



# Jackie Gothard Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Jackie Gothard at -- You're at Haring?

Jackie Gothard: 5213 Haring Court in Metairie.

RH: 5213 Haring Court -- Metairie, Louisiana. Today is -- Wednesday, September 20, 2006. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring-Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Jackie, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be videorecorded?

JG: I agree. Yes. I'm honored.

RH: Thank you for joining us in this project. I would really like to get -- I was fascinated by your background, and I'd like to get a little bit of information about how long your family's been here, if you wouldn't mind telling me what year you were born, and what your neighborhood was like that you grew up in.

JG: Okay. Actually, I am third generation of my family in New Orleans. Both sets of my grandparents, the paternal and maternal grandparents, were European-born, some of them from Russia, some from Poland. They came over to America at the turn of the century. I think right after 1900, 1901, '03, around that time, and they settled in the New Orleans neighborhoods of Dryades Street and Rampart Street. It was a downtown area, but that's where all the Jewish immigrants were. Both sets of grandparents, in fact, were in some kind of food industry. My maternal grandparents, the Kansas family, Morris and Frieda Kansas -- he was a kosher baker, and they operated a bakery and a kosher delicatessen on Dryades Street, right off of Melpomene Street. They had that for years and years, and that hub of Dryades Street was the center of the Jewish community in



those days, in the early 1900's. And many people who have memories of Dryades Street, when you ask them what are the highlights that they remember, they recall the community gathering at Kansas Kosher Delicatessen. The Kansas family had nine children. There were five girls and four boys. [One son, Jake, died in his early 20's.] These eight Kansas children all grew up in that area. The other side of the family, my father's parents, were in the chicken business, Kosher chickens, and they had a business right on Melpomene Street in a residential neighborhood. What looked like a garage actually had chicken coops in it. The kosher slaughterer would come once a week and slaughter the chickens right there, and they would clean them and deliver them to the families in the neighborhood. So I came from a background of food, people serving food. My father's side of the family was the opposite of my mother's. They were five boys and three girls, so there were also eight siblings on that side, opposite sexes. They all married, they all had children. We were a slew of cousins growing up in a really close family, all in that neighborhood. The earliest memory that I have was actually on Dryades Street. I remember being on that street where the delicatessen was, and a few doors down there was a barber shop. The barbershop had the outdoor barber sign, you know, the spiral red and white spiral sign. And I can remember sitting on a bench near that sign, and there was a man with a puppy dog. I wanted to pet the dog, and he jumped up, snapped at me, and put a small cut on my cheek. And I guess that made it a vivid memory. But I can remember Dryades Street. I can remember as a child, going into those chicken coops. My uncle, Max pressner, took the business over from his father, when his father aged. With my sister and cousins, I remember the fun of chasing the chickens around in the chicken coop. Behaving the way kids do, you know, for fun. Yes, I do have memories of Dryades Street. The first home that I can remember was a little further uptown on Baronne Street, about two blocks above Louisiana Avenue, in the neighborhood of Louisiana and St. Charles. My parents opened up a kosher delicatessen, and we lived above the store, my sister and I. There were only two of us. So, I came from a family of folk in food businesses, and then I grew up in a delicatessen.



My parents had that business from the early 1940's, in the beginning of the war years, and they did not get out of the deli business until I was in college. [My grammar school was across the street – Kruttschnitt School.] Then I went to McMMain High School, catching the streetcar on St. Charles Avenue and then the Nashville Ave. bus -- because that's where all the Jewish kids went -- to McMMain High School for Girls. After that, I attended Newcomb College -- my dates used to pick me up in my house above the deli.

RH: And now, was this Pressner's?

JG: Yes -- Pressner's Kosher Delicatessen. There are still people today who call me Jackie Pressner. In fact, when Sol and I got married, he said, you know, I don't mind that they're still calling you Jackie Pressner, but I really prefer not to be called Sol Pressner. [It was such a popular name in New Orleans because of the deli.]

RH: Well, tell me, because I can remember the Long's Bakery there, Long's Delicatessen.

JG: That was on Freret Street, Bill Long was the baker and his sons.

RH: So, but this is an area that was a pretty Jewish area, also.

JG: It was -- I think the Jewish community was moving from the Dryades Street, Rampart Street, more uptown into the Louisiana Avenue Parkway, Nashville Avenue neighborhoods, more uptown. And Freret Street became a bit of a hub too. There was Long's Bakery, which was kosher. There was Ralph's Kosher Delicatessen. That was Ralph Rosenblatt. He and his wife were holocaust survivors, came here after World War II. In fact, my dad helped Ralph to set up his business. He was a butcher, a kosher butcher. My dad helped Ralph get established in the community, and then he had his own business. And at first, he was on Carondelet Street, right around the corner from our deli, and then upscaled to the Freret Street area.



RH: So, what are some of your memories of being Jewish, and growing up in New Orleans?

JG: My Jewish memories all revolved around Beth Israel. My family was so steeped in the synagogue, and so active at Beth Israel. My sister and I went to Hebrew school. There was no Hebrew day school then -- parochial day school. Now there are two in the city, but those didn't come about until the '60's and '70's. We had afternoon Hebrew school, just like the Christian children have catechism in the afternoon, we had afternoon Hebrew school. Beth Israel had its own Hebrew school, and we went four days a week, Mondays through Thursdays, every day after public school. The Hebrew school bus, a big yellow school bus, would go pick us up to go to Hebrew school about 4:00 pm (Hebrew school was 1 ½ hours) four days a week. On Fridays, we were off in the afternoons, but on Friday evenings we went to synagogue for Sabbath evening services. On Saturday morning, there were Junior Congregation services, so all the kids who were in Hebrew school went to their own little Junior Congregation services Saturday mornings. And then we socialized as a fun group Saturday afternoons together. We were off. Sunday mornings was Sunday school, from 9:30 in the morning till noon we were in Sunday school, and so I was at Beth Israel. Every day of the week. Most of our friends belonged there also. We also did a lot of socializing at the Jewish Community Center. In those days, the original JCC was called the YMHA, YWHA -- Young Men's Hebrew Association, and Young Women's Hebrew Association.

RH: So, where was that located?

JG: That was on Clio Street and St. Charles. Right across from where the big New Orleans Public Library was near Lee Circle. It was just one block from Lee Circle. Then the YMHA/YWCA became the JCC. They changed it to Jewish Community Centers. It's a national body now. And the JCC moved to the building at the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Jefferson Avenue, which was formally the Jewish Children's Home. It was



for orphans of Jewish families. They were orphans because most of their parents died in that outbreak of cholera, I think, that was in New Orleans, in the 1920's, '15's and '20's. Some children who lived in that home very prominent. Judge Louis Yarrut grew up in the Jewish Children's Home. Our own Gabbai that I told you about earlier, Myer Lachoff, his sister and brother were in the home, because his father died when they were very young, and his mother needed some help raising the children. Another prominent person I can recall -- Carol Hart, grew up in that home. The Home no longer is needed, but in 1903, I think that might have been the date, the home decided that the Jewish children in the home needed a school to go to. I don't know the population of the children there, but that was the origin of Isidore Newman School, an outstanding private school today. Isidore Newman created this school for the children of the Jewish orphanage. Those children got a wonderful education from the start. Eventually the home was no longer needed as an orphanage. If there were any children needing homes, it was done as foster care. You know, we've gotten away from the orphanages, and foster care is a much more natural setting for children to grow up in. So, the home dissolved and is now the Jewish Children's Regional Service, and serves children in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, a regional area, assisting these children with scholarships for camp, or scholarships or tuition money, or trips to Israel. They do help, in many ways, children who need some financial assistance, but not as orphans.

RH: Well, now, tell me, let's get back to you. And tell me, what was it like being Jewish in New Orleans at this time? Did you have a sense of -- I assume you had a sense of yourself as different from other kids?

JG: Yeah. I knew I was -- I grew up in a very mixed neighborhood. Our delicatessen was in a very mixed neighborhood. And I went to public school, which was across the street from the delicatessen. And so, a lot of my neighborhood friends were not Jewish, but some of the Jewish kids in the neighborhood after school would say goodbye to our Christian friends, because we'd have to get on the Hebrew school bus and go to Hebrew



School. But we would socialize with them, and be with them, and share birthday parties with them. And we grew up in a very inter-religious neighborhood. Also just one house down from our delicatessen -- some black families lived. They didn't go to school with us those days. There were segregated schools. But we were friendly with everybody in the neighborhood. And my best friends were -- who were not Jewish, were Italian. And I didn't have any sense of, growing up in New Orleans, of antisemitism, of separateness. I just didn't feel that, in this community in those days. I'm sure some of it was there. But I think New Orleans has a history of enjoying its ethnicity, and enjoying its multi-cultural components.

RH: So, is that one of the things you'd say was kind of distinctive about New Orleans Jewish community?

JG: I think so. Yeah. I mean, everybody goes to the Irish-Italian parades, and has a good time, and catches the cabbages from the floats and thinks that's a blast. And everybody goes to the Zulu parade, when Zulu used to be a separate, all-black organization, we went and enjoyed the black parades. I think New Orleans is a city that appreciates and enjoys its cultural elements.

RH: So, tell me -- I'm a little -- I'm interested in when you decided to move out to Metairie. And also, I'm very interested when the -- if -- you weren't in on all the decisions, but the decision to move from Carondelet of Beth Israel.

JG: Beth Israel?

RH: Out to Canal, which is on the lakefront.

JG: My parents sold their delicatessen in the early '50's. I think it was around '53. I was at Newcomb College. And we bought a home -- my parents bought a home on Audubon Boulevard. And my sister and I were so excited that we didn't have to go home, walking through a kosher delicatessen to get to our living quarters upstairs. Although our home



area was really lovely. It was like an apartment! But downstairs smelled like pickles and pastrami, you know. (laughter) And the guys that I dated, the Jewish boys that would come to Tulane from New York, they would love to come into Pressner's Kosher Deli, because my folks would come down and make them deli sandwiches, and they'd dig their hands in the pickle barrels, and they'd say, oh, this tastes and smells just like my neighborhood in Brooklyn or the Bronx. So, our house above the deli was like a hangout, a social hangout. But then we moved to Audubon Boulevard, and my sister and I were so excited to be in a house that had a real kitchen in it, because our kitchen was the kitchen that belonged to the deli, and we never had to go to the grocery store, because we had all the food downstairs. And we used to beg my mother, can I go to the grocery, can we go, do we need bread today, do we need milk today? Please let us go to the grocery. It was such a treat to go to the grocery and shop, because it's something we never did, growing up. That was kind of ironic, that you enjoy going to the grocery. But we moved uptown, and then my dad had a good friend -- I was still living in town and at Newcomb. My dad had a good friend who was building subdivisions, a small subdivision in Metairie. And he said one day, why don't you come out -- I want you to come out and see what we're doing out in Metairie. We didn't even know how to get to Metairie. I mean, we knew how to get to Metairie Road, but this was the Metairie off Veterans Highway. There was no I-10, and I don't remember how we got here, I think Metairie Road to Bonnabel, and then out Bonnabel to something called Veterans. Then it was a two-way road from Clearview out, and it was really the sticks out here. My dad and mom went to see this little new subdivision, and in one day my mom said, I like those little houses in Metairie, a lovely small home, neighborhood homes. She said it's all so new, and it's got a new modern kitchen and big closets, and a nice backyard. Why live in an old neighborhood like Audubon Boulevard? (laughter) I guess she didn't realize how elegant Audubon Boulevard was. And by then I was married, and my husband and I, in our first year of marriage, rented a home in Gentilly, not too far from Dillard University, so we were out of the uptown area. And we were married one year. In the second year of



our marriage, we had a child, one child, and then shortly after, I was pregnant with my second child. So my mom and dad said, well, why don't you guys move to Metairie too? We were both practicing social workers, so we had two incomes. We thought we were rolling in dough, and we could afford to buy a house. So, we came out here, and we -- my parents and Sol and I bought houses right next to each other, on Page Drive in Metairie. The first six months, we didn't even have mail delivery, because there weren't enough people living in that block for the U.S. Postal Service to send a mailman on the street. We had to go to Metairie Road to pick up our mail. We were the first two people to move into the block. We pioneered out in Metairie. We were here before East Jefferson Hospital, before Clearview Shopping Center, before the I-10, and we've been here for -- we'll be married 50 years next year. So, we've been out here for 48 years, and --

RH: So, you raised your kids out here in Metairie.

JG: Yeah. When we moved down here, we had Jody, who was about a year old, and we were expecting Eddie. They're 16 months apart. And our second son was born out here in Metairie, all the children, the other three came after that. We have five altogether. We have four boys and a girl.

RH: So, where did they go to school?

JG: Public school. They went to public -- by that time, in '72, Sol was -- decided he wanted to further his career. And he went to law school at night, to Loyola Law School, because he had some GI educational monies available to him, and he was one who would not want to pass up an opportunity to go to school. He could be a professional student. So, he went to law school just because he had the GI Bill going, and it lead to his interest of using his social work degree and his law degree, to become a juvenile court judge. So, he practiced law for 10 years, had a small office on Veterans Highway with one associate, in a building that my dad built, because after my dad sold the





delicatessen, he went into partnership with his Italian friend, Sam Cimino, and the two of them opened up a floor covering business and a gift shop and a carnival business, selling Mardi Gras beads and doubloons, and trinkets --

RH: Really?

