Joshua Mann Pailet Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Joshua Mann Pailet at 241 Chartres, his business, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is August 2, 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. Joshua, do you agree to be interviewed, and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Joshua Pailet: Yes, I do.

RH: [laughter] And getting your mic now. So the first questions are really when and where you were born, and your Jewish and your general education.

JP: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, at Touro Hospital. But we moved to Baton Rouge two years later, so my first eighteen years of my life was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I was educated in public schools [and] graduated from Baton Rouge High School in 1968. Our family was a member of Temple B'Nai Israel in Baton Rouge, with Sunday school and all the normal little Reform.

RH: And so you were Reform?

JP: Very much so.

RH: Did you hang out with other Jewish people, or were your friends mixed?

JP: Both. Through Sunday school and neighborhood I had Jewish friends, and I also had friends of all faiths.

RH: Were you bar mitzvahed?

JP: No. Confirmed.

RH: Confirmed, okay. Is there any way you could describe or a memory that you have that would capture what it's like to be Jewish growing up in Baton Rouge or the South?

JP: I think my answer will always be colored and flavored by the fact that my mother escaped the Nazis and was the only survivor of her family. So my Jewish education and awareness centered around that.

RH: Wow. Can you talk about that a little bit?

JP: Sure.

RH: I'm not even sure where to ask a question, but what does being the child of a Holocaust survivor –? How does that affect who you are as a person?

JP: I think my mother did a particularly great job at remaining positive and not conveying anger, and her whole life was devoted to her children. But her incredibly positive attitude, which anyone who knew her would comment on, was rather remarkable to me. Because as I grew up and I learned that she had lost her mother and father, and her brother, and of course was asking lots of questions, her goal, I believe, and later in life we talked about it, was to not be a victim, a further victim. So she devoted her whole life to her children. She taught at Sunday school to kindergarten students, so in that sense, her life was a great role model for me. She was incredibly astute. She could read people like that [snaps]. She had insight and intuition, and she, of course, knew history. She lived it. These are the things that influenced me much more, frankly, than the temple. Although I loved my rabbi dearly, Rabbi Walter Peiser – and he was a great influence as well. I actually enjoyed then, looking back, the contrast between the public school and a secular thing and the Sunday ritual of being with my ten or fifteen Jewish friends of my same age in Sunday school. It was a very loose and open atmosphere; it wasn't a rigid you-have-to-go-to-temple kind of attitude. My mother had much more by living now and what you do with your life and service.

RH: Wow. So how did you come back to New Orleans? When did that happen?

JP: I went to Rice University and graduated there in 1972 with a degree in economics, [and] in 1973 with a degree in business. But I started my art gallery. I had gone around the country – San Francisco, Colorado, Texas – to consider where I would start it. But I circled through New Orleans and started it here. So at the age of twenty-four, I landed in New Orleans, where I had cousins and grandparents, and things like that, but I didn't really think I would come back to New Orleans.

RH: Why is that?

JP: Well, as a kid growing up, New Orleans wasn't – it was too close to home. I was glad to go away to school in Texas. I was glad to go further and further away. So it was kind of ironic that I landed back here. It was a place that was perfect for starting a business, being an artist. The atmosphere here for photography was ideal, and it allowed me to basically take my apartment, turn it into an art gallery, and see what would happen.

RH: So, did you always know, as far as an art gallery, that you were going to do photography?

JP: No. Oh, I thought –

RH: Did you [inaudible] –?

JP: – I was going to be an engineer and build computers when I started college. And then that slightly changed, and by the time I graduated, I was fortunate enough to be fully focused on photography because I'd had major art patrons buying my photographs before I knew people bought photographs. So that shifted my gears quickly and allowed me the opportunity to pursue what I have pursued, which is both to have an art gallery that shows and sells great photographers' original photographs, like Ansel Adams, for

example, and to continue taking the kind of photographs that I like to take. Those have been a parallel feature in my life. Museums have collected my work. I've published a couple of books, and I continue to photograph, as I did during Katrina.

RH: Tell me, when you say that you felt like it was an ideal atmosphere, what does that mean?

JP: New Orleans then and now was definitely a much more open community to less than-standard people. It's a very forgiving community in that sense. There's nothing here that really shocks people that have lived here a long time. It was at that time a very financially warm city in the sense that rents were low, the business climate for having a business in the same building you live in was okay and positive, and it was an art city. It was a city full of creative people, it also had a long history of great photography, and it just – as an adult, it wrapped right around what I was doing. I didn't intend to stay, by the way.

RH: You didn't?

JP: Not really. I didn't know if this gallery idea would work. Always had the backup plan of my degrees to go and make a real living with if it failed. I had no idea when I started that it would succeed in the way it has.

RH: Did you, when you moved back, or in the years that you've been here, engaged or gotten involved with the Jewish community here?

JP: Not that much, to be honest with you. I go to temple occasionally, I have Jewish friends here, and engage each other in normal outside-the-temple activities, but no, I have not been a gung-ho, regular temple person.

RH: You said you belonged to Temple Sinai?

JP: Sinai.

RH: A reason why you affiliated there?

JP: It felt very much like Temple B'Nai Israel. And a couple of my friends were already there. And near my house. It definitely had a feeling for me, on a much bigger scale, what the climate was within Temple B'Nai Israel from Baton Rouge.

RH: How would you describe that climate?

JP: Just a little more open, relaxed approach to Judaism. It’s funny. My momma was not so gung-ho about rituals, but she was gung-ho about the history, who we were, being proud about being Jewish, not turning your back on it, that we were special, and that we had a role in life. And those teachings really, in my case, just let my life be my Judaism. And so going into temples, which I totally love doing, was not at the forefront of the way I was raised. If we missed a night or we missed a week, it was not the end of the world. So she wasn't a ritual person, but to me, she was as holy and religious as anybody I've ever known because of her actions.

RH: Wow. What a tribute.

JP: Absolutely. She's a major force in my life.

RH: Tell me, why don't we move on to Katrina because I think your story's pretty significant. You stayed?

JP: I stayed.

RH: Why did you stay?

JP: I stayed because I've stayed for every hurricane, and I'm a good scout, and I'm well-prepared, and I had my supplies. You remember who I grew up with as my teacher, my

mother, [a] survivor of World War II. She didn't waste – she was a nurse. I learned a lot of practical things growing up. So regardless of whether it was going to be the biggest storm in the world or [a] small storm, I was always prepared. That means plenty of fresh water, plenty of food, all the usual things, and mentally, you have to be prepared. And secondly, in this particular one, as I watched friends and people calling me to say to get out, we're going – people I knew who never had left before, I had already made my mind up, and I was in a zone of comfort. I just stayed put. And I would stay again.

RH: Did you stay with anybody?

JP: No, I was actually solo.

RH: Solo?

JP: Yeah. I have a home uptown near Audubon Park, and I have this building. I slept and stayed here, but during the day, I would go back and forth via bicycle.

RH: So, well, if you don't mind recounting if you can remember –

JP: I remember. [laughter]

RH: Well, some people say the days are kind of foggy, but if –

JP: Well, being a photographer, and truly once I had prepared, and the car, and the truck, and checked on my neighbors, and Sunday rolled in, Sunday afternoon rolls into some light rain, and the town being a ghost town, and the sun's going to set, so then at that point it's just waiting for the storm. Being a photographer, if I don't remember piece by piece, the photographs remind me. So, in this case, because the photographs I did became such a significant body of work in the year after Katrina, when it was produced and shown as a set, I can remember almost hour by hour.

RH: So, I mean, the primary reason you didn't leave was just because you don't leave.

JP: Don't leave. Don't like the idea of being in a car going somewhere with people stuck on a highway. I've always known it's coming back that's the big issue. I had lived through a couple of hurricanes, in hindsight of lesser strength, but the electricity goes out, you do what you got to do, and sometime in the next two weeks the electricity comes back on, and life goes on.

RH: So, why did you stay at your shop and not your home, just out of curiosity?

JP: I'm a history buff, and in three hundred years, the French Quarter has never flooded. [knocking] [laughter]

RH: Right.

JP: And the building structure, being all brick, being attached to other buildings, it's very unlikely that the building would come down. It had multiple stories if there was a flood. Those are all the things that went into my mind in making the choice of where I slept. In truth, the most valuable stuff that I'm responsible for is here. But it's the fact that it was the French Quarter, quality of the structures, and if something went wrong, I felt that the French Quarter would be rescued.

RH: So, how were you the first night? Were you taking photos? Were you out?

JP: No. [At] night, I didn't tend to go out. The first night, well, I would call Sunday night, which is in advance of the storm, and that's just a night where you pay attention to the wind, and I was still hooked up to the Internet and electricity and was able to track it and see what was going on. Frankly, I went to bed after midnight sometime and woke up Monday morning at first light probably because the storm shifted gears. Electricity went off about 7:00 AM, but at sunrise, which is probably 6:00-ish, there was definitely a shift in the sound and what was going on, and I now knew it was going into its full force. It had probably been eighty miles an hour overnight, maybe a little more, but certainly, once daylight came, it changed. Fortunately, right before the electricity went off, I still

had about an hour on battery backups, I could see that the storm had shifted just a fraction, which is what I had been wanting all night long, and I felt that we were going to be spared. Then the morning, I mean, if you want to continue on the timeline –

RH: Yes, please.

JP: It's the morning of the storm, which is Monday. From about 6:00 AM until about 1:00 or 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon is the storm. I spent most of my time monitoring the surroundings through the windows of the various floors I could move through and watching signs blow off of buildings, watching windows blow out, [and] watching shutters come down. Each stage of the storm seemed to trigger for me because there are no trees down here to watch, so my visual cues were the things flying through the air. So initially it was signs and things like that, then it was shutters, then it was windows and doors sucked out of buildings. I watched [the] neighbors' building and glass going in and out, and then finally I watched the corner over there, and the window finally it's gone. Things like that. Then in the later stages of the storm, a few shingles started coming off roofs. Then, for me, the peak of the storm was when I was standing here and, all of a sudden, I noticed – all the roofs along here in the French Quarter have hatches for maintenance access to the roof, and these hatches were starting to come off of buildings. And then I noticed what I thought was my hatch in the street. And this is an interesting part because at various times during the morning, I was going around with a portable drill and drilling shut the frames of my windows because as I watched everybody else's and I'm moving around, I'd find a window in my own building about to go. I'm not just talking about the glass part I'm talking about the frame. So having a portable drill and being a fixer guy, I just was doing that. Then, this hatch comes off. I didn't want the rain coming in my building. Now, interesting enough, being on a corner, these storms are very interesting in that the wind changes directions as the storm works its way through you and past you. So at various times during the storm, the direction of the wind was four different directions. Also, by the time it hit the fourth direction, I knew it was finally

moving past us. That's how you can kind of feel hurricanes if you actually go through them.

RH: Because of the circular motion?

JP: Yeah. There are different quadrants that's affecting you as it goes through or past you, or whether it goes right over you or next to you, the eye of the storm, which side you're on. People have asked me, did you ever regret – did you ever have a moment of fear that you wish you hadn't stayed during the actual storm? And there was about a two-second moment when I literally heard the freight train that accompanies tornados, and it sounded to me like it was coming from Canal Street and going to come right down this street. And it stopped. It probably was a tornado. I had, for a couple of hours, seen lots of them. In the wind and the rain, I could see little twisters. [snaps] But they would just disappear like that. For those couple seconds when I heard the freight train I went, “You may have stayed too long.” But it disappeared. It either went over us or wasn't that close –

RH: Went back up.

JP: – or something. I don't know. But hurricanes seem to be full of tornados, I think.

RH: When did it start to calm down, and you feel like –?

JP: It’s interesting. Like, the hatch story, I'm sitting here

looking through the door, and it's sitting right there out in the street, and I don't want to leave that hole in my roof because it's raining, and I'm not real interested in having to have those kinds of losses. This is before I knew about bigger problems. And because the wind goes in different directions – so anyway, I opened my door, and because the wind was going this way, I could stand in my door with my door open and not a drop of wind was coming in. The other thing I would comment on about this hurricane, and

maybe all hurricanes, they breathe. They like [take a breath], and that might be at a hundred miles an hour, but they are pulsing. And it's not a constant thing. So, I'll stand in that door with that thing opened, looking at that hatch, and I finally just ran out there and got the hatch, and brought it back in, and went up in the attic, and figured out a way to get it back on and attach it back down. Sounds bigger than it was. I just did it. It just needed to be done.

RH: When you talk about the buildings and the pressure, the barometric pressure must change in them.

JP: Changing constantly. Besides the observation I gave you here when I did finally start going back to my home, that's the first thing I noticed. Every single building, house or building, a window or door, high or low, is out. It's a very consistent first impression in the first twenty-four hours. I believe that's pressure adjusting, especially as homes have become so air-conditioned and sealed up. Older architecture here did better, and I believe it has to do with the original breathing of a house, whereas nowadays, we are shutting it down. History shows that Porter Street and all the modern buildings went through tremendous stress because some of them just exploded glass out near the Superdome. Or it must have been some major tornados.

RH: It might.

JP: That's an amateur's observation, but I do believe it's grounded in science. I think that breathing I'm referring to is just barometric pressure changing and shifting.

RH: I had always heard to open the window on the leeward side.

JP: That's what we did when we were young when there was a big one that came through Baton Rouge, and the eye of the storm actually passed over us. That's 1964. That's Betsy, which also hit Baton Rouge, not just New Orleans. That was a good – I remember that. This building – when I renovated it, I designed it so it could breathe. And

the same thing with my home, and I'm sure it helped keep the damage a little less.

RH: So, when did you feel like you could come out and walk around?

JP: I got impatient around 1:30, and I had parked my big van across the street in case it did flood and [inaudible]. I was just getting impatient around 1:00, 1:30; it had been going for six hours. I could tell it was coming down, but it wasn't stopped, it was still substantial. And at 2:00 o'clock, I decided to drive back uptown, and it was still blowing decent, but nowhere compared to three or four hours earlier. So, I did. I got in my old van and headed to the river to go uptown. And that's what I first – I remember crossing in front of Saks Fifth Avenue and noticing doors down. Now, had they been broken into or blown down, I don't know. But I think they may have been blown out. Anyway, I go up, and my first relief was that most of what I was seeing was just a few – was wires, trees, and no water, and it really didn't rain that much. And there were some tremendous gusts of winds out along the river, and I stopped and almost regretted leaving, but they stopped, and I went ahead and got up there. The closer I got into uptown, which is very wooded and wonderfully wooded, it just turned into a green carpet of tree debris. I managed to get around it and get to my neighborhood, where I found my neighbors grateful that it was over and tree limbs piled up against our houses, and by the time I got there, within the next half hour, there was no wind. It was quiet. It was starting to clear up. Swept up the neighborhood, made the pile of debris, washed down the sidewalks, got my bike out and my camera, and was waiting for people to start coming back home. Still didn't know anything about the rest of the city. This is 3:00, 4:00 o'clock, 5:00 o'clock –

RH: Monday?

JP: Monday. 6:00 o'clock, I'm definitely out on my bike sort of surveying uptown. I don't think I really took any pictures, but I had it with me. Had a flat tire on my bicycle.

RH: How'd you fix that?

JP: That's a great question, isn't it?

RH: Yeah. [laughter]

JP: It sort of – again, before knowing what the rest of my city was going through that was – what am I going to do tomorrow? I really want to photograph and document some of this. And I want to use my bicycle. Well, I had to walk it home, first of all, in total darkness. And that's when I realized the city was just abandoned. The fire station I go by is closed down. One guy came up to me when I was pushing it home to offer help. "No, I'll get home." I tell you what. I left it alone. I woke up the next morning. I fixed it by using duct tape on the tube, and I had enough air left in my air compressor, could only blow it up to find the leak to fix the leak with the duct tape, but to put it all back together and blow it up, and it worked for over a year.

