

History
of the
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: Nicole Hardin

Interviewer: John P. Swann, Ph.D.

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Interview with Nicole Hardin, New Orleans District Office

September 25, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: This is an interview with Nicole Hardin of the New Orleans District Office, Metairie Resident Post, on September 25, 2007. We're here to discuss FDA and Hurricane Katrina.

Now, Nicole, could we start by your telling us a little bit about your background, a little bit about growing up in New Orleans, because I know you're from this area.

NH: Right.

JS: And bring us all the way up to your arrival at FDA, and even maybe up to the time of the hurricane, what you were doing in the agency.

NH: Well, I was born in 1944, and my parents both were New Orleanians, my father with a well-established contracting firm. He was a painter and wallpaper hanger. And my mom taught second grade, and her father was from India, was a merchant in New Orleans. And I went to public school for elementary school, where my mom taught, which was very difficult because she was harder on me than on the other kids; and then to Catholic high school, Xavier Prep, and college, Xavier University.

The interesting thing, at the public school -- and I'm not going to give you overmuch detail -- was that it was primarily Catholics who went to this public school. And on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, there was release time for the students to leave school and go to the church school for catechism. So every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, around one or two, the school would empty, and the public school teachers walked the students to one of two Catholic churches, either Corpus Christi or Epiphany. And those -- there would usually be about a class in each grade of students left; one teacher would stay behind with them. And that tells you a lot about what it was like growing up in New Orleans -- a very, very religious-oriented culture -- because everything about New Orleans, well, lots about New Orleans, revolves around those Catholic and Christian groups.

JS: But I have to ask, did the students get holy days of obligation off in the public schools?

NH: We used to be off on some holy days. The public schools were closed on November 1st, All Saints Day. From what my recollection, that was a holiday, it was a school holiday. And I'm sure . . . And, of course, this is a long time ago, but my recollection is that the Friday meals at the schools were meatless.

JS: You probably had December 8th off as well.

NH: No, I don't think we had that; I don't think we had December 8th off.

But in New Orleans, November 1st is widely observed All Saints Day. You visit the cemeteries; the tombs are cleaned and whitewashed, and people bring flowers and there are services there. So who could go to school? And, of course, Mardi Gras grew out of the Catholic tradition, because it's always Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.

My earliest recollections of Mardi Gras are actually a photograph that was lost in Katrina, I'm dressed up in costume as an old-fashioned girl with my dad on Canal Street, waiting for the Rex parade, and he is dressed to the nines in a suit and a hat and tie, and I just don't know why he was so dressed up. Back then whenever we went to Canal Street to shop, the shopping area, you dressed -- hats and gloves for the ladies, men in suits. And, of course, that shopping district is gone now, mostly hotels. But it's still the main street of New Orleans.

I had a, I realize now, the older I get even, the more I realize what a sheltered life I had. There was no thought of going to college outside of the city. My parents always told me, "Well, there are good universities here, and Xavier, an African American Catholic school where my mom had gone, was here, and they had a good chemistry department. Science is okay, but you're going to Xavier. And I never questioned my parents.

When I was at Xavier, the sit-ins were beginning -- this was early '60s -- and I wanted to go in, go down to the Woolworth's counter and sit-in with the other kids from school, and my mom told me no. She said, "You will have other opportunities to make a contribution that you won't be able to have if you have a police record," and that was so

true. If I had been arrested, they would never have hired me at FDA back in the '60s. And I believe FDA is where I was supposed to be.

Because of this upbringing, my faith has played an important role in my life, and it's always been there to a greater or lesser extent. And I think as all people age, if you have the good fortune to age, you become closer to your god and realize the increased importance of your faith. And I think one of the things I am eternally grateful for, for my parents -- and I didn't know anyone in my mom's family, but my dad, I mean, her mom and father had passed, but my dad was one of 10, and it's their faith, you know, the tremendous faith and sense of family instilled in the kids. And that persists even today, and it has done me well through -- they were there for me as part of my support system following Katrina.

After I finished Xavier, I had applied to the government, got on the Civil Service register. No calls. And I started teaching, in a Ninth Ward school, as a long-term sub, teaching chemistry as a long-term sub. The teacher I was replacing was out for the year, on maternity leave. I was there only a few months when [Hurricane] Betsy hit. In fact, it wasn't even months, it was just weeks.

JS: Wasn't that 1965?

NH: Sixty-five, yeah. And I quickly developed a great relationship with the students. Then, at that time, chemistry was an elective, so the students in the class were no discipline problems even though the school already had a bad reputation from having what were considered discipline problems in those days, but it pales in comparison to

what it is today. We developed a great relationship, and they, it was very difficult to leave them when I got the notice of availability from FDA.

When I received the notice of availability -- is that enough on my earlier . . .

JS: Let's go ahead and talk about coming to FDA.

NH: Okay. When I got my notice of availability, I brought it in to the lab and only learned later that nobody else had ever brought in a notice of availability. I asked to talk with the laboratory director, who, to my surprise, was a woman, Helen C. Barry. She, we essentially had an interview. I just thought we were talking, but in looking back on it, she obviously just interviewed me since I was there.

And when we finished, she told me that, two things that I consider very important. One, that my rating -- I was in the top 10, but I didn't have a top rating, and it confused me because I had, like, a 99. But I let it go. She said there were other people who had higher ratings, and I learned more about that later. And she also told me that she knew I would understand that should a man with similar qualifications want the job, she would be morally obligated to hire him because he would have a family to support. And I said, "Yes, ma'am." And what else could I do? This was before the days that this thing was not accepted, by law not accepted.

But I got hired.

JS: You got hired.

NH: I got hired.

Helen Barry and I became great friends over the years. I believe I was the young upstart who was sometimes the thorn in her side, but I believe I did great work for her, which, she told me that later. It was always a challenge to get my worksheet past my supervisor and her without it being returned for errors, and I was really good at it. But they motivated you to want to do it like that.

I think the New Orleans laboratory was rather unusual because of the number of women chemists we had.

JS: How many women chemists did you have?

NH: The chief chemist, Jean Gaul, Pat LaGrange, Betty Campbell, Carolyn Olsen, Rudy Kreiger, Kitty Pusateri. Oh, I can't remember the other lady's name. So there were six or seven of us. And back in the '60s -- and they had been here forever. That was unusual, that was unusual.

And then when I started going to FDA meetings, I'd often be the only woman there. There'd be a whole lot of guys. But I can say no one ever treated me with anything but respect, to my face at least, throughout the ordinary kinds of, you know, joking and kibitzing that you have among co-workers. Neither as a woman or as African American was I mistreated. There were definitely problems at times, you know, that I didn't always agree with management, but they usually, they were not, I can say they were not race based or gender based. They just didn't know how to do things.

Helen came back to New Orleans after she retired, and it was just one other woman and I from the District who were visiting her in her last times, when she was dying.

JS: When did she pass away?

NH: Oh, gee, I'm not going to be able to remember. I don't remember.

JS: Well, give me a flavor for some of the things you were doing in the lab when you started with the agency. You certainly -- had you started doing a lot of pesticide work at that time?

NH: Not right away. The policy then was we all needed to be generalists, that no matter what happened and what issue might come up, they needed anybody to be able to pick up and run with it. I did a lot of drug work. I was well trained by Johnny Weeks. I have his photograph in my office still with the balance. And I need to show that to you, too, before you leave.

We had so many chemists then that you shared lab benches. I shared a lab bench with John Weeks. John Weeks was really the top analyst we had in our lab. He was well recognized by everyone as being the go-to person for information. He had the technique down. He could tell you anything or help you with it. And one of the highlights of my career as a chemist was that Mr. Weeks had enough confidence in the quality of my work to use reagents which I had prepared.

And you remember the muffle furnaces, where you would ash things? It was one of his favorite little sayings, was he'd pass and he'd say, "I see you're making an ash of yourself again." Those were good days.

I did show a propensity for and liked pesticide residue work, and I was -- I'm being honest, not modest -- I was good at it, and I enjoyed it.

Pat LaGrange was our pesticide specialist. Pat was never really happy either with laboratory management at the time, neither with laboratory management nor her work as a chemist. She had always wanted to be a dentist, and she had four children in elementary school and decided she was going to dental school. And she was well recognized as a great pesticide specialist throughout the agency.

Back then we'd have meetings, pesticide residue workshops. That probably predates your time. Almost every year they would have them, and they were great for bringing all of our chemists current with the latest technology, helping them to network -- they didn't call it that in those days -- but, so you could go to each other and work together when you had similar problems.

But Pat left, went to dental school, led her class, and had a thriving practice.

Unfortunately, about five years ago, she contracted a very rare form of Parkinson's, and she died last -- no. Was it last year or the year before? I can't remember if it was pre- or post-storm. But she was in her sixties, her sixties.

Well, when she left, I applied for the pesticide residue specialist position and got it.

It was neat working in the Custom House those days. It's a gorgeous building.

JS: Where is the Custom House in New Orleans?

NH: On Canal Street, the 400 block of Canal, which means it's four blocks off the river. And this is before the World's Fair in '84, which developed a lot of that riverfront property. There were mainly parking lots down there. There's a huge shopping development there, Canal Place, now. The Canal Place, the Custom House, and then the Marriott are down at that end of Canal Street. And then, of course, the aquarium is on the river at Canal Street.

During the time I was the pesticide specialist, the Custom House building was, money was appropriated by Congress to renovate the Custom House, actually to restore it to its original grandeur.

JS: About when would this have been?

NH: Oh, this was late '70s, late '70s. And the appropriation was set up so that only Customs and Customs-related activities could move back into the building once it was complete, so we had to find new space.

And the person who won the bid built a new building just for us on Elysian Fields near Gentilly Road, Boulevard, which is in the Gentilly part of New Orleans. It had all of the offices in the front, and then the laboratory was across the back. They said if we blew ourselves up, it would just be the back of the building and nobody else would be hurt.

JS: I think that's the same approach that DuPont Labs took.

NH: Oh, really?

JS: Yes.

NH: And it was nice to have all of this space custom-built for us. We were able to have input into the design, and we had a walk-in freezer. And we didn't have to go down to sample prep, on the first floor, to grind up samples. We had a nice, specially made grinding room, and there were air ducts to use. By this time we were doing a lot of mycotoxin work, and New Orleans was the National Mycotoxin Laboratory for the agency until it closed in laboratory reorganization in the nineties, the early nineties. So that was nice, that was nice.

By this time I'm working in mainly pesticides, but also doing some mycotoxin work.

JS: Like aflatoxins?

NH: Yes, aflatoxins, ochratoxins, zearalenone. And Jean Gaul is my supervisor. She had been at FDA when I came, and really was my primary mentor. She also was a coeditor of the FDA Pesticide Analytical Manual in the beginning, when they first started, actually. Jean decided to do work as a compliance officer when a spot came

open. Bert Guerrero became my supervisor. When he left, I applied for his job as supervisor. And, of course, I know it's unusual in the agency to be promoted to supervise the group you're in, but I already was the senior person, the specialist.

JS: When was this?

NH: Was it early nineties? No. Sometimes my memory is just . . .

JS: Nineteen ninety-one.

NH: Ninety-one. Okay.

JS: Nineteen ninety-one.

NH: I had an excellent group of people working for me in my group, self-starters, highly motivated, great work ethic. And even though we had worked side by side, when they made the announcement that I had gotten the job, everybody cheered in the meeting. So, of course, people say, "Well, yeah, they had to get on your good side," but I think they meant it.

It's almost cliché-ish talking about what people talk about their coworkers becoming their family too or being close enough to be like members of the family, but that's the way it's been in New Orleans. You don't have a lot of turnover. A lot of the

people who have -- and this is pre-storm -- a lot of the people who work here are from this general geographic area: Louisiana, Mississippi.

JS: So the majority, at least three-quarters, if not more, of the staff are from this area.

NH: Yes, yes. And they will not take a promotion to not move. Some of them will move to get the promotion, and then when something opens up, come back.

JS: In this era, say, in the nineties or so, was it unusual for people to get together socially, I mean, either in small groups or in larger groups, in the District office?

NH: Mm-hmm. It changed a lot over the years. In my very, very first years, I did not socialize with any of the people outside of work, but we would go to lunch. At some point, they started inviting the new girl along with them. Then there -- but I know that there were people who definitely socialized away from the job. And I became part of, well, one of, a group of us who worked together, the people that I pointed out to you in that were working with this group of high school students, we were part of a group that got together away from the office on the routine basis. We would do dinners like once a month at each others' homes, and some other folk, too.

JS: You're referring to the project that was documented in an article in *FDA Papers* in 1970, which we'll certainly lay our hands on and get a copy of.

NH: Oh, right.

In more recent years, I'd say around, from the time that we moved to Elysian Fields, the second -- I've worked in three, well, this is the fourth location I've worked in for FDA: the Custom House; then we moved to Elysian Fields when I was still in the laboratory.

As part of EEO, and then later, with the development of an Employee Advisory Committee, which I have knowledge that it developed because of the lack of District management's attention to certain personnel issues, including EEO types of things. But it was promoted as an Employee Advisory Council, EAC.

JS: When are we talking about here?

NH: It was on Elysian Fields. You're saying when?

JS: When?

NH: So it would have been in the eighties, it would have been in the eighties. I was the first chairperson of EAC. There were representatives on EAC that were elected from each branch, and some officio members, ex-officio members from people like EEO counselors, the special-emphasis program coordinators would be on it, like the Hispanic program, Asian American. And this group was almost like the social arm of the District.

JS: Was this approach unique to New Orleans District as far as you know?

NH: I have no idea, I have no idea.

JS: Okay.

NH: But it happened right after our DD was out on an extended detail, and a DD from another district -- no. Someone from EEOB came in. Emergency Operations Branch? It's something and Emergency Operations Branch.

JS: In headquarters?

NH: In headquarters. They had a detail as DD, as District Director.

JS: Do you remember who this was?

NH: No. Not long after that, this was the approach used. I don't know if it was suggested to or developed by our District management, but it was great. This group would plan the special-emphasis weeks or days, you know, do a black history program where we would have speakers come in. There were self-development kinds of programs. Our federal women's program was a part of that, too. And any of this type of activity was always coordinated by EAC. And I believe it had a tremendous impact on

our bottom line, which is protecting the consumer, because now there were other activities, and some of the meetings were mandatory. Now, you didn't have to go to our luncheon, but if there was a meeting on a particular thing, you would have to have a good reason to not go. It was part of the training that you needed to have. And so people who were meeting in there and talking and doing things now were working together better because there was no first-starter barrier. You know, when you're going to work with somebody that you never talked to or whatever, there's a certain curve in there where you're getting used to each other, and so now you've gotten past that and you're working more together. I think that that was one of the really good things that developed from it.

But, again, not through EAC, but because everybody was having more interactions, we had more celebrations of birthdays, well, not birthdays, but like, you know, if somebody was getting married, we'd probably do a shower for the first baby, and the guys would come. It wasn't all ladies. We'd give showers for the guys when they were getting married. But it was a tremendous sense of camaraderie.

JS: Right, right. Well, this actually gives a very good flavor of what life was like for you and . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE B

JS: Okay. Let's go ahead and continue with kind of this sense of camaraderie in the District.

NH: In the District?

For a number of years we did a variety of things. Someone would have a connection to be able to get cheap tickets for a baseball game. The Zephyrs were new then, a minor-league team. And we'd have hotdogs and hamburgers. Somebody would barbeque in the yard parking lot behind the building.

JS: Tailgating at the FDA?

NH: Yes.

JS: Wow!

NH: Pretty close to it. And then just go on over to the game. Family would come and meet us here. And it wasn't a hundred percent participation, because some people lived across the lake, but sometimes they would stay. We'd have a Christmas party every, well, holiday party often after hours where families would come.

One of the other -- it's amazing how stuff starts coming back to you.

We are famous for our -- Oh, we need to get you one of those, the NOL-DO cookbook. Remind, we have to get you a NOL-DO cookbook. I know that's an artifact that was salvaged. I'm sure Barbara George has some.

We'd do a tremendous -- this holiday lunch, where we used the cold-drink machines -- we call them cold drinks here; that's sodas, soft drinks, pops -- we'd use the

profits from that to buy all the meats. Somebody would buy the turkey, a ham and a roast.

JS: Profits from the machines?

NH: From the cold drinks, the soft-drink machine.

JS: I thought those profits went to the company that put the machine in.

NH: Well, we had arrangements where we got a cut of it.

JS: That's great. This is New Orleans.

NH: I don't think that's so unusual.

JS: Okay. I didn't know how it worked.

But, anyway, so you got some profits for this.

NH: Right. And some of the guys would prepare the meats, you know, in New Orleans, guys cook. It's not only a woman's thing. No problem with the guys. We had some good cooks. And everybody would fix a dish. Somebody would plan it so that you'd sign up for what you're bringing – appetizers, soups, salads, entrees, sides, desserts – and it was like . . . Everybody, of course, wanted to do their best recipes, and you'd roll

them out. It was excellent. And this is when everyone wanted everybody else's recipe, so Barbara George started collecting the recipes, and we put this little pamphlet together. It's online, but there are some original printed NOL-DO cookbooks.

JS: Nodo?

NH: NOLDO, N-O-L-D-O. I know my pronunciation isn't . . .

And we always had a ton of food left. And I had the idea once, you know, we never see the retirees. Why don't we invite them to come back for the holiday party? And it was great. They didn't have to pay or bring anything. We just invited them to come by. And it was just so good. This was the time of year that we got to see them. And I'm surprised Tim didn't tell you about the Christmas parties because he always was involved with the entertainment.

But we had great entertainment.

I have a picture. Oh, I should show you my photographs. I have a picture. Did you know Bob Bartz, who was our District Director?

JS: Not personally, but I certainly know of him.

NH: Did you know Howard Lewis, who just passed? Oh, well, then you can't appreciate it as much.

We have a photo of them dressed up as The Supremes doing a song at the Christmas party.

JS: We didn't tend to do things like that in headquarters.

NH: You all don't do a lot of things in headquarters.

But, again, you see, we work hard, and we, when it comes time to doing the work, we do it, we get it out, and people were, you know, they put in all kinds of hours to do the job, before there were things like credit-hours and flexi-time. We just did it, we just did it.

One last thing about District life. Every year, we'd have a crawfish boil. I miss those, I miss those. At first we used to do them in the yards. You know, you talked to David Leray [sp.]. You know he's a fisherman, a hunter, and we have the cooks. And we would -- occasionally, there were times so that there'd be outsiders, you know, FDAers from other places who . . .

JS: Would come in just for the crawfish boil?

NH: No. We wouldn't tell them. There'd be too many people coming. But it was part . . . You know how you do the awards picnics, all the awards activities, you know, it was that kind of thing. And later, we started doing them at a park. When we moved out to Plaza Drive, we started doing them at a park that was about a mile away. We would have -- and the guys were there with the huge kettles, frying catfish and boiling crawfish, and that's all gone. All that's gone. I think one of the -- that's just another one of the real losses, is to not have that camaraderie anymore. It's missed.

JS: Well, let's move -- I want to move a little bit farther ahead to the issue with the hurricane. But you mentioned earlier, Betsy. Now, being a native New Orleanian, you've seen your share of storms and how people prepare for storms. I mean, this is nothing new for anyone around here. You've seen a number of storms, different size storms, come into the area, close by, very close by sometimes.

Hurricane Katrina was obviously a very different kind of storm. But you've seen some ones like Hurricane Betsy, I suppose Hurricane Camille, and . . .

