

**An Oral History**

**with**

**Deborah Jackson**

**SSC History Project**

**Interviewer: Martin Oramous**

**2006**

# Biography

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## An Oral History

### With

### Deborah Jackson

*This is an interview by the Stennis Space Center History Office. The purpose of this interview is to document the story of key personnel during/after Hurricane Katrina at SSC. The interview is with Deborah Jackson and is taking place on January 19, 2006. The interviewer is Martin Oramous. Also present are Paul Foerman and Shelia Reed.*

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** Please start with your name and your position out here, your job title.

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** My name is Deborah Jackson. I'm the Project Manager for InDyne, Inc. InDyne is a subcontractor to Mississippi Space Services. They hold the FOSS contract here at Stennis. I guess my story begins prior to the storm maybe even back in July. Up until July I had actually been a shelter manager. There was a storm in July. I was shelter manager for B-1105 and didn't have any negative events occur during that storm but I just decided after that storm I had done it enough. It just took too much of a toll on me physically because I was the type of shelter manager who believed you should stay up all night and walk around your shelter and make sure that everyone was O.K. After that storm in July, I said, "I don't want to be a shelter manager anymore and I'm going to resign that position." So, I did with mixed feelings but never the less I did. Then we fast forward to August and we've got another big storm headed this way. I'm like I'm not a shelter manager. I don't have to worry about it but I am a Facility Manager of B-1200. So, naturally as with every storm I am involved in the preparation of the facility with respect to making sure that things are put away and things are covered up. We do this with every storm. It was somewhat routine; we weren't sure what the storm was going to do. It seemed like well, is it going to hit us, is it going to go to Florida again? We really felt sorry for the folks in Florida because I believed that it maybe was going to hit the Pan Handle again and didn't know what impact it would have on me.

My husband was actually out of town that week and he got home from Montana on early Saturday afternoon and I said, "What are we going to do about this storm that's coming?" He said, "What storm?" I said, "Well, Montana is in the United States. Surely you heard that there's a hurricane in the Gulf and it's coming this way." So, that was just kind of a general attitude that everyone seemed to have. We just weren't really sure what the storm was going to do and didn't make that big of a deal about it. On Friday afternoon here at Stennis, we did make the usual hurricane preparations up to and including making sure that everything was secure in the basement of B-1200. We have had flooding in the basement in the past and were concerned that if there was any power lost or anything like

that that the pumps wouldn't work. The ground level water would get into the basement just not even thinking about what the storm might do. I did call and speak with someone in NASA as to whether or not we should be open on Saturday, whether or not StenniSphere should be open on Saturday. We had received the information from the Emergency Operations Coordinator that StenniSphere would still be open. It was open Friday and would be open on Saturday. The Public Affairs Office said yes we would still be open on Saturday. As it turns out, I was working on another project that was coming up in the next couple of weeks in fact the following weekend, Stennis Community Day. I came out to Stennis on Saturday. Spoke with my employees who were beginning to get a little bit concerned because the storm was very unclear. We just didn't know where the storm was going to go but we never the less went through our normal operations that Saturday morning. About the middle of the day I had some folks that were off-site delivering placards for Community Day. They called me from Slidell and said, "We are really concerned that we are going to get caught in the contra flow and not be able to get back to Stennis." They had a government vehicle. So, I said, "Well, I'm going to kind of make an executive decision myself and tell you to come back and shutdown what you are doing there in Slidell and we'll start preparations here at Stennis to close StenniSphere early." As it turns out, the Emergency Operations Coordinator came by B-1200 and he said, "Most definitely. Get your folks back. Prepare to shutdown Stennis and get ready to leave the site as if the storm might come before Monday." Everybody was just beginning to get more and more nervous as the day grew on but we got everything tied down, put up, wrapped up and left.

I went home and wasn't really sure what the storm was going to do. I really didn't do that much around the house myself. As I mentioned earlier my husband was out of town. He got home. We talked about it. We weren't sure what we were going to do. He reconfirmed, "Now, you are not a shelter manager. You don't have to go out there do you?" I said, "No, I'm not required to go out there but that's where I want to go." I've been going out there for so many years and as shelter manager he never came to Stennis with me. He always stayed at our home. We live about 1200ft. from the beach. We're about 29ft above sea level in Pass Christian. He always felt like he just wanted to stay there with the house. Well, for some reason I don't know if it was because he had been out of town he said, "I think I'm going to evacuate this time." We pretty much decided late Saturday evening that we would both come to Stennis some time on Sunday. We were still watching the storm, didn't know what was going to happen.

Sunday morning I got up and got dressed and ready to go to church which of course in retrospect seems kind of crazy but I went to church. I'm a Sunday school teacher. I got there and people were kind of scurrying around Long Beach. The church is in Long Beach and they had not called for an evacuation of that part of the city yet. So, church was going on. I said, "My family is planning on evacuating. I really need to get home." You could just feel the tenseness at that time Sunday morning. People were really getting concerned and almost panicked. I went home. My husband wasn't even getting ready to leave. I don't know what he was doing but he wasn't getting ready to leave. I started packing up my pictures, my usual thing, for some reason I picked up a hurricane preparedness flyer that was lying around the house and it said you needed to take your

important papers with you. I went over this stuff with my husband and he said, "Why? It's not going to be that big of a deal. I don't need to take that. I've got it all electronically." I said, "Well, I don't know. I just think we should take everything that it says that we should take." As it grew a little bit later in the afternoon, he finally after watching the weather reports and everything decided that maybe this was going to be a little bit more serious than he had anticipated. We were just going to come to Stennis in my truck and leave his SUV at home but he rearranged all of our vehicles so that he got his SUV in our garage so all of the vehicles were inside. We brought my truck to Stennis. We came to Stennis Sunday afternoon. There were already families in B-1200. B-1200 is not a shelter. The folks that stayed in B-1200 were employees and employees' families. There were a couple of employees' immediate neighbors that stayed there. We had about 60 people in B-1200. Realizing that it was not a shelter there wasn't necessarily anybody in charge so I just kind of took over that responsibility although not officially.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** Is that what usually would happen when a hurricane comes? Being a shelter manager before, there has been a hurricane threatening the Coast in July certainly over the year there have been a number of hurricanes that threatened the Coast. Was there anything different about coming out here on that Sunday afternoon not just for you but for the people who were here? Was there kind of a sense of impending catastrophe that wasn't in the other hurricanes or was it just like any other?

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** It was different for me because I was not in a shelter and not acting officially as a shelter manager. There were some people in B-1200 sheltered that didn't normally come out for a storm. I would say that was the biggest difference but we still didn't know what was going to happen. It was just kind of like we were all out here. One of the employees had cooked food all Sunday morning. She had made this big spread of food: fried chicken, potato salad and everything. We had all this wonderful food. There was somewhat of a party atmosphere. The fact that we were all employees, we didn't have the public with us as you normally would in a shelter. It was kind of like a little family gathering in a way. Frankly, I didn't sense a feeling of impending doom at all at that time. My husband and I slept on inflatable mattresses in my office. There is a television in my office. We left the television on but I actually went to sleep. It wasn't uncommon to stay awake for a storm always but for this storm I felt like I wasn't the shelter manager. We are going to get a bad storm on our side and then we will probably end up coming back to work Monday or Tuesday. That's the feeling that I had when I went to sleep Sunday night. There were people all over B-1200. They were just kind of bedded down. There wasn't this normal sense of sitting around the television which is usually what we would do in a shelter during a storm. Everybody would sit around the television and watch exactly where the storm was going. We had power, no problem. Monday morning, everybody got up and we were just doing our normal thing and the power was on in B-1200 but I was speaking to my Corporate Office in McLean, VA at about 8:30 Monday morning and the phones went out. Well, that set off my immediate sense that this was going to be pretty bad because I can't remember the last time the phones went out here at Stennis Space Center during the storm.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** Could you tell what was going on outside at that point?

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** The wind was blowing and it was raining but it wasn't necessarily that incredibly bad in B-1200, that's the building with the tower at the top. There are windows around the tower but the only other windows in B-1200 really are the windows to the front door and then there were some windows in the Rocketeria which we weren't actually in the Rocketeria at that time so we didn't have the opportunity to look out those windows. I went downstairs and said, "The phones just went out." Then everybody starts, "Yeah, it's really bad outside." We start checking the weather more seriously. We even had the weather on the large screen in the auditorium. The projection booth was open and we had it on up there so we could see what was going on. I decided I just better start walking around the building acting like a shelter manager would act. I did have a radio because StenniSphere has radios so we had radio contact with the Emergency Operations Center. They knew we were over there. They knew how many people we had. They had requested that we just keep them informed about that.

I started walking around the building, a few hours later one of the employees came to me and said, "I hear water in the basement." I said, "We better go down and check." We went down stairs and sure enough water was pouring in, this was 10:00-11:00 a.m. pouring in from some of the conduit pipes in the basement. So, I immediately called on the radio to the Emergency Operations Center and let them know that water was coming into the basement and we needed some assistance over there. I remember Mike McKinion said, "Thank you for that report Deborah but right now we're not allowing anyone to leave the building." By this time the weather had gotten really bad. It was raining typically in a storm in sheets. The wind was blowing really bad. Everybody was kind of huddled around the front doors watching. We just discussed the fact that we shouldn't stay too near the doors because it seemed that debris was flying around a little bit. The storm just got worse and worse. Everybody pretty much stayed in the lobby. I heard on the radio that a tornado had been sighted in front of B-1100. Everybody rushed to the windows to see that. We tried to keep our radios turned down so that everybody didn't hear what was being reported from the Emergency Operations Center. Somewhere in there the power went out. Well, when the power goes out that elevates the concern and the fear to a much higher level. Everybody by that time was pretty scared. Things looked bad outside. It had gotten very dark. The trees were blowing. I remember the trees in front of the Visitor Center actually laid down in one direction. Then we heard on the radio that the roof blew off of part of B-1100. We started hearing all these horrible things going on on-site. Honestly, in B-1200 you didn't have, except for the front door, you didn't have that sense of what was going on outside. We requested that people stay in the Lobby area and in the auditorium area. We couldn't go in the basement because water was flooding the basement. It was pouring in. The folks that had spent the night there the night before removed all their belongings. We got what remaining food we had down there and brought it upstairs with us because we knew after a point we would not be able to go down into the basement. We just kind of all pulled together there in the lobby area.

Ken Albright and Mark, the security guard who was also staying in our building, started walking around the building to make sure that our building was turning out to be secure except for the basement. We noticed that water was running down the stairwell. I had a

pretty good idea from where it was coming from and I also knew that we're really not supposed to go to the tower during the storm, the tower kind of moves now when the wind blows really hard. I got Mark to go with me and we walked up to the tower. The elevator had been turned off before the storm which was normal practice. Mark and I walked up to the tower in the height of the storm. The tower was kind of swaying. What was interesting something that I had never seen before, I had seen water come in under the door at the very top, at the observation deck but this time water was coming in, pouring in all the way around the door. It was just spraying in. I don't know that the seals have ever been replaced on the door to the observation deck. I told myself that I needed to make a mental note. We needed to get these replaced before the next hurricane season because the same thing would happen again. Here we were near the observation deck and the water was pouring in and running down the stairs. We knew that this would be a hazard because we still had people that were staying on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and it was getting the stairwell wet. Mark and I went to the Tower area and we got all the mops and whatever we could find that the custodial staff used up there including large rolls of the hand towels. We placed them all around the door to try to sop up the water and it seemed almost like a useless cause but we had to try to stop the water as best we could. Then we setup the wet floor signs and walked back downstairs. Some time later in the storm, Mark and Ken and I walked back up to the tower and at that time we observed the windows to the tower actually flexing and water was coming in around the windows. We got water up there of course, water came through the stairwell and down the stairwell and then we had rising water in the basement. We had only a couple of other areas where we had a little water come in to B-1200. Really and truly throughout the storm, we felt like we were in probably one of the safest buildings out here. We just kept saying this building was built in the 60's. It's very secure and safe. We did have a little water come up through the carpet in the auditorium and it was weird. We know that there's a French drain under the floor in the auditorium and the carpet just started getting wet and it started spreading. It was a little water down there. We had to move the folks up from the areas that they had claimed to sleep in the auditorium. We have a roll-up door in our millennium hall area of StenniSphere. Water started coming from underneath the door. In all the doors that collapsed during the storm, it never even occurred to me that that might happen with our door but it did not. The door held strong. It flexed. The rain came in underneath. The rain came in around it. We have a huge curtain in front of that door. The curtain blew. The curtain got wet but the door thankfully did not collapse.

Another kind of funny story, throughout the storm, Ken and Mark and I were continuously walking around the building to make sure that everything was O.K. Ken called me on the radio and said, "Ms. Deborah, it sounds like the roof has blown off in the Hall of Achievements." I'm like, "Oh, no that's not possible. The Hall of Achievements has been there since 1982. I'm sure the roof didn't blow off." Well, 1984 actually. So, I walked fast to the Hall of Achievements, Ken and Mark were walking up one of the walkways, all of a sudden there was this really loud sound and it sounding like, in fact it was gravel blowing off the roof but if you can imagine somebody throwing a lot of gravel onto a tin building that is what it sounded like. I was walking up behind Mark and Ken, they heard this sound and the metal to the metal building was really rattling loud. They turned around and ran. This is in the dark. We had flashlights. They ran

passed me and I just kind of stood aside and they said, "The roof is coming off, the roof is coming off." I said, "No it's not." They said, "Look you can see the light." The roof was actually flexing and blowing up. Air was coming in and it was lifting up and you could see a crack of light underneath the roof but it didn't blow off. It was just funny at the time. I said, "I can not believe you guys are running away from this. It's just wind."

What we basically did the rest of the day was just try to keep everybody calm. At one point, the eye of the storm came over Stennis. Everybody wanted to go outside as they usually do and we did. We let people go. There were smokers in our building. They wanted to stand outside and smoke. We let them do that. Then they got a little bit further away from the building and further away from the building. We noted all the trees that were down and the damage. We had a banner on the front of the tower of B-1200. It had blown off. It was in a tree down the road. We saw our banner. We saw just all kinds of debris all around. It looked pretty bad. People checked out the fact that some of their windshields had been broken by flying debris. The things I remember about the eye of the storm was it was never going to leave. It was the longest eye that I could ever remember experiencing in my life. It seemed like it lasted an hour or more. I don't know exactly how long it lasted but then the weather started getting bad again. The wind started coming from the other direction. We got everybody to come back inside. Then it blew and it rained for what seemed like forever. You couldn't tell by the lightness outside what time it was. It seemed like the longest day because it had been dark and it got light and it got dark again and it got light again in a little bit.

Finally, eventually the storm was gone. What we noted at that time just in looking around outside was that the trees, young magnolia trees, in front of StennisSphere, they had laid down all the way flat on the ground. We noticed them during the eye of the storm. They were pointing the south direction. After the storm they were laying back down in the complete opposite direction. It was clear evidence of the different direction of the wind. We thought that Stennis had taken a pretty good hit. We still didn't have power or phones. We couldn't get our cell phones to work. One of the folks that was riding out the storm had a real small generator. I think it was even like maybe a welding machine type generator. He was able to hook up a very small screen television. We were able to get a very poor scratchy reception from WLOX. Late into the evening everybody was still huddled pretty much in the lobby of B-1200. Everybody's eyes were glued on the television. We couldn't believe what we were hearing about the devastation that had been left from the storm. I remember one of the first things we heard was that everything South of the tracks had been completely destroyed. There was nothing left South of the tracks. We all couldn't believe it. The folks that lived near Stennis in Pearlington felt like their homes were surely flooded. So, everybody began to get really upset, more and more upset as we watched the News. The reception was just very, very poor so we would get just bits and pieces and that even made it worse. We weren't getting what we believed was the whole story. We couldn't see what was being broadcast so that just made things even worse. No power, it was hot. It was buggy. We had the doors opened and people just believed that their homes had been destroyed. Everybody believed that. We were getting a little bit of information about New Orleans. Some of the folks that live in the surrounding areas had relatives that live in New Orleans. When the word came that the



levees broke in New Orleans, those people got very upset, almost hysterical. We were kind of dealing with that sort of thing but of a more pleasant note it was very interesting, we had an elderly lady who was the mother of one of the employees in the building. Everybody was sitting in their lawn chairs around this tiny T.V. Every time I would pass by this lady she would grab my hand and say, "I don't remember your name, wasn't this wonderful for my daughter to have planned this surprise birthday party for me." The first time she told me that, I just went along with her because I could tell that she was elderly. I said, "Yes mam, that was just so sweet. Your daughter is so sweet and thoughtful." She thanked me for coming. She said, "I'm sure you gave me a really nice gift. I'll be sure and send you a thank you card." It was such a strange experience. This woman has Alzheimer's and she didn't know where she was. She didn't know where she was. She didn't know what was going on. Here she was in the midst of all these people that felt like their lives had been destroyed. She was in a very peaceful place. She thought this was a surprise birthday party for her. It wasn't her birthday. It wasn't even near her birthday. She just didn't know what was going on. She knew she was in a strange place and there were a lot of people she didn't know and she believed that they had come to her birthday party. It was sad in some ways but in other ways it was a good thing because she wasn't experiencing all the fears and concerns that we were.

That night some people stayed up pretty much talking, wondering what could have happened. What was the condition of their home? We knew the basement in 1200 was flooded. We had water in a few other spots in the building. We all pretty much went to our respective pallets, and inflatable mattresses and cots and probably didn't sleep well. Slept very fitfully for what was very hot in the building. We had limited restroom facilities in B-1200. The next morning people were up before daylight getting ready packing their stuff up which is usually the case after a storm. If you are shelter manager, people are ready to go before daylight. They want to get home. They want to see what happened to their house. That always was a problem being shelter manager because we were told in the past we could not allow people to leave the shelter because we didn't know the conditions of the road. If there were lines down, it could be very dangerous for them to leave Stennis Space Center. That was a challenge keeping people here when they wanted to go home which is something we had experienced with the July storm.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** But certainly some of those people and maybe you included perhaps knew people that they had left behind in their neighborhoods also who had decided to ride out the storms in their homes. That had to be of some concern.

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** Everybody was very, very concerned. They were trying to get in touch with people that were not there. They were trying to get in touch with people that they knew were working as security guards or as fire department in other places away from Stennis, just trying to get in touch with all those people not being able to get in touch with anybody. We were totally cutoff. That added to the panic, concern and fear. We did have other people from Stennis stopping by the building letting us know the condition of the roads outside of Stennis. Allen Price from the Fire Department stopped by and mentioned the condition of the roads, the Interstates going in both directions and the fact that there were trees down. They were trying to get the trees cleared off the

roadway so people could leave. At one point we heard from someone that Interstate-10 was under water. The look on everybody's faces, we were in shock. We couldn't comprehend what had really happened. The unfortunate thing was we didn't even know what we couldn't comprehend. We didn't know how bad it was going to be on the outside. The first folks to leave lived in the Pearlington area. They drove as far as they could drive and then came back and reported to their friends and family that they couldn't even see their house. The roads were still under water. They couldn't get there but that they felt that their homes were flooded. There were people that were just breaking down crying. They didn't know what they were going to do. That was all going on. People were loading up their cars. My husband and I were of course in shock pretty much like everybody else. We sat on one of the benches in front of B-1200 and kind of talked about what we were going to do and how we were going to deal with whatever we found. I said, "Well based on what we heard on television, I think we need to prepare ourselves for our house being a slab. There's a slab there." My husband said, "Well, I don't know what would be worse, if there's a slab or if it just flooded." So, we agreed whatever it was we would just deal with it. We tried as best we could to brace ourselves for the belief that there would be nothing there when we got home because we lived so close to the beach.

The biggest thing was not being able to communicate, not being able to get in touch with their relatives. You're right. There were people that had stayed in Picayune that had not come to Stennis to ride-out the storm. The folks here were trying to get in touch with them there. We even had people that left to go to Picayune and came back and said their house was O.K. but there was total devastation everywhere. When they finally said that Interstate-10 was not underwater we decided that we were going to leave. This is incredibly selfish of me to say but had I been a shelter manager I would not have been able to leave. That was my first thought that I need to get home and see what's left. I'm sure that's the way everybody felt. I did truly feel so sorry for the people that were in positions that were not able to leave, knew that their responsibility was here with Stennis Space Center. I thought when we left, in fact I told the people in 1200 I was going to go home and see what's there and we'll probably be back. We'll probably be back Tuesday afternoon because we won't have anywhere to stay. We'll just come back and stay here. When we left that's what we believed we would do. That's what the folks in the B-1200 thought that I was going to do. That I would be back that afternoon.

So, we left and were just shocked and amazed. We'd never seen so many trees down, had never seen the type of destruction that we were seeing. One of the first things that we saw totally unbelievable on Interstate-10 headed East, one of the fuel tanks from the Stennis Airport that I believe is normally underground or very near underground was crossways of Interstate-10. I said, "What is that?" My husband said, "That's a fuel tank from the airport." I said, "How did it get here?" He said, "It floated here." You couldn't imagine that there could have been water deep enough to float something like that. There were a couple of cows on the side of Interstate. That didn't make any sense. We don't know where they came from. They were just kind of standing there all by themselves on the side of the Interstate. There were not very many cars. We made it to Long Beach and interestingly enough did not go to our home first. My husband wanted to go to his office. My husband works at Triton so we went by his office and saw that part of the roof had

been blown off and checked out that facility. We went to the other Triton facility, then went by a couple of Triton employees' homes to make sure that they were O.K. and then eventually got to our house. As we were driving down railroad street in Long Beach we were looking South over the tracks. I said, "Bill there's a roof in the middle of that street that's not supposed to be there." We could see all this other stuff that later came to be known as debris had completely filled up the streets. We just knew our house was going to be gone. It had to be because of where it was located. As we approached our house we turned the corner. We weren't saying anything. We were just holding our breath. From the outside, our house looked like it was O.K. The debris from our street filled our yard and actually came up to our front door. We walked through the debris around the house. We had roof damage. We had a broken window. Screen enclosure was down in the pool but from the outside the house was standing and didn't appear to have any water inside. We went inside and there was just a little bit of water around either door but the house was O.K. It was like this is not possible. We walked back outside and there were about four other houses on either side of us that were remaining, standing on our street. There were two roofs in the middle of the street in the piles of debris, our neighbors' roofs. The rest of the street were slabs. I just cried. I cried. I said, "Why us? Why were we saved? Why wasn't our house destroyed?" That probably was my first really strong sense of what I later learned to be survivor's guilt. I felt so guilty because our house was O.K. We spoke with some of our neighbors who rode out the storm in their house. They mentioned to us that some of our neighbors were missing. They knew that they had planned to stay in the storm. We later found out that they did drown. We had walked through the debris and around the debris for about a week and a half before they found their bodies. Then right around where we had been walking, they found their bodies under the debris. The folks that rode out the storm got two inches in their house and ended up riding out the storm in their attic fearing for their lives. I just didn't think it was right. I just felt so guilty that our house was O.K.

We went from there to my brother-in-law's house, my husband's brother's house. On the outside it looked like it was O.K. They lived in Pass Christian Isles. It had gotten 8ft of water in it. It didn't move off its blocks as some of the houses did in that neighborhood but it was filled with water. The furnishings on the inside were just all swirled around. The water had moved into the house and just swirled everything around. We walked across the golf course to take a look at my husband's boss's house and it was near the bayou in Pass Christian Isles also. It got probably 12ft of water and was totally, completely gutted. The furnishings had just been washed out of the house. We again were just in such shock and felt so bad. Everybody had suffered all this and our house was still O.K.

We went back home. We couldn't get in touch with anybody. The one couple on our street and there was nobody else there. Our street had been impassable. The people that stayed had taken chainsaws and cut a very small, narrow path just to our driveway and that was as far as you could go because of the debris. I probably have never felt so isolated in my life. We didn't have electricity. We didn't have a generator. The cell phones didn't work. We knew because there was no electricity we wouldn't be able to get gas. My husband immediately started thinking of ways he could get gas and planned to

siphon gas out of our boat which was in a storage facility and was also safe. That was the first thing that he started figuring out how to do but for those first few days after the storm, I stayed at home. He wouldn't let me leave because we didn't have enough gas and we didn't think we would be able to get gas. We didn't know what was going on anywhere else in the world. Eventually we were able to have a very short conversation with my mother and just gave her a list of names of who to call. I didn't come back to Stennis until the following Sunday. I had been able to by sitting on my roof get a telephone signal and found out that there was gas here at Stennis. So, that was all I needed. It was like I've got to get back to work. I've got to get back to work. When I drove up that day the folks that had lost their homes and returned to Stennis to stay, rushed up to me in B-1200 and said, "What happened to you? We thought your house was gone and you just left. You were going to come back Tuesday afternoon." There I was again, I felt so bad because I didn't go back and they didn't know. We couldn't communicate. You just didn't know what to do.

