

Interview with Geraldine Player

Narrator: Geraldine Player

Interviewer: Erin Rider

Location: Jacksonville, Alabama

Date: June 4, 2019

Project Name: Jacksonville Alabama Tornado Oral History Collection

Project Description: On March 19, 2018, an EF-3 tornado devastated the City of Jacksonville, Alabama, and had a significant impact on the campus of Jacksonville State University (JSU).

Using an oral history approach, a team of researchers from JSU's Center for Disaster and Community Resilience (CDCR) conducted in-depth interviews with 25 residents of Jacksonville who experienced the EF-3 tornado. Interviews took place in the Houston Cole Library, were conducted in private, and lasted approximately 90 minutes each. An article was published in 2022 based on the tornado oral history project in the *Weather, Climate, and Society* journal by the American Meteorological Society (AMS).

Principal Investigator: Tanveer Islam

Transcript Team: National Capitol Contracting

Abstract:

On June 4, 2019, Erin Rider interviewed Clint and Geraldine Player for the Jacksonville Tornado Oral History Project at the Houston Pool Library in Jacksonville State University. Clint and Geraldine Player shared their experiences surrounding the Jacksonville tornado, which occurred on March 19, 2018, and the aftermath of the disaster. Geraldine Player provides biographical information, discussing her life before the tornado and her family's ties to the community. She and her husband, Clint, describe the events leading up to the tornado, recalling how they monitored the weather and took shelter in their basement. They recount the terrifying moments when the tornado hit, noting how their truck, where they sought safety, was lifted and shaken by the storm. Geraldine speaks about the noise of the tornado, the damage to their home, and how they prayed together while fearing for their lives. The Players also detail the immediate aftermath of the tornado, including their initial shock and the realization that their home was a total loss. They express gratitude for surviving the storm, despite the overwhelming destruction around them. They describe the community's quick response, including volunteers and first responders who helped clear debris and offer support. Geraldine reflects on the emotional impact of losing personal possessions, particularly antiques and family photographs, and the eventual decision not to rebuild their home but to relocate. The interview captures the Players' resilience, the role of faith in their recovery, and the challenges they faced with insurance and rebuilding. Geraldine highlights the importance of preparedness, sharing practical advice such as having helmets, jackets, and shoes ready for emergencies. The interview concludes with reflections on how the experience has changed their perspective on material possessions and reinforced their appreciation for community support and survival.

Erin Rider: My name is Erin Rider from Jacksonville State University. We are conducting an oral history project of the Jacksonville tornado that occurred on March 19th, 2018. Today is June 4th, 2019. We are hearing from Clint and Geraldine Player who will share their experience with the tornado and recovery. Our interview is taking place at the Houston Cole Library. How were you affected by the tornado?

Geraldine Player: Well, we totally lost our home. That was one thing. It makes us fear other storms. It makes us a little – we don't want to tell you things we shouldn't [laughter].

ER: So, how did that night start? When did you first hear that there was going to be bad weather?

GP: We had kind of been watching the weather. We always do that. I was on the phone with my daughter-in-law. I told her that, "Oh, it's going above us." They had reported it was going towards the center and above us. I told Carol, I said, "It's going above us, but we'll pray for those people." About that time, just that morning, we had decided to get the weather out on our cellphone. About that time, that app went off for Jacksonville people to take cover immediately. So, all we could do was just throw down everything we had and go to the basement. However you're dressed, that's how you're dressed [laughter]. I only had the socks on. I didn't have shoes or anything. No coat. Didn't think about it getting cold. We went down to the basement and put our helmets on. Where we usually get in the, just sit in this corner at the bottom of the steps against the concrete wall, that night my husband had put the car and the truck in the basement to avoid hail damage. So, that night, he said, "Why don't we get in the truck?" I said, "Well, we will have more coverage." So, we did. It was just an act of God helping us because had we sat where we usually sit, we would have been at least hurt really bad. Because there were 2x4s big lumber with nails right down where we sit. We were of course in the truck, and we could hear everything. It was picking the truck up and sucking garage doors in. If you think of anything I need to add to that I've already told you.

ER: What were your thoughts during that time where it was getting more and more severe? What's going through your minds?

GP: You really don't have time to – it happened so fast. We started praying. We were praying. We were holding hands. He was in the front seat; I was in the back. I was praying for God to protect us and our family and our children. But we never thought to say and protect our property. But as I said, it just happened so fast you don't have time to –

ER: At that point were you thinking that this is a tornado that's coming through?

GP: Oh, yes. We knew it was. You can hear it. We knew it was a tornado, yes.

ER: What was the sound like?

Clint Player: Oh.

GP: People say a train. I don't really remember anything like that. What was horrible was when you could hear the roof leaving. It's so fast and so traumatic that I really think I went into a shock. All I remember is just – I get chills when I think about how the sound of everything blowing. You could hear it hitting and almost lifting you up. You kept thinking, "Well, is it going to take us?"

CP: It didn't seem to let up. People say, "Well, it's over in a few seconds." But it seemed like it lasted for minutes.

GP: I believe this was an F3. Was that right?

ER: Yes.

CP: Yes.

GP: I'd hate to be in a five. You can imagine. That's one thing that I have – Even all we went through, I can still thank God that we were blessed. For one thing, we did have really good replacement insurance. When I saw all the people down in Lee County and what happened to them, we didn't have to bury – I cannot imagine what I was going through and having to bury a loved one. You can't imagine. I'm sure that would make everything else not – I will put one thing, when we finally went in the house the next morning. I just told you our RV was dry, and we stayed all night in there. We didn't sleep. All night long, they were cutting limbs and clearing the road within 6 feet of us. It was just right there at us. So, all night long. People got there so quick. That was just – It was amazing how quick people started checking on us. So, you really thank God for the volunteers and for people who are first responders. But when I got in the house the next morning, one of my best friends came in, and she said, "Geraldine –" I've been an antique collector. Oh, gosh, just all stuff [laughter] that was so important. My friend said, "What is one thing that you'd like me to get? What's the most important?" I said, "Everything and nothing." That's how you feel right then. It suddenly made me just want to just give away a lot. Just give it away. I've done a lot of that. But it just gave me a feeling of how unimportant stuff is.

ER: So, let's go back a little bit to when you finally decided you're going to get out of the truck. What was that kind of process like?

GP: I think I told you this before, but I was on the phone with my daughter. She was at Lake Lulu. They were in an RV. She kept telling me to stay in the truck once we knew that – I had told her on the phone that we were being hit, and we were really being hit hard. I kept saying, "But we're still okay. We're still okay." Finally, we got scared because it started raining on us in the truck. We knew then. I told my daughter, I said, "It's raining on us, Tammy." She said, "Well, mother, it does rain right after a tornado." I said, "No, but it's raining on us in the truck." We had to turn the windshield wipers on. It was raining so hard in the basement. She said she told her husband then we have to leave. We've got to go because it's bad. But she did say to me, she said, "Now, mother, you've always been strong, and you have to stay strong." Just that word, it just helps. But anyway, we were scared to get out of the truck for so long. But she kept texting my other children. Finally, my son told us, said, "Well get out, but hurry." We knew to

hurry out of the garage and be careful. So, we got out the truck. I had on my sock feet. The water was probably 6 to 8 inches deep in the basement. We walked through that. The door was real close. When we came out of the garage, I noticed that the – although I knew it was raining in on us, for some reason I couldn't get it all together because it was a shock to me that the latticework was out from under the back deck. Then we saw our gazebo on the ground. Then we walked a little farther. We saw our chimney was across the driveway. So, we went up to the neighbor's house. They had been hit, but not nearly – I think just mostly glass on front of some windows. They had a tree across their fence in the back, but nothing else. So, we went in. My husband had given me his shoes, and he stepped on a nail. But it was not a bad injury. But they gave me a coat to get warm. Then, as I told you before, my first son and his son got to us, and they helped. I wanted to go sit on the porch. They informed me that my front porch was gone. So, we went down to the RV, and it was dry and safe. We just stayed in there that night. In fact, because of the looting – and I don't know if anybody else has reported this, but within three hours of the tornado, they arrested three people from Tennessee for looting. So, what we did, when we could, somebody came the next day or two and helped us – and were really put in danger – helped us get the car and truck out of the garage in a hurry to make sure that it didn't fall.

