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**Session II**  
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**[Begin Tape 3341 Side A. Begin Session II.]**

**NILIMA MWENDO:** Okay, so we . . . this . . .

**LUCY THOMAS:** The end of it was when I got out the windows, we got out the windows and gotten in the boat.

**MWENDO:** [00:15] Yeah. So let me say this little part before we start. So this is the second session of the interview with Miss Lucy Thomas, who lives in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. This interview is being conducted . . . The second portion of the interview is being conducted on December the tenth, 2003, at her home on Tupelo Street. The interviewer is Nilima Mwendo. So yeah, the last thing we talked about was how you all stayed the night in the attic.

**THOMAS:** Yeah, we spent the night in the attic. And the next morning, we got out through the windows. We came down and got through the windows, because the water was still high, through the top of the windows, and went . . . caught a boat.

**MWENDO:** Did you have to go into the water to go . . .

**THOMAS:** Yeah, we had to go through the water. There was water in this house. It went all the way up there.

**MWENDO:** You swam? So did you swim?

**THOMAS:** [1:14] We just sort of took the kids, I was swimming through the windows and caught the boat. But we stayed in the attic all night. And then we left from there in the boat to a corner upstairs building right on Derbigny Street. Derbigny . . . and that's the sixteen-hundred block. I forget the name of it. Anyway, it's a two story building. We stayed in there. And when we got there, most of the people around the neighborhood in this vicinity was in the same building.

So I remember Miss Garcia's children and a girl named Linda Bryan[?] was with us. And I had a whole bunch of them with us and we were all going over to the two story building. And they stayed there until we got another boat. And we got . . . this other boat was taking just children and mothers out, and babies. And bringing them to the end of the Industrial Canal. And then we would, from the Industrial Canal, we would jump on an army vehicle. And that's when we went to the auditorium. But as my son said . . . He was a baby and we didn't know where he was.

**MWENDO:** When did he get separated from you?

**THOMAS:** He got separated from us in the water when we was getting out. He wasn't in this house. He was in the corner house with Miss Hendricks[?]. And they left and went in the same

place we were. They left from there and another boat took them to the Port of Embarkation. That's where they were. But we thought that he was behind us. When all those kids got drowned, I was like devastated, couldn't find him, didn't know what had happened. Was worried about him. But anyway, I had the other . . . Let's see how many kids I had with me. I had Geralyn, Ava, Thaddeus, Paul, I had ten children with me.

**MWENDO:** [3:53] They were neighborhood children?

**THOMAS:** No, these were my . . . I had five of my own, and five of my sister's kids.

**MWENDO:** So you must have been just scared to death.

**THOMAS:** Yes, my sister's children I had. At that time, one of my sister's children was a baby. She was, that was the one that was on the mattress. She was floating away, and Francis caught her and put her in the boat with us, and we went on.

**MWENDO:** And who's Francis?

**THOMAS:** Was my husband. Francis was my husband. Francis was the one was swimming. [laughs] Out there in all that water, going and getting help. He did a lot of swimming, because he was a good swimmer. He was jumping on this mattress, from one mattress to another, going to get help to see that they get us all out of here.

But anyway, Cherie[?], who was . . . they were Henrys[?] Cherie Henry[?] was with me, and Geralyn, Ava and Paul, Thaddeus and Gerard was with me. We had five of the boys, five, we had three girls and two boys. That was Paul and . . . Paul and Thaddeus that was with me. Because Gerard was with his mom. We didn't know where she was. She was somewhere else. Anyway, we left from there and we went to the auditorium and we stayed there until things got kind of calm. Went to another lady's house. Went to the Henry's house, see if I can get them to stay there. The mother says she didn't have no room, so we went by another lady who lived on Galvez Street. She kept us for several days, until the water went down.

**MWENDO:** How long it took for the water to go down?

**THOMAS:** [5:59] It took about three days. It took about three days.

**MWENDO:** Were you able to get back in after?

**THOMAS:** We came back, but we . . .

**MWENDO:** Or did they stop you from coming?

**THOMAS:** No, they didn't let us stay. We had to come get some of our personal things and come in. But the house was still full of water. By the time the water drained out, then we had to wait a couple of days for him to do all this work. But before that happened, the . . . we had so much mud and stuff around. Boy, it was sad. They had mud all over in the house. We had to do

this house all over in order to live in it. My neighbor had to do the same thing. Had to do our houses over. Because the water was so high in the house, the wall had been . . . got very soft and sunk in and broken up and everything. You had to redo the whole thing over.

But anyway, all I can tell you is that we had . . . It was a sad day as usual. Everybody was all scattered. By the time I found my son the next day at the Port of Embarkation and Miss Hendricks[?] came in and she was telling me that Alonzo was with her the whole time. That's where we found my son. He was the baby. He was my baby. So I found him. After we found him, that was a joyous occasion.

**MWENDO:** What was that all like?

**THOMAS:** [7:50] That was a joyful occasion, after we found out he was all right. Because of those kids drowned in one boat that was behind us. We didn't know who they were.

**MWENDO:** Did you find . . . did you know . . . Do you know those kids?

**THOMAS:** I didn't know who they were. They were just some people . . . just people were in the boat. The boat topple over and a lot of them got drowned.

**MWENDO:** And not knowing where your son was, you thought maybe that was him?

**THOMAS:** Not knowing where my son was, we thought he was drowned. We didn't know. We was like, wow . . . devastated. Anyway, he was all right. Most of the people from St. David was over at the Port of Embarkation. But we had went to the auditorium, so we didn't know.

**MWENDO:** How did you find that's where he was?

**THOMAS:** [8:42] This lady they call Miss Hendricks[?] she told us that he was with us the whole time. The priest told us. I forgot what priest was there at that time.

**MWENDO:** Did he come over to the Municipal Auditorium and tell you?

**THOMAS:** Yes. I didn't know exactly what priest that was, it's been so long. I don't know whether it was Father Killinow[?]. But then I know there was a priest in there. There were two priests. One was named Father Betsenhall[?]. He was there. I don't know whether he was the one that did the talking or the other priest. There was two. But there was a pastor there, I can't remember who he was. I'll have to look and see what year that was that the pastor was there.  
[coughs] Excuse me.

But other than that, everything else . . . Then, when we came back in the house, naturally we had to get new furniture and stuff because everything was gone. It was floating all around the house. All the furniture was gone. I remember I had just bought uniforms for the kids, and they were all gone! They had to go all through that again. Buy more uniforms for the kids to go back to school.

**MWENDO:** What kind of support did you get? Who were the people or the grants that supported you?

**THOMAS:** [10:10] They had somebody wrote us, at Stallings [Center], they had Red Cross over at [?]. They gave us . . . What you call it? What you call them?

**MWENDO:** Vouchers?

**THOMAS:** Vouchers to get different things, like sheets and towels and stuff like that. But they didn't give us money for the furniture. We had to get our own furniture.

**MWENDO:** Was it enough money for [?]

**THOMAS:** Well, we had enough money for some stuff. But naturally we had to do the rest ourselves because my husband was working. He was working down at Kaiser Aluminum, by the way, so we was able to help ourselves with things in the house.

**MWENDO:** Was it that they were only helping people who were unemployed? Or . . . ?

**THOMAS:** They was helping everybody that was in the water. But they didn't give everybody . . . some of the stuff we missed. Like I remember they had gave a lump sum of money to people, different people. Some that was getting the money didn't do nothing with it.

But we . . . we just was . . . We sort of did most everything ourselves. Through this grant stuff that you're talking about. Through a grant.

**MWENDO:** You got stuff through a grant?

**THOMAS:** [11:47] Yeah, through a grant.

**MWENDO:** Do you remember who that grant was from?

**THOMAS:** It was from the government. We got it through the government.

**MWENDO:** Was that like FEMA?

**THOMAS:** Yes. We got it through the government.

**MWENDO:** Was that enough?

**THOMAS:** We had to pay back a lot of money, because I remember we had to pay nine thousand dollars to do this house over.

**MWENDO:** You got a small business loan, and you had some grants.

**THOMAS:** Yes. Small business, yes.



**MWENDO:** Now the grant money was for what? Was that for like clothes and things like that? Or was it for the building itself?

**THOMAS:** [12:15] For the building. For here.

**MWENDO:** Okay. For the house.

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** Did the insurance cover . . . your homeowners insurance?

**THOMAS:** At that time, we didn't have flood insurance, so it didn't give us nothing.

**MWENDO:** So no insurance. You had insurance, but it wasn't for flood.

**THOMAS:** Yes. It wasn't for flood. It was for other things. But then right after that, we got flood insurance. I mean, if we'd have had flood insurance, I guess it would have covered everything. We didn't have it.

**MWENDO:** Were the bill collectors, were they lenient during that period of time? Like, you know, your mortgage note or your . . .

**THOMAS:** The mortgage notes, them wasn't so bad because he got it through the GI Bill of Rights. See, because in them days, you could get things through the GI Bill of Rights. Right now you . . . I don't know how they do it. But we got it through the GI Bill of Rights. And he was able to do our house. But he was a builder himself, so he did his own work. He did all the work his own self. All the living room, if you see.

**MWENDO:** I see that trim. You say he did all that trim.

**THOMAS:** [13:33] He did all that trimming on the house. He did all the painting and everything in the house. [?] has been like that since Betsy. You can see the house is just about to give now, falling.

**MWENDO:** I see it's a big crack up there in the ceiling.

**THOMAS:** Yes. I'm supposed to get somebody to fix that soon, I guess. Yes, he did most all this work in here, everything. But this, actually, was part of the kitchen here. He cut it right after Betsy and put that refrigerator there.

**MWENDO:** Opened up, opened this up.

**THOMAS:** He did all this work himself.

**MWENDO:** He opened this up a bit.

**THOMAS:** Yes, he opened it up so we have a little more room in here. This room, if you went by Miss Brown, you could see her kitchen is still cut off.

**MWENDO:** Like the same way?

**THOMAS:** [14:25] Yes, yes. See, our house . . . Well, Francis fixed it like this.

**MWENDO:** Yes, with . . .

**THOMAS:** Then he did her rooms, too. He did her living room and her kitchen. Living room and the dining room.

**MWENDO:** Mrs. Brown's?

**THOMAS:** Yes. He did hers, too. Because he notice she got the same thing that we got.

**MWENDO:** I haven't been there. I haven't been there.

**THOMAS:** I thought you had talked to her.

**MWENDO:** I talked to her, but she hasn't been feeling well.

**THOMAS:** Oh, yes, she has . . . So you didn't go to see her?

**MWENDO:** No.

**THOMAS:** [14:53] She has . . . her living room . . . Her living room is done nice. Her living room and her dining room. Francis did that. But he didn't do anything to the kitchen. You can see that the kitchen is still the same. Like I was telling you, it's closed in. You got a door you come in. Well, she got her box right on that side, where the door is. But she didn't cut her house like we did. It's a little different.

**MWENDO:** Any other kind of support you got, Miss Lucy?

**THOMAS:** Well . . .

**MWENDO:** Other than Red Cross, and then FEMA give you the grant. Anything else? Any other kind of support? There were a lot of, from what I researched, there were a lot of agencies that gave money to Red Cross to help people.

**THOMAS:** Yes, I know, I know. But we didn't get that. We missed out on a lot of that stuff.

**MWENDO:** Why you think you missed out?

**THOMAS:** Because we . . . For one thing, I wasn't down here. I was living on Galvez Street with this lady till everything was settled.

**MWENDO:** So you just didn't know about this.

**THOMAS:** [16:01] I didn't know about all this. But he did find out. Like I told you, he found out more about the money stuff than I did. I didn't know, so he . . .

**MWENDO:** You're talking about your husband.

**THOMAS:** Yes, he knowed all about it. But I never knew much about it. As far as for me getting things for the kids, they didn't give me anything. The one thing I got was food. They give you . . . They give you vouchers then. They didn't have stamps. They gave you vouchers. The only thing I got was food, and every time I would buy the food . . . I was living with this lady, she had half of the food with her, and my kids were suffering. I stayed with this lady for about a month, and then I came home.

**MWENDO:** Yes. I remember you saying that wasn't too good an experience. She wanted half of . . . [laughs]

**THOMAS:** Yes, everything. Boy, that lady was something.

**MWENDO:** Everything.

**THOMAS:** I think she really got rich on the people that was in the storm. [laughs]

**MWENDO:** Looks like that happened with a lot of people.

**THOMAS:** [17:07] Yes, a lot of them got . . . Then, I think they were giving these people that took care of the people so much. I don't know what, but I know that a lot of them got [?]. You were paying something like a dollar for bread during the storm. You never had to pay a dollar for bread. The bread used to be twenty-five or thirty-five cents then. Then they started it, and then they started having bread for a dollar, and it had been a dollar ever since.

**MWENDO:** So this lady on Galvez Street, Miss Lucy, was she through . . .

**THOMAS:** [coughing]

**MWENDO:** You okay? Want some water?

**THOMAS:** Was she what?

**MWENDO:** Was she through some program that you found her?

**THOMAS:** [17:52] No. They were asking people if they would take some people with children. They were like volunteers. They had room in their house, so they'd take you in. [coughing] Better drink some water. They'd take you in. But other than that, they . . . That's how we got to a house. Because when I went to the Henrys, they wouldn't take the kids.

**MWENDO:** And who are the Henrys?

**THOMAS:** Miss Henry was Gerard and Thaddeus' grandmother.

**MWENDO:** Okay. And Gerard and Thaddeus, that's your children.

**THOMAS:** Gerard and Thaddeus and Paul, Eva and Geralyn and Cherie, that was their grandma that I went by. She didn't take them, so that's how we got by that lady.

**MWENDO:** I see. Now with all . . . everything that happened you went to Red Cross. And you say you went to Stallings [Center] for Red Cross, right?

**THOMAS:** [19:10] Yes. They gave us some money. Not much.

**MWENDO:** Right.

**THOMAS:** They gave us just enough for clothing, like I told you.

**MWENDO:** Yes, and some vouchers.

**THOMAS:** And naturally . . .

**MWENDO:** You want some water?

**THOMAS:** No, that's okay. Food and stuff like that.

**MWENDO:** Did you feel that the services that you got, the support that you got, you felt that it was fair among people? Was everybody . . . Do you think everybody was treated fairly?

**THOMAS:** [19:35] No, I didn't think so. I thought that it wasn't fair. A lot of stuff was done because for one thing, the church got a lot of money, we didn't get none. They had gave . . . I don't know how much money it was. Like I say, I can't remember what pastor was there. They have to look back on the record and find out from father who was in there in '45. I forgot, but I remember Father Betsenhower[?] well. I remember him. Now there was a pastor, but who was the pastor, I can't remember. They had so many priests.

**MWENDO:** Did the church give you some help? Your church?

**THOMAS:** That's what I'm telling you. They gave the church . . . We missed out on that because I wasn't here.

**MWENDO:** Oh, I see.

**THOMAS:** We missed out on that money. They told me a lot of people was getting money from St. David. We didn't get any.

**MWENDO:** I see. St. David was the church.



**THOMAS:** But like I say, if I would have been down here, I probably would have gotten it. But we didn't get anything. But they had a lot of money that they gave to parishioners.

**MWENDO:** Yes.

**THOMAS:** [20:48] But it went to ones who were under that water.

**MWENDO:** When you all were living in the evacuation center, when you all were down there at the Municipal Auditorium, what were the issues that were happening there? The issues of concern. What were you most concerned about being [?].

**THOMAS:** Well, for one thing, it was overcrowded. The people weren't as friendly. I was really glad to get out because I had all the kids with me. I didn't want them to be . . . In other words, we didn't stay in the building over the night. Stayed like overnight and the next day we went by this lady. We didn't stay at all, we left. I didn't know the procedures of what happened after I left. But they were overcrowded. They had people walking on one another. You're trying to sleep, and everybody's walking all around you. No bunks. I could remember nobody slept that night. [laughs]

**MWENDO:** How did you all keep track of the children?

**THOMAS:** [22:06] Well, they stayed with me. They were all together. We stayed in one little corner. Like wherever we was, but we was in one little corner. Then after that, like I say,

when these volunteers came around, was taking people, we went on. But Miss Henry didn't take them children at all. I thought that was awful.

**MWENDO:** Yes, it sounds like it.

**THOMAS:** Because she could have found a way for them to stay. "Oh," she says, "I'm overcrowded. I can't take them." The three girls . . . it was Eva, Geralyn and Cherie. Three girls.

**MWENDO:** Would that be Francis' mother?

**THOMAS:** [22:52] No, no. That was, Miss Henry was Gerard . . . was my nephew . . . It was my sister's . . .

**MWENDO:** Oh, your nephew. Your sister's . . .

**THOMAS:** My sister's mother-in-law.

**MWENDO:** I see.

**THOMAS:** That's who that was.

**MWENDO:** I see.

**THOMAS:** That was my sister's mother-in-law. Her name was . . . What was Miss Henry name? I even forgot her name. She didn't take the kids.

**MWENDO:** That hurts you there?

**THOMAS:** Yes, because I had to drag them with me all over. That's how we all got by this lady house.

**MWENDO:** So where was your sister?

**THOMAS:** [23:30] Well, my sister was . . . They were across the river. They were at the port, the naval base.

**MWENDO:** Algiers?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Because they go down [?]. See, she lived in Chalmette. The kids happened to be up here. When the kids happened to be up here, they got caught in the water. Everybody had to go. [laughs] They were spending the day, or something like that. All of them was with me, the whole bunch.

**MWENDO:** She must have been scared out of her wits, too. Not knowing where . . .

**THOMAS:** [24:04] She probably was sort of scared. But she knew they was with me, so I guess she figured they were all right. She didn't worry, because they were with me. Naturally, I'm mother with all of them.

**MWENDO:** When you came back here, Miss Lucy, the stench . . . You say there was mud?

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** It probably was stinking.

**THOMAS:** It was sloppy and stinking and everything. The streets were so bad. Man, the smells.

**MWENDO:** What kind of health . . . What kind of health issues you had to deal with?

**THOMAS:** Well, you had to hose everything out yourself. I think they cleaned the street. You see, we had a canal there at that time.

**MWENDO:** On Tupelo? Right here?

**THOMAS:** [24:50] Yeah. That canal was still there.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** Then later on, they closed that canal. But that canal had a lot to do with it. It took in a lot of water and it helped, a lot of people got drowned in that canal. That canal was right there.

**MWENDO:** Right there on Tupelo.

**THOMAS:** Yes. The only thing they had was a little cross bridge, right across the little Tupelo Canal.

**MWENDO:** Where was the crossing? Do you remember which street?

**THOMAS:** [25:20] Yeah. Right here on Roman.

**MWENDO:** Oh, right on Roman.

**THOMAS:** Right here on the corner.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** The kids used to play there all the time in the canal. A lady used to live across the street there. She had about eight kids, nine kids, this lady, at [address omitted]. Now I don't know how they got out, but they weren't with us. They went to McCarty School. McCarty School . . . used to be McCarty School, which is now Martin Luther King. They went . . . They

had a lot of people went to McCarty School. We didn't go there. This vicinity went over there, two blocks from here was the closest. Yes.

**MWENDO:** So did you have to do stuff like boil water for a long time? How long you have to . . .

**THOMAS:** We had to boil water most of the time. But we had . . . We always did get our water, so we had good water. It was no problem with us for water.

**MWENDO:** Where you got your water from?

**THOMAS:** [26:17] Well in them days you got it from, I guess Abita Springs somewhere. One of them places. But my mother-in-law was already getting water way before Betsy came. We used to get it from the same place she would get it, so we had good water.

**MWENDO:** It was delivered, or you had to go . . .

**THOMAS:** Drinking water.

**MWENDO:** Yes. You had to go get it, or it was delivered to you?

**THOMAS:** Well, him . . . He went to get it from his mom's house. We had good water by the gallons.

**MWENDO:** Okay. So you didn't have to worry about too much of water?

**THOMAS:** No, I didn't have to worry about water.

**MWENDO:** But you all had gotten shots?

**THOMAS:** [26:55] Yeah, we all got shots and they had fingerprints. I wish I had the card, I could show you now. They even fingerprint all of us. Fingerprinted you and everything. I don't know what was their reason for fingerprinting.

**MWENDO:** I don't know.

**THOMAS:** But they fingerprinted us. I can still remember that. They fingerprinted us right there at Stallings [Center]. Or maybe they did that for people lost, I guess. I don't know.

**MWENDO:** Yes, maybe to locate people?

**THOMAS:** Yes, maybe so.

**MWENDO:** Identify people?

**THOMAS:** Because I remember they fingerprinted us.

**MWENDO:** Why you think the water came down this way?

**THOMAS:** I personally . . . I think the water came this way because they busted that canal at the end there on Florida [Avenue]. They bust the canal. The water . . . To keep, I guess, the people from the city having the water on their side, so the water came this way.

**MWENDO:** What you think about that?

**THOMAS:** [27:59] We thought it was terrible. Because we said [Victor] Schiro was the cause of everybody getting drowned. Schiro was the mayor at that time. I never forget Schiro. Schiro was something. He had the canal blown up so that the water could come on this side.

**MWENDO:** Did he ever admit to that?

**THOMAS:** No.

**MWENDO:** What makes you so . . .

**THOMAS:** Everybody knew that.

**MWENDO:** Yes, everybody says that. How do they know? How do people know?



**THOMAS:** [28:28] Well, a lot of people knew what happened. They were back there. Because we didn't live there. See, I had a brother-in-law at the time was living right there near the place. He right near that canal. Casmay[?] Thomas, he live right on Galvez off Florida there. Right there on . . . right where the water would come. Now they got out . . . They got out touring boats, but I don't know where they went. But he had eight kids at that time.

**MWENDO:** Did he see anything? Did he see anyone blow it up?

**THOMAS:** Yes. He knew about it. Because he's the one told Francis that he knew that Schiro blew up the place because he seen where it was. I don't know whether they took pictures of it or what. Never did find out.

**MWENDO:** They say it broke. That's what they have in the paper.

**THOMAS:** [29:21] They say it broke. But they believe that Schiro broke the canal so the water could come on this side.

**MWENDO:** What did Schiro do during the storm and after the storm? What was . . . What was he saying?

**THOMAS:** As far as I know, Schiro didn't do anything to help out anybody. Because at that time, everything was crazy. People was . . . whatever. He didn't do anything.

**MWENDO:** You think because it was a black community?

**THOMAS:** Yes. But then he didn't think about the people in Carolyn Park because these are the ones that got all that water.

**MWENDO:** That's in Chalmette?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Water went straight on down. Them people couldn't understand why they had so much water down there. You saw the picture of all the houses in Carolyn Park. Carolyn Park was hit hard!

**MWENDO:** Yes, because it was way up on the roof.

**THOMAS:** Yes. It was hit hard.

**MWENDO:** Why nobody protested? Why nobody said anything?

**THOMAS:** [30:19] I don't know. I don't know. Because . . . But the old timers at the time, they knew. Why they didn't protest or say something about it, I don't know.

**MWENDO:** Do you think they should have?

**THOMAS:** Yes, they should have said something about Schiro, because they had people getting drowned back there. Because them people don't have a chance.

**MWENDO:** That's on Florida, you mean?

**THOMAS:** Yes. They ain't had a chance. From Galvez back.

**MWENDO:** To Florida. From Galvez to Florida. It came real fast.

**THOMAS:** Yes, that water was coming real fast. That water was coming in like [makes gushing sound]. Waves like you was in . . . like you was in the river, the river, you know.

**MWENDO:** Now you say a lot of white people were there on Tennessee, so they must have been drowned. What happened with them?

**THOMAS:** [31:09] Yes, at that time . . . They must have known, those people that got out first. How they got out, I don't know.

**MWENDO:** You think they got word?

**THOMAS:** They got out first. I think actually they must have got out first because they must have known. Because most of the time . . . At that time they had, like I said, a lot of people was over there. But them people move out of there. How they got out, I don't know. But I could

remember Casmay[?] and them saying that the river was blown up by Schiro. And the river . . .  
That's why these people down here got drowned, most of them.

**MWENDO:** Now there was someone I was talking with, Miss Thomas, that said that they knew somebody working at Kaiser. And that they were told that Kaiser, ahead of time, to get out because it was going to flood. Maybe your husband wasn't on that shift or maybe that didn't even happen.

**THOMAS:** No, he wasn't.

**MWENDO:** But that's what . . .

**THOMAS:** [32:08] No, he wasn't on that shift because he was here when the water came. I can remember when the water first start coming up. I told him, I said, "Francis, look at the water coming up to the first step." I said, "If that water get up a little higher, we going to have to get out." "Oh, no," he says, "it ain't going to get up no higher than the steps." He thought it wasn't. Girl, that water came in this house, you wouldn't believe it! Like, just like a ship had then pass. [makes whooshing noise] The furnitures were turned upside down. Everything was tumbled up and down in this house. I can remember, this wasn't that stove, but I had another stove. We had to sit on that stove.

**MWENDO:** Your heart must have been . . .

**THOMAS:** Oh, yes! But I wasn't so worried about myself at the time. I was worried about the kids. Man, I was worried about getting them out of here. That's when I put all the kids in the attic.

**MWENDO:** Right.

**THOMAS:** And that water kept coming in.

**MWENDO:** Right.

**THOMAS:** [33:09] But I remember when that water first came to the step, and I can still see the water coming to the steps. I say, "Francis, that water's up to the step." "Oh," he says, "I don't think it's going to get any higher." [laughs] The water got so high! That's how we got caught in the house. Because if he had left when I first told him, we wouldn't have got in it, either. A lot of people, like I said, they must have left when the water first was coming. See, because when that water was coming, it was coming in kind of slower. Later on, that water was coming rough. Just like it had been push . . . a dyke, you know.

**MWENDO:** Just busted open.

**THOMAS:** Just busted open. That water started coming in here, boy, it wasn't funny. That was something.

**MWENDO:** Never want to live that through again?

**THOMAS:** Yes. No, indeed. That water was something.

**MWENDO:** Now you say after, after Betsy, how did the community act? How did the neighborhood . . .

**THOMAS:** [34:10] Well, everybody naturally had to get their own place of business fixed through different organizations, I guess. I particularly remember Miss Brown and them getting theirs done through . . . he was working for the SBA [Small Business Administration]. And they got theirs through small business.

**MWENDO:** Did the community help each other out? Did neighbors help each other out? Or was it pretty much everybody kind of did their own . . .

**THOMAS:** Yes, they did. They helped one another as much as they could. But as far as for giving you clothes and things like that . . . Like I say, we had already gotten vouchers for that. I guess everybody else did, too, because nobody complained about clothes after. But when we left here, naturally, we had left with just the clothes on our back. We couldn't worry about the clothes in the house. That was it. It was gone.

But they said, they said Kaiser Aluminum . . . but Kaiser Aluminum wasn't the ones that got people out. It was National Guard. The ones from the barracks got the boats. That's what got us out. The boats from down in the barracks. They took us out. Through Kaiser . . . I don't

know much about Kaiser, but if Kaiser had said anything about that or not. But I remember he wasn't on that shift. And I can remember that the National Guard was the ones that was really getting us out of here, these soldiers. Then we had to get on the soldier truck when we got at the end of the bridge. So they were really working with us, the National Guard.

**MWENDO:** That's good. So, okay . . . Was there a difference you saw between how the neighborhood was before Betsy and how the neighborhood was after Betsy?

**THOMAS:** [36:10] Well, everybody got along fine around the neighborhood here . . . especially in this little vicinity. Because most of these people were people that were in the service that owned these little houses. From this corner, from right there, Johnson Street, to Roman.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** Now these houses on the other side was not our houses. These were citizen, Good Citizen Houses. That was the name.

**MWENDO:** On the other side of Roman.

**THOMAS:** Yes. See, like Miss Garcia and them? Their house, the ones on this side, was built by Good Citizen.

**MWENDO:** That's from Roman to what?

**THOMAS:** Roman to Derbigny.

**MWENDO:** Oh, to Derbigny.

**THOMAS:** Derbigny. Yes.

**MWENDO:** By Good Citizen. Who was Good Citizen?

**THOMAS:** [36:58] Well, they were a black organization that Mr. Simon, who was the one who had those houses built, he used to live right there on that corner. That's the house they tore down lately. Instead of leaving it there, they tore it down. They could have just gutted that house out and kept it, since he was the one that was the head of the whole housing. He was head of the housing on that side. But not this side, this was for the government.

**MWENDO:** Yes.

**THOMAS:** This was government houses.

**MWENDO:** Now when you say, "for the government," you mean it was built with GI Bill money?



**THOMAS:** [37:38] Yes, GI Bill of Rights. Yes, and they had . . . Then they had another little vicinity of houses built from Johnson to Galvez. They were also government houses. That's how they . . . That's how they built them. But when they built this house and that house on the corner, and that house around the corner, all these people were in service. Like Mr. Garden[?] was a serviceman. Mr. Curry was a serviceman. These other people on the corner, they were servicemen. Then Francis . . . mister . . . The man right behind us, Mr. Gray, well, he wasn't a serviceman, but he got it through government because he worked for the post office. Mr. Morale, also, got it through the government because he worked for the post office. But they were government houses. That's how we got this house.

**MWENDO:** The government, is it that the government built these houses?

**THOMAS:** Yeah.

**MWENDO:** Then you had to apply with some kind of veteran status.

**THOMAS:** Yeah. Yeah.

**MWENDO:** When you say they worked at the post office, you mean, you didn't have to be a soldier . . .

**THOMAS:** No.

**MWENDO:** If you . . .

**THOMAS:** [39:05] No. You had to be somebody that was able to afford the houses at that time. That was years ago. These houses were only nine thousand dollars. Compared to houses today. But they were just nine thousand dollars. Of course we had to pay nine thousand more after Betsy, so that was more than nine thousand. [laughs] That's eighteen thousand. But anyway, all these houses were built by the government. That's how we got back here. Because I came from down[?] parish. I lived in Chalmette, [address omitted] Chalmette all my life. Then when I got married, I came up here. Been here fifty years. Fifty . . . fifty-one here now.

**MWENDO:** It's a long time. It's wonderful.

**THOMAS:** Yeah, yeah. So, that's about the end of the story, I guess. I can't remember anything else that I can tell you.

**MWENDO:** What stories have you heard about Betsy since Betsy?

**THOMAS:** Well, since Betsy, I said that people didn't talk about it at all. A lot of people remembered it. I was one who had asked one of the senators to put a plaque on that building to say that the people back here were all in that particular vicinity, and make it a memorial, whatever. A memorial place for where the people were. But then he said he was going to get a plaque to put on there, and never did get it. [Leonard] Lucas never did get it. That's been . . .

Let's see, it's about two years ago I asked him about that plaque. Before he got out of office. It still ain't there.

**MWENDO:** It would be nice to have some kind of memorial to all those people who worked so hard to save people.

**THOMAS:** [41:10] Yeah, yeah, that's right. See, that's what I'm saying. They should do something about it. Like the same man I was telling you about, Mr. Simon. Paul Simon's daddy, his name was Paul, too. Paul Simon was a junior. Paul Simon had Good Citizen houses out there. He was making sure that all these people were over there. He had a crippled son. His crippled son was over there in that building, too, with us.

**MWENDO:** That two story house.

**THOMAS:** Yes. We was like, wow. They're such big shots . . . and they were all with us.  
[laughs]

**MWENDO:** The big shots were in that building with you.

**THOMAS:** In that building with us. [laughs] Because they were something. Him and Mr. Johnson, Mr. Johnson who was another Good Citizen man on that corner where that brick house is, he was there, too.

**MWENDO:** Who were some of the heroes besides your husband that you remember that was saving people?

**THOMAS:** [42:16] Well, like I said, Paul Simon helped a lot of people. That was his son, Paul. Paul was a younger person. He was with the kids. My boys and everybody, helped them out to get out there. All of us was out there in that little place.

**MWENDO:** That two story building.

**THOMAS:** Two story building.

**MWENDO:** He helped by how? How did he help?

**THOMAS:** Well, they were just helping people . . . in different ways. Like, things they need, I guess. I know Miss Garcia and them . . . They lived right next door to Paul Simon and them. And Lynette was a little girl who . . . At the time, she was a little girl. She and Bibi and all of us was all together and I had them all. We all went in that building. It was funny, yes. We used to call Paul Simon daddy a big shot. [laughs] Because [phone ringing] he really was the one who owned them houses. He was a Good Citizen man. [phone ringing] That was Good Citizen Insurance.

**MWENDO:** We about . . . We about finished.

**THOMAS:** We about finished, yes.

**MWENDO:** Yes, it's starting to blink to tell me that we at the end of the tape.

**THOMAS:** [43:47] Yeah, okay. Well, that's about all I can say anyway. Because there was a man back there they call . . . What was his name? David . . . Mr. Walla[?] Mr. Walla[?] David Walla's[?] daddy. We used to call him Sergeant. He helped a lot of people. Sergeant . . . Sergeant Walla. What was Mr. Walla name? Anyway, Gloria . . . Gloria's his wife's name. She was a nurse. They both work and help a lot of people.

**MWENDO:** Did they have a boat?

**THOMAS:** No. Well, they just help in different ways. Like helping them to get food and see that they get different things, and help them out. She was a nurse, so she helped out with the [?] and stuff. She knew a lot about it. But at the time, I didn't know Miss Walla[?] that good. I know her now. Gloria, David, what David name was, David Walla. His daddy name was . . . what Mr. Walla name? Anyway, Gloria and . . . I think David Walla is his daddy name . . . I can't remember, but we called him Sarge. He was always helping, yes. He was a government man. Him and Mr. Curry at the time. He was pretty good when he was around. All them people's gone now. Moved out. Miss Curry and them moved . . . After Betsy, they moved way back, what you call it? Way back . . .

**MWENDO:** [46:02] Pontchartrain Park?

**THOMAS:** Pontchartrain Park. A lot of people moved in Pontchartrain Park after Betsy. But we didn't move, we stayed here.

**MWENDO:** What happened to the houses that they left behind? Because did . . . Not anybody would want to buy them, probably.

**THOMAS:** They just sold them.

**MWENDO:** They did sell them?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Miss Curry house is still around the corner. And Miss Polk[?] house is still around that corner. They live . . . They lived on Johnson [Street]. They were our neighbors . . . good neighbors. She used to come around every once in a while to see if I need something. But these people don't do that no more. Miss Polk, Miss Curry, Miss Gordon. What was this man name? He's gone now. They refixing his house now. [46:49]

**[End Tape 3341 Side A. Begin Tape 3341 Side B.]**

**THOMAS:** . . . corner.

**MWENDO:** On the corner? Of Johnson and Tupelo?

**THOMAS:** Yes. He still live, but he ain't got but one leg now.

**MWENDO:** Were they different kinds of people that moved in after? Or were they pretty much good people like . . .

**THOMAS:** [47:13] Well, let me see. I don't know all these people right now. There's one lady live in Miss Curry house, their name is Mr. Day[?]. Their name is Day[?]. Mr. Gordon's family still in the house there. Miss Polk moved out. She sold her house. The lady on the corner, she didn't sell her house, but it's still there. But her husband passed. Those were old timers that were around there a long time. There was another house there, they tore that down. They got new people that live around there now, so I don't know them that good. I just happen to know this man that live in Miss Curry house, Mr. Day[?], he lived there. The Gordons and the rest of those people was different people. They all gone now. They move in Pontchartrain Park, and that was it. But I know Miss Curry live with the nuns in the old days. [laughs]

**MWENDO:** What do you think of your neighborhood right now, Miss Lucy?

**THOMAS:** [48:27] Well, the neighborhood is not as friendly as it used to be when the kids were coming up. Everybody's different. They sort of stay to themselves. Like this lady in the back of my house, she's more trouble than anybody. She puts her car in the driveway, you can't get out. She's contrary about it, won't move. What's her name, Clarence and Mr. Morell house, Clarence and his wife still live there, Cynthia lives there in her dad's house now. With her husband. They not as friendly as they used to be. Galeta lives in the back house. You won't see her. They not as friendly as they used to be.

**MWENDO:** Times have changed.

**THOMAS:** Yes. Times have changed. Everything around this neighborhood has changed to almost nothing now. This lady I was telling you about, Miss Leen[?], who had those nine kids, well she lived a long time. She was about eighty-nine years old when she died. And Cars[?] used to live in that brick house, and she's gone.

**MWENDO:** Right across the street?

**THOMAS:** [49:44] Right across the street. There's new people in there right now, I don't know. Everything is just going down, if you ask me. It's going down, not going up.

**MWENDO:** What you think is going to turn it around?

**THOMAS:** I don't know. Yolanda owned this house over here, which the lady that used to live in there, she just letting that house go down to nothing. Nobody's in it.

**MWENDO:** Is it a corner house? On the corner?

**THOMAS:** Yes, corner house, yes. She . . . I don't know what she doing. She moved out in the east, I heard. Where she live, I don't know. The people that live in this Miss Henry's house, the people that lived in that, nobody's there now.



**MWENDO:** Where is that? Is that in the next block?

**THOMAS:** Next block.

**MWENDO:** In between Roman and . . .

**THOMAS:** [50:39] That's Good Citizen houses, yes.

**MWENDO:** Yes.

**THOMAS:** The seventeen-hundred block.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** Right there, your friend live where the Copelands used to. What was the name?

Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

**MWENDO:** I can see her face.

**THOMAS:** Yes, me, too. Wait . . . Miss . . . Well, I know the lady good enough. She was a Copeland.

**MWENDO:** She was.

**THOMAS:** [?] Copeland, what was her name? Well, she had two boys that grew up with my kids. Can't think of their name. I can't even think of those kids' name.

**MWENDO:** Is one of them Gregory?

**THOMAS:** Gregory, yes.

**MWENDO:** I don't know the other one's name.

**THOMAS:** [51:27] [?] my daughter knows them. She grew up with them. They was something else, those boys. Their daddy, too. Their daddy was a principal. What was their name? You can't remember their name?

**MWENDO:** Was it something with an F?

**THOMAS:** Foy!

**MWENDO:** Foy.

**THOMAS:** Yes, that's it.

**MWENDO:** That's it.

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** Miss Foy.

**THOMAS:** Foy. Miss Foy, yes. She lived there, right there where Nonna live now.

**MWENDO:** Yes.

**THOMAS:** [51:52] Then Mr. Benny's been there. Then where the Johnsons at, I don't know those people, but that used to be their house.

**MWENDO:** Is that next door to Mr. Ben?

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** Or Johnson.

**THOMAS:** No. Johnson is next door to where . . . I forget what that lady name was.

**MWENDO:** Just in the same block where [?] Mr. Ben?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Mr. Ben, then Nonna, then . . .

**MWENDO:** Where the Johnsons?

**THOMAS:** [52:22] Wait, not the Johnsons. There was another lady that lived in that house with the strangers in there now, I don't know them. Then Miss Johnson used to live on that brick . . . by that brick house. When you go out there, when we go, I'll show you where it's at. But then around the corner, I don't know where that lady at now, but they have . . . A lady used to live there, she had an adopted daughter. I don't know where she is. But she used to be a working lady, too. I've forgotten her name. But then they had a Spanish lady that used to live in that other house right next to Lito[?].

**MWENDO:** Is that, which street is that? Which street are we talking about?

**THOMAS:** It goes around the corner where the Simons lived.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** See, the Simons was on that corner where you see all that grass at.

**MWENDO:** North Roman?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Right there on Roman. Roman and St. Marie. But they address would have been St. Marie, because their door was this way. They had a St. Marie address. But that's where Paul Simon mama and daddy lived. Why they tore that house down, I don't know and I

remember asking for that house and they wouldn't let us have it. We asked them for their house, and Lito[?] asked for it, too. I don't know why they didn't let us have it. But they tore that house down rather than let somebody live in it. All they had to do was gutted their house and keep it. He was the . . . sort of run everything back here.

**MWENDO:** [54:02] Who's that, Paul?

**THOMAS:** Mr. Simon.

**MWENDO:** Simon.

**THOMAS:** Yes. Paul Simon's daddy. He was a . . . see, these people had . . . they had a black insurance company they called Good Citizen. That's who built those houses. It was right on the corner where Vocasaw[?] at now, right by next to the Democrat.

**MWENDO:** It's on St. Bernard? That's St. Bernard Avenue.

**THOMAS:** St. Bernard. Yes. That's where they came from. The office was right there.

**MWENDO:** You say they ran stuff down here?

**THOMAS:** Yeah. He's the one that built all them houses.

**MWENDO:** Okay.

**THOMAS:** [54:38] Mr. Simon. Yes, indeed. Mr. Simon and Johnson.

**MWENDO:** He made decisions about what happened back here, you mean?

**THOMAS:** Yes, yes. He'd be going around and inspecting houses and everything. Yes, that old man was something. But he . . . They came from up there around St. Bernard. That's where the insurance place was. The place is still there.

**MWENDO:** The building?

**THOMAS:** Yes. Right across from Volkerson[?]. You know where the Autocrat's at? Right next door.

**MWENDO:** Yes. Oh, next door to the Autocrat [Social] Club.

**THOMAS:** Right next door, can't miss it. Yes.

**MWENDO:** I'm going to look for it.

**THOMAS:** Yes. You go up there, I'll show you. Yes, indeed. And Mr. Volkerson[?] was a nice man, too. He's still nice. If I go up there and talk to Lance . . . Lance would give the church

two boxes of sausage for our fair. Anyway . . . They help out. Yes, they were good people, yes. So that's it, I guess.

**MWENDO:** [55:46] Well, I appreciate the story. I hope . . .

**THOMAS:** Yeah. Yeah. But things have changed. I would say that things have changed, because half of the people now are all strangers. I don't know them. They won't even come around to see if I'm alright.

**MWENDO:** Yes. So it's not that community feel like it used to be where people looked after each other.

**THOMAS:** No. No. Like I told you about Galeta[?] they know me so well, and they never come down here and say, "Miss Lucy, how you doing?" I don't see at Christmas, when Christmas comes, say, "Here's a basket of fruit." That's people. But they don't do that no more. You got to get out of here and walk for yourself.

**MWENDO:** I think it's all over it's happening like that. We got to do something to turn it back around.

**THOMAS:** Yes, right.

**MWENDO:** Make people care.

**THOMAS:** Make people care.

**MWENDO:** Make people start caring for each other again.

**THOMAS:** [56:36] They should care more about one another. As the Lord says to love one another. But when you see somebody sitting down and you don't even care about whether that person's okay, I don't think that's neighbors. You know, they should be, but they're not. Now when Betsy . . . Like I say, during the time when Betsy was . . . Right after Betsy, everybody was still friendly. Miss Curry and them was around the corner. You go down there and have dinner and stuff like that. But not these people around here. Oh, boy, you can pass in front of Galeta house a thousand times, and she'll pass you up at the corner and don't say nothing. Won't even mention where you're going, "Are you going to church?" They just not like that. They don't help one another . . . they don't care. They're more to their self. And that's bad . . . that's bad, very bad.

**MWENDO:** Well, it's a good thing you have your children.

**THOMAS:** Yes, that's right. You right. If I didn't have my kids, I don't know what I'd be doing in this house. [laughs]

**MWENDO:** Look like they take good care of you, too.



**THOMAS:** [57:46] Oh, yes. Because Peter is the one who come here, boy. He'll do all my bills and straighten that yard. He keeps that yard clean. He cuts the trees. You see that yard is always neat because he comes and do that. I don't have to worry about paying nobody to do it. If it wasn't for him, it wouldn't be clean.

**MWENDO:** No. And then you say you go by your daughter?

**THOMAS:** Yes, I go by my daughter and eat. Half of the time I'm there. Bibi's a big help, too. My son Alonzo, he's way across the river, but I go visit him.

**MWENDO:** He's the one that was cleaning out the refrigerator the other day?

**THOMAS:** Yeah! Oh, that's right, you were here when he was telling you about Betsy. He said, "My mama didn't even know where I was." [laughs]

**MWENDO:** He said he was gone for seven days. That's what he said.

**THOMAS:** I don't know how long he was gone, but actually, that lady had him.

**MWENDO:** Yes. The neighbor down the street, you're saying.

**THOMAS:** [?] about Miss Boggs daughter. I don't know if they have the story now or not? You can have that.

**MWENDO:** Whose daughter?

**THOMAS:** [58:49] Miss Boggs. Are you reading that thing? Look at the back.

**MWENDO:** Oh. That's Lily Tomlin.

**THOMAS:** I thought that was Lindy Boggs.

**MWENDO:** It says, "Trudy the Bag Lady."

**THOMAS:** Oh, I thought it was Lindy Boggs' daughter. I must have been mistaken.

**MWENDO:** No, that say Lily Tomlin.

**THOMAS:** Lily. Somebody different.

**MWENDO:** Remember Lily Tomlin?

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** She was a comedian.

**THOMAS:** Yes.

**MWENDO:** Yes. See her name right here? Lily Tomlin.

**THOMAS:** Yes. I was wondering. I said, "That look like Lindy Boggs' daughter, but it not."

**MWENDO:** [59:20] Well I want to thank you so much, Miss Thomas, for taking time out to tell a story. Hopefully this will turn into something. The next step is going to be to transcribe it. Get these tapes into a library. Who knows? Once they in a library, when people start doing research on Hurricane Betsy, maybe they'll listen to this tape.

**THOMAS:** Maybe they'll listen to that and do something about it.

**MWENDO:** And do something about it.

**THOMAS:** The way the people live . . . The houses down here are really gone, you know that. The people are not building up down here like they should. They've got so much drugs out there.

**MWENDO:** That's a big problem.

**THOMAS:** It ain't like it used to be. You can't even go nowhere at night.

**MWENDO:** Hopefully things will turn around. We've got to make it turn around.

**THOMAS:**    Yes, that's right. We've got to make it turn around.

**MWENDO:**    Okay. Thank you again, Miss Thomas.

**THOMAS:**    Okay.

**[1:00:21]**

**[End Tape 3341, Side B. End Session II.]**