Richard Lipsey Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: – in New Orleans, Louisiana. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Woldenberg/Goldring Institute for Southern Jewish Life and the Jewish Women's Archive. Richard, do you agree to be interviewed and know that the interview is being videotaped?

Richard Lipsey: Yes, I do.

RH: So, why don't we start with a little of your background, where you were born, when you came to Baton Rouge, and a little about your attachment to the Baton Rouge community?

RL: Sure. I was born in Selma, Alabama, in 1939. My family moved to Baton Rouge in 1943. My father moved to Baton Rouge to work for an uncle from New Orleans that had a hide and fur company – Steinberg Hide and Fur Company – and they had a large presence here in New Orleans and New Iberia and several other places and didn't have anybody to run that operation, so his uncle said, "Come to Baton Rouge. Operate it. If you like it, you can buy the business," which he did in 1945. So, I grew up in Baton Rouge. We belonged to a Reform congregation. They had two congregations in Baton Rouge after the war. There was one before, and they split at the end of the war. We belonged to one that was very classical Reform, Temple B'nai Israel, and I grew up in that congregation [and] had what you might call a very mild, mediocre religious education. We did go to Sunday school, and I was confirmed – there was no bar or bat mitzvah in our temple at that time – and lived in Baton Rouge, graduated from high school, went to LSU [Louisiana State University], graduated from LSU, went into the service, served in the Army for two years at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and then in Washington, where I was the aide to the Commanding General of the military district of

Washington, and also an aide to President John Kennedy. My claim to fame was I'm the only person, other than the doctors, that watched John Kennedy's autopsy. We were responsible for the body from the time it got to Washington to the time it was buried, so that was another little interesting point in my life. Came back to Baton Rouge and married my wife, Susan Haspel, from New Orleans, and we have two children, Laurie and Wendy, both married and have children. and spent my adult life in Baton Rouge in the retail business, which I sold in the late 1980's. I'd started a wholesale business in the early – mid-1970s, and I continued in the wholesale business, which I'm still in. The wholesale sporting goods business. We distribute all over the country. My oldest daughter, Laurie, is now President of that company, and we also – my wife's family, owned a clothing manufacturing company called Haspel, [which] started in 1909, and her father sold it in 1977 to Palm Beach. They moved it out, and it was resold several times. I bought the company back in 1995, out of a bankruptcy of a very large company. It was one of many labels the company owned. We've reintroduced that label in 1997, and it's grown back now that we're in several hundred stores around the country. That's sort of, in a nutshell, my life history.

RH: So, tell me about what you like about Baton Rouge.

RL: Baton Rouge is a wonderful town. Baton Rouge is – it's large enough. Particularly because of the university, because of LSU, it's large enough that we have a nice arts community. We have good programs at LSU, the LSU Opera, and the music school at LSU, and LSU has a fantastic art museum, a new art museum. We've had one for years, but we have a brand new one, which my wife is now chairman of the board of that art museum. They have a great symphony in Baton Rouge, so you have the arts in Baton Rouge. We have a pretty good school system in Baton Rouge. Like all over Louisiana and in large metropolitan areas, there is something to be desired in the public school system. But we also have a pretty good private and semi-private school system in Baton Rouge. A lot of industry in Baton Rouge. Baton Rouge is a growing city. We've had

continued growth over so many years, and it's just a fine city to live in. Sports – we've got a great sports program in Baton Rouge, with LSU, and Susan and I really enjoy going to basketball, football, baseball, ladies' basketball, softball – so it's a lot to entertain yourself in Baton Rouge.

RH: And you've been president of the Jewish Federation in Baton Rouge?

RL: I was the second president when we formed it. That's how, really, after many, many years of being a Reform Jew, and really not too concerned with Jewish matters, quite frankly. After the '67 war, a group of us got together, and we became members of the Young Leadership Cabinet of the UJA. They picked two or three of us from – well, actually, there's just two of us, I think, from Baton Rouge, Hans Sternberg and myself, maybe one other – it escapes me at this time. But we formed a Federation at that time. They had had a UJA drive previously, but it was really sort of insignificant. But we formed a Federation, and Hans was the first President. I was the second President of the Federation. That was, like I say, way back when.

RH: How big is the Jewish community in Baton Rouge? Do you know?

RL: The Jewish community now is probably in the vicinity – and I'm talking pre-Katrina, because we don't know the sum total right now of the Jewish population of Baton Rouge. There are so many Jews that really have moved to Baton Rouge from New Orleans that have not affiliated, and so it's hard to determine how many are really there. We had probably close to five hundred Jewish families identifiable in Baton Rouge. Quite frankly, there probably are more. We know of a lot, for instance, professors at LSU that come to LSU, and they don't know whether they're going to be there one year, or three years, or permanently, and they really don't affiliate. The same with the plants – Exxon, Albemarle, Dow Chemical. We really don't know how many executives come in and don't know how long they're going to be there. They don't affiliate. It's a shame. We try to get to them, but it's difficult. There're probably more than we think in Baton Rouge.

RH: So, why don't we talk a little bit now about Katrina? What do people in Baton Rouge do to plan for a hurricane? [laughter]

RL: Well, Baton Rouge, we've been lucky over the years. We've been hit with several hurricanes over the years, and it's nothing, obviously, you can do to prepare. You can certainly stock up on water and things like that, but the worst things that happen in Baton Rouge is that we have such beautiful trees in Baton Rouge. We have major losses of trees due to wind damage – the tree loss. The wind damage causes the power lines to go down, and depending on where you live in Baton Rouge, you can be without electricity for one day or a week. We were without electricity for almost a week after Katrina. The last fifteen, twenty years, after two or three hurricanes, we've been without electricity for as long as – about a week is the longest. What I've done is I've put a generator in my home twenty-five years ago and two homes ago. Every time we've built a new home or moved, we put a generator in. So basically, enough electricity to run all your lights, your refrigerator, and your appliances. So, we're okay there. After Katrina, we really learned our lesson because we had so many – we've never had evacuees before – only to spend the night because several times New Orleans has told people to get out, and so they come for one night, the hurricane passes, and they go home. This time was different. We had every bedroom full – four other bedrooms in the house full, sofas full of people, and without air conditioning, it became very uncomfortable. So, I recently installed a very large generator now [laughter] that runs everything, including the air conditioning.

RH: Let's go back then and talk about Katrina, particularly when you noticed it and when you started to be alarmed about it.

RL: Well, you could see just by watching television. I mean, it was amazing. If you go back, and it's something that you probably very easily could document from footage from the National Weather Service. But Katrina was a huge, huge storm. The power of it, nobody was really sure. They knew it was getting stronger. But from the time it was

south of Florida, south of the Keys, before it really entered the Gulf, you could tell this was going to be a major storm; you just didn't know where it was going to go. My brother is in the water business in Atlanta, and he also has a contract with the Corps of Engineers and with FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] to distribute water after a major disaster. He had called us, I think it was early on a Friday morning or Saturday morning, and said that the government was seriously, seriously concerned about this storm and had sent him to the FEMA headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida, and that we should really prepare for the storm. About six hours later, I got a call from him that the government had decided to make Baton Rouge the FEMA headquarters because it looked like the storm was going to pass Southern Florida and really go into the Gulf. So, he hopped in his car. There was no other way to get here. He could drive faster than he could get on an airplane, so he hopped in his car, drove to Baton Rouge, and got to the FEMA headquarters. They were still in a sort of little disarray because they just weren't sure exactly where that storm was coming [from], but they had a pretty good idea. They just didn't know how strong it was going to be. He came and had dinner with us. I had gotten him very – he wanted to be on call and didn't want to disturb us. I'd gotten him a hotel room by the Hardee's because, by then, people had started leaving New Orleans, and every hotel room within a hundred miles of New Orleans or more was taken in every direction. But anyhow, he had a hotel room. He called about – I don't remember. It was very, very early the next morning, and said that FEMA told him this is really going to be a big one, and they needed him in Washington to be at FEMA headquarters in Washington to coordinate the water distribution there. His son was in Atlanta doing the actual ordering and getting the water. So, that's how we were keeping up with the intensity, and knowing that the storm was going to be really something like we had never seen, maybe since Audrey, back in 1957. But this was going to be a bad storm. That's about the time New Orleans was ordered to evacuate, and I had called Susan's mother here in New Orleans. Susan had been talking to her mother, Byrde Haspel, and her brother and sister-in-law, Edward and Beth, and her aunt and uncle, her

aunt Sarah Stone, and her daughter. And said, “Look, you all come to Baton Rouge.” “Oh, we’ll get up there.” This was on Saturday. “We’ll leave later in the morning.” I said, “Look, last year you all evacuated, and you waited too late, and it took you all twelve hours to get to Baton Rouge from New Orleans.” I said, “You’ve got to leave early.” Well, of course, they didn’t pay any attention, and of course, Byrde was at the mercy of Edward, and Edward had to move furniture up in his house and do things like that. When they finally left, it was another, I think, ten-hour –this time – ordeal for them to get to Baton Rouge. But they made it with their two dogs. By the time Susan’s aunt, Sarah Stone, got ready to leave, and we’d been urging her to leave all day – she and Carol. I don’t know exactly what the problem was, but they couldn’t get away. By the time they finally – it was late in the afternoon by the time they decided to leave, and they couldn’t get out. They left One River Place and got on the highway, and for like three hours, didn’t go a quarter of a mile, just stuck in downtown New Orleans. They got frustrated, turned around, and went back to One River Place to ride out the storm. Susan’s other aunt and uncle, Gerald and Joan Berenson, kind of the same thing. They just waited, and they just decided – look, they live out in Metairie, they’ve never had water, [and] there’s not going to really be a problem. They decided just to ride the storm out, and they were in contact with their children. One lives in Baton Rouge, and a couple of their children live out in Washington. So they decided to ride the storm out. So, the first night, we had just Byrde, Susan’s mother, and Edward and Beth and the dogs at our home. That was Saturday. Then Sunday, the people were still evacuating from New Orleans. Actually, it was late, late Saturday night, I think another couple called that were on the highway about 11:30, and they had been on the highway since 9:00 o’clock that morning [or] 10:00 o’clock that morning. They just called Edward and Beth, didn’t know where they were, got their cell phone, and we got them off the highway, and they came to our home, and that filled up another bedroom. That kind of went on for a few days. People were just coming and going or staying, and this was pre-storm, pre-hurricane.

RH: So, the hurricane hit, and you’ve got a house full of people.

RL: Well, we had a house full of people, and the hurricane hit. Everybody's watching it on television, and you can see the storm turning. We realize we're not going to have too bad a time in Baton Rouge because it's turning sort of Northeast, and it looks like it's going to cut across the southern tip of Louisiana, where it looked like it was coming straight, full-force, towards Houma/New Orleans area. At the last minute, it kind of turned northeast, and went across the southern tip of Louisiana, and then hit the Mississippi Gulf Coast around Bay St. Louis. In essence, as you know, it affected from pretty much Grand Isle, Louisiana, across the tip of Louisiana, and all the way over to Mobile area. People, they really didn't expect that. They expected it to come north. Of course, God knows what would have happened if it hadn't have turned. Turning was bad, and of course, I'm not sitting here to blame on why the levees broke. I don't know, but if it would have hit New Orleans directly, it would have been a lot worse, and probably a lot more loss of lives than it was, because the hurricane did severe damage to New Orleans, but it wasn't till after the hurricane when the levees broke and the water started flooding New Orleans that the real damage occurred. That's where the loss of life occurred. We were lucky in Baton Rouge that it did turn northeast, and so being on the west side of the storm, it wasn't nearly as bad as we thought. Baton Rouge suffered a lot of trees down. Practically, the whole city was without electricity. The flooding wasn't bad in Baton Rouge.

RH: So, there wasn't a lot of rain because that would have been the flooding.

RL: It wasn't a lot of rain.

RH: On the west side of the storm.

RL: Right. It was just a lot of wind and maybe a few isolated tornado-type effects, which we had really suffered worse – I guess it was – back in around 1990. I don't remember which hurricane it was – Andrew. It was Andrew, when it came and swept through where we were in another home, and we lost a dozen huge hundred-year-old oak trees. A

tornado went right down our driveway, right along the side of our house, didn't touch our house, but it uprooted all these hundred-foot-tall oak trees, just twisted them out of the ground. We didn't have that. We had a couple of trees blown down, a lot of branches, and a real mess, but nothing devastating except the loss of electricity.

RH: So, what was your household like Monday afternoon, Monday evening?

RL: Well, it wasn't bad.

RH: Do you remember?

RL: Once again, we were lucky. We had a generator, so we had lights, and we had refrigeration on all of our food, and the fans were working, and we had ceiling fans. Everybody was just glued to the television set, trying to find out how New Orleans was. Everybody was mainly concerned at the outset because of the tsunami effect that had come on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and the rising water, and you couldn't get a lot of information, as you well know, at the beginning. So, everybody was really concerned, though, when some pictures started coming in and realizing that the whole Mississippi Gulf Coast basically had just disappeared and how devastated that was. New Orleans, of course, had been flooded from the hurricane, but not the dramatic flood from the levees breaking. When that happened, that's the real concern because so many people had left New Orleans, and rightfully so. But there were still hundreds – I don't know how many – but there were a lot of people left in New Orleans, probably two or three hundred thousand minimum, maybe more people that had stayed in New Orleans.

RH: Two or three thousand, probably, yeah. Two or three? Do you think?

RL: A hundred thousand.

RH: Do you think that many?

RL: Oh, yeah, well, you had thirty or forty thousand at the Superdome alone.

RH: Oh, you're right.

RL: You had another ten or twelve thousand that had gone to the Civic Center. Then, all around New Orleans, in these centers, you had people that had gathered in churches and places. People that were stranded. I mean, there were high-rise apartments that were full of people in New Orleans that had not left. So, I mean, there were a lot of people left in New Orleans. Strangely enough, now you talk about after the levees broke, and New Orleans started to flood, Susan's aunt, Sarah Stone, and her daughter, Carol Wright, left – all the electricity, obviously, was off in New Orleans. We kept talking to them; we were able to communicate with them. They did leave One River Place. Carol was very smart. I don't know who she had talked to, but they turned and went across right there, got on the Mississippi River Bridge – it wasn't flooded there – went across the Mississippi River Bridge, went down the west side of the river, and got on the interstate further down, and came to Baton Rouge. Took them about three hours. So after the storm, like I say, when the levee broke and when they realized they better get the heck out of New Orleans, they did, and they came to Baton Rouge. Susan's other aunt and uncle, Gerald Berenson – Dr. Berenson and Joan – weren't so fortunate. They lived in Metairie, and of course, they never dreamed there would be water in Metairie. Their daughter and their sons had been in contact with them, talking to them prior to the storm. Everything was fine, and then all at once – I guess it was Tuesday – they had not heard from them in several hours, and they had talked to them. They didn't know their condition or what was happening. The reports were the water was rising. Then, all at once, we found out Metairie, where they lived, had between six and ten feet of water in the different parts of Metairie. So they got very frightened. It was late Tuesday – it was late on Tuesday that we got a call from Leslie Berenson, their son, a doctor out in Seattle, that he had not heard from his parents and was really scared [and] hadn't talked to them. Evidently, either their cell phone had gone dead, or the tower was down. I

called a friend of mine in Baton Rouge, Colonel Greg Phares of the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's office, because I knew that he had been requested to send some help to New Orleans just to do some patrolling. They had gone in to help secure a bank, and they'd gone in to secure a couple of other areas that were in question. They had some boats, and they have a SWAT team, a really effective SWAT team. They had sent the SWAT team down to New Orleans to do some work in New Orleans. So, I called Greg Phares that night and said, "Greg, I've got concerns. Susan's aunt and uncle live on Northline in New Orleans. Do you think [there's] any way I could get you to get your men and your boat to go by their house while they're in New Orleans and just see what's going on?" So, he said, "Well, we can do this. We're going down there at midnight." They were doing the night patrol and just trying to go to places that they were told to go to to secure some areas. He said, "On the way out tomorrow morning. We'll be back probably around noon, but on the way back, we'll check it." So, I gave him the address. Well, the next morning, he calls me. There's another car going down there, and did I want to go down there? I said, "No, I can't go." There's just so much going on, and even with my business that I was having to take care of – after storm details. So, I called Gerald's son-in-law, Dale Maas, and said, "Would you come on over and ride down with one of the deputies? They're going to go try to find Joan and Gerald, and they need somebody to identify the house." So, he came right over. They got their life jackets and another boat. A sheriff came with another boat [and] went down there to New Orleans. They put in on the interstate and crossed and went over to Northline. A little difficult – they had some areas they couldn't quite get around. But they made it, and he identified the house. They pull up [to the] house. It was around noon on Wednesday, and they pull up to the house. There's about eight feet of water. They pull up to the window in the house – I don't know if it was a second-story window or a side of the house, but a window – beat on the window, and sure enough, there come Joan and Gerald, open the window in shorts and a tee-shirt. Uncle Gerald's unshaven, and they'd been in that condition for about forty-eight hours. It was a typical thing, all the sewage had been backing up in all

the houses, and everything was flooded – their whole first floor was flooded – and knocked on the window and said, “We’re the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s office. Richard Lipsey sent us to get you.” Gerald said they were just floored. They didn’t know what to do. They just opened the window, crawled out, got in the boat, and left. They called me – the sheriff’s office called me on their radio and told me that they had secured them; they were in the boat and headed back. I called Susan. Of course, everybody was very emotional – called all the family members and told them they were on the way back. By calling a couple of people, Laurie Berenson, one of the children, Laurie Maas, who had told other friends what was going on – within two hours, I started getting phone calls, “I hear you’re running rescue missions to New Orleans,” which was as far from the truth as you can get. I mean, all that we were trying to do is get Susan’s aunt and uncle out. By 5:00 o’clock that afternoon, with the help of Erich Sternberg, who is President of the Jewish Federation in Baton Rouge – he and Rabbi Martha Bergadine from the other congregation in Baton Rouge, Beth Shalom, were trying to help organize this. We ended up the first afternoon with a list within, I mean, like three or four hours [of] forty- or fifty-people’s names of people that were stranded, and these were all families of Jewish relatives in Baton Rouge. Quite frankly, a lot of them weren’t relatives; a lot of them were friends, and a lot of them were friends that people from, cousins from Dallas, or Chicago, or Atlanta, San Francisco, called and said, “I haven’t heard from my aunt and uncle. Can you tell me where they are?” “Well, we don’t know where they are. We don’t know whether they’re in their homes, whether they had been rescued, whether they were at the Superdome, whether they got in their car and drove out before the storm, which they normally would do, and just didn’t call anybody to say, ‘We’re in Jackson, Mississippi at a hotel.’” Here, we have this list of names. I must admit, after a few hours, we got it well organized, once again, really thanks to Erich. We were able to get the name, address, the contact – tried to get a contact, the name of the person who reported this person missing, that phone number, the phone number of the person we were looking for in case the phones worked, and a description of the family – how many are in the family, how old

are they, are they invalids? As you can imagine, most of these people were older people, a lot of them infirm. But a lot of them weren't. Late that afternoon, I got this list of forty or fifty names, which probably might compose a hundred and fifty people. I just get on the phone and call Greg Phares. I said, "Greg, what do I do?" He said, "Well, we really are tied up for the next day or so. We're sending our SWAT team into New Orleans, and they're working all night long. We will do what we can do." So, Greg continued to do that, and he said, "Look, let's set a date," and I forget which day it was. "Let's set a date, Sunday" because now it's already Thursday by the time I get to him, and we make all these plans – he said, "Look, we've got to do this and that." He said, "Let's set a date Sunday, and we'll go down to New Orleans, and we'll just dedicate the whole trip to this, we'll take all our boats, all our men, you line up a few vans, and we'll go to New Orleans and see what we can do." So, I lined up about, I guess, we got seven vans and drivers from our community, friends of mine that had mini-vans or Suburbans or whatever. We just allowed one person per car, so we'd keep as much room as we could. We met at the sheriff's substation at 4:00 o'clock in the morning, and the sheriff had his boats and his people. We headed out to New Orleans. We made a plan, and we headed out to New Orleans. We broke up into two different groups. We went to two different areas. Let me back up just to tell you why we decided that. We took these names, and we sat down at my office all day on the day before, and we took a map, and we plotted the address of every name that we had on a New Orleans map so that we knew where it was, and we could divide it into sectors. What I didn't know at the time until that afternoon, but it worked out perfectly, is that the sheriff's office had a computer hooked up to a Google map because they knew that with water was so high you couldn't see a street sign or an address anyhow; all you would want to see, mainly, were rooftops in the area we were going. So, I got them my list, and then one of the deputies sat there and entered it on the computer, pressed a button, and all of these spots lit up on the Google map. Then they hooked a GPS to it, and when we got down there the next morning, and they had two of them – we had four boats, and two went to two different locations. They

put the computer with a GPS in each boat, turned it on, and then, they would just hit number one, the first address, and it gave this address on whatever avenue, and then turned on the GPS, and it just drew a line of where to go. When it got to that house, you knew you were there because it just took them right to that address. We went down there, and I coordinated the activities of both of the groups. We launched right on Veterans Highway on the 17th Street Canal. That's as far as you could get. The water came right up to the bridge on the 17th Street Canal on Veterans Highway, and that's where we stopped, and the local sheriffs and police had it all blocked off. Of course, we got through, and we launched our boats right there. The other group went around New Orleans, around the West Bank, and came in, and they launched from that side. They went to homes in the Garden district over off of Napoleon and that area where it was flooding in that area. Then we went to the Lakeview area.

RH: So, the Broadmoor area, and the Lakeview area.

RL: Correct.

RH: It sounds like.

RL: It was quite disturbing because some houses you went to had red X's on them, where supposedly the police had already been and knocked on it and tried to – nobody was home then – I don't remember what all the symbols meant, but if you got the house with symbols painted on it, it meant that somebody had already been there and that either the house was clear, or they found a body there, or whatever. The first two or three houses we went to on our end were empty, and a couple of the houses, the first couple of houses already had been painted on the roof, that they had already broken into and found nobody home. The third house they went to, they found a couple of people and brought them out, and we put them in a van. At the same time, the other group was doing the same thing. When they would reach and find somebody, they'd bring them out to where one of the vans were, and they would just wait. They'd have to stay there and

wait. Of course, we would call Baton Rouge. We had Nextel phones with us. The Nextel phones were the only thing that were working. So we were able to communicate. We did that that day, and we got out several people on both ends and brought them back to Baton Rouge. There were a couple of people that resisted and did not want to leave – I won't mention names, but we had a couple of members of the Jewish community out in Lakeview that would not leave their home. Their daughter, granddaughter, and dog got them out, but they would not leave. Subsequently, a couple of days later, when they realized [laughter] they were going to be stranded quite a while, they were rescued by helicopter. But we had a couple of incidences like that.

RH: Is there a rationale for it?

RL: Just that the water is going to go down tomorrow, and everything's going to be fine. I can hear the sheriff talking to them. You know, we're in contact. I can hear him talking to them and screaming back and forth, "You've got to leave." I got on the phone with them because I knew the people, begged them to leave, told them what was going on, and that there was no way they could stay there. They said, "No." Their home was on a little mound – no electricity or anything, but they weren't flooded. Everything around them was flooded. There was no way to get out. Anyhow, they wouldn't leave. I will back up because I'm sorry, it's difficult to remember all of this. I will back up. Two days before when I did, after we rescued Dr. and Mrs. Berenson – they were going down there like at 9:00 o'clock at night and working till 3:00 o'clock in the morning, 4:00 o'clock in the morning, then coming back. I did give him some names. I forgot about them, but the next day after we had rescued the Berensons, what they did – they did their work, and they just said, "Well, we'll make a couple stops on the way out." And they rescued that night Dr. Zurik and his wife, and a couple of other couples whose name I forget, but I remember one of them was – we had gotten a call from – I think it was St. Louis – desperate to find an elderly uncle, and they weren't too far from the Zuriks. Sure enough, got them out at the same time, and a couple of other couples. The sheriff called us.

They had gone in – what had happened, they had gone to New Orleans at about 9:00 o'clock at night, and their mission was canceled, what they were supposed to do. So, they went ahead and got these people at like 9:00 o'clock or 10:00 o'clock at night. The sheriff called me and said, "Got these people, what do I do with them?" So, Susan, my wife, got on the phone, and we called and were able to line up people with houses that had rooms that would take them. When they brought them back, they brought them back to our congregation, B'nai Israel, and got there about 12:00 o'clock at night with these people, just like Dr. Zurik and his wife, also in shorts and t-shirts. Dr. Zurik, by then, had been there, like, four days without electricity or water or food or anything. They were quite elderly, but boy, they were quite happy to get out of there and be saved. We were able to place them all in nice homes and call their relatives and tell them, "Look, we just got your mother, father, aunt, uncle out." Even the people from St. Louis got in the car and headed down that night and were in Baton Rouge by noon the next day to pick up their relatives. The others, similar things like that. Dr. Zurik, I think, went to Nashville. That did happen every night. We were getting people out all the time, but it wasn't until that Sunday that we made our first major rescue attempt, going house to house to house all over New Orleans. But we had gotten out twenty or thirty people, just two or three at a time at night before then. So, very fortunate that we did get a lot of people out. We found another relative of Susan's. Frances Haspel was stranded in Metairie in an apartment house, and we were able to get to her, bring her to Baton Rouge, and got her on a plane. A couple that stayed with us got her on a plane a couple of days later to Colorado, where her son lives. There were a lot of people like that that we just were getting in and out. The thing that it is important to remember – the Baton Rouge paper did a very nice article after this Saturday trip down there. They did a nice article about saving the Jews of New Orleans. But in reality, when we went down there, and the sheriff's office went down there, passed a lot of people – we didn't turn anybody down. Anybody they saw, coincidental, that wanted to leave, that was a neighbor, a next-door neighbor on a roof, or wherever that boat was – I mean, they put them in, [and] we

brought them back. We got everybody a place to stay. We were able to find shelter for every person we brought out – able to relocate them. It didn't matter whether they were Black, white, yellow, green, what religion they were, or if they had animals with them. We brought everybody out that was in our path, that wanted to get out. We had a lot of funny incidents.

RH: I was going to ask you if there were any particular incidents that you remember that day.

RL: Okay. There were some very humorous incidents, as humorous as you can think. One gentleman that we kept getting a call from a relative in Dallas, and another relative of the same guy in California – very concerned about somebody who lived in Uptown New Orleans. As far as we could tell, they were dry. So, we never put it high on our priority list. We were really concentrating on the flooded areas. We really got out some nice people and some old people, and it was just really amazing. It was very touching. Some of the people that we did rescue didn't even know where they were when we brought them out. I mean, it was unbelievable that they were just staying in their homes by themselves and very disoriented. But we finally did get to this one gentleman in Uptown New Orleans, and he didn't want to leave. We sent a truck there and tried to tell him his relatives wanted him to leave; he wouldn't leave. They begged him to leave. He wouldn't leave, so they came back to Baton Rouge with a van load of other people. That afternoon, we go back, and we talk to his cousin in Dallas. He says, "No, he's got to leave. You've got to get him out." So I sent my van back there, and they go and talk to him, "You got to leave. They say you have to leave. You're not going to have electricity." He said, "We're fine." He's sitting back on his porch in New Orleans, and he said, "We're okay." Finally, he says, "Well, I'll leave, but I've got my friend that lives with me." We said, "Okay, you and your friend can come out." He says, "I've also got some dogs." We said, "Okay, you and your friend and your dogs can come out." Well, they're just little dogs, so that's no problem. Then they decide not to leave, so my guy leaves and

calls me. I said, “Look, one more time. Go back and let me talk to him.” So, he goes back. The cousin had told me that he had a house in California and that it was on the beach. It wasn’t being used, and to tell his cousin that he could use the house for three months. So I get him on the phone, I tell him that. I’m on my Nextel two-way radio, with my van, and they’re giving him this message. He says, ”Well, I’ve got to take my dogs.” I said, “Well, you can bring your dogs to Baton Rouge. I don’t know how we’re going to get your dogs to California.” I’ve got Angel Flights that we’d been flying people out of Baton Rouge on these angel flights. I said, “They’re not going to take six or eight dogs on an angel flight. I’m not sure they’ll take one.” Anyhow, I called a cousin back. The cousin says, “Well, okay, he can bring two dogs.” I still don’t know how we’ll get the dogs here. So I call him back. Finally, he agrees to leave. It ends up it’s he and his friend, six dogs, big dogs, and a parrot in a cage that big, one of those African Grays. I mean, this started at 10:00 o’clock in the morning. Now it’s 9:00 o’clock at night. No, it’s not. It’s 10:00 o’clock at night by the time they get him loaded up. Well, they get him loaded up. All of this is in my van. A guy next door sees all this going on, comes over and knocks on the door of my van, and the driver said, “Yeah.” He said, “I’ve been scared to come out of my house, but I see you taking these people out.” He says, “I’m a law professor at Tulane. Can I go with you?” My driver said, “Sure, hop in.” So they load him up – he goes and gets a bag. I’ve got a big van. So, they’re pulling away, and out comes a paraplegic from another house next door. He’s waving at him, and they stop. He says, “I see you’re taking people out.” “Yeah,” he said, “Can I go?” I said, “Sure, hop in the van.” So, now he calls me and tells me he’s got these other people, so we call and arrange for housing for them. I called LSU where they had the medical set-up for disabled people and arranged a place to take this paraplegic gentleman. Then we found some very nice people in Baton Rouge, the Wolfsheimers. She’s a veterinarian at LSU, and Dr. Wolfsheimer, her husband, is a gastroenterologist in Baton Rouge. They live in the same neighborhood that we do, have a very large backyard, and they agreed to house the two gentlemen, the dogs, and the parrot until we could move them on. Well, of course, it was

a three-ring circus. I'd go out of my house at 10:30 that night, and I told them we'd meet them at the Temple. I go to Walmart to try to get some dog cages, and Walmart had just closed, so I go to Target to – they're open. I go in Target. They didn't have anything but little cages. But they suggested another place that I go, a Super Walmart that's still open way out somewhere. Passing, I see a PetSmart. So I pull over and whip into PetSmart because the lights are on, but it's closed – it's locked up; it's closed, but the janitor is inside cleaning up. I bang on the door and bang on the door. Of course, they don't look up. [I'm] persistent. Finally, they come to the door. I told him my problem. The guy was really nice. He opens the door. He lets me in. Sure enough, they've got three huge dog cages left. They're a hundred dollars apiece. I whip out three hundred dollars. I give him the money. He wrote me a receipt out on a PetSmart thing. Here I go. I get there, and they get there about fifteen minutes after I do, to the Temple, and all of these people getting out. We have a lot of people there trying to move them around and get them to go where they belong. Of course, at this point, somebody tells this gentleman and his friend and dogs that we had arranged an apartment for them to live in Baton Rouge – but there are no apartments in Baton Rouge, I don't know where that came from – but finally, convinced them that the Wolfsheimers who were there were very nice people, and they were going to put them up. Dr. Wolfsheimer came in his big truck, and we were able to put the dog cages together, but they wouldn't all fit, so we got the dog cages in the back of the truck. I got the two gentlemen and the parrot in my car, and we followed them to the Wolfsheimers and then we got there. They had one small dog and five big dogs. Then we had to go around Dr. Wolfsheimer's fence because he had some little holes in it. At 12:30 at night, we were repairing the fence [laughter] so the dogs couldn't get out. It was a three-ring circus.

RH: We're going to have to wrap up this time.

RL: Okay.

RH: Just for a minute.

[END OF AUDIO FILE 1]

RH: – Jewish Voices, and I am interviewing Richard Lipsey from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Richard, you were finishing up the story of this one rescue with this entourage of animals.

RL: So, just quickly, we ended up –

RH: The ark. [laughter]

RL: We ended up getting them placed that night, and a couple of days later, I was able to get a good friend of mine at LSU to loan us a truck from the veterinary school that held lots of dogs that they travel around the country, and from the vet school. We were able to get a driver, and we shipped the two dogs – the six dogs, the parrot, and the two gentlemen off to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania – somebody had agreed to take them. Had a little family house that they weren't using on a farm and agreed to take them. We sent them to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

RH: Do you know how you found the people in Harrisburg?

RL: We had Jewish communities from all over the country calling us, wanting to know what they could do, who they were willing to help, and not willing to help. The description that they gave us of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania community fit the need for these two gentlemen [laughter] and their dogs perfectly.

RH: Who was doing the matching of people to places?

RL: Really, Rabbi Martha was. She was doing most of the matching of where to send people, which brings me back to one other point that I have not covered. The day after the levees broke, I received a call. Actually, the call came in to Greg Phares at the Sheriff's office, saying that he had heard about – he knew what happened, obviously. He had heard Greg's name on television. He was from San Diego and a member of the Jewish community in San Diego. His name was David Perez. He said, "I am going to" – he called the sheriff and asked him what he could do to help. He told him he was from the Jewish community in San Diego, and he had unlimited supplies and help at his beck and call. S, Greg, just said, "Call Richard Lipsey." So, he called me, and he said, "Look, I've got a 737 standing by. I can load it up with medical supplies, food, water, whatever you need. I've also got friends out here in the Jewish Federation of San Diego, and we can take up to five hundred families." He said, "What can I do?" This man was serious. So, I told him what he could do. I gave him the name of a couple of Louisiana State Representatives in the New Orleans St. Bernard area, Orleans Parish area, that were trying to do some good, and called them to see what they needed and told him that what we needed was help in getting people out of Baton Rouge to resettle. He said, "Well, fine." He said, "I'll be glad to help you." Two days later, in comes a 737 full of medical supplies and water and food and things like that, and we get it off and distribute it. He comes to Baton Rouge, and immediately, the first thing he did – he had already called Gulfport also. They fly over to Gulfport, they pick up a couple hundred people, and fly them out to San Diego, and drop it and fly back to Baton Rouge. By then, we load up a 737 and ship them out to San Diego. These were very few Jewish families. Mostly dislocated African Americans. I know they took at least two hundred families out there. He arranged apartments or condos, brand new for them, free of charge, gave them to them for a year. They hooked them up with the Red Cross in the area and the Jewish Federation to try to help people get jobs, give them food – whatever they needed to sustain them. He did a remarkable job. He also, over the period of time – I mean, he flew in – communications were just devastated in New Orleans. He flew in satellite

radiotelephones to be used, and he was just extremely helpful. Some things he could not do, some things he could do, but he made a lot of things happen because he was the first person to really point out publicly that perhaps FEMA and the government, the State government, and the Feds were not helping these people. He turned out to be one hell of a First Responder, and just was terrific help. A very, very nice guy. He did an awful lot for people over in the Gulfport, Biloxi area, as well as the Baton Rouge in New Orleans area. To the last day, even after he had to give that 737 back because it just cost him entirely too much, he was arranging angel flights in and out – friends of his that had airplanes. There were other people doing the arrangements, not just him. But all in all, I made note – out of Oakland, Dallas, and San Diego, we had twenty-seven companies that loaned us thirty-one corporate jets. We had a 737, a 727, and a DC-9 that made missions. They flew sixty-eight missions. They supplied us with 218,000 pounds of food, and they evacuated 638 people. It was really absolutely remarkable, and that was the kind of person that acts instead of talking about it.

RH: Now, you keep saying, provided us. Who do you mean as us?

RL: It was really – we were furnishing them, we were doing the legwork for them–

RH: The Jewish community?

RL: We had a whole group – yes.

RH: In Baton Rouge?

RL: We had a whole group of people too numerous to name, but Michael Beychok, who would be a very good person for you to interview in Baton Rouge – Michael and his brother, Ben Beychok, and Erich Sternberg, and myself, and two or three others kind of formed a nucleus to try to see what was going on, what we could help do anything. I'll give you another example. The day that we were in New Orleans, trying to rescue people, get people out, I got an email, which is in here somewhere – but I got an email

blast from Chancellor Sean O'Keefe at LSU, that said – here it is, right here – "LSU desperately needs donations of mattresses for medical and emergency personnel who are working on campus. All mattress sizes and air mattresses will be accepted." It tells you where to take them. He sent this, obviously, to a lot of people. I get it while I'm in the boat sitting there, and I get it on my Blackberry. I read it, and so – now, this is on a Sunday. So, I pick up my Blackberry, and I email a friend of mine at Walmart. We do business with Walmart, and there're a lot of nice people up there. Out [for] the heck of it, I email him. I said, "Look, we have a problem down here at LSU. We've got several thousand people in the Assembly Center, which is an emergency center set up for medical emergencies. They're all on the floor. Then we have all these state troopers, National Guard, and medical personnel that are coming in, that are manning this at LSU, and they're all sleeping on the floors. Can you help me with some mattresses anywhere?" A minute later, my telephone rings, and it's this fellow, Bill Kerr, at Walmart, who's a senior vice president of Walmart. He's in his office on Sunday morning – it was about 10:00 o'clock, I think – at Walmart. He said, "Richard," he says, "I don't know what we can do, but that's interesting. Let me see, and I'll get back with you." Ten minutes, twenty minutes later, my telephone rings, and it's Bill Kerr. He says, "Richard, how many do you need?" I said, "Well, they need a lot." He said, "Okay." So, he calls me back. He says, "Richard, I've located air mattresses and pillows and pumps in our warehouse in Hattiesburg, Mississippi." He said, "We're going to load up a trailer load and ship them to you." I said, "It's Sunday. When can you do this?" He says, "Well," he says, "they come to work at 4:00 o'clock in the morning." And the next day is Labor Day. He says, "I'll have them loaded by 7:00 o'clock, and they'll be in Baton Rouge by noon." So, I call Sean O'Keefe back and email him back, and tell him what I found. He emailed me back, "Please, please, get them on the way." Walmart loads an entire eighteen-wheeler, four thousand air mattresses, four thousand pillows, and pumps, [and] ships them to us, they get to Baton Rouge at noon on Monday, Labor Day. I had somebody from LSU go to their store, meet them [and] have the truck follow them to LSU. They certainly don't want

to unload them at the Walmart store and have to get them to LSU. They get them out there to LSU. At noon, LSU has four thousand air mattresses. Now, of course, that was all gratis, no charge. What people don't know, and they never sought any publicity on it, was at Walmart, in the first two or three days after the hurricane, sent in over forty eighteen-wheelers of needed supplies that they heard about all over the Gulf Coast, just gratis. Just loaded up everything, from these air mattresses to food, to shelter, to tents, to everything you can imagine, and sent them to areas and offloaded them without ever seeking one bit of publicity about it. They always get the bad publicity; they never get the good publicity. This was a case where LSU desperately needed these air mattresses, and as it turned out, there were probably about a thousand too many, and by late that afternoon, every agency in Baton Rouge that had people sleeping on the floor everywhere came over. So, every air mattress was made use of. So, that's just one more little –

RH: Piece of how it worked.

RL: – piece of the puzzle.

RH: What was the system behind the system? Your guys have to be fed when they get down –

RL: Well, the system behind the system, it started with the organization, where we were – in my office – where we were set up with the computers, and we were talking to each other on the computers and organizing all this. We had a lot of help from – we had a couple of people that we would call that were in charge of vehicles, that would call and find vehicles for us. We had people, like Rabbi Martha, that were making sure that people, we had apartments or houses, or whatever we could find to put people up in, that we were rescuing and bringing out of New Orleans. Then we had my wife and others that every time we would go on a mission to New Orleans, they would be up late at night, making sandwiches, packing food. Of course, not only for us, but we would pack goodie

bags for the people we brought out – water, soft drinks, little individual packs that we would give them because most of them hadn't had anything cold or anything to eat we didn't know in how long. We had candy and goodies, and we gave everybody goodie bags. So, people were organizing that and doing that, so it was an effort on the part of an awful lot of people. We had people that – guys that would drive the vans that brought cameras with them so that we documented practically all of this. We were caught on – matter of fact, a friend of mine told me they saw me on television in England, a German television crew was on the 17th Street Bridge that day, broadcasting live to Germany, which, in turn, went on some sort of a Sky News type thing, and was broadcast all over Europe. There was a lot of that going on.

RH: How much sleep did you get?

RL: Not a lot for about a week. I mean, we worked generally until one two o'clock in the morning, and then we were generally up by three or four because every day, the missions always left about four o'clock in the morning. I guess our last big mission was when the Torah scrolls at the different synagogues – we had been to the synagogues, not me, but other people had been to the synagogues. They were secure, but they were flooded, and some just the basement, some of them, the one over on Canal Street was, water way up in that synagogue. We were given the list of the one at Tulane, a Hillel House type, and then Touro and Sinai –

RH: Gates of Prayer?

RL: I don't remember. One other one. It might have been Gates of Prayer.

RH: Shir Chadash?

RL: I think it was an Orthodox synagogue on Canal Street.

RH: Anshe Sfard, maybe.

RL: I'm sorry.

RH: It doesn't really matter.

RL: I really don't remember. But anyhow, we organized that, and we broke up – Rabbi Cohn from Sinai flew in – he came in from, I think – I don't know whether he was in Atlanta. I knew he ended up in Atlanta, but he may have been in Houston. But he came in, and we were able to get keys or entrance to these – ended up somebody had already gone to one of the synagogues and brought the Torah scrolls out. So, we ended up going to three synagogues, broke up into two groups – went to these three synagogues, got the Torah scrolls, and left early in the morning to get – the sheriff furnished us one car, escort, and went down and got those Torah scrolls out, and brought them back up to, put half of them at Beth Shalom, and half of them at B'nai Israel in the secure places. The Torah scrolls were fine, and we marked them to identify which synagogue they had come from. But that was very emotional, being able to get those out.

RH: You're up in Baton Rouge, where FEMA is working out of. So, do you have any thoughts on their operation as compared to your operation?

RL: Well, quite frankly, it was totally different, as you can imagine. Here we are, really trying to be almost a first responder. We were trying to get people out that we knew about. We weren't shooting from the hip. We weren't just taking a ride in New Orleans, driving around, and saying, "Do you need rescuing?" We had lists and lists and lists. The list like this that was made up of page after page of what I described to you earlier: names, addresses, phone numbers, relatives' names, and a column over here about this person, "Melinda Miller, totally accessible, needed to try again, convince her, refuses to leave. Also found Virginia Burnette with her, also who refuses to leave, in her fifties," and so on and so forth. Here's another one. "Believed to be definitely there. Nine cats. The area is dry, the lady is a sixty-year-old asthmatic," and so on and so forth. Here's another one, just "Near Causeway and West Esplanade." Another one, "We need more

information." Another one, "Not accessible, must be airlifted, can't get to him." Another one that was at a hotel, "The hotel is closed. We went to the hotel. Hotel is closed. Assume the people have been evacuated. Suggest calling the New Orleans police department." We documented, as the report would come back to my office, whoever was there. We would document what was going on, where the person was, what we found out about the person, do we need to go back – let's call the relative and tell them they won't leave. That went on and on and on. So, we were looking for people. The saddest of all was the very first person that we went – and I presume it's okay to keep using names on here –

RH: Yeah.

RL: The saddest was the very first person that when we started the mass rescue when we got all this list – this was after the Sheriff's department had been, you know, three nights in a row had brought people out, two or three or five that we had requested them go try to find, that we knew they could get to without too much difficulty. Before we went down with them, just specifically to try to find these people, the big groups of people. One of the first names on the list was a lady by the name of Rachel Palmer. She was on our list when we went down there. We went to the house, and the house had a hole in the roof with an X on it and one other marking, stating that somebody had gone in the house and there was nobody there. We documented that. Of course, we came out, and we reported it to her daughter. I've got all the information. I don't remember exactly now where her daughter lived – but we reported it to her daughter. Her daughter was very, obviously very concerned about it [and] still had not heard from her. A couple of days later, she had not heard from her and started checking all the hospitals and so on and so forth – couldn't find her. We double-checked with the sheriff's department. They had gone back by there. We had them recheck the house, and nobody was there. The daughter put out – even sent us this, which was a picture of her mother and a full description of her mother, where she was from, what she looked like, and medical

condition. Her daughter's name, Hannah Palmer, and how to get ahold of her and so on and so forth. We distributed this to all the police, to our Sheriff's office, who put a notice out. Let's see if it's dated here – Wednesday, September the 14th. Wow, two weeks later, basically. They finally were able to identify her mother in a morgue, the one across the river from Baton Rouge near the Women's Detention Center. The lady had gone out of her house in the flooded waters when it was just rising [and] tried to get across the street to a neighbor. The neighbor screamed at her supposedly to go back to her house and get on the second floor of her house. Evidently, the water rose too quick, and she must have been swept away. The lady was found drowned a couple of days later, and they took her to the morgue. By then, they, of course, had embalmed her, and they couldn't identify her. Finally, they thought they had the description. They finally found her and thought they had the description, and the daughter sent DNA, and they matched her up. The daughter flew down and finally identified her mother.

RH: Couldn't rescue everybody.

RL: You couldn't rescue everybody.

RH: Wow.

RL: There were a lot of sick, elderly, infirm people that we were able to get out. Like I say, a lot of other people, just incidental people, some nuns, picked up a van load of nuns coming out one day. Found out about two priests. We never got them. We got to where they were, but they were friends of a friend of mine, and they had been rescued the morning. We got to them that afternoon, and they had been rescued earlier.

RH: When you were working with the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Department, did you have any assistance? When you got to the city, did anybody try to obstruct you from coming in, or because you were with them, it all –

RL: Oh, yeah.

RH: – was very smooth.

RL: It was all smooth. It was very difficult getting in and out of New Orleans, as you can imagine. But we could have never done it without the assistance of our sheriff's office. I mean, we were stopped all along the way, but as soon as they saw that blue light flashing in front of us – and we were stopped several times, but as soon as they told them we were on a search and rescue mission, and we had specific names we were going after, they always waved us through. But we could have never gotten through. There were letters given out by the State Police, giving you permission to come to New Orleans, and I know a lot of people had them or got them somehow or another. Some made it through, and some didn't – were turned back. But we could have never done it without the sheriff's office. That would have been completely impossible. You asked a question a few minutes ago about what we did as opposed to what the government services, FEMA, was doing. Like I say, it was totally different. We were kind of the first responders. That's where I got off the subject. We were going after people we knew, and whoever else came out was incidental, but we were trying to save people whose relatives just did not know their whereabouts. Well, over fifty percent of the cases of the names that we had – well over, may have been sixty-five or seventy percent – there was nobody there when we got there. They either had been rescued or left before the storm. Finally, we tracked down every single person. When it was all over, we knew where everybody was. Some people we never could get out. They wouldn't leave. Some people we couldn't get to, just physically, we could not get to them. But in the end, they were safe. We got out as many people as we could. FEMA and the government were looking at the overall picture. They were trying – surprisingly, they did a good job of getting supplies in where they could. There was just too much friction between the federal government and the state government, and so it slowed it all down. Those people at the Superdome certainly should have been rescued a lot sooner than they were. Probably should have never been told to go to the Superdome. But they did. But once they realized what had happened, it would have been very easy to fly in – on

helicopters – supplies there, and fly in a helicopter full of supplies, and fly out a helicopter full of people. They could have gotten people out if it was better organized. The same with all those people that sat up on the bridge on the interstate for two or three days, waiting on buses. If the right hand would have known what the left hand was doing, they could have gotten loads of buses in there and got those people out within six hours. It just did not happen. Between the city of New Orleans, our state government, and the Feds, I think there was too much of, "We're waiting for you to do it." Everybody was putting the blame on somebody else. Nobody stood up and took charge. That's the problem. I guess the mayor thought the state should do it, the state thought the feds should do it, the feds thought the city should do it; it was a cycle. The outside suppliers that were supposed to be shipping in food and water were doing it. The food and water were getting to the warehouses and to the distribution points. It just, in a lot of cases, was not getting distributed. It was waiting for somebody to tell them to distribute it. That's where the problem came in. Nobody said, "I'm in charge, and I'm going to get it done." That didn't happen until well over a week after the storm before things really started happening. It was just too long a delay, too long a delay. That's where I said – and look, there are a lot of other agencies. I know the Wildlife and Fisheries, the State Wildlife and Fisheries, did their own search and rescue. They did a marvelous job. I know some of the local Sheriffs down here did their own search and rescue, and they did a great job. They had a lot of individual departments – police departments, sheriff's departments, Wildlife and Fisheries ¬– and a lot of individual people like us, that, you know, we're not the only ones. There were others that took their boats out and just went from house to house, loaded them up, and tried to save people. We weren't alone with what we did.

RH: So, do you think that just the size of this disaster was so large that the country's just never come up against something like this, that there wasn't a plan? Could you lay it at the feet of an individual?

RL: It was overwhelming. It was overwhelming. [laughter] I sent out an email on Wednesday morning, on August 31st on Wednesday morning to some people just telling them, a bunch of my friends, about what had been going on, and about – that was right after we had gotten Susan's aunt and uncle. It was the Wednesday that we got them out. I was just telling them, "It's a miracle we got them out." That morning, I sent an email out, and I ended it kind of prophetic. I ended it, "This Hurricane Katrina is America's tsunami. The devastation and destruction of the infrastructure have been extraordinary. The loss of life has not been fully determined, but the level of quality of life of over a million people has been affected for months, and maybe years to come." I didn't realize how true it was. It's not going to be months. What's it been already? Fifteen months. It's going to be fifteen years, if that soon, before New Orleans is ever back to normal.

RH: So, what do you think about the recovery now, how the recovery is going? Are you as surprised as New Orleanians –

RH: I'm terribly –

RH: – its pace?

RL: – surprised at how poor it is, how slow it is, how nothing seems to happen. I think we have a good group in the LRA, but I think their hands have been somewhat tied up until recently, and everybody's been fighting over who's going to distribute the money, how it's going to be distributed, who it's going to. I'm not an authority on it, but I know they've got some really good people on the Louisiana Recovery Authority is what I'm talking about. I have a feeling, better slow and be done right than be done fast and end up with a lot of $75,000 trailers that turned out to be almost totally useless. How many millions of dollars? I mean, what was it? Half a billion dollars spent on these useless trailers, terribly overpaid for them, and people still living in them. I mean, we've got to find a way for some permanency in New Orleans, in particular, to move people in the service industry back to New Orleans. I mean, where we're sitting here is probably a

good example. This hotel normally would have valet parking. They can't hire people. They don't have people to valet park. They don't have certain services in the hotel that are still not open because they don't have enough people to supply them. Every hotel in New Orleans is the same – what have you got about sixty percent of the restaurants in New Orleans have reopened for a multitude of reasons. One is [that] maybe there are not enough people in some of the places to open up a restaurant because they wouldn't have enough customers. But most of the restaurants haven't opened because they can't get people to work. The same with – you can't build houses if you don't have construction workers. You can't remodel buildings that were destroyed by the hurricane if you don't have workers. So, it's a chicken-and-the-egg thing. But unless they get some permanent housing in New Orleans and get people that are willing to work in those houses, not just people that want to come back and sit on their behinds, like so many did before. But we need to get – the culture of New Orleans has to change somewhat.

RH: So, talk about that a little bit. What do you mean by that?

RL: I mean by that – and I'm certainly not an authority on it because I live in Baton Rouge, not New Orleans. But New Orleans has not been a city of growth. New Orleans has been a city of laissez-faire, have a good time. There have been too many people on the welfare rolls in New Orleans, too many people that have money in New Orleans but are not willing to invest it in new properties and development in New Orleans. Very few developers in New Orleans. There are some good ones – don't misunderstand me – but they are the exception, not the rule. New Orleans has just not kept up with the development of the port, the building, and the construction. New Orleans should have been the hub of – the whole Central America should come through New Orleans. It ended up, mostly it's Miami and Houston, because New Orleans was not willing to invest in infrastructure to do that. If New Orleans is going to recover, it's going to have to become, basically, the transportation center of the South. I don't know whether people are willing to do that or not. I think they seem more concerned about getting the publicity

of the French Quarter and the tourism – and that's really important. I mean, that brings a lot of money in, of course. But you have to have something, some permanency, and [for] permanency, you've got to have people that work, and jobs, and create jobs. I don't think New Orleans has done enough in that area. I think they're too concerned about the face of New Orleans, as opposed to the infrastructure of New Orleans. But once again, I think, given a chance, the LRA can do something.

RH: Baton Rouge is now the largest city in Louisiana, where you live. Do you think that will stay that way?

RL: I think it will, no question. Baton Rouge was in a growth mode before, but of course, three days after the hurricane, we had an extra quarter of a million people. Nobody knows for sure. I mean, I read every day – there are estimates of how many people are still in Baton Rouge, and those estimates range from seventy-five to a hundred fifty thousand people that are still there. I don't know how many it is, but it's certainly in the range of a hundred thousand people. Also, the best guesstimate is that over the next year, as areas of New Orleans open up and there's some rebuilding done, probably end up somewhere around fifty to seventy-five thousand permanent residents will stay in Baton Rouge. We have several friends from New Orleans that moved to Baton Rouge, and some have just stayed permanently. Some have decided to have an apartment in Baton Rouge and an apartment in New Orleans. Some have moved back to New Orleans. The flight of the doctors and lawyers from New Orleans is incredible. New Orleans has lost hundreds and hundreds of doctors and attorneys – professional people. I don't know how long it will ever take to recover that type of support they need here in New Orleans. But Baton Rouge, we're very happy, quite frankly. We're not trying to steal people from New Orleans, but we've welcomed them. Baton Rouge people have been so nice to the people in New Orleans. We have no problems in Baton Rouge. We've got some trailer park areas, and we've got people that came up – it was a boon to the housing market in Baton Rouge because, within two weeks after the hurricane, every

house on the market in Baton Rouge was sold. Still, today, while it's got a sense of normalcy back, there's still –you put a house on the market; it doesn't last too long in Baton Rouge. So, the value of the real estate in Baton Rouge has gone up substantially, but the quality of life is good. Baton Rouge has made a lot of plans. We've got a great Chamber of Commerce now that has done a lot in Baton Rouge. Our Baton Rouge Area Foundation did a lot to support the Katrina victims, raised millions and millions of dollars in support of that, and has done a lot to make the people from New Orleans comfortable in Baton Rouge.

RH: Is there a hope in Baton Rouge that New Orleans will succeed, or do you see a competition between the two?

RL: No, no, I really don't. Absolutely, I do not. I think everybody in Baton Rouge would like to see New Orleans succeed. I mean, New Orleans is our weekend vacation place, and so people want to see New Orleans recover. I guess the sense is that – and this is my take – is that New Orleans always controlled the state legislature. What was good for New Orleans was good for the state. Now that's not true. Now, it's what's good for the state is good for the state. Shreveport, Lake Charles, Monroe, Alexandria, Baton Rouge – we all have our say-so, and it's not dominated by the legislative representatives from New Orleans, which it was for so long. Now, we feel in Baton Rouge that we're more of an equal partner with New Orleans. And Baton Rouge, let me tell you, our legislators and our business community have done everything we can to cooperate with New Orleans. Quite frankly, New Orleans has not been very cooperative. New Orleans has been New Orleans.

RH: Is this post-Katrina, you mean?

RL: Post-Katrina. "We'll do it ourselves. We can take care of ourselves." There have been a lot of hands stretched out from Baton Rouge, and it's been a lot more one way than you would think. But still, in all, I can assure you Baton Rouge would love to see

New Orleans recover. New Orleans is a very strong city. A lot of tourists. Had a lot of big industry headquarters here in New Orleans. A lot of them have left, and that was a great excuse for them to leave. They've been wanting to leave, but they just didn't. We would love to see them come back to New Orleans. We need that for the economy of the state, we need –

RH: Can the –

RL: New Orleans –

RH: – port in Baton Rouge –

RL: – to be strong.

RH: Can the port of Baton Rouge be successful without the port of New Orleans –

RL: Oh, absolutely not.

RH: – being successful?

RL: The port of New Orleans, as you know, is one of the largest in the country. The Port of Baton Rouge is right in the top ten ports in the country. No, we can't be strong without New Orleans. We could never, ever – we don't have the facilities. We could never take over from the port of New Orleans. We just don't have the distribution capability. Maybe we will in ten years, but we certainly don't today. It's no reason to. They've got all of that in place here in New Orleans and up and down the river from New Orleans. I don't mean downtown New Orleans, but I mean as far, maybe, from Lutcher to the mouth of the river, is considered the Port of New Orleans. It's vital to the success of the state of Louisiana that it be a strong New Orleans.

RH: We haven't talked about this, and it's a little hard, sometimes, to talk about the issue of race and Katrina. But a lot of outsiders have talked about it, so it's a good opportunity

to hear people within the New Orleans-Baton Rouge community talk about it. Do you have any thoughts on the issue of race and Katrina, both in the rescue and the recovery?

RL: That is a very difficult and sensitive question.

RH: Right.

RL: Everybody that wanted to leave New Orleans had an opportunity to leave. A lot of people just did not want to leave. There were a lot of unemployed welfare people that really did not have a way to leave unless the government took care of them, and that's where we failed. That's where all those buses that you saw pictured in the parking lots that should have been bussing people out of New Orleans, were just sitting there doing nothing. I mean, those buses should have been loading up at the Superdome and the Civic Center before that flood ever came and bussing people out. There was no good organization. As a result, a lot of poor people, people on welfare were left behind. I don't think it's discrimination. I think it was total lack of organization on the part of our city and state government. It was very unfortunate, but I don't think there was any discrimination involved. There were an awful lot of white people down here that did not get out. The other thing that I point to [is] that if you watch television to today, all they talk about is the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish and show a lot of poor people's houses that were destroyed and see them out front today complaining and trying to nail their houses back up. Well, I feel sorry for them. What about those thousands of homes out in Lakeview, those million-dollar homes that were all gutted? A lot more people involved out there than it was in the Lower Ninth Ward, and mostly, not all, but probably seventy percent white out there. There were a lot of African-American homes out there, too. You never see that on television, and all those people are still gone. Go drive through there today. I mean, there isn't anybody – there's nobody living out there. Where are all of those people? I know a lot of them are in Baton Rouge because I know a lot of those people. So, no, I don't think there was discrimination on that part. I think it is the age-old

problem of our welfare system not working properly, too many people on welfare, making it too easy to be on welfare and not get a job. I think we have a whole root problem there that's never been solved, and the government better pay some attention to that and figure a way, a better way, a better jobs program, and of course, it all starts with education. Of course, New Orleans is known to have the worst public education system in the South. I understand that they've really done a great turnaround since the hurricane, and they've got some very good schools that have opened up. But unless we educate the young people, Black and white – that's the only way you're going to ever have a great jobs program and educated workforce is to start when they're very young, and that's what we've lacked all over the South, and really all over our country. We just have not put enough emphasis on a great public education system. Never figured it out. There are pockets where you have some good education, but there are too many where you don't.

RH: As a man who's an LSU grad –

RL: Correct.

RH: – you have a value of public education.

RL: That's right.

RH: You're committed to that. Let's switch a little bit and go back into the Jewish community. What has it meant to you to be Jewish in this experience? Have you thought about it at all?

RL: Well, not totally from that aspect, I guess, I really haven't. As I told you, my religious education as a young man – there wasn't much to it. We were temple-goers on occasion, and certainly went on the holidays. That pretty much all changed after the '67 war. We got more involved with support for the State of Israel. Susan and I went to Israel right after the '73 war, the Yom Kippur War. Our identity changed somewhat in our

interest, and our religion changed a lot after that, and hopefully we gave our children a little better Jewish education. But the whole Reform movement in the United States is changing now. It's becoming somewhat more – leaning to the Conservative side. That's another whole topic. But as it relates to Katrina –

RH: Katrina.

RL: There was an article, as I told you, in the paper, about saving the Jews of New Orleans, and that was our intent. I mean, the reason we did it is because we had the names of people. We had relatives and names of people that needed saving. In all of this, as I told you, we went and picked up anybody that wanted to come out. I failed to mention there are names of other people in here – I don't want to go into it – but other friends of mine that gave me names of people, gentiles in New Orleans, that we brought out at the same time. But the vast majority of this list were all families that had Jewish relatives in New Orleans. If we weren't going to save them, who was? I mean, there were Methodist missionaries down here that had sent missionaries down to New Orleans that were working through their churches to try to save people. There were Catholics that were doing the same thing. There were members of the Vietnamese community in Baton Rouge, I know, that were trying to get people, members of the Vietnamese community in New Orleans, bringing them to Baton Rouge, placing them in Vietnamese homes in Baton Rouge. There was a lot of – it was just not us. There were a lot of people doing it, whether it was religious or the national origin, whoever it was, trying to help people. Our primary goal was to save these Jewish people, and we're certainly not embarrassed about it, we wish we could have done more. But there was just a limit of what we could do.

RH: Are you proud of the Jewish community in Baton Rouge?

RL: Oh, absolutely I am. Everybody opened up their homes. Of course, you've got to remember, many, many people in Baton Rouge have very – because we are so close to

New Orleans, we all have very close friends in New Orleans. If not, we all have relatives in New Orleans, both. So, every Jewish home that I know of in Baton Rouge, the day before or the day after the hurricane, every home was full. Every home was full. I mean, it was not like – everybody opened up their homes.

RH: It wasn't abstract.

RL: Before the storm, we were calling friends in New Orleans – Jews and gentiles. We were calling all of our friends, saying, "Hey, get out, come on to Baton Rouge. If we can't put you up, we'll find a place for you," which we did [for] a lot of people. My daughter helped. She has a friend at a couple of hotels in Baton Rouge, and we were able to get some rooms they were holding that we stole one way or the other. But we found places for people to stay. But the people in Baton Rouge, both the Gentile community and the Jewish community totally opened up their homes to people in New Orleans.

RH: Okay

[END OF AUDIO FILE 2]

RH: Let's just talk a little more about the Jewish community, your involvement in the Jewish community in Baton Rouge, and what institutions, primarily, you've worked through as a member of the Jewish community.

RL: Well, we have a Federation in Baton Rouge, and it's a nice Federation. It's never been a strong Federation. But really, it started back, like I say, after the '67 war. It's been, for the size of our Jewish community, a pretty generous community. We don't have a community center and that sort of thing in Baton Rouge. I mean, we have a Federation, and it's made up of members of both congregations, and it's mainly just a fund drive Federation. That's all it is, and they do a few local – have a few local speakers and things like that. We've been involved with that, both of us, Susan and I have. We've been more involved, of course, with our congregation. Our congregation is a hundred

and – next year, [will] be a hundred and fifty years old.

RH: And which congregation is it?

RL: B'nai Israel. And I was President of B'nai Israel twenty-five years ago, maybe. Been on the board several times, but I've always been very, very involved with our temple and working with our temple. Susan, my wife, was the first woman president in the history of the temple. She was President probably fifteen years ago. She's on still. She's currently on the board of the temple. Of course, she's been President of the Sisterhood, and so on and so forth. So, we've been very closely tied to the temple, do a lot of work for the temple, and every time they need to raise money or build something or do something, we've both been very, very involved with our temple.

RH: Was the temple involved in the effort for the rescue in Baton Rouge?

RL: The temple was involved in it. Both congregations were involved in it very well. Our temple was involved when first Katrina hit, and a few days later, the temple – we opened up the temple for all types of supplies – clothing, food, whatever. You could bring it there. Then, some people wandered in and ended up being a shelter, supposedly for a night. Ended up being a shelter for several days. That was kind of unfortunate, quite frankly, because the temple was not a shelter. We don't have showers. We don't have facilities for a –quote – shelter. As a matter of fact, you're not supposed to use a facility like that as a shelter, but we did. It ended up [in] a little conflict with the few members of the congregation that wanted to keep it open as a shelter. Some of us that did not want to keep it open as a shelter but wanted to use it as a transit point to bring people to clothe them, feed them, do whatever we could, but we were doing one heck of a good job of moving people out, getting angel flights, taking them all over. What happened was, after a few days, when it really got serious, we were able to get every single person – we must have had thirty or forty people in the temple – we got them moved out on these angel flights, sent to different parts of the country, and everybody relocated perfectly. Then we

ended up, through necessity, keeping a Red Cross team of doctors that had come in for several more days in the temple because it was close to where they were working, and they wanted to stay there. They could shower at the hospital. But the other people didn't have any place to shower, to change. We didn't have the toilet facilities. In an emergency, it worked, and we sure put people up. But it did not need to be a long-term shelter.

RH: Is there anything that you've learned over the years, through your Judaism, that kind of helped sustain you or that you thought about every now and then? Any kind of Jewish framework?

RL: Well, I guess the thing that I was taught, as a very young man – and I see it in all the other Jews, practically all the other Jews that I know – is the close family ties. The strength in family, the strength you derive in support from your family, and the strength that you derive and support from other members of the Jewish community. You don't often see that. I don't in other faiths. I guess I do see it in some, in family ties. Individually, you always find that in families. I think I see that more than I've learned in Judaism, through our beliefs and the belief in one God, and the support for each other, and support for your family, and the support for other members of the Jewish faith that you come to the rescue no matter what. That's probably the strongest feeling that I have.

RH: Are there any things that you've learned about yourself through this experience that you didn't know before?

RL: Maybe that you take – sometimes, you really are willing to take chances, and that you've read about other people that do things, and that put themselves sometimes in

harm's way, a little dangerous and God, they were stupid to do that. But you learned it when there's a need to be met that you do it, and you don't really ever feel. I mean, I've had a lot of people call up and say, "Are you crazy? Why do you do that? Why do you go down to New Orleans? Why were you standing there with gunfire going off in the general area?" You just don't even think about it. You do what you have to do. Like I said, it was not me alone. It never would have happened if we hadn't had the support of our Sheriff's Department. That was basic. They knew what they were doing, and it just started off – they had a mission in New Orleans, and we were just piggybacking on that mission. It ended up where, for a few days, when their mission was over – their job is to save lives, and they knew we were going to save lives. Nobody else called them to do anything. They, like I said, just weren't going to go down to New Orleans and ride around in boats and see if anybody needed saving. They knew that we were going specifically to save people, and that's why they helped us. Then, of course, like I said, there were just so many people, and I, on this tape, I can't name them all. But there was so many people in the Jewish community that were involved in this effort from both congregations. I didn't call a single person to ask for help to drive a van to help us go to New Orleans. "Do you have room to put people up? We need somebody to do this?" Not one person refused. Everybody chipped in and was willing to do something. It was really heartwarming. I mean, people gave money if we needed to buy supplies for things. People organized with the UJC. We had money come in from there. Donna Sternberg, Erich's mother, did a marvelous job of getting contributions that helped all these people, the evacuees we were bringing in. There was damage to the other congregation from the hurricane. Their roof fell in, their ceiling fell in, and there was a lot of repairs to be done.

RH: You talked about raising $280,000 for twenty-four to seven families. Was that a separate initiative?

RL: That was a separate initiative.

RH: What was that about?

RL: That was totally different. That was very personal. I am a member of a hunting camp in southwest Louisiana, a very large, a very old – the camp was started in 1932. I'm the oldest member now. I've been a member for forty years of the hunting camp, and I'm the oldest member of the camp. I'm President of the camp. There are eight members. We have twenty-seven employees. It's in Creole, Louisiana, in Cameron Parish. Rita totally devastated, as you know – one month, Katrina devastates southeast Louisiana, and the next month, Rita devastates southwest Louisiana. We didn't know it was coming. That was another faux pas on our parts. The storm, everybody said it was going to Houston, Corpus Christi, Houston. Then, the day before, they said, "Oh, no, it was going between Houston and Galveston." All we did was send a guy down there and board up our camp. That's all we could do. The day before, literally the day before, when they said it was swinging, it was going to go in between Galveston and Lake Charles, we knew we would get a terrible storm on our side. It was too late; the Parish was closed, and we couldn't get down there to get any of our valuables out of the camp. A very large camp, an eight thousand square-foot camp, and an old camp, so you can imagine all the memorabilia. Well, it was built in 1957, after Audrey. Audrey wiped out the other camp. So, nothing we could do. The only thing we could do is, the day before, we called every employee, and the ones that we could get, we got most of them just to make sure they were safe, they had left the parish, and they had someplace to go. They all went to Alexandria and Kender and different places. They had relatives or found a hotel somewhere. But they were all, to our knowledge, except one we could not find until after the storm, safe. Anyhow, the day after the hurricane, we flew a plane over there, and our camp was gone. I mean, totally gone, nothing left. Cameron and the whole parish was gone. Anyhow, we had twenty-seven employees, of which twenty lived in the immediate area of Cameron Parish. It lost everything. Everything. We had seven employees that lived towards Lake Charles, Grand Lake, that area. While they had some problems, not too bad, some roofs damaged and stuff like that, they survived okay. But

twenty of them lost their homes, their businesses, everything. Anyhow, I just started a little campaign called the Duck Club Relief Fund, and I wrote every member, every person I'd ever invited to the Duck Camp in the last forty years because it was a super camp and good people. Then I got our other members to do the same thing. To whatever degree they did, I don't know. Regardless, we collected almost $300,000 within a couple of weeks and were able to distribute it to these twenty-seven people. We had to distribute the money according to federal regulations, how serious the damage was, or how much they lost. We did that. We ended up with – after we did that, I forget how much, but a substantial little amount. The money kept coming in, so we made four distributions, and then we gave the Catholic diocese ¬– because everybody that worked for us went to one of three Catholic churches down there, either in Cameron, Creole, or Grand Chenier. So we gave a contribution to the Lake Charles diocese to distribute to those three churches because they were all destroyed. Anyhow, it wasn't a lot, when you divide it up among twenty-seven people, but it was enough that they were able to buy necessities, clothing for their kids, and things like that. We distributed the money over a year to them. While not a lot – I mean, these people are very valuable – I'm not going to even call them employees. They were members of our family. I mean, most of them had been working for us for years. We're rebuilding now. Most of them all have other jobs. They work for us during the hunting season. So they have other sources of income. But it was still a profound impact on them. So we're still doing whatever we can to help them, and hopefully, we'll be back in business next year.

RH: Next hunting season?

RL: Just starting to build. Yeah, rebuild our camp.

RH: You made me curious about something else. When you came into New Orleans, did you encounter a lot of gunfire, a lot of looting, a lot of violence? Did you fear for your life on occasion?

RL: No. Really did not. The first trip we made down here, we heard gunfire. It wasn't close to us, but we could hear it, and it was just sporadic. The sheriff reported to us what they had seen. It was all really confined in a small area. It wasn't a lot of looting going on all around the city. It was just in one little, small area of New Orleans. It was an area that was just as bad before as it was afterward. It was really exaggerated in the press, about the gunfire and the shooting, and there were some buildings burned. There was some looting going on. You remember seeing the Walmart that was looted, with the policemen rolling the baskets around. That was about the worst there was. But what happened in reality was, in a couple of those neighborhoods that were sealed off, the people couldn't get out, and they didn't have food or water, and they broke into some drug stores and grocery stores. To them, it was a matter of survival, as opposed to looting to steal. Now, there was some of that, yes, there was. But from all of the reports I had from law enforcement, it was not near as bad as it was made out to be on television. We only saw one incident, we saw one incident when we were down here, of a – and we really didn't even see it. We saw some cars pull up in a parking lot near where we launched the boats and heard some commotion. We just sent one of the sheriff's cars to see what was going on, because it looked like there might be some, commotion it was. Some men had attacked a woman, and they got there and broke it up just before it got really serious, and arrested the men, and gave them to the local police there that were nearby. We had seen some police cars, and they turned them over to them. That was the only incidence of violence we saw.

RH: What do you hope for in the future for your Jewish community in Baton Rouge?

RL: Well, we're growing a little bit, which is unusual. We have two congregations in Baton Rouge. We don't know, but we certainly figure a few hundred more Jews than we had before the hurricane. Our congregation is relatively strong. The other congregation, to my knowledge, is also doing okay. But in listening to Macy Hart, and what's going on throughout the south, and seeing how many communities have lost their synagogues or

lost their rabbis, I worry about Baton Rouge twenty years from now, thirty years from now, forty years from now. Personally, I would like – we have two Reform congregations in Baton Rouge. One is pretty, still – call it Classical Reform, but it's becoming more, more Hebrew in the services, the liturgy's becoming like that. The kids, certainly, are getting a better Jewish education. We have a much finer Sunday school than we ever had. The other congregation, on the other hand, has always been more Conservative, and it was only started after the war when the two congregations separated. And got a lot of nice people there. I would love to see an amalgamation of the two congregations. I would love to see them come together, we could save by having one really great Rabbi, possibly a Cantor, possibly a first-class educator, a new facility, we could build a day school. There are a lot of things we could do with a five-hundred-member congregation, that we can't do with a 250 and 150-member congregation. I think if we had one congregation, we could get a lot of people that aren't affiliated, possibly, to affiliate. I know it would be some difficulty in deciding on liturgy, but that's why you have a Friday night service and a Saturday morning service. You know, it's a lot. It would not be easy, but it could be done. But I've had a very difficult time just getting people to sit down and talk about it. We have a large core group that would love to see it done, but as long as we have a small group of people that don't want to see it done, then there's no reason to fight it and try to do it. It's got to be – everybody's got to be willing to get on the same page and try to make it work. We just haven't been able to do that, and I'm being brutally frank about it; never discussed it like this publicly. But it's out in the open now because our rabbi is going on sabbatical and [has] been with us a long time. We're just starting the process now to look for a new rabbi. The other congregation has some serious problems with their temple and are going to spend a lot of money to have to fix it up again after the hurricane. They still haven't done it. I think now would be a great time to try to get the congregations together. But I can tell you, just from the efforts I've put in over the – and this started a year before Katrina. We thought we were making headway, and then we just hit a brick wall. I haven't given up, but I don't see it practically

happening.

RH: I've heard a little talk about some joint – looking a little more regionally with the Jewish community. Have you heard any talk about that or have any interest in that?

RL: No. I really haven't.

RH: So, what are the strengths in your Jewish community that you'd like to preserve as you move forward?

RL: What I'd like to preserve is we have a very strong Jewish community. A lot of leaders in our Jewish community, in the community at large, and we always have. From presidents of every major organization – the Boy Scouts, United Way, hospitals, and so on and so forth – we have tremendous Jewish leadership in Baton Rouge. I'm very concerned about that, and I want it to stay strong. It helps build your image in the community, and it brings the Jewish community closer. We just don't have any problems in Baton Rouge that other cities, whether it be New Orleans or other cities, where Jews aren't part of country clubs or organizations. I mean, Baton Rouge is totally assimilated. We've got as many gentile friends as we do Jewish friends, and everybody does. That's the strength of our community is that we have a strong Jewish identity, we have strong congregations, we have strong leadership, yet we are very well assimilated in the community because of our leadership in the community. I want to see that continue.

RH: Nice. What are you personally grateful for in this past year?

RL: Very good question. [laughter] I guess, number one, I'm grateful to my family because of all the support they've given me to allow me to spend so much time doing all this other stuff and not tending to my business. I'm lucky that I have – one of my daughters runs two of my businesses. My other daughter is just a do-anything type girl, whatever needs to be done, she will get it done without complaining. So I've got two wonderful daughters. They are opposites, and they both do their thing. I'm really lucky

to have such strong family support. Susan will do anything not only to support me, but she's on two boards at LSU right now. she's Chairman of one of the boards. We are both very active in the community. I'm Vice Chairman of the Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Baton Rouge. I'll be the Chairman next year. I'm President of our local club, City Club in Baton Rouge, and very active in LSU. I'm on five different boards at LSU. I'm President of the National Sporting Goods Wholesalers Association. I'm Chairman of the board of that. After two years, I'll give that up next month, so thank goodness. So, I'm grateful for the support of my family and my employees that allow me to do all these extracurricular activities. That's what I'm grateful for.

RH: Is there anything you took for granted before that you'll never take for granted again? [laughter] Have you thought of that?

RL: Good question. Yeah. Probably the leadership in the city of Baton Rouge and the willingness of people to help in Baton Rouge. I guess we kind of did take that for granted. But the way the whole community opened up its arms to the people of New Orleans is just remarkable. Everybody tried to help. There was no attitude of, "Oh, I'm glad it happened to hell with New Orleans." None of that. Everybody in Baton Rouge opened up their hearts, their pocketbooks, [and] their homes to help the people. I guess, as much as I love Baton Rouge, I kind of took that for granted a little bit. It's a great city. Great people.

RH: Do you have any different priorities?

RL: Well, yes, a little bit. Right now my priority is to try to slip away a little bit from some of the extracurricular activities I do and concentrate on one or two. I just, in the last two or three years, had my hands too full.

RH: So, what are your top favorites that you'd like to give your time to?

RL: Right now, probably the Cancer Center. We have probably the finest cancer center, one of the top three in the country – treatment center – after Sloan-Kettering and M.D. Anderson. People don't realize it's just the best-kept secret in Baton Rouge. I mean, it's a fabulous cancer center, and nothing like it in the south. And I'm going to devote my next two years to – I've devoted my last twenty years to working there, but next two years are going to be a real challenge to make it bigger and better. We've just, it's so good, it's a responsible position. We've got great leadership over there, great staff. So, really devote some time to that, and I'd like to devote a little bit more time, quality time, with my grandchildren.

RH: I have one more question I have to ask because to a lot of people in New Orleans, you're a hero. So, I'm wondering who your hero was through this storm. Do you have a hero?

RL: Through the storm, did you say?

RH: Through the storm and the Katrina events.

RL: My hero is very easy. It's Colonel Phares at the Sheriff's office. I mean, there was no hesitation. They didn't have any reason to help us any more than the man in the moon. But they were doing a mission in New Orleans, and we were just a tag-along. All at once, it was, "What else can we do to help you?" I mean, they saw they were saving lives, and these guys, members of the SWAT team, when they would pick up Dr. Zurik in the middle of the night, and his elderly wife, both of them very elderly, a famous old doctor in New Orleans. And Dr. Berenson, one of the most famous heart doctors in the whole world – picked them up and see them in tee-shirts and shorts, unshaven, crying, and just thankful to get out. I think it made them feel pretty good. They're my heroes because they were so unselfish, and it just seemed like they couldn't do enough. They had their priorities, and they had to do what they had to do. But they were always there, willing to help us, too.

RH: Do you have anything you'd like to add to this interview?

RL: The only thing I guess I could add is that I think this whole thing probably brought the Jewish communities of New Orleans and Baton Rouge a lot closer. I'm not sure a lot of people in New Orleans knew where Baton Rouge was, and I think they do now. I'm really glad to see that. I mean, I see Jewish people in Baton Rouge going to the movies, the symphony, to opera, to wherever that I didn't even know were in Baton Rouge to begin with, much less still there. They seem very appreciative of the people of Baton Rouge and what they've done. I think the many, many that have moved back, there was never a close relationship between our communities. There really wasn't, the Jewish communities. There were among individual families, but I mean, Rabbi Cohn last year – Rabbi Cohn from Sinai, volunteered to come do our – at the time our rabbi was on a medical leave, and he came and did our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. It was beautiful. Things like that. That's what my impression: our Jewish communities are a lot closer and will continue to be.

RH: Okay, I think we'll wrap up now.

RL: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]