NH: We weren't too affected by Camille. It was more over on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

You know, we did have some, a part of the hurricane culture, so to speak, now is attributable, I believe, to two things. One, the tremendous leaps of technology to be able to know there was something out there and to begin to predict where it might go. The other has been the decimation of the waterlands, the wetlands, to provide that barrier. And I don't know if it's just the loss of the barrier or also a combination of increasing intensity of storms that has put us in the situation we are now.

I told you that, I mean, I told you about being so very sheltered. It may be that just as a child, you may have expected it, and my parents, either they protect you from worrying about . . . They'd been through so much before. They wanted . . . I came from a generation that was so protected from so many things that I'm not sure that they didn't know as much as nobody knew. And I believe it's more that we just weren't aware as long ahead. We knew when the season was, but there wasn't that much concern about it.

But since Betsy in '65, until now, again, I say the increasing technology that they know that there's something off the African coast or in the Caribbean that we need to be aware could move into the Gulf.

I don't remember where you wanted me to go with this or where you were suggesting.

JS: Just a sense for how your family, let's say, typically dealt with hurricanes as they look like they might come to New Orleans. Had you evacuated before? Had you prepared your home, as a family, before these hurricanes?

NH: Not as a child. But in I'd say the past 20 years, 25 years, there was more the boarding up windows, preparation. Evacuations were not too common until, say, maybe five to 10 years. I can't -- I'm not really sure.

When we had small children and my mother-in-law with us, we would sometimes go to local hotels if there was a chance of a storm, that there could be some problems. And then very few people did that even though, you know, there weren't a lot of people doing that. But the whole-scale evacuations really is much more recent.

JS: Well, perhaps seeing that Hurricane Andrew decimated South Florida, especially around Miami, maybe seeing what that did and what people went through who stayed around for that very severe storm mattered. It might have been something that made people start thinking of evacuation as making more sense.

NH: Right.

JS: Well, let's, then, go to the August . . .

NH: We had evacuated before, though. We had started doing these evacuations I'd say probably in five to eight years. And it's hard because sometimes when I'm doing, where I'm looking back so far, I don't even count the last two years, too. It's all in a pre-storm mindset.

It had gotten to the point, for me, that before Katrina, I had told my kids, "I didn't know" -- of course, my children are grown now -- "I didn't know whether or not, with age, I would be able to live six months out of the year under the threat of a hurricane." And I believe it wasn't the actual hurricane, but the anxiety and trauma with, "Is this going to be the week I'm going to have to pack up and leave?" And it was always hard to find a hotel, to be sure, until you got there and checked in, even if they had charged your credit card, whether you would really have a room. How far are you going to have to drive before you can find a room? It was always that angst. Where should you try to find a room? Being sure that, when the season started, you got AAA books so you would have the names and phone numbers of hotels. Redoing your hurricane boxes, which, that's how they were labeled in the garage, with canned foods, snacks, basic first-aid stuff, so that you wouldn't have to stop to prepare them, because the stores were horrible, you know, to get supplies at the last minute.

JS: Sure.

NH: And they could just be thrown in the car.

JS: Well, you had to have things already on hand, like your boards to cover your windows, plywood sheets, things like that. Right?

NH: We never boarded the house, never boarded. It just didn't . . . I think it was from the, if it really hits, the boards aren't going to be much help, and we never did board up. My daddy never did and we never did. We just took our chances. And with the post-Katrina floods, boards wouldn't have made a whole lot of difference. In fact, if the house had been boarded, it would have been in worse shape because there would have been no light, no light into this system, this soup that was in there incubating for three or four weeks. That would have been even worse.

JS: Even accelerate the mold growth inside.

NH: Yes, yes, and especially on the second floor. It would have been even worse.

JS: Well, let's fast-forward to August of 2005, when the storm is moving across Florida, Hurricane Katrina, and it has, I guess, every indication that it's going to take a turn to the north and go up across the Florida Panhandle. But it doesn't do that.

NH: Yes. And that Friday, I was out shopping. My mom's birthday is August 30th, and we always have dinner, and family comes over.

JS: Had you been at work on Friday?

NH: Yes. I was at work.

JS: No sense of much in the air at work about it?

NH: No. My son was at, I'm pretty sure my son was at the Saints game, unless this was Thursday. It was either the Thursday -- I don't know if this is Thursday I'm talking about, or Friday.

JS: Well, it might have been. It's the preseason. It very well could have been a Thursday game.

NH: Yes. And he calls me on the phone. I'm in the market, I'm getting groceries, getting ready for the party, and he's saying, "Mom, they're talking here, they're telling people that there's a hurricane coming," and I said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'm almost finished; I already have a lot of the stuff for Grannie's birthday dinner Sunday. Just call me when you get back to your place." And when I got home and started listening, I

knew. I still can see the cake I had put out on the sideboard for mama. She loved the pineapple filling in the cakes. It was like she used to make them. But . . .

JS: But you knew; you said you knew something.

NH: I had started listening to the news, and it sounded more like it was something we may have to leave for. So I'm thinking more this is Thursday, because Saturday was when we left, so Friday would have been . . . I don't know; I just don't know. But if he was at a Saints game, it probably was Thursday because they did the Thursday night games and not a Friday.

Well, anyway, I started -- I got on the phone to try to make reservations, and everything was booked.

JS: The hotel?

NH: The hotels. The closest I could find a hotel was a Marriott in Houston. And some people had really, you know, when it first starts, some people will get on the phone, and a lot of them will make reservations in multiple places, depending on where they can get to.

I have a very good girlfriend; I call her my sister-friend. I met her in high school. Did I tell you about my sister-friend Jean? We met when we were in high school and got to be great friends. We both went to Xavier University together. When she was baptizing my second child, when she was his godmother at the baptism, my aunt told me

that our grandfathers had been best friends and had baptized each other's children. So we feel like we were destined. Neither of us had a sister, so we're like sisters.

I was talking to her, and she's a widow, and she didn't know when her brother was leaving, she wanted to get out. I said, "Look, come with me. Jesse wants me to leave, Nickey, my brother" -- Jesse's my husband; he was a pharmacist with Walgreen's, and he was on the overnight shift, worked a week, off a week, and of course this was his week to work. My brother is a firefighter. He's telling me, "Leave! I don't want to have to be worried about you. I know what I'm going to have to do. Go as soon as you can." So we made plans to leave on Saturday. We were going to leave the middle of the day Saturday.

[tape recorder turned off, then on]

NH: So it's Saturday, and . . . Are you familiar with Contraflow?

JS: Yes. Others have talked about that.

NH: Okay. I lived in New Orleans East and decided that, instead of coming all the way in, come through Metairie, that I would go east. I was just about sure I knew where the Contraflow, you know, where I had to be. Well, I made a mistake and was not, I did not exit at the correct Contraflow exit to go west towards Texas, towards Baton Rouge and then Texas. And . . .

JS: You were heading to Texas because that's where you had a reservation?

NH: Yes, a hotel reservation.

And as I exited, there were some -- they had two deputies there, and I told them what I needed to do, and they told me, "Follow the guy on the motorcycle. We explained to him where you need to go; just follow him." I said, "Okay." These were the only people, through this whole ordeal, who were not honest, truthful, and helpful. I can still see the guy's face, and this was just a 15-second encounter.

Very soon after exiting, following the motorcycle, they pull into a gas station. I said, "Okay." I pull in. I tell the motorcycle guy what the deputy said. He said, "He told us the same thing about the guy in front of us, and it was a lie."

And so there's no way now that I can head west. I have to go up into Mississippi. I can't remember how far it was into Mississippi I had to go. It was long; it was really long, many hours. It got to be night. I had no idea where I was, except I'm very good at reading maps. But my sister-friend and I are as opposite as you can be in some things. She doesn't read maps and she doesn't drive.

So here the two of us, on two-lane roads in Mississippi at night, no lights, and every so often I'm reading the map to see where I can go to turn. About, I guess it was about eight hours later, I finally got into Baton Rouge, and ordinarily that's 70 miles from here.

I took a chance. I said, "There's no way I can drive to Houston tonight. I'm not good at long-distance driving." And I know it was our guardian angels that had gotten us that far. I do not do well driving on interstate long distances. I really can't. Short trips is

what I have to do. And I left early enough that I shouldn't have had, you know, I'd have been able to stop, daylight, you know, and make it to Houston without a problem.

We found a Marriott. They had one room left. We were able to, they said, "You can't stay past tonight." I said, "I've got reservations in Houston. I don't want to stay past tonight." And we stayed that night, the next morning got up, and it took us a little longer to get to Houston than it would have the day before, had I gotten the right Contraflow exit, but it was a nightmare, it was a nightmare.

And on top of that, my husband was still here. He's very dedicated. He knew people would be trying to get medication before they were leaving town, and he stayed until -- was it, no. They did not leave here, yeah, it was Sunday. It was that Sunday. My son stayed to ride with him, to drive with him. And they drove on that Sunday. They started driving. I think it took them about 14 hours to get to Houston. But this was in, by this time, evacuation was mandatory. It had gotten to the, it was, everybody get out.

And then I remember -- yeah; they didn't get into Houston until three o'clock on the morning of the 29th.

I remember, after Hurricane Katrina hit, we were just all -- the hotel was full of evacuees. And they were really nice. They'd set up breakfast buffets for us gratis, and, well, this is after the storm they did all of these things. But I remember how we were so relieved when we found out that we had not taken a direct hit by the storm. And we were going to go shopping and plan the next day to drive back.

And then the levees failed. I don't believe we knew about it until maybe late Tuesday.

JS: About the levees?

NH: Yeah.

JS: You were at the Marriott there.

NH: We were at the Marriott. There were other -- some friends were there. I guess there were maybe about eight of us. But it was full of evacuees. I don't know that they were from New Orleans, but from Louisiana. And the more we heard, the worse it got, and I guess my daughter was really keeping up with the news, when she called -- my daughter and son-in-law live with their family in Scottsdale, Arizona, and she called and said, "Momma, you're not going back home."

