

Sophie Oreck Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON (RH): 2nd, 2007. I'm in the home of Sophie Oreck, at 1545 Exposition Boulevard. New Orleans, Louisiana, right on Ottoman Park. I am doing this interview for Katrina's Jewish Voices for the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life and the Jewish Women's Archive. Sophie, do you agree to the interview?

SOPHIE ORECK (SO): Yes.

RH: Thank you. We're just going to start with some simple questions like, how old are you? Where do you go to school?

SO: OK. Yeah.

RH: How old are you?

SO: 17. And I go to Newman School.

RH: OK, and you're going to enter your -- what year?

SO: Senior year.

RH: OK. And when the storm hit, what year were you in?

SO: I was a sophomore.

RH: Going into your sophomore year.

SO: Yeah.

RH: And what synagogue do you belong to?

SO: Touro Synagogue.

RH: You do?

SO: Yes.

RH: OK. All right. Well, how many sisters and brothers do you have?

SO: I have one sister and three half-brothers.

RH: So what's your sister's name?

SO: Zoe.

RH: OK. Tell me what you like about school. What's this Newman School like?

SO: It's challenging. There's a good number of Jewish kids in my class. And I just like -- I've been going there since kindergarten, so it's very familiar.

RH: Wow. Since kindergarten. So you have friends in your class that you've gone all the way up with?

SO: Yeah.

RH: And, what extracurricular activities do you do there?

SO: For school, I play soccer and tennis.

RH: All right. And you got favorite subjects?

SO: I really like math and history.

RH: Oh, wow. All right. What do you like about New Orleans? What do you and your friends like to do in New Orleans?

SO: Well, we like to do a lot of stuff outside and stuff. And there's a lot of things to do at night, like going out and stuff.

RH: Where do you guys go at night?

SO: Peoples' houses, or just around. Sometimes we'll go out to a nice dinner or something.

RH: So you don't feel afraid being out at night in the city.

SO: No.

RH: OK. That's good. Is there anything else you like to do? Do you go to Sunday school or have you?

SO: I did until I got confirmed, and then my sister and I worked as kind of assistant teachers. The teachers really just teach, and then we just kind of help with like snack and help watch the kids and stuff. You have for younger grades. Second, first, kindergarten, pre-k.

RH: This is at Touro?

SO: Yes. And you're kind of just like an assistant. They call it tzufrin and --

RH: So how long did you do that? Are you still doing it?

SO: Yes. This would be my third year doing it.

RH: So, did you have confirmation or bat mitzvah?

SO: I had a bat mitzvah and then a confirmation.

RH: OK. Why don't you tell me how they're different?

SO: I've actually never really thought about that before. But my bat mitzvah -- I was 13 -- well, actually I was 12, about to turn 13. And your confirmation, you're a little bit older, and you lead this little -- how we do it at Touro, at least -- you go to -- ours were kind of -- my confirmation was a little bit screwed up by the storm, because you do it your sophomore year, so we only really had half a year of these classes that year that you go to. And you just basically talk to the rabbi, do stuff like -- and you just really have conversation with him. And I guess you -- to me, the difference was you learn a little bit. Since you're older, you learn a little bit more about Jewish things than your bat mitzvah. At least for me, I mostly learned about how to lead the prayers, what the prayers meant, and how to read from the Torah and stuff like that. For a confirmation, I led a prayer. You lead a -- your whole confirmation class leads a service, but you don't -- it's not all by yours -- like, you do a class, and all that kind of stuff, so it was a little bit more in depth of Jewish life, and Jewish customs, than my bat mitzvah, at least. And it was with -- it was the first confirmation class with the new rabbi, so that was interesting.

RH: What do you mean, interesting?

SO: It was just -- I didn't really know him that well, and we had led class with him every other Saturday, or sometimes every Saturday. And so it was just different because I'd never really met him before, and the other -- the previous rabbi I had known for my whole life, so -- and he did my bat mitzvah.

RH: The previous one?

SO: Right.

RH: And that was, Rabbi --

SO: Goldstein.

RH: Goldstein. So he did your bat mitzvah, but was your bat mitzvah after you got back from Katrina?

SO: No, my bat mitzvah was when I was in 7th grade.

RH: Oh, OK. Alright. So, the confirmation was the one that was messed up by the storm.

SO: Oh, I said that wrong.

RH: No, no, I don't think so. I think I -- I'm just clarifying. OK. Gotcha. So, do you think boys or girls were treated any differently in the bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah kind of thing that you noticed?

SO: That I noticed? No, no. I mean, there was different -- no, actually.

RH: Are there any things you and your family do around Jewish ritual, you know, during the week or during the year? Any kind of services that are special?

SO: For Passover, my grandma always has a break the fast party thing. Other than that, Hanukkah is pretty fun. Not any really special rituals to our family that I can think of right now.

RH: OK. So what do you do in Hanukkah?

SO: Hanukkah we usually have -- my mom will throw a big dinner for a lot of the family. Either the first -- I mean, our schedules are really busy, so it comes on one of the nights. And yeah. Not too much.

RH: Do you. Is there anything for you that feels kind of distinctive about being Jewish in New Orleans?

SO: There's a smaller group of us. I mean, I guess there's a smaller group of Jewish people, but at my school I don't really notice that, because there's a good number of Jewish kids, so it's kind of -- it doesn't really -- I mean, it doesn't affect me negatively or positively -- it's a -- I don't know.

RH: Kind of a neutral thing?

SO: Yeah. It's just like anything else.

RH: And you have a lot of friends who aren't Jewish?

SO: Yeah. Two of my -- or three or four of my really close friends are Jewish, and then the rest are not Jewish.

RH: Do they ever ask you about Judaism?

SO: Well a lot of my good friends are ones that I've grown up with, so -- and they've all been to 7th -- there was -- during 7th grade, there was probably a string of a lot of bar and bat mitzvahs, and so they've been to all of those. And a couple of my closer friends have come with me to services every once in a while. And, so it's not -- it's hard to put into words. It's not something that -- it's just, it's not like a big deal, because it's a lot of people that I know are Jewish. You see a lot of people out, and you recognize them from synagogue, and my mom and grandma have -- are really Jewish.

RH: (laughter) Are really Jewish?

SO: Yeah. They have a lot of Jewish friends, though. They'll come over for dinner and you know a lot of them, so it's -- I don't know how to describe it.

RH: I think you're doing a good job of describing it. OK? Why don't we move onto the storm? So why don't you tell me what it was like when you first kind of found out that you were going to have to evacuate. Do you remember that?

SO: Yeah, well I wasn't too pleased -- we had started school on -- our school always starts on Thursday for some odd reason. So you have Thursday, Friday, and then school starts. So we had -- it was in our first week -- I mean, we had had like seven days of school. The Thursday/Friday, then Monday through Friday. And during that very first part of school, I'm always very focused, and very like, I want to do really well this school year. And as the year goes on I kind of get away from that. But at the beginning of the school year, I'm really focused. And my mom, on -- I guess Saturday was -- she was on the computer and she was booking my sister -- my dad was out of town on business. He was in California. She was booking my sister and I and my grandma a flight. And I was really, really mad because I was like, if we can't get home, and I miss a day of school, I'm going to be so mad. Because I really wanted, like -- at the beginning of the school year, all my friends -- we all try and -- I mean, that's when I work the best, because I'm just starting school and I don't want to screw it up too soon, and I was -- so I brought my backpack and all the homework that I had. And I was really mad at her for making me leave, and I wanted to stay here. Because she was staying here, so I wanted to stay her. So I, basically despite her, packed two t-shirts and a pair of jeans. And that didn't work out too well.

RH: In the long run.

SO: Right.

RH: Kind of spited you, huh?

SO: It did not turn out too well for me.

RH: So your mother didn't leave with you?

SO: She -- my grandma and my sister and I were in Houston, got a hotel, then found out that the storm was probably going to be worse than we expected, and my mom was really gung-ho on staying, and my sister is a bit of a drama queen. Then she started

freaking out. And I don't know what made her go. My mom just packed up photo albums and clothes and started driving. And she got to Lake Charles, and then stopped there and spent the night. Eventually she got to Houston. I don't remember when -- I know she got caught in traffic, but she left so late I don't think it was as bad. But my sister was freaking out, so I think that's maybe why she left.

RH: Oh, OK. So you think your sister had something to do with the decision for your mother to --

SO: Well, and we couldn't get in touch with her that easily, because cell phones were -- you couldn't even get in touch with anyone. But once we found out the storm was really bad, my sister went crazy. I was more calm. My grandma kind of flipped out a little bit. And Zoe just went nuts. She was crying all the time.

RH: Was this after the storm hit, or before?

SO: See, that's what I'm trying to remember. I think it was before. Like the last second before, basically.

RH: Do you remember going to sleep the night -- that Sunday night or Monday?

SO: Yeah, but then again -- well, I always think that Zoe blows things way out of proportion, so I was more calm about it, and just thinking. Because, I mean, we've evacuated for hurricanes before. We've stayed here for hurricanes before, and it's always kind of turned out like, well you know, there's damage, but it's not devastating. So, I didn't think it was going to be as big of a deal as it turned out to be.

RH: And so, you said your grandmother was a little --

SO: She was -- Well, because -- I don't know how well she might have packed up her house. My mom -- well, my dad was out of town. He normally does a lot of the -- like,

taking down. We have a lot of artwork and stuff. Taking down a lot of the stuff. So that was -- turned into my job, because, once again, Zoe's kind of -- I mean, Zoe helped. So I had to take down -- on our fence outside, we have all this artwork. You have to take all that down. I don't think my grandma had that help. She had her housekeeper that she's had for 30-some odd years, but I think she was more worried about her house than my mom and stuff like that.

RH: So, when you saw the storm, can you kind of describe? Were you watching TV, were you --

SO: Yeah, I was really -- I didn't know what had really -- I didn't know the magnitude of it all. I mean, I knew it was bad from what I was watching on TV, and that's literally all we did. We just sat in our hotel room and watched TV. But I didn't -- I had never really had learned that much about -- I knew that we were called the Crescent City or whatever. I never really knew that we were on high ground here, specifically. Like uptown was. I didn't really know -- I never truly been through the 9th Ward, so -- geography to me is not -- I'm very bad with directions and stuff like that. You know, out by the lakefront and stuff, I'd been there and I knew that was really damaged, and I kept on thinking about -- I have a lot of friends in Lakeview. And I knew, before I left, I was also really mad at my mom, because a lot of my friends were staying. When I say a lot, one of my best friends was staying, and I was just really curious to what had flooded, what had happened, and I was thinking the worst. I thought, we have a big palm tree out there, and my room's right next to it. I was like -- and my room is all windows, basically. So I was -- thought for sure our house was just -- and we live right on the park, so I had figured our house was just done for, because of all the trees and stuff. And then I found out later that it was mostly -- that the devastation came from the -- not -- I mean from the hurricane, but not from the hurricane directly, from the storm surge. The hurricane had passed, and then the levees broke, and then all that. So I didn't really understand a whole lot of it until I really got back and started reading stuff, and learning more about it, and stuff like that.

RH: So, were you worried about your friend who stayed?

SO: Yeah, because I couldn't get in touch with her for a while. And it turns out they -- once they had lost power for a really long time, they have a farm in Folsom, which is across the lake, and they went there, but they lost power, they lost everything. I found out -- when she finally did get in touch with me, her family had basically been stranded there, eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for two and a half, three days.

RH: In Folsom?

SO: In Folsom. And basically showering -- she said her sister took a bath in her pool that they have there. And she finally contacted me, partly because she was wondering where I was, and then also her mom and my mom are friends, too, and her mom knew Julie would have some sort of plan, some sort of way to get out of there. And sure enough -- because by that time, everyone was trying to -- they had gone to their temporary place, but now everyone was trying to get a hotel room, and all this stuff. So it was basically impossible to get hotel rooms and anything in Houston, or -- mostly in Houston and Baton Rouge, because there was no space in Baton Rouge. So they drove to Houston, and my mom got -- or booked them a hotel room and stuff, and we ended up getting an apartment -- two apartments in the same building together, which was nice. We basically lived together and that -- between those two apartments.

RH: What was your friend's name?

SO: Clair Lanelle (sp?). Yeah, she's not Jewish.

RH: OK. But she and your mother are good friends, too.

SO: Yeah, they're good friends, well, because Claire and I, you know, she -- we go to Martha's Vineyard a lot almost every year, and Claire has come with me probably three or four years. Our moms have gotten to know each other. That's the friend I'm going

with to Costa Rica.

RH: Oh, for the service trip.

SO: Right.

RH: OK. So, about when did you guys realize that you weren't going back to school? What went through your mind?

SO: I remember we have -- my sister goes to a camp in Mississippi that I used to go to. The Henry S. Jacobs. And, I used to go there and -- for four years, and she went there for a really long time. And we have a couple friends -- they live -- the friends we had there, they live in Sugar Land, which isn't too far from Houston. So they drove down and had dinner with myself, my sister, and there were -- we were -- my sister and I were bragging how we basically got a really long vacation from school, and then literally the next day, my mom was -- my mom has a good friend in Houston too. And her child goes to a Jewish school there called Emery/Weiner, and it just opened two years ago. Actually, like four or five years ago. And my mom immediately contacted her, and she got Zoe and I into this school. I think we were like -- I think my sister and I were the first people into school. And I really, really, disliked it, like, a lot.

RH: So you went there for --

SO: I went to that school for probable three or four days. My sister went the entire time, but it was -- I didn't -- I mean, like I said, I'd been at Newman my entire life, so going to a different school was really odd, especially where I didn't know anyone, and it was a little bit easier because these kids hadn't been going to school together their entire lives, because the school was so brand new, but it was still really odd, and I was only there with my sister. I didn't really talk to anyone, or eat anything -- at school at least -- for the entire time I was there. We had -- my mom's daughter -- my mom's friend's daughter who went there, but it was really -- I didn't like it. And my mom saw how much I didn't like

it, and contacted -- she's got two good friends there (inaudible). I think they're related. They're cousins, maybe. The Selbers (sp?) and the Cohens. And she contacted Deborah Cohen, whose daughters go to Kincaid, and I basically got into Kincaid, and started going there. There was an orientation for New Orleans students, basically, and while none of my girl friends went there, probably seven of my guy friends were going there, so I felt a little bit more comfortable. My first class of the day was with two of them, one of which is a good friend. We play tennis together. And so I felt a lot more comfortable there, than I did at Emery. Eventually, though, at Emery, I think the day of -- the day I had to decide whether to go to Kincaid or Emery is when a bunch of kids that I know really well. My sister's -- one of my sister's best friends, Hadley Bernstein -- she was enrolled there with them. And she is at her house a lot, though. I felt a lot better once people were there. When it was just me and my sister, I really didn't like it. And then, you know, more kids came that we -- that I wasn't exactly friends with, but a lot of Jewish kids that I knew went there. And actually, the girl Claire that I was telling you about that went. Her little sister went to that sch-- my mom, through her Jewish powers, got in an Episcopalian child to that school, because one of her best friends was going there, and she really wanted to go there, because if it wasn't there, she was going to school with people she didn't know. And she -- she was only in -- let's she, she's going to in eighth grade this year -- so she was only in sixth grade, so she really wanted to go somewhere where one of her best friends was going. So, I went to Kincaid, and my sister went to Emery, and it worked out well. Emery was really small, so it was really different for them. And Kincaid was more like Newman, but while I was there, I was completely just like, I didn't care at all about schoolwork. There was -- I mean, the math class we were in, I felt like I knew it all -- the math class we were in was not challenging at all, and -- it was kind of boring to me. But then again there were teachers that -- my chemistry teacher was -- I didn't realize it then, but was a really good teacher, and when I got back to Newman, I was enrolled in chemistry again -- like, the second semester of chemistry. And I basically had learned both semesters of chemistry in that one semester

I was at Kincaid. That was probably the good point of Kincaid -- was that chemistry class. But it was hard because you had -- when we went to the school at this orientation thing that they had for New Orleans kids, they had -- you would talk, and you would fill out what classes you were in. But thing was we were only enrolled in those classes at Newman for five days. So, a lot of -- I personally got pretty much on track with my courses, but a lot of kids now are like, classes that you would take freshman year at Newman, they're taking again, because they didn't take the correct class at the Katrina school, because they didn't offer it. I didn't -- you're supposed to take European history sophomore year at Newman, but I took world history at Kincaid, so I finished up that year at world history. So while everyone else -- there was a good number -- there was only one class at Newman that had world history when we came back. Newman created a whole bunch of classes after we came back to -- so people could finish out the year of what they had already learned. And, so I know European history, but not as in depth as other people who have taken the European history course, because I took world history, and European history was just a little slot. So it wasn't as in depth, which just puts you on a different kind of -- now you're not as uniform with the other kids in your class, and it makes a difference going into US history, which you take your junior year. And other classes like that. My friend, right now, is in a -- she took a different sort of science class instead of chemistry at her school, because they wouldn't allow her in chemistry. So now she's taking chemistry this year with sophomores. So it throws it off because of scheduling wise. Because now, since she's got to take that sophomore class, she's -- there's a limited amount of classes she can take with that schedule. There's a lot of classes that conflict with that. So scheduling when we came back from the storm was really off, because of the classes and because of all that different stuff.

RH: So you didn't really get into school too much, though?

SO: No. My report card is drastically different at my Katrina school than it is at Newman.

RH: Do they -- are they counting it differently?

SO: I believe they are sending to colleges, if you -- when they send their transcript, they're sending the -- your freshman year -- for us -- our freshman year, our second semester of sophomore year, and then junior and senior year. And then they send the -- in my case -- the Kincaid report card, and they just send it sep -- they send it with that, but it's not factored into my GPA. So my schools will see those grades, but it won't be -- and my GPA for those grades is on that report card, but it won't be factored into my Newman GPA. Because, I mean, every school -- especially in different states -- does it differently counting-wise. I was in -- they didn't offer a normal -- because I lived in Houston, everyone takes Spanish, and so there's -- there weren't that many French classes offered. Here, I mean it's -- I mean, I take French because, I mean, it's New Orleans. It's a French city. But, I take French, and so they didn't offer a French class there. And I could have skipped a semester of French and just taken a couple of my friends that just took intro to Spanish or -- my sister took intro to Spanish because her school didn't even offer any French, and she's normally in AP French at Newman. But I was in an honors French class, which was way beyond -- because it was an honors French class, and it wasn't other sophomores like me, it was mostly juniors and seniors who had been through more courses of French. But the school decided to put me in that instead of -- it was either that, or beginning French. So, that was kind of a crash course in French. And when I got back, I knew a lot of stuff, but I had skipped so much in the middle that it was a little bit odd to get back on track.

RH: Looking back on it, are you glad you were kind of immersed in that, or --

SO: Yeah, because that was also the reason I started soccer at Kincaid, because one of the girls in the French class was the captain of the soccer team, and she was just talking to me one day, and she found out I played soccer, took me to the coach, and the coach and I talked for a while, and that was basically how I started soccer. And if I hadn't done

that, I probably would have been much more miserable than I was, because through soccer, I met a lot of kids, and that French class was actually -- the teacher was really -- I was the only New Orleans kid in that class. And that whole entire class was -- it was one of my more welcoming classes. It was one that I would look back upon and I'm really happy I did take it, because a lot of kids in there were really nice. The first day, I think, someone was like, oh, let me write down my phone number. I'll give it to you if you need anything. Just call, and all this stuff. The teacher was really nice, and helped me out. She knew that I was way behind in anything they had done. So she helped me out a lot, and she was really nice. So that class was probably one of the better ones in terms of making me feel more comfortable at the school. So while it may have screwed up my French a little bit, it was good.

RH: Why were you miserable? Can you describe that? What was that like?

SO: I've never really thought about why, I just really -- I didn't -- the first -- that orientation, they assign you to a buddy person, and I had two, actually. And they were both really nice, and the only problem is Kincaid is just like Newman in the fact that it goes K through 12, and these girls hadn't been together since kindergarten, but their whole, you know, group had known each other really well. And they were all really nice to me, and I'm really thankful that they were all incredibly nice to me. They would come with me to lunch, and they would show me where my classes were, and they had a very large group of friends. And so I always had someone in the class that I knew before I went. They told me about all the teachers, and all that type of stuff, but it was just -- I find myself to be a really awkward person. I don't like -- I mean, I'm friendly, and when you meet me, I'm outgoing, but at first I'm very shy. And I feel kind of bad, because they were always so outgoing and trying to talk to me and stuff, and I really rarely talked. I don't know, I was -- I was just really kind of mortified. I was frightened. I don't even know why. I did not -- looking back on it, I can't really take that much positive from it, because I was so -- I don't know. I just --

RH: When you said you were frightened, were you angry? Can you think of some other of those kind of sad, angry, frightened?

SO: I guess I wasn't even having fun there, because -- yeah, I just wasn't having fun, I wasn't with -- my friends were -- other than my good friend, Claire, my friends were spread across the country. New Jersey. There was a big group of them in Baton Rouge. Two of my other really good friends, Casey and Rebecca, were in Houston, but they went to Episcopal along with Claire, and they lived -- and Houston's so big.

RH: You mean, not Episcopal. They went to --

SO: No, they went to Episcopal. The New--

RH: Oh, Episcopal. That's Saint of the New --

SO: They're like the New Orleans section of Episcopal. Like a big group went --

RH: That's that other school, though. St. John's Episcopal.

SO: Saint, yeah, there's Saint -- Oh no, St. John's is a different one. There's St. John's, and there's -- there are three. Well there's St. John's Episcopal, Kincaid, and Memorial High School. Those were the only ones I knew about it. And Emery, where my sister went.

RH: So, when you said your friends went to Episcopal --

SO: Right, they went to the New Orleans kind of section of Episcopal, where they kind of fused in with the Houston Episcopal, but they had -- one of my friends had two classes, and the rest were taught by New Orleans teachers, and had New Orleans students in them. And I was -- and the reason the -- the big reason I left Emery and went to Kincaid was because I thought that more people that I knew from New Orleans would have a better chance of going to Kincaid, because when I would talk to my friends, they'd be like,

we're trying to get into Kincaid. And I probably did only because we knew Deborah Cohen and she's really big there, and on the board and stuff. So I got in, and I prayed that my other friends would get in. Turns out they didn't. So that was hard for me too. But, I don't know, it was an odd experience.

RH: How did you keep in touch with your other friends?

SO: That were other places? Well, a big group -- my group of close friends, we were either in Houston -- there was four of us in Houston. There was five, I want to say, in Baton Rouge. And one of my best friends, Jordan Moses, was in New Jersey. Her family was in Baton Rouge, and she went to live with her aunt and uncle in New Jersey, because Baton Rouge was so full, and they hadn't gotten a school. She hadn't enrolled in school yet, and it was basically -- they had a lot of improv -- they made up a lot of things for New Orleans to go to school, because they couldn't all enroll in the school. It would overload. There was night school, and stuff like that. And for her, the choice was either night school in Baton Rouge, or go to New Jersey and go to Newark Academy, and live with her aunt and uncle. And she chose her aunt and uncle, which was a good choice for her. She had a lot of fun. She made some really good friends. She went out and had fun and stuff like that. I didn't at all.

RH: What do you think the difference was? Why do you think she approached it differently?

SO: She's also more outgoing and right off the bat. And she was also there, and there was no other New Orleans kid in her school. So I think maybe if I had done that, it would have been a little bit easier. And if I was living with family from -- living with -- in a real house, with family. And the apartment -- I mean it was perfect size for -- my dad, he had to deal with his business a lot, so -- he didn't really -- I didn't see him hardly ever over the storm.

RH: Did he come in right after the storm or did you guys all get together?

SO: There was no real flight he could get in. He did come to Houston. I saw him, probably, the next week after the storm, but the problem was, once my mom got to Houston, it was four of us in a hotel room. And eventually, she got another hotel room. But then again, I started school the first day living out of a hotel, with not -- I mean, my sister and I shared all of our clothes, basically, at that point, because she had packed and I hadn't. But that was the other thing. I was living out of a hotel for the first week and a half of Kincaid, which was really odd. And I stayed at the Cohen's house for a couple days, because they go to Kincaid too, so I just drove to school with them. It was just a really weird situation for me. I didn't feel comfortable. And my sister had a lot more fun, and she made friends really fast at her school. And I think that's because it was smaller. I don't know if it had anything to do with it being a Jewish school. I didn't go there, but she made friends and got -- she had fun. She would, by no means tell you that she liked it, I don't think, but she -- I don't even know if she would admit that she had a good time, but she did.

RH: So, you mean, like, you watching her, you noticed she had fun?

SO: Yeah, she would go out -- she made friends at her school, and she would call them, and they would go out to movies and stuff. And my friend Claire and I basically just stayed together the whole time. We went to one of the Kincaid football games. It was just -- I mean, it was -- they were perfectly nice and everything, but it was like, they are friends, and I really didn't know how it works in Houston -- like going out-wise. I don't know what they do at night in Houston, really. It was kind of weird, because we didn't really know what they do at night. Do they go to peoples' houses and have parties or do they just not do anything?

RH: Go to restaurants.

SO: We didn't -- I don't know. I felt really -- I just always felt so weird. And I probably could have been more friendly and kind of gone out or done more, but I really just didn't want to. I mean, I just wanted to go home really badly.

RH: You mean home, here, in New Orleans?

SO: Yeah.

RH: OK. So, what was the soccer team like? How many games did you play? Where --

SO: I don't know exactly how many games I played, but the soccer was really -- like really helpful. It was up there with the French class. I made some good friends from the soccer team that, some of which I still keep in touch with, and they were all just really nice. It just allowed me to be like -- it felt more normal. Because the whole situation was just so odd, I just randomly left and went -- enrolled in another school, and it was just so weird, that soccer kind of made it a little bit better in a way, because it didn't -- it was what I would normally be doing at home. I mean, it was odd because I had a lady coach, and I had always had male coaches, and she was a woman, so that was odd.

RH: What was that like?

SO: That was different but she was really funny. The soccer practices -- I don't know if it was just cause I was there and it was different -- or maybe she just wasn't as intense to me, but it just -- it didn't feel as intense. It was like fun. But these girls in Houston, they were no joke. Their soccer leagues are really intense. And they practice --

RH: The competition more stiff than --

SO: No, actually I think they're going to come down and play our team. I would say it would be a good match-up school-wise, but club wise, outside of school -- like club soccer, they're a lot more serious than we are. Yeah, they breed a lot more better

players, I think.

RH: Did you do any club soccer?

SO: I did not do club soccer while I was there, because that would have just been -- I don't know. School soccer was enough for me. I would not -- my mom had to make me do school soccer too.

RH: Why?

SO: I don't know. I was just really self-conscious of whether I -- what they were going to be like, how they were going to perceive me. Maybe they're really, really good, and I won't be as good, and it'll be really weird. I didn't know anyone. And in soccer, that's kind of a big deal because you got to call someone's name. You know, it's all about communication. But, my mom kind of -- my soccer coach from Newman emailed a lot of us just to find out where we were, and found out what was going on. I told him how I was thinking about playing soccer, and he wrote me an email back that was like, you better play. Because when we come back, we're training double, so you better play. And so, I just sucked it up and did it. See, it was weird because I just showed up at practice the first day, and just some Nike shorts and a t-shirt, and they showed up in Kincaid shorts and Kincaid shirts and Kincaid socks, and I was like, oh no. And the coach was like, you have to wear Kincaid apparel to soccer. I'll get you some shorts. So, I wore these same shorts everyday. She was very nice about it. She was like, I understand. You can wear whatever shirt you want. And I basically got special treatment, which was fine with me. But the soccer team was really nice. I kind of opened up to them and was more myself, and joked around with them and stuff. They were really nice. They let me keep the uniform too.

RH: Oh, are you glad to have it?

SO: Yeah, I mean I don't ever really wear it out. It sits in my drawer, but I wear the shorts sometimes. And they gave me the warm up and everything. So they were really nice. I got, I mean the jersey just sits upstairs in my room. Every time I open my drawer, I know what it's from. It was just a really -- looking back on it now -- first of all, it feels like it was five years ago. It feels like it was a really long time ago. And we're about -- what is it, going to be three year anniversary, I guess? It feels like it was a really long time ago. But then again, I feel like I remember these girls from the soccer team from like yesterday. So, I'm glad I actually did soccer.

RH: Who was making decisions in your family?

SO: My mom. Well, the reason -- we have a house in Florida in Destin, which I really wanted to go -- I would rather have lived in Destin than in Houston, other than the fact that I didn't have any friends there. Oh, well I knew one kid that went there. But because that was our house, and I was familiar with it. And I would feel so much more comfortable there. Because I had a house. I knew my way around. I had been going to Destin since I was a baby. And I would -- it's hard to describe but I would have felt much more comfortable there, even if I didn't have any other friends with me there. I would have felt a lot more comfortable, because it was our house, and I don't know. It's kind of like a second home, I guess. Or the other option was boarding school, which I was really wanted to go to really badly.

RH: Where?

SO: Andover, which my mom didn't -- my sister didn't want to go, because like I said, she's a -- she wants the family. She didn't want to go anywhere. I really did, because my philosophy was, if everyone's going to be away from their family -- And I mean not everyone. There are some people that just go to the school in the day there and live near there. But if everyone -- I would be boarding there, so it would be almost like I was just taking a semester abroad, and it wouldn't be as hectic and as stressful. Because

living with my mom was -- living in such close quarters with my mom was really stressful.

RH: And why was that?

SO: Because she -- she was always stressed about the house and what we were doing, and the main reason we stayed in Houston was because my dad setup headquarters. That was the easiest place for him to get to, because, I mean, their headquarters is in New Orleans, and it was the easiest place for him to get to. Was Houston, not Florida. And, so I was kind of disappointed, because Houston is so big, and I don't know. It's made me -- the people were so nice to us there, and when they found out, they had -- you know, if you're a student, show us your ID and you get less -- you get less than the price. And Clair and I went to the movies one day, and we showed them our school ID, and it said Newman School, New Orleans, Louisiana, and they just let us go in for free. I don't know if they talked to their manager or something about it. They just were like, you know what? Go on in. We were like, OK. The Houston people were really nice to us, but I was so uncomfortable there. I always felt really claustrophobic in a way. And I don't know if that was the small apartment that we shared, or the hotel room we lived in for a good two weeks with my sister and mom. Sometimes my dad, my grandma. We finally got two hotel rooms, eventually, but it was still odd. Like really. I mean, I was -- I don't even know how old I was, then. 15 or so. And it was -- I mean, I couldn't -- by the time I got back to New Orleans, I couldn't actually get my driver's license, because I hadn't gotten my permit, because the storm had hit and we left before I got my permit. And so, I didn't start driving until later, and it just. It was -- I always felt, I didn't like it, obviously. I don't know who did.

RH: So tell me about, then, you must have been really excited when everybody -- when your mom said it's time to go home, huh?

SO: Yeah, well actually Voodoofest goes on every year around Halloween time, and my good friend's mom -- she was in Mississippi. She works for a big energy company here,

Entergy, and she got 20 tickets to Voodoo for free. And all of my friends came, and we met down here. It was the first time I had been back, and we went to Voodoofest, and it was the most fun I've ever -- it was -- looking back, that was so much fun. My friend's mom drove us down here, and just driving in, it was -- it was really, really weird. Driving down Kaledon (sp?) Ave. was just -- gas stations weren't lit up. And McDonald's, which is right next to the gas station was torn down, and it was dark everywhere. No lights worked. It was like a stop sign at almost every intersection. And then, I got to my house, and my dad was here a lot, fixing up things and doing stuff. He came back really early, and where our refrigerator is now, there was just a bit hole. My dad had taken it out. And if you wanted something to drink or to eat, you had to go outside to the garage, where we have an extra refrigerator, and eat from there. And my dad had been the only one living here, so I got home and my friend Claire slept here with me, and Casey slept in her house with her mom. And their house was really flooded too, so they slept on the second floor. They live in Old Metairie. And Claire and I go out and we look in the refrigerator, and my dad's the only one living here. There's a loaf of bread and some bologna, and some milk for his coffee, and that was it. He was just living off the bare minimum here. And her dad actually owns a grocery store here. And they had a hard time with that, too. So we went around and saw her dad's grocery store. We drove by her house. We drove by my other friend's house, and it was just awful. It was -- and we just drove around just everywhere.

RH: Who met you at the airport?

SO: We didn't fly. We drove in from Houston. My friend's mom drove us in. And we went by her house in Old Metairie, and it was -- there was a big hole in her roof from where her dad had to axe out and get helicoptered out, and it was like the stuff you saw on the news about everyone. I mean, it looked as though it applied to a small group -- I mean, not a small group of people, but a certain -- like the poorer neighborhoods and stuff. When I came back here, I realize that it affected a lot of people.

RH: So you didn't quite realize that until you got back?

SO: No, I thought -- Yeah, exactly. I thought that it was only -- the places that got the most devastated and where there was most deaths and stuff was where people didn't have the means to get out. And so I thought it was like the poorer -- and I mean the majority of it was, but there was a vast number of people with means to get out, and who did get out, but their houses were still damaged. And the tragedy was the people that didn't have the means to get out, and their houses and their lives -- they lost everything. So, just driving around down the street from me, and just looking at all the houses, and it was -- it was sad and it was exciting at the same time, because I knew where I was. Everything was familiar. I went -- I drove by all my friends' houses. We just drove around, and it was really nice. I liked it. I needed that. It was around Thanksgiving time. No, no, it was around -- it was October when we (inaudible).

RH: End of October --

SO: Yeah, Halloween time, because it was Voodoo fest. And it was nice to just be with a lot of my friends again.

RH: So you all took kind of a long weekend, or --

SO: Yeah, yeah.

RH: Were you sad to go back to Houston?

SO: Yeah.

RH: Did you want to stay here?

SO: Yeah. I would have rather come back here and been with people I know. At my school had like an interim program where they opened around Thanksgiving. And it wasn't like regular school, because they didn't have all their teachers and they didn't have

all the students, but it was some sort of program. But, I didn't even realize that at the time. But I really would have rather done that.

RH: So, what was it like to get back to Newman, and to get with your friends?

SO: That was really exciting.

RH: What was the first day like?

SO: Like any first day of school after a summer, even though it was only a couple months. It was August, September, October. It was only like four or five months, but it felt like forever, and you get back to school, and you see people that you not necessarily -- I communicated with a lot of my friends. We talked a lot, but to talk to people that you don't necessarily talk to on the phone, but that have gone to school with you your entire life was interesting, and it was just really good to be back. Really good.

RH: What was the -- was there anything you were like really happy to find that you [hadn't?] really missed? That you were glad to --

SO: My own bed and my own room. My sister and I shared a room in Houston, which didn't work out well, because I'm an early riser, and she's not, and at least on school nights and stuff, I like to go to bed much earlier than she does. So, just basically living at home again. Having more independence and freedom, and like the familiarity of school and my friends and all that type of stuff. It was still weird because whenever I went over to my friend's Claire's house, her whole bottom floor was empty, and it was completely empty. And, that was weird.

RH: Did you and your friends end up doing anything in the recovery?

SO: Through our school, you -- there was community service projects and stuff like that. And there was all these different things like Katrina Crew that goes and cleans up. And I

did it through school. They would have -- we would have a lot of service days and stuff like that.

RH: Were you glad to do that, or did you want to do that?

SO: Yeah. I mean it was -- I mean, I feel like it didn't -- I knew it would help, and it didn't require that much of me just to go pick up trash. Other than that it just basically, I became really, like, I want to buy everything local. I bought -- or at least my mom bought a bunch of "Save NOLA" shirts which were benefiting New Orleans. I just spent all of my money that I -- I wouldn't go online and buy stuff. I would go to -- I don't do that often, anyway -- but I would go to local stores, and support local businesses and stuff like that. So, I mean that's really -- I wasn't old enough to do -- I was old enough to do Habitat For Humanity, but there wasn't such a big outlet. There is now, and I just wasn't as aware. I was more too excited to be home than anything else.

RH: Well that makes sense. I mean, let the people from out of town come in. We're going to take a break.

[END OF AUDIO FILE]

SO: Yeah.

RH: Has that been through school, or just on your own?

SO: Well, mostly through my mom, probably, because she has all these Jewish kids coming in to do work and whatnot. And I say Jewish, because she leads every Jewish group there is here. So she got all these maps, and I would just sometimes -- like whenever anyone came into town, she whips out the map and she's like, this is, you know, this, and this is this and -- there's the Katrina tour that, you know, you go down to the 9th Ward, and it's not like a literal tour, but my mom would take a group down to the 9th Ward and stuff like that. And, I drove down there once with my friend and her father,

and it was so weird. Just the places that I've seen before, and that I've definitely driven through before, but didn't know of as the 9th Ward. I didn't know of as 8th Ward. I didn't know of as -- you know, I've just -- and also, because when I got back and started driving, and so that makes you learn the city much -- I mean, I knew how to get -- if I was in a car with someone, I knew where to tell them to turn and stuff. I didn't necessarily know names of streets, but I'd be like, the second street off of St. Charles you, you know. I knew how to get places. But I learned a lot better how to maneuver my way around the city. One, because I started driving. Two, because of all of her maps and stuff.

RH: OK. I'm going to ask you to repeat this part, because this is real interesting, you know, to get it on here. Are we ready, and did I (inaudible)?

(unrelated discussion)

RH: So this is Tape 2 of Katrina's Jewish Voices and this is Sophie Oreck. So your mother's been bringing groups in. Have you interacted with some of these groups?

SO: Kind of. She brings a couple of them home to get water or something. Or if she has to run in and get something. So, I've met people. I also -- I was with her. She had a big group coming in. I forgot why exactly I was there, but at the synagogue -- and she had this whole little speech thing before they went out and did all their community service. So I didn't interact with them that much, but I have seen some of them. There was a group that actually came down during their spring break and stayed in our school and did work. So, I've met a lot of these kids, but they are off doing work.

RH: So, tell me this. What's it like to have this grandmother and this mother who are just so big in the Jewish community? What are the benefits and what are the downsides?

SO: Benefits would be I learn a lot from -- I mean, they -- like I said, I learned a lot of the maps and stuff, like what actually happened in New Orleans from my mom talking to all these Jewish groups. They know a lot of people and a lot of people know me. Just,

they're like, oh, are you an Oreck child? Are you related to Carol Wise? Like a lot of those types of things. And I don't think there are really any downsides that I can think of. They do a lot of good stuff, and a lot of people recognize them for it, and therefore I'm as, you know -- I'm recognized, also, just for being their daughter and granddaughter. But other than that, there aren't any downsides or anything like that. They're just really big in the Jewish community. And my mom's really big into any volunteer work, mostly. Like for school or for soccer, or for whatever it may be. But she's -- Jewishness is her big one.

RH: Jewishness is her big one. What does that mean to you?

SO: I just know, I mean, throughout my entire life -- conference calls and going to Israel, and making sure I go to Sunday School every Sunday. Making sure I get confirmed, making sure I have a bat mitzvah, and making sure I go to Israel.

RH: Have you been to Israel?

SO: Yes, I've been twice. Yeah.

RH: And were they with school programs, or were they with a family?

SO: My first one was with my family, when -- with my mom, my grandma, and my sister when I was younger. I would say 10, but I really am not sure. And the second one was with a program. One of my best friends, Jordan and I did this. My sister did it too the year before us. You go for five weeks. Five? Yeah, five weeks. You go to Prague for a week and the rest you travel around Israel. And we were actually there the time when the war broke out, so that was a little interesting too. And my mom being so prominent in the Jewish community -- I actually got a phone call one night from a news station here that wanted to interview me because they knew I was in Israel through my mom and her Jewishness.

RH: What year was that?

SO: That was going into sophomore year. I mean going into junior year, I believe. Yes, yes.

RH: So that was when they went into Lebanon?

SO: Yeah, that was that whole stuff. We weren't allowed to go north of Jerusalem.

RH: What did you tell the press?

SO: Well, they caught me kind of off guard. When they called, we were actually -- I forgot which street we were on -- but we were on a street walking around, going shopping, and it was late at night. And I knew they were going to call, I just didn't know when. And they kind of caught me a little bit off guard. I wasn't so good with words. They were like, what's it like being there with the war, and I was like, interesting. No, I think I said "cool," actually. Because I didn't really know what to say because I was so out of it. It was weird. I didn't do a very good job.

RH: What does Israel mean to you?

SO: Going there was -- I didn't -- I was completely ignorant, and didn't know anything about it, so going there, I learned a lot about not like Jewish customs in religious sense, but Jewish history, and wars, and stuff like that, and interesting things about why the conflict that's going on today is going on today. The history of that. Which was probably -- that was probably my favorite part, because I didn't know any background to that. And I didn't really know anything about it. And my mom and grandma and my dad are all -- whenever something goes on the television about Israel, they're all really interested, and I didn't really know anything about it. And that kind of -- especially because a lot of conflicts happened while we were there. I learned a lot about the history of it, which was interesting. And the history of the Jews coming to Israel and all of that kind of stuff.

RH: So, what did being Jewish mean to you during the storm? Can you answer that?

SO: It kind of seemed like the -- I didn't really outright be like, yeah, I'm Jewish. All that kind of stuff, because not as many people there I feel, or at least at my school were as Jewish. Or I didn't want to do anything that was out of the ordinary. And so, I didn't hide it. If someone asked me if I was Jewish, I said yes. But I wasn't like, oh I'm going to services for Rosh Hashanah tomorrow, you know? I just wanted to fit in, so I didn't say anything. If I didn't -- if someone offered -- if someone had tuna fish and everyone was like, ew, gross, tuna fish, I would have been like, ew, gross, tuna fish. So I didn't say anything that was specific to me. I was very closed off. I didn't --

RH: Were trying to blend.

SO: Yeah, exactly. So, I wouldn't say anything. So, being Jewish certainly didn't really come up.

RH: Overall with your family, though, was it you think in the end, it was good to be Jewish? And then your mother's (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

SO: Well, I know it helped out, because the reasons she knows the people she knows in Houston is through all the Jewish organizations. The two good friends she has are from the Jewish organizations that she volunteers or -- I don't even know what -- UJ everything. United Jewish bunch of stuff.

RH: All the initials.

SO: Yeah. And she knows all of them through that. So that was really helpful while we were there.

RH: And is there anything from Sunday School or any learnings that you've had about being Jewish that kind of came to your mind while you were away? Or even now, during

the recovery, anything --

SO: Looking back, probably, but while I was there I wasn't really focusing on anything like that.

RH: So, looking back --

SO: I mean, looking back. I don't even know. I guess -- I don't know. I never really thought about how Judaism played into the hurricane. Yeah, so I'm not really sure.

RH: Well, you probably know that expression "Tikkun Olam." And you've always been giving to people, where you were suddenly on the receiving end. Did that feel weird?

SO: Yeah. That did feel weird, but -- See, I never really even associated it with -- I guess since I've been learning that since I was, you know, learning all the Jewish whatevers since I was a baby. A kid. I don't even -- it's just kind of a way of life now. It's not even -- I don't even think about it being, oh this is my Jewish morals kicking in, or something like that, because it's just kind of blended with who I am.

RH: Did some of your friends not come back?

SO: Not any of my close friends, but people that I had a bunch of classes with. A couple of people in my homeroom or advisory didn't come back, but no one that I was particularly close with. People that I noticed, they weren't there. And I miss them, but I wasn't -- none of my best friends, no.

RH: Does the school feel the same as it did before?

SO: Yeah.

RH: Pretty much?

SO: There were a lot of layoffs, though. And that was -- that changed, but that's about the only thing.

RH: Do you feel like your world's kind of back to normal, or --

SO: My little bubble of uptown, yes, but when I -- I play tennis out in Lakeview and -- so I know that it's not back to normal, and my mom gets really mad whenever people find out we're from New Orleans. They're like, oh how is New Orleans, and I'm like, oh it's fine. You know, it's great. And my mom gets really mad because she's like, it's not great yet. And she doesn't want people thinking that, oh you know, we can stop trying to help or something. So, in my world, between school, soccer, tennis, my house, it's all fine, but it's not for everyone.

RH: Tell me about -- let's talk about the experience in the sense of, are there any things now that you feel like you are -- how you're different because of what you went through?

SO: I feel like I didn't allow myself to change, or even learn that much, because I was so uncomfortable, claustrophobic, frightened, whatever word, but it was definitely an experience I won't forget. I don't know. I can't even tell you what I learned from it, but it was a memorable one. Mostly right now, in a negative way still.

RH: Negative way still?

SO: Yeah. I would say so.

RH: How so?

SO: Maybe not even negative. Maybe even neutral. I just don't -- I can't think of any positive from my exact experience that I've really gotten out of it, other than learning -- like thinking about, if I have a new student coming into the school how hard it is for them. If there's a new person who just moves here from, you know, whatever mom and dad's

job. Somebody like that. How hard it's got, and how hard it is for someone like that. And I also learned that I'm going to have to -- like college is going to be a rude awakening for most people, but for me it's not going to be that bad, because I've been in an experience where I just pick up and go and I'm somewhere completely new.

RH: So you know you can do it.

SO: Right. If need be, I know I can do it. And another thing it's made me dread June 1st, which is when hurricane season starts.

RH: Are you anxious this summer?

SO: Yeah, because it's always at the beginning of the school year that you're going to get some sort of hurricane scare. And last year we didn't even get one, which was good, because if we had that would have been real bad, but it -- you can't be that lucky two years in a row, so I'm kind of scared.

RH: Do you have a plan? Do you know what you're going to do? You and your friends, did you all talk about it?

SO: I don't know what I'd do if I -- No, if I had to go back to Kincaid, I don't know what I'd do. If I went back to the Derek Hotel and spent one more night there, I'm not sure I could do it. I don't even know. I mean, I would assume we would go right back to where we were, if it was to happen again, but I can't even imagine that, though.

RH: Would you insist on going to Andover this time?

SO: I would insist on staying here.

RH: On staying here?

SO: Yeah. Even if it was dangerous or whatever. I know all the hurricane stuff. You, I don't know, stay away from windows. Stuff like that. Yeah, I would try and stay here. I would insist on staying here. I don't know how well that'd work over with my mom, but, I would try my hardest.

RH: We haven't talked about this, but you were talking about watching the TV, and you know, Lower 9 and what that looked like, and that you know, people -- the TV kind of focused on Lower 9. What do you think about race and the storm, and race in New Orleans? Do you have any thoughts on that?

SO: The way the news portrayed it, it looks, like, awful. And right now, the crime -- not even between any races -- just overall, is awful because there's no police officers. But the way the news portrayed it was really unfair to a lot of people.

RH: Explain why.

SO: Because it's unfair to show just one group of people that got -- that the 9th Ward that got devastated which is mostly an African American population, and in general, African Americans make up the more poorer part of New Orleans, and it's a really big problem, because you need to. In order -- and it's our school system, honestly, if you want to get really into it. It's not -- it wasn't -- it's not fair how the news portrayed it, and the news made it -- us -- New Orleans as a whole, look really bad. And our mayor didn't help, but -- and our local government didn't help. And nothing helped. But they didn't show Old Metairie mansions that got destroyed, or Audubon Place, right down the street from here. Actually that way. Some houses got destroyed. And they showed people looting. African Americans or white people looting. And they would only show the people that were looting -- the minority people that were looting television sets. The majority of people kicked in store windows to get diapers, food, milk for their toddlers, and the news doesn't show that. And they show the corrupt police officers that beat some poor man, and they don't show the police officers that -- they don't show the side -- there's nothing

they could -- the police officers that stayed were under such stress, there's not so many of them, and the people that were looting for the wrong reasons just broke into stores and got like -- basically armed themselves. And there's so little manpower with the police, there's not much they could have done. And they didn't show any of the hero -- I mean, they show the heroes. I feel like that most of the heroes that I've seen have been on local news. Like, they had this whole Heroes for Hurricane Katrina Heroes. Something on the local news. I haven't seen any. I mean, I'm sure there is, but the majority of the news, I feel is so negative. And upon African Americans especially. I think they were treated unfairly in the news. They were portrayed badly in the news. I mean to say that this was Bush didn't do anything because he's racist, I don't really know. I mean, that's his problem.

RH: Do you have any black friends?

SO: Yeah, our school is -- our school does not have that make black kids, but I do have black friends, and my housekeeper who I adore is black, and she's my favorite person ever. And her house was completely damaged, and we helped her fix it up, and she had us to help her, and there's so many people who aren't that well off that have -- are sitting ducks. They can't do anything.

RH: Where does she live?

SO: She lives down --

RH: You can show off your geography.

SO: It's down south of Kalem (sp?). A little bit past -- it's actually out past Clayborn (sp?), so it's -- her whole neighborhood was flooded, and it's not a particularly good neighborhood either, which I mean, is a problem also.

RH: So, do you think that how your mom and your dad have been making decisions. Have you noticed how they make decisions? You know, who's in charge of what? The decision making during the storm.

SO: Around the storm, my dad and mom, I feel like kind of worked -- my mom kind of worked with how to go on with our life in Houston. Like enrolling us in school, finding an apartment, finding everything. And my dad came back here right after the storm and secured the house, basically. And, to stop people that were -- opportunists just looking to steal stuff. To try and secure the area. So, I think that's how they divided and conquered, but I couldn't really tell you for sure.

RH: OK, that's the way it looked to you.

SO: That's how it seemed to me.

RH: Do you have a different feeling? Do you think about the federal government or the state or city government? You may never even thought about it before. Do you have a different feeling towards them?

SO: No. See, I learned a lot more about -- well, like I said, about the geography of the city. How the local government works, and what failed about the levees. Whose fault that may have been. But not even whose fault, why it happened. And, but then I know a lot about levees than the average person.

RH: I bet so.

SO: And out of that, I mean, that was basically what I learned.

RH: So what do you want to do with the future? Are you going to stay in New Orleans? Do you think you'll --

SO: Since, I've -- I mean I've been living in this house for the same room, going to the same school for my entire life. So, for college I kind of want to get out, but I definitely want to come back here and do something. Like I said earlier, the school system here is just -- private school is really the only way to go. And I've seen public schools in many -- In Georgia, and that's where -- I know a lot of kids in Georgia, I went to camp up there. And they all go to public school. And before I really knew anything like that, I always thought public school was just awful. And I was like, wow these kids must like -- there's got to be something wrong. And then you go and see their schools and they look like our school on steroids. Just much bigger. And our public schools aren't like that here. And it's not fair, because kids without means are getting the short end of the stick. And, I don't know if I could do anything to help that, but I know that is a big problem, and there's other problems here that need to be fixed, and I don't know what I'm going to be good at, what I'm going to end up doing. But, even if I end up not doing something that could benefit the city, like you know, being a teacher. Being some politician or something. If I could just make money, or something, and give it to the city and stuff like that.

RH: Now that you've been away from home, does home have a different meaning for you?

SO: Yeah, especially right when we came back. All my friends and I definitely were like, we appreciate school and everything a lot more. Just, you appreciate just like the simple, like your own bed. Your own -- or not even your own car. A car that you can drive. Especially after seeing what like -- exposing what poverty there is in New Orleans. It's really -- I don't know, you just appreciate what you have a lot more.

RH: Is there anything else that you took granted before that you really don't take for granted anymore?

SO: Like everything.

RH: Everything.

SO: Yeah, basically. Because you left everything, except for this one pair of jeans that I took with me. Like, everything, you know? My entire room. I have stuff that I probably don't even need anymore, that you know -- soccer pictures from when I was 11. My good jewelry box my grandma gave me that used to be her grandma's or something or other. Just random things that you have in your room or in your entire house that you take for granted, and that you don't want to give up.

RH: (inaudible)

SO: Yeah, a little bit. I would say so. Just my room.

RH: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

SO: Like the entire room.

RH: Is there anything you want to do now that's come from the storm, come out of the storm that -- what, you know, you weren't thinking about before?

SO: I can't really think of anything. Yeah, I don't really know.

RH: OK. Any new directions, just, in general? Going into your senior year?

SO: Going into my senior year.

RH: What do you want most from your senior year?

SO: I just, I want to have fun. I want to get into college, and just go on life and never have a hurricane again. No, I just want to be -- I want to finish up my senior year with the friends I've been with for however many years I've been with them, and with the teachers have -- some which have taught me since sixth grade, and I just want to finish out without any drama. Just easy going.

RH: Anything else you want to add to the interview that we haven't covered?

SO: Nope.

RH: Nope?

SO: Nope

RH: OK. I want to thank you Sophie. You've been a great interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW]