



Sara Mayeux Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: All right. This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing -- Sara, tell me your last name.

Sara Mayeux: Mayeux.

RH: Mayeux.

SM: Sara Mayeux from the bayou. Yeah.

RH: OK Sara Mayeux at 7830 Nelson Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Thursday, September 21st, 2006. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Sara, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

SM: Yes.

RH: Thank you. Why don't we begin telling me of your background here in the city, and also tell me your name, your husband's name --

SM: My name is Sara Mayeux. My husband's name is Ernesto Montano. And my mother's family is originally from New Orleans. My grandmother moved here right after she got married from New York. And my grandfather was born here. And my grandfather's family is related to the Latters of the Latter-Blums real estate company. And so they had originally come here from England. And my grandfather's father came from Russia via Mobile I think actually where you told me you were from. And that's the New Orleans connection.



RH: So you have grandparents here?

SM: I had grandparents here. Their house got destroyed during Katrina. They lived there for I want to say about 45 years. And they're now in Baton Rouge.

RH: OK, and you went to LSU?

SM: Yes. And my father's parents lived in Baton Rouge and my grandmother still lives in Baton Rouge on his side.

RH: And you have a connection here, because you came every -- in the summer?

SM: Well, my grandparents always lived here, and many times during growing up my aunt and uncle lived here. My mom's sister and her brother. And so I would usually spend my summers at Jacobs Camp in Mississippi, and then I would come down and spend the rest of the summer with my father in Baton Rouge, and travel back and forth between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, to visit family and stuff.

RH: OK, so tell me, how is Jacobs Camp? Because that seems like you traveled a lot throughout your life, and that might have been --

SM: Well I traveled a lot growing up and moved around a lot. So Jacobs and New Orleans and Baton Rouge area was really home to me. And so when I said, where are you from, I would usually say Louisiana. A place that's a home base. And that's where I felt comfortable.

RH: OK, and you went to LSU, finished when?

SM: I started in August of '93 and I finished in December of '96. And so I finished a little bit early.

RH: And what'd you finish in?



SM: I had a double major in psychology and anthropology.

RH: And so then you didn't come back to New Orleans right away.

SM: No. I worked in archeology for quite a – well, while I was in school, I worked for what's called a cultural resource management firm and had gone on a couple of digs, one in the Bahamas and then worked with this firm. And when I graduated I then moved with them to Port Lavaca, Texas, which is a small city south of Houston. And worked on a Corps of Engineers project there. And decided I did not want to do archeology anymore and just wasn't really -- didn't have the passion for it that I needed to pursue that. So I moved to California from there, and was in California for about five and a half years, and moved there in August of '97.

RH: And then how'd you get back to New Orleans? And when did you get back?

SM: Well I moved to California, and started my career there, and met my husband, and we got married there. We got married here, actually in New Orleans, but we lived there for two years after that. And we decided eventually that we weren't going to be able to buy a house there, and it was just very expensive to live there. And I was getting a bit homesick, even though I sort of always prided myself on not getting homesick, because I'd moved around so much but I really did miss my family, and I started to miss when we would talk on the phone, family gatherings, everybody would be there and I wasn't. So my husband's -- most of his family is in Berkeley and Oakland area, so it was hard for him to move, but he realized we had more opportunity here. So we decided to -- I started looking for a job here, and eventually got one and they moved us here.

RH: OK so tell me your job and --

SM: I work in the financial industry. With, right now I work with UBS Financial Services, and I manage financial advisers, make sure they're doing things ethically and compliant, and that sort of thing.



RH: OK and your husband?

SM: My husband now owns a coffee shop in town. Well we both own it. Cafe Luna. And he manages and runs the coffee shop. And prior to that he had worked as an AutoCAD art -- I don't know what you call it. AutoCAD sort of engineer making designs for ships at a shipbuilding yard. And he had also worked in the coffee industry when he was younger.

RH: OK, so tell me about your neighborhood right now that you're living in. What do you like about it, and why did you pick this neighborhood? Because you came in 2002?

SM: We came in December of 2002 to look for a house, and we moved here at the end of 2002. Actually, probably third to last day of -- or the last day of 2002 was the day we drove in from California. And we picked -- we looked with a realtor and we -- I didn't know the neighborhoods of New Orleans at all, except for Lakeview which is where my grandparents lived and where I sort of grew up going to that neighborhood, and so I'd actually looked in that neighborhood, and found that there were sort of three areas that we would have considered living in. Which was Lakeview, this neighborhood, which I guess is considered sort of Fontainebleau, I guess that's what you'd call it, and then further uptown. And the further you get uptown, the more expensive it was, and Lakeview we just found that the houses were a little smaller for the same amount of money you could get here, and also this neighborhood my great-aunt, my grandfather's brother's wife, lives eight doors down. And she actually was born and raised in that house, and so we knew this neighborhood a little bit. My mother, actually even more knew this neighborhood. And really liked it. And the minute we walked in this house, we knew this was the house we wanted.

RH: And is it mainly the house? Or --



SM: We love the house. Yeah, we like the neighborhood a lot now that we've gotten to know the neighborhood. My husband is more the social butterfly. I just go to work and come home, but he really has met all the neighbors and this block especially is really very social. When we first moved here, the reason we loved this house was just because of the architecture. It has some beautiful design elements, and at the time it was a good size for us. It was two-bedroom. Eventually I think we'll grow out of it. But then we came -- once we lived here, the neighbors are great right now. Rabbi Andy Busch just moved in last year and his family and next door. And the block party for the whole neighborhood is on this block. So we've gotten to know a lot of people through that. And it's just a real family. I think it's one of the fewer neighborhoods in the city that still has children that live here. Our next-door neighbor has an eight-year-old or nine-year-old, and neighbors across the street have two kids. Andy and Debbie have two kids next door. Their neighbors have kids. So I don't think you'd get a lot of that uptown anymore.

RH: So tell me some of your favorite things to do in New Orleans.

SM: Well since we bought the coffee shop, it's going to hang out there. All of our friends are there constantly. So yeah and we've made a lot of friends. My husband specifically cannot go anywhere in the city without seeing someone he knows. Where were we the other night? Everywhere we go he sees someone he knows. Places that I'm even surprised. We go to Metairie, and we still see people that he knows. So that has really brought us a lot of recognition and just a lot of friends. So we love to hang out at the coffee shop. Even when my husband's not working we go there. And we like to eat out a lot. We go to restaurants probably -- it's just the two of us so we don't cook that much, so we eat out too much. We eat out probably five times a week or more.

RH: Got a favorite place?

SM: My husband likes College Inn, Ye Olde College Inn. What's our favorite place? For breakfast we like Riccobono's, which is down the street here. Trying to think where we



would just say, let's go to dinner, and that's where we'd normally go. Have to think about that a minute. But we have lots of different places we go. Yeah.

RH: It's a good town for that. So what have been your Jewish connections in the city?

SM: Well, we don't belong to a synagogue yet. We did belong to a -- my husband's not Jewish. He grew up Catholic, although he doesn't really practice that much out of the house. He doesn't really go to church, although I know he has some spirituality, but he doesn't really go to church or anything. But he's very supportive of Judaism, and we agreed to raise our children Jewish before we got married. We had a fairly Jewish wedding as much -- it was at the Bourbon Orleans actually, but we didn't have a rabbi do it, but my cousin who was going to be going into rabbinical school was the officiant, and then we had a judge stand up and do the legal part. But we had a ketubah, and we pretty much, it was as Jewish a wedding as you can get with a non-Jew. And so what was the question -- oh what's my Jewish connection? So but when we came -- so we belonged to a synagogue outside of San Francisco and we -- my husband and I both really loved it, and we loved the rabbi there. Here we haven't really found a synagogue that we love that's really spoken to either of us. Not that there's anything wrong with the ones here, it's just nothing's really -- when we've gone we haven't really just found it I guess worth it yet, because we don't have kids yet. And I belong to Hadassah, I'm a Vice President on the Executive Board of Hadassah, which is a Zionist women's group. And I feel like I need a connection to Judaism, but that gives me enough at this point. I've always needed some connection, and in California we didn't know a lot of people, so I had to do that through the synagogue. And here I get that through Hadassah. So I don't feel that really need to belong to a synagogue right now.

RH: OK and so what kind of connections do you make with Hadassah?

SM: Well I've met a lot of great friends. Young women through Hadassah. And for a while, not since Katrina, but we had a really strong young women's group in Hadassah,



so a friend of mine, Amy Berins, and I had -- well we didn't start the young women's group, there was another woman here, but we took it on after she left, and then Amy now runs it, since I've moved on to the Executive Board. But for a while it was really strong and we had a mah-jongg group once a week, every Monday night, and that was very instrumental in having me meet a lot of people and just really feel part of the community. I think that really made me -- gave me an in, that group. Because we had at one point every Monday night we would have almost sometimes even 12 to 15 people.

RH: Here?

SM: Sometimes we'd have it here. We'd have it at somebody else's house every Monday. Yeah, and that kind of stopped actually a little bit before Katrina, and now we rarely do it anymore, which is kind of disappointing. But that allowed me to meet a lot of younger people, and here we just have a ton of Jewish friends, whereas we didn't have that in California. We went to synagogue, but I couldn't say that we had a lot of Jewish friends. I would say here primarily our friends are Jewish.

RH: Since you've been in another Jewish community and you've been here, can you speak to how you perceive the Jewish community here?

SM: The Jewish community here is very close. And I like that a lot. When I was in California I found it very hard like I said to make friends. We had people that we associated with that were Jewish, and we did have one Jewish couple that we were good good friends with. But they didn't have the -- I don't know if outreach is the word. But just the feeling that you belonged that you do here. Here I think people are so willing to make friends, and they're so willing to invite you into their home, and say come over for dinner and be legitimate friends rather than just acquaintances, and I rarely find that someone mentions somebody's name that I haven't at least heard of. Which is kind of strange, because not necessarily now, but before New Orleans was pretty big. So I just think it's a really close-knit community and it's very easy to feel welcome here.



RH: So why don't we get into your Katrina story a little bit. When did Katrina first come on your husband's and your radar screen?

SM: Well my husband and I, I had planned -- my husband's birthday is August 29th, which is the day Katrina hit. And it was his 30th birthday. So I had this big party planned and I had sent out an evite and we had probably 50 people coming over Saturday night and the theme was tacos, tapas and tequila. And I had gone, my uncle, my father's brother, is retired Navy. So Friday afternoon he had taken me -- this was Friday the 26th after work he had taken me to the commissary at the Algiers Naval Base. And I had spent about \$400 on this big party that we were going to have. And so and Friday night actually -- well let me start over because at work we have a disaster plan and every other time that a hurricane has been on its way everybody at work is emailing back and forth, check out this tracking pattern, look it might be -- for every other hurricane for days in advance we'll be sending emails at work, check this out, look how it's coming. Literally everybody left Friday night and no one had said a word about this hurricane coming. It had not -- not one person had even mentioned it at work. So Friday night we went out -- I had gone to the commissary, gotten all this food, brought it back, and alcohol. And we went out to dinner with our friends, Lisa and Nathan. And we went to Nacho Mama's on Magazine. And I think actually Nathan, who works for the Corps of Engineers coincidentally, had mentioned you know this hurricane looks like it might be headed this way. And we said, "Ehh, whatever, just let it pass." So then we woke up Saturday morning and it was -- at that point it was on the news that it did not look good. And so my husband and I, we're very lucky because we evacuate to Baton Rouge every time a hurricane comes. So we're pretty much 'close up the shop and go.' Even if it looks not really that bad we -- it's so easy for us to go that we just go as early as possible, especially if it was a weekend. So we came home and -- no we didn't come home, we woke up. My husband went to work that morning. I sent out an email to everybody on the e-list saying no we're staying, looks like it's going to be fine, you know, for the party. And then 30 minutes later I sent out an email and said Katrina won, we're canceling the



party, we're going to Baton Rouge. So then we started to get ready to evacuate, packed the dogs, and I talked to my mom and my mom asked if we could bring my grandparents. And so I called my -- I think Ernesto called my grandparents and said you all need to get ready because we want to leave early. Because we have a back route we go. Where if we go that way we can get there in two and a half hours. And we don't have any of this ten-hour nonsense. And so but we have to do it before the contraflow starts. So we were rushing my grandparents hurry up hurry up and we wanted to leave by about noon. So we started packing, we were all ready and we called them and my grandmother said but I've got this meatloaf and it's not finished cooking yet. So I said I cannot believe that you're worried about this meatloaf. Just take the meatloaf and we'll finish cooking it at my mother's house. Because we were all going to my mother's house. I was going to my dad's house but my dad and my mother live two blocks away from each other. So at about -- I guess at about 1:30 or 2:00 we finally went over there, picked them up, we had two dogs, their cat, a fish and a meatloaf. And my grandfather, grandmother, me and Ernesto. And we got on the road and went to Baton Rouge. So we evacuated about 2:00 on Saturday.

RH: And that took you two and a half hours?

SM: We did.

RH: You went the back way?

SM: We did. I don't know if I should tell everybody our back way but yeah.

RH: We won't put it on tape. So you got to Baton Rouge on Saturday afternoon.

SM: So at about like 5:00 or so right.

RH: And --



SM: Well at that point it was pretty sure it was going to come this way so we were all really nervous.

RH: Did you prepare your house in any way? Take some things or? Or your grandparents? Other than all the animals --

SM: We actually -- well Ernesto and I really -- yeah we really didn't take anything. And in order to prepare -- see we have two things we have to do because we not only have to prepare our house, we have to prepare the shop. So in the previous hurricane, which I think was Ivan, that we evacuated for, which was the year before, we had prepared like crazy. We boarded up all of the house windows. We boarded up all of the shop windows. And we really didn't bring anything more than we would have but we were very prepared as far as boarding up things. And this time we just decided that we didn't board up the house windows. We shut the shutters in the front because we have shutters on the front porch. And at the shop we didn't board anything like we would normally. We did take the signs down. Because they were swinging in the wind. So we took the signs down. And we really just closed up the shop and that's about it. I'm trying to think what we brought -- we really did not bring -- oh Ernesto brought -- Ernesto is the prepared one. I am not organized or prepared in any way. So he brought all of our insurance paperwork. All you know the house title. And he brought our wedding album, which I would not have remembered to bring, and I was really happy he brought that. And I called my grandmother and I felt like now I feel like I was really rushing her and I sometimes wonder if she would have brought more had I given her more time but I don't really think she would have. Who would have ever thought, you know.

RH: So you get up in Baton Rouge and you're --

SM: Well we got up to Baton Rouge and actually on Sunday my husband went and waited for about four hours at the Home Depot to get a generator. And so that was good. But so but that was interesting actually because I've just never seen anything like



that. Were just so many people and the Home Depot had chairs set up for everybody and they were waiting for this huge truck to come in with 40 generators. And these trucks were just coming and coming and coming. And you just had to wait till you got your generator. It was kind of interesting.

RH: This was like all these New Orleanians who were up there.

SM: Right well and people from Baton Rouge. My father -- we were out of electricity for five days even in Baton Rouge. So the Baton Rouge people needed it too. It wasn't people planning to come back here with them. Well, maybe, but that wasn't the primary -- most of the people were from Baton Rouge that knew they were going to need it in their own house. But also that day my mom, we had -- my mom had I want to say 11 people and six dogs staying in her house. Because her brother and his wife and their daughter and their two dogs stayed with my mom plus my grandmother and grandfather and the cat and my mom's sister and husband and son and their two dogs. And I guess that was it. And then my dad had me and my husband and his brother and his mother and him. So but they live two blocks away from each other so it was really nice. So my mom had a little birthday party on Sunday for Ernesto and we had a big cake and so that was kind of nice, but knowing that it was going to be a big hurricane coming and we were all sort of unsure what was going to happen.

RH: Hard not to have that anxiety.

SM: Yeah yeah.

RH: But then.

SM: So then that night we all just sort of watched the Weather Channel all night and I think I did go to sleep actually. And then at 6:00 on Monday morning is sort of when I remember the wind really start coming up and getting bad. And my boss actually called me on my cell phone and I could hardly hear him. He was at Jacobs actually. My boss is



Jewish as well and he and his wife and I think his son and some friends of theirs from Tulane had gone up to Jacobs to stay and he called me just to say this is going to be bad, just keep in touch with me. And it kind of broke up and that was the last heard. But that was about 6:00 in the morning. And then after that we just kind of sat around and watched the news all day. And it's interesting because I sort of vaguely remember hearing a report about the levees breaking on Monday in my mind. But since then I've heard that they didn't really find that out until Tuesday. But I really remember being at my mom's listening to the radio and hearing about that. So I've always wondered if I just imagined that or if they -- but then since then I've always heard that they didn't really announce that until Tuesday. So I don't know. But we just spent all day listening to the news. I had actually some work stuff that I had to do because we transferred all of our phones to the Farmington Hills, I think it's South Dakota maybe branch of UBS. So I had to work with them a little bit that day. Yeah.

RH: Oh what a clever idea.

SM: Well that's what our disaster plan is. So they take over all of our accounts. Because people still have to be able to trade and if you have an account you can't not be able to trade if you want to.

RH: So were you thinking at that time it'll be a day or so and we'll just be getting back? Or do you recall?

SM: Yeah I remember knowing that it was really bad by Tuesday. I don't know if on Monday. But see, I do specifically remember hearing something about the levees breaking on Monday. And maybe it wasn't the ones that they talk about now. But I remember my uncle sitting there with the radio and them talking about either the London Canal or the 17th Street Canal or something because I remember thinking my head I don't know where that is because I don't know those areas. Like I do know the Lakeview area but the whole Ninth Ward, I don't -- I didn't at the time know even where that really



was. I had a little bit of an idea because I had been to Chalmette once. So I sort of knew where that was. But, and my father used to live in Chalmette. So he was explaining it to me. But I think I knew maybe Monday night that it was going to be pretty bad and actually by Tuesday we were talking about renting an apartment. And on Wednesday we actually rented an apartment. Yeah.

RH: So you realized that the levees had broken, you couldn't go back.

SM: Yeah by Tuesday I don't know necessarily on Tuesday -- on Tuesday we knew it was going to be bad. And I remember on Wednesday morning I went over to my mom's and my aunt was already talking about buying a house actually. And so she was already calling a realtor that they knew because they used to live in -- my aunt and uncle used to live in Baton Rouge as well so they knew people there. And so she had already called a realtor and they were talking about either -- maybe they were talking about renting an apartment or something at the time but we knew that we were not going to be able to live with my father for much longer number one because we were just getting on each other's nerves. But we really said, look, if we have to put out the money we just have to do it because we're going to be here a while. So Wednesday morning we went and went to the LSU area because I knew that area, Ernesto didn't, but I used to live there, and I don't know why we really chose that area, I guess we felt we could find something cheaper there. So we went there and we spent the whole morning looking for an apartment and we literally told the guy sight unseen we'll take this apartment. It ended up being a dump but at least we had a place to stay. And actually literally after we got that apartment there were eight more people in line behind us trying to get apartments too so we were really lucky. Yeah and by Wednesday we had a place but we couldn't move in until actually the middle of September because the Baton Rouge Gas and Electric Company was so backed up that they couldn't even turn on the electricity or the gas for half a month for over two weeks. So but we did have the place.



RH: And so then what happened? Did you guys --

SM: Well I went back to work on Thursday. We have an office of UBS in Baton Rouge so I went back on Thursday. And started really trying to find all of our people. There were some people that were -- I think we found the last person maybe by the next Monday or Tuesday or maybe even Wednesday. But we started figuring out how we were going to run the office because we had 60 people scattered to 20 different branches across the United States. We had some people we couldn't find yet. So I went back to work by Thursday morning. And Ernesto started just dealing with the apartment and figuring out what we were going to do. And I guess by Friday we really knew OK our -- we might not have something to come back to. And that weekend we started looking at the aerial maps of the city trying to figure out if our house was underwater, which at that time it actually looked like it might be, because we did get two to three feet in this neighborhood. And some people even further down the street lost their house. But there was a lot of uncertainty. We had no clue if we had a house to go back to. And I started thinking about what I wished I would have taken and that sort of thing.

RH: What do you wish you had taken?

SM: So I was really surprised -- well I was really surprised that there really wasn't that much that I wished I would have taken. I had this one bracelet that my boss had given me from San Francisco that I really was very upset about. Well not very -- even very upset, I would have really wished I would have taken that bracelet. Our ketubah, which we did not take because we had not framed yet or anything, it was sitting in a closet. And we actually ended up losing most of that. Because the roof leaked a little bit and it got in that and sort of made it run. But I was able to save some of it and I have it hanging on the wall over there. But and then I don't know, that's probably pretty much it. Those were really the only two things I could think of that I really cared enough about to be upset about. Other than the house and just other -- my dining room furniture but it was



more just uncertainty of what are we going to do now.

RH: So are there any other people you were concerned about or trying to find at this time? I mean, obviously your work --

SM: Yes, yes actually. People at my work, but even more importantly our employees at the shop, at the coffee shop. We had left. On Saturday we had left. We had one employee named Dave who everyone knew. He was famous for saying "that's awesome". We called him "That's awesome" Dave and people loved him at the coffee shop. And he had moved here from I think Indiana and really by Monday night we were able to get in touch with everyone except for Dave. Maybe Tuesday but Ernesto was able to text message on his phone, which that's another thing. I never text messaged or even knew what text messaging was until the storm. Now I'm like text messaging crazy. But so Ernesto was able to text message on his phone so he was able to get in touch with all of our employees from the shop except for Dave. And actually to this day we've never found Dave. We know that he's OK. His partner had been back in town and told us that he moved back to Indiana. But for some reason he's never wanted to be in contact with us and we don't really -- he lived in Lakeview and he had stayed through the storm. And we assume that it was just too hard for him and he didn't want to have anything to do with New Orleans anymore, but we've actually -- we've tried. We had -- actually Ernesto and one of our customers had even come back, they looked at the morgues for him. They had looked everywhere. And I don't know why he's chosen to not get in contact with us. But we're happy we heard he's good. And we actually had left him several hundred dollars because he actually closed the shop so we were happy about that, that he had money. And so we just never found him again. But so that was a person that we're kind of sad to kind of see go out of our lives.

RH: So were you watching TV still? What did you think of what was going on with the evacuation and the --



SM: We only had local news. And because we only had -- we eventually -- well, we put our -- my dad was able to rig up the generator so that it could do most of the house so we had the TV plugged in but we didn't have any cable. And surprisingly local news was not good. It didn't -- Baton Rouge didn't -- I don't think it was as good as CNN or -- well I don't even know how good CNN was but the local news really did not show a lot of what was happening in New Orleans at the time and like with the Superdome and I guess I'm trying to remember. Everything kind of runs together. But I remember seeing some things on the news about it and thinking that's really horrible. And questioning just as everyone else why nothing was happening. I specifically remember watching the people on the Expressway that were standing there for hours and hours. And thinking just how ridiculous it all was. And then eventually we did get the national news and feeling sort of helpless about the whole thing.

RH: And so what becomes the center of your universe once you're in Baton Rouge?

SM: Well I was working a lot. And the center of our universe, I guess it was really worrying about what we were going to do with our life. We really didn't know what we had to come back to. It was just a lot of uncertainty. So really I was just constantly stressed, just a lot of stress. And my father's a social worker so he's all about dealing with the stress. And so he actually -- and I think this was good although it was annoying at the time. He sat Ernesto and I down and said you got to come up with a plan and so he sort of wrote out some stuff that he thought we should talk about and he said you need to talk about it. And we did. And it was good.

RH: Like what, if you don't mind sharing some of it?

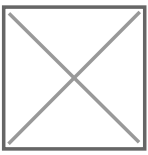
SM: Well like he said -- I'm trying to think of what some stuff on his list was. He said talk about your finances. And you need to talk about what you're going to do if you get back and your house is destroyed. And I don't know, just he sort of had a short-term list and a long-term list. And at the time we kind of thought it was -- not stupid but sort of like we



didn't have time for it. But we did sit down and talk and I think it was really good because since then, not that we didn't have I guess problems but I've just heard of so many couples that have had so much stress and so many problems since then and I think we did pretty well with all of it.

RH: So what became your next priority?

SM: Well so then we sat and we were really looking, this is about -- so by that first weekend we really like I said it was just a lot of uncertainty if we had a place to go back to and we had decided at this point we were just going to stay in Baton Rouge. And eventually like I said my uncle was a retired naval officer, so he and my husband came back into the city. I want to -- it was very early. I want to say it was maybe even the next Wednesday. So that would have been like the 7th or something like that. The 7th or 8th. And I was at work. And I was really anxious because I knew that I was going to find out that day whether we had lost our house or not. And my husband called me and I could see on the phone that he was calling me from the house. And so I was just -- it was just such a flood of relief. And so I picked up the phone and he said the house is OK. And it was just -- it was really -- yeah. So that was really just a relief. So anyway but then also after that I was also dealing with a lot of my employees who had lost everything, and I had several employees who lived in -- sorry. I told you I cry at everything so I know I'm going to be -- so we had several employees who lived in Chalmette and in Lakeview and so then dealing with them coming back from seeing their homes, or knowing what had happened to them, it was really almost a guilty feeling, that I did have something to come back to. We weren't perfect, we had a lot of damage. Our garage flooded, which isn't that big a deal, but we had to get some of our hardwood floors redone, which we're not even finished with yet, we had to get a new roof, and so although I consider us very lucky there's a lot of stress in dealing with all that too. But at the time I was -- there was some guilt that we hadn't lost more and all these other people just had such horrible things happen to them. But so my husband and my uncle came in



and they came and got as much as they could, brought it back with them. And so it was just a huge relief to hear that we still have a place to come back to. And then we kind of started thinking about OK what do we do now. Do we go back, do we stay here?

RH: He went by the shop?

SM: Well that's interesting actually. Because yeah he did go by the shop. And it was fine. He called me, said the shop is fine, there's one broken window. No looting. Nothing, it was great. And so then that next weekend our friends came in town and took some pictures. And my cousin, they sent the pictures to my cousin and my cousin calls me and says you know there's a car in the shop. And we said no there's not. No we were just by there the other day. There's no car in the shop. Well apparently there was a TV person who -- like a freelance reporter or something, and at that time I guess people were just putting TV on their car in tape to tell that they were with the media. Well they had been driving down Magazine and a Homeland Security vehicle had been driving down Nashville and this car had been -- the shop's right here and so this car had been going 70 miles an hour, there were no stoplights or no one to stop them. So the cars ran into each other. This car took out a stoplight, a concrete trashcan, ran through our iron fence over the concrete barrier and into the shop's front porch and was just sitting there. For months. For over a month that car was sitting there. So well I guess it was probably about a month. So that was kind of strange, you know, that that would happen after the storm. And so then what happened was my husband and I came in, because I wanted to come in, and they had finally announced, I think it was that next weekend, maybe like the 12th, that you could come back if you had a business or if you were -- really if you even worked at a business or something like that. So we came in and we were trying to figure out, what I really wanted to do was go to my grandparents' house in Lakeview. And they were not letting people into Lakeview. And so I really had no intention of going there. I had wanted to but I really had no intention of going there. We had brought no preparations whatsoever. They had kept saying get your shots, bring boots, well we



knew our house hadn't flooded and that the water had receded here so we didn't do any of that. And so we got here and we had to get off I think at -- where did we have to get off? I guess we had to get off at Bonneville maybe. And so we got off and we ended up somehow on Old Metairie Road. And so we got stopped at Old Metairie and the highway sort of. And the National Guard stopped us and I showed them our business card and so they said where are you going and I said oh we're going to go to my office downtown. So I told them we were going to turn right on Canal. And so he said OK so he flagged us by. So I said you know what let's try to go see if we can get to my grandparents' house. So we turned left on Canal instead and first of all I was kind of scared because I thought I don't ever do anything against the rules and this guy had said OK when I said take a right on Canal so I was like really nervous with that. But so we took a left. Well then we got to where that coffee plantation was underwater, it was completely covered in water -- you couldn't go past there. So I was not deterred so we turned onto Marshal Foch or something like that -- no, no, we turned onto a little street, I don't even remember which one but we went back behind the railroad tracks and that's when I really saw what had happened, it was like I couldn't even -- I was just shocked because we had come in on the highway and my husband Ernesto had seen this area but compared to Lakeview this was not -- we get to the area, it literally looked like a nuclear bomb had gone off or something or what I would picture. It was just all cars were covered in this ash. Like it reminded me of Pompeii or something. Where there was just this ash covering everything and the houses were just in this like gray cream-colored ash. It was just the strangest thing. And so we kept driving and we saw these guys that were I guess had started cleaning out their house already because that area the water had subsided a little bit. And we asked them is there a way to get back behind here to General Haig, which is where my grandparents live, and they said well I doubt it but why don't you try this. So we went over these railroad tracks and I did not know that area very well back there and we turned on Marshall Foch I think it's called. And I took a left and we came back through City Park and then we took a left onto Harrison and then there was still some



water. But so we had to park there and we walked from there to my grandparents' house through just disgusting -- about two feet of water. And it was just horrible. So and the thing I remember most is just the stench. It was just -- it was like just awful. And so we got to my grandparents' house and there was somebody's deck from another house was in the front yard. And I just thought that was really weird. That somebody's backyard deck was in their front yard. So we get there and of course -- well I didn't even have a key but you wouldn't have been able to open the front door anyway because their front door was like solid wood. And so Ernesto wanted to break the window and I said no don't break the window. And then I realized how stupid that was not to want to break the window. And so, you know, we thought, well -- we didn't even have anything to cover our mouths so we were just using like towels that we just coincidentally had some towels in the car. So I called my mom and everybody was over there at her house still. They were all still staying there. And I just said we're here and everybody just broke down in tears crying on the phone and they were like how is it and I just said it was horrible. And but I said what do they want, what do they want us to get, we don't have a lot of time, and what do they want us to get, so Ernesto broke the window and my grandfather said how did you get in and I said Ernesto broke the window. This was over the phone. And he was furious that Ernesto had broken the window because he just had no concept of what it was. So we climbed in the window and I just did not ever fathom that a flooded house would look like that. I just -- I didn't -- I don't know what I thought it would look like. I guess I thought it would look like everything would be in the same spot and it would just be wet. But it wasn't. It was stuff was turned over and in the wrong spot. But then some things were still where they were left. Like they had this gift card from Whole Foods that was still on the table. It was just really weird. And then so we went in and the thing I was most wanting to save was my grandparents had -- my grandmother, this window -- the front door was here and they had this window that went into their dining room so that's what we climbed into. And so we climbed in the dining room and the living room was over here and the two things that struck me initially was my grandmother had this baby



grand piano, that I grew up hearing her play, and that sort of thing, and so that was really kind of upsetting to see because it was completely actually -- it was always black and it was completely brown like this light brown color. And so that was sort of -- that was really kind of jarring. But the thing I really wanted to get was she had these two portraits in the dining room of her mother and father. And I had always grown up knowing that those pictures were going to go to my uncle and that they were really just important family heirlooms and they were completely flooded. They were all the way to the top. But so we took those thinking maybe we could salvage them and then we just walked around the house but of course it was really hard to walk around because they had hardwood floors and then carpet so while you were walking the floors were like this and then you had the carpet sinking into the places where the floors had buckled so it was really hard to walk around and the stench was just unbearable. I've never smelled anything like that before. Actually I did once, I had left some pants once in the laundry room that I had spilled turkey juice on and they molded and that was like a gazillionth of what this smell was. And so we got as much stuff as we could. We asked them. My grandfather wanted to get his -- he had some rings and a watch that he really wanted. We couldn't find it. And some coins that we couldn't find. And I really just started taking things that I thought were important because I didn't know what else to do. Like I took -- I knew my -- we always talk about what everybody was going to get when my grandparents weren't here anymore. So I remembered those things and so I would try to find those, like those pictures, my aunt was always going to get this like -- some sort of like porcelain figurine that was my great-grandmother's. I found that and took that. We tried to take some paperwork from like -- I don't know if I got this or if they got this later but there were like love letters from my grandfather to my grandmother before they got married and they actually were able to -- I don't know if save them, but they were able to get them and dry them out. So, I mean, we eventually did -- luckily we had a Ford Explorer so we rode our car over this fence that had fallen down and we kind of just knocked it down the rest of the way and we drove through the back and we parked the



car in the back but the problem was they had this humongous magnolia tree in their backyard and that had fallen over and so we were having to climb over this tree to get to the car to bring stuff. And I ended up actually throwing up twice during this whole thing. Because it was just so awful, the smell. And it's funny because I said to myself at that point -- and then the mold was all in my -- under my car. So for days I was just smelling this awful stench and I said to myself I will never forget the smell. And the other day, this was just last week, Ernesto and I and a friend of ours went to Luizza's [sp?] for the first time and I walked in and no offense to Luizza's [sp?] but I smelled that smell. It was the first time that I had smelled that smell since then. And it just made me sick. And I was like oh I haven't smelled this -- like I'll always recognize that smell of whatever it was. So anyway so we got as much as we could and we brought it back and it's funny, so we brought all this back and at that point I think my grandparents just had no conception of what had happened to their house, I think. I don't know, maybe they did, but I think that kind of shook them a little bit into realizing what had happened. So anyway I was kind of proud that we were able to do that. So then I don't -- because I don't think anybody else was able to go back until a couple weeks later, maybe two weeks later or so. So then we also took the time at that point to come to the shop and we saw the car in the shop and I came back to the house and got some stuff and then we went back to Baton Rouge. Not knowing when we would come back because they weren't really letting people back at that time. So yeah.

RH: So you were still kind of in -- you had a job but --

SM: Yeah and I sort of kept -- after that I guess about a week after that is when I sort of heard that people were coming back if they could. I think they had kind of -- I don't know if they had opened this area back up or not but I just heard that people were coming back if their houses weren't flooded. And I kept talking to Ernesto about what about opening the shop because there's nothing open -- oh I remember what it was, the time we came in we had gone to the shop and there were these guys, rescue workers, that I think were



from some church somewhere, and they said boy you all need to open up because people are desperate for coffee and so we sort of laughed it off and then I went home and started thinking about it, and I was like you know what people are desperate for coffee. So I think it was the first days of October when I started really talking to Ernesto and saying when are we going to go back, when are we going to go back. And both of us were really nervous about going back. We didn't know what to expect or who was going to be there or how we were going to run a shop with no water or no -- and we were trying to think of how could we do it because the water wasn't potable at that time. And so then about October 5th Ernesto came back with some friends who live in Sidell and he decided to just stay here and we eventually -- he started the process of getting the Health Department to allow us to open back up and then I think it was that next day the city said the water was drinkable. So we opened up and I came back in town and that was October 7th when I came back. We spent the whole day getting ready trying to figure out what we were going to do and then at 7:00 on October 8th we opened up and we had a line out the door down the steps around the corner. And it was me and Ernesto and it was absolutely insane. We just did not expect it at all. We didn't expect that many people to be here. Much less really care about coffee that much but --

RH: So other than being just totally busy did anything, did you have a moment to breathe and go "I'm glad I'm here"?

SM: Yeah it was insane. Oh first of all I was really glad I was back. I felt like I was home. At that point we couldn't stay here because this area wasn't really open yet so we had a friend who had an -- we had two -- well there's an apartment building next door to the coffee shop where we pretty much knew everybody who lived there. But we had specifically two really good friends who both were not back yet and we had keys to both of their apartments. So we started living in their apartments. And eventually ended up one of them decided to move to Chicago so we took his apartment. And we lived there for about a week or two and then we ended up moving back in the house. But yeah a



couple things really struck me. Number one was just the community atmosphere was I've never seen anything like that. Just everybody who was here was your best friend. It was really interesting. Also it really reminded me a lot of Israel because I've been to Israel twice and we always said it kind of was strange when you first get there because you have -- you're in line at the coffee shop and you've got somebody with an Uzi standing next to you who may or may not be in the army. And that's how it was here for a while, every other person in line at the coffee shop was either New York State Police, National Guard, some sort of military person. So we actually became really good friends with a lot of the National Guard people and it was just an interesting time because everybody was just very close and you -- everybody was talking about it and it was amazing to me how long people would wait in line for a latte. It really was just -- and I think it was a lot more than just that, I think they just wanted to talk to people, they were fine to wait in line and just talk.

RH: How'd you get your supplies?

SM: Well our roaster, our coffee roaster, was in Kenner, or he was down the street here in I don't know what that neighborhood's called but over by Jefferson Davis, Jeff Davis, and so he lost everything. So he ended up buying out this other coffee place in Kenner and so he was back up and running. Really Ernesto kind of figured that all out. We ended up getting a food supplier on the west bank that we were able to just pick up, which we never had before, and really truthfully it changed the whole concept of our business because we used to get our supplies from local bakeries around here which we didn't have anymore, so we had to change to the west bank, and it sort of forced us to streamline a little bit, which was good. Because we had to change the vendors that we got stuff from. We had to change the way we made our sandwiches, which is sort of technical. But we used to get the premade sandwiches from people and so we had to start making our own sandwiches, which was a better profit margin for us and ended up people liked them better anyway. So that was a good change. [coughs] Excuse me. And



so it was really interesting though just meeting people and I think people were very happy to have us here. We felt really just -- people appreciated it that we came back and did that. And obviously we got something out of it too, we were able to get our business kick-started but people really appreciated that we were here.

RH: So were you able to work there and do your other work?

SM: Well what I did was I took three days off from work and so the first day it was just me and Ernesto. And luckily we had a friend in town who was able to make a run out to get more milk for us, that was another thing, no grocery stores were open, so we were -- I don't even know where he got the -- he went out to Kenner to get the coffee so he got us some milk. And they -- he and his mom came back with a huge thing. Well that was about noon the first day. By 1:30 we were completely out of everything. Did not have anything left in the shop, nothing. Literally people well do you have lemonade, no. Do you have -- we had nothing. So then the second day comes around and it was me and Ernesto only and so then ran out at 1:30, nothing, had to close up shop. So finally on the third day we sort of got it figured out how much we were going to need to stay open till 5:00 or 6:00 or whenever we wanted to and then my mom came in and my grandmother came in to see her house -- I don't think that was the first time they'd come in but it was maybe the first or the second. So we had my mom, me and Ernesto at the cash register and making -- I was at the cash register, Ernesto was making drinks, my mom was making sandwiches and my 82-year-old grandmother was in the back washing the dishes. So that went on for a day or two. And then I had to go back to work so Ernesto had to hire -- finally he was able to hire people to help him and --

RH: When was he able to find some people?

SM: Well I think by the first weekend we were there he was able to -- some girls had come in who were just -- needed a job and he was able to hire them. And bottom line was people just had to wait. And they did. So yeah.



RH: Let's wrap up with the first tape and --

[END OF TRACK ONE]

RH: This is Rosalind Hinton with Sara Mayeux. And it's tape two and this is for Katrina's Jewish Voices. Sara, let's talk about when did you come back finally, when were you able to come back?

SM: Well my husband came back October 5th or so and he stayed the whole time. I actually came and I worked three days at the shop but our office in New Orleans was not open yet so I had to go back to Baton Rouge and I stayed in our apartment and went to work in Baton Rouge and we eventually were able to open back up our office here on October 17th. So that's when I came back for good was October 17th. But my husband came back about October 5th.

RH: So tell me what it's been like to be back here in New Orleans. How are things different?

SM: I think people are a lot closer. I think people who have come back feel this camaraderie and with the other people that have come back. To some extent I think that's true. I think they feel a loyalty to New Orleans. And they feel they've made a commitment if they've come back to stay.

RH: Do you guys feel committed to stay?

SM: We are. We actually just talked about signing a new five-year lease for the coffee shop so we're pretty committed to staying. You know, I don't know, when I first moved back I was very much against talking about how terrible it was here. There was this article that was written in -- I don't remember what magazine, the New Republic or something like that, I don't remember what magazine it was, but it was a friend of my cousin's who had -- of a cousin of mine who had written this and she sent out this article



as if it was this great article. This was probably the end of October or the beginning of November. And it really bothered me because it was such a negative article. And I still feel like this today, I feel like and I think a lot of people feel like this, I've talked to people about it, is this kid -- I want to say kid, this guy who wrote it was from New Orleans but he didn't live here, he lived somewhere else, and he came in, and the article was completely legitimate, everything he said in it was true --

RH: Can you just say a few things he's saying?

SM: I think he said -- he was just talking about how bad it looked and how he felt like it was going to take a really long time to come back and how terrible it was and to look at things and it was a very -- I thought it was a very negative article. And so I wrote this rebuttal back to my cousin about how I was just really not happy with it and I felt like I just felt like it was really unfair for someone who was from New Orleans to be putting such a negative outlook to other people. I sort of feel like if you're in New Orleans and you're from here and you live here you can talk about how terrible it is but to portray that to other people in the world, it was such a negative portrayal when we were really trying to even figure out what we were going to be doing here, and I don't know, it just really bothered me at the time, and now when I think back I think, yeah everything he said was true and maybe I got upset over it -- I overreacted but I still feel like I even have -- one of our neighbors down the street moved and they did an interview for a Chicago newspaper and said some really negative stuff about why they didn't want to raise their children here and I just didn't really understand the point of that. I feel like it's not great here but I don't know what it does to give that portrayal to the world. So that sort of has bothered me since we moved back.

RH: Do you think some people just to kind of justify their move?

SM: Could be. Could be, yeah. But I guess you don't want to lie because there are not great things here. I don't know if they're really much different than what was not great



before.

RH: I hate to make you go through it, what are some of the things that bother you?

SM: Well the school system's terrible, it was terrible before. The crime is terrible, it was terrible before. The politics are terrible, they were terrible before. The politicians don't have any plan, they didn't have a plan before. So is anything really different in that? In how terrible it is? No. So that bothered me. But --

RH: So what makes it worth being here with all that --

SM: Well I love it for the same reasons I loved it before the hurricane.

RH: So let's talk about some of those things --

SM: Yeah, I love -- I have -- I can count 40 friends off the top of my head that I would consider some of my best friends that I have here and that I would never in any other city have been able to make. You know, just the love for the city that the people who are here have. You don't get that in other cities, you really don't. I just went to Atlanta last weekend and I was thinking this has got to be the most boring city I've ever seen, everything was beautiful, it was so green, everything was so clean, and my friend and I who went said, God this is boring. Who'd want to live here? And so of course I can understand why people wouldn't live here, especially people with children, I can understand that, but we really just thought this is so boring. And so oh and we couldn't understand why no one talked about their next meal all the time. Because here we kept saying these people don't eat. And my friend and I, we kept saying "Okay, what are we going to eat, we were at breakfast, what are we going to have for lunch." That's how New Orleans people are, there they don't -- their whole culture is different. So the culture here is just so great and distinctive and I think that's hard to understand if you don't live here. But how's it different from when we've been here? A lot of people have a lot more stress. I've actually had to cut down on some of the extracurricular things I did. I was



very active in Hadassah. I just recently had to resign from the region board, which I was disappointed in myself about, because I just sort of -- not only is it that I don't have time for it, I've sort of lost interest because it was something that was really important to me before but now I'm more interested in making sure I get to spend time with my husband, maybe helping out at the shop, spending time with friends, it just doesn't interest me anymore. And so my priorities have changed a lot. I think a lot of people's priorities have changed in what is important to them or what they want to spend their time doing or what they need to spend their time doing.

RH: So why don't you talk to me a little about just what life is for you here, give me a day here, what --

SM: OK, well, I wake up in the morning. A workday, I'll give you a workday and then I'll give you a weekend day. I wake up in the morning and sometimes I'll go to the JCC to work out, sometimes I won't. I get ready, I go to work. I spend the day at work. And my day is boring because I'm at work all day but yeah and then --

RH: Well, are some of the same people there?

SM: Yeah well we've lost a lot of people, which is bad for my business because we are based on revenues from financial advisers and so we have had several financial advisers move to other branches, and so we've lost that revenue.

RH: Is it less fun to go there because of that?

SM: Actually it's more fun, actually that's actually interesting because I had only worked there a year when the hurricane came. Actually it was almost a year to the day. And I really kind of felt like an outsider before the storm because the people there had -- some of the people there worked there 20 years. So after the storm I feel like the whole corporate culture sort of within our branch has completely changed. We're all much closer now. The people who have decided to move back here are much closer. I



consider them friends now versus just coworkers. Yeah so I think that's actually -- if you've stayed I think you've become -- you've just built stronger friendships. So actually work, the first several months were horrible. I was doing everything by myself, people had not come back yet, I was very stressed out, my branch manager wasn't there, my whole support staff pretty much wasn't there, I was pretty much a one-man shop in my area. And it was stressful, I can remember times I was under the desk crying. But yeah but I would say since about April it's gotten better. I hired somebody and -- well one of my support staff came back in January and then I hired somebody in December to cover another area and it took her a while to learn but I would say by April I really started feeling like the weight of taking care of the whole place come off of me.

RH: So you were really running the whole --

SM: It was -- yeah it was stressful. But the people there recognized that and I've been rewarded for that. I got a big plaque and reward and a monetary bonus for doing all that. And they're taking care of me so it's been worth it. And so that's my regular day and then I come home and if I didn't go to the JCC in the morning I'll probably -- I'll try to go to the JCC in the afternoon. We're taking tennis lessons now so on Tuesdays my husband and myself and another friend take tennis lessons, which is nice.

RH: Where are you taking tennis lessons?

SM: We take them in Jefferson Parish, which -- the Jefferson Parish Recreational Department they have them and so we're enjoying that. And then we'll come home. Sometimes I cook. Most of the time we go out. And now on a weekend usually my girlfriend and I will meet at the coffee shop in the morning and decide what we're going to do for the day. Ernesto usually is working on Saturdays and sometimes Sundays. So we'll meet at the coffee shop. We'll decide what we're going to do for the day. My best friend here is getting married next month so it's been pretty much planning wedding for the last six months. And we'll just kind of walk around Magazine Street sometimes or



take a walk around Audubon Park. And I don't know, that's kind of it but --

RH: So how you've gotten through this, I just want to ask a few questions just about the Jewish community. Because your relationship -- in some ways your relationship has changed because you're a little less involved in the Jewish community, is that true?

SM: Yeah. Yeah that is true actually because before I was very active in the Young Women's Group of Hadassah, I was in this other function of Hadassah, which was called the Hadassah Leadership Academy, that's over now. I was doing a lot with Hadassah last year and the year before that. Additionally, like I said, we were playing mah-jongg every week so not only would I see the girls there but we would of course gossip about everybody in the city and so you would hear what was going on. So yeah I think I've become a little less active. I did just get asked to be on this new taskforce, the Katrina Implementation Taskforce, so I'm kind of looking forward to that. Because I think I'll meet some people that I really have never known in the Jewish community, so that'll be interesting, but yeah definitely I guess I've gotten to know the people that I care about more but I haven't -- I don't know as many people maybe now. So yeah but actually Andy and Debbie moved next door so we've gotten to know them really well, which has sort of expanded our Jewish knowledge and that's been kind of fun.

RH: And is there anything in your framework like of being Jewish that helped you get through the past year?

SM: Yeah I think so. I guess I feel like Jews sort of don't give up. It's sort of not in our nature to give up and I'd like to think that that's maybe from my Jewish identity. And I think that definitely has something to do with why I wouldn't want to leave New Orleans, I don't want to be a quitter. I would feel like I'd be failing, actually that's one of the reasons I didn't leave California is -- it's kind of similar actually. When I moved to California I had moved there because I was dating somebody and we broke up shortly after I moved there and one of the reasons I didn't leave is because I felt like I would have failed going



to California. And that was like four months after I moved there. And I stayed another five years and one of the reasons I did not want to move from there was because I felt like everybody would say, oh that was something she tried that didn't work out and that was dumb of her to move all the way to California. And for some guy. And so I specifically didn't want to move from there because I felt like I would be seen as a failure and I think that that's kind of the same here, like I don't -- although I love New Orleans, but I definitely feel like if I moved here I'd be a -- if I moved from here, or if we moved from here, I'd be like a quitter, I wouldn't have given it my all.

RH: So do you feel a responsibility to build the Jewish community up in any way or more of just the city?

SM: I really feel more the city. I guess I've never really thought about that. I have definitely thought, boy, it's a shame the Jewish community has gone down a third. I've never knowingly thought to myself -- well that's not necessarily true because I specifically when I joined this -- when they asked me to join this taskforce, they gave me a list of things that I could choose from to be on the committee and my number one choice was the retention and how to retain and encourage young Jews to move back to the city. So I guess I definitely have an interest in seeing that happen and being a part of that. I don't know if I've ever knowingly thought about that in my head. I think when I've knowingly thought about why I want to stay in the city it's to rebuild the city, not the Jewish population, but I guess in the back of my mind it's there because that was my number one choice for this committee so --

RH: And are there any other things that have been particularly Jewish that have helped you or sustained you or any rituals? And I don't mean formal rituals but just kind of personal rituals that maybe you're more intentional about or anything like that?

SM: I can't really think of any, give me some examples.



RH: One of my friends, she touches the mezuzah more. That's it, she's just more grateful for her home.

SM: I definitely --

RH: So she touches --

SM: Yeah that's a neat idea. I don't do that but I have this little thing where sometimes -- and I don't even think is like the right way to say the Shema or anything but I like say the Shema at random -- I know you're supposed to do it when you wake up in the morning and go to sleep and stuff like that but I don't do that but sometimes I'll say it just like in the middle of the day and I'll just kind of thank God for having made us so lucky. I don't know if I do that any more than I did before.

RH: Well, that's beautiful either way.

SM: Yeah. So I'd have to say probably no, not that I can think of.

RH: Let's talk a little about your relationship to New Orleans. How do you feel -- well I'll tell you what. I want to go back a little bit to the Jewish community. In Baton Rouge or here did you ever have to call on the Jewish community for any help or did you --

SM: Not really. We did go to High Holy Day services there last year but see I knew -- I'm friendly with a lot of people in the Baton Rouge Jewish community because I went there when I was at college and I taught Sunday school there. So my aunt went there when she lived there.

RH: What was the synagogue there?

SM: Beth Shalom. And so did I ever have to call on them for help? We did get a grant from them when we came back, which was very helpful, which I was a little embarrassed to take. I remember I was at mah-jongg one night when we came back and all the girls



were talking about go to the Jewish Federation or I guess it was JFS actually and they have these \$700 grants that they're giving to anybody who's coming back, anybody who's Jewish I guess, and so I went and applied for it but I was really embarrassed to do that, and then I felt like well everybody's doing it, and then I felt like but I don't need it as much as other people, but we definitely could use it, and we did use it, it was very helpful to us, but I was really sort of trying to decide if that was something that I wanted to do or needed to or should have done.

RH: Was it kind of hard -- another Jewish concept is this tikkun olam. So now suddenly you're on the receiving --

SM: Yeah well I guess for me it was just, did I need it as much as somebody else. And a friend and I talked about that and they said, well, it's not like you're getting it other than somebody else, everybody's getting it. So we went ahead and applied for it. It was very helpful. Other than that I haven't really been directly on the receiving -- other than that gone and asked for help from the Jewish community. Now my grandparents have needed it, they've had a lot of help for the older Jewish population in Baton Rouge and bringing them back here and helping out in that respect.

RH: And what was it like to go to the High Holy Days in Baton Rouge?

SM: It was in a big Baptist church. The ceiling of the synagogue had fallen in. So they had it in the church next door, which they have a pretty good relationship anyway but it was really nice of them to let them use it obviously. I didn't really feel much, it was kind of a very like hollow Yom Kippur, you know. It just -- it didn't really -- I didn't even really want to go. I don't even know if I did for Yom Kippur. I think I went for Rosh Hashanah and for -- actually you know what, I absolutely did not go for Yom Kippur, and I hate to say this on camera, I worked, because my boss is Jewish and so he wasn't in the branch anyway but he wasn't even -- he went to synagogue and so somebody had to be there to run the place and so I went in and you know I didn't even really mind it. I just didn't feel



like it. I just didn't feel like dealing with the Jews. You know at that time. I didn't feel like schmoozing, I didn't feel like talking to people about the hurricane, I didn't feel like finding out what everybody else was doing, I just didn't feel like it. So I didn't go. Even for Rosh Hashanah I think we went to services, my mom and I, that morning and they had a big oneg at the synagogue next door because the common area, whatever they call that where they have the food and stuff, was OK, so everybody walked next door and I didn't feel like going to that. So my mom and I just went out to lunch. But so this year I'm a little bit more excited. I'm going to go to Hillel. My best friend Jody is the Assistant Director at Hillel. So I'm going to go with her to Hillel and I'm looking forward to that actually yeah.

RH: Nice. So how do you think -- do you have an opinion about how the Jewish community has conducted itself?

SM: I think they've done excellent. I know that the Jewish Federation was the first people we heard from. They were immediately not only sending people here to help save people but just being in touch. They got in touch with everyone. They had meetings in all the different cities. They not only had meetings just to come to but they even had meetings, they had an insurance guy come in and tell you about how to deal with the insurance companies and they just I thought were really good about making sure that everyone was accounted for, was just OK, and if they weren't then dealing with that and kind of giving them some guidance, yeah I thought it was excellent, I really didn't expect that for anybody from there to really care where I was. But like we would get emails, fill out this survey, tell us where you are. And I was surprised at how organized they were, yeah.

RH: So let's go into the city of New Orleans. If we're going to talk about what worked and the Jewish response do you have an opinion about the federal -- your government?



SM: I think it was horrible. And I just don't know if -- New Orleans is just such a mess all the time anyway but if we had left it to the Louisiana leaders I would say it was acceptable, just because what can you expect, but the fact that the federal government didn't step in soon and say you guys can't handle this, we're going to -- I just think it's horrible. It's a real disappointment and it's surprising. On the one hand I want to say it's not surprising but it is. It is surprising, it's very surprising that they couldn't have done a better job of organizing things and making decisions faster and it's disappointing.

RH: Does it kind of make you rethink your relationship to the government? Or the forgranted-ness of your citizenship?

SM: Yeah, and I do really feel like had it been a different city it would have been a different story, I really do, I think that had it been another city, and maybe that's because their own leaders would have been more organized. That could be the case but I really -- I don't think that this would have happened in another city, I think it would have been more organized, and better well run and I think the government would have cared more, I really do.

RH: So what about now and the progress going on now --

SM: Oh, very disappointed, I'm very disappointed in the progress that's been made. I feel like there is no plan. They keep talking about a plan. They keep talking about this 100-day plan or Bring Back New Orleans Commission, there's supposed to be a plan. I've never seen a plan. Actually I did see a plan. I have to monitor everyone's email at work and one of the emails that came through was from Rob Couhig who was one of the mayoral candidates who I actually thought would have done a really good job, although I'm not normally a Republican, but he had sent one of my brokers his -- he's now helping out the mayor here. He had sent one of my brokers his 100-day plan, that was just recently. And I read it and it had some really good ideas in it. But I don't see any of them being implemented. I just don't see anyone -- I'm very disappointed that -- and I know



there are tons of extenuating circumstances but that no decision's been made of where they're going to rebuild, what they're going to tear down, that the teardown hasn't happened, that there's just been no concrete decision about anything I feel like, or at least it hasn't been communicated to us. So when it first happened people said oh it's really going to be five or ten years before New Orleans can get back to where it was and I just -- I feel like if nothing concrete comes out soon I think that's going to go to 15 to 20 if ever. So no I'm really disappointed in the city, I'm disappointed in the federal government, I don't know what the answer is though.

RH: How do you feel about the racial politics in the city? Do you have any thoughts on that?

SM: Yeah.

RH: Do you think the neighborhoods are getting too much attention?

SM: You mean too much attention? No I -- you know what, I really do think that had not everyone in the Superdome been African American, I don't think it would have happened like it did. I really don't, I agree with them. I think they're right, and I don't think there's anything wrong with saying that. I definitely agree that had there been a different population in that Superdome that the federal government would have reacted very differently. And whether that's an income level or a political divide or educational I'm not sure but I definitely agree with that so we were watching this Spike Lee thing that came out and a lot of people, a lot of white people, were saying well it's not fair, they didn't represent Lakeview, well that's not -- although, yeah, Lakeview flooded and it's terrible, I think a lot of them have the means to come back and do things for themselves and I think a lot of African Americans are not being given the chance that they probably should and are being ignored to some extent. And that's again part of the there's no plan. There's just no plan.



RH: Do you feel any responsibilities there? I'm not saying you should --

SM: I don't know, I don't know what I can do. I don't -- maybe I could join a group and be more grassroots possibly but do I feel a responsibility? No, because I do feel like people are responsible for themselves and I don't necessarily think that on every level the federal government has to step in, I actually think at this point if you haven't gotten yourself to where you want to be then it's probably a personal responsibility. But more at the beginning stages, the first three months specifically there could have been a lot more help there.

RH: Is there anything you'd like to like sit down and talk to Mayor Ray Nagin about or Governor Blanco or the President as a businessperson in the city?

SM: Oh without a doubt I think they need some more tax incentives for businesses. We moved here from San Francisco, which was crazy expensive, yet I think New Orleans has like the highest tax base in the country or something like that for owning a home. The homeowners tax is very expensive so they want people to move back here but our mortgage I'd say a third of it is our taxes that we pay every month. So it's very hard to buy a home here. We were thinking about buying an investment property. Well the taxes would be so high it's not even worth it for us. So things like that, taxes for businesses, I think there could be a lot more incentive there. Some grants. I've heard about some grants in the works for small businesses. I haven't really seen anything concrete on that. I don't think -- if there is something out there it's not being communicated properly. So other than grants from private organizations I really have not seen the city stepping up and -- or the state stepping up to put anything out there for small businesses. If anything I've just seen small businesses closing. We've just been really lucky that we've done well since the storm, but that was just lucky, because we happened to be in the right place I think. But --

RH: Right. So let's just talk about your vision of the future.



SM: Yeah I would love to see New Orleans become -- and I think it could if the right people did something -- become a real beautiful place to come and live and visit. And like I said I was in Atlanta last weekend and we went to this little park that they had like a fair in, like they had craft fair or something, and it was in the middle of the city and it was just this beautiful park and I was just thinking that's such an easy thing to do, yet we don't do anything like that. And even the French Quarter's looking junky lately. Our one jewel it just seems like they're not taking care of it. So I would just like to see them have some real urban planning come in and really do some urban planning downtown and like I heard about this -- we were in San Francisco in May and they came out with that big plan for the area by the Hilton. I haven't heard anything else about that since they came out with that. That was like one day they said they've got this big plan, they made this mockup of it, and have you heard anything else about that? I haven't heard a thing. So there's no -- anyway so that's what I would like to see is some real urban planning and instead of just people coming back, rebuilding homes in areas that are going to flood again, and I'm not saying don't rebuild there but let's have a plan before we start rebuilding there, and they're just -- that's what I would like to see.

RH: What are the strengths of the city that you'd like to preserve?

SM: The history, the architecture, the culture, the sort of laissez-faire attitude I think in some respects is great and some respects maybe it's what leads to all of our problems, but it makes the city what it is. So and I think it's going to be hard to preserve that without the same population dynamics that we had before.

RH: What do you mean when you say 'population dynamics?'

SM: Without as high -- without the same African American/white population divide I think that culture is going to not necessarily be as strong as it maybe was.

RH: So you see that as a benefit? In some ways it was beneficial --



SM: On a crime level maybe, but as far as not -- no because I think even this year we saw Mardi Gras was different. It wasn't the same as it had been before. Anyway I'm not sure about that, but I think that's one of the best things about New Orleans, just the ability for everyone sort of lets it loose and to most extent gets along and just has a real laidback attitude. Yeah.

RH: And do you see any opportunities coming out of this for yourself personally?

SM: For us yeah our business has increased probably threefold since the storm. So that has been really beneficial for us. I think we have some opportunities to really decide what direction we want to go in. Do we want to invest in real estate, do we want to invest in another Cafe Luna, do we want to buy another bigger house now? We kind of -- we're at the beginning of our life right now again. So for us we have a lot of opportunity to sort of start over maybe. Not start over because we never really started, but to sort of just define our life differently maybe.

RH: Do you have any plans? Are you going in new directions now that you --

SM: Well, are we going in new directions? I don't know that we're going in new directions or different directions. We're sort of on the same path we were before. We've had a lot of decisions to make about the shop since we've gotten bigger and doing more there. We've had to sort of change our relationship and when we see each other and that sort of thing. But new direction, I mean, not really.

RH: So tell me what are the things that you took for granted before that you'll never take for granted again.

SM: I think my friends. I definitely missed having just -- well I guess actually you know what I take for granted is sort of the daily routine, like we were talking about before, just having a daily routine and just sort of the mundaneness of life. And Katrina really stopped that and you had to sort of start over from scratch as far as what your life was



going to be like. And we've just now really gotten to a point where our life has sort of gotten back into the routine of things and every day isn't obsessed with insurance or fixing the floors or painting the house, which we're still doing, but so I guess just having a routine I took that for granted, just knowing what my next day is going to be like. What else have I taken for granted? I don't know, yeah.

RH: Well you already talked a little bit, I don't know if you have any more to say on this, but you talked about your priorities are a little different.

SM: Yeah.

RH: For instance Hadassah is you're more focused on things in the city, it seems like.

SM: Yeah and I'm more focused on our own life really, which I don't know if that's good or bad, but I guess really the -- I used to -- I don't know if this is good really but I was really interested doing things for -- being interested in the world more before, and now I'm really just interested in my own life, I want to do things with my husband and do things with my friends and I don't necessarily want to take the time to plan a healthy women event for the city, just doesn't interest me anymore. So I don't know if that's really good but I guess I've kind of decided that right now I would rather spend more time on me and my relationships.

RH: Something you're doing is your family's a priority.

SM: Yeah.

RH: And you're making time for --

SM: Yeah more for that like Ernest used to get -- my husband -- used to get upset because I would spend so much time on Hadassah and he felt sort of left out and I don't want to do that anymore. And I do sometimes feel bad, like I said I quit a couple of



different things and I felt guilty about that but I just -- I'm not interested, I'd rather spend the time with my friends and family and I guess I kind of feel like that's selfish but it is what it is.

RH: So tell me have you learned anything about yourself?

SM: Have I learned anything about myself? I'm proud of myself that I was able to come back or that we were able to come back early and that we felt confident enough to come back early and to sort of be a pioneer in rebuilding the city and I'm really proud of that. I think that was brave to some extent. I would say that I feel like I sort of learned that I'm OK with dealing with stress. Maybe not as good as I thought I was. I always kind of thought I was really great, I can handle all the stress at work and I was good at that, I was good at multitasking, and maybe I'm not as good at that as I thought because I did get really stressed out about it, and so maybe I learned that.

RH: And maybe that's ok.

SM: Yeah, yeah. So --

RH: Do you have any ideas now when you think about your grandparents lost their home, your home is OK, do you have any kind of thought about what home means to you?

SM: Well yeah, that's interesting because like I said before, I was really anxious about having if we -- when we didn't know if we had lost our house. But I really did before we knew it was OK, I had come to the conclusion that it's not really matters that much, the physical, as much as I probably wouldn't be saying that had I lost everything. I hate to say this because I didn't lose everything, so it's a little hypocritical but before I didn't know I didn't lose everything I'd sort of come to grips with the fact that I probably was going to come home to nothing. And that was I guess OK. But I did feel like as long as I had my family close and I'd be able to come back to the city and that that's home more so than



the house.

RH: Is there anything that -- it seems like home is also Cafe Luna. And a big part.

SM: Oh yeah definitely. Not just for me. I think a lot of people would feel like that in the city. I think we've really -- I'm really proud of my husband in that respect because he has really made a home away from home and a gathering place for a lot of people that I'm shocked about still every time I go there, I'm just shocked that all these people are always there. But it's really -- it's a nice spot and I think people really appreciate that, yeah.

RH: Is there anything else you want to say? Because it's been a great interview, and I just -- anything you've kind of been thinking about that you haven't talked about?

SM: I had all these thoughts before. I was like oh I've got to remember to tell her this. And of course now I can't remember any of it. But --

RH: You can always call me.

SM: Yeah.

RH: Any part of your story you feel like you haven't told?

SM: No, the big -- I think the really big things that I came away from Katrina with were my grandparents' house and just losing that was really hard for all of us, but I was just kind of surprised at how much that upset me. Not necessarily for the house but just for them and just they I think they might not have even lived there forever but just the fact that they lived there for so long and my mom grew up there and her sister grew up there and then I spent a lot of time there, that was pretty upsetting, so I guess that goes back to what's home. I probably -- that was like a home to me. And then I guess really just the whole coming back and starting the shop and really feeling like a part of the city, a part of



the rebuilding effort, was really meaningful to me.

RH: Just thinking this, so I'm being kind of off the top of my head, because I got the sense when you talked about your grandparents' home and it was your mother's and your aunt's and yours too, that when that's gone there's like a little bit of a safety net -- something safe has left the world --

SM: That also was a gathering place for our whole family. I'm sorry. That was like where we would have all of our -- because when our whole family in New Orleans gets together it's like 30 people. So that sort of became or was -- not so much -- as they got older it wasn't as much anymore, but I had my naming there. I just can remember a lot of family gatherings and oh sorry, so yeah I think so. It's like a place, it's just kind of a part of my life gone, yeah. So yeah definitely. I don't know so much of a safety net, it's just a sort of a part of my life that's not there anymore. So yeah. I just -- also I think about how they must feel and it -- I just can't imagine living somewhere for that long and then losing it in a day. That just must be really hard and then having to relocate and start your life over at 82 and 84 -- or 85, it's pretty tough.

RH: Do you guys get together more in Baton Rouge?

SM: Yeah more in Baton Rouge.

RH: They been down here to your place?

SM: They've come down, they come down to the shop a lot and eat our sandwiches. But yeah they --

RH: After all, you've been doing the dishes, you've got some rights --

SM: Right, right, they're owed it. They actually were here recently but they -- well they'll come down here for doctors' appointments sometimes. But normally we go to Baton



Rouge every month once a month and we'll spend the weekend there so we'll see them there. And my other grandmother lives there too. Coincidentally this is interesting. My -- excuse me, I have to blow. My mom is very close to my father's mother and she was living with my father at the time of the storm. But before the storm my mother had helped her move into -- or had helped her get her set to move into this retirement home -- you know place, you know they have their own apartment and everything, I don't know what you call it. But anyway, it's not assisted living yet, it's like a step down yeah. So anyway so my grandmother was going to get ready to move into this place in mid September. Well as soon as the storm hit my mother was on it and they were able to get my grandparents in the same home. So it's just so funny to me because my parents, my mom and my father got divorced when I was about two, but I've been really lucky that they have always been very friendly and the grandparents have always been very friendly. But I would have never guessed that they would be living together when they were 85. And so I just think like had you asked them 30 years ago, well 30 years from now you're going to be living in the same -- upstairs from your daughter's ex-husband's mother, it's just -- it's kind of funny how things work out, it's just really weird, so --

RH: So anything else?

SM: I don't think so, no.

RH: OK. I guess we can wrap it up.

SM: OK, OK.

RH: It's just been great.

SM: OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]