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Marlene Payne  
Recreation Superintendent  
City of Rocky Mount  
June 1, 2001  
By Alice Thorp  
T40  
Side A & B

Side A

**Alice:** I am Alice Thorp. I am sitting at City Hall on June 1, 2001 with Marlene Payne, who is employed with the City. Marlene, can you tell us what your job title is?

**Marlene:** I'm Recreation Superintendent. And do you want to know what I do?

**Alice:** Yeah.

**Marlene:** Some of the stuff I do. I have...my area of responsibility includes overseeing the operation of the six programming divisions and they are The Art Center, Athletics, The Children's Museum, Neighborhood Programming which includes the river programming in the two community centers, and Special Olympics and a few citywide things...it's not all neighborhood actually...and Senior Programming, and Special Events. I don't dare leave any of those people out. But that...that was six.

**Alice:** And how long have you lived in Rocky Mount?

**Marlene:** Seven years. Actually it was seven years last fall.

**Alice:** And were you personally flooded?

**Marlene:** No, I was not.

**Alice:** And are there any other facts about the nature of your job that you think you need us to know before we sort of get to your story.

**Marlene:** Well, probably a little bit about my background working for the city. I came to Rocky Mount to be director of The Art Center. And that's what I was for five years and I changed jobs, became Recreation Superintendent two weeks before the flood. Actually, on my anniversary date of employment at the Art Center exactly five years after I took that job and, of course, I'm still heavily involved with the Art Center. I don't think I ever would have left that altogether. But, at the time of the flood I was Recreation Superintendent but was still serving pretty much as Art Center Director and still running back and forth a lot from the Art Center to City Hall and...and back again. So, we were in the hiring process when the flood hit. We were, in fact we had Jerry Jackson's interview scheduled the Wednesday morning, the day before the flood hit.

**Alice:** Goodness. And just for the record the...the Art Center was flooded and I'll let you at least mention that in your interview, or in your story. So, would you just tell us your story.

**Marlene:** What happened. Well, yes. The Art Center was flooded badly as was the Children's Museum. In fact, the facilities...the joke was that I was Superintendent of Dumps there for a while because we lost the swimming pools which were in my area of responsibility, both of those. We lost the Art Center and the Children's Museum. We flooded in the lower level of the B. T. Washington Community Center and we had...we lost...we didn't lose but we had a very badly damaged carousel which is also in my area of responsibility. And the train was okay, but the carousel was badly damaged. So, the department...and there was heavy park damage too, you know, tennis court fences, ball fields. Battle Park had many, many huge trees down. So, the department took a really, really big hit. And it...Wednesday...that Wednesday was a really busy day. Jerry's interview...Jerry Jackson's interview was scheduled for that Wednesday morning and I remember Pete Armstrong, my boss, who was the department...the Director of Parks & Rec

stuck his head in my office and said, "Do you think maybe we ought to cancel this interview because there is all this stuff going on?" You know, we were preparing for bad weather. And I don't know...I just... Well, let's just go ahead and do it. Let's just get that one out of the way and it...then it's done. And...and we did. It was probably a bit hurried, but it was, as it turned out it was a really good thing that we did that. After that...

**Alice:** Could I just interject one thing?

**Marlene:** Sure.

**Alice:** Now Jerry Jackson is...you hired to become the Director of the Art Center. Am I correct?

**Marlene:** Right. We did. In fact, we hired Jerry in a...we didn't exactly follow usual procedure to hire Jerry. I mean, we did technically but the time frame was a little strange 'cause normally Human Resources, well, do background checks and all that. Of course, Jerry was already employed with us. He was the Visual Arts Program Coordinator at the Art Center and had been for some time. So, they were already familiar with his background. And then they notified people by letter and all that kind of thing. But, of course, in...in the crisis on the weekend...by the weekend it was very apparent that the Art Center really needed somebody that was...that belonged to it. That staff needed that. And needed somebody who was out there with that as the focus in making, you know, to make decisions and to handle things without having to worry about all the other divisions. You know, somebody that was really dedicated to the Art Center and nothing else at the time. So I ran into Janice Cox who's the Human Resources Director in a hallway somewhere in City Hall. We were both working in Emergency Operations Center that weekend. I said, "Janice, is there any way that we can go ahead and hire Jerry this weekend?" And, because of circumstances and she said, "Oh yes". And so she and her people expedited the

process. And he became Art Center Director and his...of course his...I was Superintendent of Dumps and he was Director of Nothing. I...it was just kind of a little inside joke. But, after we interviewed Jerry on Wednesday, Pete and I went out looking for food. Now all the departments in the city had specific areas of responsibility should an emergency occur. And Parks & Recreation, our department was responsible for manning shelters and coming up with food for city workers and shelters, as best we could. And so, that...that's why we were out on this food search and Pete had a van, at the time. So, we were out all afternoon buy...buying food and...which was quite an experience in itself. I mean, it was the strangest thing to me to go in grocery stores and see rows of empty shelves because lots of people were preparing for the storm and it was not a lot of food out there. Well, there was a lot but it was strange. It would be like, I don't know, six kinds of artichoke hearts or things like that. But we did get a lot of food. We went...I remember going to Harris Teeter. We went to Hannaford. The manager...Hannaford was closed actually and somehow Pete rounded up the manager's phone number and the man came down there and let us in. And, so, we...we got that van just as full as we could get it. At that point we really were just trying to buy enough for the two shelters in town that we thought we might fill up. And, of course, in our experience around here when you open shelters you probably have as many people from the coast seeking shelter as anywhere else. I mean, I don't know that we thought too much about filling them...them up with our own people. So, we did all that and I guess I ought to say a little bit before I get into the Floyd story about previous floods of the Art Center because we had had two. I've been in...before Floyd. I had been in Rocky Mount, oh I don't know, about a year I guess when Fran hit and following Fran there was a flood that went in the buildings at the Art Center. Fran was a strange flood to...well, I had never been in a

flood so I guess any flood would have been strange but it was very slow coming on. I m...the water came up just very, very slowly. It was hot. It was humid. It was a really nasty flood. And, of course, I know now all floods are really nasty. I mean, there dirty, they...the odor is that people mention...that terrible old odor is...there just ugly things. And Fran was...the water went in the building and it stayed there for days and it was probably, I don't know, about twelve inches deep, I guess, in the highest gallery, in the main gallery of the Art Center and it was in the orchestra pit but that was mostly seepage in the Playhouse. It did a lot of damage in the Art Center to the lower floor because it was in there so long and the walls absorbed all the water and all that. We had evacuated things. So we didn't lose art, we didn't lose equipment because we...we had...had time to get it all up. And so that was okay. But we still had to tear out the thing. You know, the...the walls and replace everything downstairs and so you kind of are out of commission, you know, in that process. So it's kind of a hassle. That was, they said the worse flood that had happened here in anybody's living memory anyway. And low and behold just a year and a half later we didn't have another one. And actually that was after one of those B hurricanes. Now I...I'm not even sure which one it was. Bonnie maybe? But anyway, that flood came in a little quicker. We still had time to do things, I mean it took hours and hours from the time we knew it was coming until it really got into the building, but that one...the water was in and out quicker and it really did much less damage but it was more water. And that time the water didn't just seep up through the orchestra pit of the playhouse. That time the water actually came in through the side doors of the House. In to where the audience sits. And I think very few people in town probably even in the city government really knew that the Playhouse had had water in it from flood twice and the second time it wasn't seepage water, it was water outside the

building rushing in doors. Still we were very much aware of it. You know, when you...you live with it and you live with the clean up and all, I mean, you...you don't forget. We were flooded...had been flooded twice. Well, then when the weather got really bad before Floyd. We were concerned...we figured that we would probably have another Fran type experience, that it was possible at any rate. But all you know is what you've experienced really, or what somebody else has experienced and we had had two floods that took hours and hours for the water to rise, even days, a couple of days. And there...I must say though that the water did not behave exactly the same way in the first two floods which still is a puzzle to me. I don't really understand that. With the first one, the water came in the front door. With the second one, the first big water was seeping through the rim in the back of the Tank. So, I don't know why it behaved differently, why it seeped in the orchestra pit and why it then came in the doors as a major problem and second and I don't know why that surprises me. I don't know how you account for that you would think that low places are low places and that's where it would be first every time. And that was true to an extent but not completely and that was something of a surprise. But after the food buying expedition that Pete and I had been on we...we took all the food to City Hall and unloaded it and...'cause we're pretty wet by now. I mean it's raining and windy and everything and by the time we did all that and got it all unloaded it was about 10:30 at night and I went home. And I just live on Hammond Street. I live down at the far end near the Art Center. And so it's not far at all from City Hall and I didn't have to deal with places that are low and where you can see any flooding. But I had just gotten home and gotten dry and the phone rang and it was Pete and Pete lives in Northgreen and going home he had crossed water and he...he said, "You know, that water's getting kinda high maybe you ought to check on the Art Center." So...so I did. I went

back down there and it was really raining hard and it was a little bit windy. The water, you know, the rain wasn't coming straight down and there was an awful lot of rain. And...but it looked fine down there and I pointed my headlights toward the river, there's a little parking lot that kind of abuts almost abuts on the river itself. It's, you know, a lot of people go there and put their boats in at the end of the parking lot and the river it was fine. It was about to overflow but it wasn't really bad. It was just beginning to come into the corner of the parking lot there. So I turned the car around and pointed the headlights toward the corner of our little warehouse building and the dumpster, the garbage dumpster... dumpster and between those two things was the first place in the previous two floods that water had encroached on buildings. So, I thought well, you know, if...if that's clear we're fine, at least until tomorrow afternoon. This is based on history and how fast it comes up. So, there...there was no water there. There were puddles all around because of the rain, but it was not river water. It...it...it...it wasn't. So I thought, oh well, we're in pretty good shape. We don't really have to worry about anything tonight. And so I started to go home and I pulled back around in front of the tank and remembered that Jerry Jackson, who was our Visual Arts Program Coordinator...he's the person that's responsible for exhibitions and curates them but also cares for them and a person that you're really going to need if you have to...to move things and make decisions about what to do about art. And Jerry had just moved and had a new phone number which I knew was taped to the Director's desk in the office in the...in the Tank. So, I thought, well okay. I didn't really want to get out in that rain again but okay we'll...we'll do that just in case I need it quickly. And so I...when I t...unlocked the door and opened it and just right away there was water in there and it was, I think, at that time about four inches deep and there was this noise that was unlike anything that I've ever heard before and it soun...The first

thing I thought of was water falls, which that can't be. And then all of a...and the stench hit. And I okay, this is sewage. This is not flood water, this is backup. And...but it was still such a puzzle so I just waded on it. I mean we had an exhibition up and...and what the noise was and where it was coming from was the toilets. Both the...there is very small men's and women's toilets in the core of the Tank on first floor and they each had one toilet and out of each of those toilets was coming a column of water the same size as the opening of the toilet bowl. And it was just coming out, just columns of water going up against the ceiling and splashing down. It was just a roar. It was amazing. (Laughter) I could never imagine anything like that. And so that's what it was. Well, it finally dawned on me that I needed to go open the front door and when I did that the water immediately, you know, rushed out and it went down to about two inches but it stayed, the water level...the sewage, whatever it was, we don't want to think about what it was, stayed at about two inches. So, of course, I went in there and got that phone number and I called Jerry and then I called Larry Camp to send a crew, a Parks Maintenance crew, whose...they're a wonderful, wonderful support system and Larry sent a crew over, I don't remember how many now. It's hard for those...the crew, Parks Maintenance people are not really accustomed to moving art and the exhibit that was up then was...in half the gallery was the Deaner Circus. Mr. Deaner lives in Greenville. He's elderly, in very poor health and he has spent. Now he is. He had spent forty years of his life carving this little wooden circus and it's wonderful and...but...and that's what was in there. So Jerry and I moved the circus. We had to take it apart and pack it up and take it upstairs and the guys helped with bigger things and we didn't move a lot of equipment and that kind of thing upstairs. I do remember we moving a couple of chairs, you know, a few things that were not art upstairs. It's...it's funny what you do. Based on our experience we ...we decided,

okay, the water got this high the highest in...in... probably after the Bonnie one it may have gotten to eighteen inches in back of the Tank. Something like that. And so we put all of the equipment up high probably a good two feet higher than the water had ever been before, with the copiers, the computers, the files, all of that, we moved up but, of course, that turned out we didn't move it up enough. So, we did all of that and we left, I guess, about 1:30. There were other things in there, too.

**Alice:** 1:30 Thursday morning.

**Marlene:** Thursday morning. Yeah. And we just went home. And...still with not a clue really about how different it was and probably even less a clue about it than a lot of other people at the time because we had been flooded twice and at that point, when we left at 1:30 we knew we were going under. There was no doubt. The water had risen rapidly and I guess maybe that was sort of a clue but it didn't really sink in. Because in the past, it had come up so much slower than that, but we really didn't pick up on that at the time. We knew it was coming in. There was no doubt that we were going to have water.

**Alice:** So at 1:30 when you left, water - not from the toilets but from the river, was coming into the Tank.

**Marlene:** No, it wasn't coming into the Tank but it was coming around the corner of the Pumphouse. You know, right next to the tank and we knew the way it was moving that it was coming in. It just never occurred to us that it would come in as much as actually did. And so we just left. I mean, you know, had we had any idea obviously we...we would have taken everything up to second floor. We did not go to the Play House. I don't know that was going on over there at the time. We had the immediate concern of the Deaner Circus and the things...you

know that kind of thing on the first floor of the Tank and we did have an exhibition, an art exhibition, up in the Lobby of the Play House, because we use that for exhibition space because we are terribly short on...on that, so we \_\_\_\_\_ that to service. But, we didn't really worry about it because that is so much higher than the first floor of the Tank. The Lobby, especially, that's the highest part of the Play House. The stage is considerably lower than that. So we didn't really worry about that at all. And, at that point I was go...if the water is gushing out of the toilets over there it's removed from the art that was there and the art that was there was oil, it was not work under glass. So, we just didn't even need to know that at that point and since we...you know...it just never occurred to us the water would get so deep. So we did not go move that. So th..that happened to be a Senior show for a young painter who was a student at ECU. It was his senior show. His...the chair, the painting chair at ECU, who is Paul Hartley, had come to the opening of the show so he had seen the work. And..so you know, this is something that this young man needed to graduate and so...but it had been seen. As it turned out, Jason, the bo...painter, did put together another body of work and have another show though he didn't have to do that he just.... Well, maybe he did in a way compelled from within but not required to by...by the..by the School of Art. But anyway, so there was that...and that's a big regret.

**Alice:** Ultimately, his art did flood.

**Marlene:** It did flood. And...Jason had...had entered, Jason Smith, had entered the outdoor art show, the previous one and had gotten best in show and the best in show is the purchase award for us. So, it ends up in the permanent collection of the Art Center. So, we had this piece that will for...that will forever be associated in our mind, I guess, with the flood and another artist, who did a flood piece, which I happen to have at home, used his piece within her piece because

it's this boy bending over this black bar across and he's kind of looking down over everything. And so, in the piece that I have he's up at the top looking down at the destruction of the Art Center with this black thing...it's very...you know, kind of effective. And....there is a po...I don't know if you noticed in my office when we were in there, there's a post card, our announcement for that show, with that piece on it is...is there on my desk. It's been there ever since the flood. But, it's just, you know, one of those things you kind of hook on to. And it's...but we did really feel terrible about that, though he was great about it. Jerry was the one actually who had the courage to make the phone call and tell...tell him about the loss. But...so that...that was...that was not a pleasant thing ...and we just hated that. Okay, so we did leave though, finally at around 1:30 and went home, went to bed. I think I was amazed that we still had power at that point, we did. But the next morning when I got up...in fact, it's funny, going home and I live about 30 seconds from the parking lot. That's why I live there because I was the one they called in the middle of the night when the burglar alarm went off at the Art Center, so I deliberately got very close to it. But, all of a sudden going home, I...it hit me how nasty, filthy, yucky I was and it was just...just all of a sudden to horribly disgusting. So, I remember, I stopped on the back porch and I wasn't going to take that stuff in my house (laughter) and got rid of it and was very much aware that I got a hot bath when I got home. There...there was still power and there was hot water and that was such a big treat at the time. But...actually, when I got up the next morning, whenever it was, I don't remember, we still had power but it did leave before I left the house. I went into the Emergency Operation Center about 7:00 and that was just an incredible experience, the...the Emergency Operation Center. You sat th...I think there were about two people from each department that.... There were a couple of people from each department there that were assigned

to take calls. The calls had been screened in the Call Center and if they couldn't deal with them in the Call Center, they would send them to the appropriate person. Of course, ours...and...and...and the people in the field were reporting to their supervisors there too. It was set up in a U-shape, you know, the tables were in a U-shape and everybody had, I guess, two phones in front of them and we were positioned in there right straight across, toward the end of one of the arms, straight across from the Fire Chief, and the police chief and...and their folks. Which means that the emergency...you know, we were very much aware of the all the emergency calls, the rescue calls coming in. But then we would have our own thing to worry about which was finding food in all of this mess and the problems at the shelters because the shelters got very full very quickly. And We had to open up more and get people to them and, you know, it..it was just kind of a monumental problem. So, you are busy and you...you're dealing with all of this, and if there was any kind of lull or a pause in the conversation or something you would be aware that there is this highly dramatic thing going on near you. Like there are so many people, you know, stuck here and a tree we need to get a boat to get them out. I remember one time, a helicopter person had called in and this was later, saying that we had dropped all of these people that we've rescued by the side of the road, what do we do...you know, just all of these things going on and you would hear this little fragments of it and then be distracted by your own thing to do. And it was like there were all of these adventure movies going on around you and it was just really incredible and..I think...and people would come in to report to their supervisors and you would here pieces of stories. It was a hectic place, it was really busy, it was noisy, there was a lot of really frantic activity for the first day or so. The only time I remember it being still was when, I think it was a news...a TV news person, I think from Raleigh brought a video, an aerial video in.

And the people in EOC really hadn't seen that much because they were in the EOC and they didn't have..., you know, they weren't seeing the water and they brought this aerial thing in, it had to be the next morning. And, it was incredible and you...you could not hear a sound in that room because everybody just was in awe of all that water, and how amazing it was. And the only sound was this...a phone would ring and somebody would very quietly deal with it while this video was going on. I think everybody was just kind of stunned and in fact Janice Cox in her story described this one big group gasp as she called it and that's very appropriate. It was very interesting. But the whole experience was really surreal. It was just not anything that happens to ordinary people like us and I don't know...it's just really kind of hard to...to describe it. Some of the calls were funny. Some were frightening and some were funny. The lady wanted us to send somebody in a boat to...to mail her utility bill (laughter) and things like that, you know, and then it was just a really strange thing. It was just really odd. But...and I really don't know how to describe it. The...one of the things that you hear over and over, too, is...is when fin...people finally do get out...was about...what they saw after. And, we never really...those of us that were working up there all...all weekend really saw very little of the water. We saw the pictures and that was awesome. We saw some...and, of course, I was going down...we had opened Edwards Junior High as a site to feed city workers and since I was involved with that.....staffing...getting people down there to man it and rounding up food, I was in and out of there a few times. So, I did see the water all down in that end of Hammond Street and down around the Art Center. I went down there two or three times and that was pretty spectacular, really. But, it was just a strange thing. But, afterward, because, you know, I was out checking facilities and we were out doing this, that and the other...afterwards, as soon as the water went down, FEMA...FEMA came in. Well

FEMA came in before. But, we began working on the FEMA grant application process which involves all kinds of documentation so we had to have people out at the buildings when the crews came in to strip them. You know, which they did quickly. There's contamination and they get everything out and so everybody has their stuff out on the curb and we had...with city facilities...we had staff there writing down everything that came out, which...and Ann Wall made us do that...our budget manager, and she was right because that...you have to document it or you can't get the money to replace it. So...and that was a hard thing to do for some people with some things. And...the Art Center and the Children's Museum particularly, it was hard, and...and could be kind of emotional. These huge piles of debris...I think...and looking back there were two main images from the flood. One was the water...all that water and that was an awesome sight, I mean, that just struck...struck awe...in everybody who saw it...and that's one thing people feel is awe, I guess. But I think the thing that really hit the heart and soul of people, that tugged at the heart strings...that really hurt, was after...was seeing the debris and...and all of these ruined things and everything people owned. That...that was really hard and I got a phone call about the second day, I guess. I was back in my office after...after the EOC from a woman who was a photographer, who had been hired by one of the news services, I think. It wasn't the local paper or anything. She had come in and...and whoever hired her had sent her all over eastern North Carolina taking flood pictures. She had called because she had been to the Art Center to take pictures and she needed some information for identification of the facility, and so she got whatever she needed...and then she said "I must ask you... I must tell you something". She said "I've been everywhere in the past few days, all over eastern North Carolina. I have seen terrible things, I've seen frail, elderly people, you know, hauled out of attics. I've seen just all of this

devastation and it's been really hard, but I've done really well until I went to the Art Center".

And she said, "There was all of this debris and she said there was this door and when I saw this door, I fell apart". Well, I knew exactly what she was talking about. That summer, we had run...we always ran lots of arts, we still do, run lots of art camps at the Art Center and we had run 35 that summer and that was part of Jerry Jackson's job is doing...getting those together. And, he had had all of the kids in the Art Camps all summer had put their hand prints on these two big old closet storage closet doors we had in the Pumphouse, and the staff too, everybody. And, so it had just been done that summer and it was all bright and shiny and new and she said there was this huge pile of rubble with this door sticking out with all these bright kid's hand prints and she said it just all hit me, all of a sudden, what the debris meant. And she said there I was in the parking lot of the Art Center just coming to pieces after...but...and I think that is the effect the debris had on just about everybody...I think that's the thing that we...we'll all carry with us. It's one of those things. I did finally and I wanted to mention this because I don't know how it came to be, but it was a nice thing. I don't know when this was either. I'm not good with time...but, a few days later it occurred to me that probably a tetanus shot would be in order, after slugging around in all of that stuff in the Art Center. So, I asked Jerry, you know, about his and Jerry had been out of the country not too long before to he was current and I wasn't. So I went to get a tetanus. I called my doctor and went over...I remember going up to pay for it, and they said "No, we...we don't charge people who were exposed because of the flood". And that was a nice thing and I don't know if that was a program that was out there at the time but it...it was...it was still a nice thing. And right now...I guess that's pretty much my flood story.

**Alice:** Well, I have a few questions. Going back to the shelters, I now you had mentioned

that...before in storms we had more of our occupants were from the coast versus Rocky Mount. This time, would you say the majority, obviously the majority, but...were Rocky Mount people or....

**Marlene:** Yes. Well, the flood...these people were flood victims. In the past, I think, we have had sort of refugees from the coast from wind and that kind of thing. The flood came from the other direction and we were really one of the hardest hit, first, early on. They were our people, they were by, in large, people who had been plucked from water. I know, at R.M. Wilson Gym, that first night, everybody was wet and I know that Lynn Driver and his folks, Carlton Alston...Carlton runs adult league sports programs and Lynn is the Athletic Director. They were over at R.M. Wilson giving away or giving these...extra, baseball pants, the football pants, any T-shirts from teams, or anything like that to people because everybody that came in was wet and cold. And...No, these were flood victims. See, and it moved...it moved from the west - east and the people east got hit after we did. So, these were not coastal refugees at all. These were our own folks, I think.

**Alice:** And how many shelters do we traditionally have in Rocky Mount and what are they.

**Marlene:** Well, usually, their Red Cross does them...sets them up and I know in the past, I remember just being told when we get an emergency alert that...I remember at one point, Benvenue Elementary School was one...in some past thing when we were getting ready...I don't know if it was ever...well, I think it was, as a matter of fact, for coastal people mainly. The schools. We only had Parker Middle School and R.M. Wilson that set up and then I think the Red Cross had sent out in the county and I'm not familiar with those. They filled up really quickly and we had to open another one and I really...I was doing something else at the time...I was not

involved in that one or even getting it opened...I do remember having trouble getting permission to open a school. And, you know, I remember all of that going on, but I really wasn't involved with that. It...it...well it was just amazing. And one of the big problems with shelters...that happened this time, that I don't think had hap...we'd never thought about happening, is that we were cut off. People were cut off from the shelter to which they would normally have gone, you know, had they needed...they just couldn't get there. So you ended up with these strange concentrations of people not what you would expect. I think the city was divided into three or four parts and you just couldn't get from one to the other. So that was a problem as well. Actually, there were people everywhere, in the firestations, they were in City Hall, they were everywhere.

**Alice:** So in lieu of being able to get shelters open because we were divided into four pockets, people were allowed to just come to a public facility, such as the fire station or City Hall to just be safe and dry and out of the elements.

**Marlene:** Yeah. In that kind of situation, you do what you can. I mean, you take them wherever you can and you couldn't get very many places. And I think a lot of the people...I think a lot of the people did not co...I think a lot of the people were actually taken....the fire department rescued huge numbers of people and they put them wherever in first...they put them wherever they could put them.

**Alice:** You talk about the...the getting food for people for...for in the shelters as well as for the workers. You were at Parker, I believe, you said?

**Marlene:** At Edwards. We fed...we fed...

**Alice:** Would you bring in the cooking staff from the...the Edwards School or did you just do

prepared...I mean, you just tried to provide food that you did not have to do anything with?

**Marlene:** Well, there was no power at this point, you know. So, it was kind of a challenge. The whole food thing was a challenge. And the food situation is probably, something that will be handled differently in the future. I think the fire department, the police department will probably work more on taking care of their own people because in that kind of situation, you have transport problems. You have grocery stores closed. You do not have restaurants open and that kind of thing so people get resourceful. We had sent Jerry Jackson out, I remember. But, he was the first one we sent out. Because the...the food that Pete and I had gotten the day before was gone...just in a skin minute. So, Jerry went out, and at that point early on, ended up...I think he did get a lot of snacks and that kind of thing for R.M. Wilson from a convenient store somewhere. We ended ...and...and I remember him going out with Jacob Parker and then another trip with Steve Warren, these were park maintenance folks, and they'd go to Raleigh and fill up the trucks. We...the Western Sizzler fed a lot workers, you know, just anybody that we could get that could manage to cook the food, and we had some catered from Raleigh that was brought in. In fact, at Edwards, most of the food, you know, and some and we had some catered from Raleigh that was bought in. In fact, at Edwards most of the food was brought in. You know, people that those big...those wagon things, you know those .people that cater barbecues. And you know, they take those cookers out. They had those were doing the cooking....and that's not every restaurant, you know. You are pretty limited and probably there are city employees who will not touch chicken to this day (laughter)...so that seemed like that was every meal. And so we... and we brought food into City Hall. There was a large workforce in operation during all those hours. City employees were everywhere doing everything. That was pretty amazing and they were

wonderful. I...I was very proud of them. It was...

**Alice:** What...what was the average...for most city employee when he came to work. How long were their shifts...would they work twelve...obviously, more than a 8 hour day. But would they just sort of stay until they couldn't...

**Marlene:** Well, it was funny. A lot...some of the things you did depended on circumstances. If something needed to be done, people stayed and did it and I talked to a fireman this morning who was there the first seventy-two hours. I went in at 7:00 to the EOC and Pete had been there all night...or...or not all night, but he was there when I got there because he had gone home...I don't know, it all runs together...but anyway, he...he was there before I was. And late that afternoon he said "I need to go home and get cleaned up and you hold down the fort and I'll be back". And so he went home and of course the water was still rising and he couldn't get back. Which, meant that I had a 24 hour shift because I ended up being the Parks and Recreation person there and then you would go home, take a nap, and you'd go back. I think it was...if you could go home, that's what you did. A lot of people couldn't, a lot of people couldn't get back home - they got trapped on the other end, the opposite end from Pete, and they slept in their offices, here and there, and were here for days.

**Alice:** How long was it, I...I can't remember, before you could get around...before the pockets ...the water receded enough to be able to motivate around the...the city?

**Marlene:** Oh, I'm not good with time. I'm thinking it was maybe Monday or so. When it crested and you could...

**Alice:** It crested on Thursday.

**Marlene,** No, I think it crested later than that.

**Alice:** Later than that?

**Marlene:** Uh huh. It continued to rise.

**Alice:** That's right. Because we left, I guess it must have crested some time on Friday.

**Marlene:** I'm really not clear on that.

**Alice:** So it was probably Sunday or Monday?

**Marlene:** I do remember...I remember a lot of talk...there was a lot of concern with the rescue people about they were going to find on Monday, so that's why I think the water was at least...they expected it to be going down on Monday because the current had been so swift and there had been so many elderly people rescued from ....well, the Riverside area, Duke Circle, down in there and all, that they were really afraid that they hadn't gotten everybody and they were very nervous about that. They were dreading Monday. So, I think that was when they expected it to go down...as it turned out, it was...it was amazing that...that the death toll was as low as it was and I think that all of the people who...who were, well the three, I think who were killed, were in cars, they weren't trapped in houses. And when you think about how many people actually were trapped in houses, that's pretty amazing. But there was a lot of tension in the EOC about that. Are we getting them all? You know.

**Alice:** How long did the EOC...how long was it manned on the 24 hour basis? Once...once it started on Wednesday, sort of when was the time that...that it...

**Marlene:** Stopped? Hum. I think there was somebody over there probably through most of the next week in the day time. I don't think it was at night. I think that I left...I think I went back to my office totally on Tuesday. But, there were a few people that were still working. I don't think they were working then all through the night or maybe one person was in there. But, all of the

departments weren't manning their stations then. I think through the weekend was...was pretty much it...through Saturday anyway.

**Alice:** How do...how do you feel about I...I...the employees and...and how the city responded? How...first of all let me...I guess I should separate the question. When I...When we look at how Rocky Mount responded to this, not having anything to base any of this on, in previous history, how do you feel about the way they responded and do you think we learned some things and hopefully we want have to use what we learned again, but...but...

**Marlene:** Hopefully, we can use what we learned, hopefully, in not that kind of situation again. I think employees responded extremely well. There were heroes all over the place. I saw extraordinary things, and people were selfless. And...A lot of these people, a lot of these people, had been flooded out of their home. A lot of them kept on working. And I know that it was not easy to see what happened to the Art Center and I have five years of my professional life invested there and I...you know, that was work down the river and that doesn't feel good. I cannot imagine how people coped with that and with their personal loss. I just can't imagine it. I don't know, a lot of it is adrenaline rush, at the first. It is. I think people do...ordinary people do extraordinary things and thank goodness, they...they...they really responded well. I think the community did too. I think from what I've seen the community has responded well. We are in a really unusual time right now, I think, because of the flood. It's a very exciting time and a very difficult one and we have a chance now to be better. And you know, usually if you get a chance to be better, you have to somehow make it, and you work, you know gradually, toward becoming better. We have a chance to look and see what happened and see what was wrong with what we had, as wonderful as it was, and do better all of a sudden. We can do that and I think that is the

case. I think that, the...what we want to do with the cultural complex, with the children's museum and the Art Center, building it up there near the library and doing that really wonderful thing is so exciting. And, and I loved the Art Center...I mean, I love it. But I know, that it... it would not...we didn't need to go back there. There are number of reasons...people still ask...well, you know why didn't you go back? And it was funny, I think it was when the flood hit, it never entered any of our minds to stay out, that we would not go back, until we got to that debris stage. And then it hit everybody. Because, bear in mind, this was out third time that I don't know if I can take this anymore and even though this one was much more devastating, the others were still very trying and in fact, some story that I taped earlier, had said about his people. This was Chief Jones, Fireman, that....'cause I asked him, "Could you do it again, could you do it again?", and he said "Yes, I think we could, but then we would lose people". If we had to do it again, we could do it because you can only put so much of this kind of thing...because it is emotional...even when it's your work, it's still...it's hard to take. And we can only put so much of this on the same people. They can only absorb so much. And, I think that's kind of the way the Art Center st...staff was. I think had we been told to go back in there, that probably, everybody would have started looking for jobs elsewhere. I think we would have lost them because it's very disheartening to have to go through that over and over. Plus the fact that we were absolutely busting the seams at that place, we were just busting the seams. So, we now have an opportunity to correct those things and the danger is, that fear will keep us from doing it, right. And, it's the Roosevelt thing, the only thing we have to fear now is the fear itself and an economic downturn - people get very conservative when really the best thing we could do for the economy would be to make that special and a big really economic asset so, but still, you know, you have to deal with

that climate. And just as a kind of personal footnote to the whole flood experience for me, and...and this is to tell you that I don't take leaving the Art Center lightly at all. I think all of us who work there were very emotionally attached, but we...but we don't want to...didn't want to go back, but still I, several months ago, I caught myself. I live on the end of Hammond Street, down there. It's not too far from Nashville Road, it's just a couple of houses this side of the school and I...I buy my groceries at Harris Teeter. Well, several months ago I realized that I was driving home from the grocery store down Sunset and it hit...okay, now why are you doing this because before the flood, I never, ever did that. I went to the Harris Teeter down Nashville Road and Bethlehem and Beechwood and over. It's quicker, it's easier, you know, and I always said that and I realized that since the flood I don't do that anymore. So I said, okay Marlene, let's face this. I do not like going by the Art Center. It's derelict and deserted and sad and I just don't want to see it. So, it's still..you know, it's still there. We have...we hope...we have plans...we talk about what's going to happen to the Art Center next. I want to make it my own personal favorite. I want it to be a climbing wall and I want a ropes course and get into this outdoor...it's a beautiful park...beautiful park and I think that probably once it's used and cared for I'll find myself driving that way to Harris Teeter again, but, you know it's that kind of thing. So we didn't take it lightly and the way I feel about it is not the exception. Among staff people's the way it is. I find it easier that the Children's Museum is gone altogether (laughter)...I mean, it's easier to go over there to Sunset Park for me. I think everybody here is always going to miss what's gone, the houses, and all of that. It's just...that's really tough. But, we do have this chance to do some wonderful things. And we have the talent. We have...our staff is great. We have the ability to do this and really do it well, so...and...and with the library...I mean, it's just the most amazing

thing and we have other opportunities because we lost other things. We lost, you know, swimming pools and Rocky Mount had a lot of need anyway in terms of...of recreation. We didn't have a lot of facilities, you know, to do a lot of things, a lot of different programs. So, we really need to look at how we come back and we...because, this is our chance, this is our big opportunity to come back as a really special place, with a lot to offer industry and business and all, I think, decisions that are being made right now are really, really important ones.

**Alice:** That certainly sounds like it. I can see where you say that and I think we do have the opportunity to...to make it better than what we had and it gives us a way to turn a horrible situation into something that...that in the long run has ended up helping our community in some ways. Because there are so many negative scars, as you have a scar, all of us has psychological scars I think, those even who weren't flooded, have guilt because they weren't.

**Marlene:** And we run into that. Survivor's guilt. Sure.

**Alice:** Right, so I think this gives us a way to possibly turn something into a...a plus for us down the road. We are about a year and a half away now, how do you feel the recovery...I know you have plans for the Imperial Center, I know that as far as Parks & Recreation are concerned, you have sort of come up with your plans and you're aggressively working towards those, but how do you feel the recovery on a whole, the efforts have been throughout the city and...

**Marlene:** I think...I'm really proud of the efforts as a whole. And people have come back in sort of an amazing way. Not everybody, and I hate that. Some people...some people just can't. I think if they possibly could, they did and that's a real credit to them. I think everybody has made an effort. I don't hear a lot of whining. I hear no whining about what I've lost. I've heard none of that and that's wonderful. That's pretty amazing. The city, itself, I think as a whole, not just

my department, but the...the city really cares. I've worked for government agency for a long time, not a city government. Before I came here I worked for a special purpose district which is kind of a different thing. But this city really does care, I mean, they...they do want it to work well. And, I think they have instituted things, I think, immediately when they saw what could happen. They took steps to handle it the next time. I think they were as well prepared for what happened as any city could have been. Probably, much better prepared than...than most would have been for what happened to them. And they made huge effort...the FEMA...they have been meticulous, with the FEMA thing. It's a...a monumental chore. I wouldn't have believed how complicated it can be and all the things you have to...to do. But, they have done it. They have seen to it that it's been done and it's been done right. And that's our salvation here, really, is that FEMA money. And you don't get it unless you do that well and they've done a super job of that. Their hazard mitigation management has been just really, really good. And I know it moves a lot slower than...than people would like it to, but it moves...think about many things in federal government...it's moved faster than...than a lot of other things do. I think all of that has gone really, really well. It's not that the city is perfect, it isn't, but it does try and it does care and I think that what happens reflects that. That it's willing...the management puts tremendous amount of effort into doing...doing well and doing things correctly and taking care of it's citizens. I've been real impressed with that. I'm not a native, I don't have to say that. You know, you know it's not my home town, as such, but I've been really pleased. Yeah, they've been very responsible.

**Alice:** Well, I want to thank you for your interview. This has been wonderful, I think. And I can obviously sense your emotion and your involvement and I thank you and I thank all of the city

people for us. I think, we as citizens, have certainly been much more enriched because of the people that we have working for us, and I thank you and I would like to ask one last question. Would you give us oral permission to keep these tapes in our archive and to use them in our book.

**Marlene:** Certainly.

**Alice:** Thank you.

**Marlene:** You're welcome.