JG: Yeah.

RH: He must have been one of the first.

JG: They were. It was Pressner's Carnival Mart. And they were the biggest in the city. They were the first to bring in doubloons. They actually traveled to Czechoslovakia, the two of them, which was behind the Iron Curtain then, before the breakdown of the Iron Curtain with Russia, and got special visas to go in, and bought Czech beads, which were made out of glass --

RH: That's glass.

JG: Yes.

RH: Glass beads.

JG: The glass Czech beads. They were a real hit in their day. My dad, Ralph Pressner and Sami Cimino had an amazing business. It was Mardi Gras beads and trinkets and doubloons, from December through the end of Mardi Gras season. And that kind of shut down and became the Carnival Store. And then my dad and Sam left -- it was on Orleans and Broad downtown at first -- my dad left Sam and built a building on Veterans Highway. And his had also floor covering and the Carnival Store. And Sol's office was at one end of his building. So, Sol was the first practicing attorney on Veterans Highway, except for one other office that was John Mamalides, who ended up becoming very active in politics in Jefferson Parish. So, Sol pioneered out here in his law practice, but



wanted to be a juvenile court judge. You have to be a practicing attorney for ten years, I think, before you can run for a public office as a judge. So, in '72, he won his first election as Juvenile Judge, Jefferson Parish.

RH: Got your (inaudible) here.

JG: Hi, Dixie. Hi, Dixie. (Golden Retriever dog) You want to say hello to the people? (laughter) Say, I'm Dixie. And I like to be --

RH: Nice headshot, Dixie.

JG: -- and I like to be in the center of things. Yeah. But he won his election in '72, and served as a juvenile judge for 14 years.

RH: Now, just explain to me, was that -- is that the Orleans Parish, or was that --

JG: Jefferson Parish.

RH: Jefferson Parish.

JG: Because we lived in Jefferson, and he ran in Jefferson, and he served in Jefferson Parish. Shall I get her out of here?

FEMALE VOICE: That's fine.

JG: She'll settle down, I think. Then he ran for a higher court after serving for 14 years on the juvenile bench -- in '85, I think, he ran for a position on the Louisiana State Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal -- and won that election. [He served 17 years as Appellate Court Judge.] He retired one day after Katrina (laughter). His retirement day was after 33 years on the bench. He reached mandatory retirement age, and his first date of retirement was September 1, '05. So, he got gypped out of a retirement party.

RH: Really?



JG: Yeah.

RH: So, tell me about -- do you remember or know about Beth Israel's decision to move out to --

JG: Yes. The uptown neighborhood on Carondelet Street was changing. It was a mixed neighborhood, it always was a mixed neighborhood of blacks and whites, and it always had been a very congenial neighborhood. But the Jewish community was getting more on its feet financially. These immigrants who came and had their businesses were successful, and they wanted to have nicer housing than living above the delicatessens, or living next to the chicken coops, or in the upstairs from their bakeries, although that smelled pretty good, I guess. But they started moving uptown. Beth Israel remained at 1616 Carondelet Street -- the original site, until 1970. And remembering that we were chartered as an Orthodox congregation in 1904. So that was 60 years of our being uptown, and with most of our membership moving out to the Lakefront area, or to the uptown area, the time was ripe to make the move from Downtown. So we left Carondelet Street. We built a beautiful sanctuary and school building on Canal Boulevard. We left Carondelet Street, following our congregants, who were going to the suburbs. Many of our congregants lived in that Lakefront area. Some also moved into the Metairie area, but it was not too great a distance to Canal Boulevard from Metairie. It was a good move for us -- to leave the Downtown area, the central downtown, and move to where the Jewish population was going.

RH: And about how big was Beth Israel then at that time?

JG: Huge. 400 families. I'm trying to remember the seating capacity of our sanctuary -- maybe 400 in that main seating area that you saw, the main sanctuary. We had to open up the sliding doors, and put additional chairs in the back, and use some of the social hall area, because we had 600 plus people at services for the High Holidays, for special services. And on the Sabbath -- I can remember Junior Congregation had about 100 --



75 to 100 children came to Junior Congregation. These were school age children from second or third grade through high school. I can remember a Sunday School. The original was lost in our flood, but -- I counted 125 children at least in our Sunday School. So we had a big congregation – lots of young families, too.

RH: Were a lot of people coming into your congregation who were, like, new in the city, or was it primarily --

JG: You know, they were primarily generational, I would say. They were families like mine, and look, my family of 16 aunts and uncles, with all their kids, were a big number. You know, when I talk about Beth Israel, I can say, oh, my cousin, Jacob did this, my cousin Meyer did this, and my cousin was a Sisterhood president. And it's all my family that was so steeped in the congregation. So, primarily it was generational, the membership. But then, Beth Israel always had a smattering of people who came to the community. The attraction was Tulane University, especially the Medical School. Research here in the city in medicine, in sciences, always brought in their share of young Jewish people and couples. If they were looking for a traditional Orthodox congregation, they had only two choices. Well, they had three choices in those days. There was Anshe Sfard, which is still down on Carondelet Street, but is very small, much smaller than even Beth Israel is today. There was Chevra Tchilim, which was Downtown at one point, but had moved up to Claiborne Avenue. They dissolved and merged with Shir Chadash Conservative Congregation. So they no longer exist. And then there was Beth Israel, and we were the largest of the Orthodox congregations. So, the ones -- the people who came in town to teach, or to be affiliated with the universities, and came from an Orthodox background, we got a lot of members that way.

RH: Now, I want to just circle back one more time, because I'm very interested in Sophie Newcomb. You're the first person talking about it.

JG: About Newcomb?



RH: Having gone to Newcomb.

JG: Oh, gosh, oh well.

RH: You know, and I guess it was at a time where a lot of women didn't necessarily go to college.

JG: I was the first -- I have a cousin, first cousin, Albert Regenbogen -- he's three years older than me. He graduated Tulane Law School the same year that I graduated Newcomb College. The two of us were the first two in our family to get college degrees.

RH: And so, was there kind of a family decision you should go, or did you decide you should go?

JG: Oh, there was no question. [I was a good student, and my Dad was so eager for me to attend college.] My dad actually started Tulane in Night School. He went part-time at night. This was in the early '30's, the Depression Age, so he didn't have the money, he couldn't afford to go to college full-time, but he wanted to be a bookkeeper. He wanted to be an accountant. He actually worked for the New Orleans Public Service Department, which is the forerunner of Entergy. He went to Tulane part-time in the evenings, to take some bookkeeping courses. He never got to finish that. My mother started high school at Cohn High School on Napoleon Ave., but that was the days when Kansas Bakery was really up and running and busy, and all the girls and boys had to work in the bakery. They helped -- they worked behind that delicatessen counter, all the children. And I think the guys maybe delivered the goods, and the girls had to work behind the counter. And they had to, I mean, they weren't affluent. And I remember my mom saying that her underwear, the petticoats that the girls wore under their dresses were made out of the bleached cotton flour sacks, because you recycled everything then, you know. And so, the thing is that they came from poor roots, but they worked hard and moved up. And when it came to college and education, there was no question that I was going. And I



planned it all along. I did finish Newcomb, and went on to get a Masters in Social Work, but at that stage, I said, I'm ready to leave -- I need to make a little break from home, and get a little more independence. I did graduate very young. When I received my degree from of Newcomb College, I was 16 years old.

RH: Really?

JG: Yeah.

RH: That's very young.

JG: Yeah.

RH: So, did you just not go to some of McMMain?

JG: No, I went through all of McMMain, but I had skipped 2 years in grammar school. In those days, if you were an outstanding student, your teachers would let you skip ahead half a grade – if your parents consented.

RH: Oh, I understand.

JG: So, I skipped twice, putting me one year ahead of myself. Also I was a September birthday, so I was one of the youngest ones in my class. I was really two years ahead of age in school. The first time I was able to vote in elections -- I was already in graduate school. I wanted to be Social Worker, because one of the most influential people in my life was my youth director in B'nai Brith. There is a B'nai Brith Boys and B'nai Brith Girls – A Jewish organization, for high school students for Jewish youth group activities. And so, my friends and I all belonged to BBG, B'nai Brith Girls, and the boys had their separate chapters of boys' groups. It's called AZA. The director of B'nai Brith in this community was a gentleman named Harry Popkin. I really had a crush on Harry Popkin (laughter). He was just such an amazing person. He was nice-looking, he was athletic,



he was tall, he was smart. His wife actually was the youth leader of my BBG chapter. And I was very jealous of her, because I wanted a man like Harry Popkin. He and his two brothers got together -- there were three Popkin brothers -- decided to open a summer camp for Jewish youth in the mountains of North Carolina. And he hired me to work at Camp Blue Star -- when I was a senior in high school. He asked me to come up to his camp, to work at the camp as a counselor, a junior counselor, actually. And so I went to Camp Blue Star, and got a taste of what it was to be away from New Orleans for the first time for eight weeks in the summer. That was my biggest separation from home, and to do something so exciting and to work with children. Harry was a Social Worker, and he said, you need to go to Social Work school. And whatever Harry Popkin said, I had to do. I was going to do it, you know. He was a great swimmer, too. And I loved swimming, and I still swim today for exercise. I wanted to do anything he said. So, I went to Tulane School of Social Work, and told them I was interested in a Social Work degree. I was graduating Newcomb, and it was a two-year graduate course, post-graduate course. And they said, oh, great, we have a great class coming in, and here's an application. I said, I don't want to come to Tulane, though. I want to get away -- I'm just graduating Newcomb. I need to get away, and I want to know from you, where are the best schools for social work in the country? So they gave me three choices -- Columbia, Berkeley, and Western Reserve in Cleveland. Those were the three schools that they recommended. I picked Cleveland. I thought Berkeley was too far away. California was just too far away. New York, for Columbia -- I was kind of scared to move from a nice little small community like New Orleans, to New York City -- that was too much of a challenge. And Cleveland was kind of my choice, and the school is now part of Case Western Reserve University. But then it was Western Reserve School of Social Work, School of Applied Social Sciences. And I started there the fall after I graduated Newcomb. Sol, my husband, was in the army for two years after he graduated from CCNY, City College of New York. And he wanted to be a Social Worker. So he ended up coming to the same school that I did, and that's how we met. We were both beginning



students in social work. We got engaged maybe four months after we met, and got married, though, two years later -- after we finished our degrees. It was a two year program.

RH: So, why a Social Worker? Did you --

JG: I liked working with children and adults. I like working with people. I thought I would want to be a doctor. I really thought I wanted to be a doctor, because I also liked sciences, pure sciences, and I was a chemistry major, of all things. The thing about being a chemistry major at Newcomb was that you spent hours and hours and hours in the lab. And after my second year of so many chemistry course and science courses and physics labs and all, I said, you know, it's so beautiful outside, I don't want to be in the lab all the time. So, I switched to psychology as a major. And that lead to my influence by Harry Popkin, and going to Social Work school. I still like the sciences, but working with people is really much more fun.

RH: Well, what a great story (laughter). Why don't we go into the Katrina story, since we've got a great background about New Orleans.

JG: Well --

RH: When -- what did your family generally do about a hurricane, and when did this one kind of come on your personal radar screen?

JG: OK. I think the first time we ever evacuated was for Georges, Hurricane Georges, in 1998, I think. Up until then, we stayed through Camille, we stayed through Betsy. We never thought of evacuating. The hurricanes then -- at least they didn't come in our direction then. Betsy was frightening. Camille came toward us, but then veered east and the Gulf Coast got the big hit, and it just wiped out Biloxi and Bay St. Louis. When Betsy came, we were here and we lost power. We weren't living next door to my parents at that time. We had moved into a bigger house, because we kept having more children.





