

Anne Levy Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Anne Levy at her home, 3135 Octavia, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Tuesday, November 14, 2006. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Anne, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Anne Levy: Yes.

RH: Okay. We're going to put your life – your Katrina story a little bit in the context of your life, so if you wouldn't mind just explaining, talking a little about your general education and your Jewish education and how you came to be in New Orleans.

AL: Okay. Well, the first thing is my family, my sister, and I are Holocaust survivors. Our history is a little bit different as far as the education part goes. We came here in 1949.

We started school for the first time. As far as our Jewish education, our parents joined Chevra Thilim Synagogue, which was on Claiborne Avenue. We also went, before there, to Beth Israel Sunday School when we first came to New Orleans. As far as my Jewish education before that, I had very little of it. I knew I was Jewish, and I knew we went through all that we went through because we were Jewish, but I didn't really remember any Jewish holidays or Jewish celebrations until after the war. That was when we arrived in Germany and they started the Jewish community there of survivors. That was my first taste of Jewish life and Jewish education.

RH: You came to New Orleans in 1949.

AL: Correct.

RH: Where did you live in New Orleans?

AL: Not too far from here. Well, we first lived on Josephine Street. The Federation found an apartment for us, which was very hard because, by that time, my brother was born in 1948, so when we arrived here, he was eleven months old. It was very hard to find apartments that would accept children – children and dogs. They used to have signs out there: “No children and no dogs.” But the Federation found us an apartment on Josephine Street, and that's when my sister and I started our first school experience here in the States at Jackson Elementary. We had very little – we didn't speak English, but the teachers were fantastic. That's where we started school. From there, my parents bought a house on Eden Street, which is not too far from here. My dad re-did the house, and that was where we lived, also in the Broadmoor section is what it's called.

RH: So, describe the neighborhood where you live now.

AL: Well, at that time, it was a great neighborhood. You knew all of your neighbors. It was working people. My dad did the work himself on the house when he refurbished it, and we were among other Jewish and non-Jewish families living on Eden Street and the surrounding area. It was close enough to where we could walk to synagogues during the holidays when we were in high school. It was a great neighborhood. As a matter of fact, this neighborhood, I used to go down on Nashville Avenue to get to school or catch the bus and go to McMaine, which was the next school. I went for two years there and two years into Fortier High School. That's when, as far as school went, I was enrolled to start Tulane, but then the proposal came, and I got married instead.

RH: You married your husband instead of Tulane.

AL: Right.

RH: And Sophie Newcomb.

AL: Right.

RH: Can you tell me? Was there any discrimination? Or have you encountered discrimination here in the United States or in New Orleans?

AL: No. I really have to say that I did not. This is my home. I always feel like New Orleans has been my home. I've been very fortunate because I did not experience any discrimination. What was strange was finding the discrimination of Black people, which was, to me, very uncomfortable because I felt like I was the newcomer, and yet I could sit on the bus anywhere I wanted to, and they couldn't. That's the first time that I felt any form of discrimination in New Orleans. But myself? No. People were very kind and very nice.

RH: What is the center of your Jewish life now?

AL: Well, the synagogue, Touro Synagogue, and just being aware of who I am. I haven't been active as much as I would like to. I thought that after I retired, because I worked all of the time, that, after I retired, I'd be able to get involved in more things. Now, I'm really interested in it, but I haven't. And then Katrina came around. We had just retired seven months before Katrina hit.

RH: Is that right?

AL: Yeah.

RH: So, tell me about the business your family was in.

AL: My husband and I had an antique business on Louisiana Avenue. It was a pretty good large-sized business.

RH: Stan Levy Antiques.

AL: Stan Levy Imports.

RH: Imports.

AL: Yes. We were there for many, many years, enjoyed a wonderful reputation, and had a wonderful business. But we both were getting – starting our seventies and I more than my husband thought it was time to stop and smell the roses and enjoy other things. So, we retired. We closed up in 2004 and moved into this house at the end of December 2004. We were in here all of seven months when the house was destroyed –

RH: Oh my gosh.

AL: – and we lost all that stuff.

RH: Why don't we move into the Katrina story, and you tell me when you became aware of Katrina and how you prepared.

AL: Well, it came on so all of a sudden because we knew something was brewing Friday, but Saturday morning, we had a bar mitzvah to go to; it was one of my school friend's daughter who is also a very close friend of Robin's, so we knew that we were going to go to this bar mitzvah.

RH: It was Adam Orlansky.

AL: That's right. That's right. So, we all were at the synagogue, and Adam did beautifully, but it was an uneasy feeling there because everybody was talking about evacuating, and we actually didn't make any plans as such. Robin and Bobby called us and said that they would go to Monroe. Why don't we come along with them?

RH: And Robin's your daughter.

AL: Right. Robin is my middle daughter. That Saturday morning, we went to the bar mitzvah. We stayed for the luncheon. Like I say, everybody was talking about it. Where were we going and where was this one going? So, we decided – Bobby said, “We're leaving about two o'clock Saturday afternoon.” My husband and I came back here, I guess about 12:30, one o'clock, and we started – what did we do first? The silliest thing we worried about was the iron furniture outside by the pool. We didn't want that to slam into any windows and things. So, we threw the furniture into the pool and carried our BBQ and as much of the furniture as we could inside downstairs in the den. We really didn't pack much. We packed enough clothes, some shorts and T-shirts for about two or three days because we were going to be back in two or three days. As far as papers go, we really – I didn't stop and think because just the other day I realized I lost my naturalization papers, my citizenship papers. I just realized that. My husband had the presence of mind that he took our passports, and he took insurance papers. That's what we went with. I didn't take jewelry. I didn't take anything because we were in such a rush to get out of here. And honestly, we just never imagined. Not in a million years could we have imagined what would happen here.

RH: So you rode up with Bobby, or you followed Bobby and Robin –

AL: No. We were in a convoy. We had Bobby and Robin and the kids in one car, and Margo and a friend in another car, and Stan and I were in another car, and we all –

RH: Margo is Bobby's mother?

AL: Bobby's mother. Margo Garon. And we all made our way to Monroe, to relatives of Margo's and Bobby's, the Mintzes. Saul and Jean Mintz. And they were absolutely gracious to open their home. We all showed up at their doorstep – we even had a dog – and that's where our first stop was. We stayed at their house, and it was very unnerving because there we were. We were glued to the TV, watching what was happening, and it was unnerving to see my children, Bobby and Robin, in a dilemma of where will the kids

go to school. If we can't get back, where will we go? And how will he earn a living? It was very, very unnerving and brought back some really bad memories.

RH: Is that right?

AL: Of uncertainty. Of life changing drastically.

RH: Really?

AL: Yeah. So, we stayed there, and then, when we saw that we wouldn't be coming back to New Orleans that fast, everybody decided to go. Robin and Bobby and Margo and the boys went to Houston. Stan and I decided to go to Atlanta to stay with my brother. He lives in Atlanta. He's an attorney there, and so we went to stay with him.

RH: So, how did you make that decision? Do you remember?

AL: We just decided. Where would we go? My husband has family in Florida and California, but Atlanta was close, and my brother wanted us there. So, we just decided to stay there. They have a very large home, and we wouldn't be a burden on them because they have a downstairs, a complete – it's a separate house. It was just very, very nice for us and for them because we didn't feel like we would be a burden on them.

RH: Was it hard leaving Robin and the kids after?

AL: It was awful. Not only that but our youngest daughter went to Ohio with her husband, who's in the service. They wound up in Ohio. I knew she was safe. Our oldest daughter lives in Abita, and I was worried about her because she didn't evacuate. She stayed there.

RH: Did you get in touch with her?

AL: I had a hard time getting in touch with her. Actually, we went looking in shelters. We were in Monroe then. We drove to different shelters to see if she somehow wound up there. But she had stayed put. And finally, when we could – when the phones started working, we got in touch with her, and she was fine.

RH: How long was that? How long did that take?

AL: For us to get in touch with her? About four days. It was awful. Because we didn't know exactly where she was. She was by herself, and we weren't sure how bad it was where she was. So it was worrisome, and it was a terrible time. At the same time, again, sitting in my brother's house, watching TV with all of these people at the Convention Center and in the Superdome and seeing the water, how high it was, it was, I mean, many tears and very uneasy and very scared because we had no idea what was happening here.

RH: When did you get a sense what happened to your house?

AL: Not until weeks later when Bobby got a permit to come back to New Orleans. They don't live too far from us, so he went to check out his house, and then he came by here, and I remember we got a phone call from Robin and Bobby – I don't remember who we talked to first. I think it was Bobby. He had gone in here, and he couldn't even open the door. He tried to break in the back kitchen door, but it just was all swollen shut, and he could actually see the water line. So, he actually broke down, and he called Robin.

When he talked to her, he broke down, and he couldn't believe how badly this house looked and what had happened to it. So that's the first hint of – he was the first one to see firsthand what had happened to our home. And like I say, we only were here about seven months, so it was really devastating. But as long as all of the kids were okay, and we kept telling each other, "It's just stuff. Well, it's just stuff." But you don't realize what you have lost until you came back and took a look at it.

RH: So, before we move to you coming back, were there any other people that you were in contact with throughout this?

AL: We were calling my sister and her family. They wound up in Memphis. And so we were continuously on the phone because my sister and I have a very special relationship. We have always been together, even through the Holocaust. We were always together other than when I got married and left home; that was the first time of separation. And then this was the longest separation after this catastrophe, so we were always in touch because we were all nervous, we were all worried, and of course, friends were scattered all over the place, and we kept in touch and were calling back and forth. It was very hard because cell phones weren't always working, and you couldn't always get in touch with everybody that you wanted to get in touch with. But we managed, and we were in touch with family [and] friends that wanted to know if we were okay.

RH: Was there consolation in that?

AL: Oh, the thing was that at least we had to keep in touch with each other. That was the only thing that made it bearable, and we could get through the day is by being able to be in touch with family members and friends and see how everybody was doing. I think without that, it would have been horrible. As bad as it was, if we hadn't been able to keep in touch, it would have been horrible.

RH: Do you remember any of the conversations with your sister or anyone? What you were talking about?

AL: We were always saying, "Well, at least we're all okay, and we'll get through this."
She had her children with her, so she was okay that way. But emotionally, it was very hard. I can't think of any particular conversation.

RH: Did you talk about the past with your sister? Did you talk about being in Poland or Germany?

AL: I think we were comparing it, how we had gone through so much, and then having to go through this again. This time, we didn't have the parents. We were the parents.

There were times when I thought about it, and I said, "I don't know. My parents were really special, how they could handle things during their terrible time." Here we were, going through this tragedy, worrying about our children [and] if everybody is going to be okay, if their houses were okay. It was uncertain. Everything was uncertain. Our homes. Our earning a living. Are we going to be covered? We knew we had insurance, but would we be able to collect? All these problems. And yet, people were so generous and so nice wherever we went.

RH: So, did you connect at all to the Jewish community in any way during this?

AL: The biggest thing that made an impression on me is when we came back to New Orleans and were told that the Jewish community all over the United States had collected money and sent it to Jewish Federation here. Everybody needed to register because they had money for us. I had a very, very hard time with that. Because, I guess, it brought back memories. When we first came to New Orleans, we were dependent on the Jewish Federation, on the Jewish community here, who helped us find an apartment and furniture and all of the things that you need when you're starting a new life. And so I had a – actually, I had a fight with my husband because he said, "Well, we're going to register at the Jewish Federation for this \$750 that everybody was going to receive." And I said, "I can't do that." He said, "What do you mean you can't do that?" I said, "I can't. I don't want to do that. I don't want to get a charity or whatever way you want to look at it." I had been there, and I had never thought in my life that I would have to do that again. And it's not like we had all of the money in the world, but it was hard for me. And everybody kept saying, "But don't be silly. Everybody is doing it. We need some cash-on-hand," because even the banks weren't working right. So I said, "Okay." I remember going to the office at the Federation, and I had tears in my eyes as I was signing this form because I didn't think that I should do that. But we did. And then I found out that

everybody did, so I guess that was okay.

RH: It gave you a little consolation?

AL: Yes, it did. It did. But you reach a point in your life when you want to give rather than receive and I was able to do that. We established a small foundation for my parents, but it was time to give back to the community. I've been able to do that while we were working and all of that, but then finding ourselves in this situation where everybody was in trouble. So, it was hard.

RH: So tell me, about what date did you return to New Orleans?

AL: I know that we were back here for maybe November, beginning of December. We were here for the holidays.

RH: So, tell me how you made a decision to come back if you can remember.

AL: Well, there was no question that we would come back, and as we were watching the news and more people were coming back – as a matter of fact, we came back when this zip code – we were really not supposed to be here yet, but my husband was itching to get back to see for ourselves what condition our home was in and what we could salvage and what to do, so we just decided that we had some good friends that – the problem was where to stay and some friends of ours, they live in Metairie, and they weren't coming back for a couple of months. So they told us, "Why don't you use our home," and that's what we did. We used their home for maybe two months.

RH: And was that in November?

AL: I'm trying to think. It was the end of October, beginning of November. Because they were coming back – they had to be back – she's a teacher, and she found out that she would have to be here for December 15th, which meant that we wouldn't be able to live in

their home. So, we found another apartment, and we moved into a very small apartment.

RH: Tell me what it was like to come here and what you found when you got into your home.

AL: It's hard to describe. The first thing that I remember is looking – well, first of all, trees were blown away, everything was dead because time had passed and saltwater had killed all of the grass and all of the foliage, but then when I got to the back door and looked inside the kitchen, it was like a tornado hit it or something. I mean, everything was swollen. The water was up so high that everything in the cabinets was dirty and nasty. It's just too hard to explain. The things that were downstairs were floating, I guess, in the water and wound up in the kitchen. Everything was upside down. And the smell was awful. The smell was just terrible. So it was shock. It was really shock. And then, once we got into the house and saw our furniture, everything [was] ruined. We had wonderful antiques. You picked up a chair, and it just fell apart. Things that we had collected for years and we thought we'd have forever were ruined.

RH: Was there anything that you could salvage?

AL: I'm trying to think. That was in the house? There are a couple of consoles that are downstairs. One is iron, one is wood, and a coffee table, that's iron that my husband cleaned up and refurbished, and that's what's left.

RH: Wow. Did you lose your china?

AL: Some of the china floated so that that was saved. I lost all of my silver. I had it in the cabinets, so we had people who came in here to gut it and get rid of our stuff, take the furniture out, see if they could salvage something. They tried. They pulled the furniture out because we were even here by that time. They had pulled out – the rugs were ruined. The furniture was falling apart. Some paintings – this painting survived. Another one we had didn't. There were a few –

RH: That's a painting of a streetcar.

AL: Right.

RH: It's a beautiful painting.

AL: There were things, other art pieces that were on the walls that didn't survive. So, very little. Some china and some old beer steins, a collection – some of those survived because they floated. When the furniture came down in the water, it all came down. Some of it got chipped and broken, but some of it survived. I found myself, in the winter, November, December, outside by the pool, trying to wash this awful, smelly, grimy china and glass, whatever, tried to wash it off. And what did I use?

RH: Clorox?

AL: Clorox and water, and I washed all of that and just put it away in boxes.

RH: Why was there no question that you were going to come back? Why come into this?

AL: We have a lifetime here in New Orleans. First of all, New Orleans is very special to me. Always has been and always will because it's the first American city that we lived in. This is home. I've been here since 1949, and this is home. Europe is not home. Europe is bad memories. These are good memories. You know, school, getting married, having children here. New Orleans is home. I always wanted to come back. My husband wanted to come back to see what we could salvage. So, once we started – we gutted the house, and we cleaned up whatever things we could. But what was interesting was – it was a shell. It was not a home until a Jewish group from New Jersey came into town, and they wanted to help people gut their houses. They happened to choose us as one of the houses. It was that group and that experience that kind of gave us the impetus that we could do this. That we could maybe refurbish this home.

Because it was interesting. They came in here. They gutted it. Well, no. The house was gutted. But they came in here, and they said, "We can put some sheetrock up for you." And they did. And what was interesting about it is that they made sure that this hallway had walls. Because until then, if you came into the front door – well, the front door was ruined. Everything was ruined – but by the time they finished, you had walls in this hallway. Had some walls in the study. So when you looked through the – came through the front – it started to look like a home. It started to look like a house. My husband and I said, "Well, I guess we can do that. You can continue." They gave us spirit, and they also gave us hope that we could do this. So we really got into it and decided that we would refurbish this house.

RH: So, did many of your neighbors come back? Because this area was pretty hard hit.

AL: Very hard. Well, as I said, the neighbors across the street stayed here for the hurricane. The hurricane came and went, and everything was fine. And then the levee broke. They had to be actually rescued from the second floor by – it was a boat. That's how high the water was. So, they came back. They were working on – they decided that they were definitely going to re-do their home. The people in the next corner came back after a while and decided to re-do their home. So we had us and the people across the street. We were here from the beginning. And then, little by little, one neighbor came back, and then another neighbor came back, and the street seems to be coming back. The first three or four blocks of Octavia are coming back. And all along, people are rebuilding. We were pioneering, but I'm glad because other people are coming back. And hopefully, we'll have another nice neighborhood as we did before.

RH: Are there any things that are missing now that you wish were back that you wish you could have?

AL: Personal or –

RH: Personal or in the city.

AL: Personal, a lot of papers. Mementos. I was very involved in – I don't know if you're familiar with it – the Duke Campaign, so I had many tapes and mementos from that.

RH: Explain a little bit about what you did. What was the Duke campaign?

AL: I got involved – that was my mission, is to – when David Duke started running for office, I couldn't fathom that he would be our governor, so I got involved in that election between Edwin Edwards and David Duke. I was more inclined to follow David Duke and try to convince him that he didn't know what he was talking about.

RH: Did you talk with him?

AL: I addressed him a few times.

RH: Really?

AL: Oh, yeah. That's where all my energies went. When you said, "What were you involved in?" Civically, that was what I was involved in for a few years because I knew what he stood for and where I came from. My history. And I couldn't imagine my grandchildren living here in New Orleans, in Louisiana, and having someone like that running for office. So, if anything that I have accomplished, that was my biggest thing, to fight and make sure that he didn't get elected. I confronted him wherever I could.

RH: So you lost a lot of the –

AL: I had a lot of tapes. Interviews. As a matter of fact, Spielberg, the Shoah Foundation, made tapes, and I lost that. I don't know if I'll ever – I won't be able to replace many of those things, but somewhere down the line, that was my legacy to my children, but they'll find it. There was videotaping and all of that. Somebody has it. So, it's okay. But it's the personal things that you lose. On the other hand, it's how it has

changed New Orleans. You couldn't have imagined when you drive through the city, and we did to see the devastation, that I consider us lucky here in this neighborhood. Even though every house in this neighborhood was damaged. Ninth Ward is bad, and Plaquemine Parish, New Orleans East, Lakeview, and this, too. Because in this neighborhood, every house had damage to it. So it wasn't like one house was spared and another wasn't. Every house was damaged.

RH: Well, why did you consider yourself lucky?

AL: Because we're still not as bad as people in Lakeview or in New Orleans East. You know? We were here right from the beginning, so we saw – I mean, it was so bad here in the beginning. There was no grocery store. No drug store. If we wanted anything – the first place we would go was Metairie because you couldn't find anything local. But, little by little, we saw the progress, and once things opened up, we were able to function. We were luckier than Lakeview, let's say. How badly that was damaged. Some parts will never come back. So you can always be worse, as they say.

RH: What sustained you during that period back here as pioneers? How did you keep body and soul together?

AL: I think it helped that Stan and I had each other because if he had low moments – and we had many low moments – I would kind of pick him up or vice versa. We started our married life with very little. So we knew what it's like to have very little. And I guess we always thought we could do it again. If you've gone through hardships, you can handle it. As hard as it is, you can handle it. But it helped having each other and working together to get back. To decide that we were going to do that.

RH: When did your children come back?

AL: The youngest daughter that lived in Metairie came back beginning of the New Year. January. Robin and Bobby didn't come back until December when the semester of

school was over, and the children could come back to Newman and start school again. So they were gone through December.

RH: What was it like to have them back?

AL: Oh, that was great, to get to see them again. And knew that they were well and everything worked out okay.

RH: Do you remember –? What was your first holiday together? Jewish holiday?

AL: Rosh Hashanah was the first High Holiday.

RH: Yeah. Where were you for those?

AL: We were in an apartment. We didn't have the family here so – wait a minute. I need to come back. I can't put my dates together, but Rosh Hashanah was the first High Holiday, and I remember we were at Touro for services, and that was the first time as a community belonging to Touro that we had services there. What was so amazing about that service was that we had a lot of rescuers and service people and all kinds of helpers that were here in New Orleans that wanted to celebrate holidays. They came to Touro in their uniforms, whatever – doctor, nurse, marine, you name it. The people that needed to be at a temple were there. It was just a wonderful, wonderful feeling to be there as a community. Then the second biggest thing was, for Hanukah, when this artist decided – he came down here with, I cannot tell you how many menorahs and Jewish artifacts. He came here, and we all met at the Jewish Community Center as a group. The amazing thing was to see people see each other for the first time. There were maybe some of them who were still living out of town, but they came in for the gathering. It was huge. There were so many people that showed up at the JCC to see who was there, who survived, where they are, and make that connection again. It was great.

RH: Were there any gatherings, other gatherings, that you recall that were important to you? That kind of stand out during those times?

AL: Well, I think all of the – even today, the gatherings that are being held at the JCC or the synagogues or the whatever, as a community, it's always special now. And I also remember going. For some reason, I needed to be – they had a gathering at the Superdome but not in the Superdome. One of those – I don't know what they call it – plazas or whatever, and I remember they had set up chairs. Mary Landrieu was there, Mitch Landrieu, politicians, and just folks. Just New Orleanians gathered there. I think it was on a Sunday morning, for a service.

RH: Kind of an inter-faith service of some kind?

AL: Yeah.

RH: Really? And you went to that?

AL: I went to that. I just felt that everybody should be there.

RH: And why? Why did you think?

AL: I felt like I made it, and I needed to be there. Show my support for the city. Just felt like I should be there.

RH: Do you have any friends who haven't returned?

AL: I have friends who came back and sold their house and moved away and acquaintances that have done the same thing. A lot of friends took them forever to get back into their houses, but there are a lot of people that decided not to come back. In the Jewish community –

RH: Are you angry at them?

AL: Am I angry at them? I can't be angry at them because everybody has to do what they need to do. I think it goes back to how much adversity can you handle and what adversity can you handle. I felt like I've been through worse things in my life, and I've seen horrendous things in my life before this. So maybe that made me stronger, and I felt that I could do it. I mean, I was devastated. And yet, other people who had not gone through what I have lived through were much more affected. Maybe it's because they didn't – life has been pretty good and pretty even-keeled, and they didn't have hardships, so this was the worst thing that had ever happened to them, and maybe they just couldn't handle it. But I think we all were affected. Don't get me wrong. Mentally, we were affected. I think we all have been depressed at one time or another, and our emotions, I think, are much rawer. Well, not raw. We have a hard time concentrating on things. I know myself. I have a hard time concentrating [on] reading a book. I always read. But for some reason, I just don't have – I can't concentrate on sitting down. I guess that's "Katrina fatigue," or whatever you want to call it. But I think a lot of people have it. Also, when we first came back. I think we were in a daze, and we were in a quandary. We didn't know how to deal with things. But we dealt with them.

RH: What do you love most about New Orleans?

AL: I love the people. I like the city. Don't get me wrong. I don't like the politicians. Politics is bad. But I feel like we need to be here and speak up, and maybe we can make it a better city education-wise, racially wise. I think we have a lot of work to do, but we need to do it.

RH: Is there anything distinctive about the Jewish community in New Orleans that you can articulate?

AL: Again, I have some very special feelings for the community here, because when we first came, we were treated very well. My parents started a new life very late in life. But people were here to help – with a helping hand. That's what I remember about this city,

and maybe that's what draws me so much to it, is that I remember those times.

RH: What has the Jewish community kind of meant to you during this experience of Katrina? Can you articulate that?

AL: I think it has become close. Always glad to be together and enjoy things together. And I think, as a community, they've always come through with a helping hand. But I also must say that the Jewish community as a whole in the United States has come forward with a helping hand. People coming down here and working and seeing what is needed and helping the synagogues because every synagogue and every organization has suffered financially. And yet, as a whole, they are being helped by the rest of the community. I think they'll work much closer together between all of the temples, all of the synagogues. and the variety of people. I think they're working much better together.

RH: That was one of my questions. What is one of your hopes as you move into the future of the Jewish community?

AL: That's my hope that, as a whole, they work together and not think of "my synagogue," "my club," or "I belong to this or that." That they work as a whole and help out the whole community. Because we have lost a lot. I think it's about one-third of the Jewish community that we have lost, that people have moved on. Older people who maybe have children out of town left, and they moved somewhere else. They were big contributors to this community, so it's sad to see them go. So, somebody else will have to step up and take their place. I mean, we're old by now. It's now up to the younger generation. I have a lot of hope in the younger generation that they will hold it together and work for the right things.

RH: Okay. We're going to stop for a minute and get on to our other questions.

[END OF PART ONE]

RH: Just, what has being Jewish meant to you during this experience? Can you talk about that a little?

AL: Well, it's a whole thing. It's being Jewish. It's being a New Orleanian. It's being an American. It's all in one. We don't live in a vacuum, so being Jewish, I'll attend synagogue, and I'll attend whatever functions I can attend for my community, but I'm also interested – as a whole, as a New Orleanian, I want it to be better. I want the Jewish population to get along with the Christians and the Muslims, and Black and white. I want us all to get along much better and work toward the betterment of all of us. I don't know if that answers your question.

RH: Okay. Are there any ways that you kind of see, since you've been involved in politics, some ways that can facilitate that, some things that need to happen for these dialogues to happen?

AL: Well, I think we have – there is a beginning. I have hope because we have elected pretty much a new city council, so I'm seeing some hope. And yet, I watch the news, and I get discouraged when racism is coming up and is brought up at council meetings or wherever. This is the last thing that we need. We all suffered. I don't care if you're poor or rich, Black or white, we all started – actually, we're in the same boat. I realize that some people are better off than others, and we need to help each other out, but we need to work as a whole. But I'm seeing glimpses of hope, glimpses that maybe things will change politically and school-wise, especially with the schools, that it will be different. Hopefully, things will be better.

RH: Do you think the – what do you think about race in the storm? Do you think it affected –?

AL: Oh, it was horrible to watch the pictures. To be in Monroe or to be in Atlanta and watch the pictures of the people in front of the Convention Center and the Superdome. It

was awful. What the city didn't plan, what the leaders never thought about, was about all these people that could not get out of the city. These thousands of people were stuck.

No car. No money. Nowhere to go. And so it was a terrible thing to watch that. And, I guess, that's why people play up the race question. I don't know how you can fix it other than everybody working together. I just don't know how else you can fix it.

RH: Do you want to comment on how you felt the response has been, the city, the state –?

AL: Oh, it was awful. I must tell you, I felt like the United States can answer a call anywhere overseas in a matter of a couple of days. The help is there. The rescue is there. It took forever [for] the government to come in here and help us. I really felt we were let down. Again, I have this special feeling [about] what I think the United States can accomplish because I've been part of it. They rescued me, so I feel like we can accomplish anything, and I felt we were too slow in rescuing people here in New Orleans. If we can go to the tsunami and deliver food and water and all kinds of help in no time at all, what's wrong with us here? It was like we were treated like a third-world country. That's my feeling about it.

RH: How about in the recovery? Do you have any thoughts about –?

AL: That, again, is so slow and so tedious. We were fortunate because we had good insurance, so we could get it started. But all these people that are still waiting for the first dime from an insurance company or the government – I mean, it boggles your mind. They've registered, I don't know how many people for the recovery, and to this day, only twenty-six people have received checks. That's outrageous. People are stuck. So much time has passed, and they're stuck. They can't do anything. You feel awful for them. There has to be a better way.

RH: Did you have anybody like a housekeeper or anyone that you have tried to find or keep up with? That have returned or come back? Anything like that?

AL: The people that worked for us when we had our business, they've come back. Some took longer than others because they didn't have the means to come back. And they didn't have any place to rent. So, we have kept up with them, and they seem to be all right. They're back to work, and they're doing okay.

RH: Is the antique business still going?

AL: No. We dissolved it when we sold our building and dissolved the business.

RH: Are there any Jewish teachings or concepts that have been present in your mind over this past year?

AL: I'm not good at Hebrew, so I'm not going to quote you any of that. But there's always the saying that you need to help people. That if you just help people and if you're able to do it, you should do it. If you hear of hardships, that you should talk to someone about it. Just my regular belief that we, as human beings, can help each other. That's all I can answer you.

RH: Are there any Jewish observances that mean more to you now or that have become more special?

AL: Well, I think that all of the holidays are much more special now. It's always good to be together, get together with family, and celebrate. Nowadays, you want to gather for the good things and celebrate the good things. So hopefully, we'll be able to do that, starting with Thanksgiving.

RH: Are you having some people here for Thanksgiving?

AL: I'm hoping to have my family here because Thanksgiving has always been very special to me, and I've always had Thanksgiving. My husband and I have always had Thanksgiving, even when my parents were alive. The whole family always gathered at our house for Thanksgiving. So, even though we don't have any place to seat them, we will have it here.

RH: How many people do you have?

AL: I guess if we have all of the kids and grandkids, maybe twenty-five, thirty people.

RH: What do you serve?

AL: Turkey. The usual.

RH: Any good pies? Cakes?

AL: What we usually do is everybody usually brings something, so we'll have a combination of apple pie and pecan pie and all that good stuff. Typical American food.

RH: So, what are you going to do for chairs?

AL: Everybody will bring a chair, or a couple of chairs. We'll be all right. We'll be okay.

RH: You can have a dance floor.

AL: That's right. Plenty of room to sit on the floor.

RH: Tell me about what you want for your grandkids. What you would like to see for your grandkids.

AL: Oh, not to go through any hardships. And, of course, I know that's impossible. But I do hope, first of all, my grandchildren don't know antisemitism and that they can grow up in a much better world. Be generous and be kind. Get along with everyone. That's what

I hope for them.

RH: What do you hope for the city here in New Orleans?

AL: I hope that we can put Katrina behind us. That even though it was a devastating occurrence, maybe whoever comes back makes it a better city. When I say better city, [one] where everybody gets along. That's my biggest hope for the city, is for everyone, for the people to get along. Go ahead and re-do your homes and re-establish your lives and learn something good out of this horrible experience by rebuilding and starting their lives over. Some people have lost loved ones, and so many elderly people have died.

Some things won't be that easy to overcome, but hopefully, the city will be rebuilt, more people will come – maybe not come back, but other people will come and work for the betterment of the city. Because it's a great city. It's such a great city.

RH: What are some of the strengths of the city that you would like to see preserved?

AL: The city has been here for such a long time. It's an old soul. It has great music, and if we could preserve all those good things that this city stands for, all these millions of people who come and visit here and they love it and enjoy it. I think the diversity of this city. If we can continue that, then it will be okay. It will be a great city again.

RH: What are some of the biggest changes in your life since the hurricane?

AL: That's a hard question to answer. Changes? I'm not as obsessive about things, and if things don't happen as we want them, as fast as we want them, I've learned to be very patient and that eventually we'll do what we have to do, or people will come to work if we need something done. If you're living here now, you really have to learn patience. And eventually, things will happen.

RH: Are any of your priorities different?

AL: Oh yes. Priorities? Yeah. Material things aren't that important. Things are things, and that's why we're not in a hurry. If we find what we want, we'll get it. And if we don't, we'll wait. At one time, I wouldn't be patient like that, and I'd want to go ahead and go out and get it done, get it finished, and today, it's whatever. If it comes, it comes; if not, it will come later.

RH: Is there anything you've learned about yourself over this past year that's kind of bubbled to the surface?

AL: Well, I don't know. I'm a bad judge of myself. I don't know. I don't know how to answer that.

RH: Well, is there anything that you took for granted before that you'll never take for granted again?

AL: Yeah. You just don't know from day to day. You really don't. You almost have to be prepared for almost anything. I thought I was prepared to handle things. But life is uncertain. You do the best you can. I think that's about the main thing. You just do the best you can. And after that, you just leave it to fate. Fate, God, all of those things. Because some things are beyond your control. We couldn't control this. So you just have to accept it and go on.

RH: Anything you want to add to this interview?

AL: Oh, there probably will be after I've finished with you, but as of right now, I'm just grateful that we're back in our home. I'm grateful, most of all, that the family survived and is together. Anything else, we can handle. As it comes along, we'll be able to handle it. Because I think, if we handled this, we'll be able to handle whatever comes our way. Health is the most important thing. If we have our health, then I feel like my husband and I can do what we have to do as long as we are healthy.

RH: Do you feel healthy?

AL: I'm healthy. We're healthy.

RH: Good. Okay. Thank you.

AL: Is that it? Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]