CP: That's the guy from church.

ER: Huh?

CP: The youth director from church.

GP: Yes, the youth director from First Baptist Church. We knew him. He helped my husband get the car and truck out. Then at some point, I don't remember when, we moved the RV out of where it was and pulled it in the upper drive. My daughter and her husband left. I think Mike slept till 4:00 a.m. Then they left. On their way here, they brought three generators, lots of plastic bags, and cases of water. So, when they got here, we were able to put the generator and keep the RV going. But it hit our hot water heater on the RV. So, we had no hot water. Every morning, I'd get up and put the washcloth in the microwave to wash my face. I don't think it has ever been as rainy and cold as it was that March after that. That's one of the first things I remember is I was just so cold all the time. When I see somebody now, it makes me want to make a big pot of soup and get some big coats and take it to people. But Samaritan's Purse, Billy Graham's Ministry, oh, they were just wonderful to come and help us. So many people did come by with food. It's just amazing how the community did come in and help us. As I said, we did have good insurance. We knew right away – My insurance man, the one we pay the premium to, got to my house about 11:30 the next day. We knew the number, and we called the insurance people about as soon as we knew they were in the office. I knew their number by heart [laughter]. He told me then, he said, "I feel sure this is a total loss." So, then it took a while for us. We got our frustration was that the insurance adjuster, they had him come from California. I couldn't understand that. He came all the way. Why did they not have some adjusters here close to come in? That I couldn't understand. We were frustrated. My daughter was real frustrated. Then they started having people come in like SERVPRO. I don't know if you want to put this or not, but my sister lives at Silver Lakes, and the tornado had gone through there. She had two neighbors that were really wiped out. They both told me, "Don't use SERVPRO." That they had

bad experiences with them. Well, because I guess my insurance company was trying to get them to get SERVPRO, they finally, it was about three or four days later, will see my furniture was wet. It's real mahogany. You can't even restore it to its original state and it hold its value. So, anyway, my son bought some boxes and wrapping, and my daughter wrapped. I lost less than five pieces of glass. I've been a glass collector [laughter]. I would have been better off probably if I'd lost a little more of that. I did lose a lot of me – I had a lot of books, old books. I did lose a lot of those. Some of my family pictures on the wall, they were damaged. That was one of my biggest personal losses.

ER: Let's go back to that morning. So, you spent the night in the RV. Then you go back in, and this is your time to see the house in daylight. So, what's coming through your mind, and what are you noticing?

GP: Well, we walked in the kitchen door. Then I looked into the den. We had just bought a sofa. We bought it and put it on the credit card and pay it off the first of the month. Because we make money on our credit card. We had not even paid for that sofa. I had a fairly new fabric La-Z-Boy recliner that I had bought four months before. Here's all this debris and sheet rock and everything all down on it and wet. It's just that way. It's just one of those things you have to accept. This is life. I know Bob McLeod from Our Father's Arms came up to my house.

ER: Wow. Yes, you had major damage. Pretty [inaudible].

CP: Yes, that's the couch.

GP: Yes. Well, that's when they were taking it out. You don't have a picture of the den the way it was.

CP: Yes.

GP: But Bob McLeod from Our Father's Arms came up there. I think it's after I had called him. I was going to donate a lot to them. I've known him a long, long time. He walked up on the porch. I had not shed a tear. I was just seemingly calm in a way. He hugged me, and I said, "Bob, this world's not my home. I'm just passing through." That's kind of how I felt right then. Material things just don't seem as important. Later, and you may not want me to jump ahead.

ER: No, that's okay.

GP: Later, we were going to my other sons over on 6th to eat one night. All my family was here. We were just going to try to go over there and eat. Usually, I go down to 11th and turn right, go up 6th and turn left down to his house. Well, that night there was so much debris everywhere. We were on 3rd Avenue, 9th Street. We went all the way down 3rd and around up and come back up into my son's house. That night, it was almost dark. The next morning, we were sitting out in front of the house, and we had made a decision. We were almost sure it was totaled. We do not want to try to build this back here. That was my first quick decision. People started hitting us really hard to buy. We had a man, it seemed like, the next day, was there. He had a team, and he was there getting repairs. When he got to my house, he wanted it – he didn't

want to repair it. He went in and saw that it only broke one stained glass window up in the top over the porch. Most of the old wood and doorknobs, all that, was fine. I'll get back to going around the curb. But the odd thing about a storm, they'll tell you, go to the basement. You know where would have been the safest place in my house?

ER: Where?

GP: The front bathroom toward Birmingham where the storm was coming from. It did not have – it was just like you could go in and use it. The lights were off, and that's the only difference. Then my back little utility room on the side of the house, not touched. So, it's just unreal to say what a tornado's going to do. Because the basement, I don't feel good in a basement anymore. But anyway, we went around the curb, and that night it was almost dark. There was a long house on the corner, a big, ranch style with a swimming pool. I told my husband, I said – It was for sale. I said, "I know one thing, that's not what I want [laughter]." I knew I didn't want a great, big ranch house with a swimming pool at our age. But next door – and it had already gotten dark – there was something in the yard. But I didn't know what it was. There was a cute, little house cottage-looking with a nice front porch. Good. It had a good curb appeal. I said, "Well, that was a cute house." Well, we went around. My daughter, later, she got on it, and she liked it. But anyway, she went on Zillow. I had never heard of Zillow.

ER: Oh, yes [laughter].

GP: [laughter] She said, "Mother, I went on Zillow, and that house is so cute." I said, "Tammy, I'm not going to live on a street named Zillow [laughter]."

ER: Oh, yes, that's what you thought [laughter].

GP: That's our biggest joke now.

ER: Yes, that's funny.

GP: But anyway, long story short, finally we did buy that house and moved in May 7th. That's jumping ahead a little bit. But back to having a company. My daughter wrapped all that. About two or three days later, they did send somebody from SERVPRO from up in Gunners. By then we didn't need them. We had a little trailer that you pull. My son had a large trailer that he pulls with his motorcycle and lawnmowers and everything. His sister's friend had a huge trailer. We bought a fourth trailer. We loaded everything we owned that we could salvage in those four trailers. Then the nicer things, some of my few antique furniture that I could keep, my son had a huge living room that was empty, my one son, and we put everything in there until we got in the house on May 7th.

ER: Where were the trailers located?

GP: We stored them up at my daughter's. She has two big lots up there. We just pulled them in back up there. I got really frustrated with the city because my daughter has a house, and it has an extra lot. It's actually our house, but she has a lifetime estate in it. We had this empty lot on the

back. She needed an outbuilding. Now your insurance will pay for an iPod. If you go rent an iPod, it'll pay for it. But it won't pay for a building or a trailer. Is that not weird?

ER: Yes, it's [specific?].

GP: Pays the company, but it won't – so, we said if we got to buy, we'll buy a building to go on that lot. We went down here on the highway. They'll just bring one out and put it on. My son said, "Well, the one on 204 looks sturdier." So, he went out there, and they said, "Well, you have to get an okay from the city before we'll bring this out." The city, because we were going to have to go in and divide those lots, redo the whole thing to let the city put that stupid building, which will look better. They said, "Now, as long as anything has wheels on it, you can park it there." Now, just how much sense does that make? We even thought about getting wagon wheels and putting it [laughter] on the building.

ER: [laughter] Right.

GP: But we were really frustrated. Even with the city in a time like that, we have always kept our property really good, no litter, grass cut. We really have a lot of pride in our home and to be denied a storage building which would have looked better. Now, my daughter's got our trailers parked up there, and that's okay.

ER: Yes. You would think they would have been lenient especially because of the tornado.

GP: It makes no sense. But anyway, you go through frustrations like that, that you really don't need at that time.

CP: But now we really didn't have a place to stay. Even though we did stay in the motor home, it was not livable because it had suffered a lot of damage also.

GP: Hot water heater.

CP: It had holes in the roof. It rained inside there also but not over the bed. We could sleep on the bed, but the rest of it was –

GP: It was rough living there. But my son-in-law called as soon as they got here the next morning, he started calling to try to get us a room somewhere. The nearest room was Boaz, Alabama because of the storm. You know what is so crazy too? It was probably maybe close to a week before I knew that anybody else was damaged that bad. I kind of thought we were the only ones. That's a weird feeling too. Then I didn't realize until way later, probably took two months or longer, that it really put that many people out of homes. I guess you go into a take-care-of-me stage or something. I don't know.

ER: You're overwhelmed [laughter]. A lot to –

GP: Yes, just overwhelmed.

ER: So, that first week you mentioned that you were kind of going through and collecting some of the contents. Then what was kind of your living arrangements?

GP: Now, what? I'm sorry I didn't get your –

ER: So, the first week, like the next day and then onward, what was your living arrangements? I know that you said you were going through the house and getting some of the contents out. What other things were you doing, and then where were you living?

GP: Well, we were living in the RV.

ER: Still? Okay.

GP: We actually stayed in it for about, maybe ten days, Clint?

CP: Maybe.

GP: Because of looters. We knew as long as we were there, we could at least protect anything that was in the house. Everybody – Any kind of food, if somebody didn't bring something, we'd get something. But we had a lot of food brought, a lot. My family is here. I have a sister that lives at Silver Lakes and a brother in Oxford and a brother over in – so, I have family here.

ER: You got family, got you.

GP: We go to First Baptist. We have our church family.

ER: Then after the ten days, what was your living options at that point?

GP: Well, actually I have three children here. We first went to my son and his wife because they've got four bedrooms and their children are gone. That was good. We went there and stayed; I don't remember how long.

CP: Maybe a week.

GP: No, we stayed longer than a week.

CP: Two weeks.

GP: Let's see, Clint, we may have stayed a month there. But then we went to my daughter, Melissa's. Her house is smaller, but she wanted us to come too. I wanted to give my son and his wife – you don't dare want to overdo your welcome [laughter].

ER: Yes. Give everybody a little break.

GP: Yes. They were good. So, we stayed with family though till we bought the house. The day we bought the house on March 7th, we had gone and had them deliver a mattress.

CP: May 7th.

GP: May 7th, yes, we closed that day. We had bought a mattress for our – We were going to try to keep our king-sized bed from my bedroom. It was still over at my son's, but we knew we were going to have to buy a mattress for it. I didn't want to do that right then. So, we bought a mattress for the other bedroom and put it on the floor. That night, the first night, we slept on that mattress and threw a sheet on it and put a coffee pot in the kitchen, and we were trucking again [laughter].

ER: Yes [laughter]. How was that process like to – your home was declared a total loss, and then you're looking for another house. What was that process like? What went well? What were some of the challenges?

GP: Well, it's devastating. For one thing, when I bought the house that the tornado hit, when I found it, the realtor – we had built out going toward Piedmont a new home. I just wanted to get back into town where I could hear the band at the college on Saturday. I just missed the sound of town. So, my realtor took me by this house. I said, "Now, I don't know. That's on a hill." She said, "You've got to go in that house." When I walked in the front door, that house was me from the front to the back. It had a little formal living room parlor and two bedrooms. The back actually had a huge kitchen with a bay window that faced that mountain up there. You could see that mountain. Then it had a stained glass window nearly as big as that on the side. Then from our bedroom on the back, you go through the den there. Our bedroom on the back had another bay window that faced the mountain. Oh, I fell in love with that house. I had to have it. So, we bought it. Everything just clicked. My house sold. It just clicked. I would lie in bed at night and place my furniture. It was so easy. We moved in on the 13th of December. It was sleeting and raining. This house had just been restored. It was just wonderful. Through the years, I would dream of leaving. I would dream that maybe I had bought another house, and I would wake up sick. I've left my house. It's weird. But I did get to stay there twenty something years. But I knew at our age, we did not want a massive, big whatever. Yet we had so much stuff in a way that we couldn't go to – I didn't really want to go to a garden home yet. So, this house we bought, inside is not me at all. Clint, see if you can find a picture of it and show her. We have a really nice front porch. We have a really good, flat-level back porch. The whole lot is big. We realized that we could pull through the gate, park our RV on the back. It has a huge building on the back instead of a basement, and we needed that. It fit our need. I've just tried to kind of realize that [laughter] I was really frustrated, first just trying to get my spices in the kitchen. They didn't fit like they did. You don't think about things like that. To think about what all we had accumulated all the years, and suddenly, you've got to put it somewhere else.

CP: You're talking about that picture? That one?

GP: Yes. [Show her?].

CP: Right on that.

GP: That's the house we bought.

ER: Oh, wow. Very pretty.

GP: It has curb appeal. It's real close. The backyard is big. It fit our needs. Inside, I had a lot of antiques. I had some luster lamps that were this tall, big, in my dining room. There's nowhere, nothing like that fits in this house. That's been my biggest frustration trying to go from that to the – but again, life is not always exactly what you want [laughter].

ER: Is this house still kind of close to your kids?

CP: Oh, yes.

GP: I'm closer to one of them.

ER: Okay [laughter].

GP: I don't know how good, but that is okay. In fact, they were all within – Well, Greg lives on 6th and 8th. Melissa lives on 8th and 11th. Tim really is just – we're on 3rd Avenue still here. You go up to the corner and turn this way, and I can see the back of the top of his house. But I don't see him anymore than I did the other way. We're not always there.

ER: Then from where your kids' houses are, did they have any tornado damage?

GP: Tim? No.

ER: Or any of them.

GP: Greg had a little roof damage, not much. Melissa had the most. Her screen porch was totally knocked down. She had a lot of damage on her back.

CP: Trees.

GP: Our granddaughter's car was damaged. Now, our trucking car, truck had nothing. Later we found a little nip on the back of my chrome on my bumper on my car about like that. Nothing. We had to go in and help repair Melissa's. It's been frustrating. She needs an electrician to fix. They have to turn the electricity off. It has to be somebody licensed. We have not been able to get that done. Rick Goodwin is a good one. We got to him in a hurry. He'd say, "Well, I'll come so and so." I've called him I bet – He's promised me I bet ten times. I went to another one somebody recommended, and he said, "Well, I've just retired." But he said, "If you need somebody, call Rick Goodwin." I said, "I have." Now, that's been frustrating because she still needs that done. We're willing to pay, but you can't find anybody to do it.

ER: Yes. That would be frustrating. Well, thinking a little bit about the resilience side, what helped you cope with the challenges from the tornado?

GP: What have I...?

ER: What helped you cope with the challenges from the tornado?

GP: God, my faith.

ER: Yes, I was going to say your faith, your perspective especially when you were thinking about all the loss that you had.

GP: Right. Let me say this too, something I learned, when somebody goes through something like that, I got to where I did not want to hear anymore. It was probably a little bit of my – I guess you have some bitterness no matter what. It's not really bitter but just frustration. People would come up, and everything is wonderful with them. I had a lady pull up in front. We were in the RV. Her nails were all done that day. They pulled up in the road, and we walked out. I looked like heck. My hair needed frost. I looked pitiful [laughter]. She, "Honey, just be proud that you're alive."

ER: Yes. That's always what they say.

GP: So many people would say, "Just be proud you're okay." Well, that was the first thing we did. We thanked God that we're okay and the rest of it. Now if I see somebody like that, I would say, "I'm sorry you're going through what you are. I'm sorry you're going through this." I guess everybody thinks the thing to say is, "Well, just be thankful honey that you're okay."

ER: Yes. That's always what they say, and it doesn't, it's not that helpful [laughter].

GP: But see, they're going back home where everything's clean.

CP: Or some of them pull up. They're, "If you need anything." The whole time, they're pulling off [laughter].

GP: [laughter]

ER: Oh, yes [laughter] and you're like, "Well, I kind of do, but you're already gone."

CP: You have to run them down to tell them what –

GP: [laughter] But for the most part, like I said, Samaritan's Purse was just wonderful. They worked, and they presented us with the Billy Graham Bible, Study Bible that we really appreciated.

ER: That's very sweet. Is there something you could point to that helps you recover more quickly? Anything specific?

GP: There again, God. I came from a family that were survivors. My dad was the most positive person on earth. If I ever went to him with a problem or something, he'd say, "Well, if you can't do that, just do this." It's just, I guess being brought up that way.

