



Joel Colman Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: Rosalind Hinton interviewing Cantor Joel Colman at Temple Sinai, 6217 Saint Charles Avenue, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Thursday, August 31, 2006. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archives and the Goldring Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Cantor Colman, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that this interview will be video recorded?

Cantor Joel Colman: Yes, I do.

RH: OK. Why don't we begin with just some simple information; your name, where you came from, your family who is here with you in New Orleans, your age, if you don't mind or your birthday, and just how you came to be in the New Orleans area.

JC: OK. I'm originally from the Metro Detroit area, specifically Oak Park, Michigan and I made my way through here to become the Cantor at Temple Sinai. I'm a graduate of Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, the School of Sacred Music, which is a five year Cantoral program, it's the same seminary that the reformed Rabbis go to, and I graduated from the New York campus 11 years ago. And, I came here to New Orleans in 1999 to serve as the Cantor and then a few years ago I also took on the additional portfolio as the Educator Director. My wife Jackie, she is the administrator for the religious school program and she also teaches. My son Joshua, who just graduated from high school, was going to Ecole Classique, a private school in Metairie, Louisiana. He would have been graduating with a class of 40, instead he ended up going to Walled Lake Northern High School in Walled Lake, Michigan, which is a community of only a few miles in diameter but they have three public high schools with over 1,600 kids in each. And each high school has over 1,600 kids; he had a graduating class of 435. But his



whole senior year was of course entirely disrupted; he -- my wife is back, we are living in our house, and this is just the basic information. And we also have two Labrador Retrievers, Ben and Jazz, and so the two labs, my wife and I are back in our house. My son Josh worked at Camp Maas, which is a Jewish residential camp in the Metro Detroit area. I worked at that Jewish camp myself for over ten years, my mother worked at the camp and so he was a counselor there. Tomorrow he leaves to go to England for two weeks because my wife is from England so he's going to visit family. And then he will be back here with my wife on Rosh Hashanah, and when he is here on Rosh Hashanah on September, what is Rosh Hashanah dates, I forget, the 21st, it will be the first time that all of us will be together in New Orleans in our house since Katrina, when we left the day before.

RH: Oh my gosh, that's over a year.

JC: Yes, who knew when we left the house that we wouldn't all be together for another year?

RH: So, tell me about - you live on Pine Street and I'm assuming by your address that you're on the other side of Clayburn?

JC: Yes, I am, I am, if you go up, if you go to Saint Charles Avenue, it ends at Carrollton, you go up Carrollton and where you see the Notre Dame seminary on your right, where the cross street is Welmsley (sp?), you go down Welmsley about six blocks, and there, right to Dominican High School and Saint Rita Church is my house, it's on the corner of Pine and Welmsley.

RH: So your house was flooded?

JC: Well, yes and no, it was. The main part of the house, it's not a big house, it's 1,200 sq. ft. and it dates back to 1926. The house itself is up on pillars, and then there's an additional part of the house not connected, where it used to be a one car garage. That's



right on the ground and that's where we have the water heater, a bathroom, a washer-dryer, and my son's room, that was flooded. And we have flood insurance, and when the flood insurance guy came we found out that the - when he looked at the property, he said, "Oh, the room that was flooded and ruined", he said "You needed two flood policies because you see the two rooms, the two entities aren't connected". We didn't know that, no one bothered to share that info with us. Josh's room was the one that was really flooded badly and so we had to take our flood insurance money and use that to repair his room but 6, 7, tenths of a mile could make the difference between getting 3 feet or 6 feet.

RH: And so --

JC: We were in the 3-4 feet range, so in a way we were kind of lucky. You know people down here were actually, when we spoke to people and we were asking about the damage, if they said that a tree fell through their roof, that was actually a moment of celebration, you know that?

RH: Explain that.

JC: Well, the reason is, is because if a tree fell through your roof that means your homeowners' insurance would kick in. And, that has a much better opportunity, gets more dollars back to repair your home than flood insurance. So you were kind of hoping that if there was damage, maybe it was more wind damage. And that's the whole thing that some of the people in Biloxi and Gulfport had been struggling with their insurance people, is that they, the insurance people are telling them, "No, this was flood damage", and they're going, "Flood damage, then why is my car and tree over there, up, you know"? So...

RH: Right. Tell me about, tell me about the neighborhood, what you liked about your neighborhood. What you still like about your neighborhood.



JC: Well, it's -- New Orleans is different than -- You know every Jewish community defines themselves as being different, you can't help but do that and it is, to a degree. But I've lived in St. Louis, I've lived in Detroit, I've lived in Jerusalem, and I've lived in New York, and I can tell you that New Orleans has some unique differences. When I teach ninth grade at Temple Sinai and I have 15 kids in my class, I could very easily have 7, 8 different schools represented in that one classroom. In other words, I have seen it where you will have kids who will live houses down from each other who will not ever see each other in school because they go to different schools, they go to different private schools. Unfortunately because the public school system is so poor in New Orleans that people have to send their children to private schools. So, if you have a neighborhood and you take one square block, you could have easily 10, 20 different schools that are servicing just the kids in that block. So, it's a different kind of feeling, the kids, when the kids are here at Temple they don't see each other in school. My neighborhood you don't see a lot of kids really biking around, but what I like about it is that there is Dominican High School, there's a church next door, and there's St. Rita's School half a block down. So, I see a lot of activity, I see a lot of kids walking around and I think what I like is that you have people walking their dogs and what's nice is that when you have two dogs like I do and you walk them, that's when you meet your neighbors. So, I think that's what I like about the neighborhood.

RH: So, you walk them twice a day?

JC: No, we're -- I think we're a little lazy in that; also, they're two Labs, you know they each weigh like 80 pounds so, you know if they see another dog they get excited, but I like to take them for a little bit of walk. And, I'm sure we'll get to this later in the interview, but when I lived in the FEMA trailer here at the Temple we, when my wife and son lived in Detroit for the year, they took one Lab and I took the other. So I had one Lab here and I would walk him down Saint Charles Avenue and I would play with him here inside the Temple, take the ball and I'd throw it down the hallway. So, as far as my - one of my



Labs is named Ben, this is his playground, the Temple.

RH: (laughter) Why don't we get into your Katrina story. Tell me about when you first became aware of the storm and what kind of decisions you and your wife made, and your son.

JC: Well, I remember about a week before the storm, Bruce Katz, the chief meteorologist for ABC News here, is one of our congregants at Temple Sinai, I remember him specifically saying, "This is Katrina and it's heading to Florida. We have nothing to worry about". And, it wasn't just Bruce who said that, everyone said that. When I was picking my son up from school and, as I said, he went to Ecole Classique in Metairie, so you know, we had to pick him up and bring him back home when school was over, I remember stopping in to the Amoco gas station on Airline and Transcontinental and the guy saying to me, "Wow, what do you think about the storm heading this way"? And I said to him, this was a few days after Bruce was saying the storm was going to Florida and now it was making some turn, and I remember saying to him, "I don't think we're going to have anything to worry about". I really didn't. But obviously as we finished services on Saturday, Sunday we were going to have a citywide Jewish teachers' program that was going to be held at Temple Sinai and that was postponed so we knew that the weather was severe enough where we had to start canceling some events. The thought process of when we were going to leave, it came into a reality obviously Saturday, and now it was for us, not if we were going to leave, but when we were going to leave. And that was important too. We ended up leaving Sunday, mid-morning and we drove to Henry S. Jacobs Camp located in Utica, Mississippi and that's the reformed Jewish camp south of Jackson, Mississippi. The contra flow plan, which here in Louisiana, is a plan which designates highways to run in one direction because getting traffic out in this area is not easy but if you can flow all traffic in one way, it can speed the evacuation up. Last year, or two years now, when we had a hurricane threat, the contra flow plan failed miserably because when the city called for the contra flow plan to take



place, no one bothered to tell the Louisiana State Police so things were a bit of a mess. I have to say that Hurricane Ivan, that contra flow plan did not work but this year it did for Katrina. That is one thing that did work. The three hour to Utica, Mississippi turned out to be a six hour drive, which isn't too bad. So we got there Sunday night and we were there a couple of days; it's funny, a lot of people, some of course I'm sure will, but the moment that I heard that New Orleans was flooding, I don't remember that moment. I don't have a clear recollection of, oh my God, the city is flooding. It was just like one thing after another because at the camp the storm was strong enough where it hit into Jackson, Mississippi, not to the degree, of course, of New Orleans, but we lost power at the camp, we lost use of water, and now it became obvious that for many of us we had to leave again. Where are you going to go? That was a big decision; where do you go? We have two cars, I've got my family and two dogs, my family is either in California or in the Metro Detroit area. Now the other thing that I do is I'm also a ham-radio operator, so what I did was is that I had the capacity of operating mobile and I remember putting up my antenna on top of my car, its a mag mount, and getting on the 20 meter band, 1,400 megahertz and I heard some hams who were trying to help out with some emergency communications and there was a guy saying that there's someone on the I-10 overpass who needs medical help. I got on the air and I gave him the phone number for the New Orleans Fire Department, which, by then, I'm sure wasn't working. But then I got to a ham in Connecticut who I asked him to call Cantor John Kaplan at Temple Israel in Memphis, Tennessee. So here I'm sitting in my car, I talk to this ham who I've never met before in Connecticut, who says standby, he makes a phone call to Cantor Kaplan, he speaks to him. Cantor Kaplan tells him his response, he gets back on the air, he calls me, and he says Cantor Kaplan says come on up. So, we packed up the two cars and we drove to Memphis, Tennessee and we stayed there for two days. And, it was helpful because then we were able to sort of collect ourselves, really think about where we were going to go next.

RH: So when exactly did you leave Camp Jacob to go up to -- Tuesday?



JC: I would say Wednesday.

RH: So you were in the dark the whole time, up in Camp Jacob?