We needed another bedroom and another bathroom. We needed more space. So we moved a half a block further down in the same neighborhood, in a little bigger home, and we were separated from our parents. And that was the -- probably the most frightening night of no power, no phone communication, and it's the first time that that had happened during a hurricane. The howling winds -- you couldn't hear a person sitting next to you speak, because of the noise. And we kept hearing all the crashes and things clamoring into the house. And the next morning, when everything was quiet and settled down, and we went outside, we found that our carport had collapsed on top of our cars. We were all safe, though. We had moved our kids into the central rooms, and no windows blew out, and nothing tragic happened to our house. We had some roof damage. We walked down the street to check on our parents. Probably a little twister had come through there. Their roof was stripped off. They still had the wood, but all the shingles and the tar paper were gone, it was just a wooden roof. And so, consequently, all the rains during the night just came pouring in, pouring in. They must have had two inches of water throughout their house. They were older, and they weren't in the peak of health. We were so worried about them. They stayed in their house and they managed, but we had to bail them out, literally, bail the water out of the house, get some roofing put on real quick, and rebuild. But it didn't flood like Katrina flooded. When it came to -- during one hurricane, we actually left our home, but did not leave the city. We boarded up as best we could, secured everything that was loose outside. My dad by then had his two-story business, the Carnival Store, and the floor covering store, right on Veterans Highway, a good, strong, steel-structured building. We went to his building, up to the second floor, we brought sleeping bags, and blankets, and some food, and we stayed through the night in this upstairs part of his building. That was the only time, and we didn't even really evacuate. We just left the neighborhood where the house was, and moved to a stronger, sturdier high-level building. We left for Georges and went to Atlanta, to be with one of our sons. We also left for Ivan. It took us 11 hours to get from New Orleans to Lafayette, and thank goodness we had a friend who had a place for us to hold up in



Lafayette until the next morning and we came back and we were spared. Ivan, again, veered away. This time, you know, it was a different story. Katrina. Actually, my husband and I were not in the city. We were at a wedding in Washington, D.C. We left on the Thursday before the storm (dog noises -- hi, sweetie. Yes, I'll shake hands. OK.) We left the Thursday before, went to a wedding, and Katrina didn't even have a name yet. It was pouring down rain, and was a tropical storm in Florida. We didn't even think about it being a hurricane that was going to come four days later. And on Friday and Saturday, all the people at the wedding who were watching the news in their hotel rooms are saying, "Have you seen the storm?" "Have you been watching Katrina?" And we really had not paid much attention to it. I think it was early Saturday, when there was so much news about it. We put the television on, and saw this monstrous storm coming, you know, right up north toward the Gulf. And I called my son, Eddie. The wedding we were attending was not until the next day, till Sunday. And I called -- Eddie's my only child in New Orleans, and his wife and son live here in the city, in Metairie. And I said, "Eddie, the heck with the wedding. I mean, we just saw the news about this Hurricane Katrina, which is a three and -- category three, and it might be a five by the time it gets to New Orleans. We're coming home!" He said, "Mom and Dad, don't come home." He said, "We're not waiting 'til tomorrow to evacuate." We had a housesitter here to take care of our two golden retrievers at the time. We had two dogs, he had a dog, his in-laws had a dog, so they were leaving town. He said, "I'm going to go to your house, pick up the animals, secure your house as best I can on the outside. We're out of here this afternoon. We're not waiting -- we're not going to get stuck in traffic like we were with Ivan. We're evacuating early." So he came and he took all of our pictures that were in albums, and he moved them to the second floor. He picked up videos that were irreplaceable, and moved them into a safer position, took time to do that (dog groans), got the dogs and the dog food, locked up, and left. We met him in Dallas at my youngest son's home, where they ended up. We actually stayed in Washington for the wedding. When the storm passed through on Monday, we tried to come home but we couldn't. We



didn't even know about the flooding yet. It hadn't happened early Monday morning. But the storm had passed, and it looked like New Orleans was going to be OK. The New Orleans airport was closed, we couldn't fly in. But we changed our flight to Dallas. Still not knowing about the flooding, we arrived in Dallas on Tuesday, and Eddie and Blayne, his wife, and Benjamin, and all the dogs ended up in Dallas. Sander, my son in Dallas, convinced Eddie to come there. You know, it's hard to evacuate with children and dogs -- a lot of dogs like we had. He said, "Come to Dallas. I have a big fenced in back yard." So, we all met in Dallas, and we stayed there until it was safe enough to come home. There was no power. Metairie was shut down. Nobody could come home anyway until we saw what the flooding was going to do. But we were watching what was happening on the news then. Around the clock, you just couldn't turn it off. And we were watching the aerial views of Canal Boulevard and Beth Israel. And by now, I'm President of the congregation, and I'm concerned about my own home, but I'm concerned about my house of worship, too. It's my responsibility as President. And we could see the waters. We couldn't see the sidewalk or the front walkway of Beth Israel. It was under water. So we knew that there was water at some level, also in the building, not dreaming it would be ten feet high by the time the levies broke, and it just came pouring into that neighborhood. So, when we got to Dallas, my son, Sander, who lives there --

RH: I should -- we should just stop one second, and you should tell me how many children you have.

JG: Sure. OK. There're five. There're five Gothards. My oldest son is Jody, who now goes by his Hebrew name, Yaacov, and he is in Atlanta. He's not married. He's a single guy in Atlanta. He has a professional resume writing company. And he's an outdoorsman to the hilt. He loves kayaking, canoeing and hiking, and just being in the mountains and in the woods. That's his love. And he's got a nice little business and he can take off on the weekends and go do that. And he's very active in a group called Mosaic, which is a Jewish, young couple -- or singles group, couples and singles that



enjoy the outdoors together, and do a lot of those activities. My second son is Edward -- Eddie, he's here. He's an attorney. He's the only Gothard that lives in New Orleans. And he has one child, Benjamin, who is now almost 12 next month. And Benjamin is our first grandchild, and there's always something special about the first. And also, he's the only grandchild -- I have nine grandchildren -- that lives in the city. The thing about Benjamin is next year he will be making his bar mitzvah at age 13. Every Jewish young man at the age 13 prepares for their accepting adulthood, at least responsible for their behavior in the eyes of God. And on becoming of age, at age 13, this bar mitzvah ceremony is a real milestone in their lives. Benjamin is fifth generation Beth Israel. My grandparents, who were founding members, my parents, then Sol and I are third generation. Eddie's fourth, and Benjamin is fifth generation, so if he -- if Beth Israel's still alive and well, and we're planning on that, and we're working toward that and so far so good. We're making progress slowly but surely -- he'll make a Beth Israel bar mitzvah. It might not be on Canal Boulevard, but it'll be a Beth Israel bar mitzvah. So, they're the only ones that live here. My third son -- the first three are boys -- is Andrew. He is a clinical psychologist, he and his wife, Julie, have three children. Daniel is nine now, and then they have twins, who are five years old, boy/girl twins. They're adorable -- Sidnie and Gabriel. They're in Atlanta, and he has his practice there. My fourth child -- we finally got a girl -- is Shayna. Shayna means beautiful in Yiddish. She is the pride of her dad's eyes, you know, the one daughter in all these men. She is also a clinical psychologist. She has a PhD, and she's Dr. Shayna Gothard. She's married to Eric Hoffman, who is an Israeli, just a wonderful young man, and the two of them had two adorable girls, two daughters. They are five and almost four, and they are Tara and Maya. She's number four. When we had Shayna, we said, oh, we can make a girl. Let's have another little girl, they're so sweet. And so we decided to have a fifth child, and it wasn't a girl (laughter) -- another boy. So we're four and one. He is Sander. He is a family practice physician in Dallas, with another Julie daughter-in-law, his little wife, Julie. They have three children. They have two girls and -- who are ages five and -- so I



have three grandchildren who are five years old. Three of them were born eight days apart. The twins and Mikayla in Dallas are five years, and she has a little sister, Lindsay, who is three. They have a new baby brother, Jeremy, who is three months old. So that's nine grandchildren in four different cities.

RH: OK. And Dallas is where you were --

JG: Evacuated to.

RH: Evacuated to, so you had -- there was three there, and then one joined them.

JG: And Eddie came with Ben.

RH: With Ben.

JG: And we were there almost a month. We were there until mid-September.

RH: So, tell me what you thought when you saw the TV, and when you were watching on TV --

JG: You know what? At first, you're just numb. You're just numb. You just can't believe what you're seeing. And I can remember the devastation of Betsy in the Ninth Ward, and people getting stranded in their homes -- flooding in Carol Sue subdivision, I think. The water came up to the roof line, and people were trapped in their attics, and so many drownings happening there. And I couldn't believe, like, this is happening again, but the breaches in the levee were so frightening. And when we first heard that there was a break in the 17th Street canal -- it didn't say if it was the New Orleans side or the Metairie side. You know, Orleans Parish or Jefferson Parish. At first it didn't say, and then your imagination gets a hold of you, and you just keep wondering what it's going to be. Eddie's and Blayne's home is just a three-year-old, brand new home, their dream home that they built. And it's not that far from the 17th Street Canal, so if that flood were to -- if



that levee broke in Metairie, they are in Bucktown. They could have been pretty heavily hit. If it broke in New Orleans, I know how close -- I think Beth Israel's just about a mile or so as the crow flies, from that 17th Street canal, from Bellaire Drive. And I knew Beth Israel was going to get it. And then we realized it when we were starting to look at these aerial views, that it actually was the Orleans side that broke and gave way. And so we knew Beth Israel was going to be hit hard. Then we heard that the pumping stations shut down in Jefferson, and all the canals were overflowing. And we live on the levee. When you look out of my backyard, there's a levee across into Lake Pontchartrain. So, when we first heard the levees broke, we thought, oh, my, you know, oh, my goodness, you know, we're -- if that levee gave way here, our house, our backyard, our fence, our trees, we're the first line of defense (laughter) for our neighborhood, with these winds and waters coming over. In the 36 years that we've lived in this home, this is our third home in the same neighborhood, because as the family grew and grew, we needed some more space, and thank goodness we were able to upscale to a bigger home. We picked this house because of the levee, because it would be so much for the kids to have the bike trail and the walking path along there. And we had a huge backyard, where my husband and I both love to work in the garden. I grow flowers, and I have a greenhouse, and he has a huge vegetable garden -- that's our therapy. That's my therapy, gardening. So, we just thought if that levee broke and we're right here, I mean, we don't know. I went to bed every night in Dallas, trying to picture in my mind what was in all of the cabinets and storage units and closets that are on the ground floor -- this is a two-story home, but most everything is on this ground floor. I'm trying to say, I'll never remember everything that I've lost, if it flooded in my house. There's just no way I could even come up with a list of contents. I never did what we were advised to do, you know, go around and take videos of everything, of your pictures on your wall, of your furnishings, of everything. I never took time for that, so I -- every evening, I tried to picture one cabinet, or one closet, or a special corner where I had things tucked away, and thinking of what I was not going to come back to. I'm a pack rat. I save everything, and my kids hate me for that (laughter).



They come here, and they say, Mom, what are you still doing with my third grade science project in the attic? You can get rid of it. I said, I can't, it was your third grade science project, don't you want it, you know. I have tee-shirts and clothes that we had for our kids that had their names on it. I can't bring myself to give too much away or pitch out. And my friends, and even my sister recently gave me books on how to unclutter your life. And I tell my sister it's a great book, but I can't find it. It's somewhere around the house under piles of papers and magazines.

RH: Were there people that you were concerned about, that you were, like, trying to get in touch, or talking to?

JG: Most of my family were away. I mean, it was just Eddie and Blaine and Sol and I and Benjamin and the dogs. And we knew we were safe. We were together. All of our kids knew we were safe. We didn't know what was here at home. We were in touch with many family members who had fled to Houston, and many of our friends and family were in Dallas. Many went to Atlanta and Memphis -- Birmingham. All of our close friends from Beth Israel, and we knew that they were away with their children and grandchildren. We didn't know who actually stayed behind. We found out later that there was -- there was a young man, a single guy in our congregation, who stayed in his house in the Lakeview area, had to be rescued by boat. He then spent some time at the Superdome. It was a horrendous experience. He then spent some time at the airport, out on the Tarmac, just sleeping out there in the open. He said that was horrible. He finally got hold of a bicycle, and just started peddling out Airline Highway, and was picked up by either a car or truck driver who offered him a lift somewhere, and we heard about his story later. He had a terrible experience.

RH: Did he come back?

JG: He still lives in Houma today. He's not back in the city. I have young cousins who were married two months before the storm. Their house -- they had a little house in New



Orleans East -- the house flooded, they lost both cars, they lost all their wedding gifts, they lost everything. And just starting out on their marriage life. When we came back to the city, they actually stayed with us for about a month, until they found a rental place. And every day I would send them out to that house to try to find something that was salvageable, some China, a crystal or -- the wedding gifts that were still sitting there untouched. And, so they're starting from scratch, both of them. We did have family members that were affected like that, and we had friends in Metairie who lost their homes, because they lived near the West Esplanade Canal, they spent a few weekends with us. But then they found an apartment in Ormond -- not too far -- but they were in Baton Rouge for a while, commuting back and forth here, to repair their home. And that got very hard, with the traffic between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. They found an apartment out beyond the airport. And so now they're here. But they stayed with us for a brief time. We had some volunteers that came in to work at Beth Israel for Katrina relief, and help us clean out. One couple in particular from North Carolina -- again, a little bit younger than just Sol and I, and they were staying at Camp Algiers, which was the army base converted into tent living for the hundreds of volunteers that were coming in. There was a female tent, a male tent, and a couples tent. And they were living in this couples tent on two cots side by side, with 200 people in this tent. And this happened to be the month of December. We had some cold nights. It just dipped down really cold one day. And they were actually helping us scrub some of the Yahrzeit plaques, the memorial plaques that we were cleaning in my patio and the outdoors, because it was too toxic in the synagogue, to -- (tape switches off and then back on)

RH: I have to stop for one second, and we're just going to switch out the tape here.

END OF AUDIO FILE 1





RH: -- I'm with Jackie Gothard. So, you -- tell me, you were able to come back earlier, because Metairie people were able to get in.

JG: Yes.

RH: So, you were actually in pretty early.

