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4700.1684 T3336
Session I
November 20, 2003

[Begin Tape 3336, Side A. Begin Session I.]

Nilima Mwendo: So this is an interview with Ida Belle Joshua, community activist and social worker of New Orleans, Louisiana. She was one of the survivors living in the Lower Ninth Ward when Hurricane Betsy barreled down in New Orleans in 1965. This interview is being conducted on November the twentieth, nineteen . . . 2003 at her home, [address removed] The interviewer is Nilima Mwendo. So, I'm going to begin with some background information. So, when did you move into the Lower Ninth?

Ida Belle Joshua: I moved in the Lower Ninth Ward in 1949.

Mwendo: What was going on? What did this place look like? What was it like?

Joshua: [1:00] What did it look like? We had to cut a path from St. Claude Street to get down to this lot that I paid two hundred and fifty dollars for. It was just . . . I was living uptown and Odele, down in the next block, said, "You got to buy a couple of those lots." I couldn't get my husband . . . convince him to buy more than two. I wanted to buy the three. He said . . . being conservative, so we bought that one lot. We used to have to come walk down the road to come here and build the first house that I had here. We would . . .

Mwendo: What kind of house?

Joshua: The first house that we built.

Mwendo: Oh, the first house.

Joshua: Yeah, we would cook and serve beer and wine to the guys. They built our house, a concrete block house.

Mwendo: It was this one?

Joshua: Right in the same spot, correct.

Mwendo: Right here, okay.

Joshua: [1:51] Then, we were doing fine. Our goal was to pay for our house, to educate our children, and to travel. Of course, Betsy came along and interfered with all of those life plans that we had. We watched everything wash away.

Mwendo: How old were you when you first moved here?

Joshua: Nineteen . . . I'd have to figure that out. That's been . . . that was in 1949. I'm seventy-five years old now, so . . .

Mwendo: Ida Belle, you look so good. Are you serious?

Joshua: It's hard work, but that's been many a years, yes.

Mwendo: Okay, we'll figure that out. Okay, you say you were living uptown . . . [phone rings]

Joshua: I was living on . . . can you cut it off? [phone rings] [tape paused]

Mwendo: So, you were living uptown and you moved here because the lots were cheap? Or what did you hear about this area that made you want to come in this area?

Joshua: [2:52] Well, I had a friend of mine who had a lot down on Derbigny [Street] and Forstall [Street]. Odele, I used to do hair with her in a beauty parlor on Washington Street. She encouraged me and my husband, even before we married, to buy one of the lots at two hundred dollars a piece. We did, and then we were in that area where they were tearing down property at Washington [Avenue] and Willow [Street] for the Magnolia Projects, so we had to get out. So, we just built the house so that we could come . . . we didn't have any . . . My husband working on the riverfront and I was doing hair. At that time, you know, people were not buying property and taking as many risks. We were afraid of debt. We bought the property . . . the lot, then bought materials to build the house as we went along, and did it without any kind of indebtedness. We were debt free when Betsy came along, with a plan in terms of what we would do with our life. You want me to continue?

Mwendo: How many people . . . I know you want to jump into Betsy. I'm still going to stay in the background.

Joshua: Oh yeah, I know.

Mwendo: We're going to get to Betsy. This is good, though.

Joshua: That's alright.

Mwendo: About how many people were here when y'all moved down here?

Joshua: Well, when I moved down here, they had Mr. Turner way across the street, myself, and there was a house on the corner. It was really just an open area. We had, when . . . this was a white guy over here, about three . . .

Mwendo: Across the street . . . When you say [?] you mean across the street?

Joshua: [4:31] Right. Right across the street from me, right in front of me. They had about three property owners down here, people struggling trying to build their homes.

Mwendo: Everything else was just like forest looking or marsh looking, or what?

Joshua: It was just open. It was just open land, so much so that we had a snake path across the lot back here. I've seen about five or six snakes passing, because it was just kind of open and the canal is right here.

Mwendo: There was no levee? There was no nothing right there?

Joshua: Where it is now, but there wasn't any people walking, a lot of traffic. It wasn't like in a jungle or anything, but there wasn't many properties. They'd built most of the houses after that.

Mwendo: Okay. I hear there were a lot of truck farms down here. Was it . . . Maybe it was in the Holy Cross area. It wasn't in this area?

Joshua: No.

Mwendo: They had truck farms?

Joshua: [5:28] Yeah. They had people who had bought property cheap and were raising vegetables and hauling them into the city. That was in . . . Remember now, that was in 1949. Betsy came along in 1965, so there was a fast development down here. There was a big exit from in the inner-city to come down in the Ninth Ward, just as you see people exiting now to go in Eastern New Orleans. People were buying cheap lots and building up their homes. On Tennessee Street, there was a lot of . . . it was all white. That was a white community. I think

we did just what people are doing now, thinking that we were going to a better community and could afford it. Most of the area all along Tennessee Street was white civil servers, politicians that lived along in those houses; well kept.

Mwendo: Did they build or were already built, on Tennessee?

Joshua: Well, I don't know. I really don't know. I'm sure you could look at the construction and see that there was a general theme in the contractors who built those houses, because they're all somewhat of the same order. You could look in some blocks where it's kind of uniformative in terms of the building. Then, some people built their homes, but not to any great deal on Tennessee. Tennessee was like a development that the white America bought and lived exclusively, just like you see in St. Bernard, and Chalmette.

Mwendo: So the rest of Lower Nine, it was mostly African American people who were buying that?

Joshua: [7:31] Correct. There was some scattered whites around, but very, very few. Then, you had people came down like Dez[?] with the . . . We had a theater at Caffin [Avenue] and Galvez [Street], a black-owned theater. We had . . . Caffin was kind of developed. Various people moved to down . . . Teddy Marchand built. Pete Sanchez [Andrew "Pete" Sanchez Sr.] came and bought property. He built, so it was a developing community.

Mwendo: Did you want to say who Pete Sanchez was and Marchand was?

Joshua: Oh, Teddy Marchand was a African American construction worker who . . . he and his brother . . . Teddy, Paul, several of them bought property and built. Teddy bought, oh, it was like two or three blocks on Caffin and then over on Delery [Street], and started building homes to sell in the community; to recycle in the community. Pete Sanchez was a civil service employee who bought property on Claiborne [Avenue] and Charbonnet [Street], and built a big house. Sherman Copeland who was a teacher at that time, an elementary teacher, who also bought down here . . . taught at one of the schools. That's Pete. That's Teddy Marchand and Ike [Isaac] Reynolds, one of the major civil rights freedom riders . . . fighters. We all got together and started a community activist group.

Mwendo: What was the name of that group?

Joshua: Well, we applied for . . . We worked under the Total Community Action Program. But prior to that, it was just . . . It was community people who were interested in developing this community. Most of the time, we would meet at Sherman Copeland's house over on Galvez Street or we would meet over here. We developed the [Lower Ninth Ward] Neighborhood Council, we had an Area Beautification Committee that I was chairperson of. Trying to keep . . . Trying to have an investment in the community.

[10:14] We promised . . . we vowed to each other that we would never move out of the community, that we were vested in this community. Of course, Pete Sanchez is dead. Sherman kept that address for the longest, but he eventually moved. Teddy Marchand got . . . He had some kind of financial problems, as most of our African American businessmen. I think he moved to California. His brother, Paul . . . is it Paul? I think it's Paul Marchand built some

property over on Derbigny Street, the house which Melba bought over there; Melba, my daughter-in-law. It was just a turnover of people in the community. Through all of that, we tried to link together and to work for the betterment of the community.

Mwendo: It was a developing community.

Joshua: It was.

Mwendo: Before Betsy, it was a growing community. People were doing good.

Joshua: It was.

Mwendo: It was mostly laborers and professionals, some professionals that were in this community.

Joshua: [11:23] Correct, right, with an interest in this community . . .

Mwendo: [agrees]

Joshua: . . . as you see in many other communities. But it just . . . Well, I guess I keep getting back to Betsy. Betsy was a crisis that really created problems in this area. In some ways it created problems, but in other ways it stimulated the activists. Because after Betsy, we started fighting for urban renewal. We sent representatives to Washington [D.C.], so that we could get

legislature here, so that we could have some urban renewal. We had . . . I'll never forget it, Jim King who came down with the model city. We met over at Glapion, Glapion Funeral Parlor over on Caffin [Street] and Prieur [Street], something. We met there one time with Jim King who came down and was telling us about the money that we could have in the community. He brought some little white guy who said that he would be our representative. It was Sherman, myself, and Pete, and Teddy, and all of us. All of us all sitting, it was a large group. We just said, "Oh no." We wanted a black representative. They said, "Well, who do you think could perform in the capacity and have the knowledge?" We all . . . We all suggested Sherman.

Mwendo: [12:54] Let me go back a little bit. Let me go back a little bit. Talk a little bit . . .

Joshua: And that's . . .

Mwendo: Go ahead, finish up.

Joshua: That was after Betsy.

Mwendo: After Betsy, yes. I'm going to bring us back. We're going to get to all of that. Tell us a little bit about yourself. You were a hairstylist at one time. I never knew this. I know you as a social worker.

Joshua: Twenty-something years.

Mwendo: How many years?

Joshua: For about twenty-some years I worked at Washington and [?] in a beauty parlor. I had my two children up there, living in the area [address removed]. That's Magnolia Projects now. Worked across the street and did hair. My husband and I pooled our money into buying material to build this house in the Ninth Ward. Our goal was to be property owners. To move out of that area that was deteriorating in terms of . . . groups were on the corner with the smoking marijuana then, tease and blues, so there was an infiltration in that area of drugs. Our dream was to get our children out of that community, so I did hair morning and night. My husband worked on the riverfront. We invested our money; cash, purely, bought materials to build this house.

Mwendo: Then what happened? How you got into social work?

Joshua: [14:34] Well, that was after the storm. I was always a social worker, because I was still helping people and working in the community. I wasn't a formal social worker, but I was always in to things in terms of helping people. People would come here and ask me for . . . run my mouth and they'd come and ask for information. It was amazing. A story that's really outstanding, a little boy that was going to [Alfred] Lawless [High School] was recommended for a job at city hall. That's an example of how isolated we were. He came and knocked on my door to ask me how to get to city hall, about fifteen or sixteen years old. That just shows you in terms of what . . . how isolated people and children were in this community. I'm not saying that it's an advantage that we wandered down into the inner city, because at that time we were more community . . .

Mwendo: Oriented.

Joshua: . . . oriented. But, we went on and bought houses, I mean, bought this house, built this house. We never did venture out to buy houses, but my husband bought a boat. He was a fisherman. He bought several boats. The children, we sent the three children to school.

Mwendo: School down here? Or private schools?

Joshua: No, they never did . . . my kids never did go to . . . Yeah, yeah, Ike. Jr. . . . I think all of them went to Saint David. But after St. David . . . St. David Catholic School . . .

Mwendo: [16:14] Which is right down her in the Lower Ninth?

Joshua: . . . is right down in the Lower Ninth Ward. After St. David . . . and I'm not sure . . . I think Ike, Jr. went straight into St. Augustine [High School]. Yes, because I remember him catching the bus from down here. I used to get into many battles with the priest at St. Augustine because he would always be late. The bridge would go up. I'd have to go fussing and trying to get him back in school.

My daughter, one of . . . They went to Annunciation [High School] until I saw that Annunciation [?] wasn't any better than any public school. They would come and tell me about the things that were going on. I thought I was buying them into a better school. I took them out and put them in Thirty-Five [McDonogh #35 School]. Ike, Jr. didn't go to Thirty-Five, but the two girls graduated from Thirty-Five. I transferred them to Thirty-Five. They both graduated.

Ike went on to Xavier University. Of course, he got married and he never did finish. He had two years at Xavier. My middle daughter, Sheila, went to UNO [University of New Orleans]. She stayed there for two years. Jeannie, she didn't go to college. She got married and then studied to be a licensed nurse.

Mwendo: Okay. I'm going back to this part, because you just said it. You were always in a position of being a social worker. Not officially, but you were always conscious of the community, helping people, and that kind of thing. What was it like before Betsy to develop this community? Tell me, where was the community right before Betsy? What level of infrastructure was in place by the time Betsy was here? Then what kind of community . . . what kind of cohesiveness was happening before Betsy came through?

Joshua: Well, I may have the years kind of mixed up, but I know we were fighting for things down in the community. I think at that time, Moon Landrieu was . . .

Mwendo: Or [Victor] Schiro, I think.

Joshua: [18:48] Schiro, Schiro. Yeah, and Schiro was mayor. We would negotiate and meet with him. I remember Moon Landrieu . . . Schiro was out of town. We were fighting to get a playground back here. Moon Landrieu came to my house to meet with me about . . . What happened was, we started a fire on the [?] We cut grass and . . . because we couldn't get any recognition from city hall, we just started burning the grass.

Mwendo: Why you couldn't get recognition from city hall?

Joshua: It was an African-American community. They were not interested. They were not doing anything. We didn't have any playgrounds. We didn't have any kind of recreation for our children. To attract attention, we called the stations. We got out there, cut with our grass cutters, and act like a bunch of crazy, militant people. That's when Moon Landrieu came and promised us all kind of equipment and this Florida [Avenue] playground on that side of . . . where there's nothing now, but we did . . . temporarily we did have a playground. Because of the social and economical conditions of the community, parents just couldn't or didn't have the time to invest in recreational activities. You have a lower income group, you'd call meetings in the playground and no one would come because it was getting off of the bus. The buses would take an hour and a half or two hours to get down here. There was little participation in terms of getting people . . . Most of our meetings was just the leaders, the people who were really interested. But in terms of getting community people to come out was very . . . as it is now, it was hard.

Mwendo: How the community was looking right before Betsy? What was the feel then?

What was the potential you felt then?

Joshua: [20:53] Well, before Betsy, I think you had a thriving community. You had people who were able to live up to the income that they . . . They were able to keep their property up. They were fighting for survival, but there was a general . . . You could pass any of the houses and see them painting, cutting the grass, and with an investment in their particular

property. Because even though it was a low income group, you still had a group of people who were . . . who wanted to be a part of the mainstream America and have that nice house.

Whatever money they had left after they paid their bills on a Friday. They would try and do some improvement to the little houses that they had.

Prior to Betsy, we were so proud that we were in a community where people were really trying. Trying to get the best for their children and fighting for a bus to come down. For a while we had to walk from Claiborne Street down here. We just didn't have any buses, we didn't . . . You had people who would go to meetings and advocate for better services down in this area, because you had that group of people who had come down here with a dream, with a hope of improving their life for themselves and their children.

Mwendo: Okay, let's move on to Betsy.

Joshua: [22:35] Oh, Betsy was . . .

Mwendo: Okay, so this is right before, like . . . Betsy came to New Orleans September the ninth, 1965. I'd say like September eighth, September seventh . . . actually, it start hitting . . . it was in August when it started hitting the . . . I don't know if it was Florida then, I'm not sure what the dates were once it . . . but around from the end of August until that September ninth. Did you know about that storm coming? What did you tell me about how the . . . What were you doing the days before?

Joshua: [23:13] The day before Betsy, I was scheduled to have surgery. I was going in for . . . I had had . . . I had cancer. I'd had surgery prior to that and then I had to have . . . the day . . . September the tenth, I was scheduled to have a mastectomy. I was preparing my house, stocking up my freezer. My baby was sick with the fever. I didn't watch the TV. I didn't know any news. I just was so busy hanging up curtains, getting my house ready for my convalescent period when I would come out of the hospital with my three children and would be home. I didn't know . . . I didn't know anything of . . . I just wasn't listening to the news.

Then, I had an old television. I was doctoring up my baby, who had the fever, in the back of the house. My oldest, my son, was watching TV. He would run and tell me, "Mama, they say the eye is coming in." I'd say, "Yeah, now go ahead back and watch it again." My husband was around on Jourdan [Avenue], at a beer parlor on Jourdan Avenue with his fishing buddies. That went on throughout the early part of the night. The wind was blowing and . . .

Mwendo: None of the neighbors said anything?

Joshua: No.

Mwendo: Nobody told you? Did they know?

Joshua: [24:40] Well, no. If they did, there was no knocking on the doors or anything. When he came back and hollered again at me about the third time, he said, "Come. You got to watch it." I was bathing my baby with alco-rub and my husband around the corner, so I called him. I said, "You come on over here! We're going to be floating down the canal, and you'll be

over there!” He came. The wind was blowing and we was trying to . . . We really were not preparing to leave. We was just trying to buckle down for a hard storm.

Suddenly we heard something under the house go [claps hands] boom. I didn’t know what it was. He went outside. We had a porch and he had his boat out there. He had a car. He ran back in, he said, “Grab the kids and come on in get in the boat. We got to get out.” No, before that, we had two cars. He said, “Come on. You drive one car, I’ll drive another. We’ve got to get out of here.” When I looked . . . We were all in our night clothes. When I looked outside, the trees were swaying and the wind blowing. He’s telling me to drive a car. I said, “I can’t . . . I can’t . . . I can’t drive. I can’t get out of there.”

Mwendo: Now this is the day of the storm?

Joshua: No. That’s when the storm was going up. That was September, yes.

Mwendo: The ninth.

Joshua: [26:12] Yes, the ninth. But see, the storm hit us . . . It was at night when it hit us. All I could look out there and see things blowing and going on. By the time we got through negotiating about what we would do, the water was at the porch. We heard a bam, and then we saw the water. And so . . .

Mwendo: You say you heard a bam, you say you heard it under the house or . . .

Joshua: No, when the water was coming under the house. Yes, we heard the explosion, but we thought it was from the storm. Then we saw all this water gushing coming to us from the levee, not from St. Bernard Parish, not where the storm was coming. The storm was coming into New Orleans, but the levee . . . when we heard the noise, the bam from the levee, the water was gushing on us from the levee.

Mwendo: You saw that water coming?

Joshua: I could see the water. We could see it . . . You're in water. You could see the water, the waves coming. We were frightened to death. We were so frightened that the boat was right outside of the house, my husband got down in the boat off of the porch to pull it to the porch, and there was water in it. The water was all in my house. I mean, the water was up, we were walking . . .

Mwendo: Was it fast?

Joshua: Yes. It would . . . just rose up.

Mwendo: About how fast you'd say it was coming?

Joshua: [27:35] Well, that happened in about a half an hour or so. We were walking . . . I had made a reflection. I looked at my sofa that I had plastic on and there was water. My husband had gotten paid that day. I say, "Oh wait! Let me go get your wallet!" He said, "Just

bring your ass out of here and get in this boat!” We got in the boat, put on raincoats, with a gown and, I think, slippers or something. The children was dressed and put them in the . . . By the time we got in the boat, then the neighbors was screaming and hollering and telling him to come and get them, because they were in their homes and the water was . . . We were in a river!

Mwendo: How many families were about in this block?

Joshua: Oh, in Betsy? We had . . .

Mwendo: Was it a full block?

Joshua: Yes, we had a full block . . .

Mwendo: Okay.

Joshua: [28:27] . . . when Betsy came along. The lady next door and her husband, Mrs. Baker and Emile, and all. They came over and got in the boat and a neighbor across the street. It was a twenty-foot boat, Evinridge boat. He just overloaded the boat with the people to get out. He turned the motor on. To show you how powerful that water was coming in to us, we spent all night with that boat trying to get in the next block to Odele, his aunt, a two-story house, the house is there now. It took us all night to fight that current from the water coming in. At one time . . . and I think we went down low and came back into the house because the wind was just blowing us back towards St. Bernard. All this was in one block, an area of one block.

My husband has some life preservers. You know what they call it, the lifejackets in the boat. He put one on me and the children, and the neighbors, they were all fighting for one. I told Ike Jr., he was a teenager then. I said, "Well, Ike, you don't need one because you can swim!" Ike looked down. I'll never forget. He looked at that water. He said, "I never swam in water like this!" My poor husband, every time he'd get the motor running, it was a thirty-five horsepower Evinrude motor. I'll never forget that. Every time he got it running, debris would come and stop it. He would have to get out in that water, stand in water like up to his neck to try and get the debris out of the motor. Because when the motor would go off, we would be pushed back towards the house. So that went on . . .

Mwendo: How tall was he? How tall was he?

Joshua: Oh, my husband was like six feet.

Mwendo: It was up to his neck?

Joshua: [30:27] Yeah, he was[?]. It was just frightening and as we would work down . . . Finally, the motor would go. We'd go a few feet. We'd pass houses of people screaming and hollering, and asking us to take them. That went on all night. All night we were riding in the water trying to get out.

Mwendo: There was no National Guard?

Joshua: No, nothing.

Mwendo: No rescue?

Joshua: No. No nothing. The water came on us. Within about a half an hour to an hour, all this happened just instantly. So fast, we couldn't even . . . we couldn't go back and look for a wallet or look for clothes to put on. We had a raincoat and tennis . . . The water was just there. There was nothing we could do but just try and get into the boat. The boat kept stopping because of the debris. People in one house over here on Florida Street . . .

Mwendo: Across the street?

Joshua: [31:28] . . . on Law Street. A man had broke a hole in the roof because the water was coming up to his roof. See, our house was high because it was on pilings. Then we were in the boat, so we was out of the water. He couldn't . . . because his house was low, so he was trying to get out. He was in the roof, screaming and hollering, but we couldn't . . . We had so many people in the boat, we couldn't rescue anybody. Then they'd say, "Please come back and get us." They just didn't know what to do. Sometime during that day of the tenth, we got down to the two-story building.

Mwendo: All night?

Joshua: [32:11] All night, we was rowing backward and forward. For one week after that, I couldn't take a bath because I was still [?] . . . going backwards in water from the . . . We got to the two-story building . . . The water was so high that we just got out of the boat and got into the second level of that house, right around the corner. It's right there, on Derbigny and Forstall. That was Odele Williams' house. We got up on that second level and other people who could . . . one man floated . . . He put his mother in a sofa and floated her in the water, because a sofa will float. I didn't know that, but it will float in water. He brought her to the house. The house upstairs, which is about four rooms, was just packed with people who went over there. Then somebody had the radio on. They said, "Don't drink the water." We survived until that next . . . no, a few hours in the house. We knew that we couldn't stay there because the water was . . . It was like in the middle of a river.

Mwendo: It kept coming up?

Joshua: Yes, yes. It was just coming up. We were on the second level. The water was coming up to the second level, so we knew we had to get away from there. Then, my husband said, "Well, we've got to try and get down to Claiborne Bridge." He said, "I've get to get you all out." He said, "Because I got to come back and try to rescue some people." He put me and my children and some of the older people in the boat.

Mwendo: What time of day about this was?

Joshua: Oh, that was about ten, twelve o'clock . . .

Mwendo: That morning?

Joshua: [34:00] That morning, yes. We had been fighting. Then, we got the boat. Then, that morning, Odele . . . I don't know. I think there was some bread or something. The children, when there's a disaster like that, they want to eat something. We fed them bread and something else. He said, "Well, we can't stay here. There's no bathroom, no water. You've got to get away from here."

We started the motor. He got the motor working and we went down . . . We went down to the Claiborne Bridge, but we couldn't get on that Claiborne Bridge for some reason why, we couldn't get on that Claiborne Bridge, but at St. Claude . . . he went on down to St. Claude Street and let us out, and he said . . . That was like about two o'clock in the day by that time. He said, "Go over at the Port of Embarkation, over there." He said, "Go over there and stay. After I try and rescue people, I'll come back for you."

Mwendo: That's at the end of Poland Avenue, the Port of Embarkation.

Joshua: Yes, correct; right over there. Me and my three children and some of the people that he rescued, we walked over there. But, the conditions was deplorable, it was just . . . because people in the area had gotten there before us; people who could get out, who got to the bridge, and would walk over. See, there was no water on the other side.

Mwendo: On the Holy Cross side, you're talking about on the other side of the canal.

Joshua: On the other side of the canal. I'm talking about . . . I'm talking about the Port of Embarkation that's down at the end on . . .

Mwendo: Of Poland Avenue.

Joshua: [35:45] Poland, correct, yeah. There was no water over there, so people had gone there as a site of safety. When we got there, it was just so many people. I told my kids, I said, "We can't stay here." I had a baby that was sick. We started walking down St. Claude Street. We walked from St. Claude Street. There was no telephone, no services, no money, so we just walked. We walked down to Canal Street with my two children.

I think, at that point, I got . . . I saw somebody who gave me a ride to my mother's in the magnolia . . . where the projects . . . where I had to move out to come down here, she had moved back in. They gave us a ride to her apartment. My husband stayed down here for, oh, it was about a week or so before I saw him, because he was down here trying to rescue people with his boat. We went up there.

Mwendo: He was rescuing people for a week?

Joshua: For a week, he was down here. It was just awful.

Mwendo: So people were [?]

Joshua: People were stranded in houses, on roofs . . .

Mwendo: For a week?

Joshua: [37:04] Yes, and he worked . . . Some coast guard people came, but it was very few and sparingly. It was mostly people who lived in this area who had boats, but you never heard anything about that. There was no recognition of community people who had done that. He got up there. He came back. He came by us in about a week or so.

Mwendo: You were scared? Did you think that maybe . . . You hadn't heard from him or nothing?

Joshua: Yes, but I was so busy trying to survive with my children. I knew that he was a man by himself and he could swim. He could operate that boat. I didn't worry about him as much as I worried about us with no money, no clothes, no nothing. Nothing, in our night clothes, no identification, no nothing, no toothbrush. The things that you would think, a toothbrush, a washcloth, a brassiere, and I had just had surgery. I mean, none of those things you had.

I went to my mother, who was a senior citizen, and she had nothing. We were there . . . I stayed with her for about three months, because he was still trying to rescue the house, but we had water up to the roof . . . ceiling of my house. He was trying to get things out and looking for things. He'd come down here. She only had a one bedroom apartment in the Magnolia Projects. It was just awful.

[38:39] Some of my friends, I mean . . . I went through . . . some of my friends would call and say, "I heard what happened. You're out of something? Well, come and I'll give you

something.” Then, I went to one girl’s house. When we got there, she brought us to the kitchen rather than let us sit in the living room. She went in her closet and started . . . instead of pulling those things out before I got there. She said, “Oh, maybe you can have this. Maybe, you can have that.” I felt like dirt. I felt awful. Then we went to the lines for the Red Cross . . . got a toothbrush . . .

Mwendo: How helpful were they? How was the Red Cross?

Joshua: Well, that’s a whole long story that I need to tell you about the Red Cross. That goes on and . . . That went on. I stayed out of my house a year, one year. I was with my mother. I think she got tired of me and my children. Then, my cousin, Reverend Gordon, Helen Gordon, and Chris Gordon, they lived on Fourth and Derbigny. Helen was teaching in Houma, so her house which was a big house on Fourth and Derbigny, would be empty. I met her husband, Mr. John, one day I was in Venus Garden buying some food for my children. I was telling him . . . I was so depressed, being displaced from fixing up my pretty house. Here I am . . . my mother would put out her worst linen and her worst towels. We’d have towels sometimes with holes. It was just so degrading and so humiliating.

[40:29] Mr. John said, “Oh no. You’ve got to come over here by us.” He had a two-story house and all. John Bright, Helen hadn’t married Gordon then. He said, “No. You can’t stay there with your children.” He said, “Helen is coming in tonight.” That’s when you would teach in Houma and come back on the weekend. You had to establish a residence to be out there, so she’d come in on the weekend. That night she came and got us and said, “Oh no. You come on over here.” We stayed with her for a year.

I was telling her I had a surgery pending. She said, "Well, you go and have it." I went while I was there, had surgery, and was staying there for the longest. My husband was coming down here, working on the house. I guess, he was probably going through depression, because when he wasn't working, he was drinking [laughs]. It just went on and on. One day, she told me. She said, "I'm enjoying you all, but it's time for you to go back home." I said, "But Ike said the house is not ready." She said, "Ready or not, you go back to your house." [Laughs]

Mwendo: Well, tell me about the Red Cross experience.

Joshua: Okay. Well, the Red Cross . . . I went and got the little immediate handouts and all. Then, right after the storm . . . Well, the two cars, they were gone. The boat was gone. With insurance money, we bought a new car. See, we got enough money to buy a new car. Then, the Red Cross, they were saying how . . . they were advertising that you could get a SBA loan [Small Business Administration]. Me, with my smart self, I said, "I am not borrowing money, because our president came on the foot of the steps, I mean, on the foot of the bridge on Claiborne Street, and he proclaimed it a disaster."

Mwendo: The president of the United States?

Joshua: [42:30] United States, who that was? [Lyndon] Johnson then. I think it was Johnson.

Mwendo: I don't know who was the president.

Joshua: Then, he said . . .

Mwendo: Yeah. Johnson.

Joshua: Yes, because I worked with that clean-up program and everything. I even used to correspond with Lady Bird [Johnson] because we were doing [?] But, he said, "I will restore you to where you was prior to the storm. I guarantee you." My neighbors, I talked to them. They say, "SBA loan with three percent interest." I said, "I am not borrowing a penny. I don't have any money. I've got medical bills. I am sick. I am not borrowing." I said, "The president guaranteed me."

I'd run to the meetings. I'd go out here in the parish. In St. Bernard, they gave them outright grants. The logics for that was that they were at the ceiling of their indebtedness. They couldn't borrow anymore money, so they gave them full grants to build back, people in St. Bernard. People in the Ninth Ward were accommodated by loans. That's what happened to this community. I mean, it was wonderful they thought. My neighbors all around here would go there and get five and six thousand dollars with three percent interest.

[43:52] I said, "I'm not doing it. I've got medical bills. I was guaranteed." We went on and on. We lived with the house needing repair. I said, "I'm not borrowing it. I'm not doing it." I would go argue and fuss at the meetings. They would always try and put me off.

Mwendo: What meetings were these?

Joshua: This was the . . . disaster committee that came down for the federal government, like the Red Cross.

Mwendo: Well, like FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency]?

Joshua: Yes, FEMA, right yes.

Mwendo: FEMA was holding meetings.

Joshua: Yeah. Yeah, right. You'd stand in a line, they'd go over your financial situation. Well, my husband was working for the railroad. I was a beautician, but I wasn't listed. You know, I would just do hair. My shop was gone. Our only income was what he was making at the railroad. It was comparatively a good salary, but it wasn't reinstating us to where we were.

[44:54] I held out and held out. I think I held out for a whole year. I would go to meetings. I'd write letters and just contest the idea of having to borrow money. Mr. White down here; he's dead, but he said, "Mrs. Joshua, you can get this money. It's so cheap, three percent!" I said, "I'm not borrowing. Our whole life was founded on not having indebtedness. I'm not doing that. I'm not going to do it." I just was persistent. Sometimes, my husband would argue with me and all. I said, "I'm not doing it. I mean it. I'm not going to get in any debt from a natural disaster."

Finally they did write out . . . I got some grants. I think I'm about the only person down here who got those grants. I got a grant to pay my medical business . . . my medical bills. Dr. Oshener[?] operated on me. That wasn't a small amount. I owed them, besides what my

husband's insurance paid. Then, we got grants to finish our house. We built the house. It was like a showplace because we had that cash money. Then we had his work. But we were duped all kinds of ways. We heard the water . . . we heard the explosion. We got the water instantly, too fast to get out. Then we were not accommodated like the individuals in St. Bernard. I would go to the meetings, because I was going to go to the meeting today for the . . .

Mwendo: The lots.

Joshua: [46:31] . . . for the lots, to see if the terminology was the same, that they told us at St. David that they were telling St. Bernard, because I'm sure it would be different. But, that's what happened to this community. That's why you've got such deterioration. On Tennessee Street, this street was a showplace. People borrowed money. When you get that lump sum of money, poor people get it. They're drinking. They're shopping. They bought everybody . . .

[End Tape 3336, Side A. Begin Tape 3336, Side B.]

Mwendo: Go ahead.

Joshua: This lump sum of money that people got from the Red Cross, they bought cars. They partied. They bought a few things for the houses. But after a while, the money was gone and the payment was due. The people . . . the whites on Tennessee Street could see what was happening to the houses from the water. They sold those houses, because you had people who

had money who lived in other parts of the Ninth Ward. They had cash money to make a down payment, so they made down payments and bought these houses.

[47:58] Remember, the population prior to Betsy was civil service people. Sort of like middle income, whites that lived over there. I don't think there was any blacks on that street. The blacks . . . that was another sense of arriving; buying houses, but buying houses that they couldn't afford. Women who did domestic work, men who was longshoremen who had seasonal and couldn't . . . bought the houses, and didn't have the excess money for the upkeep. The street . . . It just started deteriorating through the years.

Mwendo: Are you saying what happened was with Betsy, the whites that were on Tennessee moved?

Joshua: They moved out.

Mwendo: The blacks, when they got the loans, bought the houses.

Joshua: Yes, they bought the houses, but they bought a house that they couldn't financially support. Those houses, I don't know what they went for. You could see a For Sale sign all along Tennessee Street. It was a beautiful sight. They did some surface repairs. You know, the houses were in water . . . not long ago . . . Periodically, you go down Tennessee Street and you'll see people pulling that sheet rock out, because . . . through the years, since Betsy. Because most people just went in there, painted over it, and just did surface work. You got stuck with maybe an \$80,000 home. Your income was maybe \$30,000 or something like that. You

couldn't do any repairs. It's been general depreciation of property ever since then. There's not been any money, infusion of money in the community. That was a general . . . just a deterioration.

Mwendo: How many hurricanes you been through?

Joshua: [49:55] Oh, I've been through, excuse me, all of them since 1965. One of them, I was in Chicago. Ike was here, but I've rode them all. Now, the one that I didn't ride was the one last year. I was so afraid [?] escape. Remember when there was a general exit of the city? Everybody was leaving.

Mwendo: Yeah.

Joshua: Took me about four or five hours to get to Jacksonville, Mississippi. I had to stay in the auditorium, stayed there. Then, who was it? Morial [Mayor Marc Morial] wouldn't let us come back. When I got back, there was no damage. I said, "You see, I didn't have to leave." But I've been through all of them. I've never left. I've always said I was going to leave, and I don't.

Mwendo: Prior to Betsy, you hadn't been through a hurricane. So, you didn't even have any idea of what . . .

Joshua: Not as bad as that one. Then, we've had . . . Yeah, we've had hurricanes. Yes.

Mwendo: Okay, but you just thought this was a storm y'all could ride out.

Joshua: [50:56] Yes, we could do like we always did. We could have rode it out if it wasn't for the explosion. The explosion . . . See, what happened was, it's logical. They saved the city because if there wasn't an explosion, that water would have been pushed into the city. You would have had a flood throughout New Orleans. But, as it was, by this being low, the water settled here. Anybody who came back after the storm could see there was nothing but . . . closer from the canal down to like the next street, there was nothing but water that settled in this low spot. It made sense, but we thought . . . I thought that since I was sacrificed that I should be rewarded for that sacrifice, but we were not.

Mwendo: What happened with the explosion? What was the explosion about?

Joshua: The canal was . . . They broke the canal on this side. There was an explosion to let the water out to meet that water that was coming. See, St. Bernard had gotten it. The wind was blowing the water from St. Bernard into the city. Now, at the rate the storm was coming, it would have passed over the Ninth Ward and just went right . . . the water would have gone . . . The storm would have gone into New Orleans. But, when we had the explosion, it was like a combustion. It just . . . the storm and then the water from the canal.

Mwendo: Was there any, like you said, acknowledgement, warning?

Joshua: Warning? Nothing.

Mwendo: Even after, did they admit that they did it?

Joshua: [52:35] No. Well, every once in a while you will hear different people will say that. Nobody of any significance and nobody admitting.

Mwendo: Right.

Joshua: Right, no. Nobody admitting, but I mean, anybody could see that that was the logical thing to do. Rather than flood the city out, you flood a certain area. Then, when you do that, you need to compensate that area, those people.

Mwendo: The treatment was more like . . .

Joshua: Like what we usually get. The money went into St. Bernard in terms of . . . That's why St. Bernard is still financially stable, because they have gotten assistance. With all the storms, they get assistance. They get grants, but you don't get grants here. There's no such thing as a grant for anybody who's suffering from the Ninth Ward. People will go borrow money, buy rugs and put over the old floors . . . They just don't do it.

Mwendo: What is the community like now after Betsy? You had said that it never has returned to its state, even though the president said . . .

Joshua: [53:54] No. It didn't return financially, but it did . . . there was an upsurge of community activists. That's when we went into our stance in terms of trying to organize the community from 1965 on through the seventies.

Mwendo: Okay, so talk about that.

Joshua: Yes.

Mwendo: What was that like?

Joshua: We went through trying to get community people to come out and work. We had various programs. We initiated the breakfast program started at Lawless.

Mwendo: What was the breakfast program?

Joshua: Well, the breakfast . . . I was working over there. They had teachers over there talking about children suffering from malnutrition [?], who did not have breakfast and was eating when they came to school. The federal government passed a law that schools could apply for money to serve breakfast to children who were coming from poverty in the homes. Professor Isadore Wolf was a principal over there.

[55:02] When we went to him, I was on the . . . a part of the community action group. When I went to him, I was an aide over there. I said, "Well, you can apply for the breakfast program." He presented it to the faculty. They said, "No, that was too much work." We

organized and we fought for it anyway. It was sort of like pushed on them at Lawless; Lawless Elementary, the one that they tore down. They finally got the breakfast program. Sherman and all of them were active.

Mwendo: That was what? About nineteen what?

Joshua: Like nineteen, I guess, seventy [1970]. I had to get him to come over there and talk one time because they was just . . . Then, after they got the breakfast program . . . and that was at all of schools, that was a different . . . there was . . . That's when your school was first.

Mwendo: Ahidiana [Work/Study Center] or Dokpwe ?

Joshua: Dokpwe, yeah. But . . .

Mwendo: Work/Study Center.

Joshua: Yeah. But, that's when . . . I don't know. By working over there, I just saw so many terrible conditions in terms of what was going on in the community. People with the attitude of they're coming down to teach the children, not feeling an investment in the community, so much that I even sued the school board during that time.