JC: No, I mean you have to remember that, there was some time for the storm to travel up that way and the loss of -- You know first we lost electricity, then we lost water, and I had a battery-operated television so I was able to watch the news and one of the WDSU, I believe, was operating from their Baton Rouge affiliate. I can't tell you how comforting it was to see newscasters who knew the New Orleans area because they could tell you exactly what was going on because they knew the area. So, Wednesday, along with everyone else, everyone was just going, you know, different ways, and we ended up driving up north. We ended up staying at a hotel in Louisville, Kentucky. Cantor Kaplan is a member of AAA so he was able to buy this big, thick book of AAA hotels that take animals. And it's a very helpful reference book because we found a place and we stayed in a hotel in Louisville, Kentucky and then on the way, you know I was on the phone constantly trying to make arrangements as we're driving up north Detroit. One of my dearest friends in the world that I grew up with was Allen Lieder and Alan is a Cantor in Closter, New Jersey. Alan and I go back to junior high school and we roomed together in college. He was the Cantor at my wedding and I was the best man at his wedding, and his parents, Alan and Alisa Lieder lived in Waldlake, Michigan. Alan's sister, Sherrie, who's married Mark Enfield, is a member of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan. Alan's parents are also members of Temple Israel, so, they sort of contacted Temple Israel and started to create a support system for us so that by the time we arrived we literally had my son registered at school and we stayed at the Lieder's for about two weeks. Temple Israel helped us get an apartment, helped us get clothes, because just like everybody in New Orleans, we all left with three days of clothing so we ended up staying, as I said with the Lieder's for a couple of weeks, in a very small house and moved into an apartment in Novi, Michigan, right next to Walled Lake, registered my son, did the complete registration. In fact, I remember when we registered my son the lady at



the school district, who was, I mean she was so kind but she was almost beyond kind, she was almost too bubbly, but it turns out that when you register your child into a school there's all sorts of documents that need to be handed over. Obviously, we didn't have them. By then President Bush had made an announcement that schools all around the country should accept any children coming from the Gulf Region and let them in their schools with minimum fuss and paperwork. So in Walled Lake they registered my son under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act.

RH: Tell me about that.

JC: Well this Homeless Act apparently is a provision that allows children to register into a school with minimal paperwork and then if the child let's say is going to Walled Lake High School, and the guardians find housing out of the school district, not in Walled Lake, because he's registered in this McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, even if the child moves to another school district, this Act allows the school to retain the child in that school and provide transportation. So, the parents don't have to find another school for him. So, it simplified things for us. And, I remember when we went to the -- We had to register him in the district office and then we actually went to the high school itself, which by the way looks like a college campus, I mean it's huge, it's brand new, it looks like a cathedral compared to some of the schools we have here. And, they wanted to put my son under the lunch program and that's when I said "No, I can feed my son, I can give him \$1.50 so he could buy the lunch". And the next day when he went to school, he paid for his lunch, and he's sitting down at the table, and all of the sudden the lunch cashier comes running up to him and says to him, "You're in the program", even though I said I wasn't filing, but nevertheless, so for the whole year he didn't have to pay for his lunch. Let me tell you, for a high school kid not have to pay for his meal, that's pretty cool for as long as he was concerned. I think in many ways for my family, I think it was hardest on my son because here is Josh who is a senior in high school, it's like one of the big machers, he's one of the co-captains on his football team at Ecole Classique. I'll never forget, you know



there's some things you remember, it's interesting you can forget some specifics, but August 25 I remember very clearly, that was Thursday before Katrina. And why do I remember this is because that's when they had the football jamboree, this is like the opening football night, and this was played at Ecole Classique and three other football teams show up and they play like half a football game and then they play the other team. And I remember Josh was one of the co-captains to go out onto the field and I also remember that night as being a meeting at the Jewish Center that I missed, because you see that was the very first meeting for the committee that was going to take care of the planning for the Maccabiah that were coming to New Orleans in the summer of 2006 and I was a co-chair of the Communications Committee and so I couldn't go to that committee meeting because I went to my son's football game. And, so here's my son, a senior in high school, having to go to a whole new school. Going from a school in which it was pre-K through 12, but there were only like 40 kids in a class, going to school where there's almost 500 kids in a class. And, by the time we got up to Walled Lake I'd already spoken to the football coach and when we got there and we were at the Lieder's home, the coach had a barbeque at his house and the coach had a couple of football players pick my son up and take him to the barbeque even before a practice or anything. So that helped my son a lot because it built kind of a social circle for him at that time. And he practiced with the team for two weeks, became eligible to play and my mother flew in from California, and the Lieders' and my wife and I we went to his first football game, and an hour before the game, he tore his ACL and he was out for the whole year.

RH: Is ACL is --?

JC: It's in the leg.

RH: Right, oh my God.

JC: You know, that takes a long time to recover. The whole football team is coming out and there's no, I can't find my son, and then a minute later he's coming out in his football



gear, but he's in crutches. So, that was, you can imagine how hard that is, now he had to have surgery, though I can give you the good part though, is that in January he became friends with some kids who, they, every year, what they do is they audition for the school musical. So there were doing A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum and they said, "Why don't you audition with us?" and he got a really good part, Miles Gloriosus, he got a wonderful part, he met new kids and made new friends and it really helped his year even though his room was ruined and flooded. By the way, he has been here a couple of times and I don't think this is too disconnected from the story, but I don't know if you're aware that the Reform Jewish Community, the Reform Jewish Organization, the umbrella, the Union of Reform Judaism, every Jewish movement has a youth group. And the National Federation of Temple Youth made the decision that all the children, all the high school kids, who had been affected by the Gulf - you know by the storms, not only will they give them free registration to the regional conventions that take place twice a year, but they will give you free air travel to these conventions.

RH: Oh, how nice. So, where was the convention?

JC: So, in April of 2006 my son flew from Detroit to New Orleans to go to the convention that was being held at, I believe it was Jacob's Camp, I think it was in Baton Rouge actually. So we had kids coming from all over the country; I was very proud of the Union for Reformed Judaism and the leadership there that made that decision. It cost a lot of money, but it was very, very important. So when my son came down in April, his room was being worked on. And, he saw his room after it had been gutted, and it was being repaired. You know he saw his room in a really good transition, he has yet, the room is done, it's virtually finished, he hasn't seen it yet.

RH: Did you take pictures of it when it was?

JC: Yes, because -- you know, there's an old saying that there are only six Jews in the world, we just keep moving from place to place. The reason I tell you that is because the



company that got the contract to restore and repair Tulane University, which is virtually next door to us, is called Belfour Company, which is based in Birmingham, Michigan. Tulane University suffered over \$180 million of damage. Well Belfour has been down here literally since September. One of their point people is Howard Goldman. Howard Goldman, his daughter is the Program Director at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan. Howard Goldman graduated from Oak Park High in 1974, I graduated from Oak Park High in 1975, I didn't know him, there was 400 kids in our class. And he started coming to services here. We met up and Howard, God bless him, became my contractor, so he helped get my house repaired. Now I'm down here, my wife is up there, and --

RH: You settled your wife and your son in --

JC: In an apartment in Novi, Michigan. I came down here a few times, I mean there's some, you know, we can get more detailed if you want, I made my permanent move down here right after Thanksgiving.

RH: OK. But you were down and around Baton Rouge at times.

JC: Well, High Holidays was very interesting. I don't know if you -- one of the Reform Temples in Baton Rouge just needed for the High Holidays some clergy for their High Holiday services. So Rabbi Cohn, the Senior Rabbi here at Temple Sinai, and I led High Holiday services in Baton Rouge. We felt it was a good place to be because it was close enough for maybe many of our congregants to go to. So it was a win-win situation for that congregation, they got someone to lead the services and we had a place to be where congregants can come and see their Rabbi and Cantor and of course other people who were attending the services that they knew. But there was a significant moment during, for Kol Nidre because 1-1/2 days before Kol Nidre I was in the conference room at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan and there was one of the many conference calls with the Union of Reform Judaism Office. And after the conference call, our



president of our temple, Sandra Levy, she asked me, she said, “Joel, I'm getting phone calls and there seems to be a desire that there be a Kol Nidre service at our temple. Would you lead the service since Rabbi Cohn is going to be at the temple in Baton Rouge and they also had a soloist there so at least there would be someone who could sing the liturgy”. So the day before Kol Nidre I came back here to New Orleans and I had to prepare an entire service, write a sermon, and our organist, Miss Betty Schwartz, read about in the paper that we were doing the services. And she came the day of Kol Nidre, thank God for her, and by the way, Miss Betty Schwartz, who has been our organist since 1964, passed away a week ago and as frail as she was, and she had damage to her home on Broadway, she came here and the service took place in the chapel. I tell you this because before the service started I looked in and the chapel was filling up, which seats about 125. So before the service began I went to the Bimah and said we're all moving to the sanctuary. And so everyone kind of clapped and we all moved into the sanctuary and over 300 people came.

RH: Oh, my word. There were that many here?

JC: Yes, yes. So, there was those moments that were really quite powerful.

RH: Can you tell me a little more about the service itself? What you were thinking about in preparation?

JC: You know, in a way, when you have to do something as big as that, the less time you have to think about it, the better. You just, you just go and you just do it. And I remember afterwards, I asked Rabbi Cohn, I said to Rabbi Cohn, now this was before Kol Nidre and I was speaking to him at a restaurant, and I said, “Rabbi Cohn, I want you to picture a scenario in which it's six months before Katrina and I'm asking you these questions”. And I said, “Rabbi Cohn, can you imagine a Category 3 Force weather system hitting New Orleans during the hurricane season?” And remember this is an imaginary conversation 6 months before Katrina, and I asked him that question and he



said, "Sure, I could see that happening." I said, "Rabbi Cohn, if this horrible storm hit New Orleans, can you ever see 80 percent of New Orleans being flooded?" And Rabbi Cohn said, "God forbid that should happen, but yes, I guess I could see it." And I said another question, "Rabbi, if New Orleans was hit by this terrible, terrible storm, do you think the government response would be right there, helping the people, the citizens of the Gulf area?" And Rabbi Cohn's response was, "Well, I would hope it would be good, but I guess I could see it not working." And I said one more question, "Rabbi Cohn, can you picture a scenario with you in perfect health and me as the Cantor leading and giving the sermon at Kol Nidre at Temple Sinai?" And he said, "Not over my dead body."

(laughter) Because, you know, for the Rabbi to give the sermon on Kol Nidre at any of these High Holiday services, Rabbi Cohn works for months on these sermons, I mean, a lot of serious thought and study and work goes into it. I mean he connects every single sermon during High Holidays to each other, and here it is a day before Kol Nidre and I have to put together this sermon. In fact I ran across and I told that story as part of my sermon too. I don't think actually the service itself was as important as the fact that we were all together in the sanctuary. That was the strength that we gathered.

RH: Was it primarily Temple Sinai?

JC: No, other people, rescue workers who were Jewish, other members of the Jewish community came, it really was a mixed bag.

RH: So, you must have been one of the first services here in the city?

JC: Yes, Tuoro Synagogue had services, I know Gates of Prayer was doing services, all the synagogues, if they were able to have services, as soon as they could, they did. I know that Gates of Prayer and Tuoro Synagogues - Tuoro Synagogue had services in Houston in which they provided a lot of support for the Jewish community there. I also remember going to Beth Israel, you know the conservative shul you know that famous, famous photo, the dramatic photo that was taken of a Rabbi carrying out a Torah from



inside the sanctuary Beth Israel and the waters up to here on him, in fact it's the cover of the Detroit Jewish News this week.

RH: I do know the picture.

JC: OK, well I walked into that Temple three weeks after that and I can tell you it looked even worse because the waters had receded and now you could really see the damage. It was awful in there. The stand that held the tallitzim was shredded; all the different, the tallit was just all - it must have been, they were all shredded and horrible, it looked bad, it really did. And I asked Cliff Curran, one of our congregants, Dr. Cliff Curran who grew up in New Orleans, I said, "Cliff pick me up, let's drive around the city". And so we drove around. When we got to Beth Israel on Canal Boulevard I said, "Let's stop in here." And the door was opened, it was unlocked. And what was there to protect, I took photos, and I have it. It's so sad, it's just so sad.

RH: So this is one of the first things you did when you came back, is you -- where did you go when you first came back to New Orleans?

JC: When I first came back I lived in my house for two months and there was no gas service so I had no hot water. People asked me, they asked me two questions, and it's funny, they don't make sense, but you'll understand. The first question is, how did you take a shower? And the second was, don't tell me what you did. But in a nutshell, what I did was that I heated up water in the microwave. I went to the staging area for the New Orleans Fire Department which was on the West Bank and was at a Christian college and I was able to see the fire fighters. And I remember I was having lunch under the tent and they gave out these bag lunches, I saw one of the firefighters, he pulled out from the bag, it was like this huge candy bar and he was just like looking at it in amazement. "Wow, look at this." You know that's, it was just, sometimes the most simplest things. I asked the Chief of the Fire Department, Charles Parent, I said, "Can I help raise some money for the fire fighters?" because Temple Israel up in West Bloomfield, sometimes



they would ask me, “could you teach a class or could you sing a Friday night services?” They were just so fabulous. But every time they asked me for a specific date I was coming back down to New Orleans, and of course, you know, what were they going to say, “Don't go back to New Orleans”. It was just; every time there was just a conflict. So I said “Maybe”. If I could do something, a concert, and so I spoke to Rabbi Yedwab (sp?) and Cantor Smoulash (sp?) from the Temple and they thought, “Let's not just do a concert, let's do a cantorial concert, we'll bring all the Cantors in from, many of the Cantors who can participate from the Metro Detroit area, they said, “We want to give it a New Orleans flavor, why don't you get some, we'll pay for some jazz musicians or whoever, so we brought in Clarence Johnson on the sax and John Rankin on the guitar and Rachel Van Gourhese (sp?) on the harp who was in Detroit several times playing for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. So they played - they had -- they paid for these three musicians to come in and so on the Tuesday of the week of Thanksgiving we did a concert at Temple Israel, 500 people showed up, and we raised \$18,000 and they said, “Who do we want to raise this money for?” They asked me, and I said “The New Orleans Fire Department” Why? Because over 75 percent of the members of this department lost their homes.

RH: Wow.

JC: So, that was what we -- And so, when they sent down the money in January, I with one of the fire fighters, we picked out a number of fire fighters who had lost their homes and who had families. And so I had the unbelievable honor of going to all these damaged fire houses and come up to a fire fighter; we'd walk into a fire house and let's tell them they need to be a little quiet I think, tell them we're filming in here. Just open the door. OK. (background conversation, inaudible) I had this, these multiple moments where I'd walk into a fire house and we'd say, “OK, where's John Peevy (sp?) the chaplain wants, I'm a chaplain with the New Orleans Fire Department, he wants to see you.” And they'd say, “What did he do wrong?” (laughter) Anyways, I'd sit down with



this fire fighter, I'd tell him about this concert and I'd say, and I want to give you a check for \$1,000 to help you because I told them, I told the fire department. "I don't want to give out \$25.00 checks to 500 guys and women, I want to give out a check that will help these people." The response from some of these individual fire fighters will just make you cry. I can't tell you how many of them said to me, "You know something, I'm doing OK, I've got some insurance money, but you know, Michael, over there, that fire fighter, he could use the money more than me." Can you believe that?

RH: That's amazing.

JC: We had a press conference here at Temple Sinai and, in which I handed out the checks. It's funny, the check from Temple Israel in West Bloomfield came like the same day that we scheduled the press conference so when I handed out the checks to the fire fighters I said, "Please wait till Thursday," because you know, that's kind of not a cool thing to do, when you're handing out checks saying, "Listen, don't cash it right away." (laughter) But, given the Katrina circumstances it made perfect sense. And it was funny, because when I called the bank to make sure it cleared, I think 9/10ths of the fire fighters went to the bank on the day I told them to and deposited that check. So, it was -- Because honestly I felt a little bad, I mean I did what I had to do, I mean I took care of my family, and I'm also the emergency coordinator for the Amateur Radio Emergency Services. My call sign is NO5FD and you know, here all this is going down in New Orleans and I couldn't help. In fact, I just got an email today from my National Ham Radio Organization which wants to create a database to call people to bring them to areas that need communications. Because you see, the people that could provide emergency communications and stuff, we all had to leave, we all had to evacuate. Before I forget, a lot of people got some checks from their insurance company, I forget, what did they call it, they got some money because you know they were out of their house, to help them get through the next few weeks. When I called my insurance company, they said, "We're not doing that." And I asked, "Why?" and they said, "Well



your house wasn't deemed unsuitable to live in." I said, "Well, wait a minute, there's no water, there's no gas, there's no electricity and there's a mandatory evacuation. How –" They said "Not unsuitable, how unliveable -- your house wasn't deemed unlivable." I said "How unlivable does my house have to be" They said,"N , we made the decision not to do that."

RH: My word.

JC: And the other thing is that, everybody, you're interviewing 100 people and I bet you every single person you interview will have not the same story, but similar stories. Every one will have these trials or they know of close relatives and friends who are going through these trials every day in some way or form. So, my little story of these little things that you know, I'm dealing with my insurance, everyone has to deal with them, or in getting your home repaired. My mailman, I just spoke to him yesterday, he's just starting to get his house repaired. So, anyways, am I carrying on too much?

RH: No, you're not. You wear so many hats, you've got your family, explain your role with the Ham operators.

JC: Well, basically what happens is this, here's a cell phone, during an emergency, even a minor emergency, these things won't work, I mean the cell phones get overloaded, and then if there's no power, you know, a lot of people won't be able to charge their cell phones, and besides if the cell phone towers are down you can't use them anyway. By the way, people found out this isn't something good for the records too, do you know how people communicated shortly after the storm with their cell phones, even though the cell phones, text messaging. They found out that worked. But Ham radio operators are able to provide communications that other people can't do because we're ready for emergencies. We can operate and talk to people from all over the country from our car. We can set up a temporary emergency station. Show you how crazy the city was at that time, our National Emergency Ham Radio Station actually flew a Ham operator in from



Houston to the New Orleans airport to help the city out with communication. They got permission from the National Guard to bring this guy in; the guy came, he was at the airport for two days, no one picked him up from the city, he flew back.

RH: Oh my word.

JC: But I went to a Ham Radio Conference recently in Huntsville, Alabama, and there was a Ham who was flown in and helped out with Coast Guard communications. People -- This hobby, but partially some old technology with the use of new technology, is still so valuable in a storm. We can get the message out. The other problem is, in an emergency, agencies have difficulty to each other. Inter-operability is the big magic word. Red Cross needs to talk to the National Guard, National Guard needs to speak to the Coast Guard who's got the helicopters over there. The helicopters need to talk to the city, and you know, and sometimes having the Ham radio capability can help. And I told my wife and I told my Rabbi this, I said, "Unfortunately when the next emergency comes, wherever it is in the country, I want to be able to go and help," because so many of us, we just couldn't, you know we were taking care of our families, and also many of us weren't in a position to help. So, we had to depend on, for communications and like, and rescuers and first responders, they had to come here. I remember when I came back to New Orleans and I was at the staging area for the New Orleans Fire Department, I was there when the New York Fire Department was there. And they set up a 9/11 Memorial, by the way, there, and I saw a ceremony when they said good-bye to the fire fighters. Did you know that the New York fire fighters, they got into these buses and they drove all the way back to New York? And that's how they came here, they piled into these buses and they just drove right down here, they didn't stay in luxurious hotels, they just drove, boom, down here, and they helped out.

RH: So, when were you here? When did you go to the staging area?

JC: If you were wanting to know what date that was, I have absolutely no idea.



RH: The beginning of October?

JC: I don't remember. It was in September. But if you were to ask me the specific dates --

RH: I was curious how far into the recovery --

JC: It was in September, not too far after. I remember Rabbi Cohn and I, we visited congregants who were all around. Rabbi was in Atlanta and he saw congregants there and I drove to Houston and I met with congregants there. In fact, I put the word out and we had 25 people meet at the Food Court at the Galleria in Houston. (laughter) That was really nice to see people. And I had to drive from Houston back to Detroit because my son was having the surgery on his knee. And I made a mistake, when I left Houston I didn't go north and then angle off to Detroit, I went east to Birmingham and then went up north. Why was that a mistake? It's a perfectly legitimate route, the problem was is that I was traveling east down the Gulf Coast I couldn't find a hotel to stay in overnight. Every time I pulled in they were filled because they still had evacuees. So, by 11:00 p.m. at night I hadn't found a place to stay, so I kept on driving and driving, and then I ended up taking, I did a 28-hour drive just stopping in Rest Stops just to wake myself up and I made it, I did it in one shot.

RH: Oh my gosh, that's like teenagers doing that.

JC: In fact I think I wrote it down. These are all my notes as I went back. I kept this all during--- because I had to write down bank notes, and tax notes, and I guess I didn't, I thought I did, put in here. I remember it was a 28-hour drive, like 1,100 miles. I took some No-Doz about midnight, but I have to be honest with you, that some time I was driving through Cin -- oh here it is, it was 1,410.8 miles. That's how much I drove in one shot. But you know, when you ask adults that, you go, "Would you drive 28 hours by yourself?" They go, "No." I go, "OK, let me put it to you this way: if your child was having



surgery, would you do it? Of course you would, you would do what you have to do.” So, believe me, I'm no big hero, big daddy, any normal parent would just drive that distance.

RH: So, you were doing a lot of traveling in the fall, so you were doing it by car, you were coming down I guess by plane into Baton Rouge, maybe?

JC: Yes, left my car at the airport in Baton Rouge. I had an interesting experience in Baton Rouge. Gosh, what's his name? I met at the Baton Rouge airport, he used to be a wrestler, about 6'8", African-American guy, he's been in a lot of movies, he played the president in *The Fifth Element*, if you know the movie. And, I took a picture of him and got his autograph because I knew my son would appreciate it, and then right on the side of the scope, I mean here I met with this former professional wrestler who's in the movies, sitting across from me from this flight was Senator Mary Landrieu and I remember asking her, and she said the same thing, I think so many people think we're all dreaming. It's this nightmare we're all having, even this interview right now, it's a nightmare, kind of, we're all going to wake up and it's all going to be pre-Katrina. That's the kind of thought that we had, less so now, I think the reality is just, you know. I was reading on TV, they were talking about post-traumatic syndrome for the people in New Orleans and the Gulf Area, and this lady was saying, “What do you mean post-traumatic, we're not even at the ‘post’, we're still in the ‘trauma’, we haven't hit the ‘post-trauma’ thing yet.” She's right. So, am I anticipating your questions?

RH: You're doing a great job. When you first came back to New Orleans did you go to your house right away? Do you recall?

JC: Yes, I do recall, the -- I was able to make a cell phone call and it was, it was like time stopped, it was just strange. We have a wooden fence in the front and that came completely down, not from the storm but from the utility company chopping down the tops of the trees and not caring where they landed, it destroyed the fencing. In one of the many times that I came down I stayed with the Glade family. The Glade Family, who live



in the Garden District, let me stay at their house and Dr. Louie Glade is a heart surgeon. He's not a big man, he's got a big heart, he's not a big man. He came into my house and the both of us taped up the white stuff. Do you know what the white stuff is? The white stuff is your refrigerator, your washer, your dryer, that's what the city called your white stuff, and he and I moved our, my fridge, out of the house.

RH: Wow.

JC: I'll never forget him and his family. We stayed at his house. A lot of people stayed at his house on Dufossat Street. Try to have your transcribers Dufossat spelled right, I'm not going to even spell it for you guys, you figure it out. Look it up on Mapquest. And, I think the hardest part was emptying out my son's room, you know, all his memorabilia from 17 years of life. Also, we had in there past letters, you know we had some stuff, our stuff, letters I'd written to my wife, and letters she had written to me, letters from grandparents, and just, there's really nothing you could really keep, it was all ruined. There was a dresser, not an expensive dresser, that was sodden and it was the dresser that I grew up with as a child. And when I was back up in Michigan, I thought it was important that I show Josh what was, what I had thrown out. And, he's not 10 years old, he's a senior in high school, and when he saw the dresser, he said, "Dad, do you know what's in that dresser?" I said "No." He said, "All my Playboys." (laughter) I said, "Well now it's one woman now. It's one girl. It's kind of blended together." But, that was very hard to throw out. And the other thing was, was that, I just remembered, putting all that stuff out on the sidewalk and then seeing people pick through it and taking things. I also remember living in my house and hearing the Red Cross truck, you know with the special bleep horn and a PA announcement from the truck saying, "We have lunch, we have dinner." And the meals weren't awful, but they weren't great, but they were, it was OK. I had Red Cross meals for many weeks.

RH: Was there anything when you went --



END OF PART 1

RH: ---this interview with Katrina's Jewish Voices. Well, I was just about to ask you when you went in, was there something that you saw or something that you wished you had moved, taken with you?

JC: Well, I was concerned, I knew that on the wall about this high up in my house was this photo of me and my grandpa and I wanted to make sure that was OK, and it was. So I was glad about that.

RH: Did your wife, did she have instructions, please send me, or bring me...?

JC: Yes, there was -- She did want me to bring some stuff back. When I came back at Thanksgiving I brought Ben back with me and you know, some dogs will only do their business on grass, like my dog. And, when we went across the street, you know the grounds just were, salt water was on them for a while, he didn't even recognize the ground was grass. People were getting flats driving around because of all the stuff on the roads. It was really; you had to be careful where you drove. And, finding a place to eat wasn't very easy. I did go to -- Ecole Classique did start up again they only played two football games the whole season. And I video-taped kids and teachers saying, "Hi" to him so I could bring it back up to him, for him to see.

RH: What was the decision once the school opened for him to remain in Detroit and not come back, how did you --?

JC: You know every family had to make decisions. We asked Josh; he started the school, but it was like, where were we going to live, we didn't even know at that time. I mean, at that time we didn't even know if we were going to get a FEMA trailer. We had an apartment in Metro Detroit and he was going to a really good school. And, many



families had to make these decisions. Kids who, some kids came back, some came back and went to other schools, and now are back at their home school now. But, a lot of kids ended up staying where they were just to give some kind of stability. And back in 1990, 1991, I was a seminary student at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, that was the summer of the first Gulf War. And my wife and son, we made the decision that they would leave, and they lived with her parents in Leeds, England for seven months; I didn't see my family for seven months. And we said to each other, "We're never going to do that again." I missed my son's 18th birthday, I missed his prom, I missed my wife's birthday, I missed Passover. You know, I missed a lot, but my wife and I have a very, very strong relationship. We knew we could, we'd be OK, and we are. We're very OK. But, you know, we lost a year. A lot of families had to make some very decisions like that. I mean the FEMA trailer that I live in, I lived in, it was just me and my dog, and let me tell you it got claustrophobic after; I mean you sit in there. Sometimes I would just drive to a mall on a Sunday afternoon just to be in an open space.

RH: When did you get the FEMA trailer?

JC: I do remember that. The FEMA trailer was delivered here on December 8, 2005. Now to get a FEMA trailer hooked up, you need a few basic things. You need water, you need to have the plumbing and you need electricity, and then you can move in. You can't move in until you have those things hooked up. And for some reason the FEMA trailer they gave me is a handicapped trailer, which means the entrance is 3 feet wide, and there's no gas that you have to replace, it's all electric, and the bathroom is a decent size. I had a little guilt because I'm figuring there's someone in a wheelchair who's been waiting for a handicapped trailer and I got it. Now it was delivered on December 8; now here in Orleans Parish, if you have electrical work done, I mean significant electrical work done, it has to be inspected by the city. So you can imagine in December and January the thousands of FEMA trailers and homes that needed inspections. So, you know, the hundreds of electrical inspectors from the city, can you imagine how busy they were?



Well, I'm telling you a joke, because yes, the city did need to inspect these places, they did need to inspect the thousands of FEMA trailers and homes that needed electrical inspections so they could move in, the city had a total of two electrical inspectors. I'm not kidding, I am not making this up, I am not guessing, there were two. People were calling their councilman, I was calling the Councilman Jay Batt's office, people were calling 6 On Your Side, the TV station, people were calling and calling, it's insane. Finally, finally, the city said, months later, OK, the electrical inspection can be done by the electrician who's doing the work. So, my trailer was delivered on December 8 and I moved in on February 8, I had to wait two months. That FEMA trailer, which was right out there, sat empty for two months.

RH: Now that is a common story, unfortunately. So, you were at the Glades' when you were here in town?

JC: No, I stayed at my house.

RH: You stayed at your house? Oh, this is when you were at your house, wow. You're camping out in your house.

JC: Yes.

RH: So, you walked your dog, what were the other ways you kept yourself together without being with your family? What other things did you do? What other routines did you develop?

JC: (laughter) Well, I was able to get on the Internet, I got a Verizon broadband card to go into a laptop computer so I was able to do that. We had Direct TV, so I had that put into the FEMA trailer. I played an online game called World of Warcraft. (laughter) I guess it's a violent -- I don't know how; I don't think it's as violent as some of the other games, but there's a lot more strategy involved, but you know, I was able to do that, and read and I'm a toy guy so I had some satellite radio in there so I would listen to that, in



the trailer. That's how I kept myself busy. Of course being so close to temple I could be right here too.

RH: So, what did your day look like? Did you have days that looked like one another or was every day different?

JC: Well, here, let me tell you about a different day.

RH: OK.

JC: I was walking -- My schedule was this, you're asking what my schedule was, Ben would wake up around 7:00, 7:30 and we would, I would walk him down Saint Charles Avenue, where there was, where I could get the newspaper. And, you know it was nice for him, he needed to go out, I wanted to get the paper, and this was the day, this was the last day of Passover in April. And, I'm walking Ben down the street, and when you're walking down Saint Charles Avenue, first, as you're passing the temple, first you pass the office part of the temple and then when you get to the corner of Saint Charles and Palmer, no Calhoun, this is Palmer, when you get to Calhoun, that's the corner of where the sanctuary is. Our sanctuary is a large sanctuary space, it's like 1,200 people can fit in there, it's a glorious space. And, there up on the steps of this space, in front of the sanctuary doors, is a box, about yag big. Now, if there was a box that was put in front of the office doors, that would have been a little suspicious, but usually you can see the UPS label or something like that, that's not unusual. But a box in front of the sanctuary doors is very unusual. I went up to it, I didn't touch it, I looked at it, unmarked. Well, I looked around the Uptown area, I looked at this Uptown area and I thought, "This area is going to be a little bit different in a short amount of time." I called my - the fire department who, they didn't have to call 9-1-1, they just had to walk down a few steps because they're all together now. And, a Sergeant Guidry (sp?) of the New Orleans Police Department showed up. He looked at the package and he said, "This looks suspicious." He calls his Supervisor, his Supervisor comes, he looks at it, not only does



he think it's suspicious, the last day of Passover this year happened to coincide with the anniversary date of Waco and Columbine. Also, the next day he informed us, was Hitler's birthday. Now I got to tell you, I do not keep Hitler's birthday in my brain, I choose not to keep that birthday date (laughter) and I hope to never have it in my head. But, because of these other anniversary dates, the police were sort of on the alert for some possibilities. So, now this Supervisor began shutting down traffic in the Uptown area; yelling at people to walk away. And soon things are cordoned off and a Bomb Squad Supervisor from the New Orleans Police shows up. By the way, if you want to get what a stereotype Bomb Squad Supervisor would look like, khaki pants, black shirt, shades, and looking about as cool as you can be. He looks at the package, asks me a few questions, he feels it's suspicious, now he calls out the Bomb Squad. So, I'm sitting in a police squad car watching all of this, I had called Rabbi Cohn who happened to be in New Jersey doing a filming of The Ethical Edge for MSNBC, he's on there and once in a while he flies and does some tapings. So while I'm sitting in the squad car I get a phone call, it's from Rabbi Cohn. He says, what's up Joel? I go, "Well, Uptown is shut down, the New Orleans Bomb Squad is coming, there's a suspicious package in front of the sanctuary doors." He says, "OK, now tell me what's really happening." I said, "This is really happening." So, the Bomb Squad shows up, and they set up this unit with a large nozzle and it blows a strong puff of air to blow it away from the building. The puff of air, you hear a big pop and it not only blew the package away but it sort of exploded the package, as it were. And, I guess you want to know what was in the box? In the box was the April issue of Southern Jewish Women. A whole box. This wasn't the fault of the magazine people. Somebody in their distribution company dropped it off and was supposed to actually hand it to somebody, instead, that's where they put it.

RH: Oh my God.

JC: It was the lead story in New Orleans. Loyola University had been evacuated, (laughter) so when I saw that package and I told you Uptown area was going to change, I



knew it. Now, about two weeks later I was walking my dog and I noticed that the window to the Rabbi's office was broken and I looked inside the Rabbi's office, someone had taken a parking cone and thrown it through Rabbi Cohn's office window, smashing the window and making quite a mess. Now, every time I call the President of my temple, Sandy Levy, and I say, "Sandy, hi, this is Joel, I was walking my dog---," she immediately panics.

RH: (laughter) They may have been glad when you moved back to Pine Street, to the FEMA trailer.

JC: You think so? I think so. I hope you don't mind I told it, it was a long story but --

RH: That's a pretty interesting April spring afternoon here. So, how, tell me about your community here at Temple Sinai, how many have come back? How are you doing, how are they doing?

JC: You know we're not, the numbers, I think every congregation is losing about 12 percent or so of their congregation. People have moved away, there is a temple family that lived on State Street, I see their house every day when I drive to temple, and they moved to Austin. I'm so sad every time I see that. The temple leadership, you know you might think that when I compliment my temple leadership, I'm trying to make brownie points, I'm really; I want to tell you honestly, the temple leadership has been meeting constantly and trying to make sure that we will be financially solvent, not this year, not next year, but in three or four years. We're moving ahead, we're redoing the bimah, we're going to fix the religious school's rooms up which needed fixing for many, many years. We're creating programs for young families. We're going ahead with full programming, religious school, everything we can do. People need a place to go, people need a spiritual home and I think congregations throughout New Orleans are going to provide that.



RH: So that -- That's interesting to me because I think some people's natural inclination would be to entrench and kind of draw back, not to repair the bimah, repair rooms that hadn't been repaired in years---

JC: Right. What its doing is that you're saying that, we're not sitting here and we're not twiddling our thumbs, we're not sitting here and going, "Oh this is terrible, this is horrible." We're, you know, you have to try to move forward. Throughout the long history, the long history of Jews, when you think about all those moments in thousands of years in which there were these significant events that happened to Jews. When we think about the Portuguese Jews 500 years ago which had to get out of Portugal within two days. Of course, the Holocaust and the Pogroms in Russia and parts of Poland, and you think about the significant events in which people lost their community or something happened in their community and they came back and it wasn't the same, this is one of those events, it truly is. And, the book has not been written. The media has a way of saying, back in September, people might not be able to move back into New Orleans for weeks, maybe even months, maybe years. You know, I miss this is, there are places in New Orleans obviously who, Old Metairie, Lakeside, Chantilly, the Ninth Ward, Lower Ninth Ward, Upper Ninth Ward, is just, it's bad, and it needs a lot of help in rebuilding. As bad as it is, I think when we look back in a few years, this community will be strong and healthy again, it will be. If you don't think that, then you can't stay here because it's going to make you crazy. (laughter) But I really believe, in the bleakest of moments, when things, when 80 percent of the city is flooded and it looks bad, it looks horrible, I think we're going to look back in a few years and we are going to be amazed. And I think people are going to want to come back to New Orleans and I think the Jewish community will grow.

RH: So, how is your Sunday School? How many children do you have here?



JC: Well, you know, usually, I think we were down about 40 kids for half the year. Typical of our congregation, they don't always register when we want them to register. Religious school starts September 10 and that's when we'll know, and the week afterwards, where we're really at. And we'll see, but I think we're only combining one grade, grades one and two. Everything else, you know, there are five, six kids in a grade, that's what we're going to have. And they, kids are going to want to be here, they really will. We're going to have some programs too, to help them, we're going to bring in some people, and with the parents, to help talk about loss and healing, really help them that way. We have a new children's Siddur that we're using this year. People, you know you talk about how people may be want to stay indoors and sort of deal with that, but you know, during tragedy, or when sad events happen, that's when people really reach out and need to be with other people. So, I think we'll see -- You know when we have Rosh Hashanah services here, it will be the first Rosh Hashanah eve service at Temple Sinai since 2003, because in 2005 we were in Baton Rouge. In 2004 we were cancelled because of Hurricane Ivan. Can you imagine that as a shehechyanu moment? I mean, this congregation has been in existence for 130 years, I don't know if there was ever a time in that, over 130 years, where Rosh Hashanah Eve services were cancelled and here we haven't had them in our sanctuary in two years. So that's going to be a special moment.

RH: It sure is. Is there anything - again, anything that you plan to be doing to celebrate Rosh Hashanah this year, that you're thinking about?

JC: Yes, to have a service in the sanctuary with our congregants. (laughter)

RH: Very practical.

JC: That's the moment where we can look out and see the familiar faces. This, this event has been -- you know Katrina took a lot of lives when the waters flooded, but its evil reach still continues to this day. For our seniors who also died prematurely from the



stress --

RH: Is your organist one of those, do you feel?

JC: Yes, she's a Katrina victim.

RH: Really?

JC: Sure, with all the stuff she had to deal with her house. You know, we had seniors here who, you know they were set in their house or apartment, they had a quiet life visiting their family when they can, and never expected to have flood insurance, and all of a sudden they lose everything and they have to start over and their in their 70s or 80s. It's one thing for me, I was born in 1957. I'm going to turn 50 in February, it's one thing for me to deal with this traumatic change and it's hard for everybody, no matter what age, but for our seniors, it takes a toll on them. You know, for those who had to evacuate, all of a sudden you don't have your doctor, you're not in that same rhythm that you need, so, it's going to be so good to see everyone, together again. You say, "What are you going to do special?" That's, just to have a Rosh Hashanah Eve service in our sanctuary, that's special.

RH: It seems like what you just said earlier, and I don't think it got on tape, but I think what your father or your grandfather said about being Jews when they were pushed into a ghetto situation or what, what would happen?

JC: That within that structure of nothing, of being in a terrible environment, nevertheless, there will be a school created, there will be a synagogue, there will be a newspaper, there will probably be an orchestra, and just like here, I mean, we're a, every synagogue is bringing in special speakers and noted Rabbis and historians. You know people are going to be coming here to help, but, I'll give you a for-instance, the Katrina anniversary day, which was only, today's what Thursday? It was two days ago, a year after Katrina. Rabbi Cohn and I participated at a service at the Convention Center, it was an



ecumenical service, started at 12:15, I didn't stay till the end, but the keynote speaker spoke for half hour. That's OK, but before the keynote speaker, there was 25 things that happened before he spoke. Prayers or songs, that service went on for hours. There was a couple hundred people there in the Convention Center, in Hall D, which probably seats thousands of people. And some of those people that were there, had to be there because they were city workers or something like that. We did a service that night, two nights ago in our sanctuary. We did it with four other congregations, non-Jewish congregations, and there was over 800 people there. There was no media that showed up, which was sad, but nevertheless, 800 people, no one had to be there. They were there because they wanted to be there. And I think we're going to be seeing that.

RH: Wow. One of my friends is in the Gospel Choir you had.

JC: The Shades of Praise, they rocked the house. They rocked the house.

RH: So, your job, one of your jobs, is the healing power of music, you should know a little about that. Can you talk, expand on that a little bit?

JC: I think, you know I sang at that service, You'll Never Walk Alone. And the lyrics, (singing) "When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark, at the end of a storm is a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark." And the words, "Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone, you'll never walk alone." You know, I think that's the message we want to send to people when we sing together, you're not walking alone. It's so easy to feel alone because everything is such; the simplest things are just so hard, and to get things done is just so difficult and ponderous. And, the message of "you'll never walk alone" is so important because when you're here, you're flooded not just with the waters, but you're flooded with the visual of everywhere you drive, where you can still see damage, you're flooded with the Katrina news in the newspaper, on television, every where you're turning, it's there, it never leaves you. And, that's why, when people come to temple and they sit and they have an



opportunity to be together in an environment where it sets - to give that prayer environment for people strengthens them so they can go out and deal with all the mishegahs they have to deal with on a daily basis because it never leaves you, it just never leaves you. Think about every news story when you're watching the television, it's all Katrina, everything in the newspaper, on the radio, on the radio, it's there, it never leaves you. So, when you come here and you sit in temple, at least there's something you can do, at least you're turning your mind in to, you know you're praying for hope, you're praying for strength, you're praying for healing, and you're not strengthening just yourself, but by your participation in a minyan of a service, you're strengthening everybody else. You know when you think about Kol Nidre a prayer about all our vows, in which you talk about all those things that you did that gives you an opportunity at Kol Nidre to say, "I'm sorry," and throughout this whole High Holiday experience you're sort of spiritually renewing yourself to start over. The gates are opening for you to start new, you're starting fresh, it's a new year, you have another chance. And yet this very personal moment of where you're trying to renew yourself spiritually, such a personal moment, takes place at a Kol Nidre service in which there are going to be more Jews at that service than any other during the year. This very personal, private moment takes place in a very public forum, why is that? I think it is because, I think it takes place, when I'm chanting that Kol Nidre, it's, we can't do it ourselves. We can't. We need everybody around us. You may not know the person who's sitting three chairs down, but we can feel their presence with us, and I think that's what we can do when we have our services with the Jewish music, with the Jewish liturgy, is we're giving the people a message, "You're not walking alone" we're doing it all together. And we feel that not just within our services, but we feel that strength coming from congregations around the country too, when we feel that support. I hope that was OK.

RH: Tell me about that when you say you feel that strength from around the country.



JC: I was recently at a Jewish Educators' Convention on the campus of Duke University in August and they showed a video of what was happening, what happened to some Jews in New Orleans, and I was; I came out to talk about a Katrina Mitzvah website in which congregations, I didn't create this website, Jackie Silverman did, in which people have an opportunity from around the country to go to this website and see specific needs for congregations. So, how they can help, and I got up and I said, my name is Joel Colman and I'm the Cantor and Education Director at Temple Sinai in New Orleans and people cheered. You know, I'm helping my religious school, Tzedakah Fund is help to fund a ham radio emergency station for the New Orleans Fire Department and besides our religious school doing that, there is a little girl, 12-1/2 year old girl in California, I don't know what this is exactly, she's making pillows, corn pillows, that's what she calls them, and she's selling them as part of her Tzedakah project for her bat mitzvah and she's going to send the money to help fund this emergency ham radio station for the New Orleans Fire Department. She's doing all that from California. Her mom -- I've been on the phone with her mom and she just sent me her photo yesterday. So, when you get those kind of, when you get that kind of help from around the country, that helps too.

RH: So, what is it like when generally you're on the giving end and suddenly you're on the receiving end of all this assistance?

JC: There was one time I felt really uncomfortable, well there were two, when I was at the high school with my son and they wanted me to fill out the papers so my son could get on the free lunch program. The other one was some ladies from a congregation up in Detroit said that there is this guy who runs a laundry company and he has some clothes for you. And, so, I drove with these two ladies to this laundry facility where they actually launder stuff, and he points me to this rack of clothes that no one had picked up. And I could see why no one had picked up these laundered, he had me looking at these clothes that were just awful. He made me feel bad that I didn't pick anything and I picked something just so he wouldn't yell. That was hard. So, yes, you get a few of those



uncomfortable moments. When people help out, my first thought is how can I help you back? (laughter) But it did teach me about the sensitivity when you do help people, when people are in need and you want to help them out. You have to do it in a very gracious way, you have to do it in a way that doesn't embarrass somebody, do it in a way that is, what's the word I'm looking for (pause) I don't know, you do it in a way where the person you're giving to, you don't make them feel like you have nothing and I have everything. I don't know.

RH: Patronizing is the word --

JC: You know what it is, you have to do it with dignity. Even for the person who doesn't have anything. You know sometimes, because Temple Sinai here is on Saint Charles Avenue, we get people who knock on the doors looking for money. They want a handout; I mean it happens a lot. You know you can't, and they're, and some people come back time and time and time again. And, you know, how do you differentiate the people who really need help or this is all they do, some people just go down Saint Charles Avenue and knock on all the church doors and the temple doors looking for money. The Rabbi and I received a number of gift cards from Wal-Mart and Target and I remember a family pulled up in a schleppy van and a lady came to the door, she had a family, not Jewish, obviously, and asked if I had any money. I didn't really have much cash, but I had these cards from Wal-Mart and Target and I gave her a \$25 card to Target and a \$10 card to Wal-Mart, and the look on her face was, "Oh my God, I could do something with that." So, being on the receiving end was certainly different, but at least I know I was, my family was being taken care of. I was able to give back to, you know I mentioned the Lieder family and Walled Lake, Hal and Alyssa Lieder who let my whole family stay with them at their tiny home for a couple of weeks with, you know, they had a small home and they brought in me, my wife, my son who's 6'3" and 230, he's no tiny kid, and 2 black labs weighing 80 pounds. And, you know, they don't have a lot, it's a retired couple. I think Alyssa still works part-time just to bring in a few dollars. And Sherrie, their



daughter, who's married with two kids, her husband works, I think he works hourly, he works his butt off and she works at the Day School at Temple Israel. These aren't doctors and lawyers bringing in \$200,000 a year. So, we all went to my son's graduation at Walled Lake Northern and we're sitting at a restaurant afterwards and Sherrie, the mom, says to me, we were going to send my daughter who's 12 years old to this one-week camp but it didn't work out. And I thought to myself, "Wait a minute, Jacob's Camp, the Jewish Reform Camp, they belong to a Reform Congregation up there, when I worked there, if I worked there, when a Rabbi or Cantor educator works at Jacob's Camp and you work there for a week, you could designate a week's worth of tuition to go toward a kid, OK?" So, I said to Sherrie, "Why don't we send your daughter to Jacob's Camp in Utica, Mississippi, why don't we send your 12 year old who's never flown by herself to a camp in Mississippi, and you live in Detroit and you go to this camp and you don't know anyone?" And mom says, "She knew me, I would do it." And the daughter said, "I'll do it." So, what we did was that she went to her temple, and Temple Israel, do you know how much it costs to send a kid to a residential camp for four weeks?

RH: No I don't, how much?

JC: It's \$2,800. It's almost \$3,000. So, Temple Israel put \$1,000 in, I worked there for two weeks, Cantor Warren, the Cantor at Tuoro Synagogue, he worked there for a week at Jacob's Camp, he gave his week time to this girl, and through all these efforts, we were able to send this Jewish girl from a family that helped me out, and she had a fabulous experience at Jacob's Camp.

RH: She was there four weeks?

JC: Yes. She made new friends with kids from Memphis, from Jackson, I mean she's a girl from Commerce Township, Michigan. We sent a Jewish girl to a Jewish camp and studies have shown the experience of sending a kid to a Jewish camp is as powerful as sending them to a program in Israel, where their sense of Jewish identity is implanted



and set and strengthened, that's how powerful a Jewish camp experience is. So, I guess to answer your question, is that when people give to me, I think about how I can give back to them if I can. I don't know, that's the way I thought about it. The only problem is now she wants to go back next year.

RH: Oh dear (laughter). That's a beautiful story of how it comes around and goes around, and keeps coming around and going around.

JC: That's right.

RH: What do you think is special about the Jewish community here in New Orleans and about Temple Sinai's place in that community because you've been here a long time?

JC: I haven't been here that long, I mean, when you think about the life of a congregation and I've only been here seven years, the Jewish community, you know Rabbi Cohn is very involved with some of the Human Relations Commission in the City of New Orleans. Rabbi Cohn is working with the Chief of the New Orleans Police Department in facilitating people who may have some issues with the Police Department. Me and my volunteer work as a Chaplain, the other Rabbis in the community teach, like at Loyola, or teach at Tulane, I think our congregations want us to be involved in the life of our city. And I think our congregants are the same way. We just don't look at how we can help the Jewish community, our picture is larger than that, our picture is really the City of New Orleans itself. So, that's how I view my temple, my Jewish community here is really being not just here for to service the Jewish community but to here and be part of the healing of the entire City of New Orleans, we're all in it together, it's a group effort. So, we try to strengthen ourselves through our Jewish prayers that we understand, but at the same time, we are so aware that we just don't, you know, we're not just here to help Beth Israel and their community come back, we're not just here for Temple Sinai. Temple Sinai is not here for Temple Sinai, Temple Sinai is here for what we can help. You know, that's why interfaith relations is so crucial and



that's why on Tuesday night we had so many hundreds of people here from all different faiths and beliefs. So, and I like that about our community. And we can make inroads, too, you know when you think about a temple in New Jersey, how involved is a temple in New Jersey going to be with the Mayor, the Governor? I mean I sat, when I was at the Convention Service there was a gentleman sitting right here, I had no idea who he was, but right there was Lt. General Honory (sp?) he was one of the major heroes, I got his autograph, by the way. (laughter) And then next to him was Mayor Nagin, and next to him was Governor Blanco, and next to me was Rabbi Cohn. I mean Rabbi Cohn could pick up the phone and call the Mayor and he will know who he is, and that's the way I think our Jewish community wants it.

RH: So, what do you think, is there anything that you think in particular to bring back the Jewish community that you would like to see in the rebuilding?

JC: To bring back the Jewish community? Well I think --

RH: Well, you know, that's a question, you have to see that it's gone, it's smaller now --

JC: It's smaller, but the only way the Jewish community is going to be stronger is if the city is stronger. If Tulane is bigger, if Loyola is bigger, if they have more students they need more teachers. If businesses come here and they need more people and people can move here, then I probably didn't say that well. What I'm saying is that we're not going to make new Jews necessarily within New Orleans. The communities that have growing Jewish communities are the ones in which people are moving into those areas, into those metropolitan communities. People are moving to Atlanta, people are moving to Las Vegas, the Jewish communities in Las Vegas I'm sure are just growing by leaps and bounds. Why? Are they doing such special programs that people are moving there? People are getting on the phone, "Oh listen, did you hear about the services at this temple in Las Vegas, let's move there?" (laughter) No. No. So, as New Orleans goes, so does Temple Sinai, so the way the Jewish community is going to grow is if New



Orleans is going to grow. If our infrastructure is such that people are going to want to come back here, and the only way that's going to be is that New Orleans needs a, needs a strong person or group that can make the difficult decisions, and so there's a clear vision that's happening, and so people can see that the monies that will hopefully start flowing in here, is building and rebuilding and maybe we can get a couple of quiet hurricane seasons and we can make the levees stronger, and that's how our temples are going to grow. Strengthen the levees, it will strengthen Temple Sinai.

RH: So that's got to create a little frustration with all the inertia with all of the planning, does that--?

JC: Sure, it's all part of the stress, it's all part of the stress. That's all part of the dealing with the day-by-day.

RH: Is there a kind of a tipping point for you where you say, "I'm leaving"?

JC: You know, I hate to quote Rabbi Cohn, (laughter) because I've heard this not just from Rabbi Cohn, but if we get hit with another Katrina-like hurricane, that could be it, we might as well just turn the lights off. I think that, I don't know if that will happen. What's scary is is that you know, the full brunt of the hurricane didn't hit us, it hit us east, not by a lot of miles, but it certainly did not hit us. What happens if we get that weather system that, you know that when it hits us on this side of the storm, you know, we're all experts now, this side, not this side of the storm, well, you're looking at it from that side, but you know what I mean, when it's swirling this way, what if that eye hits right, whack, right into New Orleans? What if it hits into that whack, it's starting to hit us into the Metairie and New Orleans proper area, as opposed to, into the Mississippi strip down there, what if it's here? Well, maybe that's the time in which we're just going to have to say, "It ain't going to happen." If you're asking me, do I think about that? No, I do not, I do not. Because otherwise you're just going to sit there and watch Discovery TV all day or something like that.



RH: Here at temple are your colleagues and work force, is it pretty much the same? Have most people come back?

JC: Yes. Well, some of our, the engineers and the custodians, we lost some of those and we have some new people. But the office staff, we have a new administrator, our administrator retired, and she's a returnee from New Orleans, so yes, that's essentially, I mean, we have a new administrator, from last year we have a new custodial staff, we have a new administrator, we have a new organist. So, I guess if you look at it in a global scope like that, yes, things have changed. But, if you start looking at things in the lens of that way then you're just overwhelmed with all the changes.

RH: So, do you get angry when you hear of other people leaving? Has it changed any of your relationships or friendships?

JC: I learned, remember I talked to you about the first Gulf War? And, there I was a Cantorial student, with rabbinical students and education students at Hebrew Union College and the American Embassy said in January of 1991, you should leave Israel, a lot did, 12 stayed. I stayed. And there was concerns that, you know, how were you going to feel about those people that left? Here you're a rabbinical student, you're going to be a Rabbi, you're going to be a Cantor and the relationship you have with Israel, and here Israel is going through a moment in which they need your presence, you may not be doing anything specifically but just by being here and shopping and buying, going to the supermarket and being seen, being heard, makes a big difference. From that experience I learned that I'm not going to judge people for leaving, I really can't. I'm sad when they leave, but I'm not angry with them, I really am not, because people have to do what they need to do for themselves and I'm not going to judge them as being bad. And, what I'm going to do is I'm going to look and thank God for the people that decide to stay. You know, I've got enough tumult inside me dealing with the everyday stuff. The people who want to leave, my wife and I after we went to the Jewish Educators' Convention, we were



at Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina and there was a guy there with two labs and I was talking to him, and he's from Metairie. He said his wife didn't want to live there anymore, he was sad that he left. So, no, I'm not going to be angry with the people that left.

RH: How do you think the Jewish community has conducted itself through this whole crisis?

JC: The Jewish community has been, I think, has worked so hard in trying to support each other, whether you're Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, wherever New Orleans Jews have congregated in a significant number, there were people there to help you out. And, you know this is not a large Jewish community anyway, I mean, Detroit is a Jewish community of 90,000, 100,000 people. Every week the Jewish News comes over, it's this thick. This is a small Jewish community and its resources are not infinite, and yet they kept on, you knew they were there. The Jewish Federation was in Houston and you knew they were out there. I don't know about other individuals how they may feel, but I feel pretty proud of the Jewish community of New Orleans.

RH: Has being Jewish, you think, helped you get through this past year?

JC: I think, it's not necessarily being a more universalistic kind of view, by having faith, having a specific faith, gives you a place to sort of release those prayers and hopes in a way that can help you. A lot of times when I'm going through stuff just by me singing the Jewish liturgy helps me. It gives you a place to go and I think it's the same thing whether you're Protestant, Baptist, or Catholic or Muslim, is that you have a place to go in which you can share your prayers. Not that you can't, private prayer is important no matter what faith you're at, but it's, when you, my Judaism was able to give me an avenue to keep me together spiritually so, that's how my Judaism helped me. And, it's, and you have to balance it because, shaliach tzebure, a Cantor in Hebrew translates to "a messenger of the prayer". A Cantor's job is to sing with and is to sing to God for the



congregation, that's my role. So, I don't know who grades you on that, or how you're evaluated, but that's, that's the spiritual role that I have and I take it very seriously.

RH: It's a certain kind of responsibility with that it seems.

JC: That's right, that's right.

RH: Especially in the time of crisis, when you're trying to voice the community's needs to God.

JC: That's right, and being part of it means that you can't help but share your voice in a way that links itself to what's going on. I don't know if I can explain it any further, but that's as detailed as I can feel it.

RH: Well, I'm getting this sense that part of that linkage is what happened on Tuesday night, and how it came off, and how interfaith it was for one thing, but how also it was here in your synagogue with 800 people.

JC: It's a powerful moment, an interfaith moment too, but you see, that's the thing about Temple Sinai and the role in our community is that we provide those moments for people to come and for many of them, that was just what they need at that time, and hopefully during high holidays and during Shabbat services, that's when people could have it too. Or, if you go to Waldenberg, where there's a lot of Jewish seniors there. You don't have to do too much when you visit a senior center, you can just bring kids over, the seniors just want to look at the youth people, they just want to look at the kids, they just want to look at you.

RH: So have you been over to Waldenberg?

JC: Yes, I did a concert there in July, an afternoon thing, yes. I did a lot of musical theatre, it was fun. You have to, you can't have a big ego when you sing in front of a



group of senior citizens. You know you could be singing your heart out and they'll be someone sitting there, going,

(imitates sleeping and snoring) I mean, come on, some of these people are 80, 90 years old, and they have, they're struggling with a lot, and they may be sleepy at that particular moment, so. Or, someone may scream, "Can I go now?"

RH: They keep you humble.

JC: That's exactly it - they keep you humble.

RH: Do you have any other concerts planned this year, or have you been thinking about anything or...?

JC: Still working on it. I brought in a Cantor in April, from San Francisco, Rose Burach, fabulous Cantor, and that was nice too. You know we brought in last year in January, Rick [Reck?] who's a Jewish folk pop singer; he did a thing here and I had him do the first day of religious school. I guess the thing is, you know, when people say, "Are you going to have special healing?" We should bring in speakers and things like that, and we're doing that, you know, but I like to keep the message in this is that every weekend you have a moment to sort of have that spiritual time where you could kind of reflect and relax a little bit, every Friday, every Saturday morning, we're here.

END OF PART 2

JC: Actually Cantor Joel Colman, thank you for giving me a pay raise.

RH: Cantor Joel Colman, I'm sorry. Cantor Joel Colman for Katrina's Jewish Voices. And I was asking you outside, and so I wanted to have it, what exactly does a Chaplain for the Fire Department do, and what is your role?



JC: The essential role is that it's a volunteer position, but you're on call 24/7. You will get called for two things in general, if there is, God-forbid, a death at a fire or if there is a 4-alarm fire. The reason we get called if there is a 4-alarm fire is because the fire is of such a nature where it's large that there could possibly be a death. So, if I get called to a fire, and there is a death, I will go to where the body is and I will say a prayer over the body and then if there is a family there related to the person who passed, I'll be with them. Usually they're in shock, and you stay there until some other family members take them home, to another location. You also may go back to the fire station to help the fire fighters talk about what they just experienced, especially if it was a child who had died in the fire. The other thing is that you may represent the city at certain times. In fact I have a good trivia question for you. Pardon me, I'm being recorded, I think I'll do it this way. Here's a good trivia question. You know what happened at the Convention Center here in New Orleans, what a horror that turned into, so the trivia question is, what was the last convention at the Convention Center before Katrina? And the answer will sadden you. The last convention at the Convention Center which concluded on Saturday, Katrina hit on Monday, was the largest convention in the United States for paramedics and EMTs. In other words, the Convention Center was filled with ambulances, fire trucks, the newest and latest in health aid materials for emergencies.

RH: Oh my God.

JC: And the reason I know that is because I sang the National Anthem at the opening ceremony on that Wednesday, and on Friday I was at the Convention Center in the morning walking through the Expo, which is why I know what was in the Convention Center. So, the media never asked that question, interestingly enough. But, when you think about what was in the Convention Center on that Saturday, and then what was there less than a week later, everything that was in that Convention Center on that Saturday probably could have been some assistance in some way or form.



RH: Now that you're saying this I remember hearing a report on NPR and there was an emergency medical guy from Houston who got stuck.

JC: That's why.

RH: That's why. He and his wife, they were both emergency medical people.

JC: That's right, now you know why, now you know the rest of the story.

RH: So, how did you get interested in doing this? Why did you decide you wanted to do this?

JC: Well, it's, it's a wonderful way of being involved in your community that doesn't - it's volunteer, and what's nice about it is it doesn't overwhelm you at times, but when you are doing it, you're really helping out. So, I'm glad I'm doing it, I learn an awful lot, an awful lot when I go, especially with the fire fighters.

RH: How's their year been?

JC: It's been the worst year in their lives, the most horrible year. You have fire fighters who are suffering such deep trauma from everything. You know I'm living in my house, rooms are a mess, but things have been painted, I'm living in my bedroom, I'm with my wife, you know, I'm watching TV at night, I'm comfortable. Some of these fire fighters still are living in trailers or wherever they're living, and they're getting paid bupkis, very low pay, and yet they are asked to perform the highest standard of heroism and bravery at any time of the day when they're on duty. So, when I say I'm really proud to serve as Chaplain of the Fire Department, I really mean it, it's really great. And that's, that's the way the Jewish community is in New Orleans. That's why I said, Jews who are, the leadership, the Jewish leadership in this community, I can bet every single one of them are not just leaders in a particular Jewish synagogue, but are leaders in all sorts of other organizations throughout the city.



RH: So, a few more questions, kind of wrap-up, kind of reflection questions. One is, what is your vision for the future? I guess that would be for the Jewish community and also the community here in New Orleans. And maybe even for your family.

JC: My son wants to be a New Orleans fire fighter, where he got that idea, is beyond me.

RH: How does that make you feel?

JC: It makes me feel very good, it's just a matter of him getting in. To be a New Orleans fire fighter means you have to take a Civil Service exam given by the City of New Orleans. When the City of New Orleans will be giving these Civil Service exams is, your guess is as good as mine. My vision is one of hope, my vision is one that this community will be a beacon for people to say, the worst can hit us and yet we're going to come out stronger than ever. I really believe that's how it's going to happen, I think it's going to surprise people, and yet at the same time, it doesn't surprise me because we have seen how communities have been just devastated, not just in the United States. Think about parts of Europe from World War II, think about Japan and the atomic bomb, think about communities that have suffered floods and other natural disasters and see how they have come back. It's going to be the same with New Orleans. The leadership leads us in the right way and the government is supporting us, and the citizens of this community are given the tools to repair, yes, I wouldn't be surprised if you come back to me in five years, and you say to me, so tell me, what's different, and I'm going to say, let me show you around. Because five years ago I would never show you here, but now I can. I have a photo of the Lower Ninth Ward, have you all been to the Lower Ninth Ward yet?

RH: I have.

JC: You have.

RH: I put in a health clinic down there in the 90's so I have some friends down there.



JC: There's a, you know, the thing about Katrina which really shocks anyone who sees it, is that the damage is not just like a particular block area, the damage is not over here, or just over there, where the damage hit it's block after block after block after block after community, I mean it's just huge, it's huge, you just can't get your head around it, and yet I see this one photo over and over, I took the photo, I just saw it again in the newspaper today, actually on the Internet, and it's one, it's a house off it's foundation and the house is like this, it's like a bell curve, and then underneath the house is a car upside down. It is the most dramatic photo of destruction and I hope that five years from now I'll be able to go back to that area and show you, "This is what it is now, and look." I remember I took somebody from the Lower Ninth Ward to Lakeview, which also got hit. And Lakeview, you know the houses in Lakeview, which are more of a brick and mortar construction, as opposed to Lower Ninth where the houses there were much poorer and much more susceptible to that kind of water damage, whereas the Lakeview, don't get me wrong, some houses there are just horrible, but the rebuilding is obviously going on faster there. And I remember when I went to the Lower Ninth, I was there around 6:00 p.m., which is an interesting time to go, because that's when a lot of the working, work, is kind of stopped, and it's quiet. And then I was at Lakeview at the same time. At Lakeview you could hear birds chirping, at the Lower Ninth you heard nothing. I hope that in five years we're going to hear loud music, we're going to hear families outside playing, that's one thing about New Orleans, you can play outside all year round, maybe not in August, it's too hot. And by the way, I have season's tickets to the Saints. I could never afford to get season's tickets. Have you heard about what they're doing?

RH: No.

JC: The New Orleans Saints, someone made a very interesting suggestion, the Superdome, the highest seats, you know people will sometimes call them the nose-bleed sections, but I have to tell you I've sat up there in like Section 629, way up there, and you don't feel like you're in another county when you're watching the game, you can really



see the whole game. Well, they are selling season's tickets up in these upper reaches, \$14.00 a game. So, for less than \$230 I was able to get two seasons tickets to the Saints game. And --

RH: That's a real act of hope.

JC: Yes. The first Monday night, the first home game is a Monday Night Football game, like September 25, against the Atlanta Falcons. I understand President Bush is going to be there. I hope he doesn't go because that means security will just be insane, but the stadium is going to be packed. I'm going to be there with my son, and it's going to be a moment. It really will. I just got the season's tickets in the mail yesterday and that first Monday night ticket, it's like, it has more of a gold-leaf kind of cover to it, it will be a special night.

RH: What a great night for you and your son.

JC: Yes, it will be neat. That will be special.

RH: So, what do you feel like have been the biggest changes in your life since this hurricane?

JC: Being away from my family - personally, being away from my family is very, very hard. And then changes, are you talking changes for me personally or changes that I've observed?

RH: Well, since you brought both of them up, personally and just things that you've observed.

JC: Well, for me personally, the separation from my family, that's the hardest one of them all. For the community, I think the black/white issue is as out there as it's ever been; it's just so sad. There's a book that is in my FEMA trailer that I'm almost, I got the



last few pages to read, it's called *Rising Tide*, and this book was actually required reading for Tulane freshmen a few years ago. And it talks about the Mississippi flood in the 1920s and part of that had to do with this terrible flooding and the way black people were treated. And black people were prevented from leaving the South when the floods came because the white owners didn't want to lose the workers and so they made these black people suffer in horrible conditions. And, here it is in 2006, and here we have another flood, and the African-Americans suffered so deeply. I mean non-African-Americans suffered so, but the majority that took place at the Convention Center, at the Superdome, I mean, it's a tragedy, it's an embarrassment. That's -- I'd like to see that change, you asked me to see what; I'm telling you what hasn't changed. We really need to do better than that. On the other hand I saw Spike Lee's movie, *When the Levees Broke*, and yet if you're from Old Metairie or Lakeside/Lakeview area, you're not going to find yourself represented in that movie. And that's another thing too that we should note, is that there's a lot of people who, middle-class, upper middle-class, who lived in these homes worth several hundred thousands of dollars and they lost their home and they get \$250,000 for their flood insurance and that's it. Where, how can these people recuperate? We've had people who have suffered on all spectrums - black, white, poor, some with some money, some with a little bit more money, so what has changed? I think what has changed is that people are going to be keeping their eye out on the city, on the federal level, and they're going to keep a good eye out on whether money is coming to this community and when it comes to this community, it's going to be used. I think that's what's going to be noted. And so I think the changes are is that people aren't going to let this slide any more. When my son was up in Walled Lake, Michigan and you saw those public schools, you go, "So this is where public money is supposed to go. This is where tax money is supposed to go." And you look at the schools here, I think that's, I think what has changed is that people aren't going to settle for what has been going on in old New Orleans. And I think, I hope we can keep what's best of New Orleans, which is the unique culture and the fusion of music and food, but I don't think we're going to put up



with the local government shenanigans, I think we're going to expect action. And I think citizens, citizens who ordinarily wouldn't be involved are going to be involved, so I think that's the changes I'm going to see.

RH: That's good then, something positive, that's rising. So, do you think there's any healing that needs to be done around the race?

JC: Are you kidding? Are you kidding? Healing? Not just with race, did you know that 80 percent of the psychiatrists have left New Orleans?

RH: Actually I do, because I know about three who are here.

JC: Someone told me a figure, there are 22 in the entire city. You could probably find that on Fifth Avenue, in half-block in New York.

RH: True.

JC: Yes, that's a lot of healing, yes, black/white relationships, absolutely. Look at the mayoral election.

RH: Well, how do you take that?

JC: Well, the mayoral election here we, you know, by the way I didn't talk about this, but you remember Mayor Ray Nagin's speech how New Orleans will be a chocolate city because that's the way God wanted it. Well, guess who gave the blessing for the city at that Martin Luther King event in front of City Hall that day?

RH: Who?

JC: Me. (laughter) I was there. And thank God I got off the dais and stood in the back otherwise you would have seen this punim on TV all over. By the way, I don't think Mayor Nagin read the program title for that day, it was to commemorate, it was Martin



Luther King Day, so Nagin is talking about how the city will always be a chocolate city because that's the way the city wanted it. The theme on the program, the written program, was Unity Through Diversity; I think he missed that. By the way, I kept a program and when we had a mayoral forum here at Temple Sinai a few months later, I had him sign it.

RH: You did?

JC: Yes. Talk about an item that will probably sell a few dollars on eBay, but I'm not going to sell it on eBay, but I know that one day there's going to be some historian who won't know who I am but will thank me for having that.

RH: That would be a very valuable document.

JC: But I think the problem is that the African-American population will not vote. It seems like here they will not vote someone who's African-American out of office even if they're incompetent and we need to somehow move beyond that because I know that I'll vote black or white, either way, I just want to vote for the best woman or the best man to be in office. I didn't vote for Mayor Nagin, I voted for Mitch Landrieu, I hope he comes through for us.

RH: Do you -- It sounds to me like you feel like he could be a pretty divisive person with some of his rhetoric or...?

JC: His rhetoric is, you see he was elected in and he had a strong white vote, and I think the African-American population felt he was not really for them and I think he's trying to garner their support. And, I think he does it in a way, you know sometimes you can say maybe those things when you're in a specific demographic audience, but my goodness when you say something like that, I mean listen at that Martin Luther King speech, there was only about 100 people at that ceremony in front of City Hall, but every, every news channel, every anchor person from New Orleans was there. So, you know, Golda Meir



once said that the Palestinians never failed to miss an opportunity, and I'm hoping that New Orleans and our political leadership aren't the same way, that you know, we're not going to fail to miss an opportunity. Because other communities around the United States which have suffered some devastation have an opportunity to repair things that they never could ever repair before because of its history and because it's always been there, it's always been like this, and now when you have things that have been washed away or blown away and you can re-do things now, New Orleans is not the kind of community which will immediately take advantage of that. So, maybe one day when people are watching this video, and it's 10 years, 20 years from now, I'm hoping that New Orleans will be back, there will be changes, it just won't be as fast as maybe the rest of the community, it will take us a little bit longer, but we'll get there.

RH: So, tell me, for you, are there any priorities that are different for you than you used to have? Is there a way also, maybe you balance your life a little differently, between your work and different tasks?

JC: You know, I'm not there yet, you know, we're still in the storm. I haven't had a chance to really evaluate at that point, how things are different, my family is not together yet. And yes, I suppose, of course, I could come up with some things, but honestly, just, we're not there to sit back yet, we're not, remember, we're not "post" yet. (laughter) It's a year but we're still involved with it. So maybe in half-year I'll be able to look and say, "You know, this is not as important as this." But I'm not there yet.

RH: You're making me think of something else because another question I've been asking people is about their sense of home and what is home, and I certainly see you saying it's the three of you together, for sure.

JC: Yes, absolutely. It's very strange when you drive by your home when you're living in a FEMA trailer and you see people working in it, and you see or, it's just dead in there, and you go, "That's my house." By the way, my wife picked out a color, it's like,



butterscotch, the house is so bright now, USAir is now using it as a marking point when they're flying, "Oh there's the house, make a left." (laughter) It's a happy house, and that's what we need, it's a happy color, it's very bright, very cheery, and that's what we're looking for. See, we're not there at that time where we can just sit back and say, "Hey, we can't kick back and put our feet up yet, we're not there." It's still too early.

RH: So why don't you tell me, just what else would you like to say? What else would you like to tell history, because that's one of the people we'll be talking to today, to have them understand where you are at this moment, and perhaps --

JC: This is not to compare - I want to be clear on this, I'm not comparing the horror of the Holocaust to Katrina. But the connection that I want to make is this, that I found, is that whenever you speak to a Holocaust survivor, any Holocaust survivor, they all have a remarkable story. I mean they, any Holocaust survivor has a story worth a movie, I really, it's incredible. You talk to any of them and you hear their story and you think, "My God, that could be a movie, because it's got so much, it's so unbelievable, you couldn't even make that up. Your story of survival is amazing." And so the connection that I'm making with that observation is that every hurricane survivor has a story, everyone has a story, whether you lost your house or not, we were all deeply affected and that's the kind of connection that I'm making, is that I'm just amazed that you ask anybody who was here, I'll say, now instead of saying "Gulf Region", I'll say, "In New Orleans, everyone has a story." Whether it may not be specifically about them, it could be their brother or their mother, but they all have a remarkable and incredible story of some deep sadness or of some amazing coincidences or of incredible help from strangers. And that's what I, that's something I like, that I've noted, that every person that I talk to when I ask, "What happened to you?", wow, they've got a story to tell. So, in a way, I feel very humbled that you're interviewing 100 people and the thing is is that while some of the stories may sound the same, I think you're going to find that when you hear these 100 people, all of them, every one of them have an amazing story. There's something in there that you



go, "Wow, isn't that incredible."

RH: Do you think that says something about the way people are living life so intensely, but also about the human condition? Have you thought of that, that what you have been through and what it may offer even?

JC: You know I think it's, I wish we could slow down, I wish we could slow down, here in America we don't slow down. In Europe, you know, holiday, vacation time is like sacred, it's like Torah and here in this country we don't have that. People, four weeks off, that's normal in England, I talk about England because my wife is English and I think that's, I think that has deepened in me in that we need to spend more time with the people we need to be with because I guess I'm reflecting, too, on some of the people we lost through Katrina and how precious that time is with the people we love. So, we need to spend it, and I'm as guilty of overworking as anyone. I guess you can't help it when you're a Cantor or a Rabbi of a synagogue. So when my son comes back, you know those times together, I mean my wife and I just this August, after the Jewish Educators' Convention, we spent some time together. That's the first time, I mean we actually spent like 3, 4 days just driving around, we've never done that before, and we've been married; in fact that's the other thing we missed, we missed our 20th wedding anniversary. So, we're already talking about what we're going to do next summer, and how we're going to make sure we have some time together.

RH: That's nice.

JC: Good enough?

RH: Good enough. I thank you very much.

JC: Thank you for your efforts in making this recording. It will be important.



RH: I'm very proud to be a part of it because I'm thinking it will be very important, and not even the questions I asked, it's the things you have to say.

JC: Right, right, and the others, and everyone else. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]