JG: When the power was turned on in Metairie. And there was one day that was designated by Harry Lee that Metairie residents who had evacuated could come back, get in at 6:00 am, check on their homes, but they had -- the curfew, I think, was midnight, or 11:00 pm or midnight. You had to leave. So, my son, Eddie, came back then, because his law office is in a high-rise building at 3500 Causeway Boulevard. He was very anxious to get a hold of the file server in his law office. Everything in that law office, all the cases they're working on, all their lawsuits, all their court hearings, all their documentation, everything is in this closet in a big computer box called a file server. If he could get that out safely, then they had salvaged the entire records of three partners in their law firm, plus they had a couple of extra attorneys working for them up there. Everything in their livelihood was in this file server, so he and one of the young assistant attorneys who had evacuated to Baton Rouge, went -- Eddie drove from Dallas to Baton Rouge, picked up his friend, they came in on that one day that they were allowed in, and went up -- they were on the 14th floor -- so they climbed a dark stairwell. The building was not powered up yet. So, they climbed up 14th flights, 13 flights of steps, got their power server, file server, told how delicate it was, you can't bump it, drop it, knock it, nudge it in any way. It has to come down as gently as possible. So I think they put it in some kind of sling made out of a tarp, and carried it down 13 flights of steps. Their computer company is in Baton Rouge, luckily, so they drove their file server to Baton Rouge, and he salvaged everything for them, and Eddie actually picked up his computer from his home, came back to Baton Rouge with it, and he was up and running and getting his law practice going again from Dallas.



RH: From Baton Rouge or Dallas?

JG: Dallas.

RH: Dallas -- from Dallas. OK.

JG: Yeah, the file server can get delivered to Baton Rouge and plugged in there. All he needed was the computer with him, and he was up and running. His law partner, one was in Memphis, and one was in Jackson, Mississippi, I think. They were connecting with each other, and trying to work together to see what they could salvage.

RH: So, was he checking -- did he have, like, things he was supposed to do for you? Did -- was he going to check everybody's house when he came in that one day?

JG: He came --

RH: -- one day, or --

JG: -- he went to his home, and he -- and his in-laws live five houses around the bend from us. So, he came and checked their home and our home. And he called us on the cell and he said, you house is dry. It just -- you had some roof damage, trees are down, your greenhouse blew away, your roof is damaged, your patio roof blew away, but your house is intact. You did not flood, he did not flood. The worst thing, besides all the damage outside, which, if your house doesn't flood, that's nothing, you know, that's so minor. You're just so blessed and so fortunate when you didn't have six or 12 inches of water in your home and lost everything. So, we were so relieved, and felt so lucky. His in-laws, they were safe too. Their home was safe around the corner from us. So, we came back feeling pretty good. And then it was not but maybe less than a week after that entry into Jefferson, that people were allowed to come in, as long as the power was turned on in their neighborhood. And we found out that ours was, and I don't remember how we found that out. Actually, we weren't sure of that. We flew, as I said earlier, from



Washington, D.C. to Dallas. We didn't have a car in Dallas. We were using my in-laws', my daughter-in-law's parents had an extra car that they loaned to us. And Eddie and Blayne and Sol and I were living in a Residence Inn -- temporary housing that my daughter-in-law arranged. She has corporate people that come in town, and they have corporate housing that you could take for a month at a time near their home. So, we were very comfortable, and just watching the news again around the clock, and keeping ourselves as busy as we could, and trying to keep in touch with all of our family and friends who were spread all over. The Dallas community was wonderful. They -- Jewish Family Service in Dallas got all the New Orleans evacuees, or as many people as they could, to gather together and greet each other and have some refreshments, and just say hello. And when you saw people from New Orleans that you hadn't seen since before Katrina, you just hugged them and kissed them and you were so glad to see them. And it was like a reunion, almost like a family reunion -- and many of the -- we all knew each other, but we didn't all know we were in Dallas until Jewish Family Service got us together. In fact, during the three weeks that we were in Dallas, I went to Jewish Family Service and did some social work intake for them, just to keep busy. And there were many people, New Orleans evacuees, who were coming in for food stamps, and vouchers at some of the supermarkets, and for clothing, and for diapers, and for linens. And these were the evacuees that lost everything here, and were --

RH: So, these weren't just Jewish evacuees.

JG: No. They were black, they were Hispanic, they were everything. But they were New Orleans evacuees, and Jewish Family Services, one of the centers that was giving out clothing and food vouchers, and money, and cash money for them to have a little start, and also giving them directions to go for temporary housing, and for temporary work. If any of them wanted to help or they needed to eat, they needed to keep busy, and help children get into schools, because this was the beginning of the school year. So, we were there. And Jewish Family Service asked me, with my social work background,



would I come and be a social worker again, and help with some intake. And that was rewarding, and that was good, you know.

RH: When did you start to deal with the problems Beth Israel had? Because --

JG: When we knew, in fact, that we did have water, and we knew that we did not take precautions to move the Torah scrolls. Books can be replaced, and of course we didn't even imagine that we would lose everything -- library contents, everything in the Rabbi's study, -- all of our Judaica, all of the gift shop -- the gift items, some were very nice gold and silver Judaica items in the Sisterhood gift shop. And the contents of our history that were in the computer and the files in the office, they were all, everything tipped over under water. Ten feet of water swirling around the way it did really took its toll. It was utter devastation in that building, and furniture was just tipped over and found in different rooms, and hallways, and strewn around. Prayer books were all over the place. The computers were tipped over and under water, and this is the water that was the nasty, filthy, murky water of everything imaginable in it, not just clean lake water that came up and then went down. It came up, and because there were no pumps, it stayed there. And it took two and a half weeks before we could actually get into the building. And I knew then, that we were in trouble, but my only hopes were that the Torah scrolls would not be affected, because they sit in the arks where they are kept -- they're in that are elevated off the ground. And then the Torahs themselves are on spindles that are at least six or eight inches, the bottoms of the spindles. And they're resting on that. So, I'm counting inches. I'm counting (clears throat) the level of the floor, counting (clears throat) -- excuse me -- how high it is to the floor of the ark. Then I'm giving myself another six inches of the spindles, and I'm saying just maybe the water is not that high, is not that high! And the Rabbi had evacuated, our Rabbi, Israel Schiff, was in Memphis with his family. My cousins, Jacob and Lee Kansas, you heard me mention them. We were really concerned about their home, which was in the Lakefront area. But they were really lucky. They were far enough off of Robert E. Lee toward the lake, where the elevation



slowly, slowly rises. They did not flood, and two houses down from them got six or eight inches of water. So, they were worried about their home, but also Beth Israel, and I was worried about Beth Israel, my responsibility as President, and where are my people, and is everybody safe? And anyway, this gentleman from New York was working down here in a religious Orthodox group. And they were working with the volunteers in search and rescue. They were in touch with our Rabbi in Memphis. I was in Dallas. Jacob and Lee were in Houston, and we were all in touch by cell phone connections back and forth. And he said, I'm going to go into Beth Israel, and see if I can take out your Torah scrolls. And there was no problem going in, because the glass walls on either side of the wooden doors were blown in by the rising water and the force of the flood. Everything was glass and debris, and stuff swirled around. Bookcases turned over. It was like the storm just had a hey-day in there. You know, you're swirling everything over. They did go in, though, and there was a call to me -- this was on September 12, I think that might have been a Monday -- and on September 13, I got a call in Dallas, I'm in Dallas, early in the morning from a good friend who lives in Los Angeles, saying, isn't the name of your congregation Beth Israel? And I said, yes, Steve, it's, yeah, it's Beth Israel. He says, well, there's a picture of your Rabbi on the front page of the L.A. Times carrying the Torah scroll out of your synagogue, and he's in waist-deep water. And I said, it's not my Rabbi. My Rabbi's in Memphis. I just spoke to him a few minutes ago, and I spoke to this guy who's in search and rescue down in New Orleans. It's got to be him. And a little while after that phone -- we went to the computer real quick, to Eddie's computer, and we pulled up the front page of the L.A. Times, and in vivid bright colors on the front page was Isaac Leider from the organization ZAKA. It's a religious group of people who volunteer and work in search and rescue. And he and a few of his friends were down here in New Orleans, going into the homes in boats, because there was still that much water in Lakeview, making sure that there were no people stranded inside. They're the ones that check the homes for people, or animals, and took out a lot of people who were stranded. They took out our Torah scrolls, but it was too late to save them. A third of the scrolls



were in water. And they are made out of animal skin, calfskin, and the parchment was just melted and disintegrating, and Torah scrolls need to be replenished and refurbished from time to time. It's hand calligraphy written, the Five Books of Moses on animal skin, and in constant use in the synagogue services, it gets worn, so = from time to time, you know, have these repaired. But these were not repairable.

RH: So, what happened? How did you connect with these guys?

JG: Isaac Leider called me finally, and he says, "I have your Torah scroll." I said, "I know, Isaac. I saw you on the front page of the L.A. Times." And he said, "I'll take them to Baton Rouge with me," because their point of departure for rescue was Baton Rouge by helicopter to Zephyr Field. And they would come in -- they were staying in Baton Rouge, come in the city -- Zephyr Field was high and dry, get in the police cars or whatever vehicles they were in until they got to the flooded areas, where they had rubber rafts, and then go in to try to rescue, and rescue Torah scrolls. So he said, "I'll take them to Baton Rouge with me." I said, "Oh, please don't do that, because I don't know who you're going to leave them with, and I will have to get them from Baton Rouge back to New Orleans, and I don't know how soon I'll be returning." I said, "I just heard of a person who might be able to help me. Can you give me ten minutes? I promise I'll get back to you in ten minutes." A former secretary of Beth Israel, who is not Jewish, but she worked at our congregation as secretary for almost ten years, and she knows all of our congregants, and she knows our Rabbis well, and she can appreciate our reverence for the Torah scrolls. And I had heard that Becky Heggelund is her name -- that Becky had moved in to her house in River Ridge, because it didn't flood there, and the storm wasn't as bad west of the city. So, Becky was at home and I reached her by phone, on her cell. I told her the story of the Torah scrolls, and I said, "Becky, can you take these scrolls and keep for us, so they don't have to be taken to Baton Rouge?" She said, "I'll do anything I can. If I can help you, I will." So, I connected her with the ZAKA rescue team. She met them at Zephyr Field within a half hour. The Torah scrolls were taken from the back of



that rubber boat into the back of her car. She took them home and called me, and when she described them to me, and then we called the Rabbi and told him what -- how she found them, we realized that it didn't sound good. She said, "Jackie, the calf skin is rotting." I said, "Becky, maybe they could dry out. Maybe just" -- it was so hot then, and so dry. You know, there was no rain for two months after Katrina. It was very stifling hot. I said, "Maybe on your back patio, you can spread them out on a picnic table or something. Maybe they'll dry and we can get them restored." She said, "Jackie, I'm telling you, they're melting." I mean, they were ruined, not reparable -- the parchment is just dissolving. It smells like rotting animal skin. She said, "It smells awful, it's probably bio-hazardous, believe me, they're not going to be restorable." So, we talked to the Rabbi about this, and we had to agree, you know, with what she found, and take her word for it. And he asked her to please bury them for us temporarily. In the Jewish faith, if a Torah scroll is not useable anymore, if it's beyond repair, you do not just put it in the garbage or put it out with the debris. It's treated respectfully, like a Jewish body that passes away, and you lay it in the ground and put it to rest, with dignity. We couldn't get to our cemetery at Beth Israel, because it was under water on Elysian Fields, and there was nobody here to do that anyway. So Becky temporarily dug a hole in her own backyard, with a shovel, and it had to be as big as a grave. Torah scrolls can be four feet long, they're heavy, they're rolled up on parchment. And being wet and rotting, they're probably heavier. And she had all seven of our torah scrolls -- these were of different sizes, but she had seven of them. And she said, I'll try for a couple of days to let them dry out, and we were in constant contact by phone. And she said, "Jackie, this is not good -- it's not going to work, believe me." So, the Rabbi asked her to just wrap them as best she could, like make a shroud if she could. She had, I think, a white tablecloth or a plastic covering. She put them in a white covering, and then put them in a plastic cover of her barbeque pit, to protect them from further water. And she dug a hole and buried them. And the Rabbi said, "Becky, please remember where you put them," and she said, "Rabbi, there's no way (laughter) I'm going to forget, you know, where these are." That



was done in September, and they stayed in Becky's backyard. Becky, by the way, is not Jewish. I think I mentioned this. And she just did this out of the goodness of the heart, because she knows how important and precious the Torah scrolls are to the Jewish people. And she would do anything she could to help us. So, we came back, and as more of us returned, we started cleaning out the building, and we were trying to stop the mold, and --

RH: When did you come back?

JG: I came back in mid-September -- mid- to the end of September, around the 20th, maybe -- which is the 20th of September now. That's about a year ago since my return. Right. Yeah, it was right around that week, because my birthday's tomorrow and I remembered, I'm going to make this return, you know, on my birthday.

RH: Were you in on your birthday?

