

Julie Wise Oreck Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: OK. Today is July 2. I'm Rosalind Hinton. I'm in the home of Julie Wise Oreck at 1545 Exposition, right on Audubon Park. And I am doing Katrina's Jewish Voices for the Goldring Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life and the Jewish Women's Archive. And, Julie, do you agree -- do you know you're being taped and do you agree to be interviewed.

Julie Wise Oreck: It's pretty hard to not -- yes, I know I'm being videoed and --

RH: OK. What I'd like to start with is just a little bit of your family background, like, your family, their names, your husband, your children's names, how old you are and then you're --

JWO: I have to say that.

RH: If you don't mind. You can say what year you were born.

JWO: That's OK. Then they'd have to figure it out.

RH: OK.

JWO: OK. So I'm Julie Wise Oreck. I'm, depending on how you count it, about a fifth-generation Louisiana Jew. My family came here in the mid-1800s. My father's side settled in Abivale. This is an aside. Ironically, yesterday, I was trying to put some things away and I just read some history of my family and I thought that the older ones were all buried in the cemetery in Abivale and I found out one is actually buried here in Hebrew Rest, so I'm going to have to go out and find him. And that we also were members of Touro Synagogue way back then in the turn of the century. That side of the family. So, my father's side of the family was from here. My mother's family was originally from

Chicago but we -- both sides of my parents' family was here before the Holocaust. So we're third, fourth, fifth generation on both sides, I am. My husband's family is from -- well, he grew up in Duluth, Minnesota.

RH: OK. Say his name.

JWO: Marshall Oreck is my husband. His family grew up in Duluth, Minnesota. I'm not his first marriage, so he's got sons that live in different parts -- two sons that live in different parts of the country, but my step-son, Alden, lives here now in New Orleans. Grew up part of his life here. He's 29. And, lived with us throughout different parts of his life and is now living here in New Orleans and has been. My daughter -- I have two daughters, Zoe and Sophie. Zoe has just turned 18 and Sophie has just turned 17. Zoe is off to college next fall and Sophie will be finishing her senior year at Isidore Newman School. I grew up here. Had never lived more than, I think, 10 blocks from Audubon Park except when I didn't live here, and that was just really during college and just thereafter. And, let's see, I -- so I've lived in Uptown, New Orleans almost every day of my life and I love it. It's my life and it's really important to me, the city.

RH: What's it like to be Jewish in New Orleans?

JWO: Well, it's interesting. I think I've lived two very distinctive Jewish lives here. Growing up we were a sort of very typical Southern assimilated family. Very ultra-reform. You know, we had a Christmas tree. It wasn't any big deal. There was -- there was a show on Broadway called "The Last Night of Ballyhoo." It was one of the best things I ever saw because the beginning of the show, they're putting -- decorating the Christmas tree and the woman is putting -- one of the leads, stars whatever, leads in the play, is the daughter and she wants -- she's arguing with her mother -- she wants to put a star on the top of the Christmas tree and the mother says, no, darling, Jews don't put stars on the top of their Christmas trees. And I just -- that was like one of the best things I had ever heard at the time because they were actually from Atlanta, this family. And I

identified with it so much and, at that point, I had already really come to be much more, if you will, observant in my life and much more -- I don't even like to say the word religious but much more observant about my religion and doing more traditional things in my life. So that I could associate or identify with that was great for me. So growing up I was very assimilated. We, you know, knew the holidays were going on but we weren't practicing them that much. But I was very aware of being Jewish and my identity as a southern Jew particularly -- I was very identified in that sense. My parents were very involved in the community, so the tikkun olam aspect of Judaism was always there for me, that it was very important. My father, you know, was president of the Jewish Community Center. My mother was doing, you know, other things in the community. They both did a lot of community service. Of course, I knew the National Council of Jewish Women was important. So it was there, but it wasn't -- we weren't as observant. We were much more traditional southern Jews.

RH: So, what was your journey to more observance? Can you briefly --

JWO: Actually, it's very -- you know, you have children, and you go, oh, oh. My husband's family was all Jewish. He used to think it was very ironic that he was carrying Christmas trees into our house after we were married but he was fine with it and he recognized that if his mother had been, alive, she would have maybe had a little bit more of a problem with it, but -- anyway -- so, I had children and we live a block and a half from Temple Sinai on St. Charles Avenue. And, so, you know, a girl down the street sent her kids there and they weren't Jewish but it sounded like a nice little nursery school. And because my kids were so close together, I wanted to have Zoe have a little time away and I wanted to have a little time with Sophie at home. So Zoe went to nursery school for a little two-day program very early, and because it was a block-and-a-half away, I could walk there and walk back and it was very convenient. It was always expected that my kids would go to the Jewish Community Center. Of course, that's where I had gone, but this was really close and I think the fact that it was, you know, a synagogue, was really

sort of the beginning part. Not that the JCC wouldn't have been just as helpful but, you know, they'd come home with little Friday night prayers and they were trans-literated so I could actually read them because I didn't read Hebrew and I didn't know the prayers for Shabbat. And, so, little by little, baby steps with them or she'd come home with a little Haggadah, you know, the baby Haggadahs, and they were really cute and so we'd start, you know, doing little seders and things on that level and baby level. Young children level. And it was really cool and I really liked it and I liked learning with them. And, my mom -- OK. So, my dad died when I was young, when I was 25. And my sister was -- she's nine years younger, so -- OK. So, I'm 50 and my sister -- so, that was 25 years ago. Gosh. My sister is nine years younger. My brother is three years younger. But, I think mostly because my sister was in high school when he passed away, you know, we started going to synagogue more. We changed at that point, synagogues, and because when my father died we became much more attached to the synagogue and my mother went with Rabbi Goldstein, David Goldstein, to Israel. So I think that was sort of the beginning of a Jewish journey in some ways for her and certainly for me and accompanying her to services for whatever reason, I learned more and more. She then, although had always been active, I think more so became active with -- into at that time, United Jewish Appeal, now United Jewish Communities, but back then, UJA, and was doing things like business and professional women's things and going to Lion of Judah conferences and said, oh, come with me to Washington to this conference and I did and I was really learning a lot and it was very exciting. I understood then more nationally what the system did. So, OK. So we did more Federation stuff here, but I didn't really get that. And then in my late 20s I was asked to be on the Leominster Young Leadership program and that was -- that was a rude awakening into what I didn't know because --

RH: How so.

JWO: -- it was a -- it is a great program. It's actually -- there have been communities all over the country that have modeled their young leadership programs after it. It starts out

with a mission to Israel. That's the very beginning and so there you are going off to Israel. Even before the program, even before you've done many meetings, you've just had sort of an initial meeting and meet the other people in your group and the group is meant to be diverse. So you have people from all strings - Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, you have people that are very involved, you have people who aren't so involved, you have different ages, it's typically, you know, mid-, late 20s, through young leadership. Which, of course, has yet to be decided when it ends. So, you know, 40, maybe even 45, so there is a very diverse population within the group and although I was on the same level as maybe a couple of others, I realized how much I could learn from other people. There had been -- you know, there was somebody who kept kosher and there was somebody who had a Christmas tree like me. So, just a wide range. So that was the beginning of, like, oh my gosh. There's a lot of people out there that I haven't grown up with and they aren't Reform and, you know, they live their lives in a much more observant way and it was, you know, just like if you move to a different part of the city and you learn different things about how different people live. So, we went to Israel and then we came back and it was two years excluding the summer of a monthly meeting that touched things from even the acronyms of all of the Jewish things that happened in different parts of the world. The Jewish Agency. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The Joint to different religious streams. So, it was a lot of learning of community, both religious, spiritual, everything like I said, including AIPAC. You know, whatever. Just the Jewish world.

RH: Right.

JWO: Educationally. And, it was a lot of -- a lot of really interesting new things, in some ways, and old in others, and I knew more about some things than somebody else. So it was a great opportunity to learn. Just after that, I was asked to be on something called the National Young Leadership Cabinet, which is a national group and they come out and find you and select people from around the country that are already being -- showing

leadership or doing leadership things within their community, so I was asked to be on that. I didn't realize at the time what an amazing privilege that was or honor and it was totally life-changing. Like, Leominster [?] was sort of the primer, but then Cabinet was like boy, being thrown into the fire. And it was absolutely amazing. I came back like a maniac. I was so ready to like change the world and get more involved. Because, there again, there was sitting at a table with this observant Orthodox girl who looked just like me. You know, she wasn't wearing head-covering. She wasn't dressed frumly. She was just Orthodox.

RH: Mm-hmm.

JWO: And she looked just like me and she acted just like me and she had grown up in a very observant home and kosher was just part of her life. And, oh my God, that was so cool. That was just amazing. And then, you know, sitting on the other side of me, it happened to be this woman's group that was sitting there, and this other side of me was this very frum, orthodox woman who was also a feminist, and that was like bizarre and we, you know -- and then, you know, we had people that talked to us that were, you know, the leaders from all over the world. And they were amazing and they were inspirational and they taught and they were phenomenal and it changed -- that totally changed my life. So there were all of these sort of progressional steps that kind of led me into this position. I remember coming back and I went into the Federation office and I said, here's the stuff and we have to have this person and we have to have this person and we have to do all of this stuff and they were like, hey, slow down. We're just here in New Orleans and we're not necessarily going to be able to do quite as much as you want to do today. So I was like ready to hit the ball -- to hit the ground running. So I was on that for six years and -- actually eight, but six years you were able to have portfolios and I really just dove into that. And it was a great --

RH: What do you mean portfolios?

JWO: Jobs.

RH: Oh.

JWO: Jobs. Like chair of this --

RH: OK.

JWO: -- I was something called mentor chair and I was a regional chair of the area. I ran a regional conference. So each year you had a different portfolio or different job responsibility and each year I took on a different one and did just about every major job there was to do in that. At the time I stayed involved locally but I really was focused on that. It was sort of a training ground for me for -- in so many ways. So every year there was a retreat for three days and we'd go out to either Arizona in August, so we wanted to stay inside and listen to the speakers, or Southern Florida for these different retreats. And then during the year there were different conferences. There is something called Washington Conference every other year. Anyway, so that program just kept me getting more and more involved on a, you know, in every way. And hence -- and then, of course my children were getting older and Sunday School started and the synagogue became much more important to me and one day I said to my husband, I came home and I said, you know, we're going away -- I don't call it Christmas break anymore. I always call it winter break. But at that time it was Christmas. And I said, you know, we're not going to do Christmas this year. We're going to go away, if it's OK. And he was like, I don't care. It's fine. And so I told, I think, I can't remember if my step-son was still living here at that time and I sort of broke it to him and then -- the kids were babies. Sophie was six months old and Zoe -- well, she was going to be six months old at Christmas -- and Zoe would have been like a year-and-a-half and I said, this is the last one. We're not doing it after this. And so the next year we went to Disney World and I thought it was going to be empty. It turns out it's the busiest time of the year. So, the lines were long and everything, but they were babies, so it was fine. And so from then on, that was the end

of Christmas and I don't know what year that is. I'll have to figure it out and see how it was related in my -- in how old I was. But it was definitely during the cabinet years -- the Young Leadership Cabinet -- the national one. And, again, the people that I would hear speak and the knowledge I was gaining about how important Judaism was in their lives and how, you know my life was very full of things but this was a whole aspect of my life that was there for the taking and all I had to do was do it.

RH: Wow.

JWO: And so that was really -- it's sort of like discovering a talent. You know, if somebody -- a friend of mine -- and later in life she always liked to sing -- but she really, in her 50s and 60s has become this opera singer, you know. And it's just so much a part of her life and we've talked about how parallel that is. You know, it was always there for her and she always sang, but, all of a sudden now, she's on stage singing and that transition from, OK, it's there. It's part of me, but it's not so important to -- oh my God, this is really an important part of my life and I can really use it and grow from it and help myself and my kids and the world or whoever. So, Cabinet was coming to an end and I had done all of these major jobs in it and I thought, OK, what's next and I really wanted to stay involved in the national system because the local thing I knew I could always do, you know. Whether it's council -- the National Council of Jewish Women, or rather you get involved in Hadassah or whether you're doing synagogue or JCC or Jewish Family Service or Federation -- whatever agency there is here in your hometown, you know how to work within the system and you know how to volunteer. But on a national level it's very different because -- you know, I'm from New Orleans. I'm not from New York. I'm not from Chicago. I'm not from Miami. You know, I'm not from some hugely big city that automatically is feeding people into the system to work on a national level. So a group of us felt the same way, that we had been trained by the system, by Cabinet, and by UJA at the time, to do things nationally and internationally and to be leaders and to go out and to help the world. So, a group of us went to the national leaders and we said, OK, you've

done this, now use us. And they did. And, in fact, they took us, those that wanted to be involved continued to be involved because we were graduating, if you will, out of cabinet and they put us on -- and this was a really interesting -- it was during the transition from United -- from CJF, which is Council of Jewish Federations, and UJA, so CJF and UJA were merging. And it was a big deal. CJF was sort of the parent of all of the federations and then UJA was sort of, and I'm really simplifying it here, the fund-raising arm of it, and the two were merging to become United Jewish Communities. And they took us and found out where our passions or interests lay and they assigned us to different committees. They were task forces at the time, and I remember getting the call from the man -- his name is Bob Aaronson -- and he's the executive director of the Detroit Federation and I got this call and he's a very prominent, well-known man. And it was on his cell phone. I remember, I could barely understand him. But he was asking me to be on one of the task forces. And I was -- number one, so excited. Number two, and also so honored. Really, and to the extent that it was like one of the -- it was really an exciting period for the national system.

RH: Mm-hmm.

JWO: So we went on to become this task force. And mine was Israel and overseas. And, it was a small group and we met to or three times in New York and a couple of other places and that task force then grew into what was called the Pillar -- Israel and Overseas Pillar. And the Israel and Overseas Pillar, we sort of felt since we had been working so hard on this Pillar, on this task force, that this task force should be incorporated into the pillar. And those who wanted to stay and -- should be asked to be part of the task force. So we were sort of getting ourselves into that --

RH: Into the system.

JWO: But really, we were so passionate, also. We were very excited about the work we were doing and felt very strongly that it was the right track and we were moving in the

right track and we wanted to continue that. So, I then went on to this Israel and Overseas Pillar or Committee, which was one of the pillars, was working within United Jewish Communities. And the man that was, at the time, the head of the task force was not going to go on to be the head of the Pillar. His brother was very ill. It was Robert Lender -- Lender bagels, that I can say.

RH: OK.

JWO: And his brother, it was very sad and he felt like he couldn't continue and they assigned this woman, whose name was Karen Shapiro, to be head of the committee, to take over from him. And, she was from Pittsburgh and she was one of those extraordinary people that is so inspiring and so dedicated and she hadn't been involved in the national system or the UJA system at all, but she was president of Pittsburgh's Federation, which is a pretty big deal and she'd been very involved locally. And she was obviously a very talented woman. And, so when she was asked to be the head of this pillar, she accepted it readily and was very excited to take on this new responsibility and she was this really amazing person who was an incredible mentor and role model for me. That I could see that even though she hadn't been involved nationally, and of course she did come from Pittsburgh, so she had, of course, a bigger city view. But that it was OK to sort of just be up and coming and really learn a lot. So she was an amazing person for me to work under. She was talented and clever and was very good about bringing us the young leadership or new people in. She was very inclusive. So I went to her one day, I remember exactly where it was. It was kind of funny. It was in the lady's room at UJC and I said, you know, Karen, I really would like a job. If there is something that you see that you think that I'd be good at -- it doesn't have to be chairing anything, but you know, part of a committee or something like that, and she said, I'll remember that. And, a few months or a year or so later, she came to me and said, I have a job for you. I was like, great. I figured she was going to say, I want you to be part of this committee or, you know, will you work with somebody on this or that. And she offered

me this position that I kept looking at her and saying, wait. Are you sure. Wait. Am I understanding this right. So she offered me this fabulous position that, again, was another stage of my development in the Jewish world that again changed my life. Because even though I was involved in this big national system and totally understood the -- our overseas partners. Oh, and by the way, on Cabinet, I went on a bunch of missions, particularly a lot to the former Soviet Union. I meant to say that back in that part of my life. The first time I went on a mission to the former Soviet Union, we didn't then go on to Israel. Which was unusual. You'd normally go to FSU and then on. We went to just Vilna and Minsk and then there was an extension on to Berlin that was not really part of the mission but went. And we went -- the scholar in residence was this man who is pretty well known. His name is Ed Serotta and he's a photojournalist. He was on the mission. At the time there was this amazing, you know, great guy who ran the UJC's missions department. And he put together this unbelievable mission for our group and there were people on it that, at some point if you want to go back I'll talk about some of the stories there, but again, changed my life completely. These things that happened on that particular mission.

RH: OK.

JWO: So it had nothing to do with Israel. It had to do with the Joint and Jewish Agency and the work they were doing and, again, a connection spiritually to religion that I just never could have gotten, frankly, in any other way. But when you're sitting in Vilna talking to Holocaust survivors, when you go their room and you're sitting in their, you know, their fifth-floor walk-up and they haven't been out of their room, their room, in years. And, you know, the stories that you think are made up aren't, because you're living them. You're sitting there living with Genya and Genya is telling you her story, with a translator of course. Or you're sitting there with this man who is weeping, weeping, because his daughter is singing "Bashana Haba'a" to us, this group of Jews from the United States, and she is singing it so beautifully, this huge man, like from Fiddler on the

Roof Tevye guy, I mean, big, with the same hat and the same beard and everything -- is weeping in the back of the room because his 17-year-old daughter is singing this song to us and to have the man sitting next to me stand up when she finishes and he's weeping and he says, you know, I've heard that song sung a lot and I've never ever been as emotional as I am right now. He said, I want you to know I wrote that song.

RH: Oh my God.

JWO: It was Ehud Manor. And Hanan Yuval, his partner who has since passed away unfortunately, but he was a very prominent Israeli songwriter and musician and Hanan Yuval his -- played the guitar and accompanied him, they were both on our mission and those type of things you can't have -- you know, an experience like that will change your life and, in fact, they did. But again, so that was back during the Cabinet years. So, back to -- so, UJC. So, Karen Shapiro says, you know, I have this job for you and she tells me that it is the North American chair, volunteer chair, of a program called Otzma. And I, you know, it's a big deal and my step-son had done the program. He had come to me a few years before and he said, you know, I want to do some of the things you do. And I said, well, tell me what that means. And he said, I want to go to the former Soviet Union and I want to meet the people like that you've been meeting and I want to, you know, do some work like that, so he was -- he had gone to Israel, you know, the typical teen trip between his junior and senior year. And then he had gone to the Rothberg School at Hebrew University one summer. So now he was coming out of the University of Wisconsin, graduating, and he wanted to take a year off and he wanted to go, you know, tikkun olam, you know, whatever. And he -- I -- we looked at a bunch of different programs through Jewish World Service and joint programs and I saw this program, Otzma, and I loved that it had these different aspects. Leadership development. Community service. Hebrew, you know, some learning of Hebrew. Israel immersion. Working in and with people in the community and working with Partnership 2000 Committee. It was just, to me, the perfect, all-around program. It wasn't just community

service. It wasn't studying. It wasn't an education, although there was a tremendous amount of education in it. So I thought it was a fabulous program. He, in fact, agreed. Of course I kept kind of baiting him with different things. Like, here's this program that, you know, maybe you'll like. And he sort of began to bite on it. And so he went on Otzma and I was in Israel a couple of times while he was there and I went -- he was working -- he was funded through Washington, D.C. and their partnership 2000 was Beit Shemesh -- I would go to Beit Shemesh and see the program. And so then when I was offered to be chair of it I was like blown away.

RH: Wow.

JWO: It was amazing. So I was going in June to the Jewish Agency meetings. There -- the Jewish Agency has meetings three times a year. In June they have, well, the board of governors has three times a year. So in June they have what's called the Assembly and then, in October and in February, there are board meetings. So there is Assembly and board meetings and then these other two. So I'm going to Israel in June for the Jewish Agency Board of Governors and I walk in to the first meeting the first night, there is like a reception, and this man that I've known for a number of years who works at the Jewish Agency comes up to me and goes, boy, did you create a stir. It turns out that my appointment was a bit controversial because I hadn't been so involved in the program and I hadn't come maybe through the right channels or I was coming through different channels. And, it turns out that, of course, like anything else hopefully in life, it worked out great and the person I was taking over for was thrilled that it was me and we had a great working relationship and so we kind of co-chaired theoretically in a sense -- she really brought me in and really helped me get up to speed with where the program was and I officially took over from her and the Intifada happened. So, it was a good and a very challenging time and then I had to really work for a number, two or three years, to get the program -- to even have it survive, because we couldn't afford staff. We couldn't afford anything. We had dropped down to like 18 kids from 80s, from, you know, a high

of 80 in the 80s. So it was a very, very, for me, personally, amazingly challenging but, of course, rewarding time because the program still survives to this day. But, again, it was such -- again, I really learned the inner-workings of the Jewish Agency and the education department because in Israel that's where we belonged, in the education department. In North America, we sat in the UJC offices but we were a self-sustaining program. So again, we had to work with -- I had to work within two big systems. And learn how they worked and so that was really exciting.

RH: Spell the name of the program for me.

JWO: O-t-z-m-a.

RH: OK.

JWO: Can we cut for a second.

RH: Yes.

JWO: Because I'm worried I'm going to get a little emotional and I don't want to blow my nose and Zoe called and so I need to check on her.

RH: OK. Go ahead.

JWO: Am I doing OK so far?

RH: You're doing great.

JWO: I told you I'd talk too much.

RH: I wanted --

[break in audio]

JWO: OK.

RH: Ready.

JWO: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

RH: OK.

JWO: So --

RH: So you had just spelled Otzma for me.

JWO: Otzma.

RH: OK.

JWO: So I just finished that. Typically on a job like that, and there was no standard, so I could have stayed in the job for five or six years, but typically you take on a job. I went to the head of UJC. Steve Hoffman, from Cleveland, and he was taking on his position for two or three years and then going back to Cleveland and I went into his office one day and I said, you know, I need to talk to you about two things. The first one is, how long am I employed in this position? He said, well, the pay is so good I'm sure you're going to want to stay -- but I really think that three years is optimal for any position like this because there had been no standard set, so we were kind of making it up. He said, the first year, you're kind of really learning. The second year you're implementing it. And the third year you're continuing with the implementation, those were my words not his, but you'd better be grooming some new people to be taking over from you. So, because of the Intifada, I said, I really need another year. I said I need to do what you told me, so they gave me another year. So I was going to be in it four years and I started talking to the staff and I had phenomenal -- a phenomenal young woman in New York that was great staff and I had a person in Israel that was also very good but she was leaving and it

was a good transition time and then the storm hit. So, I said, you all really need to get somebody else to take this because we were planning that anyway, but I -- I'm not -- I was on the phone with the New York staff two-to-three times a day sometimes. And I was really involved, hands-on, with the program for a lot of the time. I mean, very hands-on. I mean, I'd go to Israel three times a year. I'd meet with the kids. I'd meet here before they left. I'd meet, greet them and welcome them back and keep in touch with them. I was very, very hands-on and it was -- when the storm hit and all of a sudden there I was in Houston and I said, guys, it is really time we have to find the right person to take over. I can't be what I was to you. It's not fair to the program. And we'd already been moving, so that was really good. It was perfect timing. My New York staff, her name is Marnie Mandel, and she is an amazingly talented young woman and she said, but I depend on you so much. I mean, I need you for the transition. And I said, I'll be there as much as I can but this is not a good time in my life. And so the storm and that whole was a huge transition. Here I was giving up this job that I loved. It was so -- I was so -- gave me so much. It gave me so much, watching the transition in these young people, in these young adults' lives coming to Israel, spending a year, doing the amazing things that they were able to do. I wanted to go with them. I think that's why I was so involved. You know, I wanted to like participate and live vicariously with them. And it was so exciting when I got to go and meet with them and if it was in October, they were all in one place and if it was in the spring, spring meetings, I would go to the different [program?] 2000 places where they were to meet with some of them. So, when the storm hit, it was like, there is no way I'm going to even be able to go to Israel. There's no way I'm going to be able to be on the phone with Marnie every day or calling Shoshana in Israel. It's just not going to happen. So luckily that transition had started and they -- we found the perfect new person and the staff in New York was able to be more hands-on, her senior partners at UJC. So it was a really, really hard thing for me to give up because I was so dedicated to it and it had given me so much but it was -- there was no way I could continue with it. So it was --

RH: Why don't we go to the storm from this side because I heard you sent your two children and your mother off and you were going to stay at first.

JWO: OK. Well, can I start like the two days before?

RH: Yeah.

JWO: Because it's part of my story.

RH: Yeah.

JWO: So, let me go back to -- while I was doing all of this other stuff, you know, Otzma and everything else, of course I was really, you know, very involved in my local community, being on the board of the synagogue and Federation.

RH: And this is Touro?

JWO: I'm sorry.

RH: Touro?

JWO: Touro Synagogue.

RH: OK.

JWO: I was on the board of Touro Synagogue. I was very involved through Jewish Family Service and on the board. I don't know if I was an officer at that point. I think I was. I think I was treasurer. I was very, you know, whatever fund-raiser, whatever there was going on, Hillel, and I was, of course, on the Federation Board. I don't remember what my job was at that point. So, I was chairing something, some committee, so I was always very involved locally while all of these other things were going on and they were completely different parts of my life. OK. Completely. Like the Jewish Agency -- people knew here that I was going off to Israel but they didn't -- who would even know about

Otzma because there weren't so many local people doing it. You know, it was a smaller program. So, if you only have 85 people from around the country. So, anyway, so storm season happens. On Thursday night, I'd been asked by the then president Bobby Garrin a couple of years before to try once again that he asked me to chair a community-wide fund-raiser. So all of the agencies would get together, and instead of each one having a fund-raiser, they could come together and have one large fund-raiser. And it had been tried before. It was never successful. And when he asked me to do it I was like, talk about giving you a rotten job. You know, like you know it's not going to work. But I was determined I was going to make it work. So, I started with some meetings and we started talking about it and we brought together the Federation execs. Brought together the -- I mean, the agency execs. Brought together the presidents. Brought together different groups. And we started. And then the JCC said, you know, we really want to have the Macabee Games here. And the Macabee Games are so important for a community. I mean they just -- they build up a community like nothing else and that was really exciting to me so I said to the -- they said, you know, Bobby said, if we're going to do the Macabee thing, it's too much to do the community fund-raiser. So they came to me and asked me to co-chair Macabee, which was kind of the same thing. It was this big community-wide thing. So, all of a sudden -- I wasn't -- I was involved with the JCC. Oh, and my kids had, by the way, both ended up going to nursery school at the JCC and I became involved there and it was fabulous and I love it and I'd been on the board and so when they asked me to chair it, to chair Macabee, it was sort of very similar to the jobs I'd been doing in a sense. It was putting together big communities. So, all summer -- well, all that spring and all that summer we'd been working on getting committees together and getting our overall committee, which was close to 100 people. So I'd been very busy asking people to be part of this thing and Thursday, before the storm, we had our first committee meeting and it was, without any question, one of the more exciting things I'd ever done. Because here, all this work, all of these people -- I had a fabulous, this woman, a great staff person at the JCC and she put the binders together. And she was

as anal as I was. Everything had to be color-coded and everybody had to have a binder and everybody had to have extra pages so they could -- you know, and everybody had a thing that was attached to the binder so it was so well organized. And so this girl was like, a woman, like -- whatever. She was so great and when Arline Barren, the executive director of the JCC said, look, you're going to have the best staff person, don't worry, it'll be easy. She was right because we -- and we worked really well together. It was a lot of work putting this thing together. So, the Thursday before the storm, we have our first meeting and it's, you know, people are talking about the storm -- every single person that was on the committee came to that meeting. Every one. It was so cool. We had an orthodox rabbi. We had a Jewish policeman. We had, you know, people really involved in the community. We had people that had never done anything in the community before. We had the athletic type people. We had the coaches and we had the people who were going to do more administrative. We had lawyers. We had doctors. We had policemen. We had firemen -- no, we didn't have a fire person. We had, as I said, rabbis. We -- it was an amazing cross-representation of the community. It was so amazing. That was Thursday. On Friday, one of my very best friends, my college roommate -- when I went away to school, by the way, and came back and graduated from Tulane -- and the first day of classes at Tulane, this girl and I walked in to the third floor of this intro to Spanish class because I had to take it because I didn't, whatever, hadn't placed out because I hadn't taken Spanish when I was away at the other school. So we walk into this -- she's a freshman. I'm now a junior. And we are wearing exactly the same clothes. Frye boots, jeans and a white T-shirt. So we decided we should be friends. Her name is Sugar. She is actually from West Hartford, Connecticut, but we bonded immediately. So, that Friday, her sisters' son is now coming to Tulane. Full scholarship. Honors program. Really bright kid. And I knew them because, of course, when Sugar and I became that close back then, of course then I met the sisters, I was actually in her wedding, so, you know, I knew everybody. So, Nina, her sister, Nina Savin, is coming. Nina Savin's son is coming. This is important later on because Nina is

also a professor at Andover. So Nina arrives. She's like, OK, let's drop off Nate. We're going to go to Jackamo's. We're going to sit at the bar. I'm going to eat great, New Orleans food. We're going to have a couple of drinks and then we'll go pick up Nate and his friends later and then we'll go back to your house and then the next morning we'll get them all moved in and then you and I are going to go out to this fabulous dinner. Where should we go? So, on Friday night, we're sitting at the bar at Jackamo's and I'm thinking, you know, Nina, I think I might call Avis and rent a car for you. Just in case this storm does hit and you want to take off. I have an extra car but, you know, I don't want it necessarily to end up in Boston, so we'd have to get it back. Avis has to make more sense. Don't be ridiculous. If you're not leaving, I'm not going to leave. I'm like, Nina, let me just go get this car. Let's see. So, in the meantime, all of Nate's stuff is here at my house because we're going to move him into the dorm the next day and I call Avis from the bar at Jackamo's and I make a reservation for a SUV and the next morning, Saturday morning -- so, that's Friday night. We're having a great time at Jackamo's. We come back to the house. We go to sleep. We get up the next morning. At 8 o'clock, my computer-helper person comes over to help me do some stuff about Macabee, because I can't do those spreadsheet things and I had to make sure I had everybody in the right slot, even though this staffer was great, and to help me figure out Sophie's soccer schedule and make -- because I was manager of Sophie's soccer team, and Zoe's volleyball stuff and my own personal tennis team stuff, and we were going to make sure I had the rosters right and make sure I had the schedules out and make sure I had the, you know, the e-mail distribution list for all of the parents and everybody. This was a big day on the computer. And she came in at about 8 o'clock and I said, you know what Joanne, maybe we should get some flights for mom and the girls to maybe get out of town. So, she's on one computer -- she's on my little traveling laptop old computer -- and I'm on the big computer and we're on two different phone lines and forget using cell phones because at that point they had already started being jammed. So she's on one phone and I'm on another phone. We're both on a computer and we're trying to get this

thing done, which was impossible -- finding a flight out of New Orleans. So, I -- we finally get three seats on Southwest. And we were just calling Delta, Southwest and Continental because they had the most seats. So we finally get a seat on Southwest, or three seats on Southwest, from New Orleans to Phoenix. Well, we've got some relatives in Phoenix so, OK, fine. They're going to go to Phoenix. I'll call Marshall. Tell him to call, you know, one of his best friends who is also his first cousin, tell him to tell his kids, who are my age, to get their kids ready because my mother and my kids are coming, my kids are going. So, all during that day -- so, then, you know -- fine, we've got them a flight. We decided we were going to get ourselves a flight, but not until Sunday afternoon. She wasn't going to leave and neither was I. Well, rather than doing all of those rosters and e-mail distribution lists and everything, we decide that maybe we should kind of start provisioning our houses and so we kind of made a list of all of the things we were going to do and we were going to do them when we got back in a week. And she went off to do her house and I stayed here to do my house and during the day all day, I kept calling Southwest, and I eventually got three seats to Houston. The Phoenix flight was leaving at 6 in the morning. The Houston flight wasn't leaving until 11. I was a little nervous about that because the storm was supposed to hit Monday morning and if they stop the flights early or if the storm picked up steam and they couldn't get out -- so I hesitated, but I just decided, going to Houston, at least I could get to Houston, you know, if I needed to after the storm hit because, of course I wasn't leaving. So, I called mom. OK, you're going to Houston. You're not going to Phoenix. You're going to Houston. And she was like, I'm going to go spend three or four days in Houston with your daughters? All they're going to want to do is go to the Galleria and shop. I said, mom, I'll promise you. I'll set up some play dates. My kids are teenagers, right. I'll call my friend, Sarah Selbrook, I'll call Deborah Cohen, I'll get her kids to take them out and do stuff with them. You won't be saddled with them. Don't worry. I'll get there if I need to or you'll come home. Well, how am I going to get home? I said, mom, I'll make a return flight for you. No problem. We'll rent a car. I'll fly over. I'll drive you back. It's not

a problem, you know. We'll just wait and see what happens. So, she's -- OK. A little more settled. She doesn't have to be stuck in the hotel with my kids for three days. Little did she know she was going to be stuck in the hotel with them for a month and me too. And so anyway -- so, so then on Saturday I start provisioning, right. I get out ice chests. I buy a ton of ice, because that's the one thing you really want is to be able to have at least a Diet Coke, something, when the electricity goes out and you know the electricity is going to go out, so that's just a fait accompli. So I get tons of ice. I get these stoppers. By the way, if anyone has to go through a storm, bathtubs don't really seal anymore these days. So they have these rubber stoppers that can really keep the water in the tub so you can have -- so you can flush your toilet.

RH: Right.

JWO: Where you can put the bucket in -- and so I get all of these kind of weird things. Tons of batteries. Tons of flashlights. Tons of candles that are in a little glass thing. By the way, they're the best kind because you can set them wherever you are. Don't get regular candles. Get the hurricane candles.

RH: Why not the regular candles.

JWO: Because they tip over.

RH: Oh, OK.

JWO: Yeah. So you can use one if you're in a room and it's -- because it's brighter to read, but the kind that are in a glass thing, they last -- first of all they last much longer. And so I get all of that and I already have tons of Shabbat candles so they last pretty long, too. So anyway I get more of those, the glass ones, and I get -- I already have two of the little portable radios, the little ones. Not radios. Televisions. Who wants to just listen to the radio all of the time? So I got the televisions. I got a couple more of those at Radio Shack. I've got, of course, batteries coming out of my whatever. I got a bunch of

smoked meat -- smoked chickens and smoked steaks. You know, you laugh but I'm not a, you know, I like to have some meat. And they'll last much longer, right. So even if I freeze them, they'll also last when I take them out of the freezer for a couple of days. So I get that. I get a lot of cheese and crackers and I have, already, 45 different kinds of soup in the house and I got the barbeque grill and make sure I have an extra tank of propane so if we don't have -- but I've got gas, also. A gas stove. So, you know -- what more -- what do I need? I've got water. I've got Diet Coke. I don't even like water. I got plenty of iced tea mix. I've got plenty of red wine and I have plenty of vodka and -- what else do I need? I'm fine. You know, I've got a bunch of carrots because they also will last. And I got a bunch of grapes. So, I got all of the food I could possibly need. I got all of the provisions I could possibly need. So then I started looking around my house and I go, you know, we live on a park and that oak tree is really close and there's no question that that oak tree is going to lose a limb or come into the house if the storms are this bad. Maybe I better take some of the art off the walls. Some of the things that really matter to me. And then I just thought, they all matter to me and I start taking down the art off the walls. And then I also realize I've got a bunch of art outside. We have this fence where I've put all of the kids' art and we've collected some outside art and I'm thinking, that's going to be projectile if the winds are this high. So, I start -- oh. In the meantime, Nina, let's not forget about Nina, Nina goes, you know, Julie, it is looking a little rough out there and that storm is big and, you know, if it wasn't Nate here, you know, I'd definitely stay with you but he's 18 years old and I don't want him to have his first experience in New Orleans to be a hurricane. And in the meantime, Tulane is evacuating the students. They let them move into the dorm but then they're taking them right back out Saturday afternoon, so Nina goes, you know, if it's OK, I think I'm going to go ahead and leave. So she takes off on Saturday afternoon and frankly I was -- you know, for me it's one thing. I've lived through it. I know what to expect. For her it was another -- frankly, I didn't want her to feel obligated to help me do all of the things I wanted to do and I didn't want to be feeling like I needed to not do them because -- so she went off and we kept in

touch as much as we could with the cell phone. So I start -- my stepson by the way, the one that's now 29 who was however old, he came over -- my husband was in -- I used to say he was in La La Land because he was in Los Angeles and he was so removed and he watched the storm on the television just like everybody, but he just wasn't getting it. I was like, honey, it's really big. Like I don't think I've seen one quite so big. Like, I'm not so worried about the winds as I am about the size. I'd never seen the whole Gulf engulfed by red. A little yellow and orange but red, the whole thing. So I was beginning to get a little scared myself and that's when I started taking all of the art down and Alden, my stepson would come in and he was tying down the outside furniture, which is not good stuff, so it was like, so we were fine. We -- the kids helped move -- I told them that if it mattered to them it needed to either be in a garbage bag or in their closet.

RH: OK. We're going to just break for a minute and change --

JWO: Tapes.

RH: -- tapes.

JWO: Good. And let me tell Esme that she can, you know, leave --

END OF FILE ONE

JWO: -- I'm beginning to get clued in. And, uh, so we're taking down -- I say to the girls, if it matters to you it has to be in one of these garbage bags. Oh, and I had gone to the hardware store and gotten a whole bunch of those contractor weight plastic bags. I said it either needs to be tied up in this or in your closet or both. I went around the house and I picked up every photograph that I have, and I have huge amounts of albums. They're not fancy but I've got like 30, you know. Just every time I did a picture I put it in an album. And so I took all of those and I put them in rolling duffel bags and I took all the

photographs, all the photo albums, pictures, all around the house, put them in. And then I just started on the art and started on all the silver that I've collected, all the Israeli Judaica that I've collected over the years from going to Israel. And I put it in pots and pans and put it in closets, just so it wouldn't be flying if a window broke. And the art, some of the pieces that were really big, my Alden would help me, my stepson would help me take the contractor bags and put them over that and then we'd tape them, we couldn't find the duct tape, so we'd just find this tape and staple them sometimes. And we took everything, and we put it upstairs in the second floor in the hallway. And there would be a towel, and then a painting, and a towel, and a painting or something and then, you know, tied up in the plastic bag. And then on the floor I had towels and then plastic bags and more towels so that if the water came in there would be space between them and the art. And then they were also in the plastic bags. So that took a lot of time. And we did that a lot. I don't remember if we did it all day on Saturday and or Sunday. So then Sunday morning the kids are supposed to leave at 11:00. Mom and my girls. The flight was at 11:00. But the traffic was so horrendous already. It had started on Saturday, like Nina, it took her forever to get, I don't even remember how far. But normally it's eight hours to Atlanta and it took her 12 to 15. Even on Saturday. So I said to my mother, I think we better leave really early for the airport. It's normally 25 minutes max from my house to the airport. Maybe 35 if there's really bad traffic. It took us two and a half hours or two hours or something, yeah.

RH: Wow.

JWO: So we left really early, we made -- and of course we know the back roads, we're taking, you know, let's cut through here. It didn't matter. We finally got out to the airport and dropped them off. In the meantime, everybody's screaming at me, you need to leave, you need to leave. And I'm like, I'm not leaving, just stop calling. My cell phone was ringing. My friend Sarah Silber from Houston was calling. My friend Karen Marcus from Miami. My husband in the meantime is going, well, honey, don't you think maybe

you should leave? And I was like, not leaving.

RH: So why didn't you want to leave? Do you have a sense of –

JWO: I'd left before. I hated coming back in the eight and 10 hour traffic coming back. I wanted to be here to protect my house or to -- I just didn't want to leave.

RH: OK.

JWO: It wasn't -- We'll get there. So, I get them to the airport. And then I'm thinking, you know, maybe I should listen to some of these people that are screaming at me. But I wasn't going to even think about it or consider it until they were on the ground in Houston. So they called me at about, whatever, 1:30 or 1:00 and they're on the ground in Houston. And I said, OK, I tell you what. I will -- can we cut for a second?

RH: Yeah.

JWO: She's called me three times and I'm sort of nervous. She keeps calling and I, you know, I'm only --

RH: You get nervous because, yeah.

JWO: Well, I mean, I had my finger on the button to push it away but it didn't go. OK are we back on or you just cut that part? We're still on --

RH: We're back on.

JWO: I'm sorry about that, yeah --

RH: It's OK.

JWO: You can use that for comedy relief. So when my kids, when the girls and my mother landed in Houston then I'm like, fine now I can go. But I still wasn't leaving. Oh,

why wasn't I leaving? Because I wasn't going to leave. Just, there was no need to. My house is three floors. Even if the roof blows off, I've still got the first floor. You know, so there's water damage. If there's water damage at least I can clean it up. If we're out of power for two or three days at least I can clean out the refrigerator. There are just so many reasons that I was staying. So at about 2:00 on Sunday, Alden my stepson and I had been working like mad dogs for the whole day, except for the time I went to the airport. Of course coming back from the airport took 20 minutes, but... And he said, You know, maybe we should go. Because he was also going to stay. And I said, I'm not going. I'm just not. And he said, Well, you know, Uncle David -- David Oreck, his uncle -- had said to him, you know, come up to the farm, we're up in Poplarville, Mississippi, come up here. He said the same thing to me and I kept saying, No I'm not going. So Alden said, I think I'm going to go up to Uncle David's farm in Mississippi. And I said, OK honey that's fine. We had decided if we were going to go we were going to go together. So I was kind of aggravated with him because I wanted him to come with me and he wanted to go up there. So he was phenomenal though. He put everything, he put all the duffel bags, these huge duffel bags that I had with these photo albums and all the photographs in the car for me. I did go ahead and provision these ice chests and I took all the televisions and the radios. And I sort of began to decide I was going to go at some point. I would do a little bit here and there. But I still wasn't sure I was going. The phone rings about 2:00. The phone hadn't stopped ringing but the phone rings about 2:00. And it's this guy from Israel from the Jewish Agencies. His name is Yarden Vatikai and he says -- he's got a very heavy Israeli accent, I couldn't quite understand -- he's like, Julie it's Yarden from the Jewish Agency from the Spokesman's Bureau. We'd like to do an interview with you. [laughter] I said, Yarden, do you have any idea. He said, Well, yes, that's the point, we want to know what's happening there, you're on the ground, can you tell us. And by the way do you speak Hebrew? And I said, No I don't speak Hebrew. Well, can you find us somebody who speaks Hebrew? I'm like, Yarden, I don't think anybody that's here right now will be able to talk to you because we're all kind of a little

busy provisioning and trying to get ready. And he says, Oh please. So I call a couple of people and in fact I did get somebody on the phone that spoke Hebrew. In the meantime, please, please can we do this interview? No no no, I don't have time. I hang up. Call me back in an hour, I'll decide. So he calls back in about half an hour and I said, you can't call my cell phone, you have to call the house phone, I can't -- It's not working, it's breaking up. So they call the house phone, I do this like 10 minute interview with Channel 2 News in Israel. And he calls me right back after I finish and he says, we'd like a picture so while you're speaking we'll show your picture on the television. I'm like, Oh yeah, that's just what I have time to do, go get a picture of myself and email it. In fact, right at that moment when he called back, I had thought to myself, I'm going to go upstairs and get the computer. If I'm going to leave the computer's right by the window that the oak tree is going to crash into. So I go upstairs and I'm literally sitting at the computer when he calls back. And I thought, OK. I said, OK, give me an email. If I can do it I will. And I flipped through a couple of pictures while I'm talking on the phone or doing something else. And sure enough there's a picture of me at a Jewish Agency meeting. It's the only one I can think of that's only me. So I said, ship it off. The next day I kept getting calls from people. Oh my god, we saw you on television in Israel, it was really funny. There's a reason for this story. So finally at about 6:00 I've been screamed at by enough people, that big red ball became very ominous. Had been ominous. And I decide that, you know, maybe I should go. Maybe some of the things that I was not thinking would be a problem were going to be a problem. And that if in fact the storm was so big and we were going to be out of power for so long that I was actually -- there was one thing that made me leave. I didn't have a gun. And one of my relatives, who will remain nameless, said, you know, so if you're dead it's one thing. But what if they come in and rape you? And I thought, hmm, that's kind of doing it for me. The fear of being dead wasn't, but the fear of being raped was. And not being able to protect myself. Not that I had ever shot anyone or hardly ever shot a gun. But if I had had a gun I would have stayed, I'm convinced. But I didn't, and so... Around 6:00 I thought, OK,

maybe I'm going to go. Luckily I had also heard about the counter flooding thing, that's really important if this ever happens again -- know how your counter flows work and where -- otherwise you're going to be in Jackson, Mississippi which is not where I wanted to go. I wanted to go west, there was one lane that went west. So I got in the car and I pulled out of the driveway and I said, Gosh, I need a corkscrew for the red wine I have in the car. [laughter] Drove back in. Hmm, do I have enough ice? I got another little ice chest. Because I figured I was going to be sleeping on the road someplace. And I took off, and to make a very long story short, it took me like five hours to get to Baton Rouge. Normally it's an hour. It took me another five hours to get to, I don't know, Lafayette, maybe, the timing isn't exactly right. At around Lafayette -- oh and I have two cell phones, by the way and car chargers for both -- and I was either on, trying to get through on one or the other. Or if I got somebody on the phone like my mom in Houston we'd stay on the phone, on that one phone for awhile. What she was trying to do in the meantime in Houston was get me a hotel room. Anywhere between here and Houston. Oh there was one other part. So that whole counter flow thing. So I take off and I go down Clayburn Avenue because I'm not, by the way, going to Houston. I'm going to go to Destin where we have a house that we rent out but it's not rented because it's, it wasn't rented. So I'm headed to Florida. And I get to the end of Clayburn Avenue where you have to either go West or East. And normally you would not go that way to be going West to Houston. I was going East. And I got to this intersection, it was about 6:30 at night, Sunday night. And I said, Mom, you know, I can go to the Destin house and it's open and they left me a key and blah blah blah. Or I can come to Houston. And she once again said, if you think I'm staying in Houston for three days with your kids... [laughter]. So I turned left and I went to Houston. And, which is a lot, the point is that that happened to so many people. Turn one way, you go one way, you get an airplane ticket. You know, there was no, I'm going to be away for six months. I'm going to plan where I'm going. So I turn left and I went to Houston. I ended up literally -- I kept filling the car up with gas, you know, you couldn't let that get too, because there was no gas

stations and there were long, long lines. A lot of people had run out of gas on the road. It's the last thing you want to do. So as soon as I got down to half a tank I'd try to find a place to fill up. And that took a long time because the lines were so long. Forget about trying to find a bathroom. I mean, forget about it. And then I started trying to find a parking lot at a hotel where I could just pull over and go to sleep. There wasn't a spot on the road to pull over. Cars were either broken down, ran out of gas, or people were doing what I'd planned on doing which was just pulling over and going to sleep. There wasn't a hotel parking lot, there was nothing. Finally I call, and I kept calling non-chain places because mom was calling all the chain places. And there is a sign for L'Auberge du Soleil. And it said casino in Lake Charles. And they told me they had a room. And I thought, Oh my god. I thought it was, I really at that point was starting to hallucinate. I had never went more than like 10 miles an hour, you just take your foot off the brake and put it back on, take your foot off the brake, every now and then you might touch the gas pedal. But very rarely. I had the televisions going, I had the radio on, I was, you know -- so I pull off to go to this hotel. I drive in and it's like Oz. It's like, you know, Oz. I had been -- and I hadn't changed from all the work I had been doing all day. I go to the front desk, they go, Oh no, we don't have a room for you, there must be some mistake. I look at the guy and I said, let me explain this to you. You're going to let me sleep someplace in this hotel and I don't care where it is. I'm going to sleep here. I said, that couch, back office, doesn't matter. I have the women's name, I have my, you know, that she told me I have a room. Figure it out. In fact they gave me a room. I kept going back there in the next few weeks because they had been so lovely. And then they got hit by Rita. So I go in, it's about 3:00 in the morning. I had left here at, what, 6:00, 6:30. So it's normally a four hour drive to there, four or five hour drive. Maybe it was four, I think it was four when I got there. Anyway, it doesn't matter. And I sort of spend the night. I sleep. And I talk to a friend of mine that's here, stayed in a hotel, storm's over. She's fine, she and her husband are going back to their house to see, you know, what damage has happened. I find out later that right after I talked to her and they were going out was when the water

started coming downtown. And they got separated and it was a big trauma for them. So anyway, there I am in Houston with my kids and my mom. Oh, I had spent the night there and then I drove the next morning, I slept a couple of hours, just enough to, and it was only another two hours there. I get to Houston, find out about the, I guess I'd been finding out about the flooding when I was driving because it was like midday on Sunday. I mean on Monday. And that's it. So there we were in Houston in the Derrick Hotel for a month. And I got the kids in school. My friends in Houston were like amazing and like boom boom boom. We're in shock, you know. We were just in shock, you know. And luckily I had all these friends around the country and they were like, you need to do this, you need to do that. Because anybody from New Orleans is also in shock. So people that were outside of New Orleans, some were very sensitive to the trauma that we were in. Some of them were like, well, I don't understand, what's the big deal? [laughter] Like, our city's underwater, we don't know what's happened with our house. One of my best friend's husbands had stayed and a computer, my friend that's a computer consultant, her brother had stayed. So we knew our house was OK, we knew that the oak tree in fact had not come in the house. That the other tree in the back of the house had fallen on the house but it hadn't broken through. We knew that there was a window out on the third floor, which was pretty bad, because the third floor window out, water coming through. So we knew that there would be pretty significant damage but not, you know, it didn't flood. We didn't flood. We knew where the water stopped. We could tell that. So we knew that our house hadn't flooded. But we also knew that a lot of our friends' houses were gone or we suspected they were pretty damaged. Lakeview, Metairie, even, you know, even houses that weren't being shown, you know, it wasn't just the 9th Ward, 85% of the city flooded. So friends of ours that we were with knew that they had lost a lot. So it was sad.

RH: What was it like to have friends that you were seeing in Houston who lost everything and you knew you hadn't flooded, was --

JWO: Survivors' guilt.

RH: Yeah?

JWO: It was horrible. You felt so bad. Even to this day, like, I said something very insensitive or the person thought it was insensitive one day when it was like, I just don't think it's going to happen again. She was very panicked about, well, you know, what if it happens again? And I was like, you know, it was such a bizarre set of circumstances, the storm surge, the fact that the levees were in fact flawed and we knew that, that they weren't fixed. That the high tide, you know, there were so many factors that went into what had happened that I felt weren't going to happen again. And she said, you didn't lose anything. And I said, well, I didn't lose anything personally, no. But I've gone through it with you and so many others. She said, it's not the same. And she was right. It's not. You know, it's just not. Suzanne Somers, ironically, was on one of those stupid shows that comes on after the news Entertainment Tonight. And her house had exploded. And, exploded. And it was gone. And that's what happened, it's just gone. It's even worse than just gone, because, you know, when you've lost everything from your kids' birth certificates to your pictures, photographs, to the family bible, to your jewelry, to the artwork that you've collected -- it's just gone. It's different for Suzanne Somers when it was just blown up in fire. It was still there. It was just destroyed. You could see it. You could see your child's baby pictures covered with muck. So it's worse than a fire in my opinion because you -- well, I guess a fire's not so great, don't get me wrong. But the pieces of the, everything's still there, it's just destroyed. It's not gone away, it's just destroyed, so it's all sitting there mucked up, destroyed.

RH: Did you and Marshall have discussions about how to divide up tasks or did that just happen naturally or --

JWO: Well, his task was maintaining, you know, them trying to maintain their business. Because their, the manufacturing plants on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which of course

things did just go there, you know, the tidal surge just took them away. So friends of mine that had houses there -- I had seen pictures of their houses later, they were just gone. They're just gone, they're just not there. This one man that I work with has, you know, his family house had been in their family for generations. And he showed me pictures. He said he found his mother's china three blocks down. In a box all broken up. When we were in Houston we'd wander around the Galleria, not because we were shopping, but that's where everybody congregated. That and Nielsen's [?] in Houston, the deli, that was great. I mean, you would, every second you'd see somebody. It was never, the question was always, did you flood? How did you do? If you knew where they lived, you knew it wasn't probably good. Like, a friend of mine that lives in Lakeview, on Lakeshore, she lost everything in her closet on the second, you know, she lost all of her pants and skirts and shoes. She still had tops and jackets. As did her husband. She said, it's great, I can just go around naked from the waist down. [laughter] I can just buy 10 pairs of jeans and I'm fine, you know, and 2 pairs of flip flops. But it wasn't funny, you know, it just wasn't funny. It was horrible. The depression, the overall trauma and depression is something that nobody but us understands. I mean, just like I can't understand going into my house with a gas mask on and seeing my kids photographs all over, destroyed, nobody that's not from here, that didn't live through this can understand. No one. I mean, you can think you can understand it, and you can sense, be sensitive to it. You can be thoughtful and nice enough to try to understand. But no one gets it. Just like any other thing like that. Like if you'd lived through the Holocaust or a tsunami or, you know, any kind of major life altering physical -- especially like the tsunami I would think -- but something like that. Or I always think about, you know, WWII or bombings or things like that. Unless you'd lived in that kind of thing. Or Northern Israel and had lived in the bombs shelters and had to go in and out and understood that kind of trauma too. People didn't get it. We got it. So we bonded together. We were there to help each other, you know. Sophie's, one of Sophie's friend's father said, quick, call this real estate agent, they've got some more apartments. This building's sold out already because

Tulane took almost all of the whole building because they put their staff in it. But there's this other building right here and it was real close to the Galleria, which of course is centrally located. It ended up being the best thing in the world for me because one kid went, one girl went to one school, one of my daughter's went to one and one went to the other. And this happened to be right in between so it was perfect for me. And it was close enough to friends and getting around. But the happenstance of where people ended up was so bizarrely by chance. Where they ending up renting an apartment, if they rented an apartment, where they ended up physically, Houston or Dallas or San Antonio or Miami or, you know, Utah. If they had family they went one place, if they, like us, just kind of went someplace that was close because they figured they were coming back was another. The next few weeks and few months were just, were not, there's nothing there that I really need or want to remember. You know?

RH: Really?

JWO: You know, the kindness of strangers and most importantly of friends that helped us is something you remember. But the day to day life of living wasn't pleasant at all. You know, you began to adjust. But the uncertainty of what was going to be... So here's the other part of my story, for me at least. So finally, I'm not the kind of person that's just going to sit around and wait. So my brother-in-law comes to Houston from Boston to help us and I might, you know, start crying a little bit here, because those were the kind of things that you don't forget. People that really helped. I mean, there were plenty of people that helped, don't get me wrong, I'm not like saying there weren't, you know -- but some people did things that were little, maybe to them, but huge to us. My friend who insisted that, you know, we needed a break and here's my house and I'm going to the country for the weekend. Just come use my house as a vacation from the hotel room. That was huge. My other friend who got her two daughters and said, let's just go out to dinner, you know, the six of us. And the six of us went to dinner, just to, you know, this neighborhood-y Italian place, it was actually a chain. And just sitting there and kind of

almost being normal, you know. Those little things really were... Anyway, so my brother-in-law comes, we rent a car in Houston -- we can't get flights into New Orleans. We, I don't even know if the airport was open yet, I don't think it was. So we got a flight to Jackson. It's six hours, about, from Houston. Five and a half or six. And it's only three from Jackson, and we would be coming in from another angle, so we thought it would be safer to be able to get into the city. My brother-in-law, my husband's brother, is pretty well-known. And he, you know, he's on television a lot. So that morning he had gotten in with some paperwork that my husband had the identical paperwork. But we had flown into Jackson in the morning and then drove down and with all that transferring it took a long, it took us awhile to get in. And we didn't get to the border, the border that was being guarded by the machine guns and the National Guard and the police. We didn't get there till about 2:00 and they wouldn't let us in. Same stuff that my husband had. Couldn't do anything. They wouldn't let us in. This is a mile from my house. This is --

RH: Where you stopped?

JWO: -- a block, you know, this is down the street from Giacomo's where I'd been with my friend --

RH: On the Jefferson Parish border, yeah.

JWO: -- a few days before. Right there at the end, at River Road. It would take me right now, driving there, maybe five minutes, you know, maybe five minutes. That's how close I am to my house. And they won't let me go across the border. And I'm calling it a border because that's what it was. So I, we see some friends that are walking back in to this parking lot where this place is, it's sort of like a pool hall. And we're in the meantime just sitting there going, well what should we do? And I say to my friend that's walking in his hip boots and he's got some stuff on his back and his son was with him who's in his 20s -- they had gone in to rescue their cats. And they had walked in and they'd shown us how to get in. But they say to me, you shouldn't go. I mean, back to the "you might get

raped” thing, you know. So my husband and my brother-in-law Kevin go and they walk over and sneak in. But it’s through this kind of sketchy neighborhood. Oh, in the meantime, I’m in New Orleans, I’m going to find a way in. I drive up and down trying to find things to go in. Finally we give up and my brother-in-law and my husband walk in this like, crawl, not crawl but cross over this weird little area into this neighborhood where we hear people are kind of like walking around with guns and... So I’m thinking my sister’s going to be real happy when she hears I’ve sent my brother-in-law into this. [laughter] But nonetheless, so they walk in, and in the meantime I’d been talking to this policeman. Two policeman had already committed suicide. And I was really, really upset because one of them it sounded like was this man I knew. So I spoke to this one policeman and I said, was it this man, this one? He’s a sergeant or whatever. And he said, no it wasn’t him but it was one of my best friends. And he started crying, this is this big New Orleans policeman. It was so horrible. So I go back to the parking lot. My brother-in-law and my husband have walked in and I’m now stuck in this parking lot in 90 degree heat in this little disgusting rental car, we got the last car in Jackson I think from this really random place. And there’s a whole posse of people and they’re about to go crawl in, sneak in, this other way. My friend, the cell phones aren’t working, so my friend text messages me, the one that came out in the hip boots. And he says, there’s an SPCA truck in line to get in. Go see if they’ll sneak you in. So I go down the road about two blocks so the guard, the militia, can’t see me. And I talk to the SPCA guy and he goes, you know what -- I said, look, I’ll make a huge donation, all I need you to do is cross the border and I’ll be fine, you can just drop me off, I don’t live far away. And he said, I can’t do it, because if they catch me I’ll lose my credentials. And I felt really bad, guilty, about even asking. So I look over and I knew that these other people had crossed the levee and had walked. Now I’d walked up the line of traffic that were, you know, far enough that the guards couldn’t see me. So I crossed over the levee down on the side by the river and I walked in. In the meantime I’d gotten my sister on the phone so I was kind of walking with her if you will. And she’s on the phone. But it was good for me,

because if something had happened somebody knew what had happened to me. Because I really was worried about being shot by the militia, not by the, you know -- but I didn't know who was on the other side of the, whoever goes on the side by the river. It's not exactly safe because the river's there and the river was low at that point, so that was good. So I'm walking on the side of the river and I'm crossing the border, if you will, and they're looking behind me so they're not really looking for people to do what I was doing. And I walk another couple of blocks and my sister's screaming at me and I'm like, Ginny, be quiet, there are people around up on the levee, I don't want them to hear you. Get out of there! Turn around and go back! You're crazy! I said, I'm not going to turn around and go back, they'll shoot me then for sure. Or at least arrest me, you know. And so I'm going a little further and I look up on the levee. And I know I've gone far enough now that they can't see me because the way the road is. And I look up and there's a van and there are these three men on the top of the levee. And I think, you know, do I say something to them, do I not. And they're obviously not military or you know any police or anything. So I say, do I say something to them or do I not. What do I do? So I wait a minute, and one of them is filming and one of them is obviously the director and one of them is obviously a reporter, three men. And I'm thinking, OK. So I'm watching them film and I'm kind of walking by them. And they're, you know, 50 feet or, I don't know how long. I'm at the bottom of the levee, they're at the top. And they don't see me because they're looking out over the river. And I think, OK, do I say something, do I, you know, ask them for a ride. They're finishing up and I'm thinking, now's my chance. So I kind of begin to approach them. They still don't see me and I realize they're speaking in a foreign language. But I can't tell what it is. And one of them goes, "Bevakasha!" And I go, oh my god. It's the Israelis! [laughter] It's the Israeli film crew! I knew that they were, you know -- I'm like dying. Who but me is now going to be rescued by the Israelis? I say to them, I go to, I go up, you know, closer and I'm like, they still haven't seen me but I know realize that they're the Israelis. And I have my little star of David and I'm like, I'm Jewish, I'm Jewish! You know. I go to Israel all the time! Here's my card,

look, it even has the Israel number! And then I think, who do I know that they know? And I go, Nachman Shai. He was a very well-known television newscaster, he did the Gulf War and he works now with the United Jewish Communities in Israel. And they look at me like I'm insane. And they start filming. No, no, no, you can't film me! And my hair is in a, I'm in these like, I'm disgusting, I've been sitting out in this sweaty parking lot. I'm like, oh my god. I'm going to be rescued by the Israelis. And sure enough we start talking. They're absolutely lovely. The guy's name is Arad [Near?], he's from Channel 2 News. It's the same channel I'd been on when I was interviewed --

RH: Right before you left.

JWO: Same channel.

RH: Wow.

JWO: So they put me in the van and they drive me to my house. It was so bizarre. I mean, the park was covered. It was, I don't know how long it was, maybe 10 days, maybe not even that long after the storm. The park was covered, you couldn't even see the green grass, it was just covered with limbs. [Limbs of trees, presumably? --Ed.] St. Charles Avenue, there was just a, there was just tracks that, you know, where the wheels of the cars that had gone. They couldn't get up the driveway, I wouldn't have them come up anyway because there was so much debris. I'm begging them to take something, I said, you know, I'm sure I've got, hot beer in the refrigerator. [laughter] I've got, you know, can I give you wine or can I give you liquor or can I give you food, I've got tons of food, please let me give you some. No no no, don't worry about it, we're completely taken care of, we're staying at this place. We've got food, we've got everything we need. You know, he gave me his card, told me to call him. So that was my story.

RH: Wow, that's quite a story.

JWO: Of the, you know, of that part of it.

RH: Coming back.

JWO: And the rest, you know, the rest is history.

RH: Well, how did you connect and get involved with the whole recovery, the Jewish, the plan for recovery?

JWO: You know, how could you not? You know, if you're involved in the, if you're involved at all -- I mean, we would have conference calls, executive committee conference calls, both Federation and synagogue, Jewish Family Service, you know. I was also on the, Newman, the kids' high school, I was on that board. If you'd been at all involved before, you weren't going to not be involved now. I mean, this is when your community needs you, right, I mean this is --

RH: Well, did you start to get involved in Houston? Did you --

JWO: I really, I was not president of any of the organizations or executive director. And they put together sort of a kitchen cabinet or panel, you know, a group that was the president's executive directors. And they, along with this guy Michael Novak from JVC sort of began to like, what are we going to do, where are we going to be, what do we need to be, how do we need to be? Just everything. So they, that group, the task force, whatever you want to call it, all fall was meeting as they were able to. Al Bissinger, that was just taking over from Bobby Guerin as president of the Federation, he had stayed and he had swum, swam, out of his house, made it to dry ground and eventually made it to Baton Rouge where a lot of our people were. There were a lot of people, I mean our people, [Sam Libby?] from Jewish Endowment was there, Dena Gerber was in Atlanta, Arlene Baron was in Houston down the street from me. So, you know, conference calls became the way of the world. And I guess, you know at one point Arlene and I were together at something and she said, don't think we're going to be able to have Maccabee. It's like, because it was so, that was like... So maybe because that had been,

I'd been so involved in that and that was so community, you know, I don't know. It was just, you did what you had to do. You did whatever you could do, not what you had to do, you did what you could do.

RH: Did you think about things like Maccabee? Did you think about those things?

JWO: Oh constantly.

RH: Yeah?

JWO: The loss --

RH: The losses.

JWO: -- oh the loss was so great. Not for me personally but for our community. I mean this was the biggest thing we'd ever done, you know, we'd been to this meeting in New York, we had, you know, we put together this amazing committee, we had... oh, it was, the loss of that was so huge. So huge. To me in some ways probably the biggest loss for me of the community that we suffered. Because it was, I mean, we suffered a lot of losses, don't get me wrong, I don't know what's bigger. They're all big. The loss of the population. Loss of our infrastructure, of the city. Loss of the, the loss of some major leaders that were here, incoming leaders in the community. But for me personally this was something I had worked really hard on, I was really excited about it. Two amazing co-chairs, one was Arnie Fielkow and Jake Schwartz, Jeff Schwartz. He goes by both. So the loss of that, for me personally, was so huge because it was so amazing, the project was going to be so great. The event was going to be so fabulous for the city and I just... You move forward. You know, we kind of decided, you know, let's just think if there's any way we can do it. You know, there was just no way. Arlene didn't have the staff, we didn't know what staff was coming back, what wasn't. A lot of the programming was going to be on Tulane campus, you know. How Tulane had to get -- what, we're going to go to Scott Cowen, the president of Tulane and say, by the way can we still use

your facility in six months? You know, they didn't even know what they were going to be in six months. So it's, yeah, those losses were so, so hard. Not just for me, I mean, for everybody. So getting involved in recovery, I mean, we were all involved in recovery, you did whatever you could, I think. I mean, I don't know of anybody that didn't, unless they weren't coming back and they just said sayonara, see you later, you know.

RH: Describe how this recovery program came into being and the different committees. You went through it the other day and it would be helpful to have it on film.

JWO: During that first process where the executive directors and the presidents met, along with the facilitator from the Joint, JDC. They kind of delineated the five areas that they felt were going to be the most critical. And those areas then would put together committees whether it was, you know, marketing, regionalization, fundraising, how were we going to fundraise. Just all of the different aspects, which parts did we have to look at differently. Or, you know, like, this isn't going to happen the way it happened before, how are we going to make it different. How are we going to figure out what's going to be right? And I have to say, kind of like Maccabee, that was a gift that I was given to help lead that. Because I got a real birds-eye view of the whole thing. Like if you were chairing one of those task forces and you had a committee, you were really involved in that one. But what was, you know, really extraordinary for me is I got to see them all. I got to see how they interrelated. I got to see how there were really similar things on some of them. There were areas that were crossovers on some. So the other really great thing about that was I got to ask the five chairs to chair. And that was really exciting because everyone said yes. And they were, we were very careful to pick people that we knew knew the New Orleans community.

RH: So when you say we were very careful you mean Alan Bissinger or --

JWO: At the time the acting exec was Roselle Ungar of Federation. So it was [Conard?], Alan, and me and Roselle and a couple of other people that were, you know, that knew

the community. And so we came up with names that we thought would be, that we knew knew the community. Not just this part of the community or that part of the community. They had already been presidents of something, they were on boards of other things, you know, they weren't just on one organization, you know, involved in one organization. It was community, it was people that had been involved in community for a number of years. And then we modified them a bit when Michael Wile came in, he's a strategic planner and he's a community planner and he said --

RH: And he's the new director of the --

JWO: He's the executive director. And when he came in he tweaked some of the committees a bit and one of the committee chairs said, wait a second, I didn't sign up for that! That's not my forte, I don't think I can do that. But he did, you know. And I think everybody was so on board with we need to look at ourselves differently, we need to figure out who we are and where we're going and the best way to get there.

RH: How do you think people are seeing themselves now as a Jewish community. I mean, I recall interviewing Arlene and she said it was such a shock to go to Nashville and to realize that this Jewish community was smaller than Nashville.

JWO: I'm, you know, we always had a tremendously strong Jewish community. We had a very high affiliation rate, I'm sure you've heard this from other people. We had a very tightly knit strong Jewish community. I don't think that will or has changed. I remember one of my really best friends is from Tampa, a really good friend. And I have another really good friend, actually he's the exec in Jacksonville. And I couldn't believe it when I heard the size of their community and their campaign. Their community is bigger and their campaign was significantly smaller, both Tampa and Jacksonville. Which I look at as a comparable size, you know, whatever, I mean they are a comparable size. But bigger. And you know what, that just goes to what I'm saying, that we are a very, we've always been a very strong community. I don't care in some ways, well I can't say I don't

care that we're smaller because it's huge that we're smaller -- whatever size we're going to be, we're going to be. Can we get back to where we are? I'm sure we will eventually. Is it going to happen overnight? No. Is the city going to come back overnight? Obviously not, drive around, see where we are. But I think that we will continue to be strengthened just as we are going to continue to heal. Which is, I don't think any of us are quite there yet. But we will get better, we will get stronger, and we will get better. And I'm not --

RH: What do you want to see stay here in this community? What's distinctive that you don't want to lose?

JWO: As I look at the people that have left, we lost, you know, a third of our population. They weren't all major donors, but we lost some major donors. They weren't all presidents and vice presidents and, you know, hugely involved in the agencies, but some of them were. They weren't all whatever, they were a cross section just like in the city. They were everybody. And I, I miss them. But you have to move forward. You know, I mean you can't cry over spilled milk. You just have to clean it up and make sure that it's not smelling. [laughter] You know what I mean? You just have to, you have to go forward. I don't look back.

RH: You've said though that you've had a little trouble dealing with the people who've left. You're angry.

JWO: I'm upset that people have left. I don't know that I'm personally upset at Joe or -- using a generic name -- Joe or Jane, you know, I don't know Joe or Jane so I can use that. I'm just, I love my city. And I don't, I want to see it strong. And when you lose people you become not as strong. Many years ago during the first Intifada, I went to Israel on a mission. It was a solidarity mission. We had, I don't know, nine buses or something, it was huge. And one of my really good friends is from Miami and this other friend of mine from Chicago, and the three of us would sit up every night and write like a

dispatch back to everyone. And my friend from Miami, OK so he happens to be a doctor, said, when people are sick you need to go visit them, you need to go help them get better. And that's why we're here in Israel. And that's what I've seen here, you know, how many people have we had come in, how gratifying is it to know that people are out there and care about us and are here to help us. At one point I went to work gutting houses with a group called Nahama, it's based in Minneapolis of all places. And they were down here a lot gutting houses. And this man who's from UJC, Howie Feinberg, Howie was sort of our liaison with UJC and he was down here constantly. And he brought his family, two teenage boys, down in August to gut houses as their vacation. You know? The people that left left for a variety of reasons. I know it sounds terrible, they're in a better place for them, you know. Family, jobs, whatever. Am I angry that they left, am I angry at them? Yeah. But I'm not angry at Joe. And I'm not angry at Jane. I'm angry because I want, you know, we want to be back where we were and we can't be there without them. So we have to find new "them". You know, we have to find new, the people that have come in, the extraordinary young people that are coming in to help rebuild the city. Somebody coined the word "yurpie" -- young urban rebuilding professional, I love that. You know, the people that have come in that are, that are here to, they're here to help. And that's really exciting. I need to be clear though when I say I'm angry at those people it's not them individually. It's not each one of them and what they're doing. It's the collective them.

RH: Well you know the community is going to be smaller but are there any other things that you see, any other trends that you're starting to see. I mean, is it going to be a Reform community?

JWO: You know --

RH: Is it going to be a younger community?

JWO: -- this may be incredibly ridiculously optimistic, but I think if it's possible we're going to be a better community. We're going to have survived together. We're going to have come together in a way that no other community has ever come together that I've ever heard of. Every synagogue, every agency sitting at the table together, trying to figure out what's best for us as a Jewish community here in New Orleans. What could be better than that? What could be better than every synagogue from Modern Orthodox to Chabad to Reform to Conservative, we don't have Reconstructionist but they're welcome to join us if they like. Every one of them is coming here and is coming together. They're all on the task forces, every one of our task forces was populated by every agency organization in town, from Hadassah to National Council of Jewish Women to Hillel to all of our constituent agencies, Jewish Children's Regional Service. If it was Jewish it was in the room. Everyone on every task force. And if you didn't want to be on task force one, you could be on task force five. You could choose, but we made sure that we had a cross-representation of task forces. When we've seen things that weren't addressed we've addressed them. When we've felt like there were things missing we tried to fill it in. In 10 years we'll look back and say we could have done it better. No question about it. There are things that we should be doing that we aren't doing. But we don't know what they are now. We'll know what they are in 10 years. But if we found it we've tried to do it.

RH: So what are some of the things you really like that the Jewish community, that's coming out of this planning union that really you feel is positive?

JWO: The community-wide events that we had before, that we might have had before. The Hanukkah party where everybody came back to the city. The collaboration among the other synagogues together. There was just recently an event I call the Joseph Telushkin weekend, you know, where the West Esplanade Quarter organization, well synagogues really, Chabad, Gates of Prayer, Beth Israel now because they're housed at Gates of Prayer, Beth Israel being the Modern Orthodox synagogue is housed at the

Reform synagogue, hello. Chabad's down the street and the Conservative is right across the street. So they got together and Joseph Telushkin came in and was, you know, if you're both scholar-in-residence and did something Friday night here and Saturday morning there and Saturday afternoon there, you know. What kind of great collaboration is that? Should it have happened before? Of course. Did it ever? No. Will it happen in the future? I hope so. So --

RH: So what are these parlor meetings?

JWO: Oh, one of the task forces -- do you want me to talk about some of the things that came out of the task forces?

RH: Yeah, please.

JWO: One of the things that came out of the task forces, one of the task forces, we were talking about regionalization. How can we better, how can we work together better? Not just the agencies but the community. And we decided that we needed to hear from particularly the North Shore because the North Shore -- the North Shore is the North Shore, it's not going to change, it's 25 miles between here and there, period, the end. There is a huge body of water, you know, I mean what are you going to do? How do you do more cross-programming, how do you make things happen better together? So we wanted to hear from the North Shore, especially post-storm. What's different about you, what are your needs, are they any different than they were before, blah blah blah. Turns out the parlor meeting -- there weren't so many things that came out of it that we could do better. But they internally realized some things that they could do better because, just coming from this discussion. And that parlor meeting brought in people from the North Shore that maybe hadn't been involved before. So it helped within their own community, not just them and us, OK. And so then we also decided we'd have one in Metairie. Well Metairie isn't exactly not part of, you know, I mean New Orleans and Metairie are the same city, if you will. But on the other hand, are the needs different? Are there different

needs now in Metairie? Or have more people moved to Metairie? Or not? Or is there a different dynamic or whatever. I mean, you just need to hear, you need to communicate, you need to talk. And —

RH: So had more people moved to Metairie?

JWO: I don't think, it's interesting, we talked about that the other -- we're also going to do one out in Lakeview, Lakeshore area, out by the lake we call it because it kind of encompasses all those areas. So out by the lake, we're going to do one there. People that are no longer living out by the lake, because it was one of the areas that was hardest hit, I've kind of done my own little demographic thing. They've moved everywhere. They've moved to Metairie, they've moved uptown, they've moved to mid-city. I haven't found that all of them moved to Metairie at all.

RH: Um, we're going to stop for a minute --

END OF AUDIO FILE 2

RH: -- and I'm speaking with Julie Wise Oreck. I almost called you your mother's name.

JWO: That's OK -- in 2007, almost two years after the storm.

RH: 2007, right. I'm curious about -- if you notice -- I haven't had NCJW or Hadassah come up on my screen a whole lot. And I'm wondering just about -- not just organizations, but just gender in general, and how women are working, how men are working in the community -- in the Jewish community -- if you've noticed?

JWO: Well, I mean, the things that aren't constituent agencies -- so other than Hillel, JCC, Jewish Family Service, other organizations, ADL, AIPAC, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women -- somebody's going to get mad I forgot an acronym, I don't

know, doesn't matter -- all of those organizations that had some national ties. I think they had -- just like we had UJC, the Federation, or just like the Reform synagogues had URJ -- it's nice to have a partner outside of the city. You know, how are people working? Some people are working quite well and getting on with everything, and some people commit suicide. You know, the level of drug and alcohol abuse, the level of depression, is overwhelming. You know, this young man killed himself and a year later his son killed himself.

RH: Is this in the Jewish community?

JWO: Yes.

RH: Wow.

JWO: He was a lawyer -- the father was a lawyer. And I -- I mean, I know the family -- I'm not going to say why people say what happened. Who knows? Obviously, he was rather depressed. Whether it was a business reversal, whether it was losing his house, which he did -- he was in Lakewood South -- for whatever reason he committed suicide and a year later his extremely talented and very bright son committed suicide.

RH: Wow, that's a blow for the whole community.

JWO: Oh, my god. I was at a Jewish Family Service national meeting with Dena Gerber when she heard about the father. This was over a year ago. And they -- she knew the family really well. You know, it takes the wind out. I mean, it just gets you. It just stabs and burns. Even if you don't know the person, just knowing -- look, that's not the only one. As I mentioned earlier, I was talking about this policemen that -- [chokes up] -- we're talking about a week after the storm -- killed himself. What -- you know, the amount of devastation, the amount of pain that we all, in whatever level, have gone through. It's not just -- I'm a New Orleanian, and a Jewish New Orleanian. I'm not just a person that's just in the Jewish community. I live here, I grew up here. You know, my

friends, everyone. Somebody else had asked me, a lot of people have asked me, "Have your friends come back?" It's an answer I cannot say. Have my immediate friends come back? Most of my immediate friends have come back. But why? Because our kids were seniors or juniors and almost finished high school. My kid would have never not come back -- either one. The trauma of their life being away, there was no way I would have not come back, for them. They had to be back. They had to come back and know that their life was OK. I've never said this out loud, and I don't know -- I don't know if -- there's no way they wouldn't have come back. If I had said wasn't coming back, they would have come back without me. I mean, I think it's interesting; most of the people that I know that left had younger kids. You know, their kids kind of knew what was going on, but very few of my close friends didn't come back unless it was a job-related issue and they didn't have a choice. Honestly, I can't think of any of them. One of my one daughter's best friends didn't come back; she stayed at her boarding school. But, you know, various reasons for that. I don't see men or women specifically, one or the other, stronger or easier. I think it's particularly painful if a man is back and doesn't -- he was the primary breadwinner, if you will, and he's come back and he doesn't have a job, and his wife's still working, or whatever -- those kinds of things are family dynamics that would happen anyway. But because of the storm, maybe get worse. You know, there are people out there playing golf and there are people at the tennis courts. It's real hard, though, the little things you don't think about. Like tennis. You know, Sophie didn't want to have to drive out to where she has to drive out to because she had to go through so many bad, destroyed areas, and it's so depressing. But the tennis guy she likes is out there, because the tennis guy that she likes that's in the neighborhood didn't come back. So now, she's kind of, if you will, forced to drive out there. So the business community, I'm just happy for the companies that are here, that are doing well, the development that's going on, the restaurants that have mostly reopened, all the good ones, stronger than ever. You can't get a reservation at some of the better restaurants in town; can't get one. That's thrilling. Can't get into some of the other ones, that don't take reservations

and have two-hour waits. Tourists come into town, and unless they drive into the parts of the city that were destroyed, they don't know anything's happened. So I think that we have a good base to build on. And I feel that with the Jewish community.

RH: Are there any rituals, observances, or any way you could -- I mean obviously you've connected to the Jewish community by chairing this task force, and that's one of the biggest things you've been doing. But any other kind of ways that you're connecting? Or even home rituals that are more meaningful now?

JWO: I would say that I go to meetings a lot at night. And I always tried to make sure dinner was on the table if I was going to miss it. But I'm even more careful to do that now. After we moved out of the Derek Hotel, and we moved into the apartment, my kid said, "If you make that 'whatever it was' one more time, we're going to revolt." [laughs] I would find clever ways of making the same thing over and over again! Because it was easy and fast. And I shared. There was another family there. And her husband was also not there, so she and her two girls, and my two girls and I, would dinner together a lot. I don't even want to say "have dinner together," but we would "dinner together." We go out, we would bring in, we would cook, she'd cook, she'd cook one thing, I'd cook another, she'd bring the bottle of wine, I'd bring the bottle of wine. It was really -- that was really a cool thing, you know, connecting with people. Even though she and I were friends, we were like living together, practically. Or people in Houston, we'd discover they were there, all of the sudden they were the new best friend. I would play tennis with people I would have never had played tennis with, they were much better than I was. And then coming back, you know, those kinds of things strengthen you. You have these new friends that you made from around the area.

RH: So you still have some people you're kind of connected to in Houston --

JWO: -- I'm much closer to my good friends than I was before. We appreciate each other more. We do things together more, I think. You know, we missed each other. I

think that I'm more careful -- my rabbi at Touro. Well, I have two rabbis, the one that just retired and the one that's there now. My rabbi who retired -- I just love seeing him whenever I see him. I feel a little guilty that maybe I'm going to services a little bit more now than I did before, but it has nothing to do with that! [laughs] Yes, you want to stay connected more. Look, I'm a bad example. Because I'm one of those -- I go to too many meetings and I'm really involved in a lot of different organizations. And I love that involvement. It nurtures me, and it makes me feel connected, and part of a whole. Much more so than other areas in the communities, I mean the Jewish communal work. So, as I gave up my national portfolio, that program that I chaired, Otzma, when I gave that up it was well-needed to focus locally. Not that I wasn't focusing locally before, but I didn't want any distractions. I wanted to make sure that whatever energy I had, which wasn't necessarily a whole lot, was directed locally. You know, we shop locally more. We don't order things from -- I always tried to support local bookstores and things like that. Like Amazon is only because I have to use it, at times. I won't go to Barnes and Noble, I'll go to Octavia books, which happens to be owned by a nice Jewish guy, a friend of mine, who owned something called Beaucoup Books before that. But we're much more -- not just the Jewish community, but New Orleanians, are much more focused on what's good for New Orleans. The organizations that have popped up, levees.org, Women of the Storm, Citizens for -- you know, whatever they are, they're all of these community non-profits that are for rebuilding New Orleans that are new! There are people that maybe hadn't done anything before, if you will. I don't mean that they hadn't done anything, but weren't that involved -- or maybe they were involved, but not to that level. You know, even the school system, even the new charter schools, the excitement of these new, very progressive methods of -- not just methods of teaching but methods of running schools. Our own day school, you know, keeping it alive, hoping it survives.

RH: How about the Torah Academy versus the --?

JWO: Way too political, won't go there.

RH: [laughs]

JWO: You know, they're two wonderful organizations, they're two wonderful schools. And they have, in other communities, at times, ideologically been able to merge. I don't see how. It's like -- it's like saying "I'm a Baptist and you're a Mormon, and let's learn together," you know, it's different.

RH: That's a great example.

JWO: I don't think I've ever said those words before, but Baptist and Mormon would be -- you know, I respect both religions, they're both really great religions, but I don't see their commonality. We have a commonality, of course, but there are so many different ways of looking at things and learning. They're both great, I don't think they're going to merge.

RH: How about the Jewish community engaged in the larger community of New Orleans? Do you see that happening? And is there any plan in the recovery to make a point of that?

JWO: Overall, major community leaders are Jewish, OK? The most -- the biggest two, the most visible -- Arnie Fielkow, he's a councilman, and Scott Cowen, the head of Tulane, the mastermind of the recovery of Tulane University, which is now back to where it was before and frankly in some ways even better, in my opinion. The community service being done by the kids -- this is a total aside, but you want to know about the general community. One of my very best friends lives a block from Tulane. She would have her fence vandalized, there would be trash in front of her yard, she's down the streets from fraternities and sororities, before the storm. After the storm, clean. No vandalism, no trash on her yard. Why? Because the students at Tulane are going on working at cleaning up places. They got it, you know, I mean, they're not throwing their trash on the ground anymore. Now, it's probably going to change in the next couple years, but those little weird things you don't think about. I'm like, "Hello, they've got a

community sense, they're doing community service, they see destruction, they don't want to add to it." Daniel Burger, I could go on and on. There are so many Jewish community leaders.

RH: We haven't talked about this issue, sometimes it's uncomfortable, but race, how do you feel? Is it worse?

JWO: You mean racism?

RH: Racism and race.

JWO: We live in a city, the majority of which was black. I've since learned, I don't have to say "African-American," it's p.c. to say "black." I was told that by a leader in the black community, so I feel like I'm OK with it. Before the storm, we had racial issues. After the storm, we have racial issues. Before the storm, we had crime. After the storm, we have crime. Do I think it's worse? I really don't. Is it significant? Anything is significant. It shouldn't be. Katrina destroyed black people's homes and white people's homes. It destroyed rich people's homes and poor people's homes. It destroyed a three-million-dollar house, and it destroyed somebody in a rental unit. You know, they lost everything. People lost everything all over the city. It wasn't a racial issue. Were people of means possibly able to get out more easily? They had a car, somebody that didn't have means didn't. Unfortunately, the population is skewed so that there are more black poor people than white. That was the case before the storm, it's going to be the case after the storm.

RH: Do you think the recovery's racist?

JWO: God no. I don't, personally. Look, I could be completely naïve, but I know plenty of white people that haven't gotten the Road Home money, just as many black. Is it skewed to a race, I don't think so at all. I know of a very lovely -- this black man -- who lost everything, upper-middle class, didn't have flood insurance, didn't have homeowner's insurance. Didn't matter about the homeowner's insurance, he could -- he owned his

own home in Gentilly. His area flooded, he didn't have flood insurance, he lost everything. He's still waiting for his Road Home money. I have a friend who's married, two kids, lost everything, small, cute little bungalow a mile and a half from my house, lost everything, he's still waiting for his Road Home money. I don't know, I don't see it, I think that because we're a majority-black city, African-American, black, obviously we're going to have a majority of people that haven't gotten help as fast, whatever. I really haven't even ever heard that, I really haven't. But again, I may just be naïve and having my head in the -- I hate to use the word "sand" in this city right now, because that was part of the levee failures -- I don't see it. But I may be naïve.

RH: What'd you think of the Spike Lee movie?

JWO: Ughh.

RH: Were you resentful?

JWO: I was very happy that we had the exposure that we did. I thought it was definitely racist. And even friends of mine that were black said they thought it was racist. But, OK, I don't care. I don't care.

RH: Racist how?

JWO: Racist in reverse, you know, I hate to say it this way, you know, it was only the blacks that were affected. It wasn't just the blacks.

RH: So the characterization of just the black community being --

JWO: Or just the poor, you know, OK, this woman and I had this big debate at synagogue. I was there speaking to a group. I take a lot of groups around, you know, people calling me, my synagogue's coming in, can you help us, will you take a group around? I'll do buses, I'll do smaller groups, I'll give my advice. There were a couple of

young leadership groups that came in, where they should stay, what they should do, what organizations they might want to work with, whatever. And this is sort of earlier on. So I came back in the end of December, so it was some time last spring. And she was very angry, and felt that everything was about race. And I said --

RH: Was she black or was she Jewish?

JWO: No, no, no, she was Jewish. She said, "You're just -- you're racist -- you just have to understand." You know what, I live here, don't tell me what I have to understand. I understand a lot more than you do, because you don't live here. And if you want to move here, then you have the right to tell me I don't understand. But I understand plenty, and what I understand is that the man I just spoke about that lost everything, my -- can I say it? -- my housekeeper's sister was rescued from a roof. One of my best friends sat with a gas mask on, sobbing on the floor of her house in her two hundred and fifty thousand dollar house. One of my other friends --

RH: A gas mask?

JWO: Yes, because you couldn't go into your house because of the rot.

RH: And the mold.

JWO: It wasn't the mold, it was the rot, the dirty water, the refrigerator, the maggots, the smell, everything. It wasn't just about mold, it was the dirt and, anyway. And one of my other friends, who is fairly well-to-do, and was in a two-million dollar home who lost everything, because both her roof -- both -- she flooded, the first floor was gone, the roof completely came off, the second floor was gone, she lost everything. Everything. OK, she had \$250,000 in flood insurance on her house, she had \$100,000 worth of contents. She lost everything. Can she start over with \$250,000? Is it going to be the down payment on another house like she had before? Not even close. I mean, don't get me wrong, it'd be a down payment, but they owned their house.

RH: Right, they're just starting over.

JWO: Mortgage. Furniture -- \$100,000 -- for a poor person -- you know, if you have flood insurance on your house, if you have a mortgage on your house usually you're required to have flood insurance, not always. Unfortunately, a lot of people didn't buy contents because it was expensive. But if you had a mortgage, you then, typically, have at least enough to pay off your mortgage. You know, some people didn't have that, they still have a mortgage on a piece of property that's destroyed. So, anyway, this woman and I have this heated discussion, and I said it's not just about race. It's about socioeconomic levels, not about race, in my opinion. Because there are very wealthy black people and there are very poor white people. It was about where you lived and whether you had -- you lost everything. It was about the trauma from being rescued from the roof. Rich or poor. My daughter's friend's father is a heart surgeon, he had to axe his way out of his roof and be rescued. I mean, he's not poor, he's a rich white doctor. So did my housekeeper.

RH: How'd your housekeeper fare? How did she do?

JWO: They were on the second floor, so they still had their stuff. But a lot of it was stolen. By the way, my friend who lost everything, a lot of it was looted, too. Because you couldn't get back in the city, so you couldn't protect yourself or your things, there were no alarms, there were no police.

RH: Right.

JWO: The storm destroyed people on all levels. It destroyed them financially. Wait, wait -- the storm didn't destroy anything. The flooding that happened was because of the break in the levees. I need to say that ten more times. You need to interject that in every part of everything you film for me. The storm, the storm -- washed away a lot of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The storm blew off a lot of roofs. The levees broke after the

storm and flooded New Orleans. Levees that were flawed, that people knew were flawed, broke. They shouldn't have broken, and hopefully they'll never break again. The storm had passed. The sky was blue when the city flooded. People need to hear that and know that. Witnesses that were here need to say that, and to explain to people that it wasn't the storm, it was the flooding. Now, did we have damage? Yes. Do I have damage? -- A substantial amount, because of the storm. But my house is still fine -- the structure. That, to me, is one of the most important things that people need to understand when they judge things that happened here. Why? Because it wasn't the storm. Don't be afraid of a storm. We had storms all the time. We never flooded like this. We had storms all the time. People in the Mississippi Gulf Coast -- Camille came through many years ago, washed away the Mississippi Gulf Coast, it got rebuilt. Katrina came through, washed away the Mississippi Gulf Coast, it's going to get rebuilt. New Orleans, except for Betsy, and there was some flooding - New Orleans never flooded. I mean, we had flooding because of strong rains, but that's what the drainage canals were built for, to pump the water out. You know, it was just on the front of the newspaper the other day and I think I saved it. Everyone thinks we're all below sea level. We're not all below sea level, this city. There are areas of the city that are, I don't remember the percentages, but it's over 50% that is not below sea level, of the city. It was one of those statistics we need to have people understand more. So, I -- how can we be made stronger by people knowing that it wasn't the storm, it was the flooding, about people coming back and knowing they can build, and that they can be protected, we need more than anything, we need some insurance companies to come in and say, "OK, you know what, I'm going to be your insurance company. I'm going to come in and I'm going to insure you." I tell you what; I'm never buying anything but Shell gas ever in my life.

RH: Why?

JWO: Because Shell came in, they saved the jazz festival, they kept their employees here. I will never, unless I'm really desperate, and I was once -- and then I only put in

five or ten dollars so I could get to the Shell station. I will never use anything but Shell gas. Just like I won't shop, except locally, unless I can help it.

RH: What do you want for your kids?

JWO: I want for my daughters, and my stepson, for them to go away wherever they're going to school and to come back, and to help continue to rebuild the city. My stepson now going off to go to graduate school in Texas, where he'll end up I don't know. But I hope New Orleans would be one of the choices. My eldest, who's going off to the University of Georgia this August, really wanted to go to Tulane. Except that she couldn't bring herself to go to a school that was a half a block away from our house, or two blocks. Her plan is to go away, and come back and go to graduate school at Tulane. I mean, it's not just a plan, I mean, that's her plan. I wouldn't be surprised if she -- I don't know -- she went to Tulane, we went on a tour, she adored it. It's a great school, it's a fabulous school, I love it when I hear friends of mine whose kids are coming here. People used to call me, you know, "Is it really safe? Should I let my kid come?" And this family came in from Miami, I took them all over the city, I said, "You need to see the good, the bad, and the ugly." Their daughter's here, she couldn't be happier, it's the best thing that's ever happened in her life, the community, everything. What do I want to have for my kids? What we all want. They should be healthy, and successful in the personal, and communal, and for-profit life. They should grow up and be strong and have everything that you want your kids to have. I know that what happened to them will make them stronger. I know that they will be more compassionate people because of it. Wherever they go, they'll understand people being displaced. They'll know when they see somebody working towards something that it's important to do that. And hopefully they'll do it, too. I want them to not be too scarred by this, and I'm afraid they are.

RH: How so?

JWO: It's real hard to be plucked away from your home, not your house, your home. To just be plucked away, to have everything that you know is stable gone. You know, I went through it when my father died. Boom. Gone. My father, he's not supposed to be gone. You know, this was stuff, it wasn't life. But it was their life, especially as a teenager; football games, dances, boyfriends, girlfriends, tennis lessons, soccer teams, everything gone, thrown into some new place where they didn't know anybody. OK, kids move all the time; don't get me wrong. But they don't move because their city has just gone under water, because their father now is never there, because he's either at the plant in Mississippi or at auxiliary offices in some other place. Their grandmother and her ninety-year-old best friend are living in some little apartment, and they can't go home, and they're sad, and we're sad, and everyone around us is sad. This was a really hard thing. This wasn't "my father's been transferred; I have to leave all my friends." You know what, that's hard, divorce is hard; death is hard, losing a father, mother, sister, or brother, whatever. That's really hard. But they lost a lot. It's not life.

RH: It's a way of life.

JWO: Their infrastructures, their support system, it was their everything. I'm going crazy, I'm like -- so they have a crazy mother, a non-existent father, their best friends are scattered all over the country. For the first few days, they don't know where anybody is because no one can even get through on the cell phone. Well, they're good, they can text message. By the way, everybody in the world should learn to text message.

RH: Have your priorities or anything changed since the storm?

JWO: This is going to sound a little bit whatever, but my priorities before the storm were my family and my community. How can that change? You know -- do I do more hands-on community stuff? A little bit more than I did before. But that was more, almost selfish -- would I have ever gone and done a Habitat house? Probably not. Did I go do one now? Well, I kind of hung around one; I wanted to see how it worked. Did I go gut a

house? I really did gut houses; that was really cool. But how cool can it be to gut somebody's house? But you felt like you were contributing, in the sense that it was hands-on. But yanking people's lives out of their bedrooms? [sighs] That one thing I did was probably the most heart-wrenching.

RH: Did you do it for a friend?

JWO: No, I just did it as part of a -- I just went and joined on, tagged onto a group for a couple days. And we walked into a house that hadn't been touched. It was -- [sigh] -- the backpacks filled with school books, left on a kitchen counter. The framed certificate that this woman had gotten, because her son was killed in the Vietnam War. It was obviously multi-generational housing. When my friends said they had lost everything, or when people said they lost everything, I knew what that meant, because I'd been in this home where everything was destroyed -- photographs, china, DVD's, kids books, kids shoes, the tricycle, the easy-bake oven, you know, it was everything, just gone.

RH: Do you have a different level of trust now? With the government? Or a different set of expectations?

JWO: I'm real angry with the government. Real angry. I don't even want to say what I might do to some upper-level federal leader if I saw one of them on the streets. I've been real graphic, but I won't be in the camera, verbally, where it might be repeated. I am real distrustful of any government right now. I have to tell you something. It wouldn't be happening in Israel. This would not be happening in Israel. Just now, when I was just there, or when the war in the North -- we didn't just take young Israeli kids or Jewish kids out to the middle of the country to go to summer camp. We took all kids. That's not being done here. I mean, we're not doing -- the government hasn't done anything, in my opinion, or hasn't scratched the surface of what it could be doing. Just look at the five -- OK, we can't go back, we can't look at the first week after, we can't look at what happened at the Superdome, how could that have happened? How could that have

happened? How could hospitals have been in the situation they were in? Not for a day, but for a week or two weeks. How could that have happened? It would never have happened in Israel. Never. Never. If anything happens in this city again, the first person I'm calling is the Prime Minister of Israel. [laughs] That's the first person, I'm like, "Y'all just get here and tell them what to do." You know what to do. And they tried, there were plenty of people who tried. Yes, I'm very distrustful of government, I'm very angry of it still. Still, still distrustful, still angry.

RH: What are you most grateful for at this point?

JWO: The community, UJC, the Jewish community around the country that gave money. I mean, it's terrible to say, but sometimes you just need the resources. I mean, you know, sending the clothes -- that's all good, to an extent, but after that you have to rebuild. And you can't rebuild with -- you need resources. There was this group from New Jersey that came in and helped gut and rebuild -- a lot of groups did -- but this one particular one I happened to work with, and they got it. They came in and they just did it. They just did it. The guy happened to be in construction, they did it. They came in, and gutted, and rebuilt. Boom -- boom -- boom. And it was sort of like -- we need more of that. We need developers to come in. And when I see one coming and I know they're Jewish, it makes me feel really proud. We need more of them. I hate to say it, that Trump is still building this Trump thing, I'm so thrilled, I'm going to stay at every Trump hotel I can, just like I'm going to buy Shell gas. I'm really grateful that I'm part of the Jewish community, not of New Orleans, and not nationally, but of the world. We are a very good people that do good things for people, and I saw that a lot. That's not to say that the Baptists aren't, and that's not to say that my friend, still running the Methodists -- I think that it made me appreciate all religions and how strong they can be for people. It's about your faith and your soul and what will tie you together. And I think that's been real important to me, seeing that work, seeing those Catholic groups and those Baptist groups, and I don't think I've seen a Mormon group, but I'm sure they were here!

[laughs] Seeing all those different religious groups come in and help each other and help. The Hillel kids that came and came and came and still are coming! Thank you, Hillel. Thank you for sending those kids, all of them from all over the country, different groups. I'm grateful to know that we can come together, and even if the government hasn't been there, that all these different faiths have come together and helped each other and helped our city. And hopefully will continue, because we're going to need it for a ways longer.

RH: I think we're about to wrap up.

JWO: I figured that was a good closing one.

RH: Yes, it is a good closing one, and if there's anything you'd like to add. You know, I always have to add that sentence. So, if there's anything I haven't gotten to that you feel like you want to say?

JWO: I think it's really important for everyone in the world to remember us, and not forget us. And, you know, it's really funny when I go out of town -- it's hard to be out of town. Because what is the common person in New York City care about what happens in New Orleans? But we live and breathe it every day, and it's hard. It's really hard for us. Because we want to get better, and we're not getting much better much faster. And we know we will, we don't have cancer, we just have a really bad disease that's curable. But whether or not we're going to get well, you know. The average thing in Nashville, Miami, Los Angeles, the average guy, he's going about his life. The taxi driver in New Orleans isn't. And that, to me, is one of the more important, poignant things that I experience every time I leave the city. Every person that I see on the street here has a story. Every one. The mailman has a story. The grocery attendant has a story. The lawyer has a story. The doctor has a story. The schoolteacher has a story. Everyone has a story. It's amazing, if you stop to listen to any of them. And the rest of the world doesn't know those stories. So chronicling those stories is really important. I don't care if

it's Jewish or Muslim, or Mormon or Baptist, or Catholic or whatever. The rest of the country and the rest of the world need to know. Somebody in Sweden doesn't give a damn about what's going on in New Orleans, but I wish they did. Because as a society, it's not about me, it's about a city that was pretty much ruined, that could come back, and hopefully will be back, and better, and stronger, and just like our Jewish community is stronger, will be, I think the city will be, too. But we still have a long way to go. And the road to recovery, we're just beginning on it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]