And I said, "What do you mean?"

She says, "You can't go back home. You're not going to be able to get back in the city for a long time." And she had, she made reservations for us to fly. She said, "It doesn't make sense staying at the hotel. You all just come."

My girlfriend's brother and his wife had come by that time.

We had two rooms. We had reserved two rooms: one for my husband and I and one for Jean. And what we ended up doing was Jean stayed with my husband and I, and we gave her brother and his wife Jean's room, so we just all bunked up kind of thing.

I forgot what -- I can't remember what . . . I know she . . . Oh, they were going to just stay in Houston, and she didn't. She decided she was just going to stay with her

brother. And Jesse and I left and we put our cars, because we'd driven in separately, we put our cars in one of the offsite long-term parking lots at the airport and flew to Arizona.

JS: This would have been maybe Wednesday?

NH: Wednesday.

JS: Wednesday, the 31st.

NH: Thirty-first, yeah. It was that Wednesday.

JS: Okay.

NH: My husband and I went to Arizona, and my son's girlfriend was in Washington, D.C., and he went to Washington.

JS: But you're in Arizona.

NH: Yeah.

JS: And at some point you call, either you call -- I guess you have to call because I don't think anyone in the District office knows where you are. Right?

NH: Right. And I don't remember if I e-mailed or if I called Patricia Schafer, my supervisor. But I had taken my credentials and all of the phone number lists and let her know I'm with my daughter in Arizona.

JS: When you talked to her.

NH: Right.

JS: And she's in Nashville at this time. Right?

NH: I don't think she's in Nashville yet. It's too early. I don't -- she evacuated to someplace in Mississippi; they had friends in Mississippi. And I'm not sure of exactly when they started bringing people into Nashville.

JS: How did you know how to contact her? You had her phone number?

NH: Oh, yeah.

TAPE 2, SIDE A

JS: And, as we were saying, you got in touch with your supervisor, Patt Schafer.

NH: Yeah. I got in touch with Patt. I don't remember exactly when I talked with Patt, and I may have it some other place. But at the time I got in touch with Patt, I gave them an e-mail address, you know, that they could let me know what was going on. And she had my phone number too.

And I can't remember for certain who called, but my routine is to always call, so I don't know why I wouldn't have. No matter what it is, I call in. Or if I'm too sick, my family does, you know, kind of thing. I just always believe it's important.

JS: What did Patt tell you when you got in touch with her and she found out that you were in Arizona?

NH: I don't really remember the first conversation, whether it was the first conversation or subsequent ones. But I guess what would be of interest is that, at some point early on, once they decided on Nashville being where everybody should report, she tells me, "You need to come to Nashville."

And it's like, "I'm not coming to Nashville now. You know I'm committed, I want to be there to do what I have to. I have not talked to my brother. He's somewhere in the city, still, and we cannot locate my Momma. We don't know where she is. I won't be there until I talk with my brother and I can find my mother."

Now, that's the essence of what I told her, not verbatim. And she understood; she said she understood. She said it was going to be important for me to get to Nashville, and

that they would send me the travel information, that everybody was coming to Nashville. And my intention was, as soon as I had my personal things straight, was to get there.

I spent hours on the computer trying to locate mama. When my mom was in a nursing home and when they were evacuated, FEMA did not keep records of where the people in the nursing home were sent. And they went to Texas, north Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, north Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama. And there was all kinds of networking online back and forth. People would hear, you know, you would ask your friends. I'd call a friend, and they knew the e-mail address of someone whose parents were in or whose uncle was in the same nursing home. And every time you contacted somebody or remembered somebody else, you'd get usually an e-mail address or maybe a phone number. And you'd get the e-mail address and you'd e-mail them, and they would tell you of other places, and this huge, like, tree, like going out. And so you're constantly calling these different nursing homes.

And after a day or two, they were beginning to tell you if your parent was deceased or your loved one was deceased. You had to give them your name. Apparently they had a list of the people to whom they could give information, and you gave them a name, and they would tell you, "They're not on the list of the deceased." But they did not have, they did not know where they were.

It was September 6th, and that night I called. You lose hope, but you're going to keep pushing. And the nurse told me, "I'm sitting here looking at your mom." It was such a relief.

JS: Where was she?

NH: She was in Louisiana.

JS: Northern Louisiana?

NH: Northern Louisiana, West Monroe Regional Medical Center. And it was an excellent facility. But she was sick. She had pneumonia. She was fine before the storm. Well, she had no acute problems. She had arthritis where she was chair-bound, and high blood pressure. But her mind was still sharp, no memory problems.

JS: How old was she?

NH: That was 92?

JS: Just had a birthday.

NH: Yeah. Was it 92? Yes. She's 92; she was 92. Could hold a conversation with you about anything, still read her paper every day, because I had the paper delivered to the home for her. She loved -- that's where I got it from; I get the newspaper every day. The only thing was, she might have the same conversation three times in one visit because the memory wasn't there, the short-term memory. But she arrived there with no eyeglasses, no hearing aid, no medical records, and did she not have the wristband with

her name, the little medical wristband, I don't know if we ever would have found her, because they thought she was demented, but it was because she couldn't hear them.

So I was on the phone with the staff for at least an hour, and it might have been two. They wanted to know, because I had been her primary caregiver for quite some time before she went into the nursing home, all her medical history, the medications, food, what she liked, what she didn't like. But it was, you know, just to have found her. Some people still have not found children, children!

My brother hasn't talked much about everything that's happened.

JS: He's seen some things that he'd like to forget.

NH: There was a tent not far from here, maybe about three miles, a couple hundred children in it, little children, children who couldn't tell you who they were. How did they ever hook up people?

And I mentioned yesterday, I think that a lot of the people who are gone, who were washed away, where whole families died, and there's no one to report them in the numbers.

But anyway, that first week, Nick was still in, my brother Nick was still in the city.

JS: Had you been in touch with him?

NH: I had been in touch through my sister-in-law, Brenda. At least he had somebody

he could talk with. And I know it's, he knew we couldn't find Momma, and it would have been too emotional for him to talk with me. But we're very close, thank you, Lord. And it's just the two of us.

But he talked with Brenda, and Brenda was in constant touch with us, so I knew some of what was going on. And sometimes she'd tell me, "Well, he don't want you to know, but . . ." and at least I knew I was getting good information.

At the end of that first week, they were evacuated out. Their firehouse was under water. When water started getting high, he had already gotten -- he was the captain at that house, and they had stocked in their supplies. They took the fire truck to the fairgrounds, where [unclear] the administration building there was their last-resort shelter, and they were, as long as they could, they were using the truck to move people out. But as the water got higher, they got some boats, and he has photographs of pictures where he took people. In fact, one where we used to, where we had lived before we moved to the east, he's got a picture with the water up to the rafters, and taking, before they took this lady who had broken a hole through in the roof.

[unclear] where this is. But anyway, if I think of it, I'll come back, I'll mention it.

But they were evacuated out by military helicopters late that first week, and snipers were shooting at them while they were trying to take them out. There were snipers in the city. They're not sure whether -- people were shooting at anything.

JS: These were snipers from where?

NH: People who were living in the city who were still here. They think people like

drug dealers and people who stayed behind because they figured everybody's gone. You know, there was a lot of looting, and it was real mayhem afterwards. And people were shooting at the helicopters as they were trying to evacuate the firefighters at this, from their shelter at the fairgrounds.

I think there were a lot of addicts left in this city with no supply, and they were just crazy.

JS: They must have been. I don't understand why they would have been shooting people that were evacuating.

NH: There's so much that makes no sense, so much that makes no sense.

JS: I thought you meant that there were people who were trying to protect others from looting and from crime that were trying to shoot looters, but that's not the case.

NH: No, no, no. No, no.

So sometime, I would say the end of that second week, once we knew mother was pretty stable or into the next, I was still in no shape to be trying to go back to work, and I told her, "I just have to take leave." But they never did charge me for anything at that time. I told her, "When I can come, I will get there."

Now, in this time also, my husband was a pharmacist for Walgreen's, and they told him to report to Baton Rouge. Baton Rouge, I think somebody said it doubled in size overnight. I can't remember the exact statistic. But they went, the store that he was

assigned to went from maybe 100 or 200 prescriptions a day to like 600 or 700, and they were putting trailers in the parking lots of the Walgreen's drugstores to house pharmacists who had evacuated so that they could use them to work in the pharmacy. So here, thousands of people have lost their jobs, we still have jobs. We both have commitments to our work. We know we're needed and we're going to go. So we make plans to fly back.

Oh, when we were in Arizona, you had to go to shelters to register for FEMA and Red Cross and everything, and they were giving you money and helping you get -- he was diabetic, and so we talked with a nurse at Red Cross, and they got all of his prescriptions and called them in and got him a blood monitor and everything. They were really nice people at the regular shelter in Arizona.

And when we were there, we saw a table with -- because all they had, anybody who was offering aid was at the shelter. I mean, it was really, it was very unsettling to be in that shelter. It was a stadium, close to the stadium. I forgot, some memorial place, and see a sign, women's showers at this hour and men at this hour, all the rows and rows of cots, people who had left with nothing and just ended up there. But they had it well organized.

And there was a St. Vincent DePaul Society had a table there, and they had a sign that's saying if you had a job, they would provide you one-way fare to wherever your job was. And FDA and Walgreen's were paying for our transportation. But I know there was no way I could drive, without taking a number of days, from Houston, where we had parked our cars, to Nashville. I explained our situation, and so St. Vincent DePaul got a plane ticket for my son to fly to Houston, and then he could help me drive to Nashville,

and another ticket from Nashville, an open-ended thing to go from Nashville back to Washington. I told her the circumstance, and . . .

JS: You had two cars in Houston.

NH: We had two cars in Houston. So we flew back to Houston. That was September 15th.

JS: Wait. What about Nashville?

NH: We had to go to Houston to get the cars to go to Nashville. So, the three of us flew to Houston. My husband and I together drove. We split the driving from Houston to Baton Rouge. Oh, God, I was so glad I didn't break down before we left him, but to see him, leaving him by himself at that trailer in the parking lot in Baton Rouge, I mean, he looked like a little kid.

I really kind of spoiled him. I take care of everything for him. It was really hard for him when we were separated. He had a rough time, a rough time.

He had been really sick in January '05. He had a perforated ulcer. He had been on steroids for sarcoidosis in January '05, and he had emergency surgery. And I remember saying, "At least we got our tragedy for this year over at the beginning." Who would know?

So we drove. We went to Baton Rouge. And that Saturday, we left from there. No, it was Sunday. Sunday, we left Baton Rouge and went up to West Monroe to visit

for a couple of days with my mom because I hadn't seen her. And the people there were just so wonderful.

From Arizona, once we located my Mom, we talked every day with the hospital folk, doctors, the technicians who were going to be giving her tests, the nurses on each shift. They were just so attentive. And she had, she wasn't eating well, and they thought they might have to do a feeding tube, and it turned out they couldn't because she had a hernia. So they couldn't do it, and the nutritionist there at the hospital took her on as a personal project, and we talked about exactly what she liked to eat and how she liked it cooked. And once they knew that it was hearing, that she wasn't demented, I said, "Write to her. That's what we do all the time when she doesn't have her hearing aid in," because she would take the hearing aid out and leave it places all around the home, because we had a couple of them. But sometimes it was never there. But she was used to us writing. And they got her healthy, eating, and doing just great. But that's after this time. She's coming along. At least she's making progress, she's putting on weight.

We visited with her a couple of days. Then he drove me to Nashville.

JS: Your son drove you.

NH: My son drove me to Nashville. September 21st was my first day of work in Nashville.

JS: And what was that like?

NH: It was horrible, it was horrible. I was miserable because I wasn't with my family, and we needed to be together. I really think that the trauma of these weeks are why my husband died, and not having anybody there with him to realize how sick he was getting. Because of what happened, how it manifested itself, it may not have made a difference, but I think it was because of the stress that he was just made ripe for whatever came along.

Because of that surgery and the sarcoidosis, over that whole year, he was very good about going to the doctor, and his primary physician was a close friend he'd been friends with since high school.

That's something else about New Orleans. You've got all this extended family of friends, with people that you've grown up with, that your parents were friends, and now our children are friends. And the whole scattering and separation of everybody now has had a tremendous impact on people's mental and physical health.

But anyway, do not divert. Oh, you were asking me about the . . .

I'm very appreciative of what the agency and management did as far as for providing transportation for people to Nashville, for the housing and the per diem, and they even, I think they even were able to do it for families, at least something towards expenses of families. I know technically there's some way they were able to do this. But it also was what they had to do for their bottom line. And it was good for a lot of people, but for a lot of people, it wasn't. But I knew that was my job and I had to do that.

JS: Did you find it any comfort or help being around other people from the District office there?

NH: Yes. Not because they were from the District office, but because they were friends. And had I been told, "You have to go there," and there was nobody that I knew, that wouldn't have been -- I don't think I would have been able to do it for long, unless, I mean, if they had, depending on the people. But because these were friends. And we were all in this one Residence Inn. It was like a commune, really. You learned a lot about folks they probably didn't want you to know. But it was good to have their comfort, but it was still horrible being there. It was a double-edged-sword kind of thing that . . . Well, that's not the right way to put it. But it was so good to see them; it was really good to see them. But it was so hard being away from my family. It was extremely difficult.

I guess, was it that Saturday, yeah.

JS: Which day?

NH: That first Saturday. That would have been the 24th. Tim Trepagnier and Kit Fink were going shopping in a thrift store. They said, "What are you going to do? You don't have anything planned."

I said, "I'll go in my room and cry."

They said, "Well, you can cry later. Come on, we're going shopping."

So they took me out that Saturday, and that did me a world of good. We went to -
- they knew about an upscale thrift store, and this is, for the three of us, this is just . . .
Now, we have never shopped together, but we've always compared shopping notes:
That's what I found so-and-so for, such a little amount. They're the Daughters of
Charity, I believe is what it is, does a thrift store once a year in Nashville, and you have
to be invited to give your castoffs to this thrift store. I got some really neat things.

And by this time, I've seen the aerial photos and I can see my son's truck in the
driveway under water. He had a red truck, and he left his truck there because my
husband had the new car and he and my husband drove the new car to Houston. And my
brother has driven, floated past my house and told me [unclear] is gone, [unclear] is gone.

So, while we're out shopping, after we go to the thrift store, we go to Burlington
Coat Factory, and I hear a familiar voice, and it's friends from New Orleans: my
neurosurgeon, who happens to be a close friend, and his wife. I mean, it's just, it's great
to see them. Their daughter lived in Nashville. And she calls up another friend whose
niece lives in Nashville.

I don't know if you noticed the papers I picked up when we were in the building,
the old Food and Drug building. This friend publishes a weekly, well, it's a monthly
African American newspaper. She's in Nashville with her niece, and they call her and
she says, "Come over, I'm having a Katrina refugee party tomorrow." So, at this time
they were saying don't call us refugees, and she was purposely making it a refugee party,
because we left our home, we were under duress, is what she's saying.

So I went the next day, and there were about maybe, oh, about 18, 20 people there, many of whom I knew well, and they just all happened to be in the area, and that was good. That was very good.

In this time, the agency is making arrangements for you to be able to take off. The managers were letting you take off to go back to assess the damage on your home.

JS: Now, is the city letting people back at this time, into . . . I guess it depends on where you live, right?

NH: I don't know exactly when. Oh, I do know. It is in November that we go. But during -- sometimes I'd mush this together. And my notes are not -- usually this is a daily thing, but these are from other records that I put them, put it together.

On October 4th, Mark sets up -- Marc Rivero, he's one of the other compliance officers here who's in Nashville -- sets up for some of us to go to the symphony. The Louisiana Philharmonic Symphony, which is really the New Orleans symphony, is playing in Nashville. And, of course, it's their first since Katrina, but they've gotten people to, some airline is flying them in and the hotel is donating, and they're having a concert. So Tim and Patt, Rebecca Asente, Mark, Allen and Laura Carmen were in the group. I guess there were eight of us who went and cried some and cheered a lot. And that was a really neat evening, a really neat evening. We went, because we all go to symphony. We have some culture buffs here. Actually, Mark and Rebecca sing with the New Orleans Symphony Chorus.

But the other thing that they're doing at this time is giving us respirator training, so when we either go into our homes or into firms or into the office, we'll have had the respirator training and getting us fitted for respirators.

JS: You're referring to the agency.

NH: The agency, yes.

While we're there, Howard Lewis, who had worked as a supervisor and a compliance officer in the New Orleans office, the District, and had moved to Nashville as the Nashville Branch Director, is retiring, and they had this retirement party. So we're able to go to that, which is nice . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE B

JS: So Howard Lewis's retirement is at this time.

NH: His retirement party, yeah. And there were some people who came in for that from, you know, FDAers who were no longer with the agency. Some retirees came in, he got a chance to see them. So it was a nice evening, and that's probably the last time that I saw Howard. He recently passed.

JS: Yes. We saw the obituary in the -- it was broadcast in an e-mail last week.

NH: That's right. It was agency-wide.

Also, we found a couple of churches. There are two that are not far from the hotel, so groups of us, those of us who have cars will drive a group over for church. Sometimes we go during the week in the evenings, and, if not, then definitely on the weekends. Some like to go Sunday morning and some like to go to Saturday vigil. And it's good that we share that. That's another connect, you know. It's good to have your coworker friends with you when you go to church. It's oh so nice.

That's one of the things I find very difficult to do, is go to church alone now. I've got to sit in the back sometimes because I'll have meltdowns and don't want to disturb. I mean, not loud sobbing kind of stuff, but it gets hard.

JS: What was it like, I mean, did you know the people in the Nashville branch very well?

NH: No, I didn't. Some I knew only from working on the phones. Some I had met at the District conference that we'd had in Nashville. But they were just fabulous. They tried to do everything to make us comfortable and feel at home. They set up some rooms where the -- I've forgotten what they called it, whether it was the FDA store or something like that, where they brought in clothes and games for the children and all kinds of stuff, and you just went in and browsed and took what you needed. And people from all over the agency, it was just so comforting, all of the responses that we got from coworkers. People that I had not worked with or talked to in years, I was getting e-mails from.

There's this quirky chemist in California. His name is Jerry Froberg. He was a pesticide chemist that, I remember him once on a conference call about a particular crisis

we were having, and he was concerned because he knew there was a better method, and one of the DFS people saying, “We’re not looking for a better method. We want you to make this method work!” And there was silence everywhere. But Jerry called to tell me that his prayer group was remembering me in prayer.

JS: It was a surprise.

NH: It was a nice surprise. And the actual physical assistance was wonderful, but what that represented was such a comfort. It just was so wonderful.

My family has a real history of giving and being involved and doing for others. I’ve never had to be on the receiving end before. And it was different, but it wasn’t like, “Oh, my God, never take anything, I can’t.” It was like, “Dear Lord, thank you for sending these people to us.” I mean, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have had positive impact on me and my family -- not just through prayer, but through giving money. People sent so much money. I think what they did was put all of it into what they had, a sunshine fund bank thing already established in Nashville, and it was doled out to employees. They gave everybody gift cards. And Barbara George could tell you better for sure, but I’m almost positive the first gift card I got was for \$350, and that was evenly distributed. So can you imagine? And then they did them two more times.

The second time I told them, “You know what? I don’t need the money right now. There are people who have no insurance, who have nothing, who have children and family, who really just don’t . . . Take me off the list.”

And then the last time, when things had just taken such a turn, they just sent me the card, let me know it was coming. And I know each -- I'm sure that everybody got at least \$500.

Some group in the Washington, D.C. area -- and I should remember who it was and I can't -- asked for the size and gender of all the employees and all their family members, and they went out, and they knew that we didn't have coats and sweaters. They bought; they didn't collect used, they bought coats and sweaters and had them shipped to us.

People would send like a coffee break, where there were different kinds of coffees and a number of pastries. They were doing this all the time. And so if somebody would say, at such-and-such a time we're brewing coffee, come get something, and so we would, it would be a time to gather. And they would send cards with, individual cards and notes in the packages.

And it was just -- you know, it's hard to imagine what a positive impact that had on us. And you said, well, this is not really work related, but overall, I think a lot of managers don't always realize how what we look at as fluff impacts your bottom line at getting the job done. So while they're saying it takes away, oh no, you get that back double for the time that people put in towards that kind of stuff. And it was really . . . You know, I can't thank the people who did that enough.

I'd go in the stores. You know, you'd use a check and they'd either look at the address there or on your ID: Oh, my goodness, you're from . . . How are you doing? What are you doing? I had salespeople stop and hold my hands and pray with me in stores. Everywhere, people just -- it's been wonderful.

I think I told you before, I know that the prayers of people have gotten me through this.

During the time when Jesse was sick, and it also happened . . .

I don't know if I had told you I have a meningioma. It's a brain tumor, non-malignant. It's about three -- it's pre-storm. They thought they were going to have to operate. It was found happenstance. It wasn't happenstance, but that's another story. You talk about New Orleans culture, Louisiana culture, this particular statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary that, they say the statue weeps. There are photographs of it weeping. It travels around South Louisiana. Rosa Mystica. It's from Abbeville, I believe, Abbeville or Lafayette.

I went to a rosary that, friends who had the statue at their home, and a couple of months before this was detected, the tumor was detected, sitting next to me at the rosary was the administrator of the nursing home that my mother would be going into later. And my prayer there to the Blessed Mother was, "Give me the strength to handle whatever I'm going to be facing," not expecting anything. And I had vertigo symptoms. The doctor -- I'm really heading off -- the doctor sent me for a CT scan instead of just sending me to the ENT, and they found this tumor. It was asymptomatic. The symptoms would have either have been seizures or blindness by the time it had grown, and it would have been too big to do a gamma-knife irradiation without having to surgically remove it. I had the gamma-knife radiation, and it just kills the DNA and it can stay there forever. It's asymptomatic.

So I had not -- this nurse, the nun who was sitting next to me had been the administrator at the home when my mother-in-law was there, and we reconnected. So I

had the brain tumor diagnosed. I knew it was going to be like six months, I wasn't going to be able to take care of my mom. I called her up. She said, "Just come fill out the forms. We'll take care of her." And it's extremely difficult to get into this nursing home.

But I digress. I was using that, I was telling you about New Orleans culture and how everything is built around our faith and our church. Where did I leave off? I was talking about in the District, the people . . .

JS: Well, you're at work every day from the time of . . .

NH: It was September 21st.

JS: Okay. So, late September. Obviously, they -- I think they know up there that the staff have so many other things on their minds, it's pretty difficult to concentrate on work. But at some point, you're up there, you're in place, but you do go back.

NH: Right. And people -- I believe the city was closed about a month. I can check and find out for sure. But when different parts were open, people began to come back and check on their homes, and you were allowed one visit without having to take leave to go and check on your home and see what needed to be done, whether it was, take care of your business there.

My brother did not want me going back to my house without him. I needed to coordinate his time, my husband's time, and my time to be able to go back. And we went on November 2nd, and I should remember that because when we were on the way to the

house, that was when my son-in-law called to say our granddaughter had been born. We were in the car on the way to the house.

Let me know if it gets to be too diverse.

There were things in Nashville. We would go and do things, other things too. There was a craft fair. Some of us, some Nashville, some New Orleans. One of our LIEs, Legal Instrument Examiners, Sammie Sanders, is a Native American, and they had a huge powwow right outside of Nashville. So we went there. She got us to go to that.

One of the ladies had been planning, New Orleans ladies had been planning to get married, and she was now arranging to get married up there, and so we gave her a shower at the hotel conference room. So we were still doing some of our things as a diversion from everything else.

And the hotel did stuff, too. They had an Oktoberfest. I remember that.

In the meantime, I had different people, different family members, friends, becoming very sick: heart attack, stroke, and dying. This is a constant part of post-Katrina life, is serious illness and death.

My mom had one brother, one sister, and the brother loved to fly. He taught mechanics at Tuskegee; he taught airplane mechanics at Tuskegee. But his doctorate was in educational counseling. But after he retired from teaching in graduate school, he was teaching, again teaching airplane mechanics at one of the local schools, community colleges. And he was 85, and until the storm, he was flying his own plane.

JS: Wow, incredible!

NH: He had a stroke after the storm, and he died. He missed his home, he missed his neighborhood. He was taken out of his element. The stress was just unbelievable for him. He didn't even look like the same person when I saw him.

And you hear this over and over. Everybody knows dozens of people.

Do you want to skip to when I went back?

JS: Yes, November the 2nd.

NH: I had purposely looked -- I remember when Marion and Maryann had come back, and they had photographs of their homes, and it was like, "Are you really sure you really want to see this?" And Barbara George answered, "Yeah, it's got to help me." But there's nothing that could prepare you, nothing that could prepare you.

Family dinners on occasion. We didn't have time to do it all the time, but on occasions where something was really important to me, we had this huge table in what was the living room-dining room that I made just the dining room, easily seat 14, but you could squeeze in a lot more, and I'd sometimes put another one into the foyer. A baby grand piano that had been in my husband's family.

One holiday I wanted to move the table over six inches, and I got like six of the guys, and they tried to move it. They said, "You know, it really looks good here." That table floated out of the dining room perpendicular to where it was into the foyer and was up against the steps. All the chairs from the table were scattered along the stairs. The piano was upside-down.

I had a large, about 18", beautiful ceramic bowl. The inside was decorated with flowers. That was my mother-in-law's. I had had it filled with metal balls and pinecones. And I said, "Oh, springtime I'm taking that out," and I just left it on the piano. It was beautiful as it was, but I liked to put stuff in it. It must have floated, and when the water went out, it settled down, and it was settled under the piano and was intact.

There was an old desk that we had in the garage, which was attached. The doors to the garage led into the den, which was about 20' by 30', and was attached to the kitchen, and the desk -- I don't know if it broke through the doors or the doors opened with the water, but it had floated in and was all the way in the kitchen. And the refrigerator, thank goodness, fell on its back so that the doors were closed [unclear] floated.

We had a large bedroom suite on the first floor that my mother-in-law had used at one time, and then my mom had stayed in, and we had never had any occasion to move their things out. So years of family history, my mom's journals, her plays, her scrapbooks from before I was even born were in that room, and it was all lost, all lost. You know, things you'd love to be able to share with your grandchildren.

JS: Well, when you left, you had no idea that you'd never be coming back.

NH: No. And this was the one time I didn't take my posters off the wall. I collected posters. I had a signed Peter Max, I had a Picasso print signed, I had Norman Rockwell, I had Frank Frazier, three John Scott's personally signed "To Jesse and Nicole." I had my

Gordon Parks book that he had signed for me, and I had a picture of him signing it when he did an exhibit at the museum, the New Orleans Museum, things that were, that I enjoyed. And I always used to take the posters down and put them upstairs in the bathtub covered with plastic. It's just what it is, you know. I have the memories until I'm too old to remember.

And people say they're just things, but they're your things, and they're the things that you enjoyed and the things that bring memories of -- the Picasso was the "Dwarf Dancer," was the name of it. I remember when my husband bought it for me, a store on Royal Street called Sutton's Galleries. And he always thought it really wasn't the kind of thing to be spending money on, but if it was something that I was going to enjoy, he would tell me, "Okay, go ahead and get it for the new house." That was the joke. Get it for the new house. Well, we had it for the new house, but the new house is gone now too.

JS: Was there anything -- photographs or anything -- you might have had at work, at your workstation, that were salvaged?

NH: Well, we do have some things that we salvaged.

JS: Of yours.

NH: Yes.

JS: Personal things.

NH: Yes. There were things at my workstation that were salvaged, but there are things that are missing. And it could be that one day they'll turn up in somebody's box.

My grandson's first Christmas, he was dressed up in a teddy bear costume with a whole bunch of other teddy bears around him. You know the ET in the closet? It was that kind of picture. And for Christmas, they bought a teddy bear frame from Tiffany's and put that picture in it. So my Tiffany silver photograph -- we still have that picture because they have it. And we had photographs upstairs.

I have a lot of photographs from work events because I used to, to me, history of an agency and of its people are very important, too, and I was the one who was always collecting the stuff. I have some old original pictures that were being thrown out that I grabbed. I may give them to the History Office when I retire. I'll think about them. Because the original is not as important as the image, to me; having the original now is no longer that important. It's just having the image. And I have a lot of photographs that were salvaged at work from the events we talked about, you know, Christmas parties and decorating our areas and things like that.

JS: Right, the FDA family events.

NH: Yes.

JS: You had some pictures that were home that were above the water line, so those were . . .

NH: Yeah. We have a two-story house.

JS: So those you were able to salvage?

NH: So there were some upstairs, yes. But I'd say just, maybe 40 percent upstairs, 60 percent downstairs. And of the 40 percent upstairs, this was like a sauna, the house, so some of them got wet, stuck together and dried as a brick, and some were fine. That's with everything that was upstairs.

All of the children's books that I had been saving from my children for my grandchildren, just about all of them were moldy. And I don't know if it was how they were stacked together, if the particular material from which they're made had a greater propensity or not, their position in the library, which shelf they were on.

One of the things I could not remember if it was still downstairs in my mama's room with her things or upstairs, was a bible that Saint Katharine Drexel had given my grandparents. I don't know if you're familiar with Katharine Drexel. She's one of the newly canonized, well, within the past 10 years, American saints. She founded Xavier University, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. My paternal grandfather was very active in the church, in establishing Corpus Christi Church, where her order taught in the schools, and she used to visit them. And it has the records of my father's siblings' births written by my grandmother, and it was upstairs, and it was in a plastic bag and it was fine. So I'm so thankful for that, to have that.

And then, every now and then I'll get a couple of snapshots in the mail from a friend who found, "I know you lost some, here are some more," either people from other cities or just friends who happened to have pictures. That's one of the things I'm looking forward to doing, is to getting a good scanner and copying everything that's left and making multiple copies and giving them out so this, what history we have left is safe.

JS: I'll bet that's happening a lot with people from New Orleans with family outside that lost their photographs, that family and friends are trying to help them repopulate those collections.

NH: Yes.

JS: That was when you went back to see the house for the first time, you and your husband and your brother.

NH: Yes. And my son, too, was with us.

JS: And your son too. And then you returned to Nashville.

NH: Yes.

JS: I guess at some point a decision is made by management, either district or

regional or headquarters management, that there's going to be a presence in New Orleans, we're going to have some offices there.

NH: Right.

JS: But for the time being, the district office is going to remain in Nashville. But some people are going to go back.

NH: Right.

JS: And how did they decide who was going to go back?

NH: During this time -- okay, November 2nd I went back to my house. I was barely back at the office at all. That was November 2nd. November 12th, a Saturday, I went back to Nashville. I believe before the storm, I had already requested a floating leave of sorts to go to Arizona to help my daughter when she had the baby. And on the 14th, that Monday and Tuesday were the only two days after that that I was actually working in the office, and I think after that time is when these decisions were made.

What I know of it is there was -- it is secondhand, well, not really. This is what I heard from my supervisor, was that you had to have a place to live in New Orleans. They weren't providing housing. And she wanted to be back in this area.

JS: Your supervisor.

NH: My supervisor. And she wanted her group back here. Tim had made the decision to stay in, he was going to stay in Nashville. And Karen, who's no longer with us, she's resigned, but had returned to the New Orleans area.

JS: Karen?

NH: Karen Zepeda. Karen Zepeda and Tim are the, were the two LIEs to support the Compliance Branch in the New Orleans office. And we had three compliance officers in the New Orleans office: myself, Mark Rivero, and Rebecca Asente, and then Patt was the Branch Director.

JS: Patt?

NH: Schafer, Patricia Schafer. Both Mark and Rebecca's homes were livable. I don't know how much repair or not because I wasn't in a lot of contact with people at that time. And Patt's home was okay or repairable. And they, between her and Mr. Thornburg, my understanding is that her group was moving back to New Orleans, her branch. And they knew they needed investigators down here to do what we do. And initially -- now, this is multi-hand as far as how close it is to . . .

Someone told me who knows someone who works with OCI that OCI had space that we would be able to use in Mandeville, and that might be how originally some of the people who did not go up to Nashville were able to work in this space.

TAPE 3, SIDE A

JS: So, anyway, we were talking about the decision to reestablish an FDA presence formally in the New Orleans area. And you were part of that move at that point, or later?

NH: Actually, later. I'm not absolutely positive how or why the decision was made, or if they ever really considered that they really no longer had a presence here. You know, it's just that, we just -- this is where we're working, from where we're working. No. We've actually moved, a permanent move. No. Again, that's a matter of perception. It may be that that was Thornburg and Carol's perception at the time because they both got rid of their houses and bought new houses in the Nashville area. So everybody has a little differently, looks at it a little differently.

And then you have to realize, as I look back, I'm more aware of how fragile my mental state was at the time, and now I'm more aware that I was marginal, when at the time I didn't think that I was. And I was operating fine. I was doing, you know, things were going okay. I wasn't sitting in the corner sucking my thumb, you know. I was taking care of what I needed to. But I don't know the depth of how I made decisions. I may not have been conscious. It may have been that it was just habit in making the decisions and doing the things that I was able to.

What was supposed to be a, I guess, two- or three-week trip to go to Arizona November 15th to see the new grandbaby, help out the daughter, we get in on a Tuesday, and my husband is flying in from Baton Rouge, I'm flying in from Arizona, and we were

to meet in baggage claim. When I get down to -- because we'd been there so many times, knew the airport. I get down to baggage claim and I see him sitting in a wheelchair, and I'm saying, "What is it? He can't be that sick, feeling that badly." And he is, he was the consummate practical joker, so I'm thinking he's trying to pull one off on me. But he was sick, he was sick. He'd been having prostatitis, too.

Oh, I know what I . . . I wonder so much.

Because he had been sick over that January to August time of '05, recovering from the surgery and then the sarcoidosis and the prostatitis, he had been seeing numerous doctors, and he had all kinds of scans and tests. The primary had even done cancer-marker tests, and there was no evidence of any malignancy at that time, nothing. And the doctor went back and got his files and reviewed everything to be sure, because that was his friend, he would be sure, know for himself that he didn't miss something, and he couldn't find anything. He went back and reviewed his whole, you know, everything, and there was nothing.

Anyway, Jesse thought it was just because he hadn't been taking his medications. He started taking the medicines and he felt better, so, okay. That Saturday he crashed, and we took him -- he just got really, really sick. We took him to the hospital, and with his history, they started treating everything that they knew he had problems with, diabetes, too, off and on. And then they started doing other stuff. And in 10 days he was diagnosed with renal pelvis transitional cell carcinoma.

And so I'm on sick leave. I tell them, "I don't know when I'm going to be back."

JS: What was the time that they found out about this? What kind of prognosis did they give him?

NH: I don't believe it was accurate, and I want to go back and talk to the doctor whether or not . . . I believe some doctors have a hard time telling people bad news, because he said he had a 50-50 chance. And in retrospect, I don't see how he could have thought he had a 50-50 chance. It was everywhere; it was everywhere.

JS: It had metastasized?

NH: Metastasized, yes.

JS: At that point it had metastasized?

NH: Well, they didn't know immediately. It's like the 28th, he's diagnosed. The 30th of November, he begins the chemo.

He had great doctors, and there was a cancer center that was part of the hospital that we went to. There was actually an oncology floor in the hospital. And one of the most important things was we were both comfortable with his physicians and, to us, they seemed very knowledgeable. And I'm not saying that they weren't. I'm saying that we felt we were in a good place for treatment.

And he started having chemo, and they were like, were they 12-day treatments or 12 treatments? I can't remember for sure now. But he'd have a cycle and then off. And when he . . .

One of the things that was impacting his quality of life tremendously was breathing. Fluid was accumulating in the lungs, and he had a history of sarcoidosis, which in his case had attacked the lungs, and after draining it one time and we consulted with some pulmonologists, and there's the issue of the more times you do it, the greater the chance of infection. And with the chemo and everything else, you can't get an infection. They decided to do -- oh, shoot, I can't think of the name; I had it written down. It was a procedure that puts talc in between the lungs and the chest wall, so by causing the lungs to adhere to the wall, there's less space for fluid to accumulate. And that was the, January, it's a Friday, January 6th, he had that procedure. And almost immediately, he had a tremendous turnaround. You could just see his color was better, his whole, everything. You could just see he felt better.

And we were, it was either two or three weeks, we were going to have a family meeting. His brother is a nuclear medicine doctor. He was going to ask him to fly out, and my kids and I and him were going to talk with the doctors about looking at scans and decide the next course of treatment, which of the things would be best.

After a few days, as quickly as he had improved, he reverted back to where he was. And somehow or other, fluid was still collecting, and that was the end. It was less than two months, and he was gone.

During this time also, mama was well.

JS: Still at the facility?

NH: She's still at the facility. And then she was in a rehab that was really part of but separate. It was the same building but doing rehab. And we're talking that it's time for you to find a nursing home for her. A great nursing home in Baton Rouge. They flew her down. You know, they have these angel-flight things. They got her down there. It's very close to my brother and sister-in-law, Brenda. Brenda knew someone involved with nursing homes in the Baton Rouge area. So she gave her a list of homes that were good, so we didn't have to go through the investigation thing.

You see, everywhere there were people to help us, whatever we needed.

She and my brother went and looked it over. Great facility, new, nice, great staff. They would call and tell me what she needed, because I was always sending her care packages. She liked to get stuff in the mail. She's doing great, doing great. We've made the decision we will never move her back to New Orleans. He's up there. I can drive up there on weekends and see her. I can't do my little run-ins after work. Because we know that when they open the nursing homes here, they're going to be moving them at the drop of a hat all the time because of all the issues they had before. Why move them? Why not just leave her there? We found a great place for her.

So Jesse passes. We're in Arizona. Someone anonymously takes care of the entire funeral home bill at the funeral home in Arizona. We have no idea to this day who it is. They didn't want us to know. People were helping us.

You saw the program. I asked the nursing home, I mean the funeral home if they would give a letter to the person because I would like to thank them. So I wrote a letter from me and the kids and sent it with the program. And we still, we have no idea who was our benefactor.

But there's a family here in New Orleans, people we've known forever. Actually, the man who took our wedding photographs daughter, Belva Pichon, runs the funeral home, and we called her, and she said, "Don't worry about anything." She would be in touch with them [the Arizona funeral home]; they took care of everything. We didn't have to worry about details.

The problem I had was, from Arizona, trying to find a church and a cemetery that were both available at the same time. Churches were not all open. Cemeteries were only open a couple of days a week, and they were rotating staffs among the cemeteries. So we finally got that set up.

I fly back, and one of my cousins picks me up at the airport. And I said, "Let's go back to my house." I remembered there was a box of pictures upstairs I saw. It was photos. I don't know what's in it, but I'm going to just grab that and we'll take it and see if there are any pictures we can use for the program for Jesse. And we had a bunch of good pictures in there. You'll see the program that we used. And then one side has old pictures, and then the other side is new pictures that my daughter had digitally, she took them to, she uploaded them to Walgreen's and they were printed here.

And then my friend deals with a guy who's one of the entrepreneurs here, and he told him to put the program together. So we just gave him everything because I was in

no condition to do any of that. We just gave it to him, and he just -- you know, usually it's something the family works on and does. He just did the whole thing for us.

So it's the night before his funeral, and my mother dies. I'm sorry.

JS: Take your time.

NH: She just dies, and nobody was with her. None of us were there; none of us were there.

JS: She was . . .

NH: She was at the nursing home in Baton Rouge.

JS: But she'd been doing well. She had recovered.

NH: She'd been doing great.

JS: The people were taking good care of her there.

NH: We visited her. Yeah. She was having visitors off and on, and people would call me after they visited her and tell me, "She knows you're working in Nashville, so it's okay." Nobody ever told her about Jesse. And then the people at the home really didn't know us, so they didn't know him to have said anything to her.

And then a month later was when my uncle died that I told you about.

And during this time, I'm getting e-mails and cards from work. It was like, I don't know if they planned it, but like every few days I'd have contact from somebody at work. I don't know if they planned, purposefully spread it out. But they would send me flowers or really nice notes, and it was great to have that contact.

JS: It's your FDA family.

NH: Yeah. It meant a lot, it really meant a lot.

And then being back in the city was horrible. There weren't a lot of hotels open. The hotel we stayed at was clean, but they didn't have maid service daily. But you could go get clean linens anytime you wanted. Food service amounted to some caterers bringing in a few hot meals at breakfast and at dinner [unclear].

I remember my grandson wanting to go get a hamburger. I couldn't find a hamburger place for him. The things we take for granted.

Back to FDA, during this time, okay, it's January, they're in the process of moving Compliance Branch back to Metairie. We have to get out of the hotel. They packed up my desk, my office, everything I had in Nashville, and shipped it back down here to this office. And when I came in my first day here, it was all unpacked and put away. It was all there. Some of the ladies went to my room at the Residence Inn and packed up all my stuff, all my personal things, and put it in the car, and Tim drove the car down for me. And Allen Carman -- I don't know if you've met him; he's there -- he and his wife kept the car at their house until I came down.

JS: People were looking out after you.

NH: Yes, yes.

Well, some of these people I worked with 20, 30 years. But it doesn't seem to me like we really missed a beat, though. My cases that were active, somebody looked after.

One of the things that we laugh about, there was a firm that I was dealing with that had fish, adulterated fish, and we'd been going back and forth with, what are you going to do with them, trying to convince him to tell us he's going to throw them away. He has a pretty big concern.

During the storm, he had one generator, and the generator . . . And where he chose to use the generator was on the product, on the container that held the adulterated product, not the good stuff. And he finally did destroy the product.

When Mr. Thornburg asked me to do this, I responded back to him. I said, "I wasn't there for a lot of it to know the nitty-gritty of the things that were going on, the day-to-day stuff. But I'd be glad to talk if you want me to."

JS: This is why I wanted to talk to you.

NH: Yeah.

JS: Everybody had different experiences during this, different work experiences and different personal experiences, every one very different.

NH: Yeah.

I still worry about some of my coworkers a lot. One of them you've talked to, I believe, Marion. I try to encourage her to accept what things are, but she's having a very difficult time.

Marion had this huge dieffenbachia plant. Did she tell you about her plant?

JS: No.

NH: On Plaza Drive, where we went yesterday. Once we got a notice about plant sizes, and it was really that it should be appropriate to the space, is kind of what the thing said. This huge dieffenbachia.

So after I'm back at work after the time I've taken off after my family deaths, I need to go, I need some closure with my office on Plaza Drive. I need to go see if there's anything there left, salvageable. I just needed to see for myself. So this is January. No. This is maybe February or March '06. That plant is still alive, in all its glory.

So, I cut off, I take like four or five cuttings from it, come back and stick them in water, and they root. And I say, "Okay. One of these times when you all have space in a package going up to Nashville, I want to stick it in there." I got a couple of zip-lock bags, put wet towels in there with the cuttings. A cutting is like . . . Dieffenbachia was like that big around.

JS: About an inch or more?

NH: Yeah. Big leaves. Double zip-lock bags. Put it in an envelope to her attention in with the other stuff. And I e-mail her. I get back an e-mail that, the auto-reply, "I'm out of the office for a week." I said, "Well, I've got more here. We'll send when somebody's driving up there."

When she comes back, I get a call. And she said, "You know, that sucker is still living?"

I said, "Marion, that is, I believe, a sign that you should be encouraged that we're going to be okay, that we're strong and we're going to survive. We just have to work our way through it."

And she said, "Oh, maybe it is." But she always agrees with the encouragement you give her, but it's still just been very difficult for her.

And Melissa -- you met Melissa up at the desk there -- when she went up for training recently, she brought back a picture. The plant is like that.

JS: From the cuttings.

NH: From the cutting, yeah, yeah.

So, different little things like that should encourage us to accept our circumstances and try to move on.

JS: So it's been a couple of years now.

NH: It seems like yesterday.

JS: Does it?

NH: It seems like yesterday. It's still very, very fresh, all of it, except I have trouble remembering some specifics of what actually happened here, and I don't know if that's just a way of dealing with it or not.

People keep telling me, "Oh, you should retire. Why don't you leave?" I love my work, and I needed to have this. It is truly the only thing that remains of my old day-to-day life. We're very family oriented. And our friends are scattered. There's nothing here that I do or places that I go, except for my occasional meetings for the Audubon Commission kind of thing, that's what I did before. And I have friends here. I like my work. I still enjoy them.

We [Jesse and I] were going to retire, we were both going to retire in about maybe two or three years, but I probably won't be here past that time. But this was what I needed when I needed it, some structure, something that I could get involved with that I knew, that would give me a challenge. And believe me, having worked through challenges, that's what we thrive on.

JS: That's right.

Did your retirement plans include staying here in New Orleans?

NH: I had not made that decision yet. We had talked about maybe we should move to Arizona when we retire because we're spending so much airfare going back and forth. But it's such a strong tie here. But now so many of the things that bound me here are gone. I can't see moving out of the area and living in Baton Rouge. Well, I have a home in Baton Rouge. That's where I am on the weekends now. I don't feel like I'm a Baton Rougean, as they call themselves. I still feel I'm a New Orleanian. I'll probably spend more time wherever my grandchildren are when I retire. But this is working out fine right now; it's working out fine.

I had talked with my supervisor about working out of the Baton Rouge Resident Post, but she told me she couldn't support that, so here I am. It's working out okay.

I have a little studio apartment here.

JS: For during the week?

NH: For during the week, yes, because physically I could not drive back and forth every day. I could not do that every day. I don't think even the ride with somebody, you know, somebody else driving, it still would be just a little too much.

But one of the things we've learned is we really have no control. We think we have control, and we make plans, and you just have to learn to accept them.

I guess one of the things that has bode me well is I've always been able to adjust to changes, and I think that has been extremely important, to be able to do what I need to

do in whatever the here-and-now is. I think that's a tribute to my parents, and that has been extremely important in getting through these two years.

JS: Have we not covered something that we should have covered?

NH: Who knows? I'm sure I'll think of a dozen things that I knew I would not forget to mention. But I think the most important things and, to me, the general support of everybody in the agency is one of the things that I did want to be sure, the personal support that, you know, the inconvenience of having to go and place an order for something on your lunch break instead of sitting down with your friends for lunch. We appreciated it, that kind of thing. It meant a lot.

And, you know, I do have a photograph in my office that shows us opening up one of the packages. Yeah. You may want to look at some of the pictures I have. We could -- some of them I might part with originals if it's important to you.

JS: Oh, we don't need originals. We can get scans.

NH: But if not, we have people who are great at scanning and we can send them to you. You can mark up if there are any of interest to you. You might want some I have in the Plaza Drive office to put next to the photos you took.

JS: That would be good.

NH: Yeah.

I have one I love of Compliance Hall. They dared to challenge us. It was, “Decorate Your Area,” and you’ll see it. I won’t go into detail explaining it. But . . .

TAPE 3, SIDE B

NH: They were doing a “Decorate your area, see who gets the -- I’ve forgotten what the prize was. The prize wasn’t the important thing. We won. That was it.

JS: I’d like to see that picture.

NH: Oh, yeah.

JS: I’d like to see that.

Well, I guess we’ll go ahead and end this for now. I’ll be here tomorrow. We can always pick up if there’s something that you wanted to talk about.

But everyone went through different experiences, as was mentioned earlier. I don’t know that anyone went through quite the same experiences you did, but I do appreciate your sharing this with us and adding this to the record because this is the sort of thing that will never find its way into the paper trail.

NH: No, it’s not.

JS: And this is an important part of the life and work of the agency employees at such a trying time.

NH: And, you know, one thing I think that's important is that people, in spite of their personal trials through this, still wanted to do what they needed to do as an FDAer. That was always the question: Well, what . . . You talk about your father is back in the hospital, they're running tests to see if he has, needs to have more chemo, but the next thing is, have we been to look at this yet? Did anybody think about this firm. And that's just part of, I believe, the culture in our field office.

And I really don't think -- and it's not a criticism this time -- I don't think that a lot of the people in Washington really understand what it's like working in the field because we're so close to the regulated industry that, we're geographically close, that we want to see the results of our work, and we can see what happens when we do a good job, or if we don't. We know the outcomes.

JS: Thank you.

NH: You're welcome. And I do appreciate the chance to have this opportunity. It means a lot to me that the agency has and maintains a history office that would do something like that, and we appreciate your efforts with it a lot.

JS: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW