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Session I
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[Begin Tape 3339, Side A. Begin Session I.]

Nilima Mwendo: Today on December the second . . .

Dorothy Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: . . . two thousand three. This is an interview with Dorothy Mackey Prevost, who is a long time resident of the Lower Ninth Ward of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. And she is one of the survivors of Hurricane Betsy in the Lower Ninth Ward. So this interview is being conducted on December 2, 2003 at her home [address removed] and the interviewer is Nilima Mwendo. So what I'd like to do, Mrs. Prevost, is start off with background information. For you talking about, a little bit about where you grew up. Are you from here, are you from New Orleans?

Prevost: [1:05] I'm right there in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Mwendo: So you've been in the Lower Ninth Ward all your life? What was it like? What year . . . around the years that you were a child . . . What were the years when you were a child

Prevost: Well, from . . . let's see, from a baby. I went to McCarty School at first grade.

Mwendo: And McCarty School is . . .

Prevost: Kindergarten.

Mwendo: McCarty School is where?

Prevost: It used to be in the place where Martin Luther King [School] is.

Mwendo: That's on Caffin [Avenue] and Claiborne [Avenue].

Prevost: [1:47] And I . . . After going to McCarty School in the thirties, I went to Booker [T.] Washington [High School].

Mwendo: That's uptown. That's on . . .

Prevost: Yes, that was the only school besides [McDonogh] Thirty-Five and Gilbert.

Mwendo: Gilbert Academy.

Prevost: Gilbert Academy. Then they had . . . Oh, I can't think of the name of it right now, but it was by Methodist people. It's around Ursuline [could mean Ursuline Academy or Ursulines Avenue] and . . . they have a home now, they got there.

Mwendo: On Ursuline?

Prevost: Ursuline and I think Gilbert. Gaudet [Normal and Industrial School, later Gaudet Episcopal Home].

Mwendo: Gaudet it was called, I didn't know.

Prevost: [2:48] Oh yeah, Gaudet. Across the river was [L.B.] Landry [High School], and that was the extent of that.

Mwendo: For African American children . . . high school students.

Prevost: High school. McCarty School was the oldest one down here. Everybody went to McCarty School. They had a friend of mine, he's dead now, he said that he would like to make a book of all the people that went to McCarty School and what they were doing and what they have done, because it wasn't never recognized down here. But, in Betsy, I was here.

Mwendo: Well what was it like? I'm still going to do some background before we get into Betsy.

Prevost: Oh, okay.

Mwendo: I want to find out who's the person I'm interviewing. Who is this person? What was life like for you? This is our pre-Betsy story.

Prevost: Okay.

Mwendo: Okay? So what was McCarty . . . What was McCarty like with all African Americans in this community going to that school and everything?

Prevost: One of the best things that happened, McCarty School. I learned from first, second, and third, and fourth grade, I have never forgotten.

Mwendo: What are those things you learned?

Prevost: [4:13] Oh, like adding, dividing, multiplication. We had a speech teacher that taught us different speeches, like the Gettysburg Address. I still know that. "*The Night Before Christmas*." I taught my oldest girl "*The Night Before Christmas*" in a couple of days. We used to make gardens at the school, one of the best. We kept with a lot of trophies. They didn't want to change the school, but they had to change. It was deplorable [?]. It came down.

Mwendo: The garden . . . Was it like a contest between schools? You said y'all won awards?

Prevost: Yes. [agrees] Used to be a contest with the best garden.

Mwendo: Was it between just African American schools or was it all the public schools?

Prevost: I imagine it was just with the African American schools. Not the . . . just like with McDonogh. We used to go to McDonogh's after the white children.

Mwendo: What's McDonogh? What do you mean, went to McDonogh?

Prevost: [5:34] You know [John] McDonogh, the statue. McDonogh Day, they used to call it. I think it was the first Friday in May. Every school used to go to McDonogh to the monument and leave flowers.

Mwendo: Where's the monument?

Prevost: It was on Lafayette [Street] and . . . Lafayette and St. Charles [Avenue].

Mwendo: What happened?

Prevost: We used to go after all the flowers was dead. We'd go after the white children would leave. We'd all be in white. It was nice until you learned better. Then the school stopped going because of that.

Mwendo: A lot of the schools were named after McDonogh.

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: So it was the public schools paying homage to McDonogh for the contribution . . .

Prevost: [6:29] That he made.

Mwendo: . . . that he made in starting . . . in funding all these schools.

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: So y'all would go after the white kids went for their celebration?

Prevost: They went early and we went after them.

Mwendo: By then all the flowers and stuff were dead.

Prevost: Were dead. The same way with the Toy and Doll Fund. That's still going on today.

Mwendo: What is that?

Prevost: The Toy and Doll Fund.

Mwendo: The Toy and Doll Fund, oh.

Prevost: [6:57] Yeah, where they give away Christmas toys for the children. I can remember when I was small, a lady used to live next door to us and their name was Jones. She used to bring us to the Toy and Doll Fund early, early in the morning for one little gift.

Mwendo: What was it like? What happened?

Prevost: It was nice. You never . . . It was just the joy of going in and having to maybe eat ice cream or popcorn or whatever they were selling in the stand. It was at the Pelican stand. Pelican, used to have a . . .

Mwendo: Stadium?

Prevost: Yes, they used to have baseball there.

Mwendo: Where was that? Wasn't that down here?

Prevost: No. It was way uptown. The Pelican Stadium was way uptown, [?] Pelican Stadium was at . . . Tulane Avenue, somewhere around up in that section. But it was for . . . We used to get up early, early in the morning and go.

Mwendo: Was it around Carrollton [Avenue] and Tulane?

Prevost: [8:12] Yes, somewhere around . . .

Mwendo: Was it around there?

Prevost: . . . somewhere around that way. We'd come back with one little gift. Sometimes we'd make two trips.

Mwendo: Why would you do that?

Prevost: Get another toy.

Mwendo: Oh. [laughs] Because you were only allowed one toy?

Prevost: On toy, yes, one toy. We'd come back and get another one.

Mwendo: But what you found out about that? You said just like the McDonogh Day, it's just like the Toy and Doll Fund.

Prevost: They would go the week before us. They would go before us. Now they go . . . all . . . everybody goes together.

Mwendo: Yes.

Prevost: But they would go a week before us and then we'd go the next week.

Mwendo: But you didn't learn all of this until you got . . .

Prevost: [8:56] After, because I got older. Then I guess when I was about six years old or before that, I didn't want to go anymore because it was too far. So we stopped going. One little gift. But the lady next door used to be bringing her children and she used to bring my sister and I. And then we stopped going. But I had a beautiful life. I lived at [address removed] When I moved in the house, I was eleven years old. I stayed until I got married in twenty-two years. That was the most happiest moment of my life.

Mwendo: Oh, tell me about it.

Prevost: We had six of us; four girls and two boys. I'm the only one that's left and I'm seventy-two. My mother died at sixty-seven. My brother died at sixty-five. Another sister died

at sixty-four. My oldest sister died at seventy-two. My youngest sister died at thirty-one. My daddy lived until ninety-four.

Mwendo: You look like you going to do that, because you look good for seventy-two.
Seventy-two?

Prevost: Seventy-two.

Mwendo: You look good for seventy-two.

Prevost: With the exception of this.

Mwendo: [laughs] I got gray hair.

Prevost: [10:19] I see that. Yes, my youngest daughter have more than the oldest daughter. Well my husband had gray hair when he was . . .when I met him at . . . let me see, I was nineteen and he was twenty-four.

Mwendo: What was the childhood . . . you said that was the happiest days of your life from eleven years old to twenty-two years old.

Prevost: It was just a joy with us six. My mother used to just cook. We'd play, it just was playing, make up our own game, play baseball. Sometimes we wouldn't have enough for to play

baseball and we'd just throw the ball up and down and then we'd catch it and we'd touch them and they'd be out. We'd make up our own rules and things like that. My mother used to make blackberry dumplings. We used to go pick blackberries right in the area. [phone ringing]

Mwendo: Oh no . . . hold up. [pause in tape] Alright.

Prevost: [11:22] We used to pick blackberries . . . used to pick blackberries and she'd make blackberry dumplings. The whole block would come in and they'd pick their little bit and then bring them to my mother and she'd make the dumplings. We'd all sit down and eat blackberry dumplings.

Mwendo: Was it like farms all around here or what? What did it . . . What was it like? What was the community like during that time?

Prevost: Everybody raised their own garden. We had one house and then we had another a lot, now this back on Flood Street. We used to raise all our garden, chickens, goats, cows, pigs, all that. When my daughter went to school she told the teacher that I lived on a farm. Because we raised that in gardens, corn, okra. My mother always did say, "If you have a little spot of ground, throw you some parsley." That parsley, green onions, all of that. Well, my daddy used to go fishing a lot and he would catch, oh, plenty, plenty fish. But we didn't have no refrigerator. We had a little ice box. Then we'd have give it away. We had a cow. Everybody came with a clean bottle and they got a quart of milk. So that's why I said it was so much fun back then with us, children and the neighborhood. It was neighbors. Everybody . . . "you give me this and I'll

give you that.” When the things was rationing in ’41, the stamps, my mother would have plenty stamps and she’d . . .

Mwendo: Now who were the stamps? Tell me about the stamps.

Prevost: [13:16] Oh, it was like things was rationed, like.

Mwendo: This was during the Depression?

Prevost: Yes, sugar, let’s see what else . . . The lady next door used to be on the WPA, that’s what we used to call it, the WPA. She would . . . My mother wasn’t on the WPA because my daddy used to work on the riverfront. He had . . . supposed to have plenty money. She would divide up something. Like, my mother would have this and my mother would give her that, and she would give the stamps to mother. They’d divide up like that. She would cook greens and then hand it over the fence. Fish, and all that, like that. They’d hand each other, they’d give each other all over the neighborhood and it was . . .

Mwendo: The people looked out for each other.

Prevost: Each other. The mothers look out for the children. You could tell a child, say, “You know your mama don’t want you out that yard. Go back in that yard.” But it’s different now. That’s why I say I had a lovely life back there at [address removed]. It’s still there since

'38, I think my mother and them bought the lots and they built their own home, '38. We moved there in '39, something like that, '40, '41, something like that.

Mwendo: You say they built their own houses, like your daddy and . . .

Prevost: [14:50] My daddy and my uncle . . .

Mwendo: . . . built the house.

Prevost: . . . built the house. Uncle Pearl[?].

Mwendo: Did other neighbors come help? Or it was just the two of them?

Prevost: Well, they came and pitched in, like you knew something about this part, you did that. My daddy would go help the next neighbor and things like that.

Mwendo: So how you met your husband?

Prevost: Oh, we were at a baseball game. I had a girlfriend of mine, her father-in-law used to . . . He organized a baseball game and his name was Mr. Parker. He was so good with youngsters. They used to play ball, he used to manage them, that's how it is. They used to play baseball. I came to the baseball game.

Mwendo: Where was the game?

Prevost: [15:43] The game used to be back of Tupelo [Street] and Law [Street], they had an empty lot and they used to play baseball. I was there at the game and I was rooting for the opposite team and he kept saying, "You know somebody over there?" I'd say, "No." He'd say, "You ought to go ahead on over there because you're rooting for them. Go ahead on over there. Don't be rooting for them and you sitting over here." Then I used to be agitating them because when they'd get up and they'd swing a ball and miss, I'd talk about them. I had a bag of pork skins and he said, "Give me some of them pork skins." I said, "No, indeed not." The next time I went he bought a bag and he bought me a bag. After that we've been going out. We started dating, going to the show, and then we married in '53. We had a baby in '54. She's forty-eight. Then later, in '67, we had another one, another little girl. I thought it was going to be a little boy, but anyway, I'm happy with those two.

Mwendo: Two girls.

Prevost: Two girls. The youngest one is in Lithonia, Georgia with two babies. Six . . . The little girl is six and the little boy is four.

Mwendo: You got your boy.

Prevost: Yes. So that's . . . yes.

Mwendo: The oldest one is, where is she?

Prevost: She's assistant to the biochemist at LSU. That's what she's doing.

Mwendo: She's in Baton Rouge or she's here?

Prevost: [17:43] She's here.

Mwendo: Okay.

Prevost: She's at LSU [Health Sciences Center in New Orleans].

Mwendo: What kind of work your husband did over the years?

Prevost: He was a mail clerk, sort mail.

Mwendo: At the post office?

Prevost: At the main post office. He worked there thirty-five or forty years. He was working first at the Veteran's Administration and then when he called for him to the post office he left and went to the post office. He stayed there until he retired and he died last Easter. He had Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. That was a job, two years, but God bless him, he didn't stay here long. Because my doctor told me he could be with that for twenty years. People have it a

long, long time, but he only had it . . . I guess he was getting it before, but I didn't pay any attention to it. But we was in this house for Betsy. The water came, I don't think it got to the ceiling, but we left during the night, the eye of the storm.

Mwendo: Did you hear any warnings. They had a day or two before the storm hit here, did you hear anything about it? Did you hear any reports on it? Was anybody talking about it?

Prevost: [19:18] No. I can't remember that. But I do remember when the water was coming, my husband had gone out with a light and he said, "I hear water." He had a little radio and on the radio they had said that - [Victor] Schiro was the mayor then - said, "Schiro bust the levee, broke the levee."

Mwendo: That's what the radio said?

Prevost: [agrees] So the water came from Jourdon Avenue where the Industrial Canal is. It also came from back there by the split or the slit or something like that. Because it doesn't have . . . Well, it might have a levee back there now, but they didn't have a levee, so . . .

Mwendo: Where's the split? Where's the split?

Prevost: I can't remember where that's at because they've done changed it up so much around here, but that's where our water came in.

Mwendo: Both ways.

Prevost: [20:20] Both ways, because St. Bernard down there didn't have no water and across the Industrial Canal didn't have no water. But they did have a truck, army truck, with a flash. I told Charles, I said . . . I said, "Why they got an army truck over there with a flash?" He said . . . He went to see, but the man couldn't see because the canal was . . . a canal in the middle of Tupelo.

Mwendo: At Tupelo?

Prevost: Tupelo, it was a canal, they done change it. But anyway, the people didn't know if the canal was there or the water, because the street was so full of water. He was making . . . turning that light around and telling us we had to leave because the water was coming.

Mwendo: So y'all did . . . How much time you had between when he gave you that warning?

Prevost: No time at all, not any. We left out here and my husband was working that night and I was laying on the sofa right there by that door by that window. He said when he got on the bus, the bus driver said, "The last person that get off this bus turn the bus around." He was the last person right there on Gordon Street. When he got home, he ran all the way here. My little girl, my daughter and I was laying on the sofa sleeping. He said, "Girl, you get up! You don't sleep in this kind of . . ." Because I had never been in a hurricane before. He said, "You don't

sleep in this kind of weather.” Well if I was, my daddy and them would wake us up. He said, “You don’t sleep in this kind of weather, girl, get up and put on some clothes!” Had on some shorts. He said, “Put on some clothes and get something together in case we have to leave.” He took the cocktail table and nailed against the window because the window had broke.

Mwendo: With the winds and . . .

Prevost: [22:13] The wind and . . .

Mwendo: Is it because of the wind?

Prevost: . . . and the debris was flying all around.

Mwendo: Were you scared?

Prevost: I don’t know. I wasn’t frightened. Because I guess I was sleeping. I didn’t hear it. I’m a sleeper. I could sleep right there. When he came home and he got us together and we went to the school out here, it was McDonogh 19 [School] at that time.

Mwendo: On St. Claude [Avenue]?

Prevost: St. Claude.

Mwendo: St. Claude and Alabo [Street]?

Prevost: [agrees] When we got in there and we sit down a little while, the water started rising to the first floor. We had to go upstairs. Then the next morning they had . . .

Mwendo: Y'all walked over there or . . .

Prevost: [22:57] Oh yes, we walked over there.

Mwendo: Did you have a car at that time?

Prevost: No, we didn't have a car. We walked and I think my husband carried . . . Tessie because the water was over her head. Because it was way up here on me.

Mwendo: Up to over your chest.

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: Up on your chest.

Prevost: We went to McDonogh School. First we went to the fire station, but the man told us we couldn't come in there because the water was going to come in the fire station. He didn't have nobody to go open up the school. He said he couldn't open up the school until they give

him permission to open up the school. Somehow, some kind of way, they opened up the school for us and we went in there by the school. The next day, the water was high. We got in the army truck.

Mwendo: Was the water still high then?

Prevost: [23:48] Yes, the water still high. It was coming.

Mwendo: Was there a lot . . . a lot of people in there?

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: What was it like sleeping there the rest the night?

Prevost: Oh, we'd just sit up, because you had your head on the book.

Mwendo: People were just sitting at desks, putting their head on desks and laying on the floor and what?

Prevost: Several of them died.

Mwendo: Died?

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: Tell me about that.

Prevost: [24:12] I don't know the fellow's name, but they had two people die at the school. They just put them in the hallway and I was crying and the people thought I was kin to the fellow, but I didn't know him. But I guess I was upset. To see . . . they just . . . Well, they had an undertaker was there with us that night, Calvin Young. He just put him in the hallway and I guess he pronounced him dead or they called the . . . I don't guess nobody could come out there then, because the water was so high. We left from there and we went to the Port of Embarkation.

Mwendo: And that was in the army trucks.

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: The army trucks started coming. How many army trucks came?

Prevost: Oh, there was plenty of them. Everybody who wanted to go, just hop on that truck.

Mwendo: It was like an open-bed truck or . . .

Prevost: Yes, [agrees], I think they had that canvas on the top of it. But they had the back open and you could just jump in. My husband had to pick us up and put us in the car. He was very tall. He was six foot four. He put us in the truck and we went to the Port of Embarkation.

Mwendo: Were people . . . How were people acting during all of this? Was it like panic? Was it like . . .

Prevost: [25:31] Yes, indeed! Yes!

Mwendo: Screaming and crying and . . .

Prevost: Yes, yes.

Mwendo: What was it like? What was it like?

Prevost: Some people got drowned. I done forgot how many people got drowned, but my mother and them . . . my mother and my sister had five children and my other sister had two and they went to upstairs house around the corner from them, [address removed] from around the corner from them. They stayed in there and then they . . . the truck came and got them . . . a boat came and got them. Then came from down the upstairs and got in the boat. Two of my little nieces almost drowned because they was fixing to fall in the water.

Mwendo: When they were getting in the boat?

Prevost: In the boat.

Mwendo: You know anybody personally that did drown?

Prevost: [26:23] I don't. They had people from way back then but I don't know them.

Mwendo: Did you see any bodies in the water? Did you see . . .

Prevost: No. We didn't see that because we left. But my . . . after my husband brought us to the Port of Embarkation, he came back here and he got some clothes out of the house and he told me, that's the only thing that stayed, that coffee pot. He said, "Guess what? Your coffee pot was floating in the back, all around the house." I had never used it, and I haven't used it since. But I kept it, because he threw it out and everybody was coming pick up . . . pick up the things as you throw them out. They thought they could save them, I guess. I got that. My husband threw the phone out, the telephone, just made a clean sweep.

Mwendo: How long did y'all stay in the Port of Embarkation? It was at night . . . at night you went over to 19, to McDonogh 19.

Prevost: And then we . . .

Mwendo: The next morning . . .

Prevost: [27:25] We left before that morning because the water was getting too high. It was coming in on the first floor. I thought it was going to come to the second floor, so we left.

Mwendo: Okay. So how long were y'all at the Port of Embarkation?

Prevost: We was at the Port of Embarkation for about three nights.

Mwendo: Oh, three nights. Wow.

Prevost: Oh yes, it was . . . I guess people was opening up for us, but the Port of Embarkation was closed for years. The dirt was about that thick on that floor. You either had to lay in that or clean your spot up. I would clean, they'd give us some cots to stay on and blankets. We had three cots, the babies slept in the middle of us. I cleaned up that place, that space, and mopped it, got all the dirt from there. I was sneezing because I have an allergy. The next person, I guess if they wanted to clean up, they'd clean up their space. The bathroom was, woo! I think the Pampers was just coming out. It was stopped up. My husband say, "If we stay in this place I'm going to lose my mind." We went by a uncle of his. [background noise] [speaking to someone] Oh I had . . . you left them in?

Unknown: [agrees]

Prevost: You left the key in the door?

Unknown: Yeah.

Prevost: [29:18] Alright. [door shuts] They had . . . people just . . . Looked like there was too many people in that Port of Embarkation. My husband said, "If I keep this going, I'm going to lose my mind. Because I was going around cleaning up everything. I couldn't stand it. They had a little baby, she almost died in my arms. She died from malnutrition or water or one of them. Her mama was doing something with the other little baby and I told her, I said . . . I don't know the lady, and I said, "I'll hold your baby a while, while you do that." The baby kept going like this. Going like that.

Mwendo: They eyes like flickering?

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: Back like . . . in the back of her head like?

Prevost: The head kept going back like that. It was the people that . . . their parent was in there, and they found their parent. That was something else too. When they saw their mother or their sister, and they thought they were dead and they came in this place. One lady just fell out on her daughter. Her daughter came to look for her mama. She ran to her mama and when they embraced, the mama passed out, happy to see her. But I didn't have but that one girl. The other one came way beyond that. Everybody was in there and they were crying. They fed us, the army fed you.

Mwendo: [31:18] What kind of food they got?

Prevost: [laughs] I couldn't eat it.

Mwendo: [laughs]

Prevost: But . . . My daughter integrated the school, Tessie, she integrated in 19.

Mwendo: Okay. Well, when you . . . okay, was that before . . .

Prevost: That was before.

Mwendo: In the fifties?

Prevost: Sixties.

Mwendo: That's right, the early sixties. Oh, that's your daughter!

Prevost: She met one of the sergeants or something or the captain and he recognized her. He said, "You Tessie Prevost?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Come on in here." Said, "I'm going to fix you some dinner." Poor little sugar, she fixed us a plate and she'd bring it to us, and that's how . . . because they eat better than these people. They had rice, it looked like it was grits. Coffee, they had the grounds. You know how they just put the grounds in the bottom and pour

the coffee over it and the grounds, they call this instant coffee. Sometimes they had grounds in the coffee.

Mwendo: This is at the Port of Embarkation?

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: Were there white and black people all mixed up in there or did they separate y'all or what? How was that?

Prevost: [32:38] They didn't have any white. They only had black. I guess they went to different, different sections, because I think a lot of them went across the river to the naval station, something like that. But I guess they was in there and then they left out. But I didn't see . . . But I do remember seeing a white lady walking with a crutch. She used to live right there on Tupelo Street. She had . . . the water was up here.

Mwendo: Up to her neck?

Prevost: She was walking on crutches. But you know, most of the white people had moved from down here. They didn't have any in the Ninth Ward back this way. They moved across St. Claude. It's a funny thing, the water wasn't on Rampart Street. It was just . . . it fade away like that.

Mwendo: In the Holy Cross side.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: They hardly had any water?

Prevost: [33:33] No. Because I knew my girlfriend kept calling me to come out there. I said, "Well what she calling for me for. She got water just like me." I didn't go, but she said the water came to their steps. But it was something to see. I hope I don't ever go through that again, once in a lifetime.

Mwendo: So y'all were at the Port of Embarkation for three days and then you went over to your husband's uncle's house, which was where?

Prevost: On Dumaine Street, Dumaine and Villere [Street] or something like that. It was right across the street from the San Jacinto [Hall], I don't guess you remember . . . you know about that.

Mwendo: What is that?

Prevost: The San Jacinto, [Prevost's pronunciation sounds like "sanna simmons"] that was a dance . . . a big dance place.

Mwendo: How you spell that? Sanna simmons?

Prevost: San Jacinto.

Mwendo: Sanna simmons, okay. It was a dance hall?

Prevost: [34:27] It was a dance hall. That's where all your . . . musicians and things.

Mwendo: On Dumaine Street.

Prevost: Fats Domino, Paul Gayton, and Annie Laurie, Ray Charles, Amos Melbourne[?].

All of them came there. There was a big dance hall. We went there, and then didn't want to come home.

Mwendo: Didn't want to come home?

Prevost: Because the people out there used to sit out on their steps and we never did do that here.

Mwendo: Oh. Why is that? Why is that you think?

Prevost: I don't know. It was just a custom. In that ward, that was the Seventh Ward I think, they'd just sit outside. That's the way they had their little parties. They'd sit and they'd

drink their little beer and sit on each step to step. That's what they were saying, they wanted to take the stoops back, the steps. We call them steps.

Mwendo: Oh, the stoops, yes.

Prevost: [35:39] They wanted you to come back and sit on your stoop. But you can't do that now. But anyways, when I went there, and it was amazing to see the people doing that.

Mwendo: Sitting on their steps?

Prevost: My husband said, "We're going home and we don't have but a bed." [laughs] Because this here was here, the stove and the . . . I didn't lose my stove. My daddy came here and did something with the stove and the oven, and . . . not this refrigerator. But he brought the refrigerator back. He put a torch or something behind it and I cleaned it out and he put some kind of . . . to get the odor out of it. We had that a long time, then I got this one.

Mwendo: What kind of assistance did you get? Because usually when they have this kind of . . .

Prevost: We made the SBA [Small Business Administration] loan. They wouldn't give us no assistance because he was working at the post office.

Mwendo: Oh, they say he was making too much money?

Prevost: [36:46] Too much money. I was . . . We were young, so they wouldn't give us nothing. But the Red Cross did give us a couple of sheets, sheets and pillow cases. They must have given us about three sets of sheets and pillow cases.

Mwendo: Where did y'all go? Where did you go? Do you remember where you went to get emergency assistance? Like the Red Cross?

Prevost: Oh, they gave us a bed. They gave us two beds. You could go to . . . It was a certain amount of money. You can go anywhere you want to go, but it was just a certain amount of money they gave you. I had bought my other furniture from Hurwitz Mintz [Furniture]. When I went to Hurwitz and Mintz, I couldn't find a bed for that price that they gave us. What they did, they just gave me two beds and a mattress and a spring for that amount of money, and then they knew I was coming to buy the furniture from them again. So they gave me that.

Mwendo: Oh, so Hurwitz Mintz gave you . . .

Prevost: [38:00] No, they gave me a check, the Red Cross gave me a check. I can't remember how much the check was, but it wasn't enough for two beds for there at that place. I guess I could have gone to Universal [Furniture] or something like that and they'd . . . but I guess I had them lower the prices because he just told me go. I couldn't pick out the expensive bed now. But he told me, said, "Pick out any one of these here beds." They had them. When I came . . . when I went back my husband said, "Well let's make the loan." SBA loan because we had to take all this . . . the sheetrock out the house.

We took all the sheetrock out, but we didn't have to do nothing to the outside because it was brick. We took all the sheetrock out. We made a loan. I think the loan was . . . forgot how much the loan was. [. . . ?] But anyway, we bought the furniture, the same furniture here. We bought some clothes, our watches. No, not my watch, because he gave me a watch when we first got married, so I still have that. But different things, and food. But I forgot how much that loan was, but I know when we got down to a thousand and eight hundred, I think it was . . . a thousand five hundred, they just outright give you that.

Mwendo: This is the Small Business Administration?

Prevost: [agrees] Small business loan. We had to pay it back. But I finished paying it. I forgot what year I finished paying.

Mwendo: Y'all did go through the process though, of trying to find . . . Was FEMA here? Did you know . . .

Prevost: [40:17] No, FEMA wasn't here then.

Mwendo: FEMA wasn't here then. It was just Red Cross that came.

Prevost: Red Cross, yes.

Mwendo: Okay. Did y'all try and see if y'all could get any kind of grants or anything, this being a disaster area?

Prevost: Yes we did. I went up there to the Red Cross there at . . . a section set up for it. You had to go from seat to seat, like they said, until you get up to the front. I went and sit and sit and sit, sit, sit, sit, move all around until I got to the front and they told us that my husband was working at the post office. Then they had all that in . . . I don't know how they got it, that he was working at the post office and I was young and we could get the loan, get our money, our things back. I didn't want to get the loan. I said, we could . . . like we did for the furniture, paid before, so much a month.

[41:23] He say, "No we going to get this loan. Everybody said they have to get the loan." So we got the loan and we paid it back. But this is the result that I had before Betsy. The water start coming in up under the floor by the wall, and I kept putting spreads all around the wall. My husband said, "That's not going to do any good." He said, "The water's just going to come in." He said, "They done broke the levee. I heard that on the TV." He said, "That's it. We've got to go."

Mwendo: How far up did the water get in your house?

Prevost: It didn't get to the . . . When it settled, it settled right by the top.

Mwendo: The top, almost to the ceiling?

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: About how many inches from the ceiling?

Prevost: About four inches or something like that.

Mwendo: Okay. That's pretty high.

Prevost: [42:29] [agrees] Because when we came back in here, they had a line where the water . . . I guess a couple of days it take to get out. I came in and the guys next door - well, not next door, the next door because my mother-in-law was living next door - they came and helped me clean up in here. We washed all the walls down. Just as we finished the last wall, they all came tumbling down.

Mwendo: The walls came tumbling down?

Prevost: The sheet rock just kept crumbling.

Mwendo: Crumbling.

Prevost: Then I had to pull all that out after all that washing I had did with . . . I pulled all that out, took all that out. I put the sheet right there.

Mwendo: We about to get to the end of the tape.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: [43:22] Okay, so do you know how long . . . Well, I think I'm just going to stop it and turn it over because we're so close to the end. We got a little bit of space. How long was it before you could even get back here? Get back into your house . . . how long you had to stay?

Prevost: Oh about two weeks.

Mwendo: Two weeks. Was the water in here for two weeks?

Prevost: Oh no, the water wasn't in here for two weeks, but that's when we came in to clean up, to take all the stuff out, to clean it out, put it outside. The garbage man took it. People that wanted it took it, but it wasn't going to last because it was, the furniture was mildewed, had big hunks of green and moss on it.

Mwendo: Yeah.

Prevost: Mold and . . .

Mwendo: Yes. It probably was stinking.

Prevost: [44:17] [agrees] I went back and got the same furniture that I had with the exception of the bedroom, I had a mahogany bedroom set in there, but it was too high.

Mwendo: What you mean? The price of it was too high?

Prevost: Yeah, it went up.

Mwendo: [laughs]

Prevost: I didn't get that, but everything else, was just like that.

Mwendo: Okay. Let me stop right here and . . .

[End Tape 3339, Side A. Begin Tape 3339, Side B.]

Mwendo: [44:48] At the time when it happened, do you think it was just [?]?

Prevost: After.

Mwendo: Okay.

Prevost: But I've been down here seventy-two years.

Mwendo: All your life. What was it . . . What were you feeling as you went through all of this? You went through this disruption, a big disruption in your life. You come home, your house is falling apart . . .

Prevost: Crying, distress, stressed out. My dresses went all the way down to my ankles.

Mwendo: That's how you started wearing dresses like that?

Prevost: No, I left them. They came back up. But I mean my dresses just . . . I had lost that much weight. They just went down.

Mwendo: Oh, I see.

Prevost: [45:33] Went down and . . .

Mwendo: This was hard for you.

Prevost: Yeah, but you know something, I was a size twelve at that time. My mother used to work at the school, at Hardin School, and Mahalia Jackson sent us some clothing. I'll never forget that.

Mwendo: When was this?

Prevost: For during Betsy.

Mwendo: Really?

Prevost: [agrees] Every dress she sent, my mother pick up, I could put on, size twelve.

Mwendo: So Mahalia Jackson, the gospel singer?

Prevost: The gospel singer.

Mwendo: So was she sending it to everybody down here or she knew your family?

Prevost: [46:13] No. She just sent it down here in Ninth Ward.

Mwendo: To help the people. Now why did she just send it in the Ninth Ward?

Prevost: Because we was the one that was . . . the Lower Ninth Ward with Betsy was . . . The people across the bridge, they didn't know we were in water until that next day when they flash the light. The electric was off. She just sent some clothes down here. But I didn't know Mahalia Jackson personal, but [?] I attend church. Her stepmother used to be a member of our church. They say when she used to come in town she'd come over there. But I can't remember that. I think that was before I got married. But I remember her coming, her stepmother being a member of the church when I joined that church. But she just sent some things down here.

Some of them was new. Some of them was old, we got them cleaned. My mother was right there where she could pick it out and she knew my size. She just . . .

Mwendo: You were in a lot of distress and lost a lot of weight?

Prevost: [47:40] Then I used to sew for my daughter. I make curtains, everything. But anyway, I use to sew, and I made her lots of dresses. She didn't have to worry about her. She just was worried about me and her, my other little nieces and nephews. But several people sent clothes. I don't know the other people name, but I do remember Mahalia Jackson sending packages down here.

Mwendo: What was the neighborhood like after Betsy? What was it . . . How was the . . . Before when you were growing up you said everybody was kind of dependent on each other. Y'all would help out each other and that kind of thing, barter. "I have something you need, you have something I need." What was it like after . . .

Prevost: It's not like that right now because the lady right over there, I don't even know her. I know the ladies down there . . . the lady down there, she's nice.

Mwendo: That's up the corner.

Prevost: [agrees] And the man on the end.

Mwendo: On the other end.

Prevost: [48:47] And his wife . . . the first house, his wife died. But they friends. The people in the upstairs house, well they both dead, but everybody around this way went to that house because it was upstairs, but us. We didn't go to the house. I don't know. My husband didn't even think about going to the house. But he was trying to go by his uncle house on Dumaine Street because my mother-in-law was at a convention and she was coming in town and the hurricane was coming here. It was supposed to be going to Florida, but it made a backtrack and came here. We didn't want her to go to Florida, but she went anyway. But we got the tail end of Betsy because it switched around and came this way. When he went to get her off the plane . . . the train, we used to go on a train at that time and he went to get her at the train station. Well, they wouldn't let her in the Port of Embarkation because they had too many in the Port of Embarkation. So he went by . . . She went by her brother house. That's when her brother told her, she also come and get me and the baby and we go up there.

Mwendo: She left to get away from the storm?

Prevost: She didn't know about the storm.

Mwendo: Oh, she was gone.

Prevost: She was going to the convention, the Baptist convention. During the process, Betsy made a beeline and came this way. She couldn't come in the Port of Embarkation because it was full.

Mwendo: Right.

Prevost: [50:19] She went by her brother house and her brother sent for us. That's where we went on Dumaine Street and we stayed there until we cleaned up the house and my floors came back.

Mwendo: Are these the floors before the storm?

Prevost: Not this one. I had rugs in there.

Mwendo: What? In the front room?

Prevost: Yes. This part in the front, I had rugs.

Mwendo: Okay.

Prevost: I took the rugs out.

Mwendo: All the carpet, you had to get rid of the carpet.

Prevost: The carpet. [agrees]

Mwendo: Then you put this kind of floor down. What's that? Like tile, like a tile.

Prevost: [50:49] That's a . . . oh, what you call it?

Mwendo: Linoleum?

Prevost: Ceramic.

Mwendo: Oh, that's ceramic tiles.

Prevost: Yeah.

Mwendo: Okay.

Prevost: The other one is wood.

Mwendo: Hard wood.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: That was under the carpet? Was that the original floor?

Prevost: Oh no, no, no.

Mwendo: Or y'all had to put that in?

Prevost: We had a slab.

Mwendo: Oh I see. Okay. So you put the wood floor and then the ceramic. Is this original?

Prevost: No. This not original either. This was tile.

Mwendo: Yeah, I guess it was so messed up. You had to change it.

Prevost: [51:17] But the tiles is good in the back.

Mwendo: Oh yeah, in the back of the house?

Prevost: [agrees] We had ceramic tiles in the bathroom and they stayed. But I guess these here wouldn't . . . I could have brought them back, but I just painting and all that in here [. . . ?]

Mwendo: [laughs] Was it the same kind of thing like before where everybody pitched in to redo the house or you got contractors to come in and refurbish the house?

Prevost: My son-in-law . . . no, no, no, my son-in-law, they weren't married then. I don't know. Some people just . . . He knew how to sheet rock and tape it, so he did most of that. Him and another friend of his, McCall, he's dead right now. But he came in and he gave him a hand and helped.

Mwendo: So it was people you knew?

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: So when did the neighborhood start to change? Like when y'all were . . . everybody kind of . . .

Prevost: [52:24] When we were living on Flood Street, everybody just spread out and went different sections. They bought their own house. We was renting that house. No. We was buying that house, Flood Street. But everybody went a different way. Those that didn't have their house, well they bought a house, they moved. The neighborhood . . . The old people was the same way, but the youngsters now, and it's just going down. But over here I have nice neighbors. The twins live across the street. Their daddy is the one that my husband saved him because he was . . . My husband told him, said, "You better get out here, Mr. Shell[?], because the water is coming." They just went. They had a car, they just left. Left us, but whenever they have a little disaster or something happens, she's going to call me because she said that she'll never forget me how Charles saved them from the flood. Because they had a tree that fell down on the fence and the wires was all over the fence. They was telling us, "Don't go touch the

fence.” She came over, she said, “Mrs. Dorothy I was calling you. The phone was down. I couldn’t get you.” Because we had an electric phone or a cell phone I think . . . no, not a cell phone, one of them cordless. When the electric went off, it went off. She came over here and she was telling us that.

Mwendo: What storm was that?

Prevost: [54:08] That wasn’t a flood. That wasn’t for Betsy. I don’t know. I can’t remember which one that was, but all the trees and things fell down. She came over and she was telling us about the tree, “Don’t touch the wire.” But everybody is nice. The old people is dead, the people at that corner over there, they dead. The lady and some other neighbors in that second house, they’re nice. And then the twins. I don’t know, those houses there are new, so I don’t know the neighbors in that house. But the lady down there, she’s sick now. She’s been here since the flood, since the children were small. We talk, but it’s not like exchanging nothing.

Mwendo: Like it used to be.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: How did your husband help the neighbor across the street that you say always come and say if anything happened.

Prevost: He told him that the water was coming, for him to get out. They had a car.

Mwendo: She remembered that.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: She said she's going to come check on you before she . . .

Prevost: [55:17] Every time, yeah, she checks on me. She calls me all the time. Whenever they have a cookout or something like that, she'll bring me some crabs, crawfish, or something like that, whatever they have. She's always inviting me over there, because they have a lot of parties or people coming. Whereas . . . Well, we used to have parties over here. But we don't have them any more.

Mwendo: When you think of Betsy what do you think about? When somebody mentions Hurricane Betsy what comes to your mind? What do you think about?

Prevost: Really, I got it out of the back of my head. I don't even think about it. They had a lady at church used to tell us . . . well I'm Baptist. She'd tell her determination and she would just cry about Betsy. But I didn't. I put that behind me. Look forward, pressed on to a better calling, Christ Jesus. That's what I'm doing now. I turned it over to God and he took care of the situation. The same way with my husband. I had a brother die in August, the fourth, of '02. I had a sister die . . .

Mwendo: Two thousand two?

Prevost: I had a sister died in September the sixteenth, '02.

Mwendo: Oh.

Prevost: [56:42] I had another sister, we were calling for her to get together to go to this other ones funeral, she was dead! Really! My husband had this Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. He died six months after that. I turned it over to him, and look at me. Really, I have no regrets. I'm happy! I can get in that bed and stretch out and wake up when I want. I have . . . My daughters laugh, I set my table with my dishes, put a paper plate in the center, where I sit right there. She say, "Well the spoon . . . the forks don't go with the paper plate." I got me some throw away forks and I sit right there and I eat. [makes noise] Throw it in the trash can. I cook maybe on a Saturday or Sunday, anytime I feel like eating something. I cook and I just let it run out.

Mwendo: I was talking with somebody in the neighborhood and they were talking about Hurricane Betsy, saying how the city decided to break the levee. Do you know why, if that is true?

Prevost: To save the business district. See, the water was going to go up toward Canal Street. So they let it come back this way. That's what he did. Schiro did that.

Mwendo: What you think about that?

Prevost: That's why he got out. He didn't stay long after that. They got him out of office.

Mwendo: Nobody reelected him.

Prevost: [58:24] Nobody reelected him. Everybody down here know that the situation . . . what he did.

Mwendo: Do you think about why maybe nobody said anything about it? Or did people say something about it?

Prevost: Well they said it about it, but he didn't admit that he did it.

Mwendo: What did he say?

Prevost: He didn't do it, the levee just bust. But on the radio they announced that Schiro had had the levee broke so he could save the city, the business district, and it came this way.

Mwendo: I was talking with the person that's down here in the Lower Nine and something about saying if there was a hurricane that came the same way as Betsy, they would do the same thing.

Prevost: Get out. Get out. That's the only thing you could do, because we're surrounded by water. We're already below. We're surrounded by water, just like a [?], a cup, it's going to

fill us up. That's the best thing to do is . . . Whenever they have a storm, really, I be uneasy. My daughter don't like to leave, her and her husband.

Mwendo: They don't like to leave?

Prevost: They don't like to leave.

Mwendo: They don't.

Prevost: [59:57] They like to stay. But I'll go and get me a hotel. I went several hurricanes and got a hotel. Because, we didn't have no water or nothing like that and the wind. But I just be frightened. Because for one thing, I don't know how to drive. If you caught in the water, there's nowhere to go. If you get in a hotel, it's kind of high. I don't have no people that I could go to that's out of New Orleans or out of the Ninth Ward. Most of my people is right down here. The best thing to do when you have that, just . . .

Mwendo: Get out.

Prevost: . . . get out. They tell you that. Don't wait too late, now. But a friend of mine was saying that she heard that they was telling you from . . . in St. Bernard [Parish] to get out. St. Bernard is not that far from her. But I didn't hear them when they said to get out.

Mwendo: They gave the warnings to St. Bernard?

Prevost: [1:01:16] They probably was saying it on the radio, if you in the lower area, like they do now, to get out. But we weren't paying any attention to it. I don't guess I was, because my husband wasn't home and he probably would have. Because he say he's been in several storms. He was in the navy and he was on a ship. He said, "You don't sleep when it be raining like this, girl. No, indeed not. You don't know what will happen." But they did say if you're in the lower section to get out. But at that time we didn't know where to go. But then we went to the school. But . . .

Mwendo: So if you . . . go ahead.

Prevost: No, go ahead.

Mwendo: If you had to say what's the best and what's the worst of Betsy, what would you say?

Prevost: Well, I lost everything. I didn't get . . . I didn't gain from Betsy. But a lot of people down here gained from Betsy. Like my sisters, they didn't have any husbands, they gave them plenty stuff, food, clothing, furniture, the people that didn't have or the people that didn't have substantial jobs. The people that had . . . making so-called money, they didn't give them anything. But my sisters, they both got houses, full of furniture.

Mwendo: Was that given to them or that was through a loan?

Prevost: [1:02:57] That was given to them. Red Cross give them that, clothing, furniture, food. I think they gave us thirty dollars. I'm not sure. Thirty dollars, because I bought food with that thirty dollars. They gave me some sheets, really. But they gave me thirty dollars. I didn't go back no more because they told me that I was young, my husband had a good job, so there was nothing they could do for us.

Mwendo: What was the best thing about Hurricane Betsy?

Prevost: [laughs] I really can't . . . most . . . I think it brought people closer together, because children, parent . . . Parents were more particular about their children and where they went and things like that at that time. But there wasn't nothing good about it for me.

Mwendo: But it did bring the community closer together.

Prevost: Closer, yes, closer together.

Mwendo: What kind of things made you see that?

Prevost: For one thing, the children all used to . . . the parents used to sit and talk, relate about Betsy. The schools used to have gatherings about Betsy. The people used to come to each other's house. Now, they used to come here, we didn't have no furniture at that time because we didn't get our furniture until after Christmas, I believe. We didn't have no furniture in there. We'd cleaned up the house and the floor, we'd sit on the floor and we'd put a box, and we'd

have our little things on the box, our food on the boxes. We'd just sit around the floor. That was a happy moment. All my friends used to come here and we'd go by their house, from one to another, until we all got our furniture. We all . . . we started going sure enough then after that.

Mwendo: You started what? Say it again.

Prevost: [1:05:26] We started going to each other's house often, because we had something to sit on.

Mwendo: [laughs]

Prevost: But it brought parents and children closer together, neighbors, neighborhood closer together. Because the people that . . . Well, Mr. and Mrs. [?] are dead now. I used to go by their house and sit. They used to keep the children, the little girl for me, when she come from school, because she was born . . . The other one was born after the flood and the oldest one was born before the flood. They used to . . . when I worked, she could go by any one of them house until I come home in the evening. Can't do that now. But that was something to think about. I hope they don't ever have another Betsy. Every time I hear a storm, I say, "Lord, thank you, Jesus." But the other people are getting it. I say if God was to listen to everybody, "don't let it come this way, don't let it come by me," what would happen? Somebody have to get it. But I just thank God we don't have it.

Because my pastor was saying that . . . one day he said, "If God would listen to everybody, everybody ask him for a different thing." I was reading there in Landers . . . Ann

Landers the other day where she was saying that somebody had wrote a poem and the things that they was asking for, and God gave them just the opposite because he knew they didn't need it. That's the way it was with the storm and I say, "Lord, thank you, Jesus," when it don't come this way. I am too old to start all over again. But, some people . . . and some people down there in St. Bernard in the lower part where they left from down here to go down there, every time they have a little rain, it floods down there. So we're still blessed.

Mwendo: [1:08:08] This is true.

Prevost: [agrees] We got lights all in the middle of the streets with Dutch [Ernest N.] Morial.

Mwendo: Oh yes, the street lights, you talking about the street light?

Prevost: Yeah, paved the streets . . . down here. We didn't have a paved street down here. But Caffin Avenue, [?] Avenue, and I think the government takes care of that. But the city takes care of the streets. We didn't have a street down here. You used to have to take your shoes off, wear some old shoes and when you get where you going, put on your good shoes.

Mwendo: Dirt road, it was like dirt?

Prevost: Mud, mud, mud, mud.

Mwendo: And that wasn't until Dutch Morial.

Prevost: [1:08:56] Dutch Morial came, he put lights all in the streets. He paved the streets down here in the Ninth Ward.

Mwendo: That's kind of recent, for not having paved streets and lights, that's . . .

Prevost: That's right.

Mwendo: That's a long time not having . . .

Prevost: That's right.

Mwendo: . . . what the rest of the city . . .

Prevost: That's right. We . . . I remember when Cicasio[?] was the mayor - no, Cicasio[?] was the council . . . councilman. He didn't even want to come on this street because when it would rain the water would just cover the whole street. We brought him around and let him see some of the streets down here. We said, "We don't think [?]." Then when he saw, he said, "No. That's okay." But Dutch Morial paved it, look we got a light in the middle of the block.

Mwendo: What took them so long?

Prevost: The money was going the other way. The money was appropriate for here. It wasn't coming this way. It was going somewhere else.

Mwendo: Why Lower Nine is treated like that?

Prevost: [1:10:05] It is still like that. It's the forgiven or forgetful ward. Our . . . Even our councilman, they look after the east. They're building the east up.

Mwendo: New Orleans East, yes.

Prevost: We don't have anything here. If I want a spool of thread, I have to go down there to Wal-Mart or either go in Jefferson [city of Jefferson, Louisiana, or Jefferson Parish]. I used to sew all the time. I don't sew no more because of that. I got to go way down there, not to . . . because Wal-Mart don't have no nice material. I got to go way out in Jefferson to get a piece of material.

Mwendo: There's no stores here you saying?

Prevost: No stores. No grocery stores. They only have them Vietnamese and them Arabs.

Mwendo: On the corner . . . the corner groceries.

Prevost: The corner groceries. You have to go down there to Winn Dixie or either go to . . .

Mwendo: That's in Chalmette.

Prevost: Yeah. All our money is going right down there in Chalmette and they're building it up.

Mwendo: They used to have stores here?

Prevost: [1:11:17] Yes, Schwegmann's. I was telling that to [John F.] Schwegmann when he came around last election, his wife was running for something and he came to see how she was making out, how she was doing.

Mwendo: That's Melinda [Schwegmann], right?

Prevost: Yeah. I asked him, I said, "Why would you get rid of all them stores?" "Why you bought all them stores in the first place? Bite off more than you can chew." I said, "But you could have saved the Schwegmann's up there on St. Claude Street or that one back there." I said, "Because . . ."

Mwendo: The one back there you're talking about on Old Gentilly Road?

Prevost: No. Across from Winn-Dixie he had a . . . that section back down there?

Mwendo: Oh yes, in the parish. That was still in the parish. Yeah, that big one in the parish, yeah.

Prevost: He said, "Well, you know how it is with the youngsters. They don't want to help and they don't want to do this . . ." But he bit off a little bit more than he could chew.

Mwendo: Now they had Puglia's.

Prevost: [1:12:13] Well that's the same way with Puglia's. Puglia's had the store. The old man died, one of the brothers killed himself and his wife. The younger brother, I don't know if he's living or not, but the children had it and they didn't want to . . . I guess it was too much for them. Then there's the problem with two sets of children dividing the money, too. I guess that's why he just give it up. But we don't have nothing down here. Now each one of our councilman are supposed to do this and supposed to do that. We keep putting them in, trying to get one that's going to fix up down here. Look at this lot. I have to call them to cut that lot every trip.

Mwendo: You got a lot, what? At the corner?

Prevost: Right there.

Mwendo: Oh, next door?

Prevost: [agrees] I'm telling her I'm in this house by myself. The grass is over the house. I cut close by the fence, but my husband always did that. But they don't come cut it. They cut it when it's around election time.

Mwendo: [laughs] Why they treat the Ninth Ward like that, Mrs. Prevost?

Prevost: I really can't tell you. I really don't know why. The last person that really was helping the Ninth Ward was [Sherman] Copeland.

Mwendo: How was he doing that?

Prevost: [1:13:48] He was doing good. Whenever you called Copeland, especially to cut that lot, he cut that lot and he told them, he said, "You see how them people cut that with the lawnmower close to their fence, that's the way I want it." They didn't have all these houses . . . all abandoned houses like this and the grass growing in the houses and all of that. He appropriate money for the . . . He kept our center open.

Mwendo: What center?

Prevost: E. J. Morris Senior Center.

Mwendo: It's still open?

Prevost: Yeah.

Mwendo: Oh, he's the one that kept it open is what you're saying.

Prevost: Yeah.

Mwendo: He kept getting money for it you mean?

Prevost: [Agrees] But Lucas[?] wanted to close it.

Mwendo: Really? Why he wanted to close it?

Prevost: [1:14:32] Because he wanted to bring his people in the running and he was going to close this one and open up another one. I guess because we weren't going to vote for it. We wasn't behind it. But I hope this little lady do good, Marchand[?]. But Mrs. Hazeur was good.

Mwendo: Yes, Ellen Hazeur.

Prevost: [agrees] She was good too.

Mwendo: She did a lot for the community you thought?

Prevost: Yeah. I can't see nothing Lucas did, but I guess if people that he give [?] to . . . standing in that big old long line all the way around this church. I guess they think he did good, but I don't. They built that . . . supposed to have built that lighthouse center, but I heard that's for them Arabs. He just . . . His name is just on the building. I don't know. But he was supposed to build a shopping center right there on Tupelo [Street]. No, that's St. Maurice [Avenue]. Tupelo and St. Maurice, St. Claude [Avenue], that big old pink building. But I guess after he wasn't elected I don't guess he's going to build nothing.

Mwendo: What you think is going to happen to the Lower Nine now?

Prevost: [1:16:15] It's going down. The children don't take care of the property. They've abandoned houses. The boys on the corner . . . well I guess they're on the corner of all of the neighborhoods. But you wonder who's going to run the city. They won't go to school. I imagine . . . I was telling that to a man, we were sitting down waiting for the country bus because I had to go down to St. Bernard, and he . . .

Mwendo: What you call it? The country bus?

Prevost: Yeah.

Mwendo: [laughs] There's a bus that will take you from the Lower Nine into the parish? Into Chalmette?

Prevost: On the parish line.

Mwendo: Oh you got to go to . . .

Prevost: You got to go down to the parish line and get on that bus and it'll bring you.

Mwendo: So you get St. Claude to the parish line and then you catch the parish line. Okay.

Prevost: Yeah.

Mwendo: So you were catching a country bus?

Prevost: [1:17:12] Yeah, twenty-five cents.

Mwendo: Is it today? Now?

Prevost: [agrees] With my red, white, and blue card.

Mwendo: No kidding!

Prevost: Senior citizen.

Mwendo: Oh, okay. Okay.

Prevost: This guy came just sit on the side of me and he said that he just came back from New York. Now, I don't know if he was telling me the truth, but he look like he had been in jail. But anyway, he say he was coming . . . he said, "It's so different!" He said, "The boys on the corner," and he said, "and the parent is upholding them." I said, "That's the truth. You find a boy with plenty one hundred dollar bills in his pocket and doesn't have a job, where he getting that from?" His tennis . . . his gold medallions across their chest, gold teeth, how they getting it? Thank God that I don't have that to worry with. I have two girls and they're working and they don't have no drugs in here and I thank God. I told my girlfriend I don't even get on my knees, I'm just thanking out loud, I be walking and thanking him, because I wouldn't know how to handle it. I guess I'd handle it like they would, like Bill Cosby did with daughter. Did you read the book?

Mwendo: [1:18:45] No. What did he do with his daughter?

Prevost: They had them four girls and that one boy, just like on the TV. That one girl went astray. She was on dope and he put her out. His wife, Camille, didn't want him to put her. But he put her out. He said that he could have went and got her cured if she wanted to, and until then she couldn't come back in this house. He forbid them to open the door for her, changed the lock on his door. Right now she done straightened up, she married a lawyer, got her life changed. But we cater to them when we give them money and all that. My sister had a grandson . . . I don't know if she was really afraid of him, but every time he ask her for two dollars, five dollars, she give it to him. I said, "Girl, don't be giving that boy your money like that. You know what he's doing with it." Now I wonder how he's making out because she's dead.

But God has been good to me, really. He's really been good to me. I had my . . . had cataracts removed and then messed up my eyes when my sisters and brothers died and my husband. I used to cry before my husband died, because to see him crawling on the floor like a baby. But after that I turned it over to God and I'm telling you, I don't believe I could cry because I don't think I have any more tears. I went to the doctor yesterday and he's sending me to another doctor because they're deteriorating he said from the time I got my glasses. That's what I was looking to see if that my glasses or yours.

Mwendo: [1:20:47] No. I think that's her glasses. Here, this is your glasses. That's your glasses. This is my glasses right here.

Prevost: I got plenty of them. One don't work, I go get me another one.

Mwendo: [laughs] You see another one?

Prevost: Oh yeah, here another pair. Now, I got a pair about two or three months ago and I can't even see out the [?].

Mwendo: [laughs] There it is.

Prevost: This is the latest one.

Mwendo: Okay. That look like a pair I used to have.

Prevost: I can't even . . . and they have the bifocals and everything.

Mwendo: And you can't see out of them. Your eyes have changed that fast.

Prevost: Yeah. She told me that they're deteriorating. But now, I can see far away, but I can't see close up. I need glasses. I need that light to shine right directly on it to read it.

Mwendo: [1:21:48] Well, Mrs. Prevost, we about wrapping up here.

Prevost: Yes.

Mwendo: I appreciate you sharing this story with me. I just want to get some clarification things out the way. I want to know how long you stayed at your uncle's house. I mean, your husband's uncle's house.

Prevost: We stayed there two weeks.

Mwendo: Two weeks. Then how long did it take you to get back into your house. Was that all two weeks too? Like were you living here while . . .

Prevost: Oh, the two weeks we stayed there, we just came and cleaned out the house. We moved in with a box spring, I believe.

Mwendo: Okay, okay. Now the water . . . Now you couldn't get in here for like the first week probably after the storm, right?

Prevost: Oh no. No, we couldn't get in here.

Mwendo: Right, but then like two weeks after that . . . It was about three weeks you were away from your home total?

Prevost: [1:22:44] Yes.

Mwendo: About how much?

Prevost: About a month. It was about a month because the next day after Betsy, the sun was shining just like this. You didn't think it had rained or nothing, a beautiful day. My husband came back in here, but he couldn't get in. The water was still in here, but he knew how to swim. They wasn't allowing them to cross the bridge.

Mwendo: They had guards up there or something?

Prevost: Yeah [agrees]. But he swim across there and came here. He came and got some clothes for the little girl, for my daughter, and a couple of things for me.

Mwendo: When he swam back here the water was still up?

Prevost: The water wasn't up high like it was. It was in here.

Mwendo: It was about to what level when he came in here to get the clothes and stuff?

Prevost: It must have been about . . . He's tall, it must have been about like this here on me.

Mwendo: To right, like . . .

Prevost: [1:23:49] Midway.

Mwendo: Yes. Like . . .

Prevost: Because he said . . .

Mwendo: . . . over his abdomen.

Prevost: He said, "Girl, everything is just floating." It had float . . . went down and started floating.

Mwendo: How he got past the guards?

Prevost: I don't know how he did it.

Mwendo: [laughs]

Prevost: I really don't know. He came back and he got some people. They were in . . .
Some people had put the cripple people in the closet.

Mwendo: What?

Prevost: [1:24:17] They had put their . . . On that shelf in the closet, he went got two
cripple people off . . . The lady told him that she had put her husband up there because she
couldn't get him out the water. When he said when he got there that water was right like this.

Mwendo: Right on him.

Prevost: On that shelf.

Mwendo: On the shelf, up in the closet. How long the person stayed up there?

Prevost: I don't know how long, but I know he went in and got him because the lady told
him that her husband was . . . I guess we was at the school and she told him that she had her
husband was in the . . . Told him the number of the house and where he was at and he went. Him
and some other guys went and got him out. They went in a boat and got him.

Mwendo: That was the night of the storm.

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: People had to go through some stuff?

Prevost: Yes indeed. The eye. Children crying, hollering, because they thought they was going to drown and thing.

Mwendo: And family members were scattered, some of them?

Prevost: [1:25:21] Oh yeah! They wasn't all together. Just like I was telling you about these people coming and seeing their parents and their children. Probably wasn't living in the same house with them. Because mother wasn't with us, my mother was way across the river at the naval station. But after we found out that they were there, somebody came and told us that they were over there, they was going looking to see who all was in different places. They said that they were over across the bridge.

Mwendo: That was another worry because you didn't know if your mama was living or dead?

Prevost: Yeah. [agrees] But my sister, my older sister was with . . . in the shelter with us. But the other two, the other ones was with her.

Mwendo: With your mama?

Prevost: [agrees]

Mwendo: And you didn't know for a while?

Prevost: Until somebody came in there and they told us that she was across the river.

Mwendo: How many days was it, you remember, until you found out?

Prevost: [1:26:22] It was recent, about one or two days.

Mwendo: Oh okay. That was good. Let me see what else I wanted to ask you. The dirt on the floor was about three inches high in the Port of Embarkation?

Prevost: Yeah, dust, black dust.

Mwendo: Then Hardin School, where's Hardin School? You talked about Hardin School. Is that on St. Maurice?

Prevost: No. Hardin School is back there on Law and St. Maurice.

Mwendo: Law and St. Maurice, yeah. I know where that is. Okay. Well I think that's all of my questions. You want to add anything? You want to say anything? What I forgot?

Prevost: You didn't forget anything.

Mwendo: Did I help you relive it?

Prevost: [1:27:09] Yes you did, yes, yes. Because I don't even think about it really until somebody really mention about it and then I'll think about it. But other than that . . .

Mwendo: Do you think the neighborhood would have been any different if Hurricane Betsy didn't come through here? What you think it would have been like if Hurricane Betsy didn't come through here?

Prevost: I think it would have been the same, because God has a reason for everything. I think it would have been just this way, just like it is now. That's like, a fellow was asking me, he said, "Do you believe in God?" I said, "Yes, I believe in him." He said, "Where was he, why he let all these people get shot? Your sister and your brothers and all of them died like that?" I told him, I said, "He was in the same place when his son died." He was in the same place. Just think about it. When his son died on the cross, he was in the same place where he's at now. Could have stopped it, but it was inevitable. That was going to happen. I don't know why he left me here, but I thank God.

When my sister died, we were sitting in church that night for the funeral. The next morning she couldn't . . . I guess she died when she went home. She couldn't get up. I was sitting right by her in church. I say he could have taken me instead of her. But I thank God.

Mwendo: Well I thank you, Mrs. Prevost, for this story. What I'd like to do is I'm going to transcribe this and then give you the transcript so you could read it over. You want to do that? Just whatever . . . if there's something I didn't catch or something that you want to correct, you'll have that opportunity to correct it. Then we're going to send this tape and that corrected transcript to the Hill Memorial Library and that's where it'll be archived.

Prevost: [1:29:39] Oh okay.

Mwendo: It's part of history.

Prevost: Yes, yes.

Mwendo: It's part of history. So I thank you.

Prevost: Well that's two of us in history.

Mwendo: Two of us in history?

Prevost: Yes, because my daughter integrated to school.

Mwendo: That's right. There you go. There you go. That's a beautiful story, too. That's a wonderful story, too.

Prevost: Yeah, I sure thought that was you, but I remember now it was that white girl . . .

Mwendo: Yeah, Kathy Randels.

Prevost: . . . because she was trying to get the program. She was trying to make . . . get some actresses and actors out here.

Mwendo: [Agrees] Yes.

Prevost: I remember.

Mwendo: [1:30:07] I think most of them came from Lawless, the kids that she got to do the acting came out of Lawless. I remember that. That was . . .

Prevost: Yeah. Because we went to practicing, when she was practicing with them. Then I went to the play.

Mwendo: Okay. Alright. I'm going to turn off the tape recorder now. We almost at the end anyways.

[1:30:29]

[End Tape 3339, Side B. End Session I.]