

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings
Steven Craig Wilfong Oral History
Date of Interview: February 26, 1986
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Length of Interview: 01:03:29
Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline
Transcriber: NCC

Michael Kline: What is your full name?

Steven Craig Wilfong: Steven Craig Wilfong.

MK: You live now at?

SCW: I live now at 401 Walnut Street. That's where I live, renting.

MK: A renter.

SCW: Now a renter.

MK: Are you a native of Tucker County?

SCW: Yes, born and raised.

MK: Who was your people?

SCW: My mother's parents were in the Strawderman family. I just couldn't give you a whole lot of background on my father's family.

MK: But his name was?

SCW: Blennice Wilfong. I can't remember his dad. I can remember grandmother and that's the only one. She was a Wilfong. Then evidently, he had died and remarried a fellow by the name of Saltz. So, Melissa Saltz was what she was, her name.

MK: You grew up in a big family?

SCW: Yes. There's seven of us all together, seven kids. I was the youngest. I was the totem pole bottom.

MK: Or the top. They are all scattered out now?

SCW: It was five boys, two girls. All the boys are right here in Parsons. The two girls live in Virginia. Different towns of Virginia, but they're really close. They're probably forty-five-minute drive from each other, I'd say, where they're located.

MK: So, you went to school then?

SCW: Yes, the grade school now. Parsons High School at the time.

MK: There used to be high school.

SCW: Yes.

MK: You must have finished up there, what, about [19]70?

SCW: 1970 exactly. That's a good guess. That's a very good guess. 1970, I'm 34 years old.

MK: I'm forty-six. So, I did some quick guesstimating there. Did you go into this car parts business then?

SCW: I've only been in the automobile or this business in June [19]82. That's when I bought the – where I was located on the corner. (Jim Prop?) started it. I think it was October of [19]81 and was having financial problems all the way through with it. His son-in-law ran it and was not involved in that type of business before. I feel he made some bad moves.

MK: What had you done before getting there?

SCW: Well, prior to buying this, I think for roughly for maybe nine months, I sold insurance, life insurance. Probably, ten years before that I worked for Kidwell's in the automotive business. Prior to that, I worked basically, which would have been for two years, I think, at the Tannery, Parsons Tannery. When I got out of high school, that's where I went to work.

MK: What was that like?

SCW: That was very interesting. That was a lot of hard work. That was the type of job where you put in your day's work, and you went home and forgot about it. To where, compared to something like this, I'll go home in the evening, I'm like, God, I forgot to look something up and order it. They're coming in tomorrow to get it, and I'm not going to have it.

MK: Work on your books.

SCW: Right. Lots of times you got to come back in the evenings, put in time, putting stock up, checking your inventory, putting in catalogs.

MK: But you really know this business. I mean, you've been ten years in the automotive industry.

SCW: Yes. Basically, though, that was just working on the counter. Owning it now, I don't know if you want to call it the business part of it or what you would say, but it's the real downright nitty gritty part of it. I'm being only in it for a little over three years. I'm still learning every day.

MK: Yes. It makes me very nervous.

SCW: All right.

MK: Although I've been in business myself. I've done contracting work.

SCW: I always thought that before that that's what I wanted was to be in business, have my own

business. I still say today that for me, I feel this is the only way. But it's been tough. I've learned a lot of things in the past three years. It's not as easy as what a lot of it looks when you work for somebody.

MK: Well, the tax structure is not very kind to people.

SCW: No. The B&O tax I think is totally ridiculous. It seems like to me, every month it's taxes, which you got your consumer sales tax. What you do, you have to fill out and send in, your quarterly all the time. You got your Social Security, your unemployment, your workman's comp, something that I never really thought about and still am not comfortable with, not knowing that much about it.

MK: But prior to last November, you were located in a building across the street.

SCW: 337 1st Street.

MK: A red brick, glass front.

SCW: Right.

MK: You've been in the business then what, two and a half years. You were rocking and rolling right along.