[56:29] I was a teacher-aide. They had a perfect attendance certificate that they would give you for going to school. If I'm your aide . . . I mean, the children shouldn't think that there's a difference between the two of us if I'm left in that classroom. When it got time to give

the perfect attendance certificate, Professor Wolf told me that I could not go on the stage with the teachers to get my award, that they would give it to me in the classroom. I said, "No." I organized the teacher-aides over there. I said, "No. Something's wrong." I said, "You're not giving me a certificate in the room and the teachers going to walk on the stage. No, no, I'm not going to do that." I went to the school board. Then, during all of that, they were getting paid per day for our attendance. When we wouldn't come, that money was never returned to the federal government. We wouldn't get anything.

Mwendo: Where did the money go?

Joshua: The school would keep it. Put it in . . . what they called it? The slush fund and all. Yeah, they did all kinds of . . . but it was terrible.

Mwendo: You sued them?

Joshua: [57:43] I sure did, but I dropped it because I was having problems. I didn't have any family support. I don't think at that time you got any financial money when you sued. They just declared it right and wrong, and that's all. I eventually left the school.

While I was there, I thought two of the teachers would . . . that the children would. . . I don't know where I got the idea that the teachers should sit down and eat with the children. Then, we fought with our little committee with Sherman, Pete, and all of us. They wrote them a letter and said, "Well these are not second class children. You need to eat sometimes with the children." Of course, they cut up so much, you could see why you need that time off [laughs].

They finally ordered them that they need to sit at the table with the kids, even if they didn't . . . I think, now, they don't do that. You can eat in your classroom or you can even leave school. See, during those times, you couldn't leave the campus. You had to stay on the campus with the children. It was an interesting period.

Mwendo: This is what I'm hearing, y'all were . . .

Joshua: We were in everything.

Mwendo: Pushing.

Joshua: Yes, pushing.

Mwendo: Yes. Before Betsy, y'all were pushing to develop this community.

Joshua: Yeah, to keep it . . .

Mwendo: After Betsy?

Joshua: [59:09] It got worse.

Mwendo: Yes, the activism heightened.

Joshua: Yeah.

Mwendo: Was it not only y'all already had it in your blood to do it.

Joshua: But the federal government came along and said that we're going to give you X amount of dollars, but you've got to have community support and approval. That was right up our alley. You have to have . . . With modeled city and urban renewal, you had to have a group that would sanction whatever they had did, so we were in place. Whenever a plan came down for the area, it had to pass through us. Unlike this port plan, you're not going to have a vote on that. They're giving you two alternatives. They're saying the one that's the cheapest is what they will do. That's going to be to run a bridge from here all the way down to the parish and only one exit on Tupelo Street, which means that they're going to cut this community. But, you don't have that clout anymore since the federal government really don't say that community people really should have a right to speak. An example of that is that when they came along with improving the community.

Mwendo: When who came along?

Joshua: [1:00:24] When the federal government said in terms of what we're going to do. That was in '65. Then, in '75, I built this house. In '72 or '73 I was having . . . Not this house, I built this house in '75. But, the other house that we built with some community people and all, with those big blocks, the house was built with the blocks. Then, when we got money and got better, we added a whole den in the back, cement. It started pulling away from the house. When

I went to try and borrow money to correct because I could see the blocks. All I could see was I could put some cement in it and all. The architect told me that it would be best to just tear it down. I couldn't understand, because the house was in beautiful condition. I had new carpets and everything. They said it would be better to tear it down and build all over again.

It was federal money then that I applied for. You had a choice. I don't know if that exists anymore, because I had a choice of selling this one and going into another neighborhood, or getting financial assistance to build another house. Well, naturally my children didn't want to go anywhere. All they could think about . . . Ike and them say, "We'll have to have two cars if we move anywhere." So, I just tore that one down and built another one and had financial assistance through urban renewal. There too, you had federal guarantees in terms of what you could get from the federal government, but all that has been . . . you don't get anything. You get a little money through the weatherization program, and that's far and in between. There's very little money that come down and help people down here with their homes, which is why most people down here just can't survive. They just having such a hard time financially

Mwendo: You think it's just down here in the Lower Nine?

Joshua: Well, no. That's the Republican. That's all over this country.

Mwendo: [1:02:57] I mean over the years?

Joshua: Over the years, we did have some security and some backing with modeled city and urban renewal that we could apply for different funds. But, there's no such thing now. The

state regulates in terms of where that money will go for modeled city and what money that comes down. You know it don't come down to poor communities.

Mwendo: What came first? Urban renewal or model city?

Joshua: Urban renewal came first, then modeled city.

Mwendo: Do you remember when?

Joshua: That was . . .

Mwendo: Was it right after Betsy ?

Joshua: Yeah, that was after Betsy. We couldn't really do anything too much, because we didn't have the legislature down here to go into urban renewal project. We sent, I think Sherman and Marchand went up to Washington to advocate the group.

Mwendo: Was Sherman in office then?

Joshua: [1:04:04] No, Sherman, no. Sherman was an activist working in the community, but we knew that we had to have urban renewal to do anything.

Mwendo: Who was the representative? What was your representative doing?

Joshua: Wasn't doing much of nothing.

Mwendo: Nothing.

Joshua: Cicasio[?] was . . . During that time, too, Cicasio was active and Cicasio . . . They would come to the meetings and say little things. Our activists really were Sherman Copeland, Pete Sanchez, and Marchand, who would really, really go to bat for what was needed in the community.

Mwendo: If y'all weren't there, what you think would have happened to this community?

Joshua: [1:04:47] Yes, I don't think much of anything, but it was a lot of work, now. It was a meeting every night. It was going to different places, outside of Louisiana, fighting and arguing for what you needed in this community. I remember once, I used to go to meetings so much that my husband told me, "You can't go to any more meetings and drink." [Laughs] I said, "Well I'm not going out drinking. I'm going to meetings." It was an exciting time. It really was.

Mwendo: To be making such a difference.

Joshua: Yes.

Mwendo: To see the difference you're going to make.

Joshua: Yes, right, to see.

Mwendo: Well, talk about urban renewal. What was urban renewal?

Joshua: [1:05:39] Urban renewal was fine. It gave you a sense of importance because you had a word. Nothing could go on unless there was a consensus from the community. We had a neighborhood council that was the . . . body that . . . oversees . . . what was happening.

Mwendo: But what was urban renewal? What was the program?

Joshua: Urban renewal was when the federal government put money into various . . . You had to qualify. You had to qualify in terms of social economical conditions, educational background, the conditions of the property in that area, and in terms of the validity of the individuals being able to advocate and to administer certain programs. We met all those demands and those guidelines. It was a pot of money that could be spent in the community based upon what the community people wanted.

Mwendo: How was it spent? What did it do for the community?

Joshua: Urban renewal? It was spent to build homes. Remember, like I told you, Sherman . . . I mean, Marchand built those houses over there. Different people got money to invest and do various things in the community.

Mwendo: Wouldn't somebody say then that - I'm playing devil's advocate - wouldn't somebody then say, "This community had the opportunity with urban renewal and then later modeled city?" That I would like you talk about. "They had the opportunity to bring this neighborhood back up to where it was."

Joshua: [1:07:36] Well, it was just like anything else. Those people, most of the time, who were in leadership, got the money. Everybody in the group became millionaires, except me. They used to say that they thought . . . that when I was in the meetings, they would talk about certain things. After the meetings, other things would be discussed. I never got a penny, but I was right there along with the rest, the millionaires. They did get it. It's just typical.

Mwendo: What was the modeled cities program?

Joshua: The modeled city was that this program had federal money to say that it would be a showplace. That we could do all sorts of . . . There were certain programs that you could qualify. That you could put money in education, so we put money in schools. We put money in different projects. There were many limitations, I don't remember. We're talking about in 1970 I don't know the particulars. I know that at one time I wrote a proposal and got money. It was when the neighborhood was beginning to deteriorate. I had a clean-up program, pride baby pride. I did get money to employ people and get out there and clean-up in the community. We'd carried cans and garbage cans, and people trying to instill that pride in the community, to no avail.