JG: I think I was between Dallas and here, because we came here first -- yes. We came here first. We flew to Baton Rouge. [Eddie's friend had driven one of our cars to baton Rouge.] We picked up our car. We had seen an aerial view of our house. My son, Andy, is just a wiz on the computer. And he was sending us by e-mail to Sander's computer all of these, this information. He was hooked on Katrina relief. He would have given anything to be here and work directly with Katrina. This is my son, Andy. He got his synagogue, if I could sidetrack a little, in Atlanta, to start bringing -- and all the congregants and friends that they knew -- to start bringing in relief items -- clothing, diapers, over-the-counter drug items, like band-aids and -- formula, things that people were desperate for -- water, things like that. And they started collecting it at the synagogue. It got to be too big. So much stuff was coming to the synagogue. Then they moved over to Andy's and Julie's home. He emptied out his garage, and all these donations were coming to their home. People were bringing it in droves -- cars were coming up. He ended up getting, I think, three trucks donated by some trucking





company, and three volunteer drivers who said that they would bring the goods down here to relief centers. And he was responsible, then, for three truckloads of goods being brought to Gulfport, Mississippi. As bad as we were hit, they were hit worse. And so, those three trucks went to Gulfport. And so, Andy stayed on top of all this, and he sent us the aerial views. We knew that our house was OK. We could see our driveway, see our cars. So, we said, the first chance we get to fly to New Orleans, we're going to do it. We couldn't fly home -- the airport wasn't open, so we went to Baton Rouge, picked up our car, found that we had power. And we began cleaning up our house. When Eddie came a few days earlier, he threw out the refrigerator and freezer items. That was a nasty smelling job, as everybody knows. But he did that big favor for us. He was with his stepdaughter, Aimee. Aimee is a college sports educator and coach at a women's college in Texas. But she came to be with us during the evacuation, and she came here to help Eddie. When they arrived at our homes -- there was no running water, so you couldn't really wash or clean anything. But they found bleach. They emptied everything out and just put bags and garbage cans and everything out front. They sprayed the appliances with bleach. The neighborhood, the whole city, had the same stench of rotting food. And we saw maggots, and flies, and rats -- everything was already so disgusting, so we were pretty anxious to get rid of that, and we did. A neighbor came by with a truck, and there were places that you could bring this to, and they helped us just dump everything. Garbage cans and all, we let it go. So we got that away from the front of our house. We took the bleach and sprayed everything -- Amy and Eddie did -- and then just wiped it out, and left the freezers, closed them up, we did have power. He closed them up so at least they had bleach in them. That helped get rid of the odor. So, we saw that we had power. So we really could move back, but we had left everything in the apartment in Dallas, and we left our dog in Dallas, two dogs, then, in Dallas with our son and daughter-in-law. So we had to go back to Dallas anyway. In the meantime, Rita, Hurricane Rita is coming. So we feel, we might as well leave and go get everything, and get out of here for Rita, and when Rita's finished, we'll come back and stay. And



that's how we did it. So we came back at the end of September, and were able to stay. Eddie was not quite as lucky in Bucktown, because he lives closer to West Esplanade Canal and his garage -- he had about 14 inches of water in his garage. And after he cleaned out his refrigerators and freezers -- he had an automatic icemaker -- he had no power, so he left his refrigerator and freezer doors open to air out, sprayed them with bleach, cleaned them as best he could, but left them open. In the meantime, though, the power and water were turned on. So the automatic icemakers and the water was turned on. The water started to flow, the icemakers started to work, but the doors of the refrigerator-freezer were open, so it wasn't freezing, it started overflowing into the house. So, it was just a freak accident that he had about two inches of water in the house that never should have been. And we got back and checked his house. We got back two days before he did, I think. And we went right over to the house, had the key to get in, and his wooden floors were like waves, up and down like this. And they couldn't figure out any other way that the water came in. So, he had considerable damage. Everything in his garage had to be pitched out. Power tools -- refrigerator/freezer that was under 14 inches of water. The house -- all the downstairs floors and cabinets, and sheetrock, because mold had already started to grow. So, he had considerable repairs.

RH: So, you went over to Beth Israel as the President, and you found this enormous mess.

JG: And it was mold, nasty black mold that had already started growing up the walls, already on to the ceilings. The devastation was so heartbreaking. We weren't allowed into Orleans Parish yet, to the Lakeview area. There were policemen, there were guards at all the entrances to Canal Boulevard. My husband has a plaque that he uses on his car, when he parks at the court, that says, Official, Jefferson Parish, Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal, Judge Sol Gothard. And I took his plaque (laughter), thinking I'm going to talk my way into Orleans Parish. I had to get to Beth Israel. I just had to get there. My house didn't flood. My house -- outside was a mess, but it was going to be a mess for a



while. But I had to see the synagogue. And so, I headed there -- I was the only one on the interstate. There were no cars, there was nobody here yet. So, got off at the Canal Boulevard exit from I-10, and sure enough, there was two policemen there. And I showed the sign, I said, "This is my husband's, Judge Sol Gothard. I'm his wife, but I'm actually the President of the congregation on Canal Boulevard, and I need to meet my insurance agent there," which was a little white lie. It's frightening, my husband says I lie too easily.

RH: (laughter)

JG: Frightening to me. But he said, OK, Mrs. Gothard, you can go through. And I met Jacob there, my cousin, Jacob Kansas I mentioned earlier. Jake is a big guy, he can do anything in construction. He's an attorney. He can do anything legally, he can do anything that requires a lot of work and effort. Building, and fishing, and contracting everything. So, he and I went in together. We didn't need our keys, we didn't need anything, the walls were blown in. The glass walls on either side of the wooden doors were just crashed through. There was still maybe a couple of inches of water, and we had boots. We knew to have boots, and we had the mask to protect us from breathing the mold/toxins. And when we both walked in together, and we just stood there -- we walked into the little chapel, and we just looked around in disbelief. The pews were turned over. The books -- there are two library shelves of prayer books in the back were flipped over. The books were floating around in the water. The prayer shawls that the men wear were in the water. The bimah, which is where the Torah is taken out and read, and services are conducted from the bimah, was completely turned -- it's a big, maybe eight-by-ten square platform that you go up and read the Torahs from, on a big table. That was pushed to the side and shoved into the corner. Nothing was in its place, and Jacob and I looked at each other. I mean, we went in in awe, and it didn't take long to just, for the tears to well up, and we just both starting crying, and hugging each other in disbelief.



RH: Did you think it was the end of Beth Israel?

JG: You know what? I don't even -- I don't know that I thought at that time. I knew that we had serious problems in the building. I didn't know if that building could ever be used again, and I think I'm wrong, because the structural engineer who worked on the original building in 1968, came out and looked at it. And it was a preliminary inspection of the building, but he said that its external structure, the outer walls, the roof, the support beams in the main sanctuary and in the huge social hall were structurally sound. The inner walls, which were full of mold and mildew and water -- there was just water dripping everywhere, and everything is rotting and ruined -- we knew all that was gone. You know, we knew instantly that we had nothing left in the building. But the congregation is not the building. It's the home of the building. And the congregation are the people that created Beth Israel, the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of our forefathers who built that synagogue, and gave us this kind of Orthodox Judaism that we grew up with. Beth Israel is a congregation more than a synagogue. That's the most important thing. You can have services out in an open field. We had our first service as a congregation for the holiday of Yom Kippur, because there weren't enough people here for Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. We didn't know who was back and where they were. And we started to make connections just bit by bit, through cell phones, as to who was in town. For Rosh Hashanah, we went for services in other synagogues that had a few people who returned, and we found out where they were. We went to the Conservative congregation. Their Rabbi wasn't here. They had a brand new Rabbi that had just moved to the city two weeks earlier. He went to Houston, because most of the Conservative membership was in Houston. So, he went to have services there for his congregants. Rabbi Loewy at Gates of Prayer went to, I think, Houston, and another Rabbi was in Baton Rouge. Most of the congregants, the Jews of New Orleans, were elsewhere. They were not in the city. The few of us, maybe 40, 30 people were at Shir Chadash Conservative. And it was a nice service. It was nice being together with fellow Jews. It was nice having the high holidays here, in New Orleans, even as bad as it was,



and as devastating as it was. But those of us who were Beth Israel members were -- that was the first time -- well, the first time I cried was in Beth Israel. But then we got to work, and the second time I really cried was in synagogue at Rosh Hashanah, and in the Conservative tradition you can, men and women sit together, so my husband and I were sitting in services. And I think within ten minutes of being there and opening the prayer book, I just, the tears just started to flow, and Sol said, "Are you OK?" I said, "No, I'm not OK. I want to be at Rosh Hashanah services, but I want it to be Beth Israel. And I'm glad that Shir Chadash is here, but I don't want to be here. I want to be at Beth Israel, and I know I can't. There is no Beth Israel synagogue." So, the tears flowed for a long time, but then I composed myself, and my son and Myron Goldberg, and a few other Beth Israel people helped to conduct the services. And there was a female Rabbi, a student Rabbi, who came in from California, who was a daughter of a former member who's now deceased -- Mike Brenner's daughter, Michael Brenner from Universal Furniture. His daughter, Anne Brenner, came into town to conduct services. And she tried to do a very devoted, dedicated service, and wanted so much to make us feel good, and just get our minds off of our troubles, and enjoy being together at Rosh Hashanah. And it was hard to do it. So, we decided, after that, that we're going to have our own Yom Kippur, which comes ten days later. We didn't decide that until maybe two or three days after, when we all started to say how uncomfortable we were at other synagogues. We wanted our own service. We wanted a Beth Israel service, so we said, well, let's have it. Let's do it for Yom Kippur. We had about three and a half days to pull it off. And we found -- we had to find a location -- we had to find a Rabbi, we had to find a Torah, we had to find prayer books, we had to find prayer shawls. We had to create a synagogue in three and a half days. The main source that we went to was the Orthodox union, which is our national umbrella organization, the O.U. in New York. Beth Israel belongs to the Orthodox Union. In fact, less than two weeks after Katrina, there was a conference of O.U. synagogues in Milwaukee that was geared toward helping mid-sized to small-sized congregations like we were, under 200 families, 150, 175 families, help us



with programming and outreach, and fundraising, things like that. We get a call from Yisrael Shiff, my Rabbi. He had told me about this conference earlier, before the flood, and he wanted me to go. I was scheduled to leave for Israel September 14. This conference was going to be September 11, 12, 13. I said, "Rabbi, I can't go to a conference and then come home and leave for Israel the next day. I can't do it." Well, then, the hurricane came. This is all before Katrina. When the hurricane hit, the trip to Israel got postponed. It was a Jewish Federation mission. That got postponed. It never went. It just so happens, Sol and I are going to Israel in about one month, or the end of October, we're going to Israel, on a mission to Israel, but not a New Orleans Federation mission. I'm going with my sister and brother-in-law from New Jersey, but they're chairing the mission to Israel. So, we just feel like we want to be there, especially after the recent outbreak of war in Israel. We need to support the country and the Israelis, and --

RH: So, you missed the trip last year, so you're really looking forward --

JG: Missed it last year.

RH: -- to going to it.

JG: I asked the local Federation if they would consider joining up with New Jersey, and we would have our own bus, we could do our own track of touring and programming with them. But they were still having too much re-organization going on -- they were recouping from the devastation too. They had set up operation in Houston, where most of the New Orleanians went, Jewish New Orleanians, and in Baton Rouge. So, there were two offices of Federation, one working in Baton Rouge, one working in Houston. They -- and this was September. They couldn't even think about going, you know, making a mission. That was cancelled. And so many people in the mission didn't have homes to come back to, clothing to come back. I mean, it was -- it had to happen, had to be postponed or cancelled. We asked later on in the year if they want to go with New



Jersey, but they were so busy getting themselves back in business, they just couldn't do it. So, we went, and some friends of ours are going to go with us. In fact, the couple that came in here to volunteer, that was staying at that camp in Algiers, when it got so cold in December, when they were here, we made them come and move into our house with us. We said you can't stay in this tent full of 200 people, when it's 30 degrees outside. So, they came here to be with us. We became such good buddies. We have gone up to visit them in North Carolina, and they're coming with us to Israel. It'll be their first trip to Israel.

RH: So, what are their names?

JG: Matthew and Aline Shulman. They saw Beth Israel on the news. They wanted to come here and work for Beth Israel. They stayed almost two weeks. They have a bed and breakfast in Williamston, North Carolina, that they let somebody else run for them, while they stayed here for two weeks, volunteering in clean-up every day. It's off-season for them, mid-December. So they came here and worked for Beth Israel, worked at the Jewish Community Center, cooked kosher meals, delivered kosher meals around town, scrubbed memorial plaques out in our patio, and became lasting friends of ours.

RH: Well, let me --

JG: Back up.

RH: Let's go back a minute, because -- let's go back to Yom Kippur, because --

JG: Yom Kippur -- right. That's important.

RH: Yeah. You guys --

JG: It was --



RH: -- were really wanting to have your own service. And how many of you were there -- had you --

JG: Almost 78 people.

RH: Wow.