SCW: Well, actually, it was a little bit longer than that, was would have been three years of June – what's this, [19]86? That was [19]85. I had gone through and was still going through some financial problems that I was in from really inexperience and learning. But I was really just starting to come out of it. I would have said by the middle of this year or possibly the last of it that I would have been in extremely good shape to where I wasn't quite where I should have been.

MK: You wouldn't be servicing, anyway.

SCW: Definitely. Because in that length of time, I built up a very good business. (Napa?), which is my distributor, was extremely pleased. They felt that they'd always been doing business in Parsons, but they didn't know as to what it would do. Because before they ever sold it or let props come in, they went to Wards and Elkins. Their response was that there wasn't enough business to support a store. So, since then they've definitely changed their mind. I'm sure they have. You're talking six owners over there, compared to one here.

MK: You're also active in the fire department.

SCW: Yes, volunteer fireman.

MK: For many years?

SCW: Jeez, I can't even remember when I did join it. I think it was [19]76 or [19]77. I'm not

really sure. I'm not too good on time.

MK: You've seen a lot of action in that though.

SCW: Yes. I've been through a lot of fires, a lot of car wrecks, things like that. Nothing like what we went through this time on the flood, right?

MK: What do you remember? I guess it'd have been raining, what, for almost a week.

SCW: Yes. But it didn't really seem that bad. I didn't think that we really had that much rain. I felt that we've had more rain in that length of time than what we did.

MK: I don't think anybody was particularly impressed by it.

SCW: I'm all nervous here. I got a route that I run every day from Parsons to Thomas, Davis Harmon, back down through Elkins and back in. Never seen no problems the whole day left out of Harmon, must have been about 12:30 p.m. I'd the radio on, started coming down 33. The radio comes on, says (Tuckers?) Valley School was lighting out because of rising water. That seems funny. Ten minutes later, it says Harmon's lighting down. I just came out of Harmon, and I had never seen it. Through the little streams coming off the mountains, where it was white. It was a lot of water coming down. It was white. Yes, I've seen it that way before. It didn't seem that bad. Coming to Parsons, I guess, I got here about 3:00 p.m., 3:30 p.m. I'm right beside the river where I was. So, I looked over to the river. It wasn't up. Nothing, never thought nothing about it, went home, monitors went off, went down the fire hall. We're pumping out of basement at Doc Pete's clinic. I said we're calling for 3 feet above flood stage. I said that wasn't that unusual because we've been told that before. It's always crested before it got there and went down. We have a ditch right back over here that ran, it's a railroad ditch. I did live right on the other side over here. We always have backup water. Like every time it's been like this, it comes up close to the house, but nothing drastic. We always watch it. My wife calls, a little scared about it. So, I'm starting from the fire hall to go back to tell my wife, it's they're calling for 3 feet, doesn't seem to be that bad. We're going to wait it out and see what happens. Stop in the fire hall to take my bunker gear off before I go on over to the house. The fire chief says they just closed all roads, incoming and outgoing Parsons. Oh, jeez, what's going on? So, I went upstate. I see how bad is the mountain? I said, well, you know, its small slides coming off the hills and stuff. So, he said, it's passable if you watch what you're doing. So, I'll go back home, tell the wife, and get some clothes together and we're taking the kids. I'm going to take you up to your sisters for the night. I'll come back tomorrow and get you. So, we left, took them up. I'll come back. I don't know, it must have been, what, 6:30 p.m., 7:00 p.m., come across the Black Fork, no problem. Waters up, didn't seem to be still that bad at that time to me. Come across Lambert's and I hit some water where it was in the road, but it looked like it was coming out of a storm drain, still wasn't that bad. I've seen that before. Go back down to the fire hall, put my bunker gear back on and we go back out, start pumping a few more places out, basements filling in. Next thing we know, it was the black fork bridge, it said it's washed out. You can't get across. We got firemen over there with a rescue truck and a fire truck, can't get back into Parsons. We can't get over them. We had a boy come in, said we had a jeep overturned in Holly Meadows, said we need a ladder. Well, all we had was the big fire trucks. So, we took off. We