Mwendo: I remember . . . To no avail. I remember Kenneth running one of those model city programs down here, Kenneth Ferdinand.

Joshua: [1:09:28] Yes, Ferdinand, right. He did. I can't remember what he was.

Mwendo: I think it was boys . . . I remember it was like a boys program? Enrichment program, or something like that.

Joshua: Yes, yes. There were many, many programs that people applied and run.

Mwendo: When the money . . .

Joshua: They got money.

Mwendo: When the money ran out?

Joshua: Ran out, that was it.

Mwendo: Then what happened?

Joshua: Then they moved. They ran out. They left. There went our communities.

Mwendo: Then what happened?

Joshua: [1:10:05] We're just poor [laughs]. We have deteriorated. Those of us who are here just . . . We're trying to do the best that we can. I guess I have not left because . . . I left for about a year. I went away to Atlanta to work on my master's. When I came back, my kids were at my house. I got an apartment out in Parkedalot[?] out in the east . . . but I wasn't satisfied in that community. I really wasn't. I remember one time, I was on the third floor. I fell down the steps. I screamed and hollered. Not a person came to see about me [Laughs].

Mwendo: Just let me get back into my community.

Joshua: Let me go back where my neighbors don't visit, I don't visit them. But, if they don't see me, they come knock on the door. It's so comfortable. There's a guy next door here, that I don't even see him sometimes. When I'm coming in, he'll say, "Goodnight Mrs. Joshua." At first, when he started doing that, it frightened me. But, then, it's a reassuring feeling that he's there watching . . . the guy across the street. So there's a bit of community. I guess we are community atmosphere in pockets and blocks. In some there isn't, it's just . . . There's a lot going on down here.

Mwendo: What you mean?

Joshua: Crime, exploitation, and some of everything. But, I don't know.

Mwendo: If it could have been different . . . Hurricane Betsy came through . . .

Joshua: [1:11:59] If it hadn't come?

Mwendo: No, no, no. It comes through, but how would it have, in your mind, supposed to have happened?

Joshua: If it were fair in terms of distribution of the wealth. If they were fair in terms of people in this community getting grants. If they were fair in terms of evaluating. What they said was, at one of the meetings that I went to and I almost fell out when they said, "In St. Bernard, everybody's . . . individually their case was different." They had to evaluate them differently and give them different amounts of money to reinstate them to where they were. Then, when they came down here, it was a blanket chart that they used in terms of what they would give you. It was nothing individually considered in terms of if you make \$50,000 and you've got \$25,000 worth of debt. Then, we will write off something. It wasn't that way. It was that here you could get \$3,000 SBA money.

Mwendo: That's it?

Joshua: [1:13:09] When they said that to poor people at a three percent interest, and poor people that had been paying twelve and fourteen percent interest for other indebtedness, they went for it. They thought I was a fool that I wouldn't get this easy money. I thought it was just awful, criminal, but it happened. At that time, you've got to remember that most of our leaders had kind of left or had gotten what they wanted and they were gone.

Mwendo: What do your children say about that whole experience with Betsy? Do they remember?

Joshua: Well, I got a daughter down here. Ike Jr., I think he just escapes [laughs]. They don't talk about it. It's like a period in our life that they really don't talk about it. It might be because they don't want to talk about it with me. Because I get on my soap box and I just go on and on and on. They really don't talk about it. My children are unique. I think it's as a result of the experience that they have gone through. Have they adjust? I don't know.

Mwendo: How you feel about it all? That whole experience?

Joshua: [1:14:49] Well, maturity . . . I mean, age has brought me . . . the militancy and the anger that I used to have, I've kind of mellowed out. I'm in a cycle of my life where I've got contentment. I travel internationally, I read, I do things. I live down here, but in a vacuum. I see things going on that really just very, very disturbing. But I can't go to meetings. I can't organize people anymore. I've done that. I guess now I'm just passing through and enjoying what I do have.

Mwendo: Yes, pass it on to the younger people to pick up the touch.

Joshua: Oh, they haven't picked it up [laughs].

Mwendo: [Laughs]

Joshua: They haven't picked it up. Some of them that pick it up, they get stressed out. They can't . . . they can't go . . . I mean, there's so many various things. We live in such a materialistic world. To go out, two and three meetings a night, and try and organize people when you need to. You know the educational system. You need to be there trying to help.

[1:16:07] I've got one daughter every night with her son trying to keep him on the right. He's ten years old. That's the only grandson I have. She can't . . . I've gone to meetings for her. She can't go to meetings. The one down the block, Jeannie, she has . . . Sheila, she work at Meshure[?]. She works so hard, when she gets home with those two girls, she's just out of it. Then, that's comparatively a good job. When you think about moms who work at Burger King and Popeye's, and come home with just enough money to make it to next Friday. Then, you got children who want \$150 shoes. I see them at the school where I work. They got a . . . I say, "How much did you pay for those shoes?" "One- hundred fifty" Of course they pride themselves on getting a crazy check. They spend that for the shoes and the various things that they see on TV, so I don't know.

Mwendo: There's another question I have. I think this is my last question. Then, whatever else you may want to add, you can add. Y'all had a boat to get out. I'm wondering what happened to other people who didn't have? If nobody came to rescue, nobody was around, do you know what happened to the other people?

Joshua: [1:17:36] Well, I told you, my husband and other men who had boats stayed down here for about a week rescuing people, bringing them over to the bridge. Then, there were a few coast guards that came down and rescued them. I don't remember the number of people

that died, but it was very far and in between, because we still were a community and people were . . . As we would pass, one time one man around the corner shot a gun up to get our attention. He said, "Please come back and get me." My husband said, "I'm going to come back." They did come back. They brought them. When they put them on the bridge, they went to various . . .

Mwendo: Shelters?

Joshua: . . . shelters and so they did . . . because he stayed away from . . . He worked at the railroad and he stayed away from work for about three weeks working down here. In the paper you saw the few little coast guard boats that were down here, but you didn't see anything about community people.

Mwendo: Do you want to add anything about this story? This has been a really good story, very insightful.

Joshua: [1:18:46] It's been an interesting situation. It's been depressing if you just sit and think about the deterioration, the hurt, and the harm that has been done to a thriving community of people who had a dream. You know, who wanted to . . . families were split up. Families was torn because . . . as a result of what happened. It's been an experience to watch the exploitation of those who did fix their houses up and then sold them. Even, there's exploitation right now. There's money that some of our politicians get to build homes. There's a lump sum money that's allowed to the individual from the federal government when they buy houses. What some of our very politicians down here are doing, they will get that money through the city

for \$80,000 homes. By the time you buy it, it cost a \$120,000. That money still don't get to you. That's exploitation. That's what's going on here. I guess it's going on nationally. It's just depressing to see that we keep electing people thinking that this is our salvation and it is not.

I listened to one of the newly elected politicians the other day make a speech. Her answer to the reason why she won . . . I'm taking so much pride in women winning the election. She said, "I won because God is with me. He was with me. Unlike my opponents, He was with me." Well, God . . . If I was her opponent, then that means the devil was with me [laughs]. That is the feeling that you get, so you know she don't have any sense of kinship to help anybody. She feels that God has just dropped her down here. She is better than anybody that she ran against. I said, "God, what have we created?"

Mwendo: What's the answer?

Joshua: [1:21:16] You tell me. We could sit here for another two or three hours and try and come up with an answer, but the answer is that people need to get involved. Everybody on this block who is trying to keep up their homes, in this one block, they don't get home until six and seven o'clock at night. They're working. The lady across the street keeps that house up so nice. She's a maid at Tulane University. I mean a janitor. She catches the bus. She don't even have a car. I don't know if she votes. The older couple right here on the end of the block, this man, he didn't want himself or his wife to go in the nursing home, so he saved money. He died, she didn't go in the nursing home. She's still there and they're taking care of her around the clock. This is somebody you can't get to fight and keep anything up in the community.

My daughter, who has . . . a single mother, who has two children, you can't get her to go to any meetings. I can't get her to go anywhere. By the time she finishes with these two girls, one is at Xavier University and one is at Kennedy [John F. Kennedy Sr. High School]. She is my . . . The age that I was when I was out there fighting and advocating and the change. She's there struggling, single mother with her children. The people next door and the church across the street, that's money over there. I don't think they have one or two college graduates in that church, but they are a closely knitted group, in terms of falling out in a community or doing anything. See, no, they're saving their souls. You can't. What are you going to do?

Mwendo: The churches aren't stepping up either? Haven't been stepping up?

Joshua: [1:23:21] Then, our representative that went out in office, we thought he had moved in to move up, to help people. They get richer and richer and we don't see them. Then, unfortunately, I went to some political meetings this time and got in an argument. The people down here will vote against you, not for you.

They didn't like Sherman because they say he wasn't coming to meetings. Sherman was in Baton Rouge, [Louisiana]. Now, no matter what you say about him, I worked in Baton Rouge. I used to go to those legislative sessions. He was the smartest thing that you could get in a legislative session and fight for various things, whether you agree with his philosophy or not. He couldn't come to meetings down here every night, so they said . . . they voted him out of office. Who did they vote in? Another person. Was he at a meeting every night? What did they do? They voted him out of the office. Who do we have now? Were there any promises from the

person that we have now? No, but each one of them go into office, come out millionaires. So what is the answer?

Mwendo: What's the position of the churches in this community? The church, like the church across the street? I'm thinking even during disaster periods, like Betsy, and when it's not a disastrous period.

Joshua: [1:24:46] Well, it was a little church, but I know them. They had a church next door. It was Reverend Paul. It was a family oriented . . . But they're so busy struggling for survival, in terms of reaching out helping and passing out baskets and everything. This is not rich people, but it's a rich church. St. David's I think is about the only church that will have meetings. Now, what are they doing? They'll open the door. Whether the politicians are paying them to have those meetings? I don't know, but they do open their doors and you do have meetings.

We have a community center, Pete Sanchez Community Center [Andrew P. Sanchez Sr. Multi-Service Center]. I tried last year to be a part of that group. I used to be the president. I was active, so I went there. I think, they told me you've got to fill out an application and pay some money. I did that. Then, when I'd go, I'd be asked questions. I'd be ostracized. I said, "Oh God, I don't have time for this." What are they doing? They go to meetings. They recognize a groundbreaking activity. It could be my negativity, my criticism. The younger people, I don't know. They're . . . like I said, moving out. In terms of what will happen, the future [?], I think it's just going to be a drug infested community.

[1:26:36] We've just seen that they're fixing Claiborne Street [correction: Avenue]. Claiborne and Forstall was a haven of activity for drug use. We used to march down there, call the police and everything. Well, they've moved since they're fixing the street. If you leave here at night and pass on Derbigny and Reynes [Street], there's the activity. It just moved. It's not just here. Now, it's all over. Somebody's a billionaire selling drugs to our community. We don't have to worry about the man killing us anymore. We're killing ourselves. We're killing our future generation, our kids. I see it coming [?]. That's it?

Unknown: There was just something you said a while back, "I used to be president."

Joshua: Oh, of the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council and the Area Beautification Committee. My husband also was president of the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council.

Mwendo: They're kind of very closed, right now.

Joshua: No, they're still there.

Mwendo: No, I mean they're operating, but it's like hard to just come into a meeting.

Joshua: Yes.

Mwendo: They keep things kind of . . .

Joshua: [1:27:53] Yeah. What we used to do, we used to have loud speakers in the neighborhood to announce when we'd have a meeting. We would send flyers out in the community to let them know that there was a meeting. Then, we'd invite politicians to come. One time, we were concerned about the arrests going on in the community of the young people down here. Before, it was just so bad. I remember Sherman Copeland came to the meeting. They were saying, "Well, we call the police. They pick them up today. They're out tomorrow." They said, "Okay, now. Remember what you're saying now. Tonight when you call me to bail your son out, remember what you're asking me tonight." Which was the truth, because it was our children. They were picking them up out there on the corners. Yes, we would call and say, "Get them out of jail." So it's a cycle. What's going to happen? Then, we're not investing any money down here. We go . . . What tomorrow is? Friday? Saturday?

Mwendo: Friday.

Joshua: You get on the interstate, go to Lakeside [Louisiana] between nine and twelve, and see where our money is going; Clearview [Mall]. You go into the plaza, you see how empty. Now, the Grand, they just put the Grand Theatre up there. They're advertising trying to get people to come. My girlfriend went to a movie the other day. I said, "Well, did you go to the Grand?" "No, we went right there to Chalmette." That little stinky place, when you got the Grand right there. If we don't go there, they're going to have to close that down. We go to Lakeside and Clearview. We go to those theatres and intermingle.

Mwendo: You still got that fight Ida Belle, but you're also at peace. You just need to calm your life down.

Joshua: Yes, I do.

Mwendo: You seem happy, even in the light of all of this.

Joshua: [1:30:04] Oh, yes. You can't stay . . . There's a point you get to. I do what I can. I help educate my grandchildren. That's why, I'm working there. My daughters, I help them and all. They don't ask me, but I help them. I could have . . .

Unknown: There's just a few more minutes, just a few more minutes on the tape.

Joshua: Yeah. I could have gone and did anything. I had a job in Atlanta. I loved Atlanta, but the children said, "You're going to leave us?" So, I came home. I travel. I've been all over Paris, Africa about five times, all of the islands. Every year, I go somewhere. Nationally, I go once a year. I mean internationally. I'm active with the black social workers. We travel and network with other social workers; find out what they're doing, come back, see what we are not doing, and trying to do it. I enjoy that. Try to turn it over to the younger people, but they're not willing to take up the chores

Mwendo: Well, Ida Belle, this has been very enlightening. I want to thank you very, very much.

Joshua: Well, I'm so glad to tell my little story, because I talk and talk and talk.

Mwendo: [Laughs] Somebody needs to hear it, you know.

Joshua: [1:31:28] I could go on and on and on. Yes, I could just go on. Sometimes, when the children are here for dinner, I go on. I make them . . . I put my [?] up. I make them go through the [?]. Some of them, they look and everything. It was so interesting. One year, they all came. I think, some of your children, they passed by, Mysha[?], Keenan, and all of them. I asked them. I said, "Tell me, what can you do to make this a better world?" I was so impressed with the response that they gave. I said, "You see, we don't hear this. We see the [?]" I was really impressed.

Then, another holiday, this one that's going to Xavier down here; she was just going. She had some of her friends in the community, college students . . . I'm always posing some question to them. I said, "Well, now some of you all in college. Suppose you give Mia[?] some words of wisdom." It was surprising. One boy said, "Well, don't go out every night. Then, when you get assignments, go to your room, get it that night and then, go out if you've got to go out, but remember why you're there." She's struggling trying to make it. She's not an A student, but she's got tenacity.

Mwendo: That counts for something.

Joshua: [1:32:55] Yes, she's trying. Then, the one who live with me; Kiki[?], she's in Washington. She's doing fine, so I keep trying to push them. The one at Kennedy, I thought she was a dummy. She made a three point average. I said, "Well, she'll do it at her own pace."

Mwendo: [Agrees] There's still hope then.

Joshua: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Mwendo: Anything else you want to say about Hurricane Betsy?

Joshua: About Hurricane Betsy? I just think Hurricane Betsy was just a negative point in the Ninth Ward. I think it just more or less . . . It stimulated some group and activities, but it wasn't continued. The interest . . . our so-called leader left and . . . [Tape ends abruptly]

[1:33:58]

[End Tape 3336, Side B. End Session I.]