RH: Oh, wow.

JP: It's the standing joke in our surviving family now. Our survival kit has duct tape. [laughter] But it worked. It was great because it gave me the ability to move around over the next five days, especially. Once that was fixed on Tuesday morning – by the way, when I woke up Tuesday morning, I think one of the most interesting stories I experienced –

RH: Did you stay uptown on Tuesday?

JP: Monday night, I fell asleep and stayed uptown, but after that, I never slept up there again. But I did go every day because, on one side of me, I had an older lady with her children she supported – nobody drove. Nobody had driver's licenses. On this side, I had a neighbor who was a museum person [and] took care of his older mother. They didn't drive. So I at least would check on them every day. First few days, they were

cooking up whatever food they had left in the refrigerator, so I would definitely go up there once a day. I always promised them if I left town that we'd all pile in my van and go because they definitely had no transportation.

RH: What's your neighborhood? What neighborhood is it?

JP: My neighborhood is 5518 Camp Street, very near Audubon Park, off Magazine Street.

RH: Okay. So then, we're to Tuesday now.

JP: We're to Tuesday morning. I wake up. I'm really not using the radio. It's interesting in hindsight that I just – we were so relieved – so my neighbor, who's a historian, is outside. We're talking, and I said, “Man, we're so lucky we didn't flood.” He said, “Oh, we wouldn't flood up here anyway.” He said, “Because I did a book on the floods in New Orleans in the 19th Century with the flood maps.” He goes in and gets his book. He shows me these maps, shows me the outline of where these floods happened every time – 1820, 1838 – I don't remember the years, but every – and what they did in the 19th century is they made surveys after major floods so that everybody would know where the high water had been, so when they went to develop and build they wouldn't build there. So, he had shown me all of this. I thought it was interesting. I didn't know he'd done a book. It was great. Now, it's time to get on my bike and go look at New Orleans. It was noon. Again, except for his discussion about – he explained to me how closer to the river is higher land. At the French Quarter and along the river and uptown, some places get to be six, eight, nine feet above sea level. And that all the floods in the 19th century ended at three feet above sea level. Okay, it's fine. As I came downtown, I saw a few things that alerted me to problems. One was policemen guarding the Walgreens with a U-Haul trailer and hauling out stuff for them. Just didn't make sense. Myself and four or five people were looking from afar. I was reluctant to take too many pictures because I didn't want to set the police off, but I still didn't know what was going on. Come to Canal Street,

and I see water on Canal Street. I come to this corner where, you know, about eight of us in this area had stayed. And that's when I asked some questions. They said, “No, the levees broke; the water's been rising.” “How much has it been rising?” “Well, a few inches every hour.” So I then took my bicycle and sought out the edge of the flood. Having had that discussion about the flood maps was so empowering, because it all made sense to me. It was literally the same place that did it in the 19th century. Circled the French Quarter. It was not wet up close to the river, but the minute you moved in, the bowl of the city just got deeper and deeper and deeper. For example, Canal Street, here at Chartres Street, next to the French Quarter, had one inch. But every block you went up Canal Street, away from the river, it dropped about a foot. So within about six or seven blocks, you were in four feet of water. And then, as you walked into the French Quarter, the first half block would have a foot or so of water, and it would rise up and be dry. So unless you had a basement in the French Quarter, you did not experience rising flood water. That's Tuesday. Most of the afternoon witnessing people coming through the Quarter, exhausted after hours of tromping through high water and trying to get to high ground. Anything that had wheels on it was being used to transport either their children or their garbage bag full of possessions. I saw people in wheelchairs doing the best they could. It was quite a thing on Tuesday afternoon as you started to realize that it was a serious, serious thing out there. By sunset, I made sure I was here. That was always my nightly goal. When it got dark, I wanted to be here. Because even Monday night, the city was pitch black, pitch dark, pitch quiet, and many people will tell you this, the stars in New Orleans on those first two nights were heavenly. There were no lights for 150 miles, so you could see shooting stars. You could see what I usually only see when I'm in the mountains. That was glorious, actually. And it was such a contrast after this huge storm, four, five hours later. There was no wind, crystal blue skies, and actually a little cool the first night. After that, the humidity changed, and it got hotter, and hotter, and hotter. End of the day Tuesday, I started to turn on radio and even used my portable TV to see what was going on, but the information was just not what I was seeing.

RH: Explain –

JP: What the information conveyed was that it was out of control. That the looters and gun shooters had taken over. I didn't personally experience that. I do know I had great guardian angels. I was never threatened, I never had to go get a gun, I never even thought about getting a gun. I felt invisible as the days unfolded more and more. I listened on the radio a bit. I thought a lot of it was nonsense. It got boring thirty minutes later. Save your batteries for when you really need to hear something important. I also will say that generally every evening, and especially Tuesday night, I felt while they didn't deliver the supplies to – there was nothing coming in. There were less than five or six policemen that I saw in downtown New Orleans. When a fire started, I pedaled over to the fire station to see if they knew, and it was locked up. There were no firemen downtown. Now, later I realized they were out rescuing their own family, rescuing other people, and that downtown was not of high priority. So nonetheless, on a Tuesday night sitting on my balcony here, pitch black, pitch quiet – and quiet to the extent that if somebody dropped something five, six blocks away, I could hear it. I mean, if they dropped a glass. At night, it was so dark if you had a candle on anywhere, I could just look down the street and see who was here. As they could. We all knew who was here by candle lights in various apartments at night. It was definitely a huge bonding and camaraderie amongst the groups that stayed here.

RH: You'd think if there was looting, people would loot here, in the French Quarter.

JP: This is a wonderful, important thing for history to know that the French Quarter, for some reason, still maintains a kind of respect, even, I mean, culturally. As far as I know, no store was broken into in the French Quarter. Now, Walgreens and any shop that had food or water I know was opened up, but – and again, I never found broken glass, unless the storm had done it, in the French Quarter. I think other people could probably give you some examples where it did happen on the fringes of the Quarter, but for me, no. As

people came through here, you could see they weren't bent on destruction; they were bent on survival.

RH: Were they coming through at night, or were they primarily –?

JP: Probably, but I wasn't seeing much.

RH: And so, were you seeing families? Were you seeing –?

JP: Both. Individuals, families.

RH: And it appeared that they had been in the water, they were trying to get out of the water, trying to find some dry ground?

JP: Yeah. And the word was get to the Superdome or get to the New Orleans Convention Center. Tuesday, it was still talking about the Superdome. By Wednesday, the word was you need to get to the Convention Center.

RH: Where were you riding around on your bike?

JP: Anywhere it was high ground. I only went into water up to my knees as long as I was on my bicycle. I definitely had this sort of – I'm not trying to play superhero and go document the whole thing, nor plow through water into [the] unknown, nor roam around at night, looking to see what was going on. I don't know. A great sense of calm came over me. I never really felt alarmed. I just didn't want to go looking for trouble. I knew it was a serious situation, and I didn't need to be an idiot. But I did feel a sense of, as a photographer, to record what I was seeing and feeling. So, my routine was to take care of this place, stick around here a little bit to see if anybody called, because I couldn't call out. So, mornings, I would sort of stay around here, a few phone calls got through, and I could tell them who to call. I was hearing more when people called me than I was experiencing. Tuesday night, Wednesday night, I was very disappointed and stunned

that the United States of America wasn't airlifting in water, food, lights, and the necessary basics that I know we're capable of doing. That still, for five days of that – that still alarmed me, will alarm me, that there just wasn't the full court press. Logistics were not the issue because you could come in over the Mississippi River bridge; it was completely opened to Baton Rouge and wasn't wiped out or flooded out. That's true. I'm sure it can be double-checked. That's true. When I finally left after six days to take a day or two break in Baton Rouge, get some stuff, and come back, I got in my van, drove over that bridge, and drove nonstop to Baton Rouge and ran into zero caravans coming into downtown New Orleans. I expected to see caravans of supplies coming in.

RH: And about what day was that?

JP: That's the fifth day, that's Friday.

RH: So it's Friday. Can you tell me what type of photographs you were taking, and what you felt was important to document?

JP: People. I tended to not take too many landscapes. I took a few. But people rising to the occasion and doing what they needed to do. I actually remember standing out in front of the New Orleans Convention Center, which at least 5,000 people were outside during the day – hot – trying to do what they could do, no information, no leadership, no police, no food, no water. I remember, and I wrote this down – to me, they were heroic and stoic. I definitely saw neighborhoods, families, tourists – everybody kind of trying to keep it calm. I didn't see fighting, and I didn't see screaming. I saw them screaming at policemen that would drive through and not bring supplies. There were a lot of, to me, renegades out of this parish or county for those of you who aren't from Louisiana. I saw nine New Orleans sheriffs coming through here with giant cocked guns and very threatening, and most of us are going, “Good God.” Once at the Convention Center, I did hear somebody stand out in the street and in frustration, when these guys drove past, [say], “Just bring us some water.” I was very proud of the New Orleanians that stayed

and did what they had to do here. I think the media missed the real story, and that is what went on on a day-to-day basis of how to take care of each other and keep the trouble to a minimum. Did I see looting? Yeah. Yeah, I saw it on Canal Street. It was stupid looting. It was tennis shoes and t-shirts and shoes. And the million-dollar jewelry store on Canal Street didn't get touched. Million-dollar shops in the French Quarter didn't get touched. Thank God. There was a lot of just survival mode. There was stupid mode as well, which is what TV tends to record. For me, when people ask me why I stayed – I could have driven out any time. I knew this. "Why did you even stay one day?" I mean, I got friends, family in Baton Rouge getting messages, "Just come on. Get out of there. It looks like hell on TV. What are you doing? We're worried about you." Across the street, a couple who own an antique shop, who are in their seventies, Rose and Joseph – Jewish, actually, it turned out –were staying. I said to myself, "Good God. If they can stay, why can't –?" They were definitely an inspiration to me in furthering my stay. Getting over those moments when you think, "Oh, I better get out of here."

RH: Were there any people particularly that you networked with, tried to get with, talked with on a daily basis? I mean, you said –

JP: Our group here on the corner.

RH: Your group.

JP: Which was the owner of the bar, the owner of –?

RH: [inaudible] Chartres.

JP: Chartres, yeah, I should be specific. [inaudible] Chartres. The owner of the Chart Room stayed and protected his bar. I didn't drink, but he'd give everybody he knew drinks. He had ice, which was a very huge commodity after any hurricane, and he was sharing it. The owners of an antique shop – again, older. Cliff, a tour guide, Mike, another old-time New Orleanian. Joseph and Rose. Leo, who owned Mena's, the

restaurant. That was our little core group on this corner, but you go to another corner just a block away, and you'd have another little group. So they were my daily interaction for a little while until I jumped on my bike and took off. And then uptown it was my neighbors, and then whatever came through the phone. That would be the networking that I experienced.

RH: Was there a sense of –? What was the sense when you could go up to the Convention Center, roam around, take photographs, and know you had a place to go back to, where you had ice, you had water?

JP: It's a blessing. I mean, it's what empowered me to pursue staying and to document it. I love history, and I knew it was turning into a bigger and bigger thing as the hours went by. At night – first night, second night – where are the police? They're not even driving through the French Quarter, which would be my instinct that you would be moving around, checking out, and trying to protect. So it was edgy, I think, is one of the best words. But you definitely had to have your antennae way up and be smart about the information I was receiving as I rode around and observed. Most of my pictures, when I look back and describe them to an audience, when they might like one of them, is that for me, it was a moment of discovery. It was either something I really respected or it was something that I was so amazed to be seeing happen, but it was building up my information about what was unfolding. For example, a photograph of a police car on Laurel Street going the wrong way, stopped with a broken window in the back and a tire in the backseat. And this was early on. I said, ‘Something's wrong here.” At one point in the French Quarter, everybody was going all wrong way on one-ways. It was just insane for weeks. It became a complete breakdown in decorum. But, yeah, for me, the photographs – it was my job. It became my job. But it was also – I was out exploring and trying to figure out what was really going on. Because I couldn't go over to the deepest areas, because I wasn't going to swim, I wasn't going to wade through it, and I could only bike so far, that became my boundaries. So my work, what I saw, and my

story, is a very small, little, narrow, blessed story because I wasn't attacked, and I wasn't threatened, and nobody broke into my house, and nobody did vile things in front of me.

RH: Is that why it was blessed?

JP: Yeah. I definitely felt blessed. I also could connect very much to my mother's and everyone that went through World War II's experience because Americans think if the electricity goes off for an hour, it's a big deal – or a day or three days. And now we're getting into weeks. But it allowed me to see what it was like for a major city to be shut down and realize that's what Europe was about for years. There was no guarantee of any supplies. Also, you didn't know who was who or what was going on out there. That's why I was saying I was always paying attention and trying to figure out because, really, part of it is finding out who's your ally. Is it an ally? Are they not an ally? Are they going to turn around and –? Really, what is it? Human nature. So I can tell you I definitely, in a very microscopic way, could connect to what my mother's generation had to go through without supplies and electricity, and stuff in the street, and debris, and the city shut down. You know?

RH: Were there any acts of kindness or acts that you recorded that stand out in your mind?

JP: I think the way people shared food or anything. Normally, my way of photographing life is to photograph without permission someone and then try to engage them afterwards. In this event particularly, it felt so private, everybody that was still here – there's many photographs I did not take out of respect. Sometimes because I asked before I took it and was told no. An example of that is a lady who was doing such wonderful things with her family, obviously of lower income and obviously under great stress, but to me, it was a beautiful human scene. But I asked permission, and she said, “No, I wish you wouldn't. I haven't washed or put on makeup.” I connected to that right away, and I didn't. And there's ways to take a picture even when somebody doesn't give

you permission, but I didn't. So every picture you'll ever see that I took that has a person in it, after I took it, I went up, like everybody was doing it that I was around, “Do you need anything?” So that was sort of the mantra for me in the first five days.

RH: Were there things you were able to give people?

JP: Yeah. Occasionally a bottle of water, and most people seemed to have their food together. It was interesting. Many people, rich and poor, white and black, went into the Winn-Dixies or the various grocery stores that had been opened. Once they were open, I would say you were running to stores, and most people going in, not me. Despite my huge curiosity, which is what drives my photography and my life, I decided I was not going in anybody's house, any open building, any store, and to this day, I haven't photographed inside such things. The opportunity still exists, but it wasn't for me. It just wasn't for me. That just wasn't my interest. So, I stayed out of there. But I have many people who have told me their stories of going in, getting the coffee, or whatever they needed for another couple of days.

RH: Do you think by chance that because you made that decision you didn't see some of the darker things that the press was covering?

JP: Yes. Yeah, I think that's a very astute question and observation. And it may have just been – it just may have been my mother's way of keeping it away. Sometimes, you don't need to see it, and if you do see it, it is going to be with you forever. I didn't want to see somebody shot. I didn't want to see vile things inside grocery stores just because people were having no choice. If it had come across it, I wouldn't have turned my back on it, but I didn't need to go look for it. Believe me, as a photographer, the first instinct was, “Man, you need to get into that serious stuff and you'll have a Pulitzer.” But that wasn't my motive. I believe photography should be personal and should reflect what I'm going through, and that's why I believe my pictures came out relatively very powerful. There's definitely a few images that are very powerful.

RH: Why did you decide finally to go, and did you take anyone with you?

JP: Yeah, I did. By Thursday, fires and smoke, and the way they weren't really being put out, became a big concern for me. I do remember Wednesday night late, probably 1:00 o'clock in the morning – didn't sleep much, couple hours a night – didn't need much sleep. I did put the radio on for a little while, and I have to name names. Dennis Hastert is on, questioning why you would even rebuild New Orleans. That's a paraphrase, but that's what he was saying. That was very disillusioning. When you combine that with the inaction that was going on, I began to wonder if a decision had been made to just let it go. So, when the fires weren't really being put out, by Thursday I was thinking, “Man, my witness to fire …” – that had it gotten out of control, it would have burnt the French Quarter down. It was on Canal Street, and at first no one came to put it out, and it made it very clear to me that if they didn't put it out, it had a high chance – it just – [claps]. Thursday night, I'm still waiting for the cavalry to arrive. Probably in the midst of my two-hour sleep, these explosions went off like bombs. Turns out it was the warehouse blowing up on the riverfront, but from my place, which is only three blocks from the river, the entire sky was orange with mushroom clouds and all sorts of stuff, and no helicopters or anything in the air dealing with this. It was exploding rapidly for five minutes, like bombs. I figured now that it was becoming intentional and that the looter-type guys were getting out of control. It turned out to not be that source, but for me, the dimension of that explosion and those fires were so huge, and it looked to me like it was just three or four blocks away – it was pitch black. I decided when I woke up Friday – I decided once it got to be daylight Friday I was going to assess that situation. The truth was, Friday morning, there was so much smoke in the air in downtown New Orleans that I decided, for my own health, I was done. I just said, “I'm not going to be able to put out these fires, and I've done what I can do. I think probably by sunset tomorrow, I'm going to go ahead and go to Baton Rouge for a couple of days.” That was the turning point for me. So Friday morning, I basically –

RH: When you said goodbye to your gallery, did you –?

JP: You have to say goodbye, and you have to let go of all these things. I didn't stay to protect things, by the way. People think I stayed, this is a multimillion-dollar collection, it's priceless, it belongs in museums. Things that people don't even see, the history of New Orleans, 19th-century photographs of New Orleans have been collected and are here. Yeah, I feel a responsibility for that, but that's not what life's about. But, yes, when it came time to go, I took twenty framed things with me so that when I started over, I'd have enough to start another gallery.

RH: Can you tell me what you took?

JP: I walked around this gallery and said, you better pick twenty things that'll be the beginning of your next gallery.

RH: So it can't be necessarily the most expensive thing, can it?

JP: Couple of them were, but that wasn't the criteria. It had to be a range of things. It had to represent a lot of the great artists that I – it had to be my personal favorites. A North American Indian photographed by Edward Curtis, called “The Vanishing Race.” I can name others. An Ansel Adams photograph. Cartier-Bresson, my favorite photographer of all time. The Cuzco children by Irving Penn. Photograph of The Beatles by Linda McCartney.

RH: Wow.

JP: And I went to retrieve my van. I notified my neighbors. I came back down here with the curator from the museum that had told me the flood story because I wanted him to see. He was very curious about what was going on downtown. He and his mom had stayed in the neighborhood the whole time. He helped me load the twenty or so up. We made a last cruise through the French Quarter. I would not leave – part of my final

decision was I wouldn't leave until there was National Guard or something in place. Late Friday afternoon was the first time, which was the fifth or sixth day, that they started to fan out and take up positions around the French Quarter. It was the only time I got stopped and asked – when I was leaving was the only time they stopped and asked, and that's what I wanted to see. Made friends with the National Guard guys who are going to be on my corner. John Magill, who was the gentleman that was the curator at the historic New Orleans collection, my neighbor – flood maps, flood books. We did our tour through – I took him back uptown. I tried to tell him and his mother to come with me because they had bonded with my other neighbors, and they had found somebody to take them out. So all of a sudden, nobody wanted to go out with me. It's interesting. So, it was late in the day, and it was getting like – that fire seems to be under control – maybe I'll just stay. I'll just go take a shower and clean up in Baton Rouge. So the next two weeks were just about being in Baton Rouge for a few days, back to New Orleans for a day, Baton Rouge for a day or two, New Orleans for a day, and each time trying to bring these eight or ten people and my neighbors uptown anything they needed. I would always bring an ice chest full of ice and just give it away when I was here.

RH: Where did you stay in Baton Rouge?

JP: At my best friends', Tommy Tyler and Margaret, and their family. Very gracious, opened up their house, insisted, and so on. They had left two or three messages – and back in the old neighborhood I grew up in. I'm fortunate enough to have friends that go back to when I was five years old, and we've always stayed in touch. So it wasn't like I was showing up out of the clear blue or that we hadn't connected with each other recently because we're always in touch.

RH: It seemed like you showed up at one of the synagogues also.

JP: Well, two interesting things, I think, should be mentioned. When I got to Baton Rouge on the fifth or sixth night, when my friends came back, a lot of questions, of

course. And it was clear immediately that even in Baton Rouge, they thought the French Quarter and all of New Orleans was ruined and that all of it was chaos. So they were just fascinated by the fact that I was telling them that the French Quarter was fine, that uptown was fine, that Saint Charles Avenue was fine, that Audubon Park's fine. That, yeah, the roofs are blown off, there's broken glass, and some trees are down, but it's okay. And Margaret, whose friend was the 10:00 o'clock news person in Baton Rouge on, I believe, channel two, WBRZ TV – she said, “They don't know this. You got to tell them.” I took the book with the flood maps. I was on TV in two hours telling evidently a lot of people that there was still a New Orleans, and still a French Quarter, and this was what was flooded.

RH: So within two hours, you were kind of reporting from the front to their –

JP: It was funny, yeah. Yeah. To me, it was funny. It was odd to me that five days later – and also, Baton Rouge didn't have electricity very much. I was so disappointed, I should have just stayed in New Orleans. [laughter] But it didn't have electricity for another day or two when I got there. And then I realized how widespread the storm had been, and then I started to watch what they had been watching, and then I saw CNN on Canal Street taking the footage. But what I still see to this day is the same footage, nothing else. They never walked down the street to see how we were doing. They never reported to the world that the French Quarter was sitting there high and dry.

RH: It wasn't news, I guess.

JP: I guess. That's a different interview. So, once I got to Baton – what happened is, it's a small town and people – in a way, me being on TV let everybody know that sort of knew me that I was okay. I started getting a few phone calls, and one of them was from Erich Sternberg, who was orchestrating an effort to come back into New Orleans and get the Torahs out of the synagogues and temples. Not that they had been flooded, although one or two out in Metairie had been completely flooded, but to get them out before the

fires, or the water, or the mildew, or vandalism, or whatever. So, within about seven or eight days, I was suddenly part of a group in Baton Rouge, about fifteen of us, that came back in on a Saturday morning, I believe it was around September 10th, 12th – I'd have to look at a calendar –

RH: Okay. I'm going to stop us right now, and we'll do the Torah rescue on the next tape.

JP: Good.

[Recording paused.]

RH: This is tape two with Joshua Mann Pailet for the Katrina Jewish Voices. We were talking a little bit about Erich Sternberg and manning this Torah rescue. How did they know you were in Baton Rouge?

JP: The Sternbergs have long been a great friend of my mother's, Charlotte Mann Pailet, who I described earlier. Erich had heard through the TV that I was back, and he knew I was a photographer. He wanted me to come along and photograph this effort. Would I do it? Of course I would. I felt honored. And I still, to this day, it was one of the great things I've ever experienced. So that was put together, and we were escorted into New Orleans by a sheriff from Baton Rouge, ninety miles an hour. Everybody out of our way, ninety miles an hour, Baton Rouge to New Orleans, poof, right into the middle of it. There I experienced one of these wonderful things that I love about Judaism, which is, with rabbis, just us, no pretense, no ceremony, just go in there and respectfully get the Torahs out, and, for lack of a better word, pile them up in our cars. One of the rabbis was marking them and labeling them so they could be returned to the proper place eventually. But part of me before – I called a friend of mine who's married to a lady rabbi and asked her if there was something I needed to know before I went down there – say or do when we're getting these Torahs just because I wanted to be right about it. She said, “Nah, just

do what you got to do." And that's what I love about Judaism; it has a very practical side to it, at least the way I was raised.

RH: So, where did you end up going and taking photographs?

JP: We stopped at Temple Sinai. We stopped at Touro Synagogue, and I believe it's called Gates of Prayer, where three or four congregations in Metairie, the suburbs, had put Torahs in a special upstairs room. It was the last place we stopped, and this was an amazing moment because you're going through a building that you can smell the mildew already, you're still walking through a few inches of water, you can see where the water had been, and now gone down. We'd already rescued enough Torahs. You knew the drill, and they had put all of these in a room with a locked gate. So as they opened this thing up – well, first, they opened the door, and they had to open the one from outside the building, and that let the light in. So in a very tiny closet-type room, as that light came from the outside world in, what faced me, which was just fabulous, was Torahs and computers. The photograph I took I call "The Ancient and The Modern." It was like the ancient world and the modern world. Because it was the hard drives, it was modern society against the real world, the history of our whole existence in these Torahs. It was the only time I saw a rabbi cry. It was very interesting. And there were a lot of Torahs in that room, and we got the rest of those out. Then we zoomed back to Baton Rouge, and we put them in the temple – oh God, forgive me, I can't remember the other temple's name right now, which ironically, two and a half –

RH: Stan Zamek, I think, and Martha Bergadine are the two rabbis.

JP: Yes. Martha, his wife, was a rabbi, and Rabbi Cohn from Temple Sinai. I think there were five rabbis among us. Ironically where we put them in the temple in Baton Rouge, two and a half, three weeks later, when Hurricane Rita came through, that roof leaked, and they had to be moved again.

RH: So that moment you described was the most powerful moment of that?

JP: In so many great ways, yes. Yes.

RH: I have to ask this. What is your influence artistically? You said Bresson. What are you trying to do in a photograph?

JP: Picture's worth a thousand words. I loved to write as a young person. I had great English teachers as a young man in public schools. I saw the camera, and I still do as a great vehicle for being very concise about saying something. So I've always felt that if it's a photograph that I wind up showing, it has to have all those ingredients. I was definitely a great admirer of Cartier-Bresson and the speed and intelligence of his vision. So in that sense, I like to take a picture that is spontaneous. It's fast and full of a complete story, so it stands on its own. I may photograph a whole series called Katrina, but the photograph I show you can stand alone. That’s the power of the camera that I admire the most. I love landscape photography by other people. I even take a few myself, but I love people, I love spontaneity, and it's got to have some kind of meaningful moment that's hitting me so hard in the gut it's making me take a picture.

RH: Do you think some of that also comes from your sense of history through your mother?

JP: Yes. Also, I witnessed a mother who took photographs all the time of her new family.

RH: Really?

JP: And she had zero money, and photography was expensive in the '50s. I mean, a roll of film to be developed in the '50s in a family that was lower-middle class – that's a big deal. To this day, I don't know how she managed to do it. But she was documenting her family, her children. I remember, as a young guy, asking to take pictures. “No, you can't

yet. Okay, now, last picture on the roll." So I got to take the last picture on the roll a lot. And yet never, ever owned a camera until I was nineteen. I took the last two-hundred and some odd dollars I had in my life and bought a camera.

RH: What did you buy?

JP: A Nikon. A Nikkormat. It opened a whole new world to me. The camera was a ticket. It was unbelievable. I never realized, especially way back then, less so now, but the camera was a ticket. It opened doors up to me, it opened people up to me. Most people actually do like their picture taken, and most people do take it as a compliment. Whether I roam the back neighborhoods of any major city, places people tell me not to go, or the most fanciest neighborhoods in the world, most people – kids, adults – respond positively to having their picture taken. And that fascinated me. I think it was an extension of my mother in the sense that I wanted to show her what I was seeing, even to this day. Even the Katrina thing, the main thing was to be able to show somebody else what I was seeing and also prove to myself that I had seen it. Two years later, when I showed some people these photographs, it's like, wow, I guess I was there. Life is fleeting enough to where you can second guess your own memory of things. And a photograph, when you're the maker of the photograph, is a complete diary of that moment and the moment surrounding it. And that's why when you asked me earlier how much – probably off camera – about how much I would remember, that's why I believe that I can remember so much. And especially if I pull out the photographs and start showing them to you. That triggers stories every time. So the photographs for me are history, yes. You see, I loved American history, I loved world history, and I loved my Sunday school class because we were studying Jewish history. So, yeah, even to this day, I like to live history. I like to realize that we're living history on a day-to-day basis. If I'm fortunate enough to get part of it on film or camera and present to the rest of the world – fantastic. If not, it's just the way it goes.

RH: When did you decide –? You were coming back and forth and bringing things to the people, your community –

JP: And checking on them.

RH: Checking on them.

JP: Yeah, checking on my photographs.

RH: When did you decide –? I mean, in some ways, I guess you were coming in illegally. Were you?

JP: In some ways, I was, but I knew the way. One of the benefits of staying is you learn what's really going on on the ground. So, when you leave, you learn the route out and learn the route in, and there is something about body language, demeanor, and tone when you're coming back that says, “I belong here.” Because I've heard from many people how they couldn’t get in. But I got in every time.

RH: Did you get a pass?

JP: I actually created a pass.

RH: You did? [laughter]

JP: Yeah. [laughter]

RH: A very official pass?

JP: It wasn't really that official, but it worked.

RH: It worked?

JP: Friends of mine who are medical got a copy of a pass, a yellow pass that allowed them to get to Touro Hospital, unsigned and everything. I made a copy of it. My own plans in the future – and I'd recommend it to anybody unless you're the government listening to just make your own pass. It is a situation in which – in a crisis, in a situation like that, whether it be a natural disaster or some other disasters, you're basically dealing with people who want to keep order and have the authority to keep order, but you also have the right as a citizen to do what you need to do. I would not hesitate to make an official-looking pass – if that pass hadn't worked, I'd have gone back to Baton Rouge and made a real official-looking pass. But I found – and I know other people too – when you got to the National Guard, first of all, they're eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old people, and they have a natural kind of – they'll defer to you in a bit. “Here's my business card. I got a business in the French Quarter.” “Okay, good luck.” Half the time, I got told, “Good luck.” [laughter] Imagine the National Guard saying, “Good luck.” Well, I'd already been in and out enough to know that it was no big deal in the daytime. Policemen will tell you that at night it was far different. They will describe to you as if roaches [are] coming out at night. There were some packs and gangs of thugs moving basically from apartment complex to apartment complex; as food and water ran out in this one, they'd break into that one. I didn't witness this. I'm telling you some stories that some of them told me.

RH: When did you feel like you could come back? And was there ever a time where you really thought you might start your business somewhere else?

JP: No, I didn't have that. Not once I came back with the Torah, and they weren't burning the city down anymore. See, once the full court press from the cavalry went into place on about the seventh, eighth day, I felt that it was here. I was coming in and out enough, and by the 20 – actually, when I was here, and I would – a couple of trips to the college son and his friend of Tommy and Margaret came with me. They wanted to see it. They had a Jeep. I had my car too, but eventually, I took them on a tour all around. We actually came back here just towards the end of the day, and things just keep unfolding.

Suddenly, one of the little restaurants is finally open, like the third week or something. Wow. You could actually eat food. Well, we were standing in here, and my electricity came on, and that's when I said, “I'll be back in a few days, more or less.” October 1st was an event, of course, that got cancelled, but it was the beginning of the art season in New Orleans. First weekend of September, all the art galleries – great event, very exciting. The weather usually changes. It's the beginning of the Fall season. That had been scheduled but, of course, cancelled. But I was here, my electricity was on, and I opened up. It was Saturday, I think, October 1st. And from then on, there was a sign on my –

RH: So you were opened for art's sake.

