Dr. Paul Paskoff Interview

Interviewers: Carl Brasseaux, Don Davis

Houma, Louisiana

October 4, 2010

Carl Brasseaux: Okay. Well, this is Carl Brasseaux. I am on the LSU campus this morning to interview Dr. Paul Paskoff in the LSU history department on his experiences during the storms of 2005 and 2008. And um, Paul, if you, by way of um, introduction here to the process, um, we'll be sending you a release form later, and that should be coming through the campus mail. Um, secondly, using the – because this will be put on deposit at the Sea Grant office here, Hill Memorial Library, and there should also be a copy in Lafayette to be used for research purposes, so I would certainly like to get your permission…

Paul Paskoff: Certainly.

C: …to um, allow us to put it in repositories, these three repositories. And of course as you know, there won't be any financial compensation, so there go the millions.

P: Hey – I'm a university professor. I know about lack of financial compensation.

C: And Paul, if at any time, you know, if this becomes too painful, please do not hesitate. We'll stop if you need to take a break, that's not a problem either. But um, I'm quite serious.

P: No, I understand – I appreciate you saying that. I um, but I've been going over my notes from all the reports – my notes from all the reports that I made over time, so I essentially have, I guess revisited a lot of things, and opened up any wounds there were, so I think I can do it.

C: Okay. Well, I didn't get a chance to look over the – what was it, ten or fourteen-page, the synopsis that you had developed that, as you know, made its way to LSU Press. Um, so I'm sort of flying by here, and I'm relying on you. I don't know if you want to begin with just sort of a um, chronological rendition of what happened, and then we'll go back and deal with it on a thematic basis.

P: Yeah. Sure. I guess it makes sense um, to you and maybe anybody whoever hears this to explain how I happen to report, um, I guess it was the thirtieth – the night, evening of the thirtieth, August 2005 – um, the Red Cross that opened up an operation center at um, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Hall on Tom Drive in Baton Rouge, and um, there they were um, trying to assemble the various teams and the various functions that the Red Cross has in place, um, at least on paper, to deal with national disasters, and essentially being run by the National office I think out in Kansas City – or the regional office.

C: Well, Paul if I can interrupt you – before you go any further, could you just say in a few words about what your connection with the Red Cross has been?

P: Oh, sure. I was um, a disaster action team captain, is what they call it essentially – leader of a team, and most of the disasters through which a D-A-T or DAT - unfortunate acronym – um, go to are single-family fires or apartment fires. That's the most common disaster to which the Red Cross responds, and I did this in I guess '88 and '89. And um, and then I went on – I got a sabbatical, and although I said to the, one of my friends at the local chapter that I'd be back. She said, no you won't. And she was right. And I'd gone to just two main fires, and so it was only after 9-11, 2001 that I went back, and I had to go through all the training all over again, and um, and once again, I was made a DAT captain, and I served in that capacity until March 10, 2002 when I suffered a fall, and it messed me up. And – so anyway, I had a lot of experience in disaster work, and particularly because of Hurricane Andrew I was in charge of um, the disaster assessment for Pointe Coupee Parish. So at least I knew the basic functions. So I thought after, since our house was spared any real damage by Katrina, that I would go and see um, what I could, could do. So I went down – I went down the evening of August thirtieth I guess it was, and appropriately enough I arrive at the IDEW union hall to find out it's in complete darkness because there was no power at that point in the city – or at least that part of the city. And what they were working with were Coleman lanterns and batteries for their computers and so on. And this was sort of the transition storm for the Red Cross. Maybe the ones in Florida had begun it – but we began automating their record keeping and so on. And so there were a lot of laptops and desktops in all of this. I'm sure it had begun, but this is the first really national disaster you know, enormous proportions when they began to do it. So the lack of electricity was a problem. And I showed up and I went to the reception desk where they were signing people in, and they asked me, the ladies at the desk asked me what experience I had. And I explained that I had done two tours or whatever extents as a DAT captain. And they said whoah, wait one moment. And they brought me right over to a fellow named Nelson Bailey, who was um, I guess a late middle aged fellow, and he was in charge of the disaster assessment function. And um, I'll explain that in a bit, but in any case, um, apparently, people who were experienced in disaster assessment were walking in bits of gold. And um, he was so thrilled to see me. It's one of the few times in my life I'd gotten that kind of a reception, and it was encouraging, and he said, can you come back here early tomorrow morning? I'm going to team you up with somebody from Wisconsin, and we want you to be the local liaison with the authorities. I said sure, and I went back home afterwards, and I told my wife, Beth, what had happened and so on, and I tried to go to sleep. And um, the way I am, before a big trip when I was a young fellow and we were all going to go off somewhere, I couldn't sleep. I would get excited, and so on. But that wasn't the case – I couldn't sleep because it was over eighty five degrees in the house. The A/C wasn't - no power. So I told Beth who could sleep through anything – I said I'm going to campus. And I went to my office and I called up Facility Services – I probably shouldn't have done this. I said, this is Professor Paskoff. I'm in my office trying to get something done. Of course, there's no air. And fortunately utilities were working at LSU, and um, they said, well okay. We'll turn it on. And what I wanted to get done was sleep. So I didn't lie so much by commission as by omission. But in any event, I couldn't really sleep very well. I slept fitfully sitting in a chair. I didn't want to lie down on the floor. So anyway, bright and early, I guess it must've been seven o'clock, seven thirty, having brought my toiletries here to the office. I drove out to the IDEW hall, and found Nelson Bailey.

C: So this is the morning of the thirty-first.

P: Thirty-first. And um, he said, oh, I'm really glad you, you know, you came in. and I said, well I am too. And he said I want you to meet your partner. He said this is Richard Davis from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Richard was about, he's probably um, he was probably in his um, mid sixties then – a tall guy. He must've been about six-three - must be about six-three. Strong, I mean – well it turns out he was a thirty year law enforcement veteran. In fact he had been county sheriff of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, and he had been active in retirement, um, with the Red Cross. And he had – as it turned out, he had done everything. He had been a SWAT team member; he was on the Sheriff's diving squad. He was a defensive driving and evasive driving instructor. He had driven VIP's including vice presidents and so on around. So um, and he had seen – he had seen things probably on an individual occurrence, on the basis of individual occurrence, probably worse than anything we were going to see. But I think the mass um, how should I put this. What we saw at one time probably exceeded the amount of horror that he had seen. But in any event, it was really – we hit it off pretty well, um, right off the bat. Two more dissimilar backgrounds put together – it's a little like the army I guess in that respect. Very bright guy and a lot of life experience and common sense, and we talked about everything as we drove off in a Jeep Cherokee – it was a black Jeep Cherokee that they gave us, and um, before we left, um, Nelson Bailey again said to us that I was going to be the local liaison. I said, now, I was supposed to liaise with the um, local police wherever we were going. It's not that police make me uncomfortable – they don't, but I don't have any experience with the police fortunately, one way or another. Here's a thirty year law enforcement veteran. And all the policeman would have to do is look into Richard Davis's eyes and they would see immediately that this was a brother law officer. So it was kind of laughable. Well anyway, as we were getting ready, we were drawing our supplies, and we um, we had no maps because FEMA had come in and scooped up all the maps in town that they could get. This was an indication of just how screwed up the response to Katrina, and I assume Rita was as well. The Red Cross had no maps.

C: So you were essentially flying blind heading out into the field.

P: Exactly. And what they told us – what Nelson Bailey told us – I remember. I wrote it down when I got home that night because I'll never forget those words, but I wanted them where I could see them someday. He said, we're sending you to the worst place we know of. There's no communications – they're completely cut off. We don't know if the roads are opened far – you are, this is what he said. "You are the tip of the spear." And so we drew a case of bottled water, um, some heater meals, which were MRE's, but they were called heater meals when they give them to civilians in disaster. They are high in caloric content and so on. We got some of what they call street sheets, and I'll show you one later – you can scan. Well actually I have it on a slide. Um, street sheets were - the Red Cross would give these to disaster workers for damage assessment. And they typically – you write in the address, the name of the street – that's why they call it a street sheet, and then each row is a separate dwelling or an apartment building. And you would indicate the degree of damage and the nature of the damage, and there were columns, and so there's um, "no effect", "not affected at all", "affected", for example a limb of a tree lying on a roof, "minor damage", the tree limb punctured the roof, siding was ripped off, shingles were ripped off. "Moderate damage" – the house was severely damaged but it was still – it could be repaired and lived in again, and then "destroyed". Um, what we found that first day was that

the form was incomplete. They should've had a column called "obliterated" beyond all record of having existed, but that's the nature of a hurricane, as it turned out. And so…

C: What about those that had water damage, Paul? What category would those fall in?

P: You'd indicate – well again, those same columns would work. But you'd indicate that the nature of the damage, instead of being wind…

C: I see.

P: …was water, and assuming the structure was still standing, there were ways of um, eyeballing um, the height of the water. So you know, in New Orleans, they call it the coffee line, and I guess in Lake Charles they did too. But in um, where we went in Slidell they weren't calling it that. I don't know what they called it quite frankly. But um…

C: The coffee line meaning the brown water mark.

P: The brown line – the high water mark essentially. And in New Orleans, when we went down there, we could see, you know, just the water receded you'd see a succession of coffee lines. And um, so anyway, he said that we're sending you out to Slidell. And um, for anyone listening to this who doesn't know, Slidell is on the eastern end of Lake Pontchartrain. It's a bedroom suburb of New Orleans, and it was a place where a lot of people who worked in New Orleans had moved. And it was, you know, it was a pleasant enough town, but you know, it was a satellite community of New Orleans, and the center of commerce and culture was clearly New Orleans. Um, but it was a fairly populous place, and after all it's on a lake and Pontchartrain is a scenic lake. Um, and it always had this very nice, I guess, nice existence of New Orleans but not in New Orleans. And on the lake – isn't that beautiful. And you get to Slidell by taking I-10 E to I-12 and taking I-12, and I-12 is a straight shot about eighty miles due east. And um, so off we went. We had drawn our supplies, as I say. Got some junk food – they had a canteen. They had um, set up in the – by then, um, the canteen was a very rudimentary thing. We were still operating out of the IBEW hall. The scale of the response was going to get ramped up so much that within a few days, they moved to the um, abandoned Wal-mart, um, building at Cortana Mall. And this place was huge, and it was getting cramped by the peak of the operation. But we drew our supplies, and we were supposed to - we got a - I found a local, I guess, a state map or a local map somewhere – like a gasoline station map, something that FEMA hadn't yet sucked up. And um, we were supposed to indicate red on the map those areas that were destroyed, or as we said later, obliterated. And we looked, and they had no red highlighters. The closest we could get to was pink, where upon we began referring to the various areas – we'd call them as we "pinked" an area. And if we "pinked" an area, it was gone. And um, so off we went, and that's when I discovered that Rich Davis had been a defensive and evasive driving instructor. There was no traffic at all going eastbound. Nobody wanted to be going where we were going. There was no gasoline out there. Once you got east of Hammond, actually east of Denham Springs, there was no – nothing operating. Anyway, we're going down I-12, and we must've been going eighty five, ninety miles an hour. And that's when I first found out that Rich Davis had these skills, but what I learned was that if there were a car, you know, entering from ramp some person got on the wrong direction, he would say, okay, blue car, I'm right um, move over to the left. He would talk himself

through it. And at first, it was kind of disconcerting, and quite frankly, it's a good thing to see it scotch guarded because I really was quite uncomfortable, and then after about twenty minutes, we were about halfway there. It's normally about an hour and a half trip. Um, I relaxed, and I realized this guy, you know, could – it was like flying a plane, and if we had wings, we would've been airborne. And um, so we were then talking, and relaxed, and um, we began to you know, exchange pleasantries, and then - not confidences, but you know, what our background was, and after he told me what he did, what he had done, I said well, I don't think Nelson Bailey fully appreciates just how miscast my role is here. He said, well but you're – you know, you're the local. I said well, I'm from Baton Rouge. If we were in Baton Rouge, it might mean something. Well, as we got to Hammond, and I couldn't see any evidence of damage at all. And I mean, there were some pine trees that had fallen down, but they could've fallen down in earlier storms. We got east of Hammond in the – every five miles or so, or ten miles we went, it got more – it became more and more apparent that something had happened there. It's sort of like going into a bowl, I guess – very gently, gradually, sloped bowl. You're going deeper and deeper into it. We got to Covington, and that was our first place we were supposed to try to make contact. And um, fortunately for us, Richard brought his GPS device, a Garmin – I still remember the model. The Garmin 2600, which we had named Alice, as in "go ask Alice." Um, and that was helping us find our way around because I didn't know Covington. I've only been there once or twice. And we found the police station, and - it's near where they had set up an emergency operation center. We reported there, and found out that there was no power in Covington. Um, there were trees down everywhere. They – Covington is a beautiful place, and they were um, I remember being really affected by the sight of all these old trees and these old houses now intermingled structurally. I mean that's a fancy way of saying that people had trees in their houses.

C: Was there - what was the state of the population there? Had they generally evacuated?

P: No, no, virtually nobody um, I think the reason that they didn't evacuate is because you know, nobody expected that there would be this kind of destruction. Louisiana had not had a – for the most part – that part of Louisiana had not had an incident with this kind of ferocity since Betsy. And the generation that is living there now for the most part had no experience with Betsy. And um, I mean, most houses in Covington, it should be pointed out. Most houses in Covington were unaffected except they had no power and – but there was also no telephone service. I should point out that when we left, we were at the operation center in Baton Rouge. Um, as we walked out, we saw two things, which would in retrospect be rather jarring. There was one of these auxiliary emergency generators, the kind that people are now installing in their houses to come on when the power comes out - that was in a crate on a um, on wooden skids. It wasn't hooked up. The place was in the dark. There was still no power, and there's this generator, and it's not being hooked up. I thought, well that's interesting. That's maybe symbolic of just how screwed up the operation is going to be. And really – that was my first impression. It wasn't fair, but what was fair was – there was a radio relay truck – big trailer which was designed to - its purpose was to go say, forty miles away from Baton Rouge, count for the curvature of the earth, and catch the radio signals and relay them. And we had radio in our car. They insisted we take it. They also insisted we take a Red Cross cell phone. We had that, and each of us had his own cell phone. So we had three cell phones and a radio.

C: None of each worked, I assume.

P: None worked at all. And we were instructed – we were ordered to report back periodically every hour, if possible on the hour, um to report our progress. Well we got to Hammond, beyond Hammond - we got to Hammond, about forty miles as the crow flies, there's no service. There's nothing. All the cell phone towers were down, without power, damaged. Radio towers were down or else without power. And the relay truck is sitting at the operation center in Baton Rouge, and we looked at one another when we realized that we had no power, and almost the same time we said, remember that trailer that was sitting there, the radio relay trailer? And we realized then that whatever we saw, nobody was going to hear about until we got back to Baton Rouge that evening.

C: No satellite telephones.

P: One satellite uplink phone in all the Florida parishes, and it was in Covington, and we were told that it was being used fifteen minutes every hour to a certain power. It was battery operated. One – I don't know what the population of that area was, but it's got to be several hundred thousand. And the only source of communication – the only means of communication was one satellite uplink phone in the emergency operation center. So somebody needed medication, that's too bad. And if somebody gets injured, and the road was obstructed and they needed – the person needed a rescue team to come in, well there was no way to convey the information to the rescue dispatcher. The single most screwed up aspect of the entire um, episode was the fact that the state and the municipalities, but particularly the state, had not planned ahead. This was – everybody said a storm of this sort was inevitable, and that the number of them would probably increase, you know, with global climate change and so on. Nothing had been done, and this isn't an indictment of the Blanco administration any more than it could be an indictment of the Foster administration. It's just that – you know, Cassandra's are not popular. And that's what it would've taken. It would've taken some Cassandra to say that the sky is going to fall, the sky is going to fall. People don't listen to people like that because they're downers, and it costs money. And so one satellite upland phone - we couldn't report anything, and we ended up being couriers, in part. People would give us messages. We'd explain to them, we weren't going to get back to Baton Rouge until the evening if we were lucky. One of the reasons we had so much water and meals was we didn't know when we left if we were going to get back that day. Um, and so, you know, they told us in the Covington Emergency Operation Center that they thought that the real problems were um, in Bogalusa, in Slidell. Now Bogalusa is the parish seat of Washington parish, and Slidell is the parish seat of St. Tammany, and so that's where we went. We went to um, Bogalusa first. No I guess we went to Slidell first, and we just sort of grazed Slidell, and we knew right away that this was going to be a long assignment if we had to go to find out just how bad it was in Slidell, because the roads leading into Slidell were fine, but once you got into Slidell proper, and especially in the southern reaches of Slidell, we found out the next day, it was very difficult to maneuver. But then we went on to Bogalusa, and again we had Alice, you know, the GPS device to tell us. And we get to Bogalusa, and on our way, the road to Bogalusa that we took was ordinarily a two-lane road, you know, solid yellow lines, no passing, etcetera. There was at most one lane, and I have pictures of it -the roads we went down. I guess the utility company or the parish had come through with a big truck with a massive boom and at the end was this huge circular saw. And that's what they were using to cut a trail. They turned a road, which you

couldn't see until they went through, into a trail. And we went down this, and we were scraping the sides of the jeep. Well I mean it really wasn't a road anymore. And if it weren't for Alice the GPS, we probably wouldn't have known whether we were on a road or not. And it said we were, and so we kept going. We get to Bogalusa, and we made contact, um, we were getting our bearings, and a police car drove up to us, and one of the most exhausted looking men I've ever seen in my life. He got out of the car – this is the first police officer we saw where we didn't go up to him – he came up to us. And wanted to know what we were doing. We had Red Cross all over the place, you know, on our signs, on our Jeep Cherokee. And um, he asked us what we were doing. We explained, and we were trying to make contact with the authorities to find out just what the needs of the area were, and um, he said, well follow me. And get in there – the reason he said "follow me" was because Rich Davis looked him in the eye and he looked Rich Davis in the eye, and he saw Rich Davis's retired sheriff's thing, and they were you know, it's like a reunion of guys who had never seen one another before. But they did exactly the same thing. So I realized then and there that my function was not to liaise. My function might be to pink maps, but that may be it. And that suited me fine. But um, we got to the um, city hall as it were – well the police station first, and we see a sergeant, and it turned out it was sergeant in plain clothes barefoot stepping out of the police station, which has no power of course, into his cruiser. And that was an indication of just how bad things were. Um, I don't know where his shoes were – probably in his house, and his house probably got messed up. And we went to city hall or the emergency operation center, I don't recall now, and there was the mayor, and a lieutenant of police, um, and we learned there were reports of looting. We were told to be very careful where we went, and um, Rich just nodded, and I'm thinking, I may have made a big mistake. This – this could be a big mistake. And um, he said, but you know, for the most part people are behaving themselves. It's just that we have a lot of needs here, and we don't have any power. I've ordered um, that gasoline sales stop so that you can't – you'd have to hand pump the gas out of the tanks in the ground, but there wasn't – no civilian use, only four emergency and official vehicles. And that was how they were going to fuel the police cruisers. Um, and said, we need communications, and we need electrical power, we need generators, etcetera. I said, okay, and um…

C: How well could they get around in town, Paul? We talked about the number of trees that were down, and was it difficult in getting into the – to the town from the outside?

P: Yeah, that's a good question. The approaches were clogged, but with fallen trees and limbs and the like and other debris, but the streets in Bogalusa were pretty good. I don't think they suffered a lot of damage – at least the areas that we saw. It was mainly that um, and you could begin to smell the cities, the towns, because food spoiling. There was no refrigeration. And they had no clean water. You know, most water treatment facilities are electrically powered. Um, or if they have backup generators of course they need diesel fuel or gasoline – well there was nothing. And this is just the beginning of it, but you know, in medieval days, you could smell a town before you laid sight on it, and that's pretty much what this struck me as. I mean I'm a historian of nineteenth century United States, so I can't speak to – with any profound knowledge of medieval European history, but you know, I had to take it in school, and um, yeah. This was – the next few days struck me recently as similar to what I'd read of the island communities – the isolated island communities with no sanitation, um, with no communication to the outside world, um primitive with any medical facilities. This was the state of things in um, the Florida

parishes. Now of course, New Orleans is a situation entirely different. We didn't go to New Orleans till several days after, and New Orleans was of course horrible. No question about it – and most of the dead were in St. Bernard parish and Orleans parish. Um, but the – what happened in Slidell, and indeed in some of the other lakefront communities on the north shore, the northeastern shore of Lake Pontchartrain, especially in Slidell, um, although it wasn't widely chronicled, um, was probably for capital terms, worse. And New Orleans was evacuated. Nobody thought that places like Slidell needed to be evacuated. Um, New Orleans wasn't hit by a storm surge – New Orleans was hit by, you know, man-made flood barriers giving way. Um, you know, the flood walls, the levees that had been built – it turned out that they were built in a defective manner. Um, the levee board hadn't done their job of – its job of inspecting. That's New Orleans. And of course, you know, MRGO you know, the knife into the heart of the city, um, these are man-made problems. I mean there's a wonderful book, title which escapes me, but it argues essentially that there's no such thing as natural disasters. There are natural occurrences, but what makes them disasters is the fact that human structures and lives are in the way of forces of nature. That's New Orleans. I guess you could say it's also true of Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis, and Covington and Slidell, but what happened in Slidell was that Lake Pontchartrain, driven by wind, rose up. Now the story - the stories I've gotten and the accounts I've gotten as to how high the storm surge was varied – anywhere from eight feet to twenty six feet. I think the latter is almost certainly an exaggeration, and the former, lower estimate is probably too low. But you know, split the difference, and it's fifteen feet, sixteen feet – that's what crashed into downtown Slidell, and it crashed into it. And it went in, I don't know how many miles in. and every bayou burst its banks, and um, in some places the water came up ten, twelve feet, almost instantaneously. And anybody - and this could be miles inland – who is going to evacuate miles inland? You know, a couple of miles, three miles inland? If they didn't have a way of getting out, that's where they stayed. Um, we knew how high the water had gotten miles inland. We learned by looking at the mud on the roofs of cars. And also looking at you know, what New Orleans calls the coffee line on houses, and there was routinely above the soffit of a ranch house or a shotgun house. Even houses on porches – water was up twelve feet. Um, and this is you know, a mile, two miles inland. Um, so anyway, this – when we got back that first day, that first evening, we got back I guess it was about six, six thirty, and we were supposed to be debriefed, and Rich went to turn in the nonworking, utterly superfluous cell phone and radio, and I had written some notes, you know, and I had to write up a report, essentially a post, you know, sort of a post-situation report of what we saw and who we encountered, and being an academic, I tended to be a bit verbose. What they wanted was sort of the (Jack Webb?) treatment – just the facts. And I wasn't providing color commentary, but I was just trying to identify people, but they didn't care. They just wanted just the facts, and I – you know, in retrospect, that's what they needed, because nobody had gotten around yet to saying how many buildings were destroyed, which is what the Red Cross has to do in order for FEMA to certify federal aid. Well we weren't anywhere close to that. There were roads that simply were impassable. There weren't helicopters were flying over that. Choppers had begun to you know, go back and forth over the lake, but that was, I guess they didn't do that for a couple of days when they were starting to try to evacuate people in New Orleans, and also, to drop sandbags into the breaches of the levee. So I mean there was no way of knowing what was open in way of roads and what was not, but we get back there, and um, you know, I didn't have a – I hadn't brought a camera with me. Who was going to do something like sight seeing – it didn't occur to me to do that. And I'm being debriefed, and I had written down that

there was a tree we'd seen Slidell – a huge pine tree that had sliced through a ranch house. I took a picture of it days later, but sliced through the ranch house. I mean it just – like a knife going through a cake. Through the roof, through the brick walls, and we – I got out to look at it, which technically I wasn't supposed to do, but I – the house was completely destroyed. It had gone through the slab. It had cracked open the slab. So I'd written that down because I wanted them to understand that this was not simply a matter of scraping off the slab and starting over. This was the – house had been obliterated. It was – we had to start over from scratch. And the debriefing officer, whatever, I don't' know what it was, you know, he had to debrief other people. There were only three teams that day. So there were six people doing essentially we were told we were scouts and couriers. We didn't know we were going to be couriers.

C: How much – and you talked about three teams, Paul. How much of the area were they covering in total?

P: Well they sent one down toward New Orleans as far as they could go. They sent one, um, they must have sent one to Grand Isle to see if they could get Grand Isle, and then they sent us. Then very quickly the next day they had five teams I think, and by the time they got around to um, doing actual damage assessment, you know, with the street sheets and so on, they had twenty two teams. Um, but initially it was just three teams, and none of us knew about the others. Um, you know, we just, off we went as scouts. So I'm back there, and I'm – I mean I'm just utterly tired. I'm not affected. I hadn't seen any dead bodies. I, you know, no dead animals, nothing. Just tired. Because there's nothing more monotonous, quite frankly, than staring deliberately at, at something, you know, a day, a month, minute after minute, hour after hour. Just – everything began to look the same. I couldn't tell you if what I saw in the way of damage to this day was in Covington, was in Slidell, was in Bogalusa, was in between, I couldn't tell you. It all sort of blended together. Trees down on houses, and houses split open by trees. Well anyway, so and I was fatigued because we'd been out um, by the time we got back, we'd been out for probably eleven hours. Um, of that, which doesn't sound terribly arduous, but it actually wears on one because it is kind of depressing. So I'm being debriefed, and Rich didn't have to physically restrain me, but he did clap a hand on my shoulder and said come on, let's get a cup of coffee. Because the debriefing officer was reading what I had written, and I had also described how this house had been knifed into by this huge pine tree, and it had cracked open the slab. And this fellow started doing finger pushups. You know, typical bureaucratic, I'm patient, and you're an idiot, fashion. And he starts speaking in the, "well we". Well not really the "well we", the condescending "we". We really must, you know, filling out our reports, try, as hard as it is, not to exaggerate. Now the tree went into the house. That's sufficient. And I said, the tree didn't go into the house. It went through the house. The house is now in two, not necessarily equal parts. Right down to the dirt under the slab. Yes, well I'm sure that's what it looked like, you know, something like that. I don't remember exactly, but that was the tone and I'm just sitting there, and that's fortunately when Rich came, and I'm not a physical person. I just would have said something. And I'm a sarcastic person on occasion, and the words were, for some reason not forming. I was just so angry. So I said, I'm bringing a camera tomorrow. I want to go back to that house, and I want to take a picture. And I want to bring it to this son of a bitch. And he said, okay. And, (laughs). So Rich was staying on the floor of the Methodist – one of the Methodist churches that had showers. And um,

the volunteers were pouring in from all over the country, and quite frankly there simply weren't enough accommodations for them. Every hotel, motel room was taken up, and quite frankly, a lot of them were taken up by FEMA. And so if I say FEMA as though it were a four-letter word, which it is, there's a reason. But um, I know a lot of FEMA personnel got a bum rap because of some of the incompetence of the executives in FEMA. But nevertheless, FEMA is a four-letter word, and um, these bozos, these suits in FEMA – the ones that had never went anywhere but um, you know, wondered about where they were going to go for dinner – they took a lot of the motel rooms. And so you had people like Rich Davis, and I didn't know him well enough to open, I said, why don't you stay with my wife and me living, you know, instead sleeping on a cot and taking a shower, a communal shower, in a church. And this became, I think there were two hundred volunteers ultimately at that church. Well, so the next morning, Rich and I'd arranged and would show up at seven o'clock, seven thirty, went back to the IDEW hall, and um, we got our assignment. We were supposed to go back to um, to Bogalusa for some reason. We carried information, and then we were told once we got to Bogalusa that we really needed to get to this hamlet in hill country in Washington parish called Mount Herman. And I didn't even know – it shows you what a Baton Rouge provincial I am, I didn't know there was hill country in Washington parish. No idea that there was dairy farming there. I'm not now as ignorant of Louisiana as I was then because I made it a point. I made it a point to find out about the state, but I was. I was a Baton Rouge provincial. Um, well anyway, um, so off we go that morning. That's the morning of the first of September. And we're bombing down I-12. And again, there's no traffic, and we make the trip this time to the Exit 4, Bogalusa. We got off, actually, in um, I think this time we got off at the exit for Slidell and there was just took US-11 up. And I should point out that um, when you – when we reported that the radios and the cell phones didn't work, um, we weren't told, well then leave them behind. I guess the Red Cross people who were managing the response were ever hopeful that you know, magically electricity would spring to life. Um, so um, I went that first – I'm jumping around a bit. I'm sorry. That first evening after our first day out, I went home and again, there was no power. We didn't have power I think for four or five days. But I was so exhausted that even in the heat, I could sleep. Um, and my wife, just a really ingenious person, she made me –I'm a coffee drinker, and she's not. But she heated water on our Weber grill outside. And um, didn't give me instant. She actually gave me drip coffee. I still don't know how she did that. But, and we were eating canned food and so on, we laid in supplies, but we didn't expect Baton Rouge to be affected, and it really wasn't by standards of Gustav three years later, but nevertheless, no power. Um, so I showered, I remember, and we had a battery-powered TV. In those days there was still analog, and we could watch, and I even had a magnifying glass to try and build the screen up. The screen was about a little smaller than a credit card, and I found out that if you put a magnifying glass on it, all you would see are larger pixels. You don't see any more clearly, but at least there was something of a picture, and sound and we could hear something and see something of the news. And I then went – I went to sleep, and as I said, I got up early the next morning, which surprised my wife because I'm not a morning person. And I reported back to the IDEW hall, and as we were getting our stuff, again no red highlighters, just pink. Um, I said you know, we need maps. And Nelson Bailey said, we sure do need maps. So I said, maybe Baton Rouge Blueprint Supply Company has some. And so I went over. They have two offices – two outlets, and I went to the one on, I actually don't remember which one I went to, downtown or off into the more residential area of town, but I got whatever maps I could find. I spent about a hundred fifty dollars on maps, and I never turned it in. I never turned in the chits. God knows I'd

probably still be waiting to get reimbursed if I had – it didn't matter. I just wanted the maps. We got maps for St. Tammany parish. We got maps for Terrebonne and…

C: These were geological survey quad maps?

P: Um, some were, but for the most part, they were just plat – you know, street maps. And um, I got any kind of map. And when I went there and I spoke to – you know, I was wearing my Red Cross shirt and I had my Red Cross um, ID around my neck, on a chord, um, you know, the people at Baton Rouge Blueprint Supply couldn't have been nicer. And I explained what I needed – I needed maps. And they said, well FEMA's cleaned us out practically. I said well we need maps of New Orleans. They said FEMA cleaned us out. Yeah, but you're welcome to look around and see what you can find. And I found some maps of St. Tammany parish. Because one of the problems – with what happened in Slidell was that it was not noted by or seemed noticed by FEMA, because they had no interest in it. I think um, yeah. FEMA likes the big ones, and New Orleans is big, and Slidell is what? So, we got the – I got the maps and I brought them back, and um, gave them to Nelson Bailey except for our own that we kept. And um, I wish I had kept the map of where we pinked areas. And we had different map markers. We had pink, we had yellow, and orange. No red. And green. So green was "affected". Yellow was "minor damage", and orange was "moderate damage". And we didn't distinguish between "destroyed" and "obliterated" – that would be pink. And so um, Red Cross was already ramping up its response, and I think it was the second day, September first. People had gone out the first day, but we were already the grizzled veterans, or so we thought, and we were running orientations for the people pouring in from all over the country. And I had never listened to an account of the flora and the fauna of Louisiana of what to touch and what not to touch that was being given. But anyway, we were kind of boisterous. You know, we'd had our coffee, and sugar donuts, and we were you know, sugar hyperactive I guess and caffeine hyperactive. We were laughing and joking about the incompetence because the generator was still there, uncrated, still uncrated – I mean, still not opened -still crated on its skid. And the relay truck was still parked outside where no harm could come to it, and also no use could be made of it. Um, and so we – we remarked on that. You know, and it's true. Any large organization, you know, the person who has the authority can't be informed of everything. And you know, can't – so there's a necessarily of what they call the friction of war, I guess. And this fellow, this very nice fellow – I don't' know if he was an academic from LSU or not, but he was giving the orientation lecture. And it's sort of like the people going to an exotic place. And that's what struck me. And so you know, there are different types of animals that you know, you're maybe not familiar with. He was talking about alligators and various kinds of snakes. And so on. And um, you know, many of the um, animals will perhaps be rabid, or at least disease carries. You don't want to touch them, and well that certainly makes sense. And then there are various types of plants. The flora in this area - we have poison ivy, poison oak, sumac, etcetera, etcetera. But we also have many thorn – you know, going on and on. Well anyway, we were still too boisterous. We were standing maybe fifteen, twenty feet away, and he actually said, excuse me. Trying to get something done here. And we felt badly because you know, it's like misbehaving in school. That's what it seemed like. The teacher was trying to work with some really slow students or something like that. So we reported to our vehicles, and off we went. You know, this time we had another case of water. We had given away most of our water to people. Um, and that's something that struck me again and again

and again. Um, we would go down the street clearly marked with Red Cross and so on all over. And people would come out of the ruins; they were living in the ruined houses, and ask us if we needed anything. Just amazing. I mean absolutely amazing. We said, no. Do you need anything? We've got some water, and I know the Red Cross will be setting up mobile kitchens and so on. Very, very affecting to see that. Human beings in our society often times get a bad rep that they are self-seeking, you know, rent-seeking individuals and so on. Um, I'm not making out that you know, making out that everybody is nature's noblemen and noblewomen, but for the most part, that's what people are. I mean it was really remarkable to see that, and we saw that almost everywhere we went. Um, but anyway, um, we go out there, and this time they know back at the operation center they're not going to hear from us until we get back. Well try to get back before dark, is what they told us. Okay. Um, well this time, we're driving out of course the same thing is true as…

C: Where are you headed out this day?

P: This day, September first, we're going back to – we're going back to Bogalusa and Mount Herman, so it's still the second day. I'll try to speed it up.

C: No, no. No, no. I'm just trying to get the chronology right.

P: Yeah. So it's still September first, and once again, the westbound I-12, westbound side of I-12 is just wall-to-wall trucks and cars, and what were saw were – it was remarkable. What we saw were pickup trucks with um, fifty-five-gallon barrels, um, and pumps, and they were going to load up gasoline in Baton Rouge and bring it back, and who knows what they were going to do with it, but you know….

C: I suspect for generators.

P: Yeah, and you know, clearly this was not the way you carry gasoline on and interstate, but that's what they were going to do. And I don't think anybody was going to stop them. But meanwhile, we had a clear shot all the way, and once again, eighty five, ninety miles an hour, and this time I'm completely relaxed, and Rich and I are talking about this and that, and he asked me what I taught, and um, I – we just made, you know, conversation about everything and passed the time. And you get to know somebody pretty well under those circumstances, especially when you share some really unpleasant situations, and you either detest the person for spending – I was spending more time with Rich than I was with my wife. Um, more with him – more time with him than I was with myself. Um, so he, you know, very quickly come to a point where you just like, you just gotta do your job or you really hit it off. And fortunately for us, we really hit it off and became friends. Well we get to um, Bogalusa, and they tell us about Mount Herman, and they say the situation is really bad there. They've heard they lost communications with them of course, but they know that a few hundred, well, the term isn't probably politically incorrect, but refugees from New Orleans had been sent there – evacuees is the term of art, I guess – been sent there. And um, you know, I made notes at the time, um, which I kept because I had to write them up in a formal report. Um, and what we learned, you see on September first, Bogalusa, that there were supposedly two shelters set up in Bogalusa, but only one was in service, and that was at the Memorial Baptist Church, they said on South Columbia Street, and they gave us directions – next to the Western Sizzlin restaurant. And um, we were to make contact with them there, and we did, and the um,

Southern Baptist Convention's ladies had come with their mobile kitchen, and they made chili. And we walked in to see if they needed anything, and they insisted we sit down. And I think that was one of the best meals I've ever had in my life. Um, hot chili with crackers, saltine crackers, and we just sat there, and they couldn't do enough for us. But it was clear, you know, the bathrooms weren't working. The toilets weren't working. There was no running water. Everything had to be boiled beforehand. Fortunately they had the mobile kitchen.

C: (Inaudible), how many people were in this facility, Paul? Do you remember?

P: Well there were several long tables. It's almost like a mess hall or a university dining hall kind of thing in the church. They had set up these full collapsible tables. When we got there, it was really early in the morning, and you know, not really meal time. Um, there couldn't have been more than twenty or so people. There were people sheltering there, but a lot of these people went out, I guess to try and see what they could find at their homes. Um, what we found when we went to the sheriff's office after that meal, you know, we said goodbye to the ladies and thanked them. We found out there were no phones in Bogalusa. Of course we confirmed that – not even in the sheriff's department. The sheriff's department said that the city needed water and ice and food to feed a population of thirteen thousand, and there was none of that. Um, we liaised with Toye Taylor, who was the Washington Parish president, and he said he had confirmed that he had halted gasoline sales, and limited the consumption of gasoline to emergency vehicles. And we met Mack McGehee, who was the mayor of Bogalusa. And um, between the two of them, they were doing, to my recollection, a fantastic job. They were essentially being told to make bricks without straw. And they were trying to hold their city together, and they again told us about reports of looting, but you know, these were still unconfirmed, and as we all know, the reports that came out of the Superdome of the worst behavior never occurred. So um, I don't know why people don't immediately exaggerate and talk about acts of mercy and things of that sort. Instead it's always the deprivations and the depravity of others, and what else, so I have no idea there was. I didn't hear any gunfire. Um, and I didn't see any signs of looting in Bogalusa. Now elsewhere, yes. We did, and there are crazed people, or there are people that just get so frightened and angry and frustrated that they're looking for an opportunity to kill somebody or hurt somebody or just lash out, and ordinarily they wouldn't do that. You know, you'd see them in church, or um, they'd be helping somebody carry groceries. But under the wrong circumstances, I don't know that anyone could be – I don't' believe that anybody could be reduced to that, but if there's any kind of propensity for it– it's going to come out. You put enough pressure on something it will pop. So they told us that Mount Herman was in bad shape. We got up to Mount Herman, and I wouldn't um, I wouldn't have believed what we found with – somebody told me about it. It wasn't that the city was damaged. We had absolutely no power though. They had one traffic light in that town, anyway. It's not a – it's a hamlet, but it had a nursing home, and it had a school, and so on. And um, the school was the shelter. And the um, principal of this Mount Herman school, a very fine woman by the name of Ms. (Stavenmeier?), um, had turned, as best she could, turn her school into a shelter. And it sounds like an easy thing, but the Red Cross has specially trained volunteers in shelter management. You know, they study, they drill, and then they find that all their training didn't prepare them for reality, and so they have to do it - the first time they do it, they learn. And if they can stand to do it a second time, well those people are invaluable. I mean, I couldn't do it. I

wouldn't do it. I've been asked to do it, and I give money instead. But um, well anyway, she told us that um, teenage boys from New Orleans who were among the evacuees were causing problems. They were. They were punks. And um, they had water, and they had heater meals because the system – the school system had its water supply, so that was alright. But the shelter was intended to house two hundred fifty to three hundred people. There were at least four hundred fifty in there, so they were being strained. The shelter manager was a woman, um, named Joe, I don't know if I have her last name written down somewhere. But anyway, the shelter manager's name was Joe, and she was remarkable. She could have run the world.

C: She was - was she local…

P: Oh yeah.

C: …or someone on higher command from the outside?

P: I guess she was um, been brought in. She must've been brought in. I didn't found that out. I never even asked – never even thought about it. Um, she told us the needs that they needed dish soap for the kitchen. They needed dish soap Clorox, Clorox spray cleaner. Floor cleaner. Pine Sol. Paper towels. They needed another nurse. They needed a social worker with mental health training. They needed waterless antibacterial hand cleanser. They needed things to suppress an incipient staff infection that was breaking out. They needed toilet paper, paper towels, women's hygienic supplies, adult depends, baby wipes, baby supplies, pull-ups, liquid soap, bathroom deodorizer, bathroom antibacterial cleanser, in other words, the things we all take for granted, they didn't have. And the toilets weren't working. Again, you could smell places before you saw them. Um, then we met this – the nurse, who was there. She was maybe five feet tall. Um, attractive, young woman – I guess she was in her, maybe – hard to say, because she was really weary by then. She was in her late twenties early thirties. And she was an emergency room nurse from Cincinnati, and she had been brought in. She was in the Red Cross um, disaster services, human resources. Um, registered, which means, you agree to serve a three-week tour, and they send you to a disaster.

C: So they were prepositioned, Paul, before the storm?

P: Oh, prepositioned. Yeah. And so she had been brought in – I don't know if she was brought in by helicopter or what – probably not. Probably prosaically, by car or something, or a bus. Her name was Sharon Potts, and she's one of the most remarkable individuals I've ever met she um, was the sole medical care for a village, a hamlet, that had seen its population up and double, or close to that. She had been working twenty four seven without relief. She'd take cat naps. She had to go out on an ambulance call, um, to a nursing home, so she was providing the medical care for the nursing home. I don't know where the doctors were, but medical care for the nursing home, medical care for the shelter. She was helping the shelter manager, Joe, this woman Joe, deal with the thugs. Um, she said that the emotions in the shelter in the community were running very high, and two mental health workers were needed, not one. And she said that the medical priorities were that they needed backup nursing and mental health workers. They needed oxygen and dialysis, and they also needed um, hazardous materials hazmat and other specialists to deal with what was rapidly becoming an unhealthy situation. And she said,

you've got to get the word out. That's what we need. And um, we said well we certainly do that. We'll bring it back to Baton Rouge, but um, you know, we don't know that anything will happen, and um, so she then did something that again, you know, there are all these things I say I'll never forget, and I never will. Um, she said, I need you to do me a favor. And I said okay. Something very personal. Here it is. Um, and the shelter manager Joe – her name was Joanne Dop. She said that um, the food was spoiling because the propane had run out, and they couldn't run the refrigeration. Well anyway, Sharon Potts was the nurse, and she – you know, I'm five-seven, five-eight, and she's looking up at me because she's at most five feet tall. It's not a familiar situation for me. And she said I need you to do a favor. You know, I said, well if I can, I will. She said, I need you to get in touch with my family. I haven't been able to contact them in days, you know, a few days now. Because the storm hit the twenty ninth, and so this is September first, so it's been a full out four days with no communication. She said I know they're worried. They must be worried about me. I told them I was going to Louisiana but I didn't know where. And um, she said that, well she gave me her family's phone number, her home phone number, and she said, look, if they're going to be away, or you know, work, there's an answering machine. Just leave a message and say I'm okay. I'm with the Red Cross in Mount Herman. Tell them where that is, if you know. She said, there's no telecommunications which is why they haven't had word from me, but they're in Cincinnati, and um, please ask them to call the Cincinnati, Ohio Red Cross chapter to try to communicate with me. And I said, absolutely I will. She grabbed my arm. And she had little hands, and she grabbed my arm. You know the cliché "she had a grip like a vice"? I'm not kidding – this was painful. She held it, and she hadn't slept in four days, probably. She had the thousand yard stare at times and her eyes were just staring, you know, this kind of, again a cliche, "burning intensity". And she said, you've got it, Paul? I said, I promise I will. I said, as soon as I get back to Baton Rouge I will do it. She said, you promise. I said, I give you my word. It was like I was taking the last train out of Berlin or something in World War II, you know. It was just incredible. So I then somebody else came up to me and said um, to tell so-and-so, I won't use the name, you need to come get your mother. Now Herman school. She has one day of medication left, she will be out of meds on Saturday. The phone number's on the back. And I had promised I would call that number, and I did. I called when I got back, I made both calls. I have no idea what if anything every came of them. I have no idea what happened to Sharon Potts. She will always be the little nurse for me, but she was amazing. Um, and to see people like that, I mean police in New Orleans of course got a bad rap, and some of it, I guess there were some police officers who deserved bad rap. Um, and some of it, I guess there were police officers who deserve the bad rap or worse. Um, but most of them were um, rescuing people in New Orleans. Their own homes were gone. Their own families were in jeopardy. Firefighters – the same thing. And in places like Slidell, the police and the firefighters and EMTs and so on, and in Bogalusa, they did the same sort of thing. Um, less drama, you know, and there wasn't standing water for the most part. In Slidell, the lake was receding as quickly as it had come in. But um, these people you know, first responders, were remarkable, and that nurse is you know, as I say, I'll never forget her. Um, although it's interesting, the only thing I can remember about her - how she looked – I think she had short hair. You know, sort of dirty blonde hair, but the only thing I really remember is her height and her eyes, and that vice grip on my forearm. But that's enough. Um, so anyway, we um, we did what we could. Now Herman, which was mainly collect requests for information and supplies, and um, we went back through um, we went back to Baton Rouge, and once again, we were going counter the flow of traffic. Now all the traffic was going

eastbound, back to Hammond and beyond - back to Slidell. And with the cans of gasoline, and you know. And also the usual carry cans for gasoline. But you know, some – one pickup truck must have had twenty or thirty of those little red cans, but others had two, four, six of these big oil drums. Um, we saw something else though. We saw that the first – I think this is the first evening we saw it – because we were going back, going were convoys of ambulances, and as it turned out, I don't think all of these were transporting patients. I think some of these were going to the morgues set up, you know, south of here. Because the ambulances would go on these long convoys, you know, fifty, sixty of them. Um, they'd go out during the day, um, they'd go out – go, yeah. They'd go toward Baton Rouge and Laplace and so on, um, in the morning. And they'd go back in the evening. Um, I mean just the great variety of ambulance, ambulances. I didn't realize there were so many different decors of ambulances, but um, they didn't have their sirens on. They all had their lights on. Now if you have your sirens on, it's because you're transporting somebody…

C: Right.

P: …live. If you don't, you're essentially the morgue wagon, so there were a lot of them. Um, that was my first inkling that it was going to be even worse than I thought. It was, because on Friday the second, we went on the eastern side of Slidell, which is close to the Mississippi, Louisiana line, and um, that was almost the point of impact for Katrina. I mean Pass Christian was essentially blasted by, because they're exposed and they got the storm surge. But the storm came through just east of the state line. And so we went through there and it was um, it was unbelievable. If we didn't have that GPS device, Alice, we wouldn't have known if we were on the road let alone if there were houses there. And as for – I would find out the thing had the capability of um, displaying on the screen the house numbers that were supposed to be there. And when we were riding through the streets of Slidell, where there had been houses, but were no longer. And you couldn't even see slabs because the debris field was so extensive and thick, it was eerie. This GPS is displaying the house numbers of things and places that no longer existed. And when I have bad dreams about Katrina, that's one of them. And um, it's not a very private dream, so I don't mind describing it. Um, there must be a melding of the Superdome and the nondescript, and that's really the case when there's been a hurricane with straight line winds and tornadic winds and a storm surge that debris is nondescript. It's like taking a house and dropping it into a giant Cuisinart and then dumping the contents and raking them out. You can't tell what's what. Um, well anyway, in my dream, I'm in the passenger's seat of the Jeep. There's Alice, the GPS, and you know, Rich is driving. We're not saying anything, but in the dream, Alice talks. You know, now all GPS's will say turn right, turn left. This thing was possessed in the dream because it reads out house numbers, and the ground that we're on is like smooth concrete or smooth cement that's painted sort of battleship gray, and we're in this giant dome, the interior of which is the same color. And it goes on forever, so that you can't really see the horizon, and we're driving over there. There's absolutely no debris. It's completely nondescript, indistinguishable, expanse of this, what I assume, since we're moving so smoothly over is this painted cement – gray painted cement. And it's reading out, audibly, the house numbers. And that's, that's one of my dreams. And then sometimes the most um, banal, the most prosaic dreams that are the worst. Um, so that's what we, you know, not that, but we're seeing this kind of stuff, and it's showing on the screen, it's showing the house numbers. And we didn't know if at some point if we were

actually on the road. Again, we could've been on somebody's lawn. We had no way of knowing, you know. Because the GPS is only accurate within like fifty feet or something like that. So it shows the road and it shows the car icon going, so we're on – we're following that, and it's displaying the house numbers, and we didn't say a word to one another. I think it really affected both of us. And I just remember taking the pink marker and just – I should've had a paintbrush. Whole stretches of Slidell were just pink. Um, so that was - a whole day was spent in east Slidell. And we went back, um, on the third, Saturday, and on the fourth, Sunday, and on the Monday the fifth, they sent us back. Now you would think, you know, you would think perhaps tell how much of Slidell is accessible, and how much is not, and there was, actually, there were places, low areas downtown Slidell where there was still some standing water. But that wasn't the main problem. It was just that the streets were clogged, blocked. But um…

C: So it's mostly trees? Down trees, or debris?

P: Down trees and parts of houses and cars, um, I learned – I didn't know this. But I learned going from um, Slidell, well Covington, but also mainly coming from Slidell to Bogalusa, that first couple of days, that the winds did two types of damage. There were the tornadic winds, and then there were the straight-line winds. And you know, from your own experience, straight-line winds will snap a tree off or just push it over.

C: Right.

P: And like that big pine tree that sliced through that house; that was a straight-line wind, probably. And the fact that the ground was so saturated, the pine trees just came up. But we saw something else that just amazed me to this day. I don't – when I describe it to anybody, I don't do it very often, I think they don't believe me. But a tornado – the tornadic winds will take a big pine tree – you know how the bark goes more or less straight. You can see it, and you see this spiral. It twisted – the tree – into like a corkscrew. A tree! I could not believe it, and it was one of the most arresting sights, and you know, if it could do that, leave the tree standing - but that tree is dead for all practical purposes – leave the tree standing but having twisted as though it's made of silly putty. Nature is – the forces of nature are really impressive. I – you know, too bad it also did it to houses. And the thing about houses is that they don't have the structural integrity of trees. So um, at one point, we went – we weren't' technically supposed to go, but we were trying to get a – in our defense, we were trying to get a relative idea of just how bad it was in um, southeastern Louisiana – Slidell and near the state line. We went um, eventually over to – not for several days, but like September twelfth we went to Bay St. Louis and Diamondhead, Mississippi. And Biloxi, of course to get there. And I have pictures that I took, because ever since that first day – I brought my camera because I wasn't going to allow a debriefing officer to do his finger pushing at me again. Oh, and if I could, I would just like to say that I found that debriefing officer the second day. I made sure I was the one he debriefed, and he – I told him. I said, do you remember that house? Yeah. I saw more of that. It sliced right through – broke up the slab. I thought – yeah, well I made it clear that we weren't exaggerating.

C: Excuse me, Paul. If I can interrupt you. We ran out of um, disk on here.

P: I don't mean to be so verbose.

C: Oh no, not at all. Paul, this is amazing. Okay.

P: It's on?

C: Yes sir.

P: Okay. Um, so he's doing his – I don't' know if he did his finger pushups again. I'm certainly not an intimidating presence, so but I knew I could at least um, get that smug office worker's superiority off his face. So I thought we agreed – I thought I made it clear that we were not going to exaggerate, or something like that. And he said, yes you did. And I turned the camera around so he could see the display, and I said, this is the house. And he just looked and said, oh my God. I had no idea. And I, all of a sudden, I didn't have it in me to say, yeah I know, moron. Instead, I said yeah, it's kind of hard to believe. And after that, we had no more problems. Um, he just didn't know. And I once read in um, a book by the late Eugene Sledge, who was a zoologist who taught at Montevallo University in Alabama. He had written what is thought to be one of the definitive memoirs of World War II, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*. He once described, and this, I'm not making a comparison between, you know, doing disaster work and war, but he once said that for people even two hundred, the soldiers, marines even, two hundred yards behind the front lines, the existence and the behavior of the men on the front lines was absolutely inconceivable. That it was just two different worlds. Well to a, you know, dilute that a thousand times, what have you. The difference in experience and in therefore comprehension, and by that I mean not just understanding but being able to encompass the situation in the strike zone. Um, the difference between my – our perceptions, the scouts, and the perceptions of people who were doing the debriefing and trying to um, compile the statistics, and you know, all the data and analyze them and so on – very different. If – and it's understandable. If you're, you know, making sure that there are enough heater meals or enough um, highlighters or pads of paper and rolls of toilet paper and what have you, and copier paper, and toner cartridges, well that's what you do, and it's true. Operation can't continue without that. It's absolutely important. There are no superfluous or nonessential activities in a disaster. Um, every – if we were the tip of the spear, well the tip of the spear is kind of useless without the shaft. And you know, the supply tail and the analytical tail – those are all, and communications, are all important. Now what broke down with Katrina, and with a lesser degree I think with Rita, because some of the horrific experiences, um, and consequences, bad consequences in the shortcomings in response to Katrina, I think were learned from, and to some degree avoided with Rita. But what broke down, and of course with Katrina and that whole area of southeastern Louisiana, um, was communications. And you know, command and control depend upon communication. Without communication, they can't give orders. But more than that, they don't have any basis for intelligent, enlightened orders. But they were ab – there was no communications because there were no telecommunications. We were the communication. We were the pony express. It's ridiculous. People needed help instantaneously, and the best we could do with Rich Davis driving was at best, forty, fifty minutes – maybe sixty minutes, depending on congestion in Baton Rouge.

C: But that's only after you've completed your circuit of the assignment.

P: Exactly. So we couldn't – and we, yeah. We couldn't just say, well we're just going to drive back and forth. We only had one tank of gas. Every evening we'd topped off the gas tank on the Jeep Cherokee. Um, that was more important than water. That was more important than food. You can live several days without water or food, but if you don't have gasoline, you're stuck. And um, and we never got out of the vehicle without locking it. We weren't going to get stuck where we were. But, so anyway, you know, what broke down was communications, and so the command and control was accordingly very confused. There were competing jurisdictions I heard – I don't know. I will say this. I voted for Bobby Jindal when he ran the second time for governor for the office he now holds because I was so angry at Kathleen Blanco, the governor. My wife says that um, I suffered from KDS – Katrina Derangement Syndrome. And looking back on it, I think she's right. And I'm not making a political statement, but once we had power after four days, and I would come back each day and quite frankly, each day was worse than the day before as we penetrated further and further into the strike zone. I'd come back – the routine never varied. I'd come home, I'd, you know, say hi to my wife, I'd go into the shower and try to wash the day away. Um, she would, and you know, we'd set the table for dinner. We knew how fortunate we were, and we're the kind of people who say grace before eating, but quietly, and silently and um, and I could never bother sitting there, I didn't think about being thankful. I just tried not to think. Um, but then…

C: Well you were talking about communications, Paul. And I know you kept going back to many of the same places, but for the first four or five days…

P: Six.

C: Well, okay. The, the messages you were taking in, the appeals for help – were, was there any kind of response to these? Were you seeing…

P: Yeah, there was. We were literally, you know, Nelson Bailey was right. We were the tip of the spear. In fact, we were the point of the tip that first few days. We would be – again. You know, they said. We didn't know where we – what we would find, or what it would be like, and um, but when we brought – it wasn't because of what we brought back in way of pleas for help and so on, but they needed to know just how bad it was. But behind us were coming the emergency response vehicles, which were – they had food that was cooked at central kitchens at the um, Red Cross operation center. Um, which were then loaded in these thermal insulated containers in these ERVs, they called it, E-R-V's, emergency response vehicles. And they go into the strike zone where the population presumed to be densest, and they set up these essentially mobile distribution centers.

C: So it was beginning to filter into these peripheral areas.

P: It was. And there were all sorts of talk, you know, of course, people complaining, I never saw the damn Red Cross ever. Well you know, the Red Cross couldn't go door to door. The Red Cross – and there was no way of conveying the information. It essentially had to be word of mouth or else we would pass the word that there was an emergency response vehicle that was going to set up at such and such a place. But you know, people want to lash out. They want to blame somebody, and I know the Red Cross made mistakes in terms of fundraising and so on, and distributions, but they didn't make mistakes in the

field. They sent people out, and the people who cavil over that and carp, well they aught to try doing it and staring into the eyes of, say a mother whose baby needs baby formula. The Red Cross doesn't have baby formula when it's trying to feed, you know, thousands of people. Um, so that came in, and but usually, you know, when I was a DAT captain, always one of my responsibilities along with the other members of the team to make sure that we had um, cleaning supplies; because the person whose house that had damaged by a fire but could still live in it, well they had to clean up the soot and the water and the smoke. So you'd give them a mop and a broom and household cleansers, and so on. What do you give somebody whose house is no longer there? So what we could give was nothing. We were – that wasn't our job. And we'd pass people that were in misery; that were desperate. Um, some of them often asked us what we needed, but many of them – for every one of those there are a thousand, maybe who just stayed inside. And then of course the whole area was armed to the teeth. People were leery of looters, and there was, there was at least some looting. There was a sign outside a subdivision – I took a photo of it. A big sign entering the subdivision, you know, one way in, one way out. You know, by a neutral ground, and there was a nice brick wall and plantings and so on, and somebody spray painted letters on a big piece of plywood, "looters will be shot". I guess that replaced "Welcome to Happy Acres" or something. "Looters will be shot." And we saw lots of people armed, and they weren't all wearing uniforms, and they were going to protect themselves and theirs. And if you had a house still, or even the ruins of a house and you had personal possessions in there – you covered them with tarp and sometimes you covered them with a twelve gauge. And that's what they were doing. Um, I had never heard, until the "slick, slick" sound of a pump shotgun and a street sweeper, and I don't really think you have to load it in order to scare the living daylights out of anybody. They don't even have to see it. It's sort of like the rattle of a rattlesnake. You hear that sound, and you know that the next step you take may be your last. Um, so there was a lot of that, and at one point, you know, we went down a – in Slidell we went down this road that wasn't a dead end road, but it became one because of all the debris, and there was a house that had been just all but demolished. And there was a car ahead of us with its trunk open. I took a picture from inside our Jeep. But Rich said, I'd better go check this out. That was a law enforcement officer, and as far as I was concerned, what you do is you hang a u-turn and get out. But anyway, he went over there, and looks in, and he comes back, and he said, you better stay in the Jeep. I said, why? He said, that car is filled with weapons and ammo cans. Well it turned out it belonged to a retired New Orleans police sergeant, and he was the – it was his father-in-law's house. And his father-in-law was a World War II veteran, and one of those weapons in there was an M-1 for his father, and a case of medals, decorated soldier; all that was left of the house – essentially what was this retired police officer could get out of it. And the rest of the weapons, he explained, were his, including the AR-15, the shotgun, and he's got a police special on his hip. And he was the one who told us about the police officer in New Orleans, the sergeant who killed himself because he just felt like it was so infinite he couldn't help anybody. And that had been his friend. So um, he said, you know, it's just – you never know when something like this could happen. What do you say to somebody whose father-in-law has lost his house, he's lost one of his best friends – you know, his comrade in arms, and he's armed to the teeth. I think I said "sir" a lot, is what I said. And I mean, he was moving, but it was kind of scary. I don't feel comfortable around guns. I didn't grow up with them, and um, this guy had an arsenal in his trunk. I mean cans of ammunition.

C: Well Paul, you talked about the perception that looting was taking place. You know, there was a real threat. To what extent is this real?

P: There was almost no looting in – I shouldn't say anywhere, but there was almost no looting I saw in Slidell. Um, now you know the familiar "X" on the doors and the– I saw that a lot. But those were – those weren't search and rescue teams going out. Those were search and recovery teams. They were recovering dead bodies. And in fact, um, without going through the whole chronology of day by day, I just – because every day became sort of like every other day except worse. Um, yeah, I've smelled dead animals before and rotting garbage and so on, and you know, really it makes you sick to your stomach obviously if you have to inhale air like that. But there's a smell that I had never smelled before, and that's rotting human remains. And you know, you may remember what the weather was like – it was hot. It was hot and dry, but it was hot. And you know, by early September, it's high summer in southeastern Louisiana. And um, you know, I said, I think that the earlier, you know, medieval times, you could smell a city before you go in. Coming into Bogalusa or Mount Herman, what you smell – or Covington – you'd smell backed-up toilets and sewage, sewer systems, and rotting food and so on. There weren't any dead bodies – there might have been dead animals. Um, so never having smelled that smell, I couldn't even identify. My mind didn't recoil from it; it just, I mean except that it was something dead. And Rich said, there are dead bodies around here. And I understand the sheriff of Slidell said that – the police chief of Slidell, the year after the storm, in retrospect, said that they didn't lose anybody within the city limits. Maybe so, I don't know. He said, directly caused by the storm. Well I think if you'd die of a heart attack because your house is flooding, you'd died of the storm. And I wouldn't dispute it, but I know that there were dead bodies, and we saw them, and um, worse than seeing dead bodies is the overwhelming stench, smell. It's a – I tried to write it down about it. It's the, it's the speed of light of smells. You know, it's the ultimate. You can't get worse than that. And nothing could approach it, and with Rita, I smelled a lot of dead cattle and pigs, um, around Pecan Island and so on, and it's bad. Rotting flesh of any kind is bad, but there's something about a rotting human being that decayed. Um, I don't' know if I'm going to walk around and smell it anymore. Um, but I have other dreams. If something evokes it, for some reason, I'm right back there, and there's a place south of Slidell, Eden Isle, which is a marina subdivision – very nice. And it had been hard-hit by the storm surge. In fact, there is a debris field. This is Eden Isle. And um, Rich took a picture. I had taken one of him as well.

C: I see what you mean about the debris.

P: You see what I mean? It's just – and there's a lot of water beyond this, but this was a house, and you could see it's all atilt.

C: But you're right. It looks like the – the whole development had been put into a Cuisinart and…

P: And just spread out. And what happened was the um, the lake is over here. This is the end of the lake, part of the marina. And it had come this way, sweeping all the camps and you know, houses in the subdivision. Some of them, you know, you could see the roof is ripped off here, you know, the shingles. But this house is all atilt. It's off its foundation. It's, you know, and that's um, I keep that – I kept that picture in my desk because I was working on an article on the destructiveness of the Civil War in the

South, and in all the um, diary accounts and the letters, there's all – a lot of hyperbole. I mean, a thing like war I think is our hyperbole, just like the disaster on a scale of Katrina or Rita brings out hyperbole, because people are desperate to try to come to grips with it and find the words to express it. But a lot of total destruction, total destruction, to describe what happened in the Civil War. And I did the work, and I'm confident in saying that there wasn't, and when I needed, you know, the standard – the platinum standard for total destruction. I look at that picture. Um, and I – then I know. And so when I read these accounts, I would, no. That's not total destruction. That's a few houses destroyed. That's bad. I mean, if your house – it doesn't matter if everybody else's house is still standing – it's total destruction. But this is…

C: That is total destruction.

P: That's total destruction. And off in the other end of that picture, beyond, there's hedgerows – tree lines. And I think that, well Rich and I believe that based on the smell that was coming – the wind was blowing toward us from there – that a lot of the bodies that had been blasted out of their homes because the, the camps and the houses had their backs blown in and the fronts blown out, and if you were in there, you would get out. Well you didn't climb out or walk out – you were blown out. And…

C: But in terms of Cuisinart…

P: But in thinking is into the, yeah, and into the hedgerow. Um, and at one point, we were going down the road, um, in Slidell near the lake – one of the older parts of town – you know, not the suburb. And there the water had come up ten or twelve, fifteen feet. I mean there were mudlines on the roof of houses. Mudlines. That's deposited by not rain, but standing water. And we saw you know, a dead body, and that was our first one we saw. And obviously, and I had seen dead bodies occasionally when I did fire duty, you know, disaster action team response. But this was different because they, you know, fire – the house is burned. Um, most people don't die of their burns; they die of smoke inhalation. But you know, this is different, and um, right behind us came a National Guard wagon, sort of like an ambulance, but it was National Guard. It was the green with the red cross on it. And um, there was a search and recovery officer, I guess a firefighter. And they carried picks – um, geologists have them - to break in places, and as I said, this was the house that had gotten water on the roofline, and there were these two young guardsmen, maybe three. And I don't know if they – I don't think shirts are sold anymore with shirt cardboard, but you know the color of the shirt cardboard? That was their faces. And you know, I mean death on the scale that was there in that form – it – emotionally it makes everybody a child I think. You want to go running for somebody to comfort you. In terms of what it does to your eyes and your face, it ages you. When these guys, these kids, looked like old men, and smelled, and they had to go and they went in with respirators and so on to the porch to get her. It was a woman – she'd had a heart attack, apparently, because I don't know – maybe she drowned, and they put her in a body bag and hoisted her up, and that was the first. And there were others, and um, when we got back, I guess it was toward the end of the first week. The pressure from the suits – the higher-ups, the Red Cross on the local managers, disaster response – had become intense because the suits had no idea how difficult it was on the ground. All they knew was that they were getting pressure from the government – president, and so on. FEMA – FEMA, you know, which was more hindrance than help in part, was nevertheless

putting pressure on them. We have to remember Brownie doing a heck of a job. Um, and Chertoff and others. Well anyway, um, it wasn't going – the operation wasn't going quickly enough - the damage assessment, the disaster assessment. And they augment – they gave Nelson Bailey some help. They gave us – this guy named Dick, I never got his last name – and I don't wish to offend anybody who's listening, but you know, that's a slang term, and for some reason, a lot of Red Cross workers seemed to be named Richard. And as someone put it, once this fellow Dick took over the day-to-day, well I won't say it, but you can imagine what they said. Anyway, he, Nelson Bailey, was a nice guy who – I could say it?

C: Don't self-edit, Paul.

P: Okay. That there are an awful lot of "Dicks" in the Red Cross. And this is the biggest "Dick" of them all. That's what somebody said, and I would say that's accurate. He was, um, he was a large guy, tall, heavy set, um, five o'clock, seven o'clock shadow on his face, even in the morning. Um, I never saw him smile. He was probably in his thirties, early thirties. I never saw him smile, never um, almost never heard him raise his voice, but I wouldn't have crossed that son of a gun for anything. He was a – he struck me as being a brute. A thug. But yet it was not fair – he had an impossible job. And he got it done. His job was to light a fire under us and tell us in effect that we were…

C: He was the fixer, in other words.

P: Right, he was a fixer. Right, now Nelson Bailey was doing a great job, but Nelson was trying to – was having to do everything. So they divided up the functions, and um, Dick's – he became known as Big Dick. Big Dick's job was to kick butt, and that's what he did. My recollection is, his familiar posture was like an ape. A big gorilla leaning on a table on his knuckles, staring at maps and deploying his teams. That's not fair to him. I mean I couldn't have done his job. I know that. But anyway, so after about five days, you know, teams are augmented. There are twenty two different teams, apparently, fanning out all over the area to try to get the job done faster, and now they're doing street-by-street, you know, house-by-house assessments of damage. And um, the end of the day, now when we come in after the first week, we total up the number of "affected", "minor damage", "major damage", "destroyed". We total that up – the different types of houses – or structures. There are single family homes, there are duplexes, there are mobile homes, there are apartments, and each one has to be kept. And then those figures are turned into the team leaders, and the team leaders aggregate them all by area, and then those were turned over to the statistical section, and so on and so. So all this – and I'm glad I – and I'm a quantitative historian. And I do this for a living, essentially, because it's my first research love. And I wouldn't have wanted to do that. I don't think it's particularly depressing because it's so abstracted. But anyway, um, one morning, I guess it was toward the end of the first week getting into the second week, Big Dick calls all the um, disaster teams together. And I should say that after the first three days, the small number of teams – we were, in our own mind at least – special because we were the only ones seeing anything. Everybody else was tabulating what we saw or typing up what we saw. We were the ones they had to talk to. So it didn't give us a swelled head. It just made us feel different. And we needed – you couldn't go out into the field without Red Cross identification, so we decided, there were two former recon marines who had been in Vietnam, and they were volunteering, and they were a scout team. They didn't call them scouting – they called them recon. And they went to a t-shirt, polo shirt

shop in the mall that was making custom-order shirts. And they showed us what they had, and they said that all – I think by then five teams – that all ten of us should do that. And if nothing else, that would show the suits. I don't know – you know, you get into a game mode, and you don't necessarily think. So that's what we did, and it's got, as you see, it says "disaster assessment" in red, and the black outline is a map of – outline of Louisiana. There's a Red Cross in the northern part of it, and the southern, southeastern, southwestern side it says, "Katrina 2005" and where Mississippi is, it says in green, "Recon". And that's what we wore when we went out, and um, it became of course an object of considerable envy for the people who were just doing the street surveys because of course, they hadn't gone out when nobody knew anything. And I admit – it seemed at the time to have a certain kind of perverse cache about it. Um, I hardly ever wore it, but I kept it. And um, pretty soon, people were asking where we got them, because they wanted to get them. And of course, we refused to tell them because quite frankly, they haven't earned it. So it was all that stupid stuff. Well the reason I say this is because the suits, the Red Cross, got very upset because people who worked in offices, and you know, doing the statistical analysis and the data, and the mass feeding and so on, complained about the sub-styled elite. And they said, you will not refer to yourselves as recon. You are PDA – that's what you did. You did PDA. Well I would've thought that that was public display of affection. And I knew we hadn't done that, or personal data assistant – nothing works on what would be – preliminary – you tell me if this makes any sense at all. Preliminary Disaster Assessment. So before you can assess the disaster, you assess it in a preliminary way. So we never referred to ourselves in that way. We were – we did recon. Um, but what we were, were scouts, that's all. But it was just one of the few comic – moments of comic relief to see these people getting so upset about something of no consequence. It didn't even mean that much to us, but it meant a great deal to them. (laughs) But anyway…

C: Um, if I can interrupt you there, Paul.

P: Yeah, sure.

C: You talked about everyone having to gather again after a week to deliver the um, the assessments. I take it the communication still had not been established in the field?

P: Oh no, there were no radios. Um, and that big relay truck…

C: They hadn't got satellite phones or anything else.

P: No, and that big relay truck, you know, for the radio – I don't know if it ever got to Hammond. I don't know – I mean, by then of course we were in the Cortana Mall Wal-Mart building, so for all I know they had it out somewhere else south of the city, or something like that. But we never – we could never make a cell phone call. We could never use the radio. We finally threw the stuff in the back of the Jeep, you know. We just never even tried anymore. We had our own cell phones, and you know, they didn't work either. And um, so anyway, I interrupted myself. This is going to be kind of disjointed I guess, but so one day, one morning, Big Dick yells out in like a foghorn kind of voice, Alright. Bring it in. Bring it in. Meaning he wanted us all to gather around him as though he were the coach in a football game or something, and what - we were in one far corner of the Wal-Mart building, and you know, and they call them a big box – that's all it was – a big box. We were in the um, upper left-hand corner from how you

came in, and we were sort of, like, isolated. It was like a colony. Um, public health service was nearby, but there was a very wide aisle, like a firebreak between us and them, so that we didn't contaminate them or something. There was actually I think a chain-link fence between us and statistical analysis. It was probably because that's where they kept the computers. They didn't want us pilfering them. But um, and then within the – and that was for disaster assessment. And that's where the maps were on the walls and so on, and the assignment sheets and they had these tables folding, collapsible long tables where we were supposed to um, be debriefed and fill out stuff. And then within that, of course the first several days, there were the recon people, so we were um, we were the island within the peninsula, or whatever. You know, near the peninsula - for some reason we were kept in that corner. I don't know why, but for once it actually served its purpose because Big Dick, you know, "bring it in, bring it in". and he lowered his voice to who was standing around, and he said, I want to say this, and I don't want to say it loudly. I don't want everybody outside of us to hear this, so keep your mouth shut about it. Very loving man. And he said, how many of you have come across dead bodies? And I'd say half or two thirds of us raised our hands. He said, that's tough. He nodded his head, pressing his lips together. That's tough, isn't it. Nobody didn't say anything – we just nodded. Well suck it up. Just make a note of it and move on. Like I say, you know, a soft loving man. But he's right, you know. We weren't the coroner. We weren't going to put toe tags on people. Make a note of where it is, move on. Notify people when you can. Don't worry – they'll find it sooner or later. And of course, that was it. So, quite a guy. You definitely wanted to have dinner with this fellow. Um…

C: In your own home. (laughs)

P: In your own home, of course, with your best china all around. So anyway, um, so then we started doing just these damage assessment – street by street, house by house. And again, Alice –GPS came in and – because there were no street signs. Everything was blown down. Um, almost all the houses were at least – suffered at least minor damage. And many of the major damage – all too many had been destroyed or even obliterated. And you know, Eden Isle was probably the worst hit area. Um, one point, we went back up to, not Bogalusa, but we took US-11, which runs north-south. We took it north from Slidell to some small communities we'd been asked to just touch base. And um, there were some trees down, but for the most part, nothing bad. The terrible winds um, had blown east of there, right up like hugging the state line, but on the Mississippi side. So most of Louisiana, um north of Slidell didn't – hadn't suffered this much as, for example, Hattiesburg. I think they had hundred mile-an-hour winds. Um, and so we came back down, and we had a trainee with us – a young fellow. I think unemployed, typesetter, I guess – a typographer. He worked with automation, essentially. He was twenty seven years old, a fellow named Dan – a really nice, quiet guy – and um, he was being sent out with us for orientation, and just – and so we took him around. In fact, he was with us when we came across that body. And um, his father was a cartographer, and he grew up reading maps. Well anybody who knows me will tell you that I have no sense of direction. So the irony was that I was being – I was the navigator. I was reading the maps and pinking things in. It's a wonder that, you know, if I had a map of another parish, or even another state, I probably wouldn't have known. But anyway, when I found out that Dan, you know, we tried to explain pleasantries and information, and he said, yeah, well my dad's a cartographer, so um – because I said something like, I'm sorry about the quality of the maps we're

working with. He said, oh, that's alright. My dad's a cartographer – I've seen sketchier maps than that. I said, your dad's a cartographer? I said, do you, did you inherit his interest? He said, yeah. So I said, here. And I gave him the map. So he was our navigator. He was great. Um, between him and Alice, the GPS device, we got around very well that day. And he was with us the next day when we had another new arrival a would-be a police officer from upstate New York – I never got his last name, but his first name was Mike. And within an hour, I, to myself, had nicknamed him Mike the Spike. Um, he told us without any prompting that he had "pulled bodies" from Ground Zero in New York after 9-11. I don't know, maybe he did. All he wanted to do, though, was to go down to New Orleans to pull bodies, and that's what he talked about from the entire time out from Baton Rouge to Slidell. Now he and Dan were sitting in the back seat, and Rich is driving, and I'm in the front seat. And I'm listening to this, and I had made up my mind even before I met Rich is that it's, you know, what I'm doing. I'm not doing it to make friends. I'm doing it because it's what I was trained to do, and I'm going to do it. Well Rich and I had gotten already to be easy in one another's company and enjoy each other's company. And Dan was a delight – you know, soft-spoken guy, not diffident – but soft-spoken and calm. Mike was a trip to the zoo, and he kept talking about pulling bodies, and that's what he wanted to do. Finally, since we had already seen the first dead body and others later that day, and the smell was, you know, already pretty rife. We're still about a half an hour or so from Slidell on I-12, and Dan – um, Mike the Spike is going on and on about this. And he wasn't a bad guy – he wanted to help, but this is what he thought he was tough enough to do, and he wanted to do that. I guess because that's where the drama would be, and that's where the media would be, because he told us about how many times he'd been interviewed by television and so on, and how he was a celebrity up in his hometown. So he was the young guy, and he thought this was glorious or something, or at least potentially. I looked at Rich, and Rich is like this, you know. His eyes up to heaven, and Dan is just not saying anything. Mike said it again, and I turned around, and I said, will you shut the hell up? What? I said, you don't know what you're talking about. I said, what sane person would want to do what you say you want to do? I said, you want dead bodies? We'll take you to where there are dead bodies. Well I was just trying to make conversation, is what he said. And at that point I realized that I shouldn't have said anything, so I just shut up. So conversely, the rest of the trip was made in silence except by then, actually cell phones were working. I just remembered, because this was the beginning of the second week, because Mike the Spike was talking to his mother about what he hadn't done yet, but what he was about to do, because apparently he was pretty rough. I remember that. Yeah. So anyway, um, the next day, we, I guess it was Wednesday the seventh. It was just Rich and I again. And the same thing on the Thursday the eighth, and Friday the ninth, we'd been asked to survey Madisonville and Mandeville, and a big branch of McComb. And so we went through there, and you know, they had suffered some damage along the lake and the low-lying areas in flooding.

C: So by that point you basically had done the whole northern rim of Lake Pontchartrain.

P: Right. And we pretty much finished Slidell. And um, you know, we didn't see anything particularly terrible after that. And um, then um, I guess it was um, Rich was nearing the end of his commitment, you know, it was a three-week commitment, but even two weeks, and um, I was teamed up with a woman from outside of Albany, New York named Linda Walsh, a nice young woman. And um, she really

wanted the um, recon shirt. And I said, I'm sorry, can't have it – can't have one. Well where can I get one? She asked, and I said, you had to have done it. She said, well I've been doing damage assessment. Not the same thing. So I finally – I told her where she could get one if she wanted one that badly, but any case she wanted to see, um, Mississippi. So I had the Jeep this time, and I'm driving, and we went over to Bay St. Louis and Diamondhead. And it was terrible – it really was. Mississippi was hit harder than Louisiana. Um, except I think the Slidell and of course New Orleans and St. Bernard parish, but Mississippi was – Diamondhead looked like it had ceased to exist. It was a um, community – you know, you go along I-10 East and it's off, of course, to the south – to the right, and you go down this natural murrain, I guess, the slope, to the marina. And what we saw there was uncanny. Um, at sea level, there were these piers on which homes were standing. There was nothing but piers and maybe a floor – some flooring. And like giant um, land crabs – you know the kind with the tails out? That's what it looks like. The jellyfish with tendrils out. There were the air conditioning compressors with the hoses and cables still attached, like intestines, like this with a strap, they were littering the ground. Those were the only things heavy enough to withstand the storm surge. So the storm couldn't propel them. But there were no houses – just the piers. There was a hedgerow, or tree line of pine trees – like the teeth of a comb. Imagine a comb standing up on end with pointed teeth facing upward. And the houses simply had been propelled by the water and the wind through them, and just shredded. There was nothing in the way of recognizable construction material. There were shreds of it, pink insulation – a lot of that. Bits and pieces of what I presume to be siding. Gypsum board, maybe. But no sheets of anything - it was all shredded into fairly small pieces. Um, and just caught in the – amazing. So we're driving around there, and that helped – lent some perspective to what we had seen in Louisiana, quite frankly. And we then made a turnaround – we turned around and I drove back up down what looked like a very unusually wide road, and there were twisted pieces of structural steel sticking out of the ground, just like some kind of ultra modern abstract sculpture, but making even less sense, in my opinion, than that. And driving along, and saying, I wonder if this was, you know, we were speculating to one another. Was this a subdivision or something? It turned out, it was an airport runway. It was a, you know, commercial aviation runway for um, people's private planes – it was a fairly affluent area - and what we were on was the taxi way. And what we had seen, those twisted bits of metal, that would have been a service shed. What was left of it. And then we noticed there were gas pumps – some of them lying on the ground, um, or fuel pumps. There were no planes in sight. I'm sure everybody had either gotten the planes out or they'd been propelled elsewhere, but we very quickly realized we'd better get out. And the National Guard had let us go down, because we had the Red Cross. They were patrolling – they had a roadblock up there. Um, which reminds me, I omitted something, um, when Rich and I were still going out and into South Slidell. In order to get to it you had to pass a roadblock jointly manned by the St. Tammany Sheriff's Department and the National Guard. And these guys were all locked and loaded. Um, the National Guard troops, you know, were there of course in their uniform. The St. Tammany parish sheriff's deputy was in his, and he had his – first time I had seen the, I guess he had his holster around his waist. But you know, the newer style, I guess um, pseudo squad or something is to have it on the thigh. Well he didn't have that, but he was just as intimidating as if he were um, a gunslinger, as far as I was concerned. And he leans in, makes eye contact with Rich – immediately they're brothers in arms. You know, it's amazing. I was supposed to be the liaison, remember. I'm just the, he said, well, you know. There are pretty rough boys up ahead. You better be careful. And he said, yeah. You're not

carrying any weapons are you? No. I'm sure he was thinking, you want some? But he just looked, and he said well, and he said that he heard some gunfire. There had been reports – he heard reports – every different than "of reports". So I was thinking again, this is a big mistake. You know, you surely don't have to go down there. If you have to get to a place through a roadblock, you probably shouldn't go. That's become one of my guiding principles. If you have to pass a roadblock, don't cross it. Don't go. But down we went, and um, I think we did hear some gunfire, but it could've been people shooting snakes and rats. I mean that's the other thing. Everything gets – oh, you hear a gunshot – it must have been somebody shooting a looter. Probably shooting vermin, and um, but as I say, everybody, it seemed, I'm sure it wasn't true, but everybody seemed armed. And that's – you know, you're a strange vehicle, and it's a black Jeep, so um, it's not – they're not sure if it's an official vehicle, since it's monochromatic. Um, or not – but we had Red Cross plastered all over that. The only place we didn't have it was on the roof. Um, but we rode around, and you know, saw some – and the smell was – that was just terrible. And we got away from there until we brought some food for lunch, and then we just like had to get away from that smell. So we rode over to lake – further west of Lake Pontchartrain, and there was a – I'm not sure if it was a um, an experiment station or something, but there was something out there, and we stopped there, and I took a picture of a blue heron perched on a pier, you know, a post. Um, piling sticking out of the – the lake was absolutely as smooth as glass. You would never have thought that this beautiful, peaceful, smooth, glassy body of water could've done the harm it did, but there it is, and this heron is there. I took a photo. It's just beautiful – it's one of my favorite photographs. And I have no eye – no talent for photography whatsoever, but that was so inherently beautiful, and it represented such an anomaly, I think, that even I couldn't mess up the picture. And we had our lunch, and um, and we debated with ourselves whether we aught to go back in there and risk losing our lunch. And Richard told me after the first day after we went in down, near where the smell was – the stink – that an old policeman's trick, which was that you get a jar or a bottle of Vick's Vaporub and you put a glob of it on your upper lip. I have a moustache, so it would stay there pretty well. And Vick's Vaporub fumes would you know, help to mitigate the - and I did that. I – between that, the Vick's Vaporub on my upper lip below my nose, and the, you know, waterless antibacterial soap that we used throughout, um, our knuckles – my knuckles especially, were bleeding because they were so dry from the alcohol. They cracked open, and Vick's Vaporub so irritated the lining of my nose, you know, the mucous membrane that the only thing was – I wasn't going to stop doing either of them. At night, my wife would rub aloe lotion on my knuckles, and um, I would – there wasn't anything I could do for the mucous membrane. So I didn't know – I can't stand the smell of Vick's Vaporub to this day. I just cannot abide it – I won't abide it. And it's another one of my principles – if you're in a situation where you have to use Vick's Vaporub to stay there, don't stay there. So that's – but um, but he taught me that. And so on that second night, I went to Walgreens and I bought jars of Vick's Vaporub. And um, you know the old Brylcreem thing? "A little dab'll do ya?" well I just slopped that stuff on, and I was okay. I just couldn't taste or smell anything. So I had lunch, you know, we went to the lake, I couldn't taste a thing. Everything tasted like Vick's Vaporub. (laughs) So, but um, you know, people wanted to shake our hands. Well these people had no running water, no toilet facilities, and so on, so we always washed our hands with the stuff. So we did that so many times each day that it's inevitable that our knuckles would dry out and crack. So my wife would rub the aloe cream or something like that, hand lotion, on my knuckles, and um, I – she wrapped, actually wrapped them with some gauze to allow them to heal a bit. But of course the next

morning, there I was doing it again, so. She said, what do you do? I said, antibacterial soap, you know, the waterless soap. She said, is it absolutely essential? I said, absolutely essential. And I didn't tell her anything. I couldn't. I still can't. Um, I don't know if she'll ever read this transcription – I'm not describing anything really horrible in terms of each point, but um, in a way, one of the most debase things I saw – besides the looting, evidence of looting – one of the most debase things I saw was the second day in Slidell, we went to the shelter which was at a high school. And of course, you know, no running water, no electricity, no sewage treatment, so no toilets of any kind, and um, and no Port-o-Potties. This town – the city was unprepared, which is not a slap at the town officials, the city officials because what could they prepare for? You know, you've batten down everything. You know, you have your supplies, and so on. You have your generators, and you figure you've got your um, emergency communications. Well none of that worked, but um, we were trying to survey the shelter - that was one of our first jobs on the second day to bring back the information to Baton Rouge, and I still remember. This grandmother – she must've been in her sixties. Um, holding on to a hand with her three year old or four year old granddaughter in one hand, and she had a roll of toilet paper in the other. And what had happened was that the people in the shelter had created a latrine. They hadn't dug a pit or anything. A latrine against the wall – the back wall of this end of the highschool. And that's where she was taking her three year old, and what they had to stand in, I don't want to imagine. But people were urinating and defecating in that one spot, in this swale. And that day, that was the worst smell I've ever smelled. It's still not pleasant – you don't want to smell something like that. But quite frankly in the grand scheme of things, in the hierarchy of stenches, that's just unpleasant. But it was pretty unpleasant to see that this is what modern civilization had been reduced to.

C: Had been reduced to.

P: I mean our cave dwelling ancestors at least had a separate place to eliminate. This was just against a wall. People, I guess would lean against a wall and maybe crouch or squat. Because, as I say, their feet in God knows what. And nowhere to clean them off, because there was no running water. In Covington, there were signs, as there were in many communities along the lake, north shore of the lake, um, that the city or parish officials had put up with spray paint on big pieces of plywood, "boil water before using". So um, because the water – if any water did come out of the tap, it hadn't been treated, at least not adequately. So um, well anyway, I got back, um, to – after, touring Bay St. Louis and Diamondhead on the twelfth with Linda Walsh, on the thirteenth and the fourteenth, the Tuesday and Wednesday, I had to – I guess they called it leads. And I had applied for this because I had promised one of my colleagues months before that I would take his seminar on the um, on Wednesday the fourteenth. And I knew from my own experience – I mean not experience – but I know that I was going to need a day to decompress and prepare, um, so I remember coming into the office on the…

C: Thirteenth?

C: …thirteenth – first day in two weeks that I had done anything besides what I had been doing. And um, I have wonderful colleagues. It's a group – a delight. This is my – by then I had been at LSU for um, twenty nine years, and um, they were, you know, they were just a delightful group of people. You know, sensible. We had you know, for a department of over twenty five people, there are no factions.

Remarkable. But their concerns – the inconvenience, because of course the population of Baton Rouge had swelled because of the evacuations from New Orleans. People with money came to Baton Rouge. The people without were bused to Houston, and so on. So we had lots more vehicles on the road, and there was lots more traffic, and a lot more customers at every restaurant, and every store. Stores were running out of things. And that's what I was listening to I was listening to this, you know, how terrible it was. And I'm sure if I hadn't been doing what I had been doing, I'd be complaining about the inconvenience too. But I felt like that I had stepped through the looking glass. I was in a distorted world. These people weren't cohabiting with me. We weren't coexisting in the same plane – on the same plane. And I had an appointment - lunch appointment at the Faculty Club. It couldn't be anything more normal for an academic than going to he Faculty Club to have lunch, and that was on um, Tuesday, the thirteenth, and I was meeting a professor emeritus in the Geography department whose wife was um, was thinking about having a hip replacement operation. I'd had both hips replaced in the two previous years, you know, serially, and so he wanted to know about it – what kind of difference it made. So I was meeting with him, and um, he never said a word about the storm. Um, I guess his interest was his wife, and I never said a word about the storm, or what could I have said? I couldn't tell anybody. I remember seeing my chairman, um, who is now our dean. Gaines Foster, a wonderful person. And he looked at me and he asked me when he saw me – I guess there's something about my eyes or something. How was it? And I said something I really wish I had never said, but I said, you know, I discovered that there's something worse than the sight of a dead body. It's the stink of one that you can't see. Now he didn't have to hear that. And I guess I felt I had to say it, I don't know. But fortunately I had said it to him before I went to the Faculty Club, and maybe that sobered me up. So Gaines, if you ever read this, I'm sorry I said that. But um, so I – and then I went home and prepared for the seminar and gave the seminar, and um, I don't know how well I did – I don't remember. And that was two days of dreamlike. It was um, I couldn't wait to get back. I felt out of place. Like I say, it was like I stepped into a looking glass. I didn't belong there. Now of course, that's a silly thing, but the two weeks essentially – if I wasn't sleeping, I was doing something I never imagined I would do. So um, in New Orleans on the fifteenth on Thursday, Rich and I went down to New Orleans. And um, we had been down to Grand Isle on Saturday because the reports they had gotten about damage assessment, damage there seemed to them inconsistent with some of the hearsay, and so they had sent us down to Grand Isle. And it was terrible with seventy five percent of the island destroyed. Um, and we came back from that, and then so anyway, on the fifteenth we were told we should go down to New Orleans and see what the situation was, and we had – as I say, we had poked around the outskirts, but we went to St. Bernard parish, and we, you know, Chalmette, and it was horrible. We saw, you know, Lakefront and um, we couldn't get into – you couldn't get into New Orleans the regular way – taking I-10. You had to go 310, and so we did that. We get on the, you know, the highway going down toward the Superdome, and there are mattresses and boats on the side of the road, and the debris. The water was largely gone down by then, but you know, the pumps and evaporation had helped do that. But um, we went into the city – Rich, who had been born in Louisiana, I believe, but moved – his family had moved Midwest – remembered as a little boy going to Café du Monde, and he just was desperate to see that the Café du Monde still stood. But of course, it was closed but we went there and I took a picture of him standing in front of the Café du Monde with its "Closed" sign so that he could show his wife where he had been. And um, because we had taken pictures of one another and of what we'd seen. Um, Rich so that he could show

his home chapter in Sheboygan. And I – it had all started – I'm not a voyeur, and I'm not a tourist, but it all started because of that debriefing officer doing these finger pushups, and it just pissed me off. So after that, I decided that I was going to document everything. Um, so I told him that I needed to check two things. I wanted to make sure that Galatoire's Restaurant, which is my favorite restaurant, was still alright. And of course, everything in the Quarter was fine. The only thing they suffered was spoilage with lack of power, but um, Galatoire's was there but closed, of course. And it remained closed till January I think. But um, and then I said I wanted to see some – go down on Royal Street and Decatur. And we could get anywhere because we had the Red Cross stuff, but the army was there all over, the 82nd airborne. We had seen them come in. we saw them lined up – I have picture of their convoy, the army amtracs and everything before they went in. They had been misdirected to take the I-10 Bridge out through Slidell. That was closed – it was washed away. It was part of the span, so they were stacked up – they had just gotten back from Iraq, and one amtrac was open, and the back was filled with what looked like blue crystal inside. It was cases of bottled water. Other amtrac was open in the back, and it was not blue. It was ammunition and weapons. So they were going in – they were told that it was chaos, and shooting and everything else, and they were ready. They were nice, you know. They were waving and everything. We chatted, you know, talked with them. The situation's normal. All up because there they were – they had to turn around. It's not easy to turn around, you know, a convoy of a division, practically, you know. And um, so when they went into New Orleans, there was of course the famous General Honore telling them to lower their weapons and put the safeties back on. They were going down the street abreast, and they were ready to – if they took fire, they were going to destroy whatever it was, and Honore turned what could've been a horrible situation, and it wouldn't have been the fault of the troops, but – and took control of the situation, and that's when the New Orleans I think had began to come back. And people can thank General Honore, but they can also thank the 82nd airborne because there's nothing like seeing people like that going down the street manning checkpoints. Um, I can't imagine anybody but a suicidal thug wanting to start trouble within a hundred miles of these people. Um, also, we saw what we wanted, and I took a photo – it was the last photo I took of us leaving New Orleans. I got on the, you know, going along Lake Pontchartrain, um, and the photo was looking back at New Orleans, and you could see the skyline. And it's – we're going away from it, and there it is, and it's sort of like the Emerald City, you know. it looks perfectly intact from that distance, but when we were going out of the city, we were on Canal Street, and it was Thursday, that's right. Going north on Canal Street, you – with the proverbial expression – you could shoot a cannonball up the street and not hit anything. Thursday at noon in New Orleans on Canal Street and we are the only vehicle. There are army vehicles parked off to the side. There's still standing water along the side. There were boats abandoned on the road on Canal Street in the neutral ground and along the curb, but that's it. We are the only ones. The contractor trucks that became, you know, fixtures – they hadn't become ubiquitous yet. And there is – I took a couple of shots – photos looking north on Canal Street. And except for an army vehicle, I think a humvee in the distance in one photo, we're the only thing on the road all the way up to the lake. Um, and so we got back to Baton Rouge, and we reported in, and um, you know, we had gone to the convention center I should say, by the superdome. And the city stunk – there's no question about it. And you know, what was on the ground wasn't all mud, but there was sand on Canal Street. Sand! It was just amazing. It was lake sand, obviously, and gulf sand, but it was sand on Canal Street. I've got that in a photo. I've got to look at that every once in a while to make sure I wasn't imagining it. And

the last day of when we were all together was in the operation center on Friday, the sixteenth because Richard was – he used the Red Cross expression – I don't understand its origins – was COB-ing. COB - ing. Close of business. He was rotating out. He had done his two weeks plus, and he was being rotated home, but why does the Red Cross call it COB-ing?

C: Close of business.

P: Close of business. Red Cross is an interesting organization. It's a great organization, but it's got some, some of its members refer – think of it in terms of a national disaster as being sort of a power military. Well it's not. It's just a power-distorted, maybe. Because you know, they have terminology that makes no sense, and um, I will say though that – as I say – that it is a wonderful organization. And I'm not saying it because of a plug or anything. I still contribute money. I'm done of – I did a little stuff with Gustav, you know, damage assessment, but it was nothing. I felt like an insurance adjustor.

C: But you went in after Rita though?

P: I did. I went after – they were almost folding up the operation.

C: Okay, so Paul, this is the sixteenth, I think when you go leave New Orleans for the last time. Is that correct?

P: We leave New Orleans on the fifteenth, and on the sixteenth, we're at the operation center, and…

C: We're in, where Rich's…

P: Rich is COB-ing.

(laughs)

P: And um, you know, I was still um, doing things. I don't recall – I think that was the last photo I had took. We had a photo of the three of us standing there – Richard, Linda Walsh, and I, and some of the others, but um…

C: And Rita makes landfall about ten days later?

P: Ten days later, and I had gone home. You know, I was back home – I was on leave. That's the other thing. I was on leave for a year. And I should point out that I was on leave in 2008 when Gustav hit. I should also point out that – if I thought I lived in a pole-centric universe, I would make sure I never did the following things: A, the week before a storm, well go to have lunch at Galatoires in August. Um, go on leave for a year beginning that August, because each time I did, we got hit with a monster hurricane. You know, Katrina and Rita, and then in 2008, Gustav. I mean it was just amazing. So I went home, and I was starting to try to get back into my work, because I was working on finishing a book and an article. And I had the most difficult time focusing. It wasn't until October that I could actually get back to work. And um, surely taxpayers of Louisiana will not begrudge me the time, but I really thought that there was a limit to how much I could do with Rita because I was on paid research leave, and they didn't pay me – they weren't paying me to do this, but when Rita hit, I reported back to the operation center. It was the

same operation center they hadn't – and they had just begun to wind it down, and they had to ramp it up again. And you know, Rita's called with some bitterness in the brink of justice I think in southwest of Louisiana the forgotten storm. And um, you know, Lake – nobody talks about Lake Charles, and nobody talks about Pecan Island, and the community, and um, I can only imagine how they feel. I know how people in Slidell felt when they were overlooked. Um, but Rita was amazing, and I took photos of what I did for Rita – we went out. I was on a team of three other guys, and it was a very different experience.

C: Did they go through the same process of data? I mean of disaster assessment?

P: Oh yeah. We were scouts. We didn't do street sheets. They sent us to – they were sending us to Pecan Island because they lost contact. They didn't knew anything about it, and it was really horrible. There's no question about it. But after Katrina, I'd have to say, there were no dead bodies. There was stinking farm – dead farm animals, you know. Cattle that had died of salt water ingestion because they were standing in water. You know, cattle are dumb as cattle, and you know, these cows were big dairy – big cattle country, and they were standing up to their, beyond their udders in brackish water, and they were really dying of thirst, so they drank it. And it killed them. Pigs, you know, drowned. Um, and horses – I mean, disoriented farm animals, desperate. You know, I never heard a bullwhip – talk about sheltered city upbringing – I never heard a bullwhip until I was out on Pecan Island and the cowboys; the ranchers were rounding up their scattered herds. The first time I heard a bullwhip, I thought somebody had shot a gun off in my ear. Um, of course, it was the – and that's what it takes to get the attention of the cattle, especially of one that's almost half crazed, if a cow could get crazed, at least half-crazed by the surroundings and um, when I got back – well I did see a former student that was a lieutenant in the National Guard, and he was in a humvee going one way on the road, and we were in our Red Cross SUV going the other, and we were stopped because of cattle crossing in front and behind us. And you know, I looked to – I was on the right-hand side on the backseat. And I looked to my right, and he looked to his left, and didn't quite recognize one another because we were out of our customary roles. I rolled down the window, and we exchanged pleasantries. We recognized one another at last, and I asked him, he said which way – how far are you going? And I said, I don't know. How far are we going? And he said, well, he said if you go into Pecan Island, it's pretty bad there. And I said, is it, you know, are there any dead bodies that we're going to come across? I don't – I must've asked it more tactfully than that, because it makes me uncomfortable to say it now. And he said, no, animals. So you know, thank God just animals. And that's what it us, but um, well anyway, when I got back that day, I was being debriefed, and I don't know why I was the one, but I was being debriefed, and I was asked how much damage did Pecan Island suffer? And I said, I don't really know. I don't know how much was there before, but there's a lot less there now. And there really was. I mean a church that was knocked off its piers. And you could see where the steps had been – you could see the steps. They haven't been moved, but the church had been shoved thirty or forty feet away. Houses across roads, houses that had been blown out, and what people didn't understand is that in its own way was as an ecological problem, Rita was much worse than Katrina. As a human problem, Katrina was worse because of the dead and the injured. But the Gulf of Mexico came in, I don't know, twelve, fifteen miles onto dry land. I mean what stopped it was this Highway 14. That's what stops it – like a levee. It stopped most of it, but it topped it, and left these salt water marshes where it had been pasturage north of there. And I've got pictures. As far as you can see,

it's like looking at, at the gulf. And I'm looking south, and from – on US 14, and there's nothing but water. And houses sticking out of the water, but nothing but water. And it's not rainwater, it's not bayou water. It's the Gulf of Mexico. And you and I have talked about this once. And it's going to be years before rainwater can leach that stuff out of the soil, and there's no place for it to go. I mean, it's like a holding tank. If you want to create salt, this is how you do it – in salt pods with impalements. And so the ecology, the ecological basis of the economy in south central and southwestern Louisiana, has been altered. And I don't know how you fix that. You can rebuild a house, but how do you rebuild the life – the livelihood of the person who lived in the house? And what would be the point of building the house there? And um, you know, I didn't see Lake Charles right after the storm. But everything – the pictures I saw of it just familiar with is Slidell. That's really what it was – a wall of water punched in and carved out of a chunk of the city. And nobody ever heard of it. When people here speak of the storm, they don't speak of the storms unless they're being tactful. And when the news media speak of the storm that's within two weeks of one another, well three weeks of one another, four. They speak of Katrina…

C: And they're – as you said, there's tremendous bitterness.

P: I don't blame them. I mean, the one thing you didn't have to put up with was the first flush of FEMA, because I'm – I mean, maybe FEMA just became an acronym by the time they got their act together. It still is…

C: No. FEMA is still a four-letter word.

P: Well I don't blame anybody who had to deal with them. And I had met some FEMA people in the field, and they felt terrible. You know, they would put in their request. They would write their reports. They would send in, you know, accounts of what was happening and what was needed. And, well, Brownie was doing a heck of a job, and homeland security, well there's a great system. Boy, disaster response is so much better. Um, you know, but quite frankly Baton Rouge knows firsthand the kind of bitterness because Gustav did not hit New Orleans – Gustav is the other forgotten storm. The capital city of one of the main oil and natural gas producing states in the United States – one of the main ports - the capital of the state with one of the main ports, um, is cut off, essentially, from the outside world. No electric power, no telephone. My then chairman, Gaines Foster and his wife were without power for seventeen days. We were without power for eight days. Nobody knows about that outside of – really outside of Baton Rouge. I mean it's – it's not even the forgotten storm. It's the inconsequential and forgotten storm. I don't know how many thousands of trees, lots of homes damaged. I was sent to do damage assessment after Gustav, um, north of the city. You know, in Baker and Zachary, and so on. They had only incidental damage. Also down in Gonzales where there was some wind damage. The worst damage I saw was when I was trying to come home from the operation center, and thread my way through tree-clogged streets. Um, I think only two people were killed in Gustav. It was a couple in Abbeville who had come up to stay with their children.

C: (laughs) The safer place.

P: In Paulette Estates a mile from um….

(inaudible)

P: Is this going on too long?

C: Oh, no! Um, well the other forgotten storm is Ike.

P: Yeah. Exactly.

C: Because um…

P: And even I've forgotten it, you see.

C: And I was um, I was - in June of last year, I was in a place called (Gum?) Cove, which straddles the Cameron, Calcasieu parish line. It's what, about twenty miles inland at least?

P: Yeah.

C: And it was inundated to a depth of at least four feet.

P: I have to confess – I don't know very much about Ike, because I didn't work it.

C: But it inundated all of the area that was inundated three years earlier by Rita, which had only compounded the salinity problem.

P: I really think that ways of, you know, big storms, catastrophic storms change human ecology. I mean, you can't make a living the way you did. Um, in a way, the fishing and shrimping in the gulf is going to come back a lot faster after the BP spill than ranching will and farming will come back in those areas. Because areas like this – what are the cattle supposed to eat? And what are the farmers going to grow their crops? You know, you can't - you can't grow rice, well maybe there are – is there a variety to grow rice in salt water?

C: No. They're still having problems with that.

P: I didn't think so. So I don't see how they're going to do that, and you know, the double cropping of crawfish – crawfish is fresh water.

C: Exactly.

P: And rice is fresh water.

C: Um, alligator trapping as well, because alligators cannot tolerate salt water. I mean they – they go into brackish water simply to purge themselves to get rid of leeches – freshwater leeches. They do that occasionally.

P: I didn't know that. Well there's not any – yeah. So I, and I know that – I remember with some bitterness after we got power back, and I'd listen to, and I forget who it was. It was some – oh. Dennis Hastert, who was Speaker of the House then, after, you know, in '05. Well New Orleans aught to not be rebuilt. How come nobody said that about San Francisco after any of their earthquakes? Nobody said

that about New York after the blizzard of '88. I mean, 1888, or the other blizzards um, nobody has said that, or about when Chicago flooded. Nobody said that, but they said it about New Orleans. Nobody says that Venice shouldn't be saved, or London, which is along a tidal estuary. Um, or that Amsterdam is irrational. Why have Amsterdam? After all, if it weren't for the dikes and the seawall, why Amsterdam would be Atlantis. Nobody says that. but about New Orleans – and don't think it's just racism, quite frankly, because um, the people with the greatest economic stake, and it's perhaps an artifact of racism, but the people with the greatest economic stake in New Orleans are white. And they're the ones who are getting shafted as much, in economic terms, more so than anybody else. But I think it is partly racism. And it's part being anti-southern bias. Because if New Orleans were in the north, nobody – or on the west coast, nobody would be saying this. I, and I'm a Yankee. You know, I learned that. You're a Yankee no matter if you live here all your life and die here, and you'll always be that dead Yankee, but I've lived here thirty five years, and I, I never understood the snobbery, the condescension, the sneering sense of superiority, um, that is engrained in the culture. Maybe it goes back to the Civil War. Perhaps it does. I mean, let's face it – the south, the white south brought a lot of this national contempt on itself.

C: On itself, yes.

P: Okay. But how off – how long and how much penance, and reconstruction of attitudes, which it has done, has to go on before um, people – other people in other parts of the country decide not to write off the city. Now by the same token, thousands of volunteers came in from the north – hundreds of thousands actually came in from all over the country – relief funds and so on. I mean, this country didn't forget about New Orleans and write it off, but some idiot politicians trying to make political capital did. And I wish that Dennis Hastert for example had been brought down here to, as Mike the Spike said, pull bodies, or at least just to count them and um, looked into the eyes of people who had no power. No water. No sewage, and were yet, maintaining standards of civilized behavior and say, well, perhaps we aught to just forget about the city and start somewhere else. There's a reason New Orleans has the peculiar, um, land use patterns that it does. And the French Quarter never flooded. Um, most of the New Orleans is below sea level – that's true. But if you would limit the population of New Orleans to what could be sustained easily by the French Quarter, then you wouldn't have had the Port of New Orleans.

C: Exactly.

P: And you wouldn't have had all the support functions for Port Sulfur and all the other places in which the oil is coming, and um, on which twenty eight percent of the country depends. There's no benefit without cost. And to say as Hastert, and I shouldn't just single him out. He had his counterparts. Um, to say by way of defending the Bush administration's incompetent response, because Hastert was after all republican Speaker of the House, that maybe we aught to just write New Orleans off. Well that's to say well, it didn't matter that Brownie screwed up, or that Bush screwed up. It's that – well, and it was that no matter what you did, New Orleans was just going to – well New Orleans is coming back. And if the - um, New Orleans didn't fail. The Army Corps of Engineers failed. The Federal government failed. And it – Slidell didn't fail and Bogalusa's government didn't fail, or Covington's or Mandeville – none of those

places. Lake Charles's mayor is probably a hero. He didn't fail. The people of Lake Charles didn't fail. You can tell I'm a little bitter.

C: Well Paul, is there anything else you want to add?

P: Something will probably occur to me later. I will say this. I never saw in-the-air refueling, but by the time I was done – by the sixteenth, which was when I finished my work with Katrina, I could tell the difference between a Huey, a Cobra, and a Sea Stallion helicopter. And I watched the Sea Stallions, the tanker truck – tanker planes, C1-30s, refueling the um, helicopters. The Hueys, I mean pulling Sea Stallions over Lake Pontchartrain. And I remember asking Rich. I said, why do they keep doing this over the lake? He said, in case they crash. Well of course. And he said, but you know, you'll notice the C1-30 is flying at designated times. Because we saw it every day. Designated times, the same, back and forth pattern. You know, up, over, back up, over, back down, and so on. And the helicopters would rendezvous, and that's how they could keep flying. That was amazing. It's sort of like aerial ballet.

C: I wondered that. Yeah, because that's something you never hear about.

P: Nope. That's an amazing sight – I took a photo of it, and Rich took a photo of it, so we have it. I mean you would never have believed it. I mean you could even see the hose draining out. I think they could refuel two at a time obviously, but I don't think it would be very safe with the choppers and the turbulence over the lake, but um, and I know that at LSU, you know, I have colleagues who were down at the River Center, well is now he River center, it was the Civic Center, you know, working the Missing Persons desk. That's hard. You know, a lot of people never found their families and bodies were unclaimed or never found. I know that there were bodies swept – I don't know, I'm certain that bodies that were in those hedgerows were swept out to sea eventually, or rotted. Um, I had colleagues who volunteered down at the field house um, where, which was set up as a triage surgical center, recording information and so on. So I mean this was – LSU was remarkable, you know, in what it did. Um, and just by agentive circumstance, I mean this was the place that was the staging area, and there was ambulances that were carrying – some of them came here. Helicopters came here. My wife to this day, when she thinks of Katrina, she thinks of helicopters because she was at LSU of course. She was dean of the library school, and…

C: My daughter was a sophomore here.

P: So that's all they heard nonstop – helicopters. That's all we heard nonstop. And of course the ambulances, morgue wagons, whatever you call them – scores everyday like clockwork. One direction in the morning, leave late afternoon. But um, I haven't talked about a lot of this until today. So…

C: Well Paul, I hope that it hadn't thoroughly (inaudible).

P: I think – I told you I tried to write it down. I got fourteen pages into it, and I couldn't – I could say it, but I don't think I could write it down. It would be too much like talking to myself. And for some reason saying it to somebody else was easier. Um, I still couldn't tell my wife some of this stuff– I don't think I

could tell you what some of it looked like. Not everybody is nature's noblemen and women quite frankly. But most people are. Human beings are – we're not too shabby with the species.

C: Well Paul, thank you.

P: Thank you. I appreciate it.

C: No, thank you. And…