ER: What will you carry forward from this experience?

GP: Carry forward?

ER: Yes.

GP: Well, as I said, the humility for other people going through a tornado, for sure. In fact, it seemed like we've had more than we've ever had. Before, I really felt for them. Like I told Carol that night, "We need to pray for those people." But I really did not know how it felt. That's true. Anything in life, we can think we know, but until you go through it yourself, you don't know.

ER: You have a deeper connection now you're seeing that.

GP: Right.

ER: What advice would you give others about how to deal with an event like a tornado?

GP: Well, for one thing, do everything you can to protect yourself before.

ER: There was a question earlier. Was there anything you did prior to the tornado that helped you be prepared?

GP: We bought a helmet [laughter].

ER: I was going to say you had a helmet. I think it was a clever thing to do that.

GP: We bought helmets.

ER: You had it in a place where you could get to it?

GP: Oh, yes. We had it hanging in the basement where when you went in, you just grabbed it and put it on.

CP: I think you do need to have your shoes and stuff over there.

GP: Yes, and have a jacket.

CP: Coat.

GP: Get something where you can be warm. They'll tell you to get your medicine and all that. But immediately, you need something to stay warm. That would be one thing.

CP: If it had been an F5 or 4, that just all wound up on the hillside or something, I don't know, that would have been a totally different thing to go through.

GP: I saw down in Lee County a lady came home from work. She looked to be maybe late fifties, early sixties. She had been at work. Her house – where I had all this house debris, everything. That was awful. I thought it was terrible – she had a concrete slab. Nothing, everything gone. Her son found her husband in the neighbor's yard, gone. They were leading her away. I thought how blessed I was. I really think it's not as bad as a fire. I always thought of fire. When I bought insurance, I thought I was buying fire insurance. You think about a fire, I never dreamed a tornado.

ER: Well, even thinking of how you said that night, that originally the weather reports were saying that it was going north, that you weren't in it. So, then it was a quick change all of a sudden.

GP: I know. Just that morning, he put the app on our phone, or we might not have heard it.

CP: Soon as I took the picture of her in the basement and I went straight down, it wasn't two minutes later probably the power went off.

ER: That was starting.

CP: It started going on about that time, about 8:27 maybe something like that. That was 8:19, 8:20. So, about seven minutes.

ER: Yes. Wow. Now, even just thinking that your truck was moving and then the rain coming down, it's just so terrifying.

CP: I thought, "What is moving this truck?"

GP: Well, the horrible part, like I said, was when that truck, we knew we were being hit. But it happened so fast. I really think most people probably go into a shock mode. I think that's God's protection for us to where we can deal with it. I didn't realize until later how scared I was. You kind of go back, and I can see now. But for a long time, I was in shock. I didn't know, things I didn't remember. One thing that I would never do again that I feel like especially if people are thinking about it economically, hiring these companies that come in. We didn't ever hire one.

ER: For the cleanup part or [inaudible].

GP: That money comes off your contents. I didn't know that. Now, that's the way people can be prepared. They need to know that ahead. See, nobody – My sister told me that some people had gone through that. So, I asked my insurance adjuster, I said, "Okay, now if we had hired SERVPRO or somebody, who pays for that?" They said it comes off your contents. I've got a friend at church, well two really, and they had somebody that – the lady across the street from me, they walked out up from the Robeson's. You happen to know Mary Stokes Spears. She teaches here too.

ER: No, I don't know her.

GP: Well, but anyway, Mary's house, it was damaged so badly that they had to move out and have it redone. She hired a company to go in and just pick up everything. They take it off. They'll take even your shoes and clean them up and put them in a plastic bag. Diane had to finally donate a lot of them. She said because she'd had foot surgery. She said, "When I think about what that cost me," and the cost is high.

ER: Yes, I was thinking as you were saying that, that probably has a high cost.

GP: People could be prepared. Now, it was a lot of work for us. When we started cleaning it up, my daughter that lives here, she helped us. Every piece of furniture we pulled – first we got trailers emptied and put everything we could into our back building to get the trailers, the two that belonged to my son and to his friend. Now, his friend told us, said, "Keep this trailer as long as you want." Gosh, it was as big as this room. But we wanted to get it back to him because he had a business. We felt, we wanted to get it back. So, I would say before May was over, he had his trailer back.

ER: Right. That's fantastic.

GP: We emptied it in a hurry. Then we got my son's trailer back to him. Then we started cleaning up, and just slowly, we'd bring it to the back porch. Then if the furniture was so big and we knew where it was going, it would go in. But so much of my furniture did not work in my new house. I had an antique buffet. I moved that thing everywhere.

ER: To find the right spot [laughter].

GP: I wanted it in the dining room, and it just didn't do. I had to finally get something else.

CP: A lot of, some of the furniture that we did keep, it might have looked good then but now that it's dry – [crosstalk]

GP: Yes, it dried it out more.

ER: Yes, lost its appeal.

GP: But I have to say this, our insurance adjusters were wonderful, both of them, the one on the house and the one on the contents. I know she saw what it was. She had me, to total all my clothes. She said, "You can't wear those clothes. They've got debris and insulation." She said, "You'll never get that out." Well, I'm old [laughter]. You don't take elderly people's clothes away from them [laughter].

ER: Yes [laughter].

GP: I don't care. My best friend came over. She put all my clothes – and they were so wet with all that – in big, old garbage bags. She took them home with her, laid them out in the sun and dried them, shook them, washed them, dried them again, and rolled them and brought them back to me. I kept saying, "Vivian, I need to throw some of them away. I hate for you to go through

that.” She said, “You can’t go through that right now.” She said, “You just let me handle this.” She was wonderful. I have given a lot of those away because there were things that I should have already gone through my closet. That’s another thing. Lord, get rid of stuff you don’t need [laughter].

ER: You had to be forced to at that point. It sounds like you have, though, a great support system with your family –

GP: I did.

ER: – your friends, people in the community, church, and so forth that were there to help through that process.

GP: Right.

ER: This is all the questions that I have. Do you have anything else that you would like to share?

GP: I can’t think of anything else. As I said, it’s an adjustment. But life is an adjustment. We don’t know.

CP: I always called it a forced move.

GP: [laughter]

ER: Oh [laughter].

CP: We were forced to move.

GP: I think he has been actually happier with it than I. I think he likes it better if he tells the truth.

CP: It’s hard. I loved the other house. I had it where I wanted it.

GP: He loved the front porch. He and Pete [laughter] loved the front porch. But we went by the house at Christmas, and it was going down. The man had not started the repairs. I told him, I said, “It’s just sad, isn’t it? That house and Christmas is not in there.” It’s almost like a family member or something that you miss.

ER: Oh, yes. You said earlier before that’s your home, that’s your safe spot.

GP: Yes.

CP: Over time maybe this one will eventually come around.

GP: But let me tell you something else. I've heard two other ladies that have done this lately, downsizing sounds good and easy. It's awful [laughter].

ER: [laughter] A lot of work.

GP: Yes, it's a lot of work. Then I even said, "Oh, I can't use this anymore. We'll leave this in this box." One other little thing. I got a cousin that lives in Virginia. She's just precious. She sent me a page where this other lady had gone through a hurricane, and it wiped her house out. When the lady went back, she found a teacup and saucer, Limoges, that she could salvage. So, Melinda sends me that poem about this. It had the picture of the Limoges teacup and saucer. Melinda sent me some packs of hot tea. That's just how she is. When I saw that, I said, "I've got that cup and saucer. I know I do somewhere." So, what do I do? I go out, and I pull that back in. It's going to stay in there somewhere. It's just things like that, that you don't want to give up.

ER: They have meaning to it, yes.

GP: So, anyway, I've tried to. I have given to some of my sweet family and friends, things that I just loved. Some of them say, "Well, let me buy it." "I don't want you to buy it. I want you to have it because I loved it."

ER: Yes. That's very sweet.

GP: So, that's what I've tried to do with some of the things that I can't have anymore [laughter].

ER: That's a good way to do it, yes. Well, this concludes our interview. Thank you for sharing your experience and story. We hope that other people can learn from this and hear your experience.

GP: Yes. Right.

ER: Really appreciate it.

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Reviewed by Nicole Zador, 3/07/2025