JP: I was opened for art's sake, and I understand a couple of people did it on Magazine and on Julia Street, I think I read about later on. So, that's the point, I think. Is that if you don't succumb to fear, buy into that, keep a clear head about your decision-making, and start looking for what's going right instead of what's gone wrong, you can get your footing and get back, start putting the pieces back together. I swear to God, and I was so prepared, having the type of mother I had. Things come up all the time in my head about, “Get on with it.” I can't tell you how many times I heard that in my life. “Don't cry in your spilled beer.” Things like that. When you're in these situations, you can – I saw it, I saw people I expected to rise to the occasion not, and I saw people you would think wouldn't rise to the occasion, and they did. And I think these kinds of crises are a real test. Everybody has different circumstances and responses, but if you stay off the fear, which probably means turning off the TV and the radio, then you can make decent decisions as to the steps you need to take. So for me, it was relatively easy. And not having a family and kids, that complicates all these issues. Why did you stay, were you alone – would have been much different. Much different if I was responsible for three or four people, though I probably would have stayed.

RH: Your business has to have changed somewhat from prior to Katrina, and I'm kind of wondering how.

JP: It's lost a little of the day-to-day pizzazz, or a lot in the fact that New Orleans has long been a crossroads and people coming from all over the world and all over the country, and in that sense, it's far reduced population flowing through my front door. Therefore, the newcomers I can introduce to this great field of fine art photography have diminished. On the same token, the flip side of that was the outpouring of previous customers and existing people that knew about me and my gallery that wanted to do something, that went ahead and bought another photograph, or the great story about one of my clients who found me in Baton Rouge via email – one of the first things I did when I went to Baton Rouge, by the way, and one of the reasons I went, was to get back into my email because I have a very active Internet site from my agallery.com. When I turned on my computer on the seventh night or whatever in Baton Rouge, there were over nine hundred emails. As fast as I was answering them over the next three days, there were more coming in. But it was the lifeline, and I wrote a very important email right after I came out that everybody that had written me and everybody that I had an email address on, which was – it was called “Children First.” And again, this was echoes of my mother. One of the things I witnessed was how many parents panicked [about] their children and schools, and the upheaval, and the breaking of the routine. I could just sense my mother saying, “Just get the kids settled. If you get those kids settled, everything's going to fall into place.” So, I reminded everybody in this email, “Just take care of the children.” Don't buy into this looting, riot, thugs, gun stuff. And this city still exists, there is a French Quarter, and so on. Well, that thing went out. It must have floated all over the place because I got so many emails back. But I just want to mention that that's part of what sustained me as a gallery and a business is that people stepped up to the plate in terms of collecting photography, not just immediately, but for the whole year after Katrina. In particular, there was one great man named Bob [inaudible], who collects, but he found me. He just said, “What's your address?” I said, “Why?” He said, “I want to send you

something." For the next three weeks, I must have gotten a check from him almost every two or three days by FedEx with a note that said, "I'll pick something out someday."

RH: Wow.

JP: Over and above the call of duty. Very important. But people were like that. And the outpouring towards New Orleans from people around the world, around the country, is what sustains everybody here to this day. Just digressing, the whole volunteerism that started up, the whole grassroots efforts – since government was really failing in a timely manner, it's the regular people, these volunteers, church groups, temple groups, individuals, old people, young people, professionals, Habitat for Humanity, this and that. That energy has been so beautiful to witness, and experience, and observe, and it is what sustained New Orleans immediately and in the long run. Because everybody that lived here or lived in this region had to make a decision or go through the process of, am I going to stay or go? There was a point in history where everybody realized that was what it was about. Their job, their career, their children's schools, their hospitals had all been – and there's been various decisions made. But everybody had to make it, including myself. And mine was pretty instant. It's just where I like to be, and I witnessed that it hadn't totally collapsed on itself. Because what I saw – and still see – is you just follow that stuff – your visualization is that the whole place had gone under and collapsed and was gone. Whereas in truth, half has and half hasn't. Tale of two cities.

RH: Do you resent people who have chosen not to come back?

JP: Oh, great question. No, I don't think resentment is a healthy attitude. No, I don't resent. I think in time and history who's supposed to be here will be here. I think many people will circle back. Might be their children or their grandchildren, but New Orleans has a strong, strong geographic, magnetic, delta-like quality that is not going away. It will always be here. There's a reason it's here, and it will attract people, therefore, that sense and feel that – as it always has. New Orleans has always been a place where you either

really, really love it or you just kind of – [laughter] I don't want to be here. It's just people either really automatically love it, and they get it and sense it, or they just [think] it's dirty, it's old, it's broken down, it's hot, it's humid, it's sweaty.

RH: What is the best type of help? [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

JP: For New Orleans as people, as a city?

RH: Yes.

JP: I think the grassroots thing I described is the most important because it's one-on-one, and it's people-to-people. It actually affects the people that come as they go back. It affects the person and persons they've helped by giving them the juice to go a little further because it's always an issue of stamina; it really is, especially in that first year. It still is for people. Less so for someone like me, but overall, it's about stamina, perseverance. Because the obstacles are immense. Whether it's on the phone for eighteen hours a day waiting to get an answer for your grant, or your insurance company, or whatever. When you multiply that times a million people in those first six months trying to settle all those issues, it's an overwhelming challenge. Government does not owe us anything other than our infrastructure. And I believe that's – to me, I'm not a believer in big government, but I am a believer in security, in safety, sewage and water, roads, buses, transportation, streetcars, of which as of today, two years later, absolutely zero basically has been done because of the bureaucracy and the thing about Congress, and money, and Louisiana, and New Orleans, and politicians. It's jammed up in a pipeline. And it will happen. I know it will happen. But to go slow on fundamental things, like hospitals, clinics, roads, and streetcars, transportation,

RH: Did you believe, what you just said, government doesn't owe us anything but infrastructure, and you named it –

JP: A lot.

RH: Did you believe that before the storm?

JP: Yeah, yeah. I think most people, if you slow down, realize that you can hope for government, and you can think government, but you must know instinctively, deep down inside, it's going to fall back into our lap. If you want to make something happen in your life, it's really up to you. And so you need to pull together your own resources rather than sit back and wait for that – what? The big hand of government to come in and rescue every single detail down to the last drop? No. I don't think that's a wise or reasonable expectation.

RH: But you do believe infrastructure is a reasonable –

JP: Yes, I did. Yes. Yes. I think the roads, and like I said, if I think that – yeah. I think the failure in those first five days to full court press with the military to secure one of the nation's finest cities, major city, major port – nobody's ever mentioned it. New Orleans and Louisiana provides one-third of the energy of this country. Largest port system in this country of goods that come down the Mississippi River and goes up the Mississippi River. The largest industrial corridor in the United States of America. And, of course, as you all read about, the cultural center and something really special in the history of this town. Now it was offensive to even hear that some people in this country felt it wasn't worth rebuilding. Seafood. One-third of the seafood of this country comes out of south Louisiana. These are valid statistics. Louisiana's given more to this country than it's ever gotten back, as much as you may think otherwise. It has been a net outflow, and now it was time for it to come back, and people looking for lots of excuses to delay it, procrastinate it, and parse it.

RH: Do you think any of that delay, procrastination, has anything to do with race?

JP: Yes.

RH: You do?

