Nancy Timm Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Nancy Timm, at 1539 Jackson Avenue, in her office, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is August 22nd, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Nancy, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video-recorded?

Nancy Timm: Yes, I do.

RH: So let's start with a little family history and then go into your own Jewish and general education.

NT: Sure.

RH: How long has your family been here in New Orleans?

NT: OK. My mother likes to brag that my children are, I believe, seventh generation, born and raised in New Orleans.

RH: Mm!

NT: My father's family, his mother is originally from New Orleans, but my father grew up in Philadelphia and ended up marrying my mother and moving back to New Orleans. His family goes back. I don't know how many generations, but at least four or five that I know of.

RH: Mmm hmm. And let's go into when you were born and your Jewish and general education.

NT: OK. OK. Born at Touro Infirmary in 1956. I do remember that date. And I spent my entire life in New Orleans except for six years when I escaped to go to college and graduate school. And --

RH: Where'd you go to college?

NT: I went to University of Florida for two years, and then a small college in Boston called Wheelock College for two years, and then went to Boston College School of Social Work for my Master's, ended up graduating from Tulane School of Social Work.

I like the two-institution plan for any degree. So.

RH: (laughs) I'm getting that.

NT: OK. (laughs) Yeah.

RH: And so where'd you go to grade school, high school, that kind of thing?

NT: Oh, I'm sorry. I went to Newman School from kindergarten through 12th.

RH: Hm. And your synagogue?

NT: Went to Touro Synagogue from, I assume, kindergarten -- and was confirmed there, did not have a bat mitzvah because, in those days, girls just weren't doing that. Boys weren't doing it much either, at Touro.

RH: And so, how would you kind of characterize your early Jewish education?

NT: Well, I was very lucky in that my maternal grandmother was a Jewish scholar.

RH: Oh!

NT: She truly was. Her name was Irma Isaacson. And she taught the conversion class at Touro. She led many, I guess, discussion groups, made lots of presentations on Jewish history and Jewish ethics and all kinds of things. And she would have us over every Friday night for Shabbat dinner. So I really feel like she gave me a lot of my Jewish identity, a lot of my feeling for being Jewish. My mother did, as well. My father was raised in almost a non-Jewish family. They were Jewish, but I don't believe he probably set foot in a synagogue. So it was really more from my mother's side.

RH: How would you characterize -- what's it like being Jewish in New Orleans?

NT: Well, as I said, I only got away for six years, so it's kind of, at least growing up, the only thing I know. So it's hard to compare. But as far as my experience, I was very comfortable being Jewish in New Orleans. I don't think I was really aware of antisemitism, was pretty protected, kind of in a bubble. I guess I went to the Jewish Community Center Nursery School and then Newman, which has a larger percent of Jewish kids probably than, you know, any other school in New Orleans. I think my first taste of antisemitism wasn't until I was in high school. And I was just so shocked and disturbed by it.

I ended up hanging out with a lot of people who were not Jewish, had lots of friends from other schools. And so I did hear, you know, kind of Jewish jokes and things like that, grew up with lots of people saying, "But you don't look Jewish." You know, "Did you have a nose job? Do you straighten your hair," that kind of thing, a lot of friends from Catholic schools who just didn't know, you know. So I got kind of comfortable explaining to them about Jewish culture, and even, I remember, I'd take turns having different Catholic friends over for our Passover Seder. And so, even back then, it was kind of like, the best way to kill antisemitism is just to educate people. Because they're ignorant, often. It doesn't come from a place of hate as much as just they've heard this all their lives, and nobody's ever told them any different.

RH: Wow. Hm.

NT: So. But I like being Jewish in New Orleans.

I didn't feel like it limited me.

I remember, in high school, my two close friends, at one point -- my mother sitting me down and saying, "Do you realize that Laura and Sally are going to be Queen of Comus and Queen of Rex, and you will not be invited? And I'm like, "How do you know," and, "Do I really care?"

Now -- But she was trying to explain to me because she felt like I didn't really understand that there were still certain institutions in New Orleans where Jewish people were not welcome. I remember my father wanting to join the New Orleans Lawn Tennis Club and my mother having a fit. She said that, "There are no Jews in that club." And he said, "Yeah, there are," you know, "There's the --" I forgot who he named. But, you know, there's one family, I think the Shapiro's. And he said, "It's the best tennis in town, and I want to play better tennis. And I've been put up and asked, and I'm going to do it." And I remember my mom just, you know, bristling at it and everything.

And now the tennis club has lots of Jewish families. But I do remember feeling kind of proud that we were breaking ground. You know, a part of me felt proud, and a part of me felt like, "Well, why would we want to be in a club that doesn't like Jewish (laughter) people?" So kind of grew up feeling like that was not a place I wanted to be part of. And now I play tennis there all the time, (laughs) because it is good tennis.

RH: And I'm kind of recalling maybe that your brother Allan was president of it? (laughs)

NT: President of -- Yeah. He was president of the Jewish Community Center board and the Lawn Tennis Club board simultaneously --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- which I think is a great comment on how things have changed.

RH: Mmm hmm. Yeah. Do you have any one particular memory of being -- that kind of speaks to your Jewish identity when you were younger and before we move into a Katrina story?

NT: That speaks to my Jewish identity. Well, I think what I was saying earlier, about facing antisemitism and having so many people be surprised that I was Jewish -- I also had the experience where, at least at Newman, there was a -- I kind of was a floater. I never really had a clique or a group. I had, you know, friends in each of the cliques and groups.

But there was one group that I sort of was semi-included but semi-not, and it was the Jewish group. There was a whole group of Jewish girls that lived out by the lake. Because this was, you know, when lots of Jewish families were buying property out, you know, in Lakeview and Lake Vista and Lake Terrace and all by the lake. And I remember feeling, "I guess this is the group I'm supposed to belong to, but I don't feel like I belong to them." And then I was friendly with that group I was telling you about that were queen of -- and they did end up being Queen of Comus and Queen of Rex, and I wasn't invited. (laughs)

We weren't friends by then, but -- and wondering, you know, "Where do I really belong?" Because I sort of had one foot in one world and one foot in the other world. And at the time, it may have been a little confusing. But I think that probably it was more of a comment on, "I'm not comfortable with any group being homogeneous and exclusive in any way."

And so, I think it developed a sense of wanting to be part of the Jewish community but never forgetting how important it is for the Jewish community to be a part of the larger

community and have a good relationship with the larger community.

RH: The larger [community?].

NT: Yeah.

RH: What about crossing racial lines? Did that happen much when you were younger?

NT: Not hardly at all. I was very close friends with the one African-American student in my class. I think the grade before me had the first African-American to graduate from Newman.

And David Sylvester was the guy that was friendly in my class, big, big basketball player. And it came up, one day, that he didn't know how to swim.

And I, at the time, was a swimming teacher of little kids. And I'll never forget him coming to our house and me teaching him how to swim and having to go like all the way to the deep end, you know, before he couldn't stand up, (laughter) to tread water because he was so tall. And, you know, trying to carry this like six-foot-five guy, you know, teaching him (laughter) to float and -- you know. But, you know, I was very aware how limited the diversity was in my upbringing at the time.

RH: Really?

NT: Mmm hmm. Because I remember feeling like, "I wish I had an opportunity to meet people who were from different cultures," and felt a little bit stifled.

I know, when I was applying to colleges, the college counselor was clear that I should go to -- and she gave me a list of schools that were all small, liberal arts schools. Very good schools. But I wanted a big state college because I wanted to see real people and what the real world was like. And I don't think I realized, but at that time in history, wherever you went, it was pretty segregated. (laughs)

RH: Mmm hmm. Yeah.

NT: You know? Even, you know, my oldest daughter chose American University, one of the reasons being that she loved the international flavor and all the international students. And she said it was so hard to make friends with any of the international students or any of the African-American students because they tended to all stick together and didn't want to be friends with her.

(laughs) I mean, that was her experience -- I don't know -- going there.

RH: Yeah. I teach in a college, so I see the cliques --

NT: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

RH: -- that are kind of like that. They're still very hard to cross.

NT: Yeah!

RH: You're right.

NT: Yeah. So.

RH: So let's talk a little about Katrina. When it came on your radar screen, what you did.

NT: OK. OK.

Well, my husband and I have traditionally not left. We're the kind that say, "We're going to stick it out." And then, when we do leave, it's always last minute and very haphazard. (laughs)

And we're still functioning like that.

RH: (laughs)

NT: Seems to just be something that's -- you know, except the difference is now we've got some other people we're planning on evacuating with, so we have to have our act together a little more. But with Katrina, it was I had, at the time, been Director of Counseling at a school here in New Orleans, and part of my job responsibility was to take the whole freshman class on a weeklong retreat. So we had been in a little ranch-type camp outside of Houston.

And on the way home, one of the other chaperones got a call from his aunt in New York -- and said, "Where are you?"

And he said, "I'm on bus on the way home from Houston." And she said, "Well, you need to be going back to Houston. There's a huge hurricane headed your way." And that was the first any of us had heard of it.

RH: Hm!

NT: And this was Friday before.

RH: Oh.

NT: So we got off the bus, and the principal of the school handed everybody -- I remember it was a red sheet that basically said, you know, what the emergency plan was, and if we had to evacuate, and how to get in touch with school. And I remember I was so tired and so out of reality, and I read it, and I was like, "I guess this is serious." So I got in the car, and I asked my husband, and he was like, "Oh, it's not coming this way. Don't worry about it. Everybody's overreacting." OK? So we were still under that premise. I'm going out and filling up the cars with gas and, you know, making sure we have what we need and everything. And pretty much my husband was just saying, "Well, it's good you're doing that, in case." So we went to bed, I think on Saturday night, still planning on staying.

And my brother called me at about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning and said, "You need to take the family and evacuate." Nancy, his wife, and his daughter, who was the only one in town, Brooke, were going to stay with Nancy's -- my sister-in-law's sisters in Pensacola. And they had room for us. We called my mother. I called her several times. My two children who were in town called her several times. She would not leave. So we ended up -- it was a matter of, "Do I choose to make sure my family is safe, or do I stay with my mother?" My brother said, "I'm going to stay. I want to stay for a number of reasons." And so we left. But it was a matter of packing, you know, an overnight bag. We were sure that we were just going to go and turn around and come right back. My middle daughter was due that next week to go off to college for her freshman year.

And she, luckily, grabbed a few pair of jeans and a few T-shirts, left behind everything that she was bringing with her to college.

RH: So, her first time going to college, you together, I think, had bought a lot of things for her to take up there?

NT: Oh, yeah. We had. And my husband had shipped off a box with all of her linens and, you know, toiletry -- things that she would need when she got there that she didn't want to have to bring on the plane. And that ended up arriving but about six weeks later. So she arrived at Mt. Holyoke, in Massachusetts, with a little overnight bag, for college.

RH: Oh, wow. (laughs)

NT: Yeah. So that was rough. But she's, you know, a real trooper, and she was OK. So we went to Pensacola, rode out the storm there. You may have heard from my brother; we, at one point, lost contact because his cell phone died. I mean, nobody could charge their cell phones. And so we pretty much didn't know where he was for --

RH: What was that like?

NT: It was -- you know, we went from one person trying to say, "It's no big deal," and the other person worrying -- and then my sister-in-law and I would switch places. And, you know, we went from worrying to trying to calm each other down, you know. But it was great when we finally did -- I guess we didn't lose contact with my mother until much later. So.

RH: Hm! Because I guess she was at home and her landline was working or --

NT: I think her landline was working. I think you're right. Yeah.

RH: So you went through the night of the storm, I guess Sunday night --

NT: Monday night.

RH: Monday night.

NT: Yeah.

RH: OK.

NT: I'm pretty sure it was Monday night.

RH: All right.

NT: Yeah.

RH: And what was it like in Pensaco--

NT: The storm did hit there. So, you know, we were up with -- At one point, the power went off, but it didn't last that long.

And at first, we were all just glued to the television. I think having my sister-in-law and my niece, who were -- my sister-in-law, at the time, was the Director of Technology -- she

was the IT person at Newman, the school that I went, all those years ago. And the two of them were trying to set up a -- trying to get in touch with the system administrator to set up a website so that they could post information about school opening. You know, at that point, we thought it was just a matter of people scattered and needing to know what was going on, you know, with school. And so I think we had six people and five laptops (laughter), and the house was wired -- I mean wireless. So, you know, we had laptops going at all times. And I remember my sister-in-law and my niece finally got with --

Is it [Wiffle-something?]?

Anyway. The company. And they set up, basically, a message board. And we went to bed and got up the next morning, and there were like 6,000 hits or some -- I mean, an amazing number of people were watching out for that. And then we all took turns and spent a lot of time kind of -- I hate to use the word "censoring" -- but, I guess, watching very closely what people wrote. Because some people -- you know, kids will start (laughs) saying things that you really don't want the whole world to read, you know, about the school or about each other, you know. So we monitored that. We each took turns reading all the --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- you know, saying, "Ooh, this one doesn't sound good," you know. So that was kind of a game, you know. That was kind of fun. And I don't think it hit us until the water started rising that there was really --

We were all kind of like, "Phew!

Looks like we can go back."

And then, when the water started rising, and they started talking about the breaches, and it became apparent --

They started saying, "New Orleans is going to be underwater for months," and we might not be able to go back for six months. And it became apparent that, you know, we all started needing to think about more of a long-term plan. And at that time, my husband said, "I think we should go to my mother's."

And she's in Fort Collins, Colorado. What he didn't tell me was he never planned on going. He was determined he was going to stay with a friend on the North Shore and try to get in as soon as he could. And he did do that. And my son, who at the time had just -- He had transferred from a pre-K-through-eighth school and was just starting Newman as a freshman and had been to school, I think, seven school days.

And I felt like it was important to get him into a school, you know. And so we ended up, the three of us, my daughter and --

RH: What's her name and your s--

NT: Hallie and Eli.

RH: OK. Hallie and --

NT: And Hallie and Eli and I flew to Atlanta from Pensacola. And then Eli flew straight from there to Fort Collins, and I took Hallie to Mt. Holyoke. And then what --

RH: How did you make that decision? Did you make it with the kids? Did you make it yourself, with your husband? Do you remember?

NT: I think my husband kind of made it and convinced me it was the right plan --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- and then we presented it to our kids as, "This is what we're doing." And with Eli, I felt particularly -- you know, when you have kids, you're thinking of what they need and

what's best for them before your own needs.

So I was totally focused on them.

And my oldest daughter, at the time, was semester abroad in Australia. So she was e-mailing us like crazy.

RH: And what's her name?

NT: Rachel.

RH: OK.

NT: And Rachel was feeling, I guess, very far away and very worried. And she was furious with my mother for not leaving. I remember she just sent a scathing e-mail to my mother.

RH: She did?

(laughter)

NT: I was like, "Ooh! Rachel!" You know, "You're saying what everybody wants to say." You know.

RH: Well, so, though, at some point, I guess you didn't have contact with your brother or your mother? Or what happened? How did you connect?

NT: It seems like, with my mother, you know, it was very brief, if even that significant. Because I do think her landlines worked longer, with my brother, my sister-in-law kept saying, "He's probably just upstairs, doesn't realize the water is rising."

And sure enough, that was kind of the way it was, you know. He was just reading his book, eating his jar of peanut butter and -- you know. He probably described his car and

the alarm.

I don't know if he did [or didn't?].

RH: Oh, no. Tell me.

NT: I mean, this was so funny. Because, "Yeah, I was just laying there, and I heard --" You know, he had a fairly new Lexus. And he said, "And I heard the car alarm go off. And it just kind of went heuh, heuh, heuh." And he was like, "Well, I'm not going out there," you know, "It'll stop soon." And he said, "Gradually it went eunh, eunhh --"

RH: (laughs)

NT: "-- nnnhh." And he looked out, and the car was underwater.

RH: Oh, my God.

NT: And that's how he found out that the water was rising. And, you know, he was very lucky to be rescued by a boat. So.

RH: When did your mother leave? Do you [know?]?

NT: My mother, on Tuesday, when the water started to rise, and they were saying, "Mandatory evacuation," -- she was pretty content, up to that point. She was glad she stayed. She was kind of like, you know, "Everybody told me I wasn't going to be OK, but I'm fine," you know. She said when it got really bad was when the water went out and when she stopped getting any kind of water. She just said she knew she couldn't survive like that, and she was scared because nobody was around, you know. And, you know, she was 78 at the time, in a big house, all by herself.

She ended up driving out of the city and going to Plaquemine, outside of Baton Rouge, because she knew that's where my great aunt was, you know, figured she could stay

there.

RH: And so you're taking your daughter to Mt. Holyoke, and then you're sending your son to his grandparents?

NT: His maternal grandmother.

RH: His maternal grandmother.

NT: Yeah. And it was a shame because she did the right thing -- well, first of all, when we figured out that that's where Eli was going, my mother-in-law went over to the school and asked the best way to handle it. And Eli ended up communicating with the counselor there, and, you know, to talk with her about, you know, what his interests were and all those kind of things. What was unfortunate, though, was that I don't think she realized he was in accelerated classes. Because he didn't get enrolled in any honors classes. So every single class was something that he'd either had before or was a little too easy. So he's a very dedicated, good student, and he spent a lot of time worrying that he was going to be way behind when he got back. And I heard other kids felt like their schools were either way too hard or way too easy, you know. And it's just because it wasn't their school. (laughter) And, you know, Eli was the one, I think, that had the roughest time. He was very unhappy, did not like Fort Collins at all. He said, "Mom," you know, "it's just everybody's white, and they're happy, and it's clean and --" You know, I said, "Eli, you're describing a lot of the reasons why a lot of people move here." (laughter) He's like, "Well, we're not moving here!" And he is, to this day, saying, "Please don't let's go back there.

Let's" -- you know, "I'll go anywhere else, but I don't want to go back there." And he made friends. His interest is musical theater, and he ended up getting the lead in the play.

And when Newman reopened with an interim program, he could have come back, but he had already committed to being in the play and said he had a responsibility to stay. So he did. So --

RH: What play was it? Do you remember?

NT: It was a British version of Cinderella, with (laughs) lots of humor. It was cute.

It was very funny.

RH: Was he the prince?

NT: He was actually the father of Cinderella.

But it was a huge part. Which, usually he died right away (laughter) in Cinderella but -- [Because?] when he told me had the lead, he was Cinderella's father, I was like, "But don't you die right away?" (laughter) But it was very cute. And we ended up, Steve and -- Rachel was back from Australia. So Steve and Rachel, and I drove up to see the play and get him. We went ahead and brought him back with us.

RH: And when was that?

NT: It was in December.

RH: In December.

NT: So he was there a while -- and had a rough time.

Because Steve, you know, as I said, stayed behind. And then, the school that I was working for reopened on October 21st. So I had to be back on October 14th. And so Steve and I switched places. I came back, and Steve went to Fort Collins. So really, Steve and I only saw each other like for a weekend in about a three-month period.

RH: Wow!

NT: Yeah. So, you know, it was hard on the family. We made a pledge that for Thanksgiving, we were all going to meet in New Orleans, no matter what. And we all did. So.

That was good.

RH: Wow.

NT: Yeah. We flew Eli in from Colorado to be in New Orleans (laughs), which was kind of a splurge, but it was important.

RH: Mmm hmm. What happened with Holly?

NT: Hallie?

RH: Hallie. I'm sorry.

NT: Hallie --

RH: You took her to --

NT: I took her to Mt. Holyoke.

And it's interesting. I had really held it together. I don't think I had had like a meltdown. You know, I think because of my kids, I'd really tried to keep a lid on being too emotional. And I'll never forget, I left Hallie at the dorm and went to the little hotel on campus where I was staying. And I asked the housekeeper if I could borrow a couple of the pillows from the room because my daughter had just arrived and she didn't have a pillow.

And she kind of looked at my funny.

And I said, "We're from New Orleans" (laughter) and just let it loose. And I remember this poor woman just looking at me, like, "Can I do anything for you?" And, you know. And it was, you know, the first time I'd been alone. You know? I wasn't around any of my family. So I remember having a real good cry in that room by myself because it was the first time I really -- You know, it all kind of hit me. What was the future going to be like? You know.

And I was sad about leaving Hallie.

(laughs) You know, we're very close. So, you know, I think that would have been sad anyway --

RH: Right.

NT: -- you know, to leave her. So. Got her settled in. We, you know, went out and bought her all new stuff. And I think she was worried about us. But I was glad that she was out of New Orleans and where she was supposed to be. So two out of my three kids really were where they were supposed to be and were not as affected.

RH: Do you remember what Rachel said it was like to be so far away and --

NT: She was scared. She felt like she was getting information, but she didn't know if it was correct information. She was abroad with her boyfriend, whose family lives on the West Bank. And he was able to get in touch with his family because, I guess, the West Bank, everything came back pretty fast. And they were giving them reports about how horrible it was on the East Bank, you know, that there was looting and there fires, and there were -- you know. And she was just, you know, convinced that she was not going to have a city to return to.

And she felt more like, "New Orleans is my home," than ever before, you know. Felt a whole lot of, I guess, worry about Eli. She's real close with Eli. And I guess she got

some e-mails from Eli saying, "I'm miserable. I hate it here," and -- you know. I know they e-mailed constantly, you know.

And she shared some of the e-mails with me. And I think she was Eli's, I guess, person he turned to let it all out. Because I think he was trying to, in his own way, take care of me. And I was trying to take care of him. And, you know, it was hard.

RH: You're a therapist, and so I guess one thing I'm interested in, because you also deal with teenagers, is what was -- and the kids you talked with and your own son, as an example, what did they go through and what kind of stories were they telling?

NT: Well, I think, if it weren't for technology, some of them would have gone into major depressions. At the time, all the kids had MySpace accounts. I don't think Facebook was as big at that point. Now high school's more Facebook. But they were able to get in touch (snaps fingers) with each other like that. So between the message boards, the blogs, the, you know, cell phones -- started working -- you know, all those things, I think the teenagers were more concerned about will they get to see their friends again, which is certainly developmentally appropriate. Some of them had great experiences. You know, when I got back to the school, I was able to hear lots and lots of stories.

I think the majority of kids really began to appreciate the schools that they were going to in New Orleans, you know, a lot more. I think, depending on what their coping skills were before Katrina, they were just intensified afterwards. So the kids that were kind of temperamentally roll-with-it rolled with it and did fine. The ones that were more prone to anxiety, depression, family relationship issues were pretty miserable -- scared. You know?

I can't say that I talked to that many kids who actually, you know, had major trauma, such as being up on roofs and, you know, being rescued. I had lots of kids, when I was at the school, who were suffering from real anxiety and lots of teachers who were kind of, "We

don't know how much to push them.

We don't know how much they're playing the Katrina card." You know?

"I don't have my homework because I'm still upset about Katrina." You know, that kind of thing? Or, you know, "I don't have my assignment that's due because we're living in a trailer and," you know, this happened, or that happened.

And, you know, I did hear of kids that described they were living in, basically, like a five-foot-by-eight-foot space, (laughs) you know, that was their only privacy they had was that little tiny spa-- You know.

So there -- I remember I was working with a sixth-grader who had lots and lots of anxiety before the storm. And so afterwards -- She was from New Orleans East. Her house was ruined. You know.

And her biggest fear -- I remember she was really clear -- was that her parents kept -- every day, they would change their mind ten times about whether they were staying or leaving. So I think, in an adolescent mentality, not knowing where you're going to be and having it not in your control is very stressful.

RH: Hm. Tell me a little about what that age group is like, developmentally. So what are they trying to do? And why did Katrina impact them developmentally?

NT: Well, you've probably heard people talk about, "Oh, adolescents think they're invincible." You know, "That's why they're such risk-takers because they think that, you know, it'll happen to somebody else but never them."

And I think, for some of them, it was that crack in the universe. It was that kind of like, "I guess it can happen to me. And I guess," you know, "my life, the rug can get pulled out from under me, and who knows where I'll land?" And so, I think part of the adolescent

development is to form an identity. You know, the identity's a little wobbly. And so being thrown into new situations where, for some kids, it was actually a good thing, because they'd be like, "Ooh," you know, "at my old school I was the nerd," or, "I was," the this or -- You know, "I got to be somebody else." So it's a stage of trying on new identities. And for some of them, it was a loss of identity, and for some of them, it gave them an opportunity to develop maybe some identity things that they wouldn't have been able to. I think, developmentally, depending on the age of the adolescent -- early adolescents can't stand their parents, for the most part. Even if they love them to death, they, you know, still begin to question their authority. They question -- you know, and I'm not saying all adolescents, but most begin to question the value system in which they were raised and whether their own identity gels with that. And so to be stuck in evacuation places, sometimes with many generations, I think was really hard. And that's what I'm hearing still, is that the families where they've taken in older relatives or younger relatives or taken in a sibling with small children, you know, that kind of thing, it's done a number on what kind of the roles are in the household. You know, because adolescents also like to test -- or push the envelope to see, you know, just how much freedom they have. And if you have, you know, say a grandparent that's much stricter than the parents or, you know, all of a sudden they see the little kids are allowed to do things that they weren't, you know, that kind of thing, I think it just adds to maybe some confusion in an important stage of trying to establish more of a grounded kind of who they are.

RH: [That was?] --

NT: Does that --

RH: Yeah!

NT: OK.

RH; That's great!

NT: OK.

(laughter)

RH: I do recall you telling me one interesting story about your son and that he was -- Fort Collins has a lot of Mormons?

NT: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

RH: And so he was thrown into a situation of being the only Jewish boy --

NT: Right. Right.

RH: -- and in this --

NT: Mmm hmm. He ended up meeting a couple of other Jewish kids. My husband's uncle was very involved in their synagogue there.

And so we went to some function, and Eli was approached by, I guess, people in their youth group. And he never did much with them, but he met a couple of the kids that were at the same school where he was. But when he joined the cast of this play, there were a group of students in the play who happened to be Mormon. And those were the ones that were nice to him. Those were the ones that really kind of took him in and began to invite him to all their functions. So by the end, he was sort of their, I guess, chosen one.

(laughter) And they used to ask him lots of questions about being Jewish.

And he'd come home sometimes and ask me questions because he didn't know. And it reminded me of me asking my grandmother questions because I didn't know.

Lots of times, I still didn't know the answer to these but -- and I didn't think that they were proselytizing.

He didn't tell me until later on that he felt some pressure from them. But for the most part, they were, you know, extremely respectful. He kept saying, "Mom, you don't have to worry about me partying." You know, because we had had lots of talks before he entered his freshman year at Newman, about, you know, high school parties and, you know, drinking and drugs and sex and, you know, all those kind of things. And he's like, "Well, you don't have to worry about any of that."

RH: (laughs)

NT: "They don't even curse!" He's like, "They play Spin the Bottle, and they hold hands if the bottle --" You know, he had all these jokes about, you know, how straight they were. But I think -- He said it was actually a relief. Because it's kind of like no pressure to have to say no or to say yes and get in trouble for it. I mean, you know, it was just -- well, I think he liked it because it was also almost a harem. It was mostly girls. And I have to tell you, they were beautiful. (laughter)

He would have them over. I'd be like, "Is she Mormon?" I mean, just, you know, very nice. You know, I got to meet the parents, and they were all just lovely people. So I thought that was good for him, to, you know, learn about another culture, learn to appreciate it. And he still keeps up with them, you know --

RH: Really?

NT: -- on Facebook -- and call them and --

RH: Hm. Did you connect at all to the Jewish community in Fort Collins?

NT: You know, I really, looking back on it, did not want to connect with anybody. I went through the motions of doing a few things -- the High Holy Days happened to fall around that time -- and did go to services. You know, Steve's family is not Jewish. Steve converted when we married. And he does have an uncle who's Jewish, who is actually a

Holocaust survivor.

And so he was the one that brought us, you know, to the services. The only thing I really connected to was I got on the USTA, the Tennis Association, website and posted to somebody that was interested in playing tennis. And I was amazed at how many people contacted me.

So one of the first things I had Steve do when he got into our house was mail me my tennis racket (laughter) and tennis shoes because I ended up playing a lot of tennis there because it was -- you know, tennis really is my own therapy. And so I had lots of opportunities to meet people. You know, some people invited me over for dinner or whatever. But I'm usually somebody that likes to make friends, and I did not want to make any friends.

You know.

RH: But do you know what that's about, kind of reflecting back on it?

NT: Yeah, I think I was drained. At the time, I really did just -- I kept thinking, "OK, consider this like a break from life." You know? "You're going to go back, and back to the grind, and, you know, just relax and --" You know, my mother and I are very close. She hates to cook. That was her only concern about having us stay there. So I did the grocery shopping and the cooking and -- you know.

So, you know, I kind of felt it was sort of nice not working. I've worked all my life. And, you know, just I kind of thought -- it as, "I'm just relaxing." But I think I just did not have the energy. At the very end, when I was there, I played tennis with somebody who happened to be a social worker. And I told her, if there was ever any opportunity, you know, for any contract work, that I might be staying a while and I should look into some professional options. And was contacted by her agency right before we left, to come in and do some parenting workshops. So I guess I was thinking, "If I'm here long-term, I'd

better," you know, "see about doing something with my life." I volunteered at Eli's school a lot because I wanted to, you know, see what it was like, and did that. Let's see what else I did. My mother came to Fort Collins.

RH: Did she?

NT: She did. She went from Plaquemine to Philadelphia to stay with some cousins and decided, after a week, that she really wanted to be with my brother and me, and was kind of -- I won't go into it all -- but ended up in Fort Collins. So it took my mother-in-law -- and it took us about a week to find a place that would lease short-term. And then we had to go rent furniture, and we went to some yard sales to get some stuff. And so that took some time. I got to focus on that. And my mother and I actually went to the Red Cross to -- we were going to volunteer, decided that that would be a good thing for us to do. And we walked in, we told them where we were from, and they immediately directed us -- they thought we were there for aid. And we explained that, you know, we really were there to volunteer. And they never called us, which was -- you know. And me and my mother did donate a lot of money to them, and handed them the check and -- You know, really, they didn't know what to make of us. (laughter) We weren't your -- they had found housing for a large group of people that were in Saint Bernard.

RH: Oh, really?

NT: So they ended up having a picnic for all the people that were Katrina evacuees. And my mother was just, you know, looking around, going, "I don't know anybody. I don't know anybody," (laughter) like, you know, she thinks she knows everybody in New Orleans because she's been here so long, you know.

RH: Was it strange, or was it just --

NT: Well, hearing everybody's stories made it all very real and made me feel so fortunate, you know, that, compared to, you know, so many other people, that we had

pretty much landed on our feet. You know, we were staying somewhere free of rent and my son was in school and, you know, everybody was safe. And by that time, my husband had gotten to go back into New Orleans and check out our house. And our house was OK. So, you know, we were in that 20% that did not flood, this little sliver by river or isle of denial or all the nicknames for Uptown and Garden District and CBD and French Quarter.

RH: Yeah. So you came back October, which --

NT: October 14th.

RH: Pretty early, really.

NT: Mmm hmm.

RH: What was it like being back here in the city?

What did you do first, when you came back?

NT: Yeah. Yeah.

Well, a friend of mine picked me up at the airport. She was back.

And she took me for a disaster tour, took me down West Esplanade -- not out to Chalmette or New Orleans East but just the Lakefront. And I think it's really true -- a lot of people have said it -- that you can't understand until you actually see it, and see the miles and miles of it, see houses of people you know that, you know, are inside out.

After she brought me home, we actually had a couple staying at our house, that my husband had taken in. And so, I wasn't alone. They were there. Our house was set up almost like two separate apartments. So they were in the downstairs. But I was really lonely, you know. I didn't really have anybody -- most of my friends weren't back, other

than school-related. So I also, at the time, had a private practice. So I was trying to locate all the people that I see, you know, to see what had happened with them. Little by little, things started to open up. So it was like a major event, you know, when, you know, a grocery would open, or a gas station would open or - You know, the whole city knew, you know, the only place to get gas is at, you know, this place or the only place to get groceries is this place. And, you know, what restaurants are open and how many items on the menu and --

RH: I've been told too that it was kind of man's world --

NT: Mmm. Mmm hmm.

RH: -- at that time.

NT: And my husband and I actually were in an article that was picked up -- I guess AP picked it up. And it's an article on kind of comparing the post-Katrina world to the Wild Wild West.

And it talks about my husband saying, "Yeah, we spent a lot of time at Cooter Brown's."

RH: Did you?

NT: He did.

RH: (laughs)

NT: And he said it was all men. You know, it was a really strange feeling, in that everywhere you went it was all men. You know, so many families sent the women and children off, and the men came back. When the school opened, it was a wonderful feeling.

Because it was the first sense of community, you know, that I think a lot of people had had. Did lots of work with the kids. Most of the kids did not want to talk about it. I would have to go in through the back door to get them to talk. I had time with each class, in small groups. And I would say, "Well, let's go around, and everybody tell me what happened during Katrina." And they'd be like, "Oh, no! We don't want to talk about it! Everybody wants to talk about it! We're OK!

We don't want to talk about it."

I'd say, "OK, I'm not going to make you talk about it. Let's talk about stress. What stresses you out?" "Oh!

Listen to what happened to us during Katrina!" (laughter)

You know, they just, you know, didn't want anybody to make them talk about it. But they wanted to talk. They were somewhat resentful because the school where I worked, I thought, did a fantastic job of -- you know, you take, half the school's back, half the school isn't.

How is this going to count, in terms of their -- you know, this is a college prep school, so what are we going to put on transcripts? You know, all those issues. What a lot of the teachers did was -- and you'd appreciate this, as a historian -- they got together, and they did a project. And it was, you know, a cross-curriculum project on Katrina. So, you know, in history class, they studied what happened with the breaches and what politically should have happened.

And, you know, they even had like town meetings and simulated, you know, the political, I guess, you know, system and how it should and how it did work and that kind of thing. You know, in English, of course, they wrote reflections, and they started a website of Katrina stories. And, you know, so each class used real-life experience instead of kind of -- you know, they put the textbooks aside. You know?

RH: Oh.

NT: And I remember I would go into class. I would say, "OK" -- you know, and I'd give everybody an index card each day when I'd go in, and I'd say, "OK, today --" And it was mostly a teacher technique to calm them down. You know, if they write, then they tend to just kind of calm down.

There was a high energy level.

And one of the reasons it was a high energy level was because it's an all-girls school, and they took in boys.

RH: (laughs)

NT: They took in the siblings and alumni ki-- you know, different -- and so there was a totally different energy with these middle school girls about boys. But I remember once I took in an index card, and they had to write, "New Orleans will feel like it's back to normal when --" OK? With a fill-in-the-blank. And then I'd collect them, and I'd read them all, and everybody had to guess who wrote it.

So it was a game, but it got them to, you know, think about things. And, you know, there were things like, "It will be normal when there are more than three items on the menu at my favorite restaurant," or, "When we don't have to live in a FEMA trailer anymore," "When my grandmother and my aunt and all my cousins and all come back to New Orleans." I mean, everybody had their own thing that they were dealing with, and it really gave me an idea of where they were in their adjustment.

RH: Hm!

NT: Yeah. And --

RH: Great idea. It seems --

NT: Yeah.

RH: I mean, the whole school, kind of managing --

NT: Oh.

RH: -- in that way. [So?] --

NT: Did a wonderful job.

RH: Mmm hmm. So post-Katrina, how has your life changed? Has your work changed any?

NT: One of the things -- and this was very hard for me to deal with, and luckily I'm past any kind of, I guess, conflict or sadness -- it's almost bittersweet because it's actually turned out probably better for me. Like, with many people, I think Katrina was the impetus for some change that may have needed to happen anyway. And I'd been at the school for quite a while and had toyed with the idea of leaving and doing full-time private practice. And after Katrina, the school had to make lots of cuts, and one of the things they cut was the Counseling Department. And I had an option, for the next year, of either covering the whole school, which is, you know, basically toddlers through seniors in high school or working half-time with another person and just covering middle and high school. I had been full-time middle and high school. And so, I ended up not renewing my contract. And right around that same time, the psychiatrist and psychologist that I'd referred to and -- had worked, you know, as colleagues with them for over 20 years, they decided to open this practice and invited me to come in with them as an associate. So the timing was right and it kind of forced me to do something that was what I probably needed to do anyway. So now I'm full-time private practice.

RH: OK. We're going to take a break here to change the tape.

NT: OK. That's fine.

RH: And --

NT: Do you want something to drink, Ros?

RH: No, I'm OK.

END OF FILE 1

RH: Oh.

M: It's rolling now.

RH: This is tape two of Katrina's Jewish Voices with Nancy Bissinger Timm. And I was just asking you -- you were telling me that you've gone into private practice now.

And I would like to know a little bit about what you see in your practice.

NT: OK.

RH: I don't know if you see any trends, in a practice, you know, an individual practice --

NT: Mmm hmm.

RH: -- but maybe you could just talk a little bit about that.

NT: Yeah. I think people are very vulnerable and fragile right now. That, even if they don't think they were affected by Katrina directly, it's taken its toll on them.

Their emotional resources are depleting quickly. And they don't know what's happening to them. They can't find some direct line to what they've experienced. I've had several people that I saw pre-Katrina -- have come back.

I think with kids, I'm seeing a lot of anger, a lot of anger coming out at parents, for either decisions the parents have made that have not been the ones that they wanted -- maybe they were angry before, and it's just the anger's coming out. I think the biggest thing that most of the mental health profession is seeing is a breakdown in a lot of couples, that maybe the relationships were hanging by a thread, and Katrina just was what cut the thread. So there's a lot more referrals for couples than I remember.

I actually, in my private practice -- in order for people to see me, they pretty much have good financial resources.

I do work part-time also at a place called Trinity Counseling and Training Center.

And that's much more the indigent population. It's a sliding-scale fee with interns. I supervise interns. And the cases that my supervisees are presenting are a much more traumatized population, lots of kind of disenfranchised people before Katrina who are feeling it even more. A lot of people -- and I think this is what shocks me, is why some people have decided to come back when they describe being pretty content in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, wherever they landed. And they've come back, and a lot of them don't have jobs, they don't have a place to live. But New Orleans is their home.

And --

RH: Have they come back because of family or --

NT: Some for family. Some just because this is their home. I mean, that's all they'll say, is -- you know, I don't think they can imagine -- they cannot fathom living somewhere else. So that's pretty prevalent. The -- I guess, Episcopal Diocese has a case manager program that we work with closely at Trinity -- and he describes how hard his job is because there are such limited resources. So if you're supposed to be a case manager, what do you do with people who have all these needs and there's no places for them to go? So not only does he have a long waiting list but feels somewhat helpless when it

comes to actually finding realistic plans.

RH: What kind of plans would a case manager do, for instance, that the resources are --

NT: Housing, job, school, for children, mental health services. I think he was very excited because Entergy had given them a lot of money so that they could buy some people some air conditioners and also help subsidize their energy bills. And he said the only problem with it was he had money for air conditioners for people who had no homes. And he also had people who had outrageous energy bills, and he could cover it maybe for a month or two, but it wasn't really taking care of the problem because they needed to learn how to lower their bills and, if somebody was just going to pay their bill, that was not any motivation to do that. So he was feeling a little bit like that was a stopgap, a band-aid, but not really, in his own head, what case management's about --

RH: Right.

NT: -- which is a long-term plan. I think there are many, many children out there who saw way more than they know how to process. And I think we're going to see some signs of post-traumatic stress that were not apparent at first, that, with time, are going to start to unravel. I'm seeing more kids in my private practice who are having anxiety-related issues, you know, more, whether it's bedwetting --

I have three people in my caseload right now who did OK with Katrina, and then that tornado that hit New Orleans whipped through their house. One of them had just finished like repairing their house, and the tornado took off the roof. So, I mean -- While they were in it. So those people are more traumatized than the people post-Katrina, I think, because they thought they had come through it OK, and then it's just like another crack in the universe, and this time they felt like they fell in.

RH: Right. It's almost like you're marked by God, you know. (Laughs) That's --

NT: Yeah. You begin to get a little, you know, that kind of --

RH: Just --

NT: -- startle, like, you know, what's going to happen next, whenever it rains or whenever anything happens.

RH: Mmm hmm. How have you related and connected to the Jewish community since Katrina?

NT: Right now?

RH: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

NT: Probably the agency that I'm closest to, probably being a social work agency and since that's my profession, is Jewish Family Service – I'm a past president of the board and have, post-Katrina, agreed to go back on the board and have, you know, kind of, well, I guess, you know, served as a -- they've had a task force to do some strategic planning, and I was the chair of the Counseling Committee -- so kind of some long-range planning for how we're going to provide service and, if the agency has to shrink, what priorities do we have, those kind of things. So that's probably one of the places I work the most. During Katrina, I was on the executive committee of the board of Touro Synagogue and their Youth Group Advisor. It was kind of like really had the opportunity to kind of hear how a lot of the Jewish institutions were handling monies that were coming in from, you know, outside-the-region sources and how those, you know, allocations were being divvied out, that kind of thing. Trying to reload, regroup with the Youth Group, trying to get it back up to speed. We were supposed to -- every four years, each synagogue has a regional conclave, where they have like 200 kids from all over the, you know, South come, and we were scheduled to have it the March after Katrina. And so we had to cancel it. And the kids had a fit. So we ended up doing it this past -- when did we do it? This past April, about, I think. And so, a lot of my focus was helping that

get organized and programs written. What was interesting is -- The kids put on all the programs. They write them and put them on. And they did not want anything related to Katrina in any of their programs, in anything that they did.

RH: Huh.

NT: They just did not want it to be part of their experience.

RH: Interesting.

NT: So.

RH: And so when you talk about the task force, with the counseling, what are some of the challenges that Jewish Family Services have, and are they changing some of their priorities?

NT: Well, I think their mission remains the same.

What's happened a little is that, you know, all the Jewish, I guess Federation and all the constituency agencies are aware that -- it was like money just rained down. And so it was a sense of, you know, we can add programs and we can, you know, take care of our people after Katrina and all that, with the recognition that that money was going to run out and that our population had shrunk, you know, Jewish community-wise, and that some changes may need to be made. And I think for Jewish Family Service, in particular, the problem is that Federation has asked them to do lots of programs but, in the same breath, has asked them to shrink. So you can't expand and shrink at the same time. So it's been a little bit of a problem. Of course, their intakes skyrocketed because they had -- they accept not -- you don't have to be Jewish. And so, the resources of sliding-scale agencies are limited. So they have waiting lists right now. So, you know, there was talk about adding another therapist, adding another clinician, but then there's a space issue, you know, and it's not the right time to be purchasing more square footage. I think the

priorities, in the past, were much more proactive, kind of preventive programming, and now it's much more reactive, crisis work. So I guess maybe some focuses, better than priority.

RH: Right.

NT: Maybe focus has changed.

RH: Right. Well, it's interesting that you talk about more marital trouble. And I guess in my interviews, I haven't noticed that.

NT: Mmm hmm.

RH: And so I was wondering if you thought that certain -- I don't know -- being Jewish is helpful in that regard, and keeping families together or -- and maybe providing more resources under stress.

Do you --

NT: I don't know. I think there's -- I know lots of Jewish families that have split.

RH: (laughs) OK.

NT: So maybe it hadn't come up for you --

RH: In the interviews.

NT: -- but I think in the overall population, it's probably --

RH: Pretty --

NT: -- percentage-wise same as the rest.

RH: Pretty similar.

NT: Yeah. Yeah.

RH: Unh huh. OK.

NT: I think one of the things that hopefully maybe is a little less of a problem in the Jewish community than in the greater community is substance abuse. Huge amount of substance abuse right now. I think the Jewish population -- And this is a gross overgeneralization. But I think the Jewish population, for the most, is much more apt to say, "I'm depressed. I'm anxious," and get medication for it and have the resources to do that. I think a lot of people out there are self-medicating with street drugs and alcohol.

A huge rise in substance abuse with underage adolescents.

RH: Really?

NT: Mmm hmm. From what I understand. And this isn't just from my observation but my kids' observations, as well as other mental health professionals. Mardi Gras was just over the top this year, the number of kids falling down, you know, drunk [or the?] --

RH: And you're talking adolescents --

NT: Mmm hmm.

RH: -- this is really --

NT: And I'm talking younger and younger, like eighth, ninth grade.

RH: Wow!

NT: Yeah. And I think part of it is -- (laughs) I mean, I'll never forget, one of the cards, the index cards where kids talked about, "New Orleans will be normal when" -- one of the kids, "When my mother stops drinking a bottle of wine every night." So, you know, I think the kids are watching the adults as they self-medicate. And it's kind of like much more --

It's always been, in New Orleans, that it was a whole different world than most of the rest of the world, but I think it's even more intensified.

RH: Hm. Did you or anybody in your family have to be in a position to ask for help, like take the Federation money or -- you know?

NT: We did take the money from FEMA, did not take the Red Cross money, and did not take the Federation money. I don't believe my mother or brother did either.

I know I had gotten some clear messages that the Federation money, you know, was not based on financial need and that we should take it. And neither my husband nor I still felt OK about taking it.

RH: Hm. Of course, I mean, the vulnerability's there. And I wonder what it's like to be a community that gives and then suddenly needs --

NT: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

RH: -- and had you thought about that any?

NT: Mmm hmm. I mean, it's interesting because my husband has been (laughs) kind of the collection agency for Federation for many years. He, for some reason -- I can't figure this one out -- always agrees to be the person that calls everybody in arrears --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- OK? -- who has either reneged on their pledge or has not, for whatever reason, followed through on giving. And so I kind of heard a lot about people's situations, about, you know -- and I think it was truly a dilemma for lots of people, who, it's in their nature to give and -- just so worried about the future and didn't think that they really had the money. That was real different than some people, who found it a very good excuse to use, you know, who had never really given much or were in arrears anyway, you know,

from five years ago. They were like, "Oh! Katrina.

I can't give." You know. So I don't know. I mean, I think, again, you know, from a psychological point of view, I think whatever character traits or personality traits or ways of dealing of things that were present before just were magnified after.

RH: Right. What has the Jewish community meant to you during this experience?

NT: Well, I've always felt a big part of the Jewish community. And, of course, that didn't change. I think, when I was in Colorado, it was very reassuring to go to the services for the High Holy Days, to see -- you know, I remember -- and I think it was Rosh Hashanah service -- and Eli's a singer. He loves to sing. And I remember looking over, and he's just belting out the Hebrew, you know, just singing away, and with this look of pure enjoyment on his face. And after, he goes, "Boy, that felt good because they do it just like we do at home." You know? Kind of like that feeling of all over the world, you can still attach to a community.

And I think that's what it meant for me, was feeling somewhat like, OK, there's so much that needs to be done in New Orleans, and there's that which needs to be done for the Jewish and then that which needs to be done for the whole New Orleans community and where do I direct my attention and funds to and that kind of thing. I've been somewhat immersed in it, you know, having a brother that was, I guess, president of the Federation during all this and having a husband that's very -- he's currently a vice president of Federation. So having somewhat of the inside track of kind of what was going on probably influenced me somewhat, you know, made me feel even more a part of making major decisions about the future.

RH: Mmm hmm. What about, just kind of personally, being Jewish and what that means to you?

NT: Well, it's interesting because I think, you know, in my family, especially my father, I guess we would refer to ourselves as more civic Jews, meaning the spiritual, the religious, the organized religion part of it was secondary to being part of the Jewish community. And civically, we're, you know, kind of supporting the whole structure of the Jewish community. I -- and I think it just has to do with getting older. I have gotten much more, I guess, spiritual in recent years, meaning that I love the traditions, I find myself going to services a whole lot more. I was not particularly close to the rabbi at Touro, pre-Katrina, and have become very fond of and fairly close with the current rabbi. So I enjoy going to the services and hearing what he has to say.

Again, the music is real important to me. Eli went to Israel for five -- he went to [Progpol?] in Israel this summer. And I think having my baby, (laughs) my six-foot-four baby -- you know, seeing his Jewish identity develop, you know, has made me more, I guess, cog-- (clears throat) excuse me -- cognizant of the importance it has in my life. Again, I find myself in positions, often, where I'm one of the only Jews. In this practice, I'm the only Jewish person, which is very odd, in mental health --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- to not have more Jewish people but -- so I find myself educating people, like when I take off for Yom Kippur, you know, what that is. And everybody's very respectful but, you know, I'm aware that I'm the only one, you know. I remember one of the first days we ate lunch, and somebody next to me was eating a ham sandwich, and he was like, "Is this bothering you?"

(laughter) And I've never kept kosher, so I just kind of got a good chuckle out of it.

RH: Yeah. (laughs)

NT: But, you know, some of the misconceptions about being Jewish that people who just have not been around Jews much might have.

RH: Has there been any rituals or observances or even, I guess, Jewish practices that, over the past two years, have come to your mind more or that you think about more or do?

NT: Well, I try, when we -- you know, we're like any typical American family, that it gets harder and harder for us to all sit down for dinner together. But I used to be a real stickler for it when all the kids were at home. Where, unless somebody had something else going on, I actually fixed dinner, and we sat down at a table and ate together. And it was very important. So I've tried to include Shabbat dinner whenever I can, which, it's just a sense of lighting the candles and saying the blessings over the wine and the bread, which is kind of nice. I'm trying to think of anything else. Not a whole lot of ritual. We're not -- when I say the traditions, I guess, I'm thinking more of, you know, having the Passover Seder, you know, breaking bread, Yom Kippur, you know. As you can see, a lot of it is related to food. Food's real big in our family. (laughter) And I think that, you know, all my kids love Jewish food. So that's part of it.

RH: So you're cooking at the holidays.

NT: I'm not.

RH: Well --

NT: (laughs) We go to my mother's. We either go to my mother's or -- actually, my sister-in-law, who's never converted but kept basically a Jewish home, she has the Passover Seder now. I don't know if it's because I'm the youngest or because I've got a reputation for not cooking, even though I do, (laughter) you know, or I work full-time or what, but I seem to not be the one that does the ritualistic meals. So.

RH: Mmm hmm. What are your hopes for this Jewish community?

NT: I hope that we get a lot of our Jewish kids coming back after college. There's not a whole lot in terms of opportunity in a lot of fields. But I have talked to friends whose kids were applying lots of places for law school but decided on Tulane because they want to be here. So, I hope that families don't leave, and I hope new families come in. I hope that the Jewish community can keep in mind how important it is that we're all on the same team and that we're -- You know, I think there's going to be more -- (break in audio) -- amongst agencies for funds. So I'm hoping that that doesn't get in the way of cooperation and providing services. I guess I'm hoping that a lot of the Jewish community that did live out by the lake can rebuild and get back into their homes, or, if they can't, that they're finding alternatives that are working for them.

RH: And have you been upset at people who leave?

NT: I haven't been upset because I think I, you know, respect everybody's personal decision. I think there's some people that I'm disappointed a little bit that they kind of saw greener pastures and didn't want to kind of be inconvenienced with a lot of things in New Orleans, I mean, people that really didn't lose their houses, lose their jo-- you know, I can certainly understand, if you've lost your house or your income, you know, or something, that it'd be hard. I think, rather than being upset at people that leave, I'm excited about when people are trying to decide whether to leave or not, and they stay. And it's sort of like, again, that frontier mentality of, "Yes! Some more pioneers" --

RH: (laughs)

NT: -- you know, some more people who are willing to sacrifice a little to, you know, put their heart and soul into making this a viable community. [So?].

RH: What's hard about being in New Orleans now?

NT: There's a lot of insecurity, in terms of, if there was a medical emergency, whether you could get adequate care. I had an incident a few months ago where -- I hate to say

this on tape because I don't want to bad-mouth her but my dog, who's the sweetest dog in the whole world, nine years old, bit me on the lip -- and (laughter) ended up in the emergency room and was in there for six, seven hours before I even reached triage. And it just was kind of a reminder that we really don't have emergency services.

Being in the mental health field, I'm acutely aware of that, if somebody needs to be hospitalized for psychiatric reasons, that there's a good chance there aren't any beds in the city for them.

Had that happen recently. But other than that, I have to say that my own personal quality of life has not been compromised very much.

RH: Hm. What's your thought on the city, state, federal response to Katrina?

NT: Wait, let me add one thing to that last one --

RH: OK.

NT: -- and that's the crime, considering we just had an incident on the corner in front of my house, with somebody stopping some kids breaking into a car and being shot at. So that happened two days ago. So the crime is the quality of life, and it's a concern, living in New Orleans, that crime seems to be getting worse instead of crime control getting better. As far as the response, I know one of the things Eli had to deal with was being in Fort Collins, which is Bush territory and very conservative, and hearing both his grandmothers and his mother constantly talk about Bush and the federal response and how horrible it was -- and so he'd go into school and talk about it in his classes and found that not many people agreed with him around there. But he learned first-hand that, you know -- I think is something, again, that's part of adolescence, can we trust authority, can we trust our government? And he came away with the feeling of, "Phueh. I don't think so." So, you know, that's been hard. State-wise, I mean, you know, I just think Governor Blanco, you know, never dreamed that she'd have to deal with something like this and

really was in way over her head. Nagin, I'm very disappointed in. I was a Nagin supporter. And I really like him, personally. And I've just watched him go off the deep end. I think he has post-traumatic stress disorder.

RH: Hm!

NT: And I think he's blowing it. And I'm extremely upset, as is, I'm sure, you know, everybody in New Orleans, about, you know, every day, somebody being indicted for some other corruption.

RH: Do you feel that the racial tensions are worse now than they were before?

NT: I was just talking about that with a group of friends. And my concern is it's beginning to shift from racism with African-Americans to racism with Mexicans. So, yeah, I mean, if you have racists, they're going to find somebody, no matter what race it is, (laughs) you know, to feel negatively about. Yeah, there's definitely racial tension. You know, when I'm walking down the street, and I see a Black person, I feel like I almost overcompensate by saying, "Hey! How are you," you know, just to -- you know, part of it is I've been told, you know, the best way not to be mugged is to just be, you know, friendly and assertive. (laughter) You know, but also I think it's a matter of, I think because of the crime -- I mean, one of the first questions people asked when I said something about the incident in front of our house was, "Were they black?" You know. Which was there before Katrina, but I think there's a certain threat that people feel now that has intensified. I was very sad to see, at the school where I work, which I think prided itself on some pretty good diversity, probably had, I think, percentage-wise, the best diversity of any of the private schools in New Orleans -- and a lot of the kids of color and a lot of the minority kids did not come back. So I think Uptown, in particular, is getting whiter.

RH: Do you think, as far as the recovery, there is kind of, the allocation of resources -- that it's becoming a whiter community?

NT: I don't know. I mean, I think for a while there, the housing in Uptown was just so outrageous, I mean, in terms of renting, you know, that you weren't going to get any people without good resources living in Uptown New Orleans.

I don't know. I'm not sure.

RH: Are you involved in any, you know, intercultural, cross-racial alliances --

NT: Yeah.

RH: -- in the recovery?

NT: Somewhat, not as much as I -- you know, it's one of those shoulds. And not as much as I should. I'm part of something called the Youth Roundtable, which is a group called --

Well, they get funded by Points of Light. But it's a program -- I'm trying to think of the name of it now -- where they've gotten representatives from as many organizations as they can to sit around and talk about services for youth and -- And it's very diverse. Probably just about every culture's represented. So that's -- Eric Schwartz is the guy's name that's running that.

RH: Sounds like a good idea.

NT: Yeah. Yeah.

I was on the board of a place called My House, which is a -- I don't know how to describe except that it's like a Jewish community center for the neighborhood in which it's located. And they're providing lots of services, mostly to the African-American community.

RH: Where's it located?

NT: It's on Peniston, about three or four blocks of Saint Charles, toward the lake.

RH: Mmm hmm.

NT: And, you know, they're doing a lot of outreach programs in the public schools in that district, providing like life skills classes and teen pregnancy prevention classes and, you know, those kind of things, summer camp.

RH: Have you heard, and within your practice or another place, more incidences, less incidence of domestic violence and that kind of thing?

NT: Again, I think the anger level is high. What I am hearing is more out-of-control adolescent boys and their moms being scared of them. I don't remember hearing that as much before. And, you know, that could be a trend from some other -- you know, from the way we're parenting or, you know, dads being absent or, you know, whatever but -- And I don't remember that, in my own caseload, and that's coming up a lot more.

As far as couples, some but, at least with my experience, I'm not experiencing more.

RH: If you could pick one memory from these experiences of Katrina, what would you pick?

NT: Probably coming back, when I hadn't been back in New Orleans yet, on October 14th, and my friend taking me around, and thinking, "It's even worse than I had thought it would be," you know, and realizing that, until you see it, smell it, you know -- I think the smells -- I tend to have -- my olfactory's pretty strong. And, you know, the smell of mildew, the smell of just decay really got to me. So the memory of that. I remember that Thanksgiving really well, just being so thankful that we were all together, we had pulled that off, and how thankful I was that, you know, we pretty much had -- you know, I say no damage to our house. We did get a new roof, replaced several windows, you know.

But that seemed like nothing (laughs) at the time. So just being really thankful, you know, and feeling like we're going to make this, we're going to be OK.

RH: Have any of your priorities changed since the storm, for yourself?

NT: I notice I'm paying a lot more attention to the older people in my life. Life seems a little more fragile. I think nothing really surprises me very much. You know, I think I was, before Katrina -- had that kind of temperament where I could kind of roll with things. And I find that I'm doing that even more. I have, for the first time, started thinking and trying to entertain conversations with my husband, who really still won't do it, of where would we live if we weren't going to live here. I think, with Dean threatening in the Gulf, was the first time I've ever heard him say, "OK, where would you want to live if we didn't live here?"

You know? So it's recognizing how tenuous, [still?] -- you know, hearing people say, "If another hurricane hits here, that's it for me." So knowing that, even if a hurricane came here and didn't devastate us, that there'd be a whole new wave of people that would just be like, "I can't take this." So.

RH: What did you learn about yourself from this?

NT: I actually learned that I'm very resourceful and that I can make things -- I kind of knew this about myself, but it was a really good validation that, you know, to just about every problematic situation, you can find some solution, some better than others. That I'm very fortunate to have a close family who supported one another. Realized how much I love New Orleans and how much kind of a fish out of water -- I let Eli express it for me, but I think I, you know, was certainly feeling the same thing. Learned how important our friends are, as, one by one, we were able to locate each other and talk. You know, how fortunate I am to have so many good friends. I think I really came out of it feeling that I'm very fortunate, which, again, I knew, but I don't think I realized how fortunate.

RH: What about, after not being at home and having your kids scattered and -- what does home mean to you now?

NT: Home pretty much means where my family is.

You know, I realized I'm not that attached to my house. You know, during the whole thing, my house and my belongings were never a major concern.

I know lots of people were concerned about their things. I guess things just didn't bother me that much, you know -- once I had my tennis racket.

And (laughter) that bothered me.

But, you know, I mean, that home is not about the contents of my house, and home is not even about what the address is.

But home is more where my family is.

And that I'd like New Orleans to be my home, but that would make it work, if I couldn't live here.

RH: Where did you guys talk about moving to?

NT: Well, we never really fully, you know, agreed.

But if I had my say so, I would want to live probably in suburb of D.C. My husband had said that he thought Nashville was a pretty cool place. So it's not like we have -- and the only family -- I mean, his side's in Colorado, and he grew up in Colorado and says he will never live in a cold climate again.

RH: Hm.

NT: So that's limits us a little. The only other place where I really have a lot of family is in Philadelphia.

And that's pretty cold. So.

RH: So what's kind of, for you, a priority, if you had to pick another place?

NT: A priority for me right now would be Eli's schooling. He's got tremendously high aspirations for where he wants to go to school and would want a pretty high-powered college prep school. One of the reasons the D.C. area appeals to me is I have a very close friend that used to live in New Orleans that moved there about 15 years ago.

And her son graduated from Sidwell Friends. And she had said that she had already spoken to them and that, if we needed to move there, Eli could go there.

RH: (laughs)

NT: I'm like, "OK. That would be good." (laughs) So I think his education, since he's my last. And like I said, what my kids need is priority.

RH: Right.

NT: So.

RH: Right. Are you heading in any new directions, for yourself, since the storm?

NT: I'm keeping an eye out for what resources are not there; see if there's something I can provide that's not being provided.

You know, I had done a divorce group with Jewish Family Service. Because, as I said, I think some families are splitting up. So that was one thing. I'm running a group for adolescents with Asperger's because I think there's limited resources in that area. Love my work at Trinity, feel like supervising our future social workers and counselors is a

priority. Been approached about teaching a course, which I'm kind of keeping on the back burner, on the college level. But I'm pretty content in my private practice. I find it pretty fulfilling. And then the volunteer work I do kind of fills in some of the other needs I have.

RH: That's nice.

NT: Yeah.

RH: (laughs)

NT: Yeah.

RH: I really think we've covered most of the questions. And I really appreciate you giving me all this time.

NT: Sure.

RH: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

NT: I think this project is really important because I do think that, you know, it's human nature to have memories that become pretty distorted over time. So I'd be real interested in like, you know, 20 years, to listen to this and go, "Oh, really? That's how I felt?" You know?

RH: (laughs)

NT: Or, you know, I think lots of other people would have that same experience. I think it's essential, you know, that somebody's documenting, you know, the emotional toll that this has taken on people. I think for future generations it's important.

RH: Well, thanks for being a part of it.

NT: Oh, thank you.

RH: OK.

NT: OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]