There was some people here. Stennis was still a shelter. There were tons of people here, public people. Some people had left. You just didn't know what was going on, what was going to happen. The first thing we decided to do was to try to get in touch with all of our employees and find out who was where. We didn't have phones here at Stennis. There were a few places you could get a line on your cell phone just for a few minutes. You would try to call and that would work for a few minutes and then you couldn't get in touch with people. There was still that feeling of total isolation. You were here in another spot but you didn't know what was really going on anywhere else in the world. You couldn't get in touch with folks. The Emergency Operations Center was trying to determine how many Stennis people were still alive and still around and who was where and who had lost their homes. People that could call in, the people that evacuated were calling in and notifying them. That was a source of information. My corporate office was calling from their end. They were calling on the phones that they had trying to get in touch with people on their cell phones. That seemed to be the very, very first order of business after the storm here at Stennis was to locate all the employees and their status. It was grueling because of the lack of communication. There was just no way to get in touch with people. Finally, we were able to compile a list but once we started getting that going then the next thing was we've got to get the site back up and running. We didn't know how long the evacuees were going to be here at Stennis. We didn't know when we would be open for operations again. Our instincts told us there were things that needed to be done. In some cases we could not get in touch with our NASA counterparts to get information from them or direction from them as to what we should do. You felt helpless because you knew there were things that needed to be done with regard to documenting what was going on and yet you didn't know if that's what the government wanted you to do so in most cases we did the best we could. My contract is responsible for working very closely with the Public Affairs Office. One of the other employees whose home was also not damaged returned to Stennis. She and I that first week after the storm did as much as we could do from a standpoint of fulfilling NASA's requirements on a Public Affairs front based on the information we could get. It was crazy. It was almost chaotic. People were bumping into each other in the hall and everybody of course wanted to know immediately what their status was what their condition was and yet we needed to get this

information out. We needed to let the folks that had evacuated from Stennis know to call into Stennis and let us know. I was actually running and delivering press releases to places as was another employee because there was no other way to get information out.

We did have access to some computers but information just wasn't available that we needed to successfully communicate with our folks and with the rest of the world even to let them know that we were O.K.

The biggest thing I guess for me was just not having ever imagined a situation like this, not even in my wildest imaginations. If you haven't lived through something like this, there's no way you could dream it up I don't think. I have to also admit that prior to the storm, I had somewhat of a cavalier attitude about storms not so much that it couldn't hit here but if it did, we would just deal with it and get on. You would just do what you had to do but for the type of storm this was the devastation that it created, I think it rendered people almost helpless to the point of not knowing what to do first. Really it seemed like there wasn't anybody around to tell us what to do first either. I think everybody was in that situation. I know eventually after about a week and a half, I located all of my employees somewhere or else spoke with someone who knew that they were O.K., then just not knowing what to do about work. When were we going to come back to work? We had received communication from my corporate office that the folks were going to be paid. They didn't have to worry about a paycheck. The company was just going to pay them. That wasn't really everybody's first concern. Naturally, in most cases, they had lost their homes or knew someone who had lost their home so they were in unique situations and were just dealing with that. It was the shock and the fact that you just didn't know what to do first was amazing to me.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** No one around this area has every experienced anything like that even though they may have gone through Camille. Considering that, what would you tell someone who might face the same?

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** I would not be a good person to advise anybody what to do. Right now, I personally, I don't know if it is appropriate to say shell-shocked, it may be more appropriate to say storm-shocked. I have repeatedly said, "I don't want to go through another hurricane season. I don't want to deal with it." Even as recently as last night, I told my husband I don't want to go through another hurricane season. I'm probably not in good shape myself and then to experience some of the things that everyone else did, I'm still very angry and mad. I still get upset. It helps coming to Stennis and it helped me after the storm coming to work because as bad as things were here, they didn't look like they did on the Coast. I would cry every afternoon going home. I don't do that anymore but I can still drive down Highway 90 today and get upset again almost like it had just happen. Weird, psychological things happen to you after a storm like this. Right after the storm, I thought, "I need to make a list." I don't know if I was still in a survival mode or what but I needed to make a list of what I was going to take the next time because I would take different things the next time believing that it could be my only chance to take stuff. I think I'm going to have to move the next time. I don't know. My husband and I have agreed that we're not going to live in our house. It's

not up for sale right now but we are going to move. Right now, we have a clear path and a clear shot to the beach. Prior to the storm, there were several homes, condos in front of us. Those are all gone. The next wave is not going to just come up to my front door, it's going to come through my front door and I don't want to be there then. My husband said, "We won't get another storm like that for 30 some years." I don't believe that. He never believed we would get that kind of a storm. I don't know how to tell people... I think everybody should move to the mountains. Certainly, if you do choose to live near the beach and you've been through this storm, then you might be better able to say I can deal with it but if you haven't ever been through a storm like this or any other kind of devastation like this, I would think a tornado might be similar if your house was struck. I don't think you can honestly know how to prepare for it and react. I don't know that you could ever tell anybody that. I mean we could tell people and warn them but I just don't know that you could ever be prepared for something like this.

**MARTIN ORMAOUS:** It has been almost 5 months since Hurricane Katrina hit. Do you still have survivor's guilt?

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** Oh yeah, terribly, terribly so. You feel like well O.K. there must have been some reason that you didn't have to experience what everybody else did so until you ever really know what that reason is the only thing you can do is help people in whatever way that you can. That's still not enough. I would like to just stay home from work and just go around and help folks but I'm not sure that that's the right thing to do. I feel like that maybe the best thing I can do is to be here and to encourage my folks and to hopefully make sure that they have a job.

I will tell this one story. It's a little funny. The first day that the majority or a lot of the employees came back to work, when MSS said, "O.K. if you can, get back to Stennis," I was meeting with the Visitor Relations Specialists in the lobby of B-1200. Some of the folks still lived here on-site. Some of them lived at 1200 at that time. They were kind of sitting around on the floor. We still didn't have power in that building. It was dark. We still had our flashlights. Wendy Lesieur asked the question, "Miss Deborah, do you think we will ever reopen StenniSphere?" I don't know, I guess I was just trying to survive at that time. I said, "Oh, Wendy, you know Linda Theobald. She's going to dream up something. We're going to have StenniSphere open in two weeks. You just wait. We're going to be back up and running. Don't worry. You don't have to worry about your job." I believed that and I said it with such conviction because I truly believed it. That didn't exactly happen. Today is January 19<sup>th</sup> and StenniSphere reopened yesterday, January 18<sup>th</sup>. So for these 4 long months I have been repeatedly trying to encourage the employees and let them know that I believed StenniSphere would reopen and that they would have their jobs back and things would be back to normal. One of things that we've learned, I believe I've learned after the storm is that we will never experience the normal that we knew before. That normal is gone. It will never be back. We're still learning to adjust to the way things are now.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** Is there anything you can think of that we haven't talked about that you think might be pertinent? Anything that particularly surprised you, was an

obstacle that you never ever imagined you might have to face or something that touched you? Something someone did or said?

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** One thing I will mention. Because I would never have been able to imagine devastation of this magnitude, I also never even considered or really gave any thought to the outpouring of support that the Coast has received from I think the phrase is “Faith Based Organizations”. I never thought about that before. I’m not the kind of person that wants or expects the government to take care of me and I will say that emphatically. So, therefore I never thought about FEMA but to see the people that have come from all over the United States and experience their love and their willingness to give and do and give up their own time from their job, their own money, it’s just truly, truly amazing.

One example I’ll mention, my boss, Skip Olson, is in Florida and they’ve experienced storms. His sister lives in Atlanta and once she heard of the number of InDyne employees that lost their homes, she wanted to do something. She has a prayer ministry and what she does is she actually creates quilts for people and over each quilt she prays for them. She wanted to do that for the InDyne employees that lost their homes. That’s just a tiny, tiny example of the way people all over the United States have just come to our aid and our assistance and to me it has been remarkable. I couldn’t imagine the devastation but I never would have imagined that people would have been so supportive and so willing to give and so concerned and cared so much about us. I just think that was an amazing thing that came out of the storm.

**MARTIN ORAMOUS:** We’re good.

**DEBORAH JACKSON:** O.K.

*(End of Interview)*