thought there's only three of us. Well, it was Larry Price, and the Simmons boy may be got in the front and left. We didn't know there's anybody on the back until we got down there. We had three boys on the back when we got down there. There were two McQueen boys down there. At the road down in Holly Meadows with, I guess, I don't know, must have been fifty yards out in through there. The jeep was overturned. The people were setting up on it on the side, waving our arms worse. So, we walk around scratching our heads, what we're going to do with the ladder. We can't get to them with the ladder. So, we started looking in the truck for ropes. They took all the ropes out and put them in the rescue truck when they went to Hendricks and Hambleton to try and get the people out from up in there. So, all we had was one little old – I guess the thing might have been 25-foot rope. We tied a brass fitting on it, tried to throw it out to the people out there, but it wouldn't reach. When we threw it out there, it came out of our hand – my hands actually, I was the one holding the hand of it and we lost the ropes and everything. Oh, well, I start around the truck looking in the compartments, hopefully coming up with another rope or something or some type of idea. We were all trying to figure out some way to get out of there to them. Because we knew them. I knew them anyway. I know a couple of the others who knew them. Trying to figure out a way that we can get out there to get them in or get them off there anyway. Next thing we know, we're kind of one side. I open up a compartment, look in it and I close it. Then all of a sudden, something's behind me shoving me. I turn around, there's nobody there other than just water. Pinned me against the truck and Larry Price, who got in it and tried to start it within was trying to back it up. We felt we were too far then, it didn't seem to be that high when we went in there, maybe 2 feet of water. Well, all of a sudden, he tried backing it up and did not go. Just all of a sudden, the front starts floating, turning sideways. Evidently somewhere on up the upper end of the fields with the fences and the debris and stuff holding the water back and it broke over. It just let a kind of wall water come down through evidently and just shoved the fire truck right out into the center of the doggone river there. It was a ditch with drainage ditch. It went down through there, but the water came over so much it kind of made it like a river. It wasn't the main river. We got out in there and we were stuck right there – they're all of a sudden it just – we're watching Bob and his wife and daughter over there and it just lifted up the Jeep. Just lifted it up like that, and there they go floating down the river. We watched them till it was out of sight with the lights we had because it was dark then. Everybody said, "Oh God, what's next?" Here we are on the phone screaming or the radio screaming for help to get us out. So, then we were sitting there really feeling, I don't know how we were feeling. We were scared, definitely scared. Three of us were still in the front and the three firemen and the two McQueen brothers were on the back of the truck at that time. It was swift. We knew there wasn't any way, it was going to walk out of it. So, we thought we'd just call for what we thought or – what they were going to try and do was bring the loader that Chuck Dumar had over on the avenue down and get us out. But they were out of fuel. They had to stop and get fuel. The speed of those things – the size of a loader is not very fast. The water just kept coming up and coming up and coming up and we could see probably thirty yards over a little knoll there, a little thing where there was – it was land. So, we thought of ways of trying to get over there. So, naturally, Larry being the oldest farmer says, "Let's wait." So, we're going to wait when the McQueen boys decide to try and go off with two hundred feet of fire hose and thought maybe they could walk over to the land and secure that and for us to come off. So, they tried, and I got out in the river and the next thing we know, it's washing them down and we lose sight of them. Everybody said, "Thank God. There's two more going." We thought we'd lost the Moors. We thought we lost those guys. We didn't give anybody back up here, the dispatch

or anybody that's trying to get to us really time to say anything to us because we were so scared. We just sat on that day going Mike saying, "You know, we need help, we need it now." We were shaken. We were extremely scared. Me and the Simmons boy are both scared or there's to start with can't swim. Well finally, we decided to get out and climb up on the back of the fire truck. We got up there and sat and waited. Finally, the truck started doing this back and forth and back and forth. We thought there was no way of riding that thing out. If the water comes or kept coming up, it's going to tilt it over and somebody's going to end up underneath it and that's it. Well, let me just let me get back here a little further on the McQueen boys. They went down and finally we spotted them where they went up on the knoll over there where it was high. They motioned for us to stay. Or it looked as though, which I think that's what they said they were doing, motioned for us to stay there, that the water was swift is all kind of debris in it. So, we thought, well, great, they'll go get some help. Get it down here right away. So, we probably waited another half hour and that's when the truck started rocking. We knew then we didn't have any choice. We either try on our own to get out of it or forget it. So, we went in a group, all six of us, down the 200 feet of hose. Well, we took all our bunker gear off. All we had on was pants, a shirt, and a pair of socks. The field was tough on the feet. It felt like corn stalks down here. Stepping on would have been cut off. I guess when we got to the end of the hose, we just let go. We went probably thirty feet just rolling around under the water, coming up gasping for air when you could, because it's swift, you couldn't swim in it. Larry went first. All of a sudden, I heard him. The others said they heard him say, "Stand up." So, everybody was grabbing at the ground and everything else. Finally, we stood up and we had some water that probably a little bit above our waist, still swift. You could stand in it and start walking in it. So, I stood up, couldn't breathe. I thought I was going to die right there. I see a little old sapling could have been about ten yards away from me. So, I made my way over to that thing, grabbed hold of it and then I heard somebody saying, "Craig, help me." So, I looked around. There was (Fred Trader?), and he was standing there. He said, "I can't move; I can't go." So, I got a hold of his hand and pulled him over to me. I told him, "Well, let's just stand here, until we can breathe." I said, "I can't breathe." So, we stood there. It couldn't have been maybe a minute or so. The other guys all come up and we've seen them all standing there. They started out and I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa." I said, "Backup, boys." I said, "We're going out here together." I said, "Me and Fred can't make it." So, we went another, probably another ten yards to another little sapling and got a hold of that. That's where the rest of them were. We got a hold and held hands and walked over to where we got up on that little knoll to where we could get out of it. We took turns for a while taking Fred because he can hardly walk. We got over it so far. We've seen where Chuck and Bernie come down in the loader. We could see a fire truck sitting over there, but there wasn't any way of getting into us. They couldn't get into us and the loader couldn't have got to us. So, it was just too much water, too swift. So, just for the grace of the good Lord, we made it out of there. The water was going down. For some reason, it was split. One was going this way, which took you right directly over to the river, the main river. The other one was just going over this way, I guess finishing up flooding that field out. Luckily, that's the way we washed. I don't know why, I don't know how, but that's the way we went. Then we got over there, two of them took hold of Fred and started carrying him. The rest of us took off running as far as we could, up the road to get out of there to get some help, to help him carry Fred out there when the emergency squad was coming down. Then with the basket or a board or something to carry somebody out because they already, two of the younger ones already beat us up there to tell them they needed help. We got up there and they loaded, oh I don't know, three or four of them

in the ambulance. Two of them got on inside the fire truck and (Buzz Harper?) brought me up and we all went to the hospital and kept us in there for what do they call it? You get too much water or whatever. But Fred was the worst one because he was having a lot of problems then and they put heating pads on his feet and around him to warm him up. So, we stayed there till 6:00 a.m. the next morning. They took our clothes which we had hung up there dried, left and went to the fire hall where there was nobody because it would been flooded out too. Someone said they were up at Tucker Manor. Well, we made it up Tucker Manor and everybody ended up getting a pair of shoes. But me, I couldn't find those shoes. What I had left was in the fire hall, got washed out. So, I stayed around there until, well, most of us stayed around there then for I don't know how many hours it was. We found them instead of being at Tucker Manor, they were out above the hospital. I guess we were there, I'm not really sure how long. Finally, Elena Menier came along and had a pair of boots she had borrowed from her neighbor to walk down to see her house because it was hit with flood and she loaned those to me until I could get some place to get some boots. I don't even remember where. I did get my next pair of boots. Yes, I do too. That was two days later before I could make it up on a mountain where they opened up Sugar Land Road. One of them had a truck and he took me up to my father in law's and I still had this guy's boots. Then he gave me money the next day and I went and bought me a pair of boots. Then I came back down and returned those other ones I had.

MK: What happened with the Moors then? What happened to Amy?

SCW: Fortunately for them, some way it washed them right on down and they – I understand, got out at the road, and walked up. Amy got stuck in it and she floated down there on I guess some pieces of our porch or something it was and got up in a tree. Her parents came back up here and couldn't get anybody to help for a long time to go down and search for them. So, finally, I think they got (Don Goss?) who had a boat, and he was down in St. George getting people out. He went down and went in searching in that area with another boy that was with him and heard somebody yelling and went over and got her out. So, it was just a miracle really for them and us and the whole town really, because we lost one, I think, in town from the flood. We're fortunate.

MK: What a story. Did you get to see your home that night then?

SCW: No, I didn't see the house until well that afternoon I think it was really. The water started getting down enough where you could get across to the tracks here. It was still up when we were looking out the window from Tucker Manor, it was still up at the AMP. So, I didn't try and come over here until probably sometime that evening when I walked down here across the tracks right here and took a look over and I saw it was still standing. I didn't know how bad it was, or anything until I didn't go over and go in it then because there's still water all the way around it. So, I figured I'd just wait till the water went down, see what happened. So, I don't know. I think I went back the next day before I ever went inside the house, seeing what happened.

MK: What did you see?

SCW: Wow. Dead dog, dead cat, which we had left in the house because we didn't think the water was going to get up that high. Just a total mess. Mud, probably a foot of mud. Mud all

the way around the house. You know you had to walk through mud to get up onto the porch. Well, I didn't stay too long. I walked in, looked in the living room, turned around, walked out, and left. I didn't go back and get the animals out for probably another day before I went back and got them even. When I came out of it, one of the neighbor's houses was a brick house right almost across the street from us. Not quite. It was up a little way. We had a cat that stayed outside most of the time. That thing got on the roof that had the vents and then held on to that doggone fence. Evidently, the water going over that house drowned that cat. There it was stuck on the roof, hanging over the roof with its paws on the vent. I wanted to get it down. But I didn't have any way of getting it down, so left it, and somebody somewhere along the line got it down, got rid of it.

MK: What did your store look like?

SCW: That's where I went first was the store. I walked down where I could. The windows were out, the doors busted out. The whole side of the wall was gone. There wasn't much left there. What happened is evidently it just whenever the wall went out, just like a suction, it must have just sucked most of the stuff right out of the store. Because it picked up the shelves we had with paint on it, full gallons of paint where we had like 3 and 4 extra gallons of them, probably 12, 15 pounds apiece. The shelving that was built was heavy to start with. It was a long one, almost as long with what this room is. I just picked it up and floated it and caught on where the mufflers' rack was and it stopped there. That's the biggest part of the paint stuff inside of it. It just went on down the river. The funny thing was, where the wall went out was where I had my muffler rack, and the mufflers were on cardboard boxes. It washed them boxes completely off of the muffler and left the muffler set. Just like they were taken out of it, boxes thrown away. The mufflers laid there right in order. That's the way it looked. That has amazed me more than anything, the way it did that. The boys had a little toy snail thing.

Male Speaker: I didn't see that. I wanted to get a picture of that.

[talking simultaneously]

SCW: – little green snail thing.

MK: That floated out of the –

SCW: That floated out of my house and ended up in my business, in the store.

MK: How far? 400 yards?

SCW: I'd say. I had to go across the tracks and everything to get there.

MK: Sounds like something out of Revelation.

SCW: Yes. I looked at that thing and I said, "Gee, I'm going to cry." I don't believe, and here that thing set. We set it up in the window and that's when the National Guard picked it up there and later on had it tied onto the front of the truck or something there. It was kind of comical in a

way.

MK: Did you tell me you have two children?

SCW: I've got four.

MK: Four kids?

SCW: Yes. Four kids, two girls, two boys.

MK: At least your mind was at ease about them because you've got them up on the mountain.

SCW: Right. There was no radio communication. We had no way of communicating with the mountain. All the telephones and everything was out.

MK: They must have been going crazy?

SCW: Yes. They had no idea as to where it was, or where I was, or nothing. Father-in-law didn't have a scanner either. I don't think that he knew what had happened because the scanner picked us up on the fire truck being stuck down there in the river. I can't remember now whether that was two or three days before she knew where I was. Finally, they got the radios working. One of the emergency squad people, I had them call the dispatcher – it was in the Davis place up there – and tell them if they could leave a message with my father-in-law and Thomas to tell my wife that I'm okay. It was I think three to four days after I made it back up before I seen them and let them know what had really happened. They had heard but they couldn't visualize what had really happened. I told her then, "I'm going to tell you what it is and I don't want you crying or saying nothing." I need support now. We lost all we had, which is what it really amounted to. I said, "Well, what really kind of bothered me, basically the whole town was going." You'd walk down through there and stores were just straight holes all the way through. It came in the front, washed everything out the back. But I don't think that's the way it happened though, because I went to the store earlier that evening when we went down to try and get (Snap Pitman?) out. A couple people come in with me and we took stuff off the two bottom shelves and moved it up because I figured that'd be good enough. I went to the back of the store where I had my truck parked inside and there was water coming in the back. It hadn't come in the front, but it was coming in the back. We went back down another time to check on somebody else and crap, it wasn't even knee deep when I was down at the store, around the back but that time it was waist deep. It couldn't have been a matter of fifteen, twenty minutes it seemed like, maybe. Could have been longer, but it sure didn't seem like it was very long. That water. I couldn't believe it was coming up. We tried to help (Joanne Thompson?) in her store, (Rennie Atkins?) in his store. We knew there was no sense going any further. It was coming up too high. It was going to clean them out, we could see that. That was before we ever went on the truck run down the Holly Meadows.

MK: So, your idea is the water came in from the back?

SCW: Started –

MK: Oh, it started?

SCW: – first from the back. I don't think we got that much water that came this way until it broke over at the dike at the pond. I guess that's when we started getting the biggest part of the water there. You could stand at the store when we went in it and the water looked like it was about 3 feet over the bank. It wasn't coming over in the town, but it's just like in the middle of it, it was just kind of up like that. It was carrying it good. It wasn't over the town bridge or nothing yet, but buddy, it was hitting her. That was the highest I'd ever seen it. But then it was coming up the back. I guess where it was starting to fill up the bar or where Black Fork and Shavers come together and the Cheat that was forcing it to start backing up, coming over in. Then whenever she broke over up there, I think that's how come I got really as bad as what it did at my house, it come back down field in over here at the railroad and back more water up towards the house. I don't know if it was completely underwater, but if it wasn't, it was mighty close to.

MK: When that dike broke, did a lot of water come down all at one time? Did anybody see?

SCW: I don't know if anybody's seen it. I don't think it came really all at one time. Maybe a few waves of it, but it just steadily kept coming down. Further up the bottom, it was. They got water but it wasn't as deep as what it got come down here. Of course, naturally we're lower than what they are up there. It just started up against the tracks and right through the tracks. I think (Bob Bush?) off down here and parts of his service station there had 12 feet of water in it. We measured 10 on the house over there where the mark was. They say the water is probably an inch or so above even where the water is. So, we had plenty of it.

MK: Your kids are what ages?

SCW: Thirteen, eleven, three and two.

MK: Just a little word in mind. When we first saw you in the store this afternoon, you talk as though you almost made it a point of keeping them up on the mountain as long as you could, away from this.

SCW: Right.

MK: You didn't want them to see this?

SCW: I didn't want them to see it and I didn't want my wife to see it. It was hard for me to handle, really. I knew I'd lost the business, which bothered me. When I lost the home, my first thought was, "What the Sam Hill am I going to do?" What we're going to do? I have no idea of where to go to or what to think. It's just hard to believe, a matter of hours, you can lose everything you got. I have nothing. A lot of people lost their home and that was to them. When you got a home and no business, you're losing everything that way, same as me with the business and that both. But it really had me concerned because I had a lot invested in the store. That was my livelihood. I not only lost where I lived, I lost my way of supporting my family. I didn't know how or what I would do to be able to afford to get another home or what.

MK: How is that going? You've had to work a lot with the agencies that have come in here like FEMA or some of the other ones. How's that at all?

SCW: It's a very slow process, very slow. You always read about something like this happening someplace else. You see, well, federal government's going in and they're going to do this and that for the people. You think, well, great. They're being helped, being taken care of. I can see now what really those people have been going through. It's not something that they just come back in and say we're going to do this and have you back in a new home or something like that with a matter of a month or something because it's been what, four months? I don't know of anybody that has got SBA money in hand yet for a business or a home. Several people have got approval, telephone approval. A lot of people received the papers, the finalized papers and the do's and don'ts, what you can and can't use it for. But now I don't know of anybody right off hand that's got money in hand.

MK: As a businessman, can you see ways of streamlining that to get help to people faster? Can you imagine any quicker ways than what they've been able to do?

SCW: I think one of the biggest things would be is when a disaster happens in an area like we're talking here. We're just a small county. We got Hendricks that got hit, Hamilton and Parsons, Saint George. To me, they ought to be setting up an office here and handling all the stuff right here because it all comes back and goes through a local bank. So, if it was here and they were here and all the information that you send in and they send back and say, "We need this and this and this." What you didn't send in to begin with so, there's another delay of sending in three or four days, then getting it to you. You getting it and collecting it and sending it back into them. If they were here, you could do it here. You could get it quicker. A day or two you could have it and it would be right here instead of Atlanta to where you're talking two to three days probably mail time. Whatever they mail to you and then whatever you have to return or mail to them. Even though they were set up in Clarksburg, to me it didn't seem close enough because the disaster's here. They ought to have an easier and a more central location with different type teams to take care of. They had the teams come into the courthouse and it was here for a couple weeks or whatever. Why can't they just keep them, to help you with the paperwork and stay right on top of it right here.

MK: Because it was a pretty extensive application process.

SCW: It certainly was. A lot of times, I ask for stuff that you couldn't provide. I lost a lot of the stuff that I needed and I couldn't get it and couldn't provide it to them. I didn't have it. I know several others who were in the same boat. When you have not got it, you can't get it. It's just gone.

MK: People were really in a state of shock for a long time, as far as going down and signing up and doing all the right steps of the procedure.

SCW: I don't think people were so much in shock of the fact that they – the day after – were right into their businesses and into their home cleaning it up. They didn't want to take the time

to have to go down and spend eight hours sitting in the courthouse, going from one person to another person to another one, which took basically all day long. Then a lot of trips back. I went to the business and started on that first because we were going to move in with her dad and stay until we could get things worked out. So, we just went into the store and started cleaning up. Everybody on Front Street, that's what they were doing. Everybody just started working together. Plus, a lot of individual help coming in, people helping and just trying to clean it up. Probably a good thing we did and kept a lot of this other stuff off of her mind to think about it. Believe you me, buddy, when you work and shovel mud all day long, when it comes time to go home, sit down and eat supper, you're ready to go to bed. You didn't really think about it and you were tired enough that you didn't – to me anyway – it wasn't on my mind that much until I got up the next morning, went back at it again. But just like I said a while ago, everybody goes through different tribulations. This was a major one for a lot of people. They've been other things that people go through, divorces, death of a child and stuff like that, which is tough to recover from. This is just another one of those type things. It's just part of the life and you just got to make the best of it and do the best you can, come out of it however you can. Well, I'll tell you one thing, we got a bunch of people around here that are survivors. I can't think of anybody in this community that's not trying to come back, not a soul, and they will too. There's no doubt about it.

MS: Any questions?

MK: Boy, Craig, what a good statement.

SCW: It's a feeling of everybody, I think. You went through it with us. I can't see anybody that's not just knuckled down and just coming back. What choice have you got? You've worked so many years to try and get what you got. You got to put it back together some way. Standing around and thinking about it and worrying about it just don't get it done. You just got to jump into it and do it.

MK: But people really have worked together?

SCW: Oh, I think extremely well. Here comes Salvation Army within a day's time. There's no place to eat and everybody's lost their home. You can't cook nothing to eat. Here they come, they set up a small canteen. People can get hot soup, sandwiches, coffee, whatever. Then here comes the Red Cross, not saying anything says, "You know, tell me what you lost." Right now, on this piece of paper saying, "Okay. Here it is. Take it to a store and buy it. This pays for it." It's great. I guess you'd say it's the American way maybe, but it makes you appreciate a lot of things. I think it's made people stronger in this community, I really do. We're just going back through this rebuilding thing and we're talking about the mall-type thing. It's going to be expensive. Can we make it? It's a big question. It's a lot of money. Have we got a choice? We don't. We got to make it and we will. It's going to be expensive. People are going to have to change a lot of things that they did before, but they'll do it and they'll make it.

MS: You're in here temporarily then? You're going to move back there?

SCW: No. I'm here permanently.

MS: Here permanently?

SCW: I'm here permanently. The building down there, first of all, I didn't know how long it would take them to ever rebuild it. I wasn't willing to sit back and wait. I want to get started back up since I've got obligations. I got the bank. I had to pay to make bank payments. Fortunate enough to have enough flood insurance on my house to pay the mortgage off. Didn't have nothing on contents, but it paid off what I owed FHA.

MS: How'd you know to have flood insurance? I don't have flood insurance.

SCW: FHA loan required – lived in the floodplains – it was a requirement that I had to have.

MK: They figured that was a floodplain?

SCW: Yes. I'm glad I did now. I wish I had added on the business. I would have been back in business with inventory before now. Still don't have it yet, but I'll have it now within the next two weeks. Things are starting to come together. This is another typical example of me not being the right type businessman that I should be and learning as I go. When the governor come out with this program, I should have jumped right on top of it and did it right off. But I put it off. The banks, naturally, they're trying to work with us and help us. Napa, it was coming in saying, "We're going to try and get your credit for this stuff that you salvaged." I was waiting for that. That's a long process. They got to go back to the manufacturers and see if the manufacturers will do anything which they have on some of it. This got to the point where I was saying I was wasting my time and waiting. Where I should have just went, got the money, got the inventory and stored this in the back someplace until they could have come in, taken care of it, instead of trying to wait.

MS: We didn't know what to do.

SCW: It's true but I should have been thinking more about it. I went longer than what a lot of the other businesses went, which I feel now was another business mistake.

MK: How about your home?

SCW: I'm working on a plan with the government to sell it back to the government. I don't want to build back over there. I'm not saying that in the end that I won't. It may come down to it where I don't have any choice. I don't want to do it. Where I'm at, I like it but it's in the floodplain, or floodway. I don't think it's a floodway. There's two, there's floodplain, I guess some floodway, or something like that. I get them confused. But I'm hoping to get out of it. I'd like to stay where I'm at. But I didn't realize until yesterday looking at a map that it was also in it – which it got hit in the flood too. But they cleaned it up and it's in pretty good shape. It still needs repairs done to it and stuff. When she gets her SBA money – it's (Jane?) and (Barb?) – she's going to have the work done on it too. She'd give me the option on buying it. So, I don't know any more work out there yet either. That's just another one of those wait and see things.

MS: Yes.

[end of transcript]