

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Franklin Earl Minyard, Jr. **COLLECTION:** 4700.1956

IDENTIFICATION: Orleans Parish, Louisiana, coroner for forty years, retired in 2014;
Private practice ob-gyn; 1955 LSU Medical School graduate

INTERVIEWER: Angie Juban

SERIES: Voices in the Storm: Hurricane Katrina Survivors in Pointe Coupee Parish

INTERVIEW DATE: May 11, 2007

FOCUS DATES: 1960s; 2005-2007

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3816

Introduction; Minyard born in New Orleans in 1929; parents Franklin Minyard, Sr. and Norma Dugas; only sibling, Norman, is deceased; Minyard grew up mostly in the Ninth Ward; attended Capdau Elementary, Holy Cross High, LSU, and LSU Medical School; medical residency at Tulane University, Charity Hospital; decision to come to LSU in 1947 was based on football scholarship, interest in pre-med, and affordability; he wasn't a good student growing up; decided to pursue pre-med because of interest in weightlifting, chemistry; experience as LSU undergrad was "beautiful", he got into studying, held different jobs around campus; senior year, worked in the Capitol Annex with the Department of Labor, was a driver for Governor Earl Long; at LSU, majored in zoology and chemistry; has a strong interest in history; family has been in New Orleans since 1840; studies and residencies during medical school; he enjoyed surgery and pursued a residency in ob-gyn at Charity; three-year hiatus in his residency when he joined the navy; he got married, his wife had a baby, he became a "country doctor" in Paincourtville, LA; after a year there, finished residency and set up private ob-gyn practice in New Orleans; after six years of success, he "didn't feel complete for some reason"; the next day, got a call from Sister Mary David Young with the Bethlehem House of Bread, a breakfast program for poor kids; he helped her organize a fundraiser with the New Orleans Saints that raised \$40,000; children served by the organization had mostly drug addicted or prostitute mothers; he heard about new methadone treatment for addicts, spoke with Sister David about opening a methadone clinic; idea approved by Archbishop Hannan who gave them St. Augustin's Church to operate out of; soon had a hundred women in the program, sisters taught reading, writing, other skills, and helped women get education and training; incident where two women from the program were arrested and Minyard was not allowed to bring them methadone in jail; he appealed to the coroner who oversaw prison medical care; coroner refused the request and Minyard vowed to run against him; first election in 1969 he lost because nobody knew him; eventually he was elected and succeeded in getting a drug treatment program in the prison; he wonders to this day, and especially wondered after Katrina, why he issued that challenge to the coroner and gave up his lucrative ob-gyn practice, but his works gives "a self-satisfaction that you don't get in private work"; disaster planning by the coroner's office in the 1970s and 80s based on response to Pan Am Flight 759 crash and MV *George Prince* ferry disaster; requested use of

refrigerated trucks from John Schwegmann and the sheriff for body storage and transport; in later years, requested that Homeland Security provide protective clothing in event of a pandemic; when Katrina came, he went to his farm in Folsom, LA, which was devastated; after the storm passed, attempted to get to coroner's office in New Orleans and encountered flooding everywhere, got around wading, swimming, or by boat; his staff of ten rode out the storm at their office, couldn't contact them because all communication was down; stuck in the office for five days; help from St. Tammany deputies to get out of Folsom and cross Lake Pontchartrain Causeway; avoided being evacuated to San Antonio with his staff by hiding in a port-o-let, then hitchhiked to Baton Rouge; when he tried to drive to his office in New Orleans, he got as far as Canal Street, then waded until a boat picked him up; once in Baton Rouge, dropped off at Women's Hospital where he was cleaned up after a week of being filthy; a friend that he hitchhiked with knew a doctor in Baton Rouge who they stayed with for several days; learned that people thought he had drowned; got in touch with a DMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operational Rescue Team) official and was soon working at their site in St. Gabriel; gigantic building where they set up the morgue; being so close to Baton Rouge, started having lunch with one of his college roommates who had a dental practice there, this brought back memories of his time as a student; at the DMORT site, he had his own FEMA trailer; he decided that everyone would be autopsied; his Orleans office regularly conducted autopsies for several of the neighboring parishes; autopsying everyone was expensive but he was backed by Dr. Louis Cataldie in the decision; the deceased were his people from his parishes and he would treat them the same as if they were coming through his office; working conditions were rough; encountered deceased people that he knew, including a good friend; St. Gabriel facility handled 1,200 bodies, another 300 handled by other coroner's offices; office in Lafayette dealt with deceased and floating coffins after Hurricane Rita; on how he dealt with his experience: "the storm, the post-traumatic stress that I suffered, manifested itself by extracting the joy out of my heart"; no longer plays music because of this, is not handling the emotional aspect too well; there are still 100 bodies to bury, skeletal remains are occasionally still found; believes that the emotional scars of survivors will be deeper than physical scars, people will probably start evacuating now when hurricanes come; unpleasant spin-offs of recovery, like people waiting for Road Home money; people will look back at this as a desolate time in history; contrast between stalled recovery after Katrina and quicker recovery after Hurricane Betsy because people helped rebuild; hopes that such a storm never happens again; conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T3816)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 52 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 23 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: 1 photo taken during interview. Photographer David Breidenbach

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical Data Form; Voices in the Storm reception program (2 pgs); Brochure for N.O. Forensics Center (2 pgs); Flyer for Katrina Memorial Fund; Article on Minyard from *Times Picayune*

RESTRICTIONS: None