

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Lucille D. Duminy

**COLLECTION:** 4700.1685

**IDENTIFICATION:** Hurricane Betsy survivor; New Orleans Ninth Ward resident

**INTERVIEWER:** Nilima Mwendo

**SERIES:** Hurricane Betsy Survivor Stories

**INTERVIEW DATES:** November 19, 2003; November 20, 2003

**FOCUS DATES:** Session I: 1950s-'60s, 1965 Session II: 1965-1969

**ABSTRACT:**

**Session I**

**Tape 3337, Side A**

Introduction; Duminy is the interviewer's aunt; bought inexpensive house in New Orleans' Ninth Ward circa 1949; street was so muddy she cried on moving day; no lights in neighborhood, scared when her husband had to work nights; horses running in backyard because Claiborne Street barn just behind them; put up fence to keep horses out; Ninth Ward at that time: "It was real country, like the way I was brought up"; street first paved with rocks and tar; neighborhood effort to get street paved with real blacktop; becoming attached to her neighborhood and neighbors; conscious effort to forge neighborhood ties by including neighbors at barbecues and other gatherings; looking after the kids in the neighborhood whose parents worked; Uncle Joe played accordion at night; inviting neighborhood kids to a weenie roast; loved to be around children, always wanted to be a teacher; occupations of neighborhood men and women; love of neighborhood: "I'm still satisfied right here. I am not leaving my home until they take me out of here in a box."; neighborhood improvements in early sixties; grocery stores in neighborhood; transportation in Ninth Ward; petition to keep large garage from being built in neighborhood; welcoming new neighbors to neighborhood; first warnings of Hurricane Betsy; distress when hurricane turned toward mouth of river: "Because you right at the mouth of the Gulf, and the sea could come just right over and that's it. And that's just what it did."; relatives from Empire, Louisiana, came to Duminy house to wait out storm; eating supper, watching TV with relatives; no warning to Ninth Ward residents: "And never mentioned evacuating, they didn't have no evac. They wanted us to die right down here."; heavy rain, then silence, then a truck passed by with someone hollering to evacuate; water coming from behind house, from direction of Florida Avenue; panic at how to get pregnant aunt, aunt's little boy, arthritic mother and partially ambulatory grandmother out of her house; "We can't walk now, it's too late because the water was by your ankle, and as you walk, it was coming up."; National Guard drove through neighborhood, announcing evacuation on their loudspeakers; managed to walk to McCarty

School; man who helped carry little cousin and grandmother to safety; fear, saying rosaries at school; man who took her family out in a small skiff, a few people at a time; evacuated to Poland and St. Claude, which was dry; cattle trucks came to transport them: "Cattle trucks? We're like slavery in here!"; cattle truck took them to City Hall; husband Walter vomiting blood, Red Cross unable to help; man transported Walter to Charity Hospital; getting upset at Charity over having to answer so many questions and getting so little help; Walter was a nursing assistant at Public Health Hospital, used his contacts to get good room at Charity; while at hospital, getting separated from their children; family reunited at Nanny's house, everybody accounted for; scary conditions at McCarty School, with winos and dopers.

### **Tape 3337, Side B**

After hurricane, trying to get help from City Hall just to eat, told to come back tomorrow; losing patience with people who were there to provide assistance; negotiating with assistance people for money; returning to see her house, everything destroyed; discrimination at the grocery store after the hurricane; trouble with daughter's school because uniform was destroyed; Mama got trailer from Red Cross in Belle Chasse; taking sandwiches that were put out for white people only; got SBA loan to fix up house; took job at St. Maurice Church rectory to pay off SBA loan; spending a year fixing the house back up; hardwood floors ruined; damage to uncle's house; Walter in hospital two weeks with kidney stones; getting hand-me-down clothing; discrimination in assistance process; replacing household goods and appliances; levee intentionally busted; the water filling the Ninth ward was dirty river water, not rain water; levee busted to protect city's major resources, which were on other side of river; her children's fear every time it rained after hurricane; uncle fixed the refrigerator; survival of her family: "We were strong, and nothing was going to put us down."

## **Session II**

### **Tape 3338, Side A**

Water went up to the roof in Hurricane Betsy; nobody warned them about the flood; National Guard trucks were passing, evacuating other people before flooding; finally someone came by in a truck hollering to evacuate; uncle identified rising water as river water; people from Chalmette rescuing people in boats; the shelter at McCarty School; dividing up canned goods from the school cafeteria; neighbor with heart problems; no usable bathrooms in shelter; trying to keep track of family during rescue by boat; boat dropped them off at dry spot, long walk to parents' house; police warned them against walking, because power lines down; wish that water could have been spread more equally through city, instead of just in Ninth Ward; husband Walter sick with kidney stones; staying with relatives after storm; mostly white workers providing relief services after flood; children wanting to go home, but house not ready; relatives fixed up house; friction with man providing relief who thought she didn't need new appliances; thought food should come before garbage removal in relief efforts; Walter in hospital, had to take care of cleaning up house without him; checking on parents, who were in Belle Chasse; everybody had to help each other after flood; boat rescues during flood; neighbors helping each other; mandatory tetanus shots for people in flooded areas; relief lady coming around asking personal questions; husband had private room in Charity Hospital; losing family pictures in flood; heard about child drowning at the shelter; rumors of rape and mayhem; hardest part was getting relief services; slow relief process; getting fingerprinted to receive relief services; humiliation of and

objection to fingerprinting; guards monitoring traffic into Ninth Ward; having to show identification to go to her own house; frightened to return to her house alone, while husband in hospital; washing blankets; nineteen or twenty people staying in one house; collection taken at husband's work to help out Duminy family; Red Cross wanted to see their birth certificates, which were lost in flood; hanging important papers to dry, but they were ruined; endless questions from SBA; insurance company wasn't much help; trouble washing filth out of clothes.

**Tape 3338, Side B**

Relief agencies stipulated how money was to be spent; man from SBA objected to her spending loan money on a car; breaking down into tears when harassed by lady from SBA; SBA continued to check up on them for a year, to see what they were buying with loan money; had work done on car just before lost it in storm; wanted to be back in her house, even though danger from robbers and looters; had washing machine but no dryer; friction with doctor when daughter Hope treated for convulsions; a baby died while waiting to get into Charity Hospital; arguing with doctors over treatment of her daughter; neighborhood activist Mr. Hebert; Lyndon Johnson visited city by helicopter; friendliness and helpfulness between neighbors; people who left neighborhood after storm; neighborhood before Betsy; relationship with neighborhood children and parents; Betsy memories came back during Hurricane Camille; description of Camille; after Camille, Leander Perez distributed relief money to people in Plaquemines Parish; after Camille, son went to Charity Hospital, suffering from convulsions; son put on white side of Charity instead of black; discussion about scope of interview; every hurricane season brings back memories; relatives who still live in area; evacuated for first time during Hurricane George; driving conditions during evacuation; insurance wouldn't reimburse her for evacuation motel; family members returning to their houses after Betsy; clarifying questions about words and proper nouns; explanation of term "long stew"; white people on Tennessee Street knew levee was about to be busted; levee busted at Florida Street Bridge; official story that levee burst on its own; in earlier hurricanes, sometimes rode them out on a boat; hurricanes seemed fun when she was a teenager; in those days, everybody had boats instead of cars; mother's stories of 1915 storm in Empire, Louisiana; 1915 storm ruined family's gardens and livelihood; rice farming during World War One; rice tasted better in those days; animals on farm of her youth; bartering for farm products in her grandmother's day; selling eggs to poor old man in neighborhood; got whipped for cheating old man out of money; spoke French with her grandmother; storytelling uncle; description of schoolhouse when she was a child; children separated by color; played with white children.

**TAPES:** 2 (T3337, T3338)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 3 hours, 6 minutes

Session I: 1 hour, 32 minutes    Session II: 1 hour, 34 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 117 pages

Session I: 53 pages    Session II: 64 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence (2 pages), Interviewee Biographical Form

**RESTRICTIONS:** None