

**History**  
**of the**  
**U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

**Interviewee:** Tim Trepagnier

**Interviewer:** John P. Swann, Ph.D.

**Date:** September 11, 2007

**Place:** New Orleans District Office  
Temporary Relocated to  
Nashville, TN



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INTERVIEWER(S):

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Examiner

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Interview with Tim Trepagnier  
New Orleans District Office  
Temporarily Relocated to Nashville  
September 11, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: The date is September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007. This is an interview with Timothy Trepagnier at the New Orleans District Office, temporarily relocated to Nashville, and this is an interview about the agency's response to Hurricane Katrina.

So let's start by, first of all, placing you in the agency generally and in the New Orleans District Office in particular, where you were born, and how you ended up at FDA.

TT: I started FDA 30 years ago in New Orleans. It's the only job I've ever had, was with -- I mean the only Federal job I've ever had was with FDA. I started out when I was, I'd just turned 21, and I started working in the Laboratory as a laboratory worker, and I worked that job for, I think it was like five years. And then, from that job, I went to the Sample Custodian job, and I worked that for 20 years, almost 20 years.

And then, during the late '90s, they closed New Orleans Laboratory, part of the lab consolidation, so management gave me the opportunity to either transfer to another district in my present job as a Sample Custodian, or there was a job in Compliance as a Legal Technician, it was called back then. So rather than move, I just decided to stay

with the Agency and change to a different branch. I went to work in Compliance, and that was back in 1998, and that's where -- I've been in Compliance since then.

JS: And what is the position title again?

TT: Well, it was a legal technician, I think it was called at first, and then now it's called the Legal Instruments Examiner. And thanks to my boss, Patt Schaefer, who, she promoted me up from what I'd started out as.

But I liked working for, I still do like working for FDA. It's just been too long.

JS: Tell me something about what you do, I mean, in the course of your job.

TT: Right now what I do in Compliance is, the majority of my job is I work in the Freedom of Information, gathering documents for the people who make requests, prepare it, redact it. I do an initial redaction, and then my boss or whoever's acting or whatever, Compliance Officer will do the final cut and say what's, because I'm not officially a Freedom of Information Officer, so . . . We won't get into that.

And then the other half of my job is basically preparing legal documents and doing a lot of preparing documents for the Compliance Officers and all the procedures for getting the cases into the Centers or through OE for a warning letter, seizure, injunctions, and stuff like that.

JS: And were you doing something like this in 2005?

TT: Yes. I was doing the exact same job.

JS: By the way, I don't know if you mentioned it. Are you from New Orleans?

TT: I grew up 30 miles outside of New Orleans, in South Louisiana, right past the airport. It was on the Mississippi River. They used to call me a river rat. That's what they'll call people that live along the river. They call them river rats because the accent, you know, people pick you up right away and they'll say, "You're one of them river people." The minute I moved to New Orleans -- I moved to New Orleans right before I started working for FDA, and I'll never forget it as long as I live. It was like somebody heard me talking and said, "Are you one of them river people?"

It was interesting for me to work for FDA, go to work for FDA, because the people where I grew up were so different than the people I worked with. They were, of course, they were all college educated, very different than what I grew up around, because my father worked at a refinery and it was very blue-collar where I worked and the people around me was very different, very small-town, very -- I don't want to say uneducated, but I just want to say it's very blue-collar. And FDA people were so, I should say well-rounded, more rounded and more worldly than the people I grew up with, and it was refreshing, a nice breath of fresh air for me, because I wanted to get out of that environment of a small town. It's like Peyton Place, you know. You couldn't walk outside without somebody telling your mom or if they saw you such-and-such a place.

JS: What year was it you started in the Agency?

TT: Nineteen seventy-seven.

JS: So this was a real change of venue for you.

TT: Yes. It was a big change from my lifestyle, to go from where I was living into the city. And like I said, I had moved into the city prior. I moved to New Orleans in January and I got the job at FDA in April.

And I was working out of town. When I first moved out of New Orleans, I was commuting about 50 miles back and forth for my job. Anyway, I started working in New Orleans. I was living there, working there, and for 28 years I lived in New Orleans.

JS: These were deep roots. You know the Louisiana and New Orleans culture, and it's something you obviously grew up around.

TT: Right.

JS: Having grown up in that area, you know what it's like to go through a major storm. You've been through a few of them.

TT: Yes.

JS: Katrina was a very different kind of storm, I suppose, than anything else you'd ever been through, though, wasn't it? Had there been direct hits on or just around New Orleans before?

TT: Not -- well, the only other major hurricane that I actually went through that came through the area was Hurricane Betsy in 1965. I don't know if Marion [Ferrante] expressed that, because she went through that. She was living in the city and she probably got -- I don't know if she got flooded, but I know Barbara [George] got flooded in 1965. I was living at home with my parents, which was further up the river, and we didn't sustain water damage. We just had a lot of wind damage.

And then Hurricane Camille in 1969 hit Biloxi and the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, and we didn't get that much damage.

And then when I moved to New Orleans, there were a lot of hurricanes that had come around the area, but nothing came straight for New Orleans, or the ones that did were like the Class 1 or Class 2, so there was just wind and very little water. There was no water in New Orleans.

The last one I remember, I think it was Ivan that I remember, because I lived between the French Quarter and the lake, right in the middle, and I remember Hurricane Ivan right after it was -- it had kind of passed. I rode my bike to the lake, and the water was right on the edge of the levee. It was kind of like creeping through some of the cracks where they have these bridges and all that in that area, and that kind of blew me

away, because along that area there were camps up on stilts in the water, and they were gone. I had never seen something like that before.

JS:     Camps?

TT:     People had built, like the levees that they talk about in New Orleans, people had built camps on the lake side of the -- camps, which was over the water. They were on stilts, so they were like eight feet, 10 feet above the water, regular water line. But the water had come up so high, it had totally just washed them all -- every last one of them were gone along . . . And this was like not a major hurricane. This was just like a 1 or 2, but the water surge was so bad; and I never thought about it until just now, that compared to what it must have been like for Hurricane Katrina.

          And then, to put myself where I was that weekend of the hurricane, I had never left, in my entire life, adult life, for a hurricane. I always stayed in New Orleans. And my roommate and I at the time, we used to laugh and say, "We're going to stay in the house." We had a hatchet up in the attic, you know, and we were going to chop our way out if it ever flooded. So we decided, you know . . .

JS:     This is a two-story house?

TT:     No. This is a single-story raised house. The majority of the older -- I lived in a house that was built in 1945, a little cottage, and the majority of the houses built prior to,

say, like the late '50s and '60s were raised. They were on piers up off the ground. And our house was probably like two feet, two and a half feet on piers.

And then I had, during the course of living there, I had bought the house next door when the old lady died, because it was a rental double, and when she died, I bought that house, and it was a ranch-style flat right on the ground. And I had a friend of mine living on one side, and this old lady that had been living there for years was living on the other side, and my friend and I who had lived in the house next door. We had gone out that night, and we went to visit friends and went out partying, and my roommate had went out to dinner or something. I don't remember where he went; he went somewhere. And we talked about the hurricane. "Oh, there's a hurricane out in the Gulf." We all do that. And they hadn't said anything about it coming to us that time. This was Saturday night.

JS: This was Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup>?

TT: Could be.

JS: The 29<sup>th</sup> is when it made landfall, on Monday, Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>.

TT: Twenty-seventh. So this was the 27<sup>th</sup>, that night.

Then the next morning we woke up about 8:00, and we were in the living room, and we just turned on the television, and the mayor was talking about mandatory evacuation, and we kind of just looked at each other and said, "You know, I think this is

the one we really need to leave,” and we kind of talked it over. And then we said, “Well, let’s do the hurricane thing.”

We started dragging all the stuff from the yard in the garage, and packing up the car and put the dogs in, got the food, three days of clothes, and we left about 11:00 that morning, the three of us, in my station wagon.

And in the meantime, I had a convertible, and a roommate had his car, and my neighbor had his car, and we drove those downtown to a high-rise parking lot. And so we were carting cars upstairs, like we call it, because that’s something we did all the time. No matter if we stayed or not, we always brought the cars up on the parking lot, and this time it paid off. And I almost didn’t bring the convertible. I said, “I could lose the convertible.” I said, “No, not,” you know, so I brought it up, and good thing I did.

And we decided to take my car, my station wagon, because it was newest car out of all of them.

Anyway, so we left about 11:00, and we decided to take -- you know, we talked about which route we were going to take out because . . .

JS: Eleven o’clock Saturday night?

TT: Sunday morning.

JS: Eleven o’clock Sunday morning.

TT: Sunday morning we left. And the interstate was backed up. It was like we were going to . . .

I called up my best friend that lives in Atlanta, right outside of Atlanta, and I said, “You got room?” He said, “Yeah, come on up.” So we decided . . . The interstate was still open on I-10 through 59. You couldn’t go any further east than Slidell, which is where it splits from 59, but they closed it off because the hurricane was going to come that way. They were predicting it to hit Mississippi at that time.

So we listened to the news, and they said that the interstate was like gridlock, so we decided to take a secondary old highway which went over two or three little bridges between Louisiana and Mississippi, and we were doing great. We were sailing along. And all of a sudden the traffic stopped, and we got way out in, they call it the Rigolets. It’s the area where Louisiana and Mississippi meet, and it’s very marshy. It’s real watery and it’s real low. And the traffic stopped, and the cars started coming back towards New Orleans, and we stopped somebody and they said that there had been an accident on one of these little tiny bridges and it was on fire, and you couldn’t get through. So we had to turn around, and it was very slow coming back.

And we took like this little road that went from the secondary road to the interstate, I-10. And this little road goes all the way through like swamps, and you’re going down these little back roads and we’re creeping along. And the water was coming up at that time. It was probably like 1:30 in the afternoon by then. The water was already starting to surge from the hurricane. It was pushing the water up through the Gulf into these Rigolets, which dumps into the lakes, in Lake Pontchartrain. And it was

like covering the road, and I was freaking, because you couldn't go anywhere on this two-lane road, and we were like still like half a mile to get up on the interstate, which was a lot higher compared to everything else.

And I'll never forget, there was people, there's people like in these little shack houses, little small houses, that live on these, this little area, and they were just sitting there like, you know, like everybody else does, ride them out. You know, been through hurricanes before. And I think about it now and say, I wonder what ever happened to those people that stayed, because after the hurricane, that area had like, you know, a water surge of like 20 feet. So those houses are gone. I don't know what ever happened to those people.

But we made it onto the interstate, and it took us 16 hours just to get to Birmingham. And we finally, by the time we found a hotel that would accept dogs . . . We made it really good until, like we got -- I don't remember exactly where the traffic kind of let up, but it was a long way in. And it was late. I'll never forget that. It was like, probably like 11:00 or 12:00 before the traffic finally, we were driving along just like you normally would, and finding a hotel that had room and would take dogs. Most of the places were booked. You couldn't get anything. And then when we got close to Birmingham, we found a couple places, but then they wouldn't take the dogs. And we found this place that took dogs, and they were very nice; they were very nice people. I mean, the hotel was nice. We stayed there for two days, until I could get in touch with my friend that was living in Atlanta. And he said it was safe to get back on the road because the hurricane had kind of, where we were was passing through, but there still were threat of tornadoes where we were, so we stayed there for two days until it cleared

up, and we went to my friend's house in, right out of Atlanta. And he had people up there from Louisiana staying at the house, so he had a camp boathouse on one of the lakes, and he said, "We'll put you all up over there."

And we stayed there till September the 9<sup>th</sup>, when I finally got in touch with my boss. It was actually, it was the weekend before. It was like September the, I want to say the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>. And I finally got in touch with Pat, and she said, "We've got to meet up here in Nashville on the 9<sup>th</sup>."

JS: So she was in Nashville at the time.

TT: No. Pat was, she was still in . . . Excuse me. She was in, I want to say Jackson, I think she was.

She had evacuated from where she was until -- that was one of the things that everybody had problems with. The cell phones were all jammed, and the communication was just not working. And where I was, I was so far out in the middle of Georgia, there were no phones. The house I was in didn't have a phone. We had to drive into town to use the phone. And then, luckily, I had brought my phonebook with me that has my boss and all my coworkers' phone numbers and cell numbers with it, but nobody's phone was working. So I didn't even think about calling up here.

I just finally got through to Pat, and she said, "You have to come up here," and we drove here and we went to the Residence Inn, and we stayed there until December.

JS: On that Friday, I guess you were at work on the Friday the week before.

TT: Yes.

JS: Talk about that. What was that like? I mean, I guess there was a lot of preparation for the storm. Or did people really know?

TT: No, no, because it was just like any other day. The hurricane was out in the Gulf, or coming into the Gulf by that time, because it didn't make landfall, I think, until Sunday night or something like that.

And so two days ahead of time, you start thinking about it. But, you see, it's kind of like the cry-wolf situation, you know. You've done this so many times, you kind of wait till the last minute. And there was no preparation done at work. No.

I did find out that on Saturday, our IT person drove back to the office from his house and picked up the tapes for the server and brought, evacuated. He picked them up and evacuated with him, so that was a good thing that happened because, otherwise, we would have been up a creek without all our information and data that we needed when we got up here, because we'd have lost all that. Not lost it, but it would have been . . .

JS: It would have been a while before you were able to access it.

TT: It would have been a while, right.

JS: So Friday end of the day, it's, well, as far as you knew, see you Monday.

TT: Right.

And Patt called me; my boss called me on Saturday and said she was evacuating. During the day she called me, Saturday, and said, "I'm evacuating. I'm going to . . ." I think she said Jackson, somewhere in Mississippi. She went to the worst place. That's where all the tornadoes hit. She went to an area that was -- it was bad where her house is, because I saw where she was living. I mean, I knew Patt for 30 years. I'd gone to her house after the hurricane, several months later, and it was pretty devastated as far as tornado damage and stuff like that. She had a little bit of damage on her house. But where she went, there was a lot of tornadoes, I think, that hit her area, so they rode out the storm basically with tornadoes.

And Friday, I left my glasses at work, my work glasses, left things at work that I needed when I got up here that I had to go get new glasses, and there was a lot of . . . I mean, everybody was in the same situation. Anything you left at the office that you use on a day-to-day basis, you just didn't have, and it was really pushing your limits.

You know, we went through a lot, but we never went through what people that actually stayed there went through, because, I mean, I've heard stories of people that stayed there, you know, my friends and acquaintances that I finally got in touch with later when I went back to New Orleans and visited. They said, "I stayed on an overpass for three days before they picked me up." And I'd think, geez, and I think I had it bad, you know. And I really didn't, as far as suffering or any physical or mental . . . I mean, I had mental stress from being uprooted from my home for so long, but these people had, you

know . . . I think that's what kept me going, is like I didn't stay, I didn't have the worst of it all, having stayed there.

And then when we got up here, it was totally chaotic.

JS: To Nashville?

TT: Yes. It was . . .

JS: And that was about the 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> or something?

TT: That was the 9<sup>th</sup> of September. And I remember getting to the office, and everybody was there at the new office, and it was like, oh, it's so good to see everybody. You knew everybody was still alive and nobody had ridden through the storm, all except Mark Rivero, who had stayed, but he was okay. They finally got in touch with him. I don't think they got in touch with him until a couple of days after we were up here, because, again, he didn't have any communication. All the communication in South Louisiana and South Mississippi was out. There was no way of making contact out. So he finally made contact after we were up here, because I think he was like the last full-time employee. I was the third to last employee to make contact with the office because they thought I was still there, because they knew I never left. Because when Pat called me on Saturday, I told her I was staying. I said, "We've got our ax in the attic." But we left.

JS: An ax in the attic.

TT: That was, that's your survival kit, you know. We had a rubber raft, we had food, water, our little stash, but we decided this time not to do it. I guess we had an angel looking over us or something. But we did the right thing this time.

JS: So by the time you got up here, most of the staff was here. They had computer stations, I guess, set up.

TT: None of that was really -- well, I mean, yes, they had set up desks and computers, or were setting that up as we got here. And then when we got to the office on that day, it was just . . . It's hard to remember back because it was such an uprooted time. Everybody's life, you know, it's hard to remember what happened for that six months after that. And a lot of us are having trouble remembering exactly what we did other than the mental stress that we were going through.

JS: Sometimes forgetting is a therapeutic thing.

TT: Well, yeah, but the day-to-day work stuff, we tried, and we did as best we could. Work was the same. The work was still there. We were still trying to do it despite we didn't have the files, the stuff that you normally work with. Thank goodness for

computers, you know, because most of the stuff was on the server and we could work as best we could. And then they supplied us with as much as we could to continue the job.

JS: So a lot of what you were working with was on the backup tapes that your IT person had saved, is that right?

TT: Yes.

JS: Though you still had some documents that were back in the office that you would have needed to access as well.

TT: Yes. There was nothing paper that we could have access to.

If New Orleans didn't have Documentum, if we wouldn't have been piloting that, we really would have been in a bind, we really would. If this had happened to like a different office that was still using everything paper, it would have really set them back a lot further. But we were able to continue as best we did. And we did pretty good, I think we did. I didn't hear, you know . . .

Working in what I do, the Freedom of Information, there was a lot of requests we couldn't fill, and we just told them, you know, the files are not accessible right now because they're still in New Orleans, and we don't know when they're going to be ready, even accessible. Some of them still aren't. They're still in boxes downstairs. A lot of Mississippi files are still in boxes, and we just can't get to it right now. We'd right them back and say, and they'd say, "Okay."

We haven't really had any problem with anybody saying, you know, "Produce the document." We just worked around what we had.

I think it was the thing that, well, the most stressful part for me was being away from my family and loved ones, the people that I was normally around on a day-to-day basis. That was the hardest part.

JS: They had also evacuated?

TT: My family had evacuated, but they live in the near area where I grew up, so they weren't affected like I was. I was the only one that flooded. They lived in a little community where, you know, in the area close to where I grew up, so they were all fine, but they had evacuated also, and I didn't get in touch with them until after I was up here and was able to call. I have a niece -- I have a lot of nieces -- but I knew my niece down in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, she would be a good focal point, and she was in touch with all of my sisters and brothers. So I called her. When I called her, she was able to relay the message that I was okay and where I was and stuff like that, because nobody knew where I was because we had not talked since prior to the hurricane. I had not talked to my sister or brother or anybody like that to let them know that I had evacuated. And when I got to the hotel in Birmingham, I tried calling them, but their cell phones weren't working. So I was able to call my niece, and by the time they got to her, they could let them know that I was okay.

JS: Well, huge communication problems at this time, and that complicates

everything. People aren't running around with satellite phones. Everybody -- Tyler had the same experience, just couldn't get in touch with people.

So you're up in Nashville. It's probably more than a little bit hectic. They pretty soon have things set up for you, places where you can work, and I guess they're putting up the staff at the Residence Inn. Is that what you said?

TT: Yes.

JS: The Residence Inn, and providing lodging and per diem, I think.

TT: Yes.

JS: For how long did they . . .

TT: From September the 9<sup>th</sup> till, for me it was January 1<sup>st</sup>.

And, personally, I think FDA, the agency, overextended themselves helping us. I can't say enough, how much they did for us. I mean, giving us lodging and per diem was more than I ever even expected. I didn't even expect that coming up . . . I never even thought about who was going to pay for the room and all. It hadn't even entered my mind, you know. It's like, okay.

And then, see, we didn't know we were flooded until actually I got up here.

JS: How did you know? How did you find out?

TT: I did a Google search; I did that Google, house in the water, and that was, you know, it's like, I'm not going home soon. So I knew we were going to be up here for a while.

I didn't see my house until, I think it was mid-October.

JS: Was it an issue of them letting you in?

TT: Yes.

JS: And describe that experience, when you got back.

TT: Well my roommate's mother was in a nursing home in New Orleans, and they evacuated her prior to the hurricane, so she was like in Alexandria, which is north of Baton Rouge. And when he came up here with me, in about a week or two, he wanted to get back to take care of his mother, who had been transferred to like three or four different nursing homes in the interim of all this hecticness and all that.

So he knew somebody in Lafayette, Louisiana, we drove a rental car down here and I put him there, and then I caught a plane back here, and that was just a nightmare because traveling was almost like, you couldn't, you could only go to the airport and that was it, and there was limited service, so you can only go like from New Orleans to Houston, and everything flew out of Houston, and it was just, it was horrible. The airport was dirty.

And I don't know if you remember how they had started evacuating people from the Superdome and the Convention Center through the airport, so you had all the . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE B

TT: You had all those people coming through the airport and in the planes, and it was . . . It was American Airlines . . . I don't remember now. Continental. I don't know what it was. The plane stunk. I mean, it was dirty and it was just nasty, and it was all I could do. It was the only way I could get back up here to Nashville, because I had to come back to work. I didn't have off. He was retired, and he was like, "You can't stay?" I said, "No, I've got to go back to work," you know.

So I got back up here, and it was just so stressful trying to work, trying to take care of business as your own person, trying to get your insurance and, you know. That was the hardest part, was because we were so far away in dealing with, you know, you've still got property back here and trying to conduct your personal business so far away. Even though there was a lot of it, the businesses weren't there to deal with it. You still were dealing with insurance companies, FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration], SBA [Small Business Administration], and all that, and you're doing it at a distance, and it was a lot of stress. It was just like, it was so much stress.

And then, I don't want to badmouth the local management because they were under a lot of stress, but I feel personally that we were being pushed by the management here to continue to work like it had never, nothing had happened. And this is kind of my personal feelings. Tyler and Patt didn't get flooded. Tyler had a plan that he didn't tell

us about that he was going to move -- we didn't know this -- to Nashville, and Patt's house didn't get flooded, so she was not under the same stress level that all of us were. And I just felt like they were pushing us to work, and it was very hard for the ones of us that were trying to deal with broken families, broken house, dealing with all of the stress that was going on because of the flood, and then having to come to work every day on top of that.

I mean, that was something I was really having, all of us were having, because we'd talk about it constantly. That was the topic of conversation for so long, that the stress from trying to juggle it all at one time was very hard.

And I know people that had spouses that had lost a job. They were still at the hotel dealing with, you know, they had somebody to deal with that. And I felt like, you know, I don't have that. I didn't have that luxury, to have somebody at the hotel taking care of my personal business and trying to work.

Even though they let us use the computers, the telephones to take care of your personal, as much of your personal business, I felt like I couldn't take off like I wanted to and just go down there and do what I needed to do. Patt gave me a fair amount of liberal time off to do it. A lot of the employees took emergency leave that they was donated to, that they took off weeks at a time, went down there and did it. I never did. Barbara and I are the only two that did. We managed to do it all without having to use emergency leave that was donated. And her and I kind of resented the fact that we didn't do it. We felt kind of like there was a lot of pressure on us from our managers.

JS: The other people that you said were able to go down, now, was this in part because they had . . .

TT: Different manager. They had a different manager. Their manager had their house flooded, and I think that was the whole, which you'll find out from the next interview tomorrow. And she was a little more, I think a lot more understanding.

And it was just, that's my personal problem I had with the local management, although I never did voice it to anyone. This is the first time I've voiced it outside of co-employees here.

But as far as the agency goes, FDA, the agency, I thought they were magnificent, you know, paying us per diem, giving us a place to stay, and giving me the option to work somewhere else if I choose, which they gave us all. They told us all, "You have the opportunity to move anywhere you want that there's a job opening." And they told me I could transfer up here if I wanted a job in Nashville, if I wanted it.

And I thought a long time about it, you know, and I'd lived in New Orleans for 30 years and I'd lived in South Louisiana my entire life, and I was just burned out. I had never lived anywhere else. I always wanted to live somewhere else. There was talk at one time about moving here to Nashville back in the '80s, just if I ever retired, this might be a place I would retire, just thought about it.

I didn't want to move too far away. I didn't want to move, within an eight-hour drive of my family back home, as I call it. So I thought long and hard about it, and in

January I just told them, I said, “I’m going to stay here. I’m going to relocate to the Nashville office.”

JS: This is January of 2006?

TT: Yes. I had decided to stay here and work in this office.

I sold my flooded house.

JS: I don’t think you mentioned -- sorry for interrupting, but you said it took till maybe October until you could go back and see your property.

TT: Oh, I’m sorry; we skipped that part.

JS: Yes. Well, I am interested in hearing what that was like.

TT: By the time they opened the city back up and we could go down, and I was able personally to get off from work and it was okay for me to go back, it was in October. I don’t remember, early, late. I don’t remember when it was, but it was in October, because New Orleans was under water for almost three weeks, and then they had to clean the streets to make it drivable.

And the only thing I can say is, it’s undescrivable what it was like. I mean, you can talk about it till you’re blue in the face, but till you’re there and you can see the pictures, the pictures didn’t do anything justice, because, you know, we were watching it

on television after they opened it up. They were showing the neighborhoods being flooded, that were flooded and stuff. Till you actually were there . . .

My neighborhood was, you know, I had, like, if you stood on the outside of my house, the water was eye level, and then inside the house, it was like way up to your chest. So everything had been under water so long, it was dead. There was not a tree, a shrub, a bush that was green. Everything had lost its leaves either from the wind blowing the trees' leaves off of them, blowing the trees down, and all the shrubs and all the grass and everything . . . I mean, New Orleans is a very lush city. It's very green. There was nothing green. It was all gray, and then everything was covered with mud or soot -- not soot.

JS: Silt.

TT: Silt. Because where I lived, one of the -- they didn't even show it on television, but where I lived, there was another canal break. It was like a quarter of a mile from my house, so I got a good bit of water in my house and a lot of forces. They didn't push my house off the foundation like they did in Barbara's house and stuff like that. They got the, really the worst. But I wasn't too far from where Carol lives, and we got lots of water. And it was, again, three weeks before.

But it was so gray. There was not a sound to be heard other than your car. Everything was covered in mold, that was not flooded, was covered in this black mold, and it was just growing all over everything inside your house.

JS: It must have smelled terrible, too.

TT: The smell was awful.

And each time you went down there, it got worse, because things started to rot, decompose, and the mold was getting worse because it was, you know, the weather was warming up. And it really doesn't start getting cold in New Orleans till late November and December, so things were still hot. And right after the hurricane, it was very, very hot, from what I understand.

The people that stayed there, the ones that stayed, like people around, like my sister lives out past the airport and they didn't have power for like a week, and they couldn't stay in their house because it was just so hot. They left to stay with other relatives that lived further up so just they could be in air conditioning.

But it was just, everything was just gray, like I said, and covered in mold.

It was very, I mean, the house, it looked like somebody had taken your house and thrown it inside of a washing machine and put it back in the house. All the furniture was topsy-turvy and jumbled all up. Everything floated around.

It was real funny because my living room, the living room, I mean, it's like a living room, dining room, and then kitchen, but the living room and dining room was open. All that furniture -- we had two pianos in there, and they were like thrown around like somebody had just, like I said, thrown them in a washing machine and mixed around.

Same thing with the kitchen. All the cabinets were open. All the dishes, everything inside the cabinet was spewed out on the floor. The refrigerator had flipped.

We were lucky. The refrigerator had flipped backwards because it was in one of those arch, you know, in the old days how they cut the old kitchens. They had a cutout for the refrigerator. Our refrigerator was in that, and it floated up and back. It didn't flip, so it never did open. And that was a joke -- Where was your refrigerator? How is your refrigerator? -- because it was disgustingly, the smell was just unreal. So the first thing we did was we, you duct-taped the refrigerator -- you didn't even bother to open it because you would have died from the smell -- and we dragged it.

My brother came to help me and my roommate and the fellow living next door, we each went through each house and took the refrigerators out. And the joke was, when we got to Brian's house next door, his refrigerator had flipped forward, and when it came down, the doors were open, so it kind of rested with the doors open, and everything had fallen out, and he had just bought chicken and all of that kind of stuff, and it was just all over the floor. And we had gas masks, you know, we had the mask and everything on, and the Tyvek suits.

And there's photographs of that on the website. I don't know if you saw that.

We were doing pretty good, and we laughed at Brian because he picked up one of the eggs and it exploded in his hand. He lost it. He went out in the back yard and just lost it. And it was disgusting. It was really . . . And the floor was slippery with the chicken.

And we went next door to the lady that lived next door and we took her refrigerator, did the same thing, you know, we just threw it out on the street.

The thing that was really bizarre -- everybody has their story about what their house looked like on the inside -- well, every room was messed up except my bedroom.

The mistake we made was closing all of the doors on the house before we left. We should have never done that because the doors were all swollen. They couldn't get the doors open. We didn't think, you know, we thought the water was going to go up and come down, you know, it wasn't going to stay there for three weeks.

When we finally got the doors open, we opened my bedroom door, and it was like nothing. It was just moldy. The insurance agent said she'd never seen a room so moldy as my bedroom. My bedroom faced the sun. It was the front bedroom. And being closed up like that, it like super-heated and the mold just exploded with it. There wasn't an inch in my bedroom that wasn't covered in mold. And I had just, the year before, redid my bedroom, repainted it, new curtains, new bedding, new carpet. The whole room had been renovated. And there was nothing in the house other than something that was like on the top shelf of a closet or a painting that was high up on the wall that was salvageable, because the mold just ruined everything. And there were pieces of clothes that didn't . . . People said, "Well, why didn't you wash your clothes?" There was nowhere to wash your clothes.

I brought clothes back up here. I loaded the car up, because I had my pants on the bottom of the closet, and, of course, that all got ruined. But the shirts were up on the top rung of the shelf. The water had hit the bottom and it had wicked all the way up to the top, that were wet. And the problem is, is that the hangers all rusted, so we had all this rust on the top of your shirts that wouldn't come out, so you had to throw it away.

I was able to salvage some of the clothes, my shirts and some ties, that were up on the top rack. But, I mean, literally everything was ruined.

JS: What about pictures or correspondence? Had you made any endeavor to do anything with any of those that you might have . . .

TT: Photographs?

JS: Yes.

TT: Every photograph I had was lost as far as the albums I had, because they were on the bottom of the closet, and they were in albums, again, for three weeks under water, and they were still wet by the time we even . . .

God bless my sister. That woman is a saint. She went over there before I had a chance to get over there, and she went through a lot of stuff and salvaged stuff that I never could have gotten to.

But the photographs that were in the albums, because of the plastic in between the pages, the color had run. I mean, there was no way of salvaging. I had some photographs in like little boxes, like from my childhood, that were up on the top shelves, and she was able to save that. She took them and cleaned them all off. And she went online and she learned how to do it. She's a good photo person. She's got a zillion photographs. And she was able to salvage a lot of my, the more important, I should say, of my photographs, like from my childhood, that I had up in a box.

But for the most part, most of my photographs, the majority of them are gone. I mean, a lot of my memorabilia from when I was a kid are gone. It was just destroyed

from the water. And it was brackish water, so that made it worse than if it had been just fresh water, because everyone's telling me horror stories.

I have friends that lived in Bay St. Louis, which is on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and they had just, you know, the water came in, it washed everything out of the house, and then it was all over the front lawn. And an hour later, it was just a quick in and out, and they were able to clean it up and salvage a lot of stuff that we just couldn't do because everything was under water so long.

Everything in the garage was lost. I mean, I lost so many power tools. It's like, grrr, you know, I just bought this; grrr, you know, it's like I've got to buy all this stuff all over again.

And insurance money did well. It afforded me more than a lot of other people that were underinsured. I was able to buy a house up here, and I was able to get a mortgage. But what do you do? You've got to start all over again.

JS: Yes. How is it working with the insurance getting things settled?

TT: My insurance company was quick. I had no beefs with them like other people did. I had AAA auto insurance, the auto insurance AAA, their comparable homeowners policy and flood policy. They paid off. I got the money like in November. They paid full. I mean, I wasn't underinsured, but I could have had more.

My contents, I didn't have nothing near what I should have had. I think everybody was underinsured, contents. But I was able to buy furniture enough to, you know, the house is decent. It looks lived in now.

I was joking with Marion just today, saying, you know, with my closet, I've got to get rid of clothes already, because you kind of had this thing when you first got up here. It was like, I have no clothes. And you start buying clothes and hand-me-down clothes, and people were donating clothes. I have clothes that I don't wear anymore that was donated, and I was just picking up stuff because I didn't have anything. I was wearing clothes that I would have never worn normally. And I was wearing all this donated clothes. That's all I had, you know, to carry me through till I could get . . .

The hardest, one of the stressful things for me that we talk about is everything you need to buy again. You know, you pick up a toothbrush, you have to go buy toothpaste and a toothbrush, toothpicks. You've got to go buy tweezers, you've got to go buy all that stuff that you had in your house. You want to go buy a bottle of wine, but you've got to buy a wine opener because you don't have a wine opener and you've got to go -- everything you did, you didn't have, and it was a monumental task to get, for me to get past that point of like, I don't have to stop at the store on my way home from work to get something that I need in the house, a can opener, a fork, a knife, a spoon.

JS: Well, the logistics of starting your life over again is basically what you had to go through.

TT: It was like somebody, it was almost to me, the only thing I can think of that would be like somebody going through a fire or a tornado. I think a tornado, you know, a house that's been wiped clean, a tornado or a fire is probably the worst.

The thing that was comforting for us was that we weren't the only ones. We were a community of people that could have each other to relate our losses and stress and, you know.

JS: Yes. And I gathered from Marion Ferrante, she had that sense coming up here, being a native of New Orleans and being transplanted to a place she'd never been -- not necessarily that she had anything against Nashville, but she didn't make any plans to come up here.

TT: None of us did.

JS: But I think it had to be, obviously very difficult for her too. It certainly was her feeling that having people to share experiences helped a lot, helped her a lot.

TT: It did for us.

We all went through that point where you talk about it, talk about it, talk about it, till you got so sick about talk -- I don't want to talk about flood anymore. I don't want to talk about SBA and my loan through FEMA and all that.

I had decided at some point -- I don't remember; maybe it was in early 2006 -- I just said, "I'm moving on. I can't . . ." I made closure with SBA after they finally went through with my loan and all that. I just, that was so stressful, to get that.

The SBA is the most buffoon agency as far as getting a house loan. I don't know if Marion explained the process.

JS: Is this the Small Business Association?

TT: Well, FEMA refers you to SBA to get your low-interest-rate loan. Okay? So you have to make application through the SBA, and then they . . . Of course, they've got 100,000 people at one time trying to make a loan. And I was sympathetic with these people when I got on the phone at first, saying, "You know, I understand there's a lot of people doing this at one time. I understand that you're new at this job and everything's got to go to 19 different departments before it gets approved." I said, "But I'm not getting any help out of you."

And their process was -- it's like, who ever came up with this? Okay. Your house cost so much in New Orleans. You got so much money from your insurance back. This is how much money we're going to loan you. And I'm saying, "Okay, it makes sense." You got this much money back, your house is blah-blah-blah. They wanted you to go buy a house, put a contract in on a house without telling you how much you're approved for, so you had no idea how much house you could buy. You had this like dangling black cloud over you. Okay, I'm going to go put a contract on a house. I have no idea how much money I can borrow. You know, it was like this went from, we were sort of looking at houses like in May, and this went all the way through September. I was like so frustrated. And Nashville at the time, last year, houses were selling so fast, we didn't have time to go look at houses. By the time we got to the house, it was sold. That's how fast the market was moving last year. And I was getting so frustrated.

We had a window. We knew what we wanted, couldn't get to it fast enough. So I had to decide on buying a house that I really didn't want because I wanted a one-story house. I had to wind up buying a two-story house, which they had more of, blah-blah-blah. I had to wind up going through a conventional loan before my SBA loan ever came through, because the contract wouldn't, you know, the real estate agent on the part of the sellers would not want to wait on SBA to come through, and that was taking 60, 90, 120 days, and they wanted like a two-week contract on the house, and it just wasn't happening.

So I had to go through a private mortgage company, which, you know, I had the money to do that because I was putting so much money down on the house. Most people weren't that fortunate, like Marion and other people. They didn't have that luxury, because I was financially able enough to do it. Most people were counting on that SBA loan to get a house, and they were thrown into a tizzy financially. It threw me in, it threw all of us into a financial tizzy because it screwed up our retirement plans. Most of us had to take money out of our savings and stuff like that to put down on another house.

We all had the opportunity to go back and live in New Orleans or live wherever we, you know . . .

JS: Did you have a chance to go back to New Orleans?

TT: I could have, I could have. My manager gave me the opportunity to go back and live. I could have went and lived in a FEMA trailer or lived with a relative, worked in the new office that they had set up. There was room for me. But I chose not to go back

because of physical -- I physically could not deal with living in New Orleans right now. I have trouble with my knees. I couldn't, I can't lift, do all that stuff anymore. I used to, but I just chose -- I can't do this route physically. Plus mentally I wasn't right for it either.

But it was so much stress dealing with the financial burden of everything, you know, dealing with everything, closing out all your accounts in Louisiana; closing out all your utilities from a distance and dealing with these companies, your cable company, your gas company, and they were going through devastation and problems and stuff. Just getting in touch with them, getting in touch with somebody, tell somebody. And then you've got your taxes on top of that, and you're trying to deal with closing all that stuff up. It's not like moving; you choose to move to another city. That's different. You can prepare. We didn't have that luxury, and it was very hard doing that. That was the stress that we had to deal with.

And some of us here had no choice. They had to come work up here. There was no room for them down, back down there. They had to come live up here. They had no choice.

JS: That's right. And I imagine some of those people were the only ones with a job in the family too.

TT: Exactly. That was their stress they were dealing with. They were the breadwinners. They didn't know what they were facing down the road.

But working for FDA, we were very fortunate because there were a lot of government agencies that didn't do that. I knew people that worked for different government agencies, and they didn't put them up in hotels, they didn't pay them per diem, they didn't, you know -- you fend for yourself until they opened the office back up.

JS: Like which agencies? Do you know of any agencies or departments where employees had that experience?

TT: I had friends that worked for other government agencies, and they were just out of a job until they relocated to another office or opened something up temporarily. They either took vacation or they went on leave without pay. Like I said, FDA was very nice to us. We didn't . . . I tell people, I say I made money off of it, but you got per diem while you were here; you know, you made money. But that money all went back into buying another house, buying more clothes, buying this and that.

JS: Buying a toothbrush, buying a corkscrew, buying . . .

TT: Exactly, all that money went back right into . . . You know, there was a lot of -- I'll use the right word -- animosity from the people in Nashville. They thought we were making money off of, you know, there was comments made that got back to us. Some of the people up here said, "You're making money off of this deal," and we went like, "Yeah, right." It was like, yeah, we're making money as far as per diem, but that money is just going right back into living expenses, buying everything all over again. I don't

think the people that said that grasped what we were going through. I never held it against them for saying something like that.

JS: But that does segue into a question I did want to ask, which is, when you and everyone else did move up here, you were moving into a branch which, you know, Nashville is not a small branch, but you had three dozen, almost, people moving up here; it changed the size, doubled the size, or more, of the office.

TT: Yes.

JS: What was that like for you, coming up here?

TT: I guess -- you mean moving into the office?

JS: Yes, yes.

TT: I knew most of the people here because we had a lot of telephone contact back and forth, because they were under us. I mean, I shouldn't say they were under us. They were part of our district. And the lady I worked with, named Sammy, who does the same thing I do up here, she was kind of new to the job and she didn't have very much experience in the job. She'd kind of just like got the job. And she would call me practically every day on the phone, how to do this, how to do that. I was coaching her

and training her on different programs and just everyday business on the phone, over the phone.

And the management that was up here was just kind of fading out. They were retiring, all the old managers and old compliance officers, and they were trying to unite the district. They were trying to bring Nashville up to the way New Orleans was running business, trying to bring it all together, because Nashville was doing things their way and we were doing things our way, and we were trying to unite the district together, and it was an effort. And as far as our branch goes, you know, they were welcomed. They welcomed us to the way things in New Orleans were, because we're very progressive in New Orleans. The way we ran business was very progressive.

My coworker down in New Orleans at the time, her and I, we believed everything should be paperless and computers, and they were still chiseling things out on stone up here, the way their old management was. They didn't want to change. They didn't want to throw nothing away. They didn't want to move into the computer age. And now that they were gone, we, when we came up here, we said, "Look, this is the new way of business." My boss was all for, we've got to do business the new way, and they were like, "Yay! It's about time . . .

#### TAPE 2, SIDE A

TT: So they were all excited about learning the new way of doing business and moving out with the old way of doing things. They wanted to get ahead. They wanted to move forward. I don't know how they felt in other branches about the new management

and the way things are. Nashville needed to come into the 2000s. Really, they had a lot of like outdated equipment.

And I remember the Administrative Officer, when she came up here and she said, “I cannot believe they’ve still got all this old stuff in here.” I mean, they had outdated fax machines and they were just light-years behind us. So, I mean, for them it was good, because they got everything new or updated. Business was better for them because they had the tools to work with.

Prior to moving into this office last year, I told Tyler, I said, “You know, I need to go into the file room and clean out all those old files.” They had files from the 1940s. That’s how old their files were. Their management did not believe in getting rid of files. They had files from the ‘40s. And we did a massive cleanup. We just got rid of everything. Because, I mean, we don’t . . .

Remind me or jot yourself a note down. I’ve got a few things I pulled out of the file that I come upon.

They, you know, the agency has rules. We keep stuff 10 years and we trash it.

JS: It depends on the subject.

TT: Well, I mean, right. If it’s ongoing, you keep it. But if it’s -- I’m talking about the files, the EI files and the reports and stuff like that that we do on a daily basis. The regulation is, if it’s not active, if it’s not legally binding, you just get rid of it after 10 years.

We cannot keep all that. I mean, we don't have the resources to keep that much records. So we threw out tons and tons and tons, shredded, shred, shred, you know. Because I told them, I said, "If we move into this new building, we'll never have enough room for all this stuff," because it was just an ungodly amount of files in here. We cleaned it all up and we're still trying to get it filed away.

It's a nightmare in itself because we don't have any more support people anymore. The agency's not hiring support people, and we're hurting. And I'm considered support, and I can do as much as I can, but I can't do it all. And Marion is trying her hardest. We're all trying, but you need support.

So that was, as far as moving up here, New Orleans merging into the Nashville people, it was a lot of like, "Okay, you people, you're nice people, you're good people, but we need to get up to working with the times." And they were very, they were okay.

JS: I suppose in the months following the hurricane and your move up here, your work probably wasn't that much different, though, was it, the FOI work and other work you were doing?

TT: Well, for me it was because it was the same thing. It was doing the same thing, we were doing the same work, just in a different location. My work really didn't change. It was just harder to do because we didn't have -- at first we didn't have the tools. A lot of the files were still in New Orleans. And even after they got up here, they still were not accessible because they were piled up in boxes. But the new business was just the same old, same old. Work went on. And that was stressful because Compliance is hip-

hopping. It's like it never stops. It's always moving, it's always something new, it's always -- I don't want to say backlog, but just, you don't, you have very little downtime, and it was like piling up.

And the stress of trying to do your personal business, all of us, every last person that had their house flooded, by the time they got home, they were so exhausted, they couldn't do anything. You were mentally wiped out. Everybody told me this.

I mean, I don't know how people did it that have children; I don't know how they did it. I didn't have kids to deal with, to put them in schools and deal with kids' problems when you're not home. The kids were having their problems because of being relocated. They were having their own issues. The parents had to deal with that. I didn't have that luxury.

But everybody I talked to in this office that had been relocated up here, moved up here, said that when they got home, they were fried. Trying to work all day long, trying to deal with all the stuff with your house, you were just brain-dead, and it took me I'd say a year before I was getting past it.

I'm a very positive person. I have a lot of, you know, I can push myself a lot. I was forcing myself on the weekend to get out of that hotel and take a drive somewhere, go see something, do something in Nashville.

We were fortunate where we were, in a hotel. They were like little corporate apartments; they're like little houses. And it was like eight units per house, and Barbara [George] was on the back side of mine. The same unit I was in, one of my coworkers was below me, although she was gone most of the time, dealing with her tragedy of her husband dying, her mother dying. I mean, she went through a lot.

JS: Was this from the aftereffects of the storm, or during the . . .

TT: Well, her husband was sick already, prior. He died of a brain tumor. Her mother died like in November of just old age, but still, for her it was traumatic.

The unit next to me was a good coworker. His name was Kip. He's kind of, he's a young guy in his thirties, and his wife and him just had a kid.

And then Patt, my boss, was in the next one over. And we would sometimes have dinner over at each other's place. We'd have like little dinner parties. We'd do different things together and have a little camaraderie to kind of break the stress up, because sitting in that hotel room night after night after night, watching television and just being brain-dead, got, for me, it was like I knew I had to move on and get out of that, break that, and we'd do different things.

Like Patt had tickets one night. She took us to the Grand Ole Opry. We did that, got out and went to the Grand Ole Opry. And it was funny. You'd go to it, you went to the venue, you did what you did, your mind was away from it for a few hours. But the minute you got back, you were thrown right back in. You'd come back to work and it was like, you know, you're right back in it again, you know, and it was hard.

I went to a therapist to deal with what I was going through, I mean, not that it -- I don't know if it helped or not. I didn't feel like it did, but I went to it. It was there. EAC was there for us, and I said they're giving this; I'm going to take advantage of it. I went for six times or whatever it was.

JS: Do you think many people take advantage of that opportunity to get some counseling?

TT: Yes, yes. Even the people that didn't get flooded that were just up here because they were dealing with everything, they went to counseling. I mean, it's not a bad thing. I mean, I wasn't afraid to admit that I went to counseling for this. I mean, it was like . . .

JS: After going through something like this?

TT: Well, I mean, some people have pride. They don't go to counseling, you know, and let them know that I'm going to see a counselor.

I mean, I needed to deal with the separation I was having from people in New Orleans because I was -- that was my hardest, you know. The moving up here was enough. That was something I could deal with. It was the separation I was dealing with with the people back home that was the hardest part. And after two years, I still have it, but it's not, you know, time cures everything. You're still going to have some anxiety about it, but it's getting better. You just move on. You can't, you've just got to deal with it. I'm the kind of person, you've just got to deal with the situation at home. I mean, you just deal with the situation and make your life better and get over it and move on. You know it happened, you know there's still problems, but you've got to, for me, I've got to move on, because if I don't, I will be a basket case. And there's a lot of people still a

basket case, you know. They're still dealing with it. They haven't resolved a lot of those issues, and I just chose personally to leave it behind.

It's just like, as a lot of people told me, you jumped ship, and it's like, yeah, I did. I jumped ship. I am not going to deal with trying to rebuild New Orleans. I'm not a pioneer. I'm too old. I'm not physically fit to deal with all this. I can't -- and work. I can't do it, you know. I would not be a happy camper. Even now, I go back and I get depressed. It depresses me to go back. Every time I've been back -- and it's like, you know, I'm down to like four times a year -- it depresses me. I get depressed every time I go back there.

It's like these people are living, you know, I don't want to say Third World, I don't want to say it's uninhabitable. It's just a struggle to live down there. They're not living quality -- to me, they're not living quality life. Too much of their life revolves around what happened two years ago, and it's . . .

I tell people my famous line from this: Had this happened when I was in my thirties, I would be back down there. I would be still living in New Orleans. But the economic structure of what's happening down there and the social scene and the flood, it's just, it's not for me. I've had my fun in New Orleans. I'm moving on.

JS: Do you see yourself in Nashville when the time comes for you to retire?

TT: That's a hard question, because financially I'm kind of stuck here right now. It's affordable living here, much more so than it is in New Orleans, especially right now. Anywhere in South Louisiana or South Mississippi is getting, like out of the average

person's, low to medium income, it's very expensive because the insurance has gone out of sight, utilities have gone out of sight. I could not move back home unless I lived with somebody, a relative or something like that. It would just be out of my price, especially after retirement. I couldn't afford it.

I'd like to move from here because it's really not -- it's not a bad place to live. It's very comfortable. I have a much more comfortable home than I had in New Orleans, and the cost of living is less. It's more convenient than where I lived. It's safer than where I lived. But I don't care for the community -- not where the house is, but I don't like the lifestyle of the people around here. They're nice, but it's not my -- I don't fit in here; I don't . . .

It's like, we joke and say, everybody from New Orleans, we talk to people from Nashville, it goes over their head. It's like, I don't want to say they're simple, but they're just like, they don't catch the jokes, they don't, it just goes over their heads, you know. They're just not, they're not the same type of people people from South Louisiana are. And they're good people, they helped us out a lot. I don't have anything bad to say about them. But their lifestyle is boring. They're not, they just don't have a good outlook on enjoying life. Their life is you come to work and you go home, you come to work and you go home; you go shopping on Saturday and you go to church all day Sunday, you go back to work on Monday, and there's more to life than that.

JS: Have you seen much of a New Orleans influence on this city?

TT: Pardon?

JS: Have you seen much of a New Orleans influence on this city? I don't know how many people, how many businesses, how many chefs, how many musicians, how many whatever, have moved from Louisiana up to here.

TT: They say there's like 1,400 people, families, in the Nashville area that are still here. Two weeks ago they had a, they tried to gather some people down at one of the local spots downtown, right off of downtown. They tried to get them all together, to get the people from New Orleans down there, and they had I want to say maybe 30 people altogether. And we went, Denise went, the Administrative Officer. We never saw each other because our paths kind of like moved. But I found it very disheartening. The people that I talked to that were there, there were a lot of transplanted people that were living in New Orleans, which I found really bizarre. It was like -- I don't know if you've ever been in New Orleans.

JS: Yes.

TT: Okay. The French Quarter is no longer local people. It's all transplants. It's all people that have moved in there for the last 30 years. They're not from South Louisiana. They're different. They're not local, as I say.

A lot of the people that I ran into that were at this function were transplanted people that were there just a few years and then got flooded or for some reason moved up here. And I found that kind of like strange, you know. It's like, where are the ones that

had been here, like Denise and Barbara, you know? They didn't show up. Of course, I didn't talk to all of them, so I don't know. But the ones, there were a couple that were there, I didn't talk to them, but somebody said that they had lived there all their life. I didn't have a chance to talk to them. But they weren't the people that I would be expecting to conglomerate on this event, to meet new people, meet your own kind of people. Just, it didn't pan out.

I know there's a chef that opened up a restaurant downtown that was from South Mississippi, used to be from Louisiana, had a restaurant in Mississippi, lost it, and then moved up, and he opened it up. We went there last year just to check it out.

And there's always an article or two in the paper about this person from Louisiana, a musician that jams with this [unclear] came up here and there. They always have . . . They're still to this day still having benefits to help people down there raise money and rebuild homes or whatever.

There's influence here. I don't see it that much because I don't think it's that much other than a benefit or . . . I see Nashville as a growing city like Atlanta. It's becoming a melting pot.

They just, they're moving corporate headquarters, Nissan, right outside of Nashville.

Nashville is very tight, narrow-minded, very Republican. I hope I'm not offending anybody. But it's like, it's very tight. I mean, it's rigid. It's like liquor laws here are very strange.

I don't know a delicate way of putting this, but their nudity laws here are crazy. Believe it or not, you know, you think that we're in the Bible belt, but they have strip

bars here, but they're so like regulated, you know. It's like, what is it with these people here? It's like, why are they so rigid about stuff that we took for granted in Louisiana? It's like, I don't understand it.

Something that blew my mind when I first moved up here, I used to drink Jack Daniels all the time, and I moved up here and I found out they distill it in a dry county. I stopped drinking it. I said this is like silly. I mean, it's like . . .

And my joke with everything is, these people from California are not going to put up with this city. They're going to . . . And I've heard people that live here, the progressive people that live here, old Nashville people, say that they're going to have to change. Things are going to have to change because Nashville cannot stay like this. There's always somebody pushing their buttons, trying to get things changed, but it's going to be -- I'll be dead by the time it happens, or I won't be living here anymore.

I don't know. That's a hard question for me to answer because my goal was to get settled. I'm retiring like January 2011. I'll pull a Scarlet O'Hara. I'll worry about that when the time comes. I'll have plenty of time to think about where I want to be in the next five years. I can comfortably be retired here -- not comfortably, but I can financially retire here. I'm going to have to get a job to supplement my income within a year, probably, after I retire. But I don't know. I think about a lot of places I'd like to live, but I don't know. The problem is finances. It's so expensive to live in all the places that I would like to live. I don't know. I don't have that -- I can't give you that answer because I don't know where that place is yet. There's a lot of jokes about where are you going to live, but it's . . .

JS: It's about two years since Katrina started all of this. I mean, when you look back, I'm sure you have lots of thoughts, and probably on the anniversary, you have lots of thoughts about this and what's transpired over the last couple of years.

TT: Yes.

JS: You said the agency extended itself above and beyond the means, and that's certainly a positive thing. But are there things that could have gone a little bit better, do you think, as far as . . .

TT: As far as the agency goes?

JS: As far as the agency and how it made the employees so severely affected by the storm -- how it tried to accommodate their needs.

TT: As I expressed my thoughts earlier, I don't think the managers, the two managers that I was talking about earlier, I don't think . . . I mean, granted, they were under a lot of stress. I can't take that away from them. I can't. They were uprooting their lives. Their lives were affected. We all were underneath a lot of stress. And I don't think they had the tools or the knowledge or the authority to give us what we needed, and we needed time to adjust to this.

We just found out through somebody that this emergency leave was available. It wasn't a management issue. It wasn't something they offered us. We had to ask for it and apply for it. Like I said, Barbara and I didn't get it. We chose not to take it.

JS: You chose not to apply for it.

TT: Right. We chose not to do it.

JS: Why?

TT: I had a lot of leave. I usually save my leave up till the end of the year. I was going through a lot of stress, and I was just like, you know, I really don't want to go back. I don't want to deal with this. I don't -- I was going through all that with going through my mind. I was trying to put it off.

But I was, my boss did give me a few days off just under the cuff. I don't know if you want to put this in the report or not. But she said, "Go home. Deal with what you've got to deal with." A lot of people, from what I heard, did that. They just said, "Go ahead and deal with it." But we were talking like two days, three days. We're not talking weeks on end. Like the emergency leave, they were granting like 120 days or 30 days or whatever, you know, lots of time.

That, to me, would have been a godsend to me, for all of us, to deal with the personal issues we had to deal with. I mean, we had people dealing with their parents that were like in nursing homes. We had relatives, they had no idea where they were.

They had people trying to get to Houston, to get their families out of the Superdome, that were stranded in other parts of the country. You know, we needed time to take care of that stuff.

And, granted, the agency, the management, had never faced this kind of situation before, so I can't expect them to say, "Okay, this is what we should have, should be done." There was no plan for that. There was no set plan for that. I don't know if they've worked on it since then, if like this is what we're going to do in the future if they have another major disaster like this. To me, that would have been the thing: more time to deal with the private issues of each employee on an individual basis.

Like I said, I chose not to take it because that was my own personal. Had it been freely offered to me, I probably would have taken it.

But, again, your manager is telling you this work's got to get done, this has got to get out. And I remember being right in the middle of it all. We had a congressional came through where we had to produce these mountains of documents that were in Nashville, and I was like, ugh, you know. The stress level went through the roof! And it was like, I'm not the kind of person who says, "I can't deal with this." I did it. But it put stress on my personal life because I was not available to do the things I needed to do. They didn't have a plan. They didn't know what was available there. I don't know if they did. That would have been, for me, more time to deal with . . .

I mean, as far as financially, I think the agency went way above what they needed to do for us. I'm sure it cost them millions of dollars. I don't know what the total ever came to for what it cost to do this.

JS: It costs what it costs.

TT: Yeah, and it came out of the operation budget or whatever. I don't know if they got it back from FEMA or what, because I know they were counting every little thing that we did. We're sending it in to Headquarters, whoever was the bean counter. I don't know what they did with it, but . . .

JS: Well, we've covered a lot. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think we should?

TT: The personal. When I first came to work for FDA, it was a different FDA.  
How long have you been working . . .

JS: Since '89.

TT: I arrived in 1977. It was a different agency back then.

JS: In the late '70s, mid-'70s?

TT: Yeah. It was a family. I mean, almost every other office would have told you the same thing. It was very family. Each district was like a little family. And, of course, we were a lot younger then. Even when I came here, I was the youngest person working

here, and they were just like in their late twenties and early, mid-thirties and stuff like that, so we all were younger.

We did things after work. We went out and partied and did things. We went to different social events. People had parties at their house. And it wasn't cliquish. It was the district; the whole district was invited to somebody's house. We'd have a crawfish boil or whatever. We'd do things.

And it's changed a lot; the agency's changed a lot. It's become very closed doors.

JS: When did it start changing, and why do you suppose it changed?

TT: It's funny that you ask that. I attribute that to two things. We got a manager here that changed everything, and everybody started closing their doors. This was back in the 1990s. I don't remember exactly when it was. We had a District Director that came through here that was very, totally different style of management. He was like, what do they call it, micromanaging. He was coming in to everybody's office and doing or telling them what they needed to do. Everybody started closing their doors.

And the advent of the computers, too. I'd find the ones who started getting computers, and everybody got a personal computer, they were on that computer all day long and there was no socializing anymore. The doors started closing.

And now, like in the last 10 years, I find that we just have so much work to do and so little resources that we don't have time to socialize and get to know each other. I mean, everybody wants to just get out of here and go home. There's no family left to the agency.

And on that point, what I was trying to get to was, what blew my mind, one of the things that blew my mind after we got up here and how much money they had raised and gave to each family, person, FDA employee. It blew my mind, really, that people had contributed that much money just within the agency. I was like, I was really blown away. And that's what they talk about FDA being a family.

JS: Maybe it's the case you don't socialize as much anymore, but they're still very much in mind -- people who have the needs are still very much in the minds of others, whether it's something of this magnitude or whether it's someone who is sick and needs leave, whatever the circumstances are.

But the agency has gotten a lot bigger, too. I mean, there are more people in the agency overall. But I'm sure many people would absolutely agree with you that we have so much more to do and yet not necessarily the concomitant resources to do those things, though.

TT: It's sad because, I mean, everybody says that it used to be, it really was fun to come to work. It was like all of my friends are there; we're having a good time. We had a blast at work. We got our work done. New Orleans has a reputation of always being, getting our work done, being at the top of the goals. We always reached our goals, deadlines, and we got our work done and we played at the same time. We got it all done.

When I first came here, I remember they used to have Christmas parties, and they were like your typical little parties. And then I started going and they started getting to be these wild parties at the office. And I got a reputation across the agency. Everybody

kept saying, “Well, I heard you all have got really wild Christmas parties.” Yeah, we had fun; we had fun. It was good times.

JS: Do you see that happening here?

TT: No. Again -- and I’m not just saying this because of Nashville -- we’re getting older. And as you get older, you just don’t want to do things the same way. I don’t have the energy, I don’t have the time. Barbara and I, we’re just like, “I am not going to another Christmas party up here because they’re boring!” It was like, you know, they get it catered. We all used to cook and we used to make a spiked punch and we’d drink and have a good time. I mean, the one right before the hurricane was, you know, we had rented out this whole restaurant. We had a DJ, and we had a blast. We had an open bar. It was fun. It was like something you’d go to like a wild wedding reception, you know. It was, everybody had a good time.

We came up here and it was like going to somebody’s funeral. It was so different. But that’s what they’re used to. That’s how they socialize. I’m not saying it’s bad, but it’s just different. It’s a major lifestyle change for us.

And even my personal life up here, outside of FDA, it’s very hard to socialize here, even in my neighborhood. I’m just . . .

#### TAPE 2, SIDE B

TT: I’ve been in my neighborhood a year now, and I’m just starting to know my

neighbors. It's like, it's taken me that long to break into these people because they're just different. It's like they're not . . .

In South Louisiana, it's like, "Hey, come over for dinner tonight." You just moved in the neighborhood. It's like, here, it's like, zoom. They go down the street; they don't even wave at you. I live in a little tight, small surrounded street, and it was like, whoa, wakeup call. Not everybody's like South Louisiana.

But, I mean, I don't really mean to trash people, but it's just different.

JS: It's obviously a different environment than what you grew up in and spent most of your life in.

TT: I traveled a lot. I mean, I've been to every corner of the United States. I've been to Europe a little bit, went to Canada, traveled a lot in my thirties and early forties, and met a lot of people. And people from the South Louisiana are a different breed; we are. I'm not going to tell you . . . They're kind of like, we're kind of like New Yorkers. We're different. People either don't like us or they love us. But it's just, we're different and we don't fit in with everybody. Barbara and I talk about that all the time: "They're just not like us!"

Do you have any other questions?

JS: No, I don't.

Tim, thank you so much for sitting down and talking and talking frankly. I do appreciate that. And it's enriched this documentation project on the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Thanks so much.

TT: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW