



Carol Wise Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: OK. This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Carol Wise at 1021 State Street, which is her home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Sunday, July 8th, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish life. Carol, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Carol Wise: Yes.

RH: OK. So why don't we begin with how you came to be in New Orleans and a little bit about your life here in New Orleans?

CW: OK. I came to college here from Chicago because I wanted to be warm, and I looked at colleges. My father wanted me out of the Midwest, so that left me the East, the South, or the far West. And far West was too far, and Boulder, which I was accepted at, was too cold, and -- (laughter) -- and East didn't appeal to me, and so it left me Sophie Newcomb, and -- which was warm and lovely. I arrived two days after a hurricane.

RH: Really? What hurricane was that?

CW: Unnamed.

RH: Unnamed.

CW: He who shall remain unnamed in '47.

RH: Wow. What was Newcomb like at that time?

CW: Lovely and very Southern, a shock to my Midwestern sort of being. But small, and easy to maneuver, and easy to meet people.



RH: When you say Southern, what do you mean?

CW: Southern, I mean warm and inviting and sort of laid-back -- coming from Chicago, very laid-back, not quite the -- and I think that -- that the learning of a culture, or living within a culture like that, you begin to understand, in concentric circles, what that area is really like.

RH: So what did you study at the Sophie --

CW: I -- I was -- as an undergraduate, I took the regular liberal arts courses and then ran into a very strange problem. I wanted to graduate with something that I could use in life, and Newcomb really only offered liberal arts. Tried to transfer over to their business school. They didn't take girls in their business school. And finally ended up leaving at the end of my Sophomore year and getting a degree from a teacher's college, right near where I lived in Chicago. So I have a teacher's degree.

RH: Oh. And what teacher's college was that?

CW: It was called National College of Education.

RH: Did that turn into National-Louis --

CW: Could have --

RH: -- (inaudible)?

CW: -- I don't know.

RH: Interesting. And where did you go from there?

CW: I got married to a Tulane student that I knew from New Orleans. Dick was in service, and so we moved around from Kansas to Williamsburg, Virginia, until he was out of service. This was the Korean War, '47, '51. '53, we came back to New Orleans.



RH: And so why don't you tell me his full name, and also tell me your children, and when they were born.

CW: OK. Dick's full name was Richard M. Wise. Family was from here, many generations, with family, even in Abbeville, Louisiana. And I -- as soon as we got back, I went to work, and Dick went to work, and we had -- he was -- he went into his family's business, which was an insurance company that his grandfather, great-grandfather, had started. And I went to selling real estate. It seemed like a good thing to do, and we were looking for houses, and all of our friends that we'd known in school that were married kept coming back and buying houses. So it was a very lucrative decision. Children, first child born in '56, Julie, second child born in '59, Richard, and third child born in '65, Jenny.

RH: And what was important for you and your husband -- for their -- both their Jewish education and their general education?

CW: Dick and I felt very strongly. Dick had gone to -- to Newman, and he disliked Newman intensely. So -- and I had that -- a couple years of education -- I'd actually taught when Dick was in service. And I felt very strongly about public education. So we sent Julie to a public school very near where we lived. And that worked out pretty well until integration hit. And that worked out still all right because it was a small school. And then we moved to our present -- the house I'm still in, and the public school near the house, a block away, was excellent. And finally, when she was about to have to think -- we were about to think -- of junior high, the junior high that we would have had to send her was really deplorable, fallen into disrepair. And we sent her to Country Day. Second child was learning-disabled and went to all kinds of special schools. And third child, we didn't even fool with public schools. There was no option at that point. And (clears throat) we sent her to Country Day. Jewish, my husband felt (clears throat) -- my husband was very active in the Jewish community really through the JCC. He didn't like



joining a synagogue, and he wouldn't.

RH: Really?

CW: Well, we joined Sinai -- long story -- but we joined Sinai. I sent Julie -- because I insisted -- and I sent Julie to the Sunday School because I thought she ought to have a Jewish -- some kind of Jewish education. Dick said she didn't need it. She went for a year and a half. It was very badly run. She was learning nothing [clears throat], and we took her out. And then Dick had an altercation with one of the laypeople who wanted him to give money to build a chapel. And Dick insisted that the money, instead of to the chapel, ought to go to education, and they ought to improve their schools. It was a lot more important to teach children Jewish things, or Jewish education than it was to go to chapel. And that was the end of us belonging to Sinai. Dick sent a -- sent money every year -- but he was out. And none of my children, therefore, went to Sunday School. Julie, one year.

RH: Was that different from your education in Chicago --

CW: No.

RH: What was it (inaudible)?

CW: My parents didn't approve of organized religion.

RH: Oh, really?

CW: Didn't deny the fact that they were Jewish. I remember at one point being sent to Sunday School because I had gone to church with my nanny, or nurse, or housekeeper that we had. And they finally decided that Catholics -- I was beginning to pray with beads, and they decided (laughter) that really wasn't the thing to do. So I got sent for a year, but that was about it. So --



RH: We (inaudible) about the rosary beads.

CW: -- no (inaudible). The rosary beads were -- went beyond my parents' pale. And Dick was -- Dick and his brother-in-law, John Winestock, were both -- were very close friends, and John was Chair of the Federation Drive, the Welfare Fund Drive. I think that both Dick and I began to strongly feel our roots at a very interesting meeting. The Captain of the *Exodus*, the boat, spoke before a Federation meeting, and one of Dick's friends was President of the Federation. So we showed up, and both of us were struck, touched, and while Dick still wouldn't join the synagogue, he was -- as I said, he ended up President of the JCC. And I think my children felt, as many children here felt, that that -- that community was their home and was their -- I know it's not religion -- but was their religion, was their identity.

RH: Uh-huh. The community around the JCC?

CW: Uh-huh.

RH: Tell me about your activities, because I know you've been -- how did you start to become involved in Jewish communal service?

CW: Dick had always been, and I -- I had done other things. I served on other boards -- not a lot -- I was working full-time and three children. And there isn't a lot of time for anything else. And after Dick died, the woman who was the head of the women's division came to me, and said, "Carol, would you start" -- I'd given to Federation, I just didn't do anything with Federation. They had formed -- Federation had formed a young leadership group. Then they had formed a young women's leadership group and all my friends were asked but I wasn't, because I worked and they felt I wouldn't be interested, which kind of upset me. So, I gave my money and I said, "Well, that's the end of that." But Millie came to me and said, would I start a women's business and professional group? And that appealed to me. And the first meeting was in this room, and a woman



by the name of Nancy Sternoff came from Seattle and spoke. Now she's a very close friend of mine on the board of Jewish Women's Archive, so what comes around -- and I became more and more active. I mean, the -- fortunately, the business and professional women's group grew very rapidly. There were a lot of women who had felt -- who worked and felt very isolated from --

RH: What year was this? Do you remember?

CW: If I told you '84, '85, '86, somewhere in there, approximately. I don't know, one thing lead to another, and I was asked to serve on the Board, and then I was asked to be head of a Cash Collections committee -- which apparently is the nastiest job you can give somebody, but I didn't know that (laughter). And I -- I came up with a -- with a marketing plan, if you will, a business plan, and we collected a lot of money. And for that I got something called a Tikkun Olam award, now I had no idea what that meant. Took me a long time to figure out what Tikkun Olam really meant, but it was very nice to give me an award for something that really was very easy to do. They had always done the same thing, and it wasn't working. So I walked and said, "I don't think that's a good idea," and we changed it.

RH: And this was one of the fundraising arms of the Federation, or --

CW: Well, no, Cash Collections is Carol Wise doesn't -- pledges a thousand dollars, two hundred, or usually a thousand dollars -- and over a three-year period, doesn't come -- doesn't produce that thousand dollars. And you go into what Federation calls Cash Collections. And they nurture you along, trying to collect it. But they have budgeted based on what they -- what they thought they were going to get. So Cash Collections becomes very important to the budgetary process. So, it was very easy. I mean, it turned out to be a formula that worked. I got all the past chairs of the Federation campaign to be on my committee. I figured they'd raise the money -- they had to collect the money -- and we sent out letters with all of their names on it, and it had a very



interesting effect.

RH: (laughter) That's -- that's interesting. So then, where did you move from there, and --

CW: A couple of years later, they -- or maybe, I don't know -- they asked me to serve as -- on the Executive Committee, so I did. And then they came to me and said, would I chair the campaign. I -- it's like a -- you know, you get sucked in. It's like a vacuum cleaner (laughter). You're a little piece of dust on the side, and eventually, they get around to you. I joined -- I -- I also got very active in the National Women's -- Women's Business and Professional -- which was part of the National UJ -- or UJ -- UJC at the time -- UJA, it's now UJC, yeah -- and made a lot of friends nationally, which was interesting.

RH: So, what -- I'm curious about the mission of the Business and Professional Women.

CW: They felt that businesswomen were -- they had a women's division, which usually met at noon and went on till three or four in the afternoon, and very few business people can take that kind of time out. And it was usually geared to not -- not in-depth, not quick, not -- it was usually geared to very nice subjects -- where did they go on their trips, and I felt, as did many, that it wasn't something that I would take time out from a business day to go see. So what we did with the Women's -- the Business Women and Professional group, the UP group, is we had subjects that were a lot stronger than that. We had women who were intermarried, intermarriage conversion. We talked in terms of single women who worked and had to raise children. The subject matter got a little stronger, and it drew a lot of people in. It drew a lot of women in who had felt slightly separate.

RH: So what do you think it's like to be Jewish in New Orleans? Can you describe that?

CW: My granddaughter said you asked her that question, and she went too far with it. (laughter) I think that we're held apart slightly. I think -- and I think that division only



really occurs just before Mardi Gras, as things really gear up. I think that we are looked upon by the aristocracy -- or what they consider the kings and queens of Mardi Gras -- as a very bright, very capable group so that that's the plus on the other side of it. And I think because there is so much separateness for Mardi Gras -- and -- and really it's a whole year of things, and they hire aristocracy group -- I think we've been able, as Jews, to do a lot in business, and be more successful. I think we have a lot of quality money, or money that we can put, instead of into Mardi Gras, into projects, both businesses and communal projects. I've never had any real antisemitism problems, but then I've never -- I mean, I know that my kids, my girls, have felt the division. But I didn't grow up here, so I didn't.

RH: So you were never kind of looking to be on the inside of the inside anyway --

CW: No --

RH: -- because you didn't grow up here.

CW: -- and I found out, particularly through my business, that you have a target market, you have a group that -- that you do business with, that are friends of yours, or people that you work with, or within a membership group that you have friends with, that the -- I was very active, and still am, in something called the Women's Professional Council -- actually was either the second or third President of it -- which was exactly the same common group of women, almost parallel to the Jewish group that I helped form -- of women who found out that it was -- that you could give business and get business from a compatible group of people.

RH: So that was more like a -- that was a business association that --

CW: Right.

RH: -- kind of crossed --



CW: All lines.

RH: OK. That worked, in turn --

CW: I'll have to take you to one of those.

RH: Oh. (laughter)

CW: (inaudible).

RH: So you're still involved in it.

CW: Uh-huh, 23 years later.

RH: Oh, wow. So, do you have any memories of, like, that you could speak to, that are, like, one of your favorite memories of New Orleans in general, and then of New Orleans in the Jewish community?

CW: Favorite memories? It -- Rosalind, in what way? I don't quite understand. I mean, are you talking --

RH: (inaudible) It might encapsulate, kind of, your thoughts about the community.

CW: I think -- hmm. I think that I've been touched by several events. I was trying to think -- the opening of the Jewish Community Center in -- when was it -- in the '60s, was exciting and wonderful to see a community come together like that. I think that sitting at the -- at that meeting in Exodus with a -- with a whole three or four hundred people, and realizing what had happened, was a turning point for my own thinking. I think the day we formed -- the evening that we really started the Women's Business and Professional Group for Federation was a turning point for me. In hearing somebody like Nancy Sternoff speak about -- the isolation of women in business was a turning point. Certainly, the death of my husband was a turning point for me and the affection and warmth of the



Jewish community that I felt at that time. Does that answer it pretty well?

RH: I think that's a beautiful answer. (laughter)

CW: OK.

RH: Let's move on. Let's move into some of the Katrina material, and tell me -- I've learned from your daughter that you were responsible for her -- her children, your --

CW: That's right.

RH: -- grandchildren, in heading to Houston. So tell me a little about that, and --

CW: Well --

RH: -- tell me just about what you do to prepare for the hurricane, and such as that.

CW: I got my house boarded up. I have a contractor who comes the minute it looks like it's going to hit, who actually was the contractor for this house. And Glenn calls and says, "It looks like we're going to have a blow." And he came and boarded up the house. Two hurricanes before -- or maybe it was just one hurricane before -- I was going to stay, and Jimmy [*Julie?*] said to me, "What are you going to do if it floods?" And I said, "That's easy. First place, it's never flooded here. Never." And I said, "But if it" -- she said, "The levee -- the -- the -- if the hurricane came up the -- up the river, your house is going to flood." I said, "That's easy. I'll go in the attic." And she said, "How are you going to get out of the attic?" -- since this is a one-story house. And I said, "I've got a big hatchet up there. I'll just use the hatchet." And she said, "I -- I want you to do one thing for me. I want you to take the hatchet -- I'm going to hang up -- and I want you to go outside, and I want you to go try to hit a tree with the ax, and see how much you chip away from that tree." So I did that, and about 20 minutes later, very hot, sweaty, tired, and only making one little chip in the whole tree, I came back and said to Jenny, "I'm



going to go to Houston.” (laughter) So -- and I did, with Julie and everybody else. But it was a nothing. I mean, it didn’t -- nothing happened. So this time I thought -- Julie says, “I’m going to stay here, and I’m going to this -- I have a two-story house, and I can stay.” And I thought, “You know, if it really got bad, and if it really got flooded, that’s not really a good place.” And Jenny -- Julie said, “I don’t think you should stay, Mom. I think you should take the girls and go to Houston. I’m going to stay.” And so -- I said, “OK. We’ve been before. It’s three days, take the girls, we’ll go to Houston, and we’ll be back in three days.” So, to be honest with you, other than getting my house boarded up, I didn’t think of a thing. It had happened twice before, nothing had happened. I mean, the hurricane had come close but hadn’t come here, or it veered off. And I thought, well -- and I took off with my little suitcase thinking, it may come but nothing’s going to happen. So, for -- in response, I hadn’t thought a lot about anything happening. I hadn’t picked up -- I hadn’t picked up jewelry, I hadn’t picked up pictures. I -- other than the house being boarded up, I didn’t clean out my refrigerator, I didn’t -- I didn’t do anything. It’s like Peter and the Wolf. We’d been too many times where nothing happened.

RH: Right, right. So, one of your granddaughters talked about you looking over, though, in the city as y’all were flying over, and telling her to --

CW: Look.

RH: -- take a good look. Tell me --

CW: I did. I didn’t even know I’d done that.

RH: Oh, really?

CW: No. Isn’t it funny what one -- some things. I realized that it was -- I realized, when we got out to the airport, or got on the road, that the hurricane was a lot closer and a lot bigger than any one had ever been before. And it suddenly dawned on me that I had left a lot of stuff here that I shouldn’t have, and that we might be in big trouble -- might. It



was just scary. I mean, and the panic that -- that you felt in the airport, the people in the airport who were, can you get me on a plane, please get me on a plane, my mother is sick. I've seen -- I've seen pictures of people trying to flee the Nazis, and trying to get people out of a -- out of harm's way and -- in movies. And it kind of had that feeling in the airport.

RH: Wow.

CW: I never thought about that. I didn't even realize it, that they -- I do remember saying it to them, though.

RH: So, what happened -- what did you guys do in Houston?

CW: We had a lovely, very small room, that was handicapped, which I thought was sort of interesting because I did feel handicapped, in that I was pulled out not where I should be -- handicapped was they had no doors in the bathroom, you know, and the shower was on one level, handicapped in the sense of the wheelchair. But handicapped, to me, began to mean other things. I was very upset about Julie staying. It really scared me, and as we watched the reports that night, it really frightened me. And she did leave, and she kept calling us from the car, "Can you find me a motel?" And we couldn't, so the first night we spent on the phone, trying to find a motel. Our cell phones were still working, and Julie finally, I think, at about three or four in the morning, called and said, "I found a hotel, and I'm going to spend the night. I'm in Lake Charles." So we went to bed, and we got up in the morning, and they were reporting that the hurricane had come in and that it had gone East of the city, which meant that we weren't going to have that -- we weren't going to have Category Five winds here. I don't know, and you know, Rosalind, I kind of blanked out at that point. It was like, oh, it's over, it's OK, we'll be back in a couple of days, it'll be fine. And the girls went shopping, you know. We went to the Galleria. And I -- I can't even tell you when I began to realize what had really happened. There was -- it was by the second day, and the reports showed what was happening in the dome and



that there -- that it was flooding. I had no concept of the depth of the flooding. I could understand flooding, but not at the depth they were talking about, or the catastrophic problems that were occurring. It was all on CNN. And the girls, I really didn't want them to sit in front of a television for hours. I felt it was frightening, and not good. And by that time, Julie was there, and four of us were in this handicapped room, (laughter) and it was very -- it was tense and unpleasant. A friend of Julie's -- that was on Friday -- a friend of Julie's on Friday made us move into her house, which she said she would -- it was Labor Day weekend. Julie said she wanted to stay at the hotel. So the two girls and I went to her home and had a lovely house to live in, and we weren't on top of each other. It was -- and the depth and breadth and how awful it was began to really hit.

RH: So, it took like a full week to --

CW: Took a week --

RH: -- for it to sink in.

CW: Well, you -- you lost your cell phone, you lost -- you lost people because you couldn't find anyone. We still weren't totally convinced that we couldn't go back in a week. You -- I mean, I didn't make plans. We were going to just -- going to stay at the hotel. By the end of the week, we knew we couldn't go back. We didn't know when it was going to happen. A friend of mine lives just a block from here, and he stayed. And he came to Houston -- I guess it -- either the first or the second week -- and said he'd been to the house here, and that there was no damage. He walked around. I was concerned -- there was a big oak tree that I was scared had -- might come down. He said I had absolutely no trees that had come through the roof, or anything else. And the house looked to be in absolutely perfect condition. So I stopped worrying about mine, but I wasn't sure -- I couldn't figure out all the rest that was going on. It was hard to imagine. And suddenly we began, on CNN, seeing everything. And I almost ceased functioning. I can't describe that. It was like numb. Julie says, "We've got to find a place



to live”, which we did. They got into an apartment right away. The apartment we were to take was not available, so it -- the -- my significant other, the guy I go out with, was in -- had gone to Florida -- another long story -- but he was in England when the storm hit. He came, and his daughter was in Florida, and he went and stayed with them. And we got tickets to go to Boston, and we went to Boston for 10 days.

RH: And so, that was just to kind of reconnect and just --

CW: There was no place -- you couldn't get into the city. You couldn't -- by that time, I had gone to the Galleria, like the rest of the kids had, and had, you know, some shoes to wear, and a jacket or so. And I figured I'd live the rest of my life in two pair of pants and (laughter) -- and a jacket. By that time, the Federation had come through, the Houston Federation had come through and were helping people find apartments. But we'd already found ours. We had changed cell phones so that we had a workable cell phone. We'd rented a car -- all the --

RH: All the things to make life a little easier.

CW: Just a little. And -- and -- and it seemed to me that we never quite -- you were never quite -- they let people into Jefferson Parish, but they wouldn't let them in to -- to Arlene's Parish. I didn't get that. So, I went to -- to -- to Boston for 10 days. We came back --

RH: Now, tell me a little about that. How did you pick Boston? Why --

CW: Daughter lives in Boston, youngest daughter lives in Boston. So I decided that would be a good -- we had -- we had a 10-day window. During the time that we were -- my son-in-law -- I can't remember when he came in -- my son-in-law came during that first week. He wasn't -- he -- he was between jobs. His company had been sold out, and he wasn't -- he wasn't working. So he came down, stayed with us at the hotel, and Julie and Marshall and Kevin came back here and got into the house. And Kevin got some



clothes out for me, not all the right clothes, but OK clothes -- (laughter) and pulled the jewelry out, and drove back. And my car was parked in Marshall's warehouse out in Jefferson. So Kevin took my car and drove it to Houston for me, which had to have taken place that first week, now that I think about it. So I had a car now, not a rental car, I had a car. And I had some clothes.

RH: And so when you got back from Boston, you had a car, and you had your clothes --

CW: That's right. He actually went before I --

RH: Oh, before you went to Boston?

CW: I'm -- I'm not really sure of that. No, he must not have. He must have gone -- he must have gone when we -- when after we got back from Boston.

RH: That's what I'm thinking. Or while you were in Boston.

CW: Yeah. I was just thinking that there was such an issue about getting Kevin there, and getting to stay at the -- no, I think it was -- I'll have to check, I just can't tell you -- one of the things that I had discovered, when you're in that kind of chaotic -- you disassociate. I remember him staying at the hotel, and I was at the hotel, which meant that I left that hotel on about the 10th or 11th of September. So it had to have been that first 10 days. It -- it -- it had to have been then.

RH: Were there other people you were trying to connect with?

CW: We had a very interesting -- we'd all meet for lunch -- have you heard this story about the -- the deli?

RH: No, tell me about it.



CW: Kenny -- I think it's called Kenny and Ziggy's, or Ziggy's and something -- there's a huge delicatessen like -- it was the size of almost the Stage Door Delicatessen in New York -- near the Galleria. And every lunch, and sometimes breakfast, and sometimes dinner, but always at lunch, all of the New Orleanians would meet that wanted to. But the place was overrun to such an extent that Federation, our Federation -- or maybe it was the Houston -- set up a table with a computer next to the checkout, and they were gathering names. You haven't heard this one yet?

RH: No.

CW: They gathered everybody's name and their new telephone number, and where they were in Houston, how to reach them, who their contact people were. And then, if we knew of other people in Dallas, or in Atlanta, or whatever, we'd give them that as well. And e-mail addresses, if we had them. So there would be, on any given day, maybe a hundred -- I want you to understand how many -- people that -- that walked through this place from 10:30 in the morning till 2:00 in the afternoon. So you connected with a lot of people, and everybody would tell you, well, I got in touch with, or I know that, or they got out at the last minute, and blah blah. So you heard all the stories, and the connection of people at that point, there were a huge group of people in Houston. And then the Houston Federation had several events just for New Orleanians to connect, and to meet each other, and it was a word of mouth kind of thing.

RH: Did it feel important to do that, to go to Ziggy's, and --

CW: Yes.

RH: To --

CW: Ziggy's was very important. (laughter) It really was. You had to have lunch anyway, and to really see people, and know that people had gotten out, and who had gotten out, it sort of reconnected you. I am so surprised you haven't heard of the Ziggy's story.



(laughter)

RH: No. Un-hnn. Wow. So, what were the Federation events like? Did you go to any of those?

CW: I went to some of the Federation events. It was like a bunch of zombies meeting another bunch of zombies. I mean, everybody had a story, and you listened. It wasn't too dissimilar to your story. I went to -- Federation had -- had at least -- it may -- I'm not sure it wasn't the synagogue that had the thing or Federation, or maybe it was in conjunction with each other. I'm really not positive about that. And then we got through this network at Ziggy's. We heard that there were going to be services, and we're at the services, High Holiday services, we're going to be. I did go to those and they were lovely, wonderful, including meeting a man from Beaumont who's, by this time, Rita had gone through. And I went to both -- and -- and one of the -- one of the synagogues had given us an auditorium, children -- their kids' auditorium, a huge one -- and we had services there.

RH: So that was a New Orleans crowd?

CW: Absolutely.

RH: All New Orleans?

CW: All New Orleans. I went to one service that was Houston, and I hated it (laughter).

RH: And why was that?

CW: I don't know. I felt so cut off and so uncomfortable. I mean, it was interesting to see a whole nother service, and to -- I mean, and people were lovely. I felt like an intruder. First place, people in synagogues have a tendency to sit in certain places, and I have a feeling that a group of us kind of took up somebody else's place. They were very



nice about it. I mean, they came down the aisle, and they were all set to sit in these two aisles, and there we were. And they went -- and I said, "We'll move." And they said, "No, no, stay. It's fine. We'll just slip in over here." Roswell has a cousin that lives in Houston and is very active in the synagogue there. So that's why we went to the (inaudible), that if there were New Orleans thing, I was going to go to it. I just -- I did feel like an intruder.

RH: So in Houston, what do you feel is the most helpful thing?

CW: Getting my computer running? (laughter)

RH: Did you buy a computer, or --

CW: No, no. Kevin, when he came, got my computer. I have a laptop. So he got the computer. I -- what was the most -- I think having Julie and the girls in the same building was helpful. I think the feeling of community, knowing how to keep in touch with people -- so I guess I would say that a cell phone became very important, telephone numbers, the connection of being able to keep people together. I kept thinking about the Holocaust, not that it's the same, but losing people, and not knowing where they've gone is a very upsetting way. I was -- I think too, finally, settling in were the reaching out to people from all over the country, friends. I mean, I didn't think I'd hear from them. I didn't realize that they -- that they watch television night and day. I have a friend in Milwaukee who was so upset that she was in tears. And finally, I said, "Audrey, stop watching CNN." (laughter) So the reaching out to people from all over, I think, I was deeply touched by Gail Reimer calling, and checking with me constantly.

RH: And tell me who Gail is.

CW: Gail Reimer is the Executive Director of the Jewish Women's Archives. And she called and said that the Board had raised some money, what could they do, what should they do with it. Where -- where should it be given? And I -- this was that first numbing first week or so. I suggested that they give it to the Federation in Houston because they



were inundated on a -- they were flooded when they did -- if you'll excuse the pun -- I mean, they suddenly had a -- I heard almost a thousand Jews showed up on their doorstep, and needed help. So the overpowering thing -- so, to hear from Gail, and to know that that Board had done that was absolutely -- made me cry. I mean, it was such a -- a reaching out to help people. The -- and I don't think that most -- I didn't understand the breadth and depth of how bad it really was here until I got back.

RH: So, how long were you in Houston (inaudible)?

CW: I left Houston -- Roswell left Houston the middle of October, because he got electricity, and his refrigerator was fine, and -- and he left the 15th. I didn't leave until the 30th because I couldn't get the -- the electricity, the wires into my house had been pulled out by a tree coming down in front. And they ripped up into the attic, so I had to get an electrician that would come and rewire not only the box but into the house itself as well, which he did. But that didn't get finished until the 30th of November. I came back on the 30th.

RH: Of November?

CW: Of November.

RH: So, were you frustrated by having to stay in --

CW: No, because I was sort of scared about coming back.

RH: Really? What were your fears?

CW: I was fearful of the -- I guess, of the germs -- I -- no, not germs -- I was fearful of the -- of the -- of the water, if you will, of the flood waters, how much had come through, how bad were -- how was it going to be hard to live here physically, was the -- were you going to be able to -- was there a grocery store open, was there a -- I happen to know that



there was a grocery store open, because one of the people who stayed with Julie or was in the building with us, was the people owned Langenstein's, so -- (laughter)

RH: They were back?

CW: They were back. But I -- I -- to come back to a bombed-out city was a little on the frightening side.

RH: I understand that. And so, were there any other things in Houston that you did to kind of sustain yourself that you remember before we kind of move on today?

CW: The trip to Boston was very helpful.

RH: Why so?

CW: Because I got to see that things were back -- that things were normal everywhere -- and that there were people who cared what had happened, really cared what happened. I actually went to a -- I think I went, I can't remember, I went then or a little later, to a JWA meeting, a Jewish Women's Archives Board meeting. By that time I had heard and been in touch with the Jewish Endowment people and knew what they were doing. I knew the money that was coming in. I had been, right at the very beginning, in touch with Carol Smokler, who was the Chair of the UJC committee for Katrina, and I knew by then that people were being taken care of and that they were putting the pieces back together. I knew that the URC -- I don't know, the -- the Reform movement had sent money in, and because I serve on the Executive Committee of the Jewish Endowment, I knew that we were putting money back in. I had been -- I had been with our -- the people from our synagogue and had realized I guess, very dramatically, our cantor's plight and how desperate that was. His house had gone completely under. He had a baby and a wife, wife and baby. They completely lost their brand new house, or their -- not brand new -- the home that they had just purchased.



RH: So is this at Temple Sinai, or --

CW: No. Touro.

RH: Touro.

CW: I knew that -- I knew that -- that -- that we were -- that the Endowment was going to take money, and -- and help get things back, the structures back. So I -- I began to feel better about this whole Jewish community, not just locally, but the whole Jewish community worldwide had come in and were putting the pieces back together. And that was a -- I think that helped me feel better about being here, and coming here, that it -- if -- if everybody from all over the world, almost literally, were -- were going to do that, then being here was important to help that process go through.

RH: That makes sense.

CW: Take it and bring it together. It overcame any fear of being here. The pre-- I guess what I'm saying is the protection of the whole -- you asked me a question. I'm going to go back to something that I think is important. You asked me, when did I become Jewish, kind of. One of the steps had been with -- the Rabbi had taken a group to Israel, and I'd gone to Israel. I'd never been to Israel before. And I think that going with Jews from here to Israel, and seeing Israel, helped me understand what world Jewry was about, not just local, but world. And I think all of those pieces, Rosalind, began to make me realize that somehow or other I was always going to be protected, Jewishly, or personally. I think the protection that I felt, the shield that I felt of being a Jew, gave me both the courage, perhaps, and the determination to come back and rebuild.

RH: So in some ways, what I'm hearing is that the Jewish community had your back.

CW: Right.



RH: And there was a kind of way being Jewish was helpful (inaudible).

CW: It gave -- it's sort of like -- I knew I could come back, and I knew I could do things, but I knew that -- I knew that if you protect your heart, the rest of your body will function.

RH: There was a lot of giving, and were you on the receiving end of some of that?

CW: I guess -- you'd have to say yes. I certainly was on the receiving end of -- of the High Holidays, where we were taken in and given everything we could possibly be. Certainly was on the receiving end of Jewish Women's Archives, and their feeling that they wanted to help, which really lead to this very project that we're on right now.

RH: This oral history.

CW: The -- the oral history, and the Katrina's Jewish Voices. I really feel, if you want to be protected, those are the places that you're protected. I could see people from all over the country stepping in, Jews from all over the country stepping in and coming here and doing things. I serve on the, both the local and the International Board of Hillel, have been deeply involved in the Spring Break program, for Hillel Spring Break -- had taken groups of students who were here cleaning up, working here, and (inaudible) --

RH: So, Hillel, is this the national Hillel Association?

CW: National Hillel. It's called International because literally there are 40 some-odd Hillels in Russia, the former Soviet Union, and there are five or six in South America, so -- and there are Hillels in Israel, and so yes, you call it -- we call it the International Hillel, and I'm actually Vice President of that -- of that Board. So, it's a -- to see these kids come from all over the country, and rebuild, help us rebuild.

RH: OK. We're going to wrap up this tape (laughter).

CW: I can tell.



RH: Yeah. He gives me the sign here. And we'll start another tape (inaudible).

CW: All right. Am I roaming too far?

RH: No, no. We're doing a great job, I think.

[END OF AUDIO FILE ONE]

RH: So we're talking a little more about the Jewish Women's Archive, and how this project came.

CW: The project was interesting. I think the first thing that happened, obviously, was the money that was raised by the Board. The second thing that I think happened, I showed up at the Board meeting with a map that showed the destruction of what had happened, first to thank the Board for what they had done. And the next thing I knew, Gail Reimer, the Executive Director, began talking about doing a project just on Katrina's Jewish Voices, just on what the Jews were doing. Jayne Guberman apparently began to do some research as to were there any oral histories anywhere, were there any kind of archives that included the Jewish story, because I think the Jewish story, the impact of what UJC did, the 26 million dollars the Jews like you and everybody else gave, has sustained and -- and maintained our -- the Jewishness in this city. Let me go back one step. Carol Smokler said to me when -- right after the storm when we were in that terrible room in Houston -- said to me, "What's needed?" And I said, "What's needed is money, cash." All -- our banks didn't function, so Carol got everybody -- got UJC to give money out. Then she said, "What's needed?" And I said, "All of our agencies here in New Orleans, and all of our synagogues here in New Orleans, employ people and they have -- they don't have a way of getting paid. It came from that dinner I had with the -- with our business manager for Touro, and the cantor after a meeting. We all went and got something to eat. They were without salaries. And I said, Carol, these people are panicked. They have -- they have no money. They have nothing -- the banks aren't



working perfectly, but even if they did, they're going to start eating through -- who's going to pay them? How do we get money to people scattered all over? So, in telling that story to Gail and Jayne, Jayne did some research and there was no Jewish voice in any of the archives, or any of the things being collected by the Smithsonian, or by Storyboard, or any of the other people who collect stories. And all of a sudden Gail said, or Gail called me and said, "We're going to start something called Katrina's Jewish Voices, and we're going to start collecting stories all over, for people during -- during this process. I think it's extremely important, Jewishly, that we know the depth and breadth of what happened when a disaster -- I said it -- of biblical proportions happened, that Jews help Jews. I've had a Catholic friend who said, "That didn't happen with the Catholic charities." And I'm sure some of it did. But not the depth and breadth that happened to us, not the giving, not the caring. It was just perfectly amazing to me, how my Jewish friends around the country reached out and called. My -- the -- the Hillel groups that have come down here to help us redo homes, my Hillel connections who all called and said, "What can we do for you?" The international Hillel Board met here this past spring, and actually went out and cleaned houses. I think -- I know that the JCC National Board was here. I think that those things are so important to say. We do -- Judaism is a -- in my opinion -- a spectacular religion, but it goes beyond that. There is this feeling that we are one people, and that we -- that Tikkun Olam, which I now know what it means, is important, and that we must help each other, and others.

RH: So, to you, what does Tikkun Olam mean?

CW: Tikkun Olam means -- somebody described it -- where it came from is that it's a spark that, when they -- that God is trying to put all those pieces back into one container, and you have to gather those sparks, you have to do things to help other people. It's the soul that puts it back together.



RH: Has your understanding of giving changed in any sense, this experience, or how you would even -- how you look at other people in need?

CW: Yeah. I -- I've always been, I think, a fairly generous person. I've always felt that helping others was a [phone ringing] -- was something important, that one lived, one always gave back. My mother was a social worker in Chicago during the Depression. And so, I understand giving, and how important -- and I -- I think I grew with that. I didn't -- I wasn't told that is a Jewish value until much later when I discovered that it probably is. I'm sure other people give. I know they do. And I think that they give well. But it is so ingrained Jewishly. I think we're a far richer, smarter, better group because we believe in nurturing people.

RH: So, tell me a little bit about when you decided to come back, and what that was like for you?

CW: Well, I never considered that I wouldn't come back. And I was fortunate enough to walk into a house that looks fine, except for a problem with the roof, and somebody had taken my refrigerators out. So coming back was very easy for me, and I was really angry that other people didn't come back. I have gotten over that anger as I've taken tours. People are touring the city and realize that if I'd had 12 feet of water in this house, or 10 feet -- my ceilings are 10 feet -- and had lost everything in the house, would I come back? It's a question I've asked myself many times and realized that I'm not 100 percent sure I would have. It's hard. That would be a very hard -- and I think it's harder for older people than it is for younger people. I think that we -- older people have collected all of our memories in our home, and to have to start out from scratch, do you want to be threatened again? I think living here and understanding the threat of floods, and understanding what floods now really mean in this community is a very difficult thing. Would it chase me away if another one came? I can't answer that. I thought about it a lot. I'm just not 100 percent sure that I would. I probably would, because I'm just dumb



enough to think that I could do this all over, and these are just things. And that really is true, but I can understand people not having that kind of energy to do it again. I can understand people who didn't come back. If my house had flooded would I have come back? I think so. I have such deep roots here at this point, that I think so.

RH: Even your granddaughters are, like, adamant that they're going to live here in this city.

CW: I know.

RH: Where do they get that from? (laughter)

CW: I think that there is -- my father used to say -- my mother used to say that my father was a stubborn Dutchman, and (laughter) it may come from that Dutch end of the family. I think that there is a pride in rebuilding. I think that -- I've taken some management courses, and -- and one of the management courses said, "People support what they create." And I have used that many times in creating, and to help create. I can see, in -- from that first Cash Collections Committee to -- I went back to those who created the cash, supposedly, and asked them to collect, to forming a huge collaborative to change the way child care is done in this community. I think that the more people you draw in, the more ownership they have of what you're doing. So I have a lot of ownership.

RH: Tell me about -- because this is one of the main things you're doing in the recovery -- is the child care issue?

CW: Right.

RH: Can you kind of lay out the scope of the problem, and then tell me --

CW: All right, what I'm doing. I'm not doing as much, because I'm not chairing that anymore, but peripherally I am. What has happened was that there were 281 childcare



facilities in Orleans Parish. As of last count, there are 82. The -- the Success by 6 module that we were doing for United Way, for the Women's Leadership Council, had three demonstration models that we were using to eventually -- although it's now happened -- go to quality child care, quality child care rating system, quality rating system, QRS, and to read. We've had to rebuild all three of them, to rebuild them, each unit, each child care facility, costs anywhere from 150,000 to two -- over well over 200,000. These are facilities that hold 50 to 100 kids and run by small business owners who've had to dig into savings and money that they didn't have to rebuild. To not have childcare in this community means that we cannot bring workers back. If you're going to have young workers, they're going to have young children. And while they can put their children in school, or find a school, they also have to have childcare facilities. So the rebuild of those is -- formed a collaborative, and involves a lot of different people. But what they're doing is they've called in a single contractor. One of the other problems is contractors not doing things correctly, and --

RH: You mean a construction contractor?

CW: Contractor. And I think -- I think there are eight that we're trying to get funding for to rebuild, one at a time. It's a very difficult process.

RH: Well, I'm a little confused, because you said you -- before the storm there were three Success by 6?

CW: There were three Success by 6 demonstration models. Two of them are now up and running. The money came from -- the first one the money came because a woman scrounged everything she had, including a mortgage on her own home, and diverting some insurance money that she should have put into her house, and taking her life savings, and putting it in. And then we came along and found an additional \$75,000 for her. The other part of that is that not only did they lose -- and if I lost my house, I'd lost -- lose all my furniture. They lost all their furniture and all the equipment for the children,



which had been gathered for a long period of time. We have begun to put -- we've been given a lot of books and some equipment. But we've gotten two Kaboom projects -- two Kaboom projects for two of our three. The third --

RH: You have to tell me what a Kaboom project --

CW: Kaboom does (laughter) -- OK. Kaboom is a national organization that has said that they will put, wherever possible, playgrounds back in. And United Way has helped. They -- they have national organizations that are underwriting it, and we put a small fraction in and furnish the labor to put the playground in, in one day. They have it all set up. They do this all over the country, but it's --

RH: And so, but -- so you've gotten two of the three Success by 6 and then you've got other --

CW: The third one will be up -- the third one should be up in the next month. It's almost completed. I've helped bring in a group from Tufts University in Boston. Their early childhood development group has come in and worked on -- on both -- on two of them at this point. One of them they -- the one that's not open they painted. They helped paint and draw murals, and do work. They were here for a week. And they've sent equipment down.

RH: Wow. And the other, you were talking about eight.

CW: There are eight that -- that had been chosen RFP's, had been given that we'll -- hopefully, we'll be able to find the money to build out. There -- there always is some money that the owner has, but there is -- it's not -- not adequate. And we're getting grants from people around the country, large, to be able to come in and do it. There's an article in today's paper about the United Way's program for children this summer, and where to put them, and what to do with them. So there's a lot -- there're a lot of needs. I mean, we -- we have a lot more needs than we have money or people to (laughter) --



RH: Right. So how did you get involved with the childcare? Why --

CW: Why child care? I was asked by a very close friend of mine to help perform a women's leadership group for United Way. And since I understood Women's Division from Federation, I figured that wasn't too hard to do. And women give and like to give separately. And so we formed a group of 50 founding members, very diverse, very open. Each gave a leadership gift of over a thousand dollars. So we started off with more than a -- more than \$50,000, if you equate it -- opened it up, went out for a huge group, recruited, and ended up within a three-year period with over 400 women, giving in excess of a thousand or better.

RH: So is this annual --

CW: And some -- yes --

RH: -- or (inaudible).

CW: No, it's an annual. It's an annual United Way gift. And -- and from those 400 women, we've formed a governing body and an Executive Committee. The woman who is my friend, Kim Sport, was the first President of the Women's Leadership. We called it the Women's Leadership Initiative because it was new. And I was Vice-Chair during that time that we started it. During that two years, I chaired the beginning of Success by 6, because we determined, from the Women's Leadership, that what we wanted to do was to impact children, women, and children in this community.

RH: So this was an initiative that started before the storm.

CW: Before the storm, and -- and by the time of the storm, I was -- I was -- or during the storm, I was Chair of the group, or with -- with about a six-month run in there or less. And we had started the Success by 6 program to get a -- to -- and the initiative for our Success by 6 was to get a quality rating system. We took a collaborative of over 140



people, and came down to, after a year, that what we really needed to do was this quality rating system, that that -- that that would have a greater impact on the -- on the school system, and on children in this community than anything else we could possibly do. And so that was before the storm. And when the storm hit, we had these three demonstration models, and that's where -- after the storm we went in and started working. So we're still doing the same thing. The good news is --

(off-mike voices; inaudible)

CW: The good news is that the State put a woman in charge of the Department of Social Services for childcare, a woman by the name of Sherry Guarisco. And the Governor determined that education was her -- even during the storm thing, was important, and the quality rating system went in this past legislative session --

RH: Oh, wow. So --

CW: -- throughout the State.

RH: Do you work with agenda, and some of the other --

CW: Yeah, agenda is part of -- remember, I said there was a collaborative of 140 -- agenda was very much a part, and Judy Watts, we have a -- you can't -- you can't make final decisions with 140 people, although we met once a month. We have a steering committee, and the steering committee involves Judy Watts. Pearly Awa (sp?), who's head of Head Start here, etcetera. The interesting thing about that collaborative -- and it goes back to, people support what they create, right?-- is that I insisted on that collaborative, that we have people who were funders, as well as people involved in it. And so, some of our very biggest funders, women funders, like Phyllis Taylor, were very much a part of that collaborative. It has a tendency, when that happens, to keep the people who are running small agencies not bickering about theirs is more important than -- or their voice is more important than. And so, we had the woman who is head of the



Education Division for Baptist Community Ministries, Kathy Vaughn, who is part of it, and was on the Steering Committee as well. So it -- it is a -- it is a very interesting group of people that made it happen. Sylvia Stern, by the way, came to the Collaborative meetings.

RH: Do you see here, after the storm, a break -- not a breakdown in the sense of a problem -- but a difference in how women are managing and men manage, and how they're engaged in the recovery? Is there any gender differences that you notice?

CW: No, and I think -- I think the problem here is, overall, you have to function on your job, or whatever you're -- you're doing. And then you have to function on trying to get your house in order and things done. I think that -- I think that women do more of the outgoing feeling kind of things, and men are so determined to get their business back, that there isn't room for almost anything else.

RH: Do you see women playing a crucial role in the recovery?

CW: I would think so, yes. I am so down on Nagin, that's it's hard for me to answer that nicely. But he certainly has women surrounding him in different aspects. I happen to know Brenda Hatfield, and I think she's a wonderful person. I think he is so inept that I -- recovery can't occur until he's gone, in my opinion. Real recovery.

RH: Real recovery. What do you think needs to be done that's not happening at the --

CW: I think you need --

RH: -- mayoral level.

CW: I think you need strength and charisma, and the ability -- and -- and strength comes in the ability to make decisions and go forward with them. Sometimes they are not going to be perfect. I think you need people who communicate well and communicate a sense



of urgency. I think you have to have people who don't get their feelings hurt easily, and are willing to move out and get with a -- with a vision. I think he is not a visionary. I think you have to people who don't care whether their skin is white, purple, or pink, or black, or white. It doesn't make any difference. And I don't think he's that way. I think he's a bigot.

RH: Explain that further.

CW: I think that he thinks that -- I think he is so protective of the black population that it is difficult for him to go beyond the black population and their problems. And they have many. I think he's protecting that population. I understand that. I would certainly protect the Jewish population, but not at the expense of everyone else.

RH: How is he protecting them, just --

CW: I think that he's -- that his -- that his whole -- that his whole venue, his whole thought process is, we've got to get the black people back -- that lived in the -- the African-Americans who lived in the projects back here, and into the -- into their homes. And I think he's right, but I think that any -- I think he should, and I think we should. I think that everything else gets lost. I think he's got a single -- I think that it's -- you know, the new -- the new computers you can put three or four screens up at one time and pick your screen, but they're all going on? I think he has a single screen, and I think that that's -- it's like my idea that you have to have this huge collaborative that really works, yeah, but you have to have -- it has to be broad, and -- and you have to have leadership to move it. I feel that lack of leadership. I think -- I think you have to have a voice, and I think he has no voice. All he does is complain. I mean, the Mayor wasn't good, the Governor was -- I -- well, I think she was wonderful as far as education goes, wonderful. I think she was a whiner as well. I think you have to have people who aren't fearful. And I think both of them have been fearful people. I understand their fears, but you've got to have the vision of it's going to get better, and this is where I'm going. After spending a



day on the Gulf Coast with the Jewish Women's Archive group, they have a vision.

RH: On the Gulf Coast?

CW: Uh-huh. Biloxi has a vision.

RH: Biloxi. And so that's not just the Jewish community --

CW: No.

RH: -- you mean the larger community.

CW: No, the larger community. I think actually, the Jewish community may be having its own vision problems. How can we envision -- if I had come back to a house that had been totally flooded, could I -- how could -- could I envision myself someplace else, would I have the guts to buy another little house, and to fix it up and to live here? Because that's what it takes, and the --

RH: So, you mean on an individual level.

CW: I think on --

RH: (inaudible)?

CW: -- be it an individual level? It's the vision -- let me go back to UJC -- that the Jews had to be protected, this Jewish community, fragile community had to be protected, and they moved ahead with a plan. I think if you take a little circle like that as a -- as -- as one way, if you take -- if you broaden those concentric circles, it's all the same.

RH: How -- how do think the Jewish community's done in the recovery?

CW: I think -- we have a new Executive Director. (phone rings) We have a strategic planning groups that are going along. I think we're going to make some dreadful



mistakes, but we're going to -- I think it's important to make mistakes. I think it's important to just move ahead, that you can't --

(off-mike answering machine message; inaudible)

CW: -- should we wait till that's over (laughter)? Is it going through? We'll just wait a minute.

(off-mike voices; inaudible)

RH: So, you were talking about the Jewish community.

CW: I think the -- so I -- we've got a strategic planning process. Is it flawed? Yes, I think it's flawed. Is it moving forward? Yes, I think it's moving forward. Are they going to be making some judgment calls that are wrong? I think so. Are they going to make some that are right? I think so. I think you can't be fearful of making mistakes. I think you have to move ahead, and some of the stuff that I've heard that's being done is ridiculous. But some of it makes a lot of sense. I think that -- I think we are blessed with a very strange thing, and I saw it in the Hillel -- groups of Hillel students coming in. I think that a lot of young people feel they can do more here, make a difference here in a small community, and struggle with that than they can in some big city. And so, for all of these wonderful college students who come out for two years, out of college and have two years before they can go to graduate school, I think we're going to get some of them here, and I think they're going to come down and work in AmeriCorps, or work as volunteers, or work as whatever is needed. I think they feel that it is a frontier experience, and it is -- Wild West, in some cases -- that will bring them here.

RH: What is your vision for the Jewish community here? What would you like to see?

CW: If I had a wand?



RH: If you had a wand.

CW: I'd bring it back to just where it was (laughter).

RH: Oh, yeah?

CW: That isn't going to happen. I'd like to see young people here, and I'd like to see them being given their heads if you will. And I'd like to see -- I'd like to see us open our doors to everyone that we possibly can, and to really push for that. I think one of the strategic plans was to offer people to come here some money, some kind of incentive to come. I think that's a wonderful thing. I think that people like Julie, who look out for young people, and have them to dinner and do things, is a wonderful model. I think we've got to open our homes and our hearts, and perhaps our pocketbooks to exactly that.

RH: What do you see as some of the challenges in the Jewish community?

CW: Here?

RH: Uh-huh.

CW: Fundraising. I think a challenge to us here is to -- to not -- to not split off, to become close. And I think we are at this point. I think that the closeness holds people here. It certainly has held me here. I think that we've got to not bicker with each other, and I think that -- I don't think we do bicker too much with one another. I think that the problems of the Orthodox synagogues is ridiculous, but I understand the process will take a little time before they can merge. But I hope they do, or if they don't I hope they both survive. I think that we have been fortunate to -- with the Jewish Endowment -- to put aside, if you will, an endow -- a fairly strong endowment, and I hope that the people who have left will understand that when they given endowment dollars anywhere, that they'll give it here where they came from. And some of them have. I hope we can keep them



involved enough. So -- because of support, the Jewish Endowment has put up a million dollars to keep this Federation going. I know we've gotten money from UJC. It isn't adequate to, for the next few years, and so the endowment is going to put up a million dollars to underwrite. It's important to keep the agencies going. Once you begin to lose those systems in a community, you're going to have trouble.

RH: Is there any way you connected to the Jewish community that's different than it was prior?

CW: Un-hnn. I don't think so.

RH: Are there any rituals, observances that are more meaningful to you now?

CW: Everything is more meaningful. (laughter) Everything is more meaningful. I think that -- I think the more -- we're about to start my next project -- we are going to build a new Hillel on the Tulane campus, and I'm going to be one of the Chairs of that drive because I like to build. I think if you stop building, you stop growing. So you can say, "I can't build because I have no money". But -- or you can say, "I can raise money and keep building." I watch the women who rebuilt their childcare facilities, and they just got in and rebuilt. I think that -- I think you have to just move ahead. You may go bankrupt doing it, but you have to move ahead. You have to have -- the fear of bankruptcy can't be strong enough that the fear of success doesn't override it.

RH: So how do you raise money, when there's so many people competing?

CW: You write a better -- you write a better plan (laughter). You -- you -- you know, I -- there used to be, when I was selling real estate, I always figured that I could sell better than anybody else, or I could run an office better than anybody else, or I could at least try. I mean, to say, "Everybody else is raising money, therefore I can't raise money" is silly, because you haven't talked to that many people. There -- there are always different places. It's hard, but there are always different places and different ways to look at



things. And somehow, all of those things get done.

RH: I don't know if you know too much about this, but I'm going to ask you because I'm kind of curious. I haven't heard too much, in the recovery, from NCJW, or Hadassah.

CW: Hadassah. We really ought to get both of the women who are presidents -- when we were talking about that list, we ought to. NCJW is functioning.

RH: Early, early, early, Flo Shorenstein said she was concerned about NCJW.

CW: So am I, but I was concerned about NCJW prior to the storm, so (laughter) -- the -- the -- the *raison d'être* for NCJW as the vision is not as clear as it used to be. The -- the political overtones of NCJW, the -- the social service parts of NCJW, let me put it that way -- it isn't really political, but the social service parts of NCJW, I feel, have -- aren't as strong as they used to be, or aren't as well-defined as they used to be.

RH: And is this on a -- both a national and a local level?

CW: I don't know. That would be unfair to say. I don't know. I know that locally. The -- the -- the passion for integration, and the passion for -- for civil rights, let me put it that way -- for everyone, and the passion for social ills, I just don't feel I think NCJW had begun to lose its -- its -- its ability to reach out that way. Or maybe -- maybe young women just weren't as interested. I -- I really don't know, because I've never been that deeply involved. And that it seemed to me that they kept doing the same things over and over again. Hadassah, on the other hand, has a very clear vision of who they are and what they want to do, and a hospital and a group that they very strongly support, and Israel is always going to be there, and the Hadassah Hospital is always to be there. So where you're -- you're going is easier to see. If you can't paint a picture of where you are going, clearly, you can't raise money and membership -- or membership and therefore money. And I do -- I do agree with Flo, that that is not as strong. To just have a women's group meet unless they have a perceived goal -- or a men's group unless they



have a perceived goal -- is -- is difficult, to keep it moving, and keep it moving forward. I -- I look at the Women's Professional Council, which is a group of women who do a lot of -- of referring back and forth to one another, and have a good time meeting. I look at Rotary groups, both men and women in a Rotary group, where they have -- where they do projects out within the community that they pick out. All of those things are binding to a group, and NCJW has had -- just doesn't, I don't think, has quite found its niche. But I suggest talking to them.

RH: Do you think that the Jewish community works pretty well with the larger community of New Orleans?

CW: Oh, I do. I definitely do. I think that because we're so small, it's -- it's easy to be Jewish here, and -- and to -- to establish a group Jewishly here. But it's small, and so you need the community support on a business level if you're going to be successful. You can't just say, "I'm only going to deal with Jews." Although that may be a base for you, it certainly isn't going to, business-wise. The integration totally socially is very difficult, I think. Over -- within certain groups. I think that Mardi Gras has caused our community to isolate into smaller groups, and I think that's been one of the things that has kept New Orleans from growing. I mean, you have just so many dollars and so much time socially that you can spend outside of a business. If you choose to only -- to concentrate on your krewe, your group outside, then growing your business or sometimes the -- your vision outside that little krewe is difficult.

RH: Good insight. Do you think the racial tensions are more severe now after the storm than before?

CW: Yes.

RH: And what do you think that's about?



CW: I think that -- I think that the -- each of us is scratching harder for a living, and I think when that happens, the division becomes greater. You know, I'm going to help these friends of mine who have been wonderful to me. On the other hand, I think that our future is going to be young people who don't see that division, that don't notice whatever color you -- your hair is, or your face is, or etcetera, or where you come from. I think that going back to Mardi Gras, the -- the problem of who was your Momma is lessening here, and I think that phrase, who was your Momma, while it's funny as hell, has been hurtful as hell. I think that the exclusion from krewes or from groups is very difficult, and I think that's beginning to go. I think the best thing that could happen to Mardi Gras, it would be underwritten commercially (laughter) for money. And the money that people put into those things, into floats, and into their beads, and into their whatevers, some of that money could be spent on the not-for-profits here. It would break down barriers that occur.

RH: I wonder if it would get redirected that way.

CW: Somewhat. Somewhat. And the amount of time it takes to put one of these things together could then be done by, instead of the krewe -- and I mean this from Comus down to Zulu (laughter) -- up from Zulu down to Comus, I think that some time and money and effort that's put into these parades could be redirected, A, to their business, and B, to social ills in this city. And will that happen? I don't think so. But it's a good idea.

RH: Yeah. Interesting idea. I guess we're coming towards the end here. And there's a couple more questions I have. Now that you've had to live away from home, through the end of November, does the meaning of home, is it different for you?

CW: Un-hnn. I don't think so. I think that what I learned was -- from that -- yeah, I guess it is different. I think what I learned is that home is wherever I am.



RH: Really? How do you (inaudible) home?

CW: Home -- home -- home is wherever I live. I -- that's a little off the wall, but I think you can create that, home. Home is not this piece of furniture or that sculpture. It's what I've collected, or what I put into my little secure area where I live. And that can be almost anywhere. I don't think of home -- if you think of -- all right, let me put it another way. Home is not, to me anymore, physical. It is me, and it's where I live amongst the people that I know. So that the physical, the things that are in this home, could be reproduced on a smaller scale, or even a larger scale. But home, to me, is the people that live in my community. It's the circle of friends that I have.

RH: Do you feel like you could recreate that pretty easily wherever you -- if you had to --

CW: Not out of the city as easily, obviously. Not out of the city as easily, but I probably could create it someplace else, if I chose to. And I think that's what people elsewhere around the country, the ones who haven't come back, have found. They can create a physical place to live, but they can create those friends, and those people elsewhere if they reach out. I think of the Cynthia Farbers or it's -- or Millie, who left and moved to -- to Atlanta a long time ago, created home for themselves in a new community. I see my daughter, who's gone to Boston, and has created home for her. And it's not really the physical home, because they're things. It's the -- it's the environment and the people.

RH: Are there any things, any priorities that have changed for you since the storm?

CW: I think I've begun to realize how important my family is, which is your first circle, how much they mean to me. And then the next circle are my friends, and then beyond my friends are the community that I live in, and -- and can I pull down the community, the city, if you will, and just do the friends? I don't think so. I think I need all three circles.

RH: OK, this is my personal question.



CW: OK.

RH: Where do you get your energy?

CW: (laughter)

RH: You can wear a person out, just following you around in one day.

CW: Now, I get -- now, that's not true, Rosalind. (laughter) I don't know. In fairness, I really don't know. I've always had a very high energy level, and I never realized that it was different from other people.

RH: Really?

CW: I didn't. I really did not know that. I don't know. It's good training, good genes, who knows? (laughter) My mother wasn't a very energetic person.

RH: Really?

CW: Un-hnn. Un-hnn. Not at all, and maybe it's a reaction to her, you know? I get a great deal of joy out of living because I do what I want to do, most of the time. I do -- I do what gives me pleasure, but then, I'm a very positive person, so everything (laughter) -- I mean, if you think I have energy, Julie has 10 times more energy. (laughter) And I think both girls do.

RH: How do you keep a positive outlook?

CW: I was born with it. I was -- my father had a very positive attitude, and he, while we didn't have any religious background, particularly, he had -- he would -- we used to say Dad gave sermons, and, you know, here comes another one. But it was about being positive, and it was about doing the right things, evaluating things properly. Dad had a very strong feeling that his religion was the Golden Rule, which was do unto others as



you would have them do unto you. And then I discovered that that also is a -- that came from Hillel, which I didn't -- the Hillel, Rabbi Hillel. (laughter)

RH: I didn't know that either.

CW: I didn't know that until -- along my Jewish journey I went, "That's -- that's what Hillel said. That's where it" -- I mean, it -- it came from the Bible, but it came from the Old Testament, actually. But -- but Hillel was very strong on it, so I -- I figure that those are, you know. I do things for people, and with people that I would want them to do to -- for me. Sometimes I go overboard. They wouldn't do any of that for me, and then I'll withdraw and say, "I'm finished." But --

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

CW: I don't know. I just ran through a bunch in my head, from -- for -- or for a father and mother who were good people, good role models in some aspects, or at least you could find the good in them. For having married a man who encouraged, pushed, shoved me out into the business world. For children who drive me crazy. And mostly for grandchildren who don't drive me crazy, but are wonderful and accepting. And for Roswell, who gives me tremendous moral support. So those are the concentric circles. And for a community that accepts me, and allows me to do things. I've always said Dick allowed me to work, and I realize that's partially true. A community that allows me to step in and make differences, and for the ability to be able to do it. Answer your question?

RH: Yes. Is -- OK.

CW: He's out. I'm finished!

RH: I think we can wrap it up. I do want to know something. You learned -- if you could tell me one thing you've learned about yourself through this --



CW: That I need my community. I've said it, I think, over and over, the -- the -- the understanding that -- that I have a community that will -- and now I'm going to cry -- that will step in and take care. I've talked it. I've talked about it as a Chair, and a President of a Federation, Chair of a community drive, and then Chair of the Federation, and know I know that it's true.

RH: OK. Great interview.

CW: Is he finished? OK.

RH: He's off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]