JG: Unbelievable, how we contacted that many. Now, we got in touch with the O.U., and they said, yes, indeed, you can have Yom Kippur. I said, we don't have a Rabbi. We're going to send you four Rabbis, young Rabbis, recently ordained. And we said, you know, we don't need four -- yes, you need four -- you need one to read the Torah, you need one to lead the prayer service, you need one to give a sermon, you need one just to be, you know, you need four Rabbis. We're sending you four. So, we discussed all this. So, we're maybe three or four of us planning this -- my son, Eddie, Jacob, me, my husband, Sol, Lee, maybe Richie Katz, I don't know. We were trying to pull this off. And so we called them back, and we said, look, you know, we don't know if this is going to work. You're going to send us four Rabbis. We don't even have a Torah. You have to have a Torah scroll for Jewish Holiday Services. We're coming down anyway. We're sending you four Rabbis, and a Torah scroll. They're going to bring a Torah scroll with them. So, then we started thinking, these guys are strictly kosher. There's not a kosher restaurant or delicatessen open in New Orleans or Metairie. We won't be able to feed them. We don't have kosher -- I mean, we can give them fruits and vegetables, but that's not going to keep them going, and give them strength to do all they have to do at services. We called up the O.U. and said, you know what? It's -- thank you so much, but we don't have kosher food. They're coming, you're going to get four Rabbis, you're going to get a Torah scroll, and they're going to eat kosher food, they're going to bring their meals with them, frozen food packages and all. Where were we going to have this service? We had no building. None -- all the other synagogues, they flooded too. You know, they were making do with what they had. Sol and I have friends who are Indian. They're -- one guy





is Kenny Patel, and the other is Kent Patel. They're not related, except they come from the same area in India where everybody is named Patel.

RH: Patel.

JG: And they own and they build motels and hotels. And we got to know both of these gentlemen, because they built the Comfort Suites in Kenner, only about three or four years ago. It's a nice facility. They did not flood. They are located one block before Williams Boulevard, and right off of Veterans. And I know the building, and I know the Patels. We've been out there. We know they have a meeting room that is almost the same size as our small chapel. You know, our small chapel area. So, we call them up, and we said, "Friends, we're looking for a special room. We have a religious holiday, the Day of Atonement, coming up in just three and a half days. We don't have a place for our synagogue services. Do you have any ideas? Absolutely, you come here, you're going to have your services right here with us. They had moved all of their employees, who had damaged homes and flooding, into this Comfort Suites, and they were sleeping on mattresses all in this room. It was like a big dormitory. We saw this room, and we asked, "Where will these people go? How is this going to work?" "Don't worry, it's going to be cleaned out, it's going to be ready, it's going to be your synagogue." It happened to have the same maroon-colored carpeting as Beth Israel had, and similar gold wooden décor around the edges. It faced the right direction. It faced East, so that we could put the Torah there. [The ark is on the Eastern wall, so that the congregation faces the direction of Jerusalem when praying.] They brought in very nice chairs, and we put tables up front. We created kind of a little altar area up front, with a speaker stand where we could have our services. And then we realized, oh, my goodness, the women and men have to sit separate, you know – in Orthodox services. We can solve this by putting a curtain down the middle. So, Eddie and I and his wife, Blayne, we went to Home Depot and we rigged up buckets with sand that we stuck wooden dowels in and put clothespins and hooks at the top, got some fabric, and hung it like sheets on a clothesline. The



women had one side, and the men had the other side. It was absolutely a superb setup. It was beautiful. They even brought in flowers for us, they brought in everything that we needed to set up -- tables, chairs, everything. The Rabbis that came in from New York needed a place to stay. The Comfort Suites was filled up. They were booked to the hilt with Entergy company. All their rooms were taken. So the Patels asked some of the Entergy guys if they would double up for a couple of nights, so that these Rabbis could have rooms.

RH: Wow.

JG: Some of the Entergy people moved over. Our guest Rabbis got rooms, because in Orthodox Judaism, you cannot ride on the High Holidays, or Sabbath. There's no driving in a car. You have to walk to the synagogue. None of our members lived in Kenner, walking distance to Comfort Suites, so that we could house them. They put them up. Our guests did not have to drive, they had rooms with microwaves and little refrigerators, so they can keep their kosher food cold, and then heat it up when they needed it. Yom Kippur is the day of 24-hour fasting anyway, so we really didn't have to eat for 24 hours. At the Break-fast, they could eat the meals that we had prepared, which were just dairy foods, and very simple -- fruits and vegetables and salads. So, it worked out. We had our own services. We had a good number of Beth Israel people there, and some other community people, and we were so pleased. These young men that came down were so warm, and so empathetic, and so caring, and conducted the most wonderful services for us. Everybody kind of pitched in, and did what they could. We had no Rabbi of our own, so we needed these gentlemen. And it worked out fine. And that was the jumpstart that we needed to make us -- the members of Beth Israel -- realize that we can be a congregation. There are enough of us, there's a nucleus of us, and as more and more people come back, we have our congregation still. We won't have that building right now. Maybe we'll rebuild there. Maybe we'll have to downsize. Maybe it'll be at a different address. But you know what? We moved from Carondelet Street to Canal



Boulevard, and we adjusted beautifully. We might have to move from Canal Boulevard to somewhere else, and as long as we're alive as a congregation, that's what counts. We started to have Sabbath services about every two or three weeks, as we got ourselves back up and running. We still had to depend on guest Rabbinic leadership for our services. All of our people in our congregation who had the synagogue skills to read the Torah, and to chant the Haftarah, and to lead us in prayers, those people evacuated. It just so happened that a young family went to Memphis, and he used to read Torah for us. One member returned, Gideon Daneshrad, who was filling in as our Gabbai, when our elderly Gabbai was ill, for the whole year. And he could lead the services, and he could read the Torah. And his son is a Rabbinic student. He could read the Torah. But then they left -- his family was in California, and he joined them in California and didn't come back. My son, Eddie, can do this, but it takes hours and hours of preparation each week, to read the Torah and practice and be ready to do it right. And Eddie had to get his law practice going, and he had to repair his flooded house. And so, we depended on the O.U. (Orthodox Union) sending us these young Rabbis and Rabbinic students, who came in, and some came here more than once. They took such a liking to us, and we loved them, and were so appreciative. They wanted to come back. Some of them came back two and three times, and we still e-mail each other. They are so concerned about us. So, we've had that kind of help, and as the year went on, we increased the frequency of our Sabbath services. After that one event at the Comfort Suites in Kenner, with the Patels, we knew that we could do it if we put our mind to it, and put our muscle to it. We got offers from almost all the congregations in this community to come and join them. We were offered the small chapel at Shir Chadash, and a separate kosher kitchen there. We were also approached by Chabad of Metairie, to come and pray with them. Shir Chadash is Conservative, it's mixed seating, it's a different kind of service from ours. Chabad is even a little more Orthodox than we are, and a lot of our members might not be too comfortable there. The Gates of Prayer offer seem to be the best suited to us.

RH: And they're the Reform synagogue.



JG: They're Reform. Rabbi Loewy, within a week or two weeks of my being back in the city, knew I was here. He called me in, and he called Eddie in. Eddie and I had been working so hard and so closely together. I could not have done this without my son. And I feel so guilty. Jewish mothers are good at guilt, you know (laughter), but I feel I am taking him away from his law practice, I am taking him away from his family, although his family's right there working with me. I'm just giving him so many hours of work, but I can't do this without him, and without Sol being so supportive, and Eddie's wife, Blayne, helping us, and Jacob and Lee Kansas (my cousins), of course, and Sol and Chink Lepow, and people who've been so helpful, the key people in our congregation and my key leadership have been great. We need to get more participation from all of our members. And now I think they're at the point where their housing is more stabilized. Those who've come back, who are going to return have returned. They're at the point where they're ready to pick up slack and be more active as a congregation. Gates of Prayer gave us our own separate meeting room, which has an Ark, and an Eternal Light. The Bart Room was added on about four years ago, and I asked, "Rabbi, when you built, why did you include an Ark and an Eternal Light?" He said, "Well, Jackie, you never know!" Gates of Prayer's sanctuary is at one side of the building, and the Bart Room is on the side, donated by Buddy Bart and his wife, Kathy. Kathy grew up in Beth Israel, and so she's a member of Beth Israel and Gates of Prayer. But we were offered this room to use, as long as we need it for our services, for our meetings, for our social events. Gates of Prayer has been so welcoming, and so warm, and so wonderful. The Rabbi and Louis Geiger, their administrator, the office staff, their President, Miriam Latter. They've just all been sp great to us -- all their members. Sometimes when they're finished with their services on Saturdays or Friday nights when we're there, they'll come over and visit with us, or have meals or refreshments with us. It's really nice. Really, really nice! And it's comfortable, because we have our own entryway into this room, away from their main entry, our own area. And yet, we each know each other is there, and we mingle beautifully. We bring in our own kosher foods. We haven't really taken



advantage of using their kitchen. We don't have the womanpower to work in the kitchen yet, all the volunteers I need. So we've been using Kosher Cajun and Casablanca, the two kosher restaurants that are here to supply us with meals. So this year is gone, we received a gift of a Torah, two days before the first anniversary of Katrina. So we celebrated one year in a very festive and wonderful and emotional way of getting a Torah scroll donated to us by the Jewish community of Los Angeles. It was a project started, actually, by a 13-year-old young lady, who heard about the plight of Beth Israel, and wanted to raise money to send to Beth Israel for Katrina relief. Her idea was to sell watches, wristwatches, and she sold five-dollar watches to her family and her friends, and her neighbors. Her Rabbi heard of her idea, and the congregation joined in on her project. Her synagogue is Century City Synagogue of Young Israel in L.A. It became their synagogue project. Two other congregations also heard about it. They jumped on the bandwagon, and they started to support this thing. And they raised enough money, selling watches -- she raised \$18,000 dollars in five-dollar watches. And she didn't make five dollars, because she had to buy the watches to begin with. So, that was a lot of watches. But I understand they were eventually selling them in supermarkets, and boutiques, and everybody was joining in this effort to help us. And you know, when you have that kind of support from people who don't know you, who've never been to New Orleans, but they know what we're going through here, and they feel like they need to help. They feel a basic tenet of the Jewish religion, and that is if one Jew sees another Jew in trouble, they reach out and they help. And this is what Matt and Aline Shulman did for us, and what little Hayley Fields did for us selling watches. Hayley's family and Rabbi Muskin came here on August 27, and we celebrated the one-year anniversary with a party, with a procession through the streets where the Torah was carried in with Klezmer music, which is like Jewish folk music from Eastern Europe that was played by a clarinetist and an accordionist that danced through the streets with us as we carried the Torah, from the Chabad Center in Metairie, across the West Esplanade Canal Bridge, the block down into the parking lot of Gates of Prayer, and then went into our room there at



Gates of Prayer, and had the most delightful presentation of the Torah from their community to our community. It was beautiful. And it was attended by Beth Israel members, and the Jewish community and the media was there. We had over 150 people, I would bet, crammed into that little room, celebrating with us. So, we thought that celebrating Katrina with a milestone event like this was most appropriate. It's not looking back, although it's important to remember and appreciate the year that was. But the Torah dedication was looking forward. And I think it's another major step in our recovery.

RH: What happened to your Rabbi?

JG: Rabbi Schiff evacuated to Memphis. He had been with us four years, in the four years he evacuated three times for hurricanes (laughter). His home was only three blocks from the synagogue, and it flooded. So they lost all their furniture, most of their clothing, all of his Judaic library, all of his books and research material, and sermons, and just everything that he had saved since being a pulpit Rabbi. He loved our congregation, and we loved him. He was energetic. He was optimistic. He was a fabulous teacher and lecturer, and people loved to go to his classes, and to hear his sermons. And a good, a really good Judaic scholar. He evacuated with five children. The youngest was a two-month-old baby. And we had no synagogue for him to return to. At first he said, "Jackie, I'm coming back. We're going to rebuild the Lakefront area. We're going to rebuild Beth Israel. We'll get our congregation up and running," but that was before we all realized how devastating the floodwaters were going to be. So, we had no synagogue for him to come back to. We had no home to put him and his family. We weren't yet into Gates of Prayer. This was very early on. And besides, his wife and these five young children were, kind of, "spooked" by all of this that had happened to them. Having to evacuate three out of the four years that they were here. That's kind of frightening. The children were really upset over having to do this and losing all their belongings. And here she is, nursing a two-month-old baby with four other children. We realized probably by



that November, December, that the Rabbi couldn't just wait in Memphis for things to happen so that they could possibly return. It was going to take longer than that, and he couldn't just sit idle. He moved with his family to New Jersey, right across the river from (clears throat) New York, because he got a position with Aish HaTorah, which is the Yeshiva where he received his Rabbinic degree. Rabbi Shiff is now working in adult education, which is one of his fortes. Eventually, he'll be a great pulpit Rabbi again. I'm sure that that's going to happen real soon. He did come back to New Orleans since Katrina. When we took our Torah scrolls from Becky's house and re-buried them in our cemetery. That was in mid-March, 2006. He came back in town for that ceremony, and was with us for the whole Sabbath weekend. We begged him, everybody, "Oh, Rabbi Schiff, we miss you, how's Chanah, how're the children, how's the family, but when are you coming back, won't you please come back?" And I think in his heart he just wished he could. But he could not uproot his family, and bring them to New Orleans again. There is no guarantee that another hurricane this year, or in the future, would require another evacuation. They could not handle that. So, it was a family thing that he had to do. We're in touch with the Shiffs. He did an amazing job at the Torah burial ceremony for us. He made it (clears throat), a difficult and sad time very meaningful. In the lives of most Jews, they will never see a Torah scroll being buried. And here we were as a congregation, burying all seven of our scrolls. It was a powerful, sad experience. I remember Rabbi Shiff saying, "This is not fair. This is not fair," and the death of Myer Lachoff, his lay leader in the congregation, who died two days after the storm in the nursing home, was not fair. But, you know what? Who are we to say what's fair? This is not a static world that we live in, you know. We constantly are going to have earthquakes, and tsunamis, and hurricanes, and we have to contend ourselves with this, and we have to work with it. And those of us who are fortunate enough not to have been flooded out, not to have lost everything, we have to have the dedication and the strength to stay here and rebuild the community. I've been here all my life, since my family came from Europe, and we talked about where we would go. If we came home and our house



was flooded, it might have been different -- if we lost everything, if this sofa wasn't here for me to sit on, and my books and my pictures and my videos, and all my memorabilia wasn't here of almost 50 years of marriage, I might not have had the strength to rebuild. And we talked about where we would go. And you would go to where your children are, naturally. So, I have two in Atlanta, and one in San Diego, and one in Dallas. Where would we choose? It's too far to go to California, and Sol says it's so expensive living in California. Atlanta traffic can drive you mad. Nothing is close in Atlanta. It's complicated living there, although they have a viable, vibrant Jewish population, that would be great. We don't know about Dallas. We were in Dallas for a month when we evacuated, but it never, even living there close with my kids, it was never home. And when we found that we could come home and had a home to come to and be here. My responsibility to Beth Israel was a big draw too. So, here we are, and we're going to rebuild New Orleans and Beth Israel as best we can.

RH: OK. We're going to stop for a minute --

END OF AUDIO FILE 2

RH: -- on tape three with Katrina's Jewish Voices. And so we can leave and have some gumbo. But I want us to think a little bit --

JG: That's not kosher, Roz. (laughter)

RH: Oh.

JG: No seafood gumbo.

RH: No seafood gumbo. So, what I would like to ask you about is about what -- are there any things as being Jewish that have helped sustain you, any frameworks that





you've used that kind of come to mind --

JG: OK. I can honestly say that (clears throat) it's not just the responsibility being President of the congregation, and the first female president -- I guess I'm standing up for the capacity of women to do this job, of the capability of women to do this job. But I think that my drive is more family-rooted, and one thing I didn't tell you about the Comfort Suites. The reason we know the Patels so well -- Kenny Patel, who's actually the owner of the local one -- is that they bought that piece of property about four years ago to build the Comfort Suites on, and it was a vacant, huge lot, a nice big piece of property there that was owned by two gentlemen who had it for maybe 35, 40 years, put signs for sale up from time to time, but never got any serious bites on it, until the Patels came along. And they bought that property from these two men who happened to be my husband Sol and my father, Ralph Pressner. And when my dad passed away, oh, gosh, over 30 years ago, Sol took care of this property, it was half his. The other half then came to my sister and me, but he managed it and took care of the taxes, and kept the grass cut. He tried to sell it and never could, until four years ago when Ken Patel came along and got interested in it. So, here we were on a piece of ground that we once owned, that is now a Comfort Suites, owned by two Hindu Indians, and who gave us the use of their building free, for our Jewish High Holiday service and made us feel welcomed. And I'm thinking that as much as my dad loved Beth Israel and worked so hard for that synagogue and that congregation, he has got to be the happiest man in Heaven, looking down and just smiling away, because Beth Israel is having Yom Kippur services right on the ground that he once owned. So, it's really a drive that comes from my education in Beth Israel, my growing up in the synagogue, my knowing such wonderful Rabbis and teachers who influenced my life there, and gave me an appreciation of my Jewish heritage, and just a love for our tradition. Our family is so steeped in the holidays of Judaism. When Passover comes around, we have two evenings of Passover Seders as part of this holiday, the first two evenings of Passover. And my cousin and I take turns. One year the Passover Seders are at my house, and then at my cousin's, Lee Kansas. Recently,



my daughter-in-law Blayne and Eddie Gothard have had the Seders at their home, and we have anywhere from 35 to 45 people. Mostly it's family, mostly it's cousins, and second cousins. We've just stayed so close. And also close friends of the family. Those times are so happy and so wonderful for us, when we all get together, and our kids come in from out of town, and it's an in-gathering of our family. That can also happen at Thanksgiving time, when my kids all come in town. And it can happen during other holidays. At Hanukah we have big family gatherings and we exchange little gifts and make a big to-do. Jacob and Lee once had a fishing camp down river, in Phoenix, Louisiana. Well, that blew away in Katrina. But before it blew away, it was a gathering place. We would all go down there and go out fishing, and have a wonderful time there. So, it's family, and it's -- hey, you got a little toy to play with? Good girl. (talking to dog) -- It's just family, and happy times of being together. I'm sad about my kids being so separated. And their children won't grow up knowing each other as well as I knew all my first cousins, you know, because they're in four different cities. But that's a demographic thing that's happened to every family. I mentioned earlier that I was the first in my generation, along with my cousin, Albert Regenbogen, to graduate college. The next generation, all of our kids went to college. Then all of our kids went to graduate school. When they go off to graduate school, they're more mobile. In graduate school, you get rooted in the profession that you're studying, and you tend to stay away from your home community. And that's what happened to many of my children, most of my children.

RH: Does that make you fearful for the New Orleans community of Beth Israel, though?

JG: Yes, yes, it does, because we're losing our youth – our future generations. For example, I have five kids. One is a Beth Israel member, because he's here in town, and he's already served as President of the congregation. Eddie was President before me. All of our children are involved in their own congregations where they live, and that pleases me. And they go to synagogue, and their kids are getting Jewish educations. I'm delighted for that, that they'll stay Jewishly connected, and loyal to their heritage, but



not having them here is tough. And the same thing is happening in our Jewish community. We're not growing. Before Katrina, we were not really growing in population. We would lose as many to other communities as we would have new people move here. And those that came in, I think I mentioned it before, university or college or medical school-affiliated. We would get new families. Some of these would be young people, and that would be good. And then they would have young children, and that helped our day schools stay viable. But our congregation is not reflective of that. Our congregation has lost too many of its youth. We're an aging group. We needed somebody like Rabbi Shiff. In those four years with Rabbi Shiff, we attracted a lot more young couples and young people, and it was great for us. We were on the road of rebuilding the youth. Well, that got stymied by Katrina. So, now we're engaged on a search for a Rabbinic head. We need a Rabbi replacement, and my son, Eddie, and a committee is working on that with the Orthodox Union, and with the Young Israel organization in New York, to see if there are some candidates who would come down here and take on this challenge of rebuilding the Jewish community. Jewish Federation claims that we were about 10,000 Jews in New Orleans, that's all. I had heard as many as 13,000 (clears throat) -- excuse me -- in a demographic study. But they said, the realistic figure was 10,000. Now they're guessing that we are about 6,000 to 6,500. So we've lost 40 percent, almost. That's going to challenge the viability of the New Orleans Jewish community. Not only the youth, but a lot of the older folks, who were established families with money, philanthropic money, they've moved away. So we have lost that financial support, too, as well as losing the people themselves. That's a big concern.

RH: So, what do you -- at Beth Israel. Do you have some plans, or some other --

JG: Yeah. We have plans. There is a program that's been in effect, and in operation in many Jewish communities, and we've had it here before and it's been very successful. It's a program called the Kollel -- K-O-L-L-E-L. Essentially, communities contract with Jewish teachers, Rabbis, young families with young children to attend the Jewish Day



Schools, you know, to make a vibrant young Jewish community, but with talent in Jewish education, and in Jewish leadership. These are young families that form a (clears throat) small group called a Kollel. Two, three, four families, the more the merrier, will come into a community. They obligate themselves to anywhere from two to four years, average of three years, to stay in that community, to teach in the day schools, to work with the Rabbis in their congregations, and to build upon the Jewish program in that community. [Historically, they can make a big difference, a positive influence on the quality of Jewish life.] The Orthodox Union, and Young Israel, the R.C.A., Rabbinic Counsel of America, they can tell you that communities where kollels have gone in, young families have gone in in a matter of four or five years, congregations have grown, people have come back to Jewish education, the kids are more involved in day school learning, as opposed to afternoon Hebrew school. Kollels have been a favorable and positive impact on the Jewish observance in the community. More kosher restaurants have opened up, more Judaic gift shops have opened up. People make trips to Israel, and that's been a good thing for the community that they are Zionist together, and support Israel together. And they support all the national Jewish organizations, Hadassah, International B'Nai Brith, Zionists of America. National Council of Jewish Women. The more Jews you have, the more activity, the more active the whole community is. And the kollel is the ultimate dream that we have at Beth Israel. If we could find and finance -- the big thing is financing this too, because these families come in, they need a salary, they need to support their families, they need to have jobs. And the main job of the head of each family is the male who is a Rabbi or an intern Rabbi, and he will teach, help with services, teach in the day schools, teach the kids bar and bat mitzvah lessons, have adult education as well, and the women also work, some of them. They'll teach in the schools, and they have will have women's learning sessions, and they'll have cooking classes for women, and do the things that are all centered around the synagogue and around the Jewish community, living a life Jewishly. That would be our ultimate hope for the future of Beth Israel. If we cannot get this, make this happen, and cannot afford to do this



immediately, that doesn't mean we can't do it in about a year or two years. But the important thing for us now is to get a Rabbi. I'm a lay leader. Eddie's a lay leader. My whole committee, I mean, we're just the congregants. We are working hard to bring ourselves back, we can make ourselves set up services. But bringing in these guest Rabbis and young Yeshiva students to help us is temporary. We need now Rabbinic leadership. And I think then, the Rabbi becomes our spiritual head, and we work with him. That, I think, is the next step we need to take. Moving toward that step, we purchased a home. We actually purchased a lovely home in Metairie, one block walking distance to Gates of Prayer. Now, Gates of Prayer is still just a temporary spot for us. We hope some day that we'll find our own building, or be able to build a building, or converted building, to our use. It might be in Metairie, it might be near Canal Boulevard. We're studying, all options are open. But --

RH: What are the (overlapping voices; inaudible) --

JG: We have a house --

RH: OK.

JG: [Before we purchased the home, we had to ask people living in the Gates of Prater neighborhood to house our guests – so they could walk to] where our services are. They usually come in over a Sabbath, when they can't ride. And we've provided kosher meals, and it's worked. Now we have our own home. All of our guests that come in stay in our own house. In fact, the first group of guests were seven students from a Yeshiva, a Jewish day school in Baltimore. They came last weekend with their Rabbi, and led services for us. They stayed at the house. We didn't even have beds in the house yet. It's a beautifully reconditioned home. The downstairs flooded, but you walk in now and it's all brand new and wonderful, with big bedrooms and bathrooms. They came in, they brought sleeping bags and they didn't care, and they slept in this new house and they thought it was great, and they were wonderful for us. And we now have beds in the



house, and we have a Rabbi and his family coming for the High Holidays, which start in just two days -- Rosh Hashanah. They're coming from Memphis, and the cantor who chants the services along with the Rabbi's leadership, a young Israeli fellow, is coming. He has a beautiful cantorial voice. He's in Memphis. The two of them are coming in to lead us in Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers, and be with us through the High Holidays.

RH: Now, you're a modern -- you call yourself a modern Orthodox community?

JG: Yeah, we're mainstream Orthodox, or modern Orthodox.

RH: Mainstream.

JG: Yeah.

RH: And do you walk to services?

JG: According to Orthodox tradition, you should not ride on the Sabbath. I have to be honest with you. I don't live within walking distance to my synagogue. I do drive to synagogue, and I do drive back home. I try not to do any other kind of driving, and I don't go shopping on the rest of the Sabbath -- I am around my home. But if I don't drive to synagogue on Saturday morning, I don't think I would stay here and open my prayer book. I know I wouldn't do that, I wouldn't have the discipline, maybe, and I wouldn't enjoy it as much as I enjoy being with the congregation in a service with the Rabbi, hearing the sermon and getting inspired. That's a viable service for me.

RH: So, is one of the considerations -- the reason I brought this up -- of if you build, and where you build, is where your congregants are going to be living?

JG: Yes.

RH: Is that --



JG: It should be. And what we are finding is that many more of us are in Metairie now, than in the Lakefront area. We still have a few, very few congregants uptown. They come out here. They come out here to worship with us.

RH: Now, you mentioned Young Israel, and that's a particular --

JG: That's another umbrella organization. They, across the U.S., must have maybe 150 congregations that are affiliated with Young Israel. They're also Orthodox. They are just maybe a little bit more to the left of the O.U., the Orthodox Union. Basically, the Orthodox belief is the same among them. Also Orthodox Judaism is the basis of the Lubavitch movement, which is here in the city, in the Chabad centers. There's a Chabad center at Tulane University, came here maybe 25 or more years ago -- to serve the Jewish students at Tulane, along with the Hillel house. But the Hillel is more across the board Conservative or Reform than Orthodox, where Chabad is (clears throat) much more Orthodox, a strict Orthodox movement, the Lubavitch movement. They expanded, also, into Metairie, and have a synagogue a half a block from Gates of Prayer. So, out in Metairie there -- I think Metairie's becoming a major hub of the Jewish community of our city, in that right along West Esplanade, you have the Jewish Community Center, which currently houses the offices of the Jewish Federation. They share a parking lot with the synagogue that is Shir Chadash, it's a Conservative synagogue. A half mile down West Esplanade is Gates of Prayer Reform Synagogue, and across the street from them is the Chabad Center. So, you have everything from Reform to Orthodox, very Orthodox, to Conservative, very traditional Conservative, to the Federation offices, and even the Anti-Defamation League is in the offices now with the Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Center. It's become a hub within a half a mile of each other, and I kind of like that. And I kind of like that we (Beth Israel) fit in out here, and it's nice. But again, I'm not limiting myself to Metairie as the future location of Beth Israel's synagogue. I think we have to keep all options open. We actually looked at a piece of property that was along Canal Boulevard, thinking maybe it would do for us. It was flooded, but it has



potential to be restored -- and it's smaller. If we choose to downsize from 7000 Canal Boulevard, this might be an appropriate option. But we would be isolated there. We would be the only synagogue in that area, which is good for that area if there are a lot of Jewish families returning there. But I'm not sure if there're more families there than in Metairie that are Jewish. I'll have to count heads on that. Federation could probably tell me.

RH: Do you feel supported by the larger Jewish community here in New Orleans, or is it a challenge? Because it's a predominantly Reform --

JG: It is a predominantly a Reform city. There are three Reform congregations that are big in membership numbers, big compared to the Orthodox, and big compared to Chabad. And the Conservative movement has one synagogue here. They have a sizeable population, but they lost a lot of members, too, after evacuation. All of our numbers are down. I don't know if we took a bigger hit, proportionately than anybody else. I know that the smaller you are, the more significant the loss is going to feel, but everybody took losses.

RH: So, do you feel supported by this larger -- ?

JG: Definitely.

RH: You do?

JG: Definitely. Every Rabbi in this community has contacted me since Katrina early on, offering help -- what can I do? There's a new Rabbi in town, Andy Busch, uptown at Touro Synagogue. He happens to be on the Bush-Clinton Katrina Relief Fund Committee, their local committee. He called me early on, making sure that Beth Israel got their application in, and their grant application put together, so that we would be eligible for monies from Bush-Clinton. Gates of Prayer, of course, opened their arms to us. Chabad did too, and also Shir Chadash. When we don't have enough people, or we





don't have Sabbath services scheduled for Beth Israel, I feel the need to be in services on Shabbos morning, on Sabbath morning. I have coined a phrase for myself, "I shul-hop" -- shul is other word for synagogue, so I will say, "So, where are we going this Shabbas?" I feel like Chabad this weekend. Let's go to Chabad. Or, let's go to Gates of Prayer. Or Shir Chadash, a lot of our friends are at Shir Chadash, so let's go be with them this weekend. So, they see me walk in, and they're so happy to see us, and we're happy to be there. We feel comfortable and welcomed. We'll go to services at Shir Chadash and often get honors, get called up to the Torah. They're just so nice, and I find that wherever I go, my celeb is being President (laughter) of Beth Israel, so it's Rabbi Nemes, or Rabbi Loewy, or Rabbi Lichtenfeld, the new Rabbi at Shir Chadash, who always say, "We welcome Jackie Gothard as President of Beth Israel and we're happy to have you with us." So, yeah, the support has been wonderful and appreciated by us.

RH: Although do you think that, you know, down the road as they go, there might be decisions that, you know, might favor the Reform community more, I mean, do you think --

JG: You know, I just have to hope that in the wisdom of the Board of the Jewish Federation, and the monies that are becoming available to us through major gifts that have been given at the national level, geared for Katrina relief, that all the synagogues will be treated based on their need, and based on their use of the funds. Now, very, very early on, the first people to visit Beth Israel with me from out of state was a Rabbi, James Rudin. He happens to be a retired chaplain from the army, a Rabbi chaplain, recently retired. He was contacted by the American Jewish Committee. It's a national body of non-denominational Judaism affiliation -- neither Orthodox, Conservative, nor Reform -- across the board body -- that works toward supporting Jewish causes everywhere in the U.S. When Katrina happened, and the flooding happened, they were the first ones to send a representative here to assess areas of need. Rabbi Rudin came to New Orleans in October, and the AJC started raising money immediately. He was the first one that I



brought from outside the community into Beth Israel. And that was the third time I cried. When Rabbi Rudin came in, he said, "Oh, my goodness, oh, my goodness." And I thought, you know, I've been cleaning up, and scooping up mold, and dirty books, and wet objects, and throwing out, and I got beyond the oh, my goodness. And I just got into the work of it, with the volunteers. But then, when he just stood there, and he started crying, I said, you're right, it's oh, my goodness, and I just wailed with him. That was an intense moment for him, and for us, because it was the first time from outside the community that somebody came in wanting to help and being so concerned. It ended up with a \$125,000 gift, an out-and-out check made out to Congregation Beth Israel, but that same amount was also given to Gates of Prayer, to Dillard University, and to Saint Clement of Rome Church, which is across the way from Gates of Prayer. And the reason I learned afterwards that all the money did not go just to Jewish organizations or synagogues, was that the A.J.C., looks for ecumenical programming, and cooperative programming in each community with Jewish and non-Jewish organizations working together. Gates of Prayer and their neighbors, Saint Clement of Rome, share some programming around Thanksgiving time, share some lecture times, and share parking lots. On Easter Sunday they park at Gates of Prayer, and on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Gates of Prayer overflows their parking lot into Saint Clement. So, there's a cooperative effort and a neighborliness there. Dillard University, once a year, has an ecumenical weekend, where churches and synagogues, black and white, and all the community is invited, with wonderful lectures from the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Jewish faiths, all learning about each other, and sharing experiences. AJC likes this. And that's where they place their money. And so, that has happened -- big funding has come in, and hopefully will come in from other sources. We haven't heard from Bush-Clinton yet, but we know we're decent candidates. And the O.U. has been very, very supportive, and we know that they have big funds that are geared for Katrina relief, and we're the only O.U.-affiliated synagogue in New Orleans. Recently back on board with O.U. came Anshe Sfard, we understand. But we have always been an O.U. affiliate, as



their umbrella organization for us, and they've been wonderful. They've been wonderful. Anything we need we get -- new prayer books, you know, and new supplies for the synagogue, whatever.

RH: So, here you are. It's a year later, and so let's just take a few minutes here, to talk about changes in your life. (laughter) You know, has it -- has your outlook on the world changed any in this past year?

JG: Mostly, I think I get tired at times, and I get a little down, and I think, this is not going to work, this is not going to work. And then, when we have a low turnout at Sabbath services, or some people are not in town that I need to be in town, that I'm depending on, but everybody's got their own private agenda. Beth Israel has become my private agenda, even above my own home. I have a new roof on my house, but I haven't painted the ceilings where the stains are. I have a new fence up, and I have trees cut down, but I haven't replaced my greenhouse that blew away yet. And the wintertime is coming, and I'm going to lose my new plants that I've collected or received (laughter) as gifts. We do have our patio roof replaced, and we had the fence repaired for the dog, but my personal agenda has been set aside, and I'm kind of resentful of that a little bit. But then, some wonderful thing will happen at Beth Israel, like a group of young students will come in, and make us feel so good, and we'll have a wonderful turnout at services. And then we get this Torah given to us, and it's -- it's good stuff, then, that boosts you up again, and makes you think that we do have a chance for this, and we can do this, and we need to do this. And so, I have highs and lows in this. I wish I had more time to garden. I wish I had more time to visit my eight grandchildren who live out of town. That's what I resent. I'm not free to travel the way I used to, with my husband. He's retired now. We should both be available to do this more, and see our kids more.

RH: You never thought you'd be doing this --

JG: Never.



RH: -- at this point in your life.

JG: I'm not really retired -- I work part-time as a travel agent, and the travel industry (laughter), is not what it used to be. I used to actually lead trips to Israel. Travel to Israel is not what it used to be. But I still go into my agency where I work part-time, at least three or four afternoons a week. I used to say, it keeps me off the streets, but I like it, I enjoy it -- it's a small agency, and the women that I work with are so sweet, and so nice. When I'm away they cover for me and my clients. I have such nice friends, people who have been my clientele for years. But Beth Israel is taking time away from that. It's taking time from my garden. I like to be home on a pretty day, working in the garden. I swim three mornings a week as my main exercise, and today I had to miss swimming because I had too much to do to get ready for Rosh Hashanah, so I resent that sometimes. But you know, this too shall pass, and I think that we are making strides. We're moving forward. I try not to let the times that I don't feel optimistic stay too long with me. And I think of all the people out there who don't know us, but are contacting me to help Beth Israel. I can tell you something that happened, that I can hardly wait to see. I got an e-mail out of the blue -- people are sending us things -- gift items, and a brand new shofar, and prayer books, and everything that we need has been replaced, just about. We now have to replace ourselves, and get ourselves more active. But I got an e-mail from a perfect stranger, a family where the daughter wrote and said that her parents travel around the world a lot. They are retired. And he's an artist -- he does watercolor paintings. Whenever they go to a different community, or country, and see a very old or pretty synagogue, he takes a picture of it, and he comes home and then paints that as a water color. That becomes his New Year card for Rosh Hashanah. Jews send out Rosh Hashanah greetings like the Christians send Christmas cards. He's never been to New Orleans, but he knows all about what's happened to Beth Israel from the news, and he would like to paint Beth Israel this year on his greeting card. And he can't come down here to see it, would I please send them pictures of our synagogue before, and some pictures after. I did that, and I got an e-mail two days ago, from the



daughter, saying that her father's cards are in the making, he would like to send me a copy, but she can't find my address. So I got it to her real quick so I could see the card that has Congregation Beth Israel on it that's going to go to all his friends. That's an original watercolor of our synagogue. I don't know what it's going to look like. I sent her a little synopsis of the history of our congregation, and a little bit about our year with Katrina recovery. So, that's going to be fun to see.

RH: So, what are you most grateful for? It sounds like things like that.

JG: My health.

RH: Your health?

JG: Mostly.

RH: Mostly?

JG: -- I've had some health scares in my time. I've had two cardiac stints put in, and I've had a breast cancer situation, and I've had back surgery, and I'm -- you're looking at a bionic woman. I've kind of been repaired everywhere you could see and not see, and I'm lucky that I'm active and I'm physically able to do a lot, and I have a lot of energy. Yes, I'm grateful for, my health. I'm grateful for my husband who puts up with all the time that I'm not here to have meals ready, or to look at a movie with him, or to go out to the theatre, because he understands what I'm doing is important and he supports it, and he's there for me. And I'm grateful for my children, even my children who live away. They send donations to Beth Israel, they talk about Beth Israel, they come and they visit, and each one as they've come in, over this year, for the first time before we even came to our house, they wanted to go from the airport to Beth Israel. And I guess maybe each of those times they cried, and I cried with them too, because they grew up in that building. They grew up in that synagogue. As close as I was to Beth Israel, that's how close they feel -- all my children. I'm so grateful that they appreciate their roots, and they're as



Jewish in the communities that they live in as they would be here. I'm so grateful for that. And I'm grateful for nine healthy grandbabies, because it took awhile for my kids to marry, and have offspring (laughter), even though I wasn't subtle about it. I kept saying, enough with all your higher degrees and your education. Let's find spouses, let's get busy, I mean, I raised you so that I can have grandbabies, you know. You're bigger now. You do something for me. And finally that started happening. We had Benjamin first, and he was our gift, he was such a gift, and I was the most dotting, interfering grandmom I think there was. And the kids all call me Bubbe, because Bubbe, in the Yiddish vernacular, is grandmother. And Zadie is the term for grandfather, but I always call Sol, Honey. And whenever I call him, it's Honey, Honey, do this, Honey, do that, Honey, please get me this. And they caught on with Honey, so to all the kids we are now Bubbe and Honey. And it's just fun to be alive in a time like this when you have a challenge, but you have your health and you have a big support system there with you.

RH: I think that's a beautiful way to wrap up, so if there's anything else you'd like to say, I please invite you to say it.

JG: I just want to thank you for listening to me. I know I'm a talker (laughter), and it doesn't take much of a question to get me started, so I'm just grateful that people are willing to listen to what happened to Beth Israel, the history of our congregation, the importance of an Orthodox entity in this city, that Beth Israel be maintained, as a modern Orthodox congregation. That our story can be told and recorded in history is an important thing, and I thank the Jewish archival community for including me in their interviews.

RH: Wonderful. OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]