like that? In those big trucks?" It's because they were preparing

to blow . . . and that happened at night. We had it at night here about maybe nine o'clock, that's when they, about eight thirty, nine o'clock when they bust the levee.

Mwendo: Do you know where in the levee?

Duminy: Oh, yeah!

Mwendo: Where?

Duminy: You know the bridge? You know the bridge they have back there, the . . .

Mwendo: The Florida?

Duminy: [1:19:55] The Florida Bridge?

Mwendo: Yes.

Duminy: Right where the Florida Bridge, on the left hand side, I believe.

Mwendo: On the Lower Nine side, it would have to be.

Duminy: On this side, on this side.

Mwendo: Yeah, what's this side?

Duminy: I don't know. I don't know nothing about that.

Mwendo: On . . . on . . .

Duminy: On Florida Avenue, you know the Florida . . .

Mwendo: Okay, but in Lower Nine?

Duminy: [1:20:19] Yeah, in . . . On this side. They wouldn't bust the other side because, oh Lord . . .

Mwendo: Right, right, because then the water go over . . .

Duminy: You could see where they had patched it up, put the whatever . . . the sacks of mud and the whatever they'd have to put to stop the water.

Unknown: So you say . . .

Duminy: Way down there.

Unknown: So you're saying closer to Florida Bridge . . .

Duminy: Right, right.

Unknown: . . . you could see where they broke it.

Duminy: [1:20:42] Oh yes, you could see where the levee burst.

Unknown: It burst.

Duminy: They don't say break. It burst.

Mwendo: So their story was . . .

Duminy: Why the *boom*!? Why the *boom*!?

Mwendo: Yeah.

Duminy: We heard that *boom*, unless it was something that went *boom*. [laughs]

Mwendo: [all laugh] So their story is . . . Their story is that it just burst.

Duminy: Yeah.

Mwendo: They had no intervention. They had nothing to do with it.

Duminy: [1:21:07] Oh, no, no, nothing to do. They didn't do a darn thing to it, but it just burst.

Unknown: Auntie, you mentioned how . . . Of course you went through Betsy, and then you came to mentioning Camille. Are there other hurricanes that you went through?

Duminy: No, but my mother and them went through. I can't think of all the names. They had . . .

Unknown: What about some hurricanes before Betsy? Do you remember hurricanes that you went through before Besty?

Duminy: I remember having . . . before I was married.

Unknown: Yes.

Duminy: But I can't remember all of the names of the things.

Unknown: [1:21:45] I guess what I'm getting at . . . what I'm getting at is that when you . . . were you accustomed to hurricanes coming this way and just being prepared for them and . . .

Duminy: I was accustom . . .

Unknown: Accustomed.

Duminy: . . . accustomed to it. In the country when hurricane was going to come . . . That was before I was married. When hurricane was coming, we was used to seeing the trees do this and all that stuff and water in the yard. If it was real bad we would go in the boat and stay on the boat and there was a canal that you could house . . . It was trees and heavy, what they call? Can't think of the name of it. You would go into like the Industrial Canal, we would go up in there and stay with our boat till it was over with. And then we would come back home and luckily our house was still there. So we'd say, "Thank God for that."

[1:22:50] One time we had . . . I was a teenager then and it was fun to me. "Oh, the trees are swaying like this!" Grandma say, "Get your little self in here!" The trees was swaying and all that and they were getting prepared. Grandma had things put in boxes just in case we had to move. We would walk right back of our house, maybe about a half of mile to get to the boat. We had all the boats tied up, everybody . . . that's all they had is boats. We had no cars. We couldn't go nowhere. We couldn't come to the city. We didn't know where it was going. We were safer on the boat than on . . . than in a car. So that's the way it was.

But you see . . . And look, we never, never, never, for some reason . . . I can't understand . . . All these years I was coming up never had a storm that I knew of. But my mama experienced a storm that she had walked in water to her waist. I was a baby then, you see. It was a 1915 storm that happened down in Empire, Louisiana and Buras [Louisiana] and Port Sulphur [Louisiana] and all of those little country towns they named. Well, they lost all their garden, because that was their livelihood. And they didn't have money, it was just like you're selling your . . . like if you needed potatoes, they wanted to sell . . . that's the way . . .

Mwendo: Bartering?

Duminy: [1:24:31] Yes. So that's the way it was. My grandfather lost a lot of money in his rice crop. He used to farm and he used to sell . . . make a garden and it was mostly rice, but they had garden for themselves, like potatoes, and onions, and garlic, and all the things . . . vegetables. But the rice was sold and they had a train that used to come from New Orleans on the other side. It would go down to Pointe a la Hache [Louisiana] somewhere. The train would pass right in front of the house and they would buy the rice for the soldiers when they had the war here in New Orleans. Now you know that's a long time ago. That's what I heard, they would tell us about that. So they saw a little bit of everything.

Mwendo: So when you were coming up, you saw the rice farms?

Duminy: Oh, yeah! Yeah, and good rice! Ooh, it doesn't taste like the rice today. That was brown rice and you would have to . . . they'd call it peel, like, they would take a log and cut it out in the center and hammer the rice down and all the hull would pop out like that. The rice would stay there and they say, "You try." I was wasting all the rice. I didn't know how to do it. It was fun, that was fun. And we would eat the rice just like that. That's how good it was.

Mwendo: Not cooked, it was . . .

Duminy: [1:26:04] Oh, no, it would be cooked. When they would cook it, you would eat it like that. Ooh, I never tasted rice like that. The brown rice they have there . . . no comparison

whatsoever. It was good. Everything, we had our own garden, our own chicken, our own ducks, our own cow, our own horses. We didn't need nothing.

Mwendo: You didn't have to worry about a grocery store.

Duminy: We were rich in the things we cooked. They would preserve. We wouldn't have to go to store for nothing. Grandma would bake bread in the oven outside, smelled all over. The merchants that would come down there in the country would say, "Can we buy a loaf of bread, Mrs. Ankar[?]" My Grandma say, "No, I'll give it to you." They would just give the thing. When you go to the grocery and then somebody would say, "Do you have a sack of potatoes I could buy from you?" My grandmother would say, "You can give me a shoulder of pickled meat? Here." They would swap. They would swap, you see. Those were the things. Now you see, I had wrote all of that down. Gone. Betsy took it all. You see, all of that down.

[1:27:25] So many things . . . We didn't have to go to the store for anything. I remembered one time when I was going to school, the school opened and they said they were going to have school for about six months. I would walk the whole five miles, going and coming, to just go say my ABCs, to learn. Grandma would say, "Mr. Chink is outside." It was an old man in the neighborhood. He was, I mean, poor, poor, poor. He would come every morning, my grandma would give him breakfast. Or he would want to buy some eggs. Grandma would sell the eggs a nickel a dozen, and I raised it to another nickel. [laughs] I wanted it . . .

Mwendo: You kept that nickel?

Duminy: Let me tell you what happened though, I caught a whipping for it. I had to apologize to the man. She said, "It's Mr. Chink to you. You don't call him Chink. He's an old man and it's Mr. Chink, you understand?" I caught a whipping. You know the whipping I would get? You know how they did with Jesus, the straps?

Mwendo: Yes. Oh.

Duminy: [1:28:49] On my butt.

Mwendo: Oh.

Duminy: I mean she would hit me one time and that was it.

Mwendo: Oh.

Duminy: I mean she didn't continue, "Don't do that!" or something. Because I hear people . . . sometimes I could hear their children. When I was married and stood by Mamille [?], a lady, her little girl would come from school and if she didn't have a B or an A, I could hear that child getting a whipping. It looked like she just would continue whipping that child, continue. I think I would have hate my mother for the rest of the days. I said, "Mr. Chink, I'm sorry. My grandmother . . . I have to apologize to you." He said, "That's all right baby, you can keep the nickel." My grandmother says, "I'm going to come out there and whip you." She said, "No, no,

no. No, no, no,” she would say, “*Jamais, jamais*,” she would say, “Never, never, never. Don’t never do that.”

Mwendo: You can speak French?

Duminy: [1:29:44] Oh, I used to when we were with my grandmother. But I’m losing it, yeah, I’m losing it. But sometime it comes. You see, when my mama and my grandmother was here for Betsy, it was coming back again. I guess if I’m . . . I understand it all but I can’t speak like I used to. But so many things happened when I was a little child. We had an uncle that used to . . . oh, this is not no . . .

Mwendo: Go ahead, go ahead. You had an uncle that did what?

Duminy: We had an uncle that used to come and tell us stories.

Unknown: That’s the light, just for you to know.

Mwendo: Oh, it’s going to cut off, but just keep going until . . .

Duminy: He would come and tell us stories at night and we’d all sit there. About a beautiful princess, she was caught in the woods. She lived in the woods, but she was a princess, and different things he would tell us about the story. We would sit there, “Yeah . . .” Sometimes

we would be falling asleep and then the next day when we would wake up he would . . . I said, “Well you going to finish the end of the story?” He said, “I finished it already.”

Mwendo: [laughs]

Duminy: [laughs] “I finished it already.”

Mwendo: [1:30:51] Well before the tape go off, I do want to say so we have it on tape, thank you so much, Auntie, for sharing your experiences, your stories, especially the stories around Hurricane Betsy. Hopefully, something will happen from it. If it’s only just to be able to tell your story, but who knows what could happen as a result of it being archived.

Duminy: I was glad to do this.

Unknown: Nilima, did you have any background information you still needed to get?

Mwendo: Auntie was going into it. She was . . . She was doing it.

Unknown: Oh, okay. Okay. Just making sure.

Duminy: I’m talking about what?

Mwendo: Your background, you started going into your . . . because I was going to go more into background . . .

Duminy: Oh, childhood.

Mwendo: [1:31:27] . . . and you started doing it. You just started talking about your childhood. So if you want, you could continue until the tape goes off. It's about to go off, but I don't know, do you want to stop? Or do you want to continue?

Duminy: Well anyway, I went to school for that six months and I did pretty good. I would always bring home an A, I said that was great.

Mwendo: What was the school like?

Duminy: Well it was a house, a big house, and the rooms were . . . Two rooms, they had a school room on one side and one on the other side. No bathroom or anything, outhouse. We didn't have no bathroom at that time. The teachers would come from New Orleans on the bus and go back home on the bus.

Mwendo: Who would send them? Is it like . . . because public school system . . .

Duminy: It was public school, but it was . . . I don't know, I guess the school board.

Because people were complaining that the children didn't have school. We were separated. We

couldn't go, like if, Cecily[?] or . . . if you have your children are dark, they wouldn't want your children to come with me. I had a cousin that couldn't go to school because he was darker than me.

Mwendo: So where the dark people went?

Duminy: [1:32:42] They had their own school, too. I thought it was awful. I wanted to go to school so bad. Then when I got a little older I would go with my mother to work. And I would play with the white kids. We didn't have black kids around our house at that time.

Mwendo: You just had white people around your house?

Duminy: [Agrees] I would play with the little white children. When the mother . . . My mama's boss, they were white and my mother worked for them.

Mwendo: And what she did? What kind of work?

Duminy: Oh, she was a postmaster. Oh, my mother? Domestic, would cook . . . She was a cook. When the children would come home, the white lady would say, "Look, Darette[?], I'm going to make this paper out for you and I want you to sit down here and do the homework just like my . . ." [tape ends abruptly] [1:33:35]

[End Tape 3338, Side B. End Session II.]