JP: I think it has to do with a long-term relationship between the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, [and] Washington, DC. I think New Orleans has always been out of the loop, and it's always had a kind of antagonistic relationship with the rest of the political forces of this country if you read history. And there may be valid reasons. Corruption could be a valid reason for that. I don't literally mean that race was the issue, but I think the – because this storm did not discriminate. You may only see pictures of the Ninth Ward, but if you let me or someone that lives here show you the damage, you will see it went from the richest neighborhoods to the poorest neighborhoods, and the middle neighborhoods, to this color or that color, and this color, and this color. So it did not discriminate. I think what's happened afterwards, the politicization of the event – in fact, I recall there was an email I responded to back those first few days in which race was immediately brought up because the picture on TV was Black. I understand 1,386 people died in Louisiana from Katrina, and more on the coast as well, but in Louisiana, the ethnic breakdown of those 1,386 people, and it may be more by now, was about 50-50. So not just Black people were hurt and died; white people were hurt and died. Not just old people, [but] all kinds of people were affected. But I believe politics and people's agendas have been thrown in on top of it and have really muddied the recovery. That is a whole other interview because people in New Orleans have adjusted to each other long before the storm, and it has a wonderful multicultural balance. I don't know. I'll never understand what happened those first five days, why the President of the United States couldn't authorize an immediate full-court press. I mean, Fort Polk is one of the biggest military bases in this country, in Alexandria, Louisiana, that's two and a half hours away by car. I think because of that, all the agendas started popping up. I really do. I got an email from an English reporter that I know personally from BBC early on, and in that letter, first paragraph was about racism. This was like the seventh or eighth day, and I'd just come out of this whole downtown scene. I read this thing, and I really basically jumped down her throat, and told her that as a reporter [to] drop that agenda on top of this event was misguided I've sort of watched it ever since. I think you'll see a lot more

of it, and I think it's a lot of posturing. I really think when you asked me about the race thing [and] what I really felt, and I still feel to this day, is that powers to be in Washington DC had to deal with a Black mayor and a woman governor in a democratic state.

RH: Are you saying they just didn't want to do it?

JP: They either had a lack of experience or respect. And perhaps a hidden agenda to destroy a political structure that didn't fit into their long-term view of the way politics should be. And that's about as far as I'll venture into sort of the conspiracy ideas. Because I do believe. I do believe people in Washington DC were going home at 6:00 o'clock at night because their day was over, while people were sitting on roofs down here waiting to be picked up. Another hour on a roof is a lifetime. But the little bit I've read, I just don't feel that the full-court press was on. There was no sense of urgency from what I read.

RH: Well, I mean, if you're sitting here and you're seeing fires, and you're even thinking, somebody's letting this city go, then I guess you can almost understand some of the conspiracy theories –

JP: Absolutely. Yeah, if you put me on top of a roof for three days, you would really hear me ranting and raving probably. I would totally understand that. Totally. Totally. That there was a miracle going on – the Coast Guard was rescuing thousands of people. Boaters from Louisiana themselves were going in to rescue people all day long and all night. This is the first five days; most of the people at least got rescued. Through all the other trying, we're going to get it done somehow. I have friends that brought boats in. They went to the official point. FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] guys were there saying, "You can't go in unless we get this permission, and we take your boat because you can't use your boat." These guys, these FEMA officials or whoever they were – and they told me they looked at them, and they said, "You ain't taking my boat" and drove a block down the street and launched it somewhere else because this was a

giant lake and spent all day pulling people out. That's the true story. It's what people did while everybody else was arguing the politics of it. While Washington was demanding that the governor of Louisiana federalize the state of Louisiana, it's never been done in the history of this country.

RH: No, it hasn't.

JP: And Washington exchanging faxes with the government of Louisiana on Wednesday afternoon, arguing about that? The federal government's telling the state government that the buses are on the way. Well, if I was governor of Louisiana and somebody told me the buses were on the way, I'd be worrying about something else for the next few hours. Buses never came. Until they finally arrived, and they did a great job once they were here. Those guys in the Army and the military, once they were here – A-plus. You see the Airborne guys coming down the French Quarter, you know, it's just, these guys are pros. But they needed to be there really much quicker. Most of the negative stuff that happened because – if you're a bad guy, nobody's doing anything, and there's nobody bringing you any food or water, what are you going to do? Even if you're a good guy, what are you going to do? I have to mention that I feel it was a major management failure of private corporations that owned things like Walgreens and Winn-Dixie to not have a plan in place. To not open their store up and systematically give the stuff away. It was going to rot anyway. I can tell you that Wal-Mart, [which] fought for five years to build in downtown New Orleans, didn't reopen for nine months after the storm when they opened up in the suburb within a month. They had no protection on – they didn't even design a store to close down big windows so nobody could break into it. How can you, in all good conscience, own a business and leave it there with all the supplies sitting in it, in the middle of all this stuff, and not expect people to break in and get it? Once, I was standing, taking pictures of people going in and out of Walgreens, and standing next to

me is a woman with her babies. She had just gone in and gotten the formula and the diapers. Turning point. You don't become critical of looting when you witness that because that's practical. That's survival. I think everybody would do it. I would've done it if I had run out eventually. I might even have gone into somebody's house, frankly, because it's sitting there, and the stuff's in there, and it's going to rot anyway, and I'm here, and I need to feed my family. So I'm not critical of the people that had to get what they had to get. I am critical of the young, stupid thugs that take it to the next degree, and take TVs, and do vile things. It is true; when this place was seeming to be on fire, and explosions, and nobody was wanting to take care of it, it was a disheartening moment to live in a city and think, "Well, God, maybe they are kind of..."

RH: Helping it disappear.

JP: Yeah. Which is nowhere near the truth. Nobody wants New Orleans to disappear. I think people want it to survive and do better than ever, but 200,000 plus homes just in New Orleans destroyed or ruined and needing renovation or fixing. This is a monumental challenge.

RH: Let's move a little bit over to the Jewish issues. How exactly do you –

JP: It was expensive. [laughter]

RH: Are you proud of the Jewish community in this whole event?

JP: Yes.

RH: Could you tell me why?

JP: Well, they did rise to the occasion, frankly. And they did think of other people, not just themselves. I remember the Yom Kippur service in Baton Rouge, which really combined the New Orleans congregations with the Baton Rouge congregations.

RH: So you went to that?

JP: Yeah.

RH: Why'd you go? You said you didn't like ritual too much.

JP: No, but I go to Yom Kippur. I love Passover, Chanukah, and Rosh Hashanah, so it was appropriate. And I had friends – actually, I invited some of my friends that were Jewish and wound up in Shreveport, and then Alexandria. I said, "Just come stay with us at Tommy and Margaret's house," and they did. So, we were all around each other anyway. To hear an outsider come in and describe what they were trying to do nationally and the reconnecting going on in that room was just wonderful to see and feel. Then, to be dragged into the Torah rescue things – I wasn't dragged. I was tickled pink. I'd have begged to do it. Those were things where I felt that the community rose to the occasion, and I could see it in their actions and their attitudes. And what the national – is it Zamek? Rabbi Zamek? Anyway, he spoke at one of the temples during either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, and he spoke really eloquently about it – about New Orleans, about people, and about poor people, because certainly those of us that have resources, it's easier to rebound. It is our obligation to help and lift people. But I don't believe in giving it; I believe in helping.

RH: Did you take the 750 from the Jewish community, I think, that they were offering? The Federation.

JP: Yes. Yes, and I was very grateful for it. When your business goes from a cash flow down to zero, it's very important. I'd spent hundreds of dollars on getting the photographs produced, and for me, I just rationalized [that] it paid for the photographs and the development that I did. Because an interesting story about it is I generally don't let anybody develop my negatives or print my photographs. But when I got to Baton Rouge, I had the rolls of film I had shot here, and basically, what happened was maybe a

year later, I developed these things. That's just the way that it happens sometimes, or maybe immediately if I have time. For me, the Katrina shots I had shot – okay, I'll get to them. There were just much more things to deal with. But Erich, after the Torah rescue, was – "We need the pictures. We want to see the pictures." So everybody in Baton Rouge was trying to hook me up with somebody to develop my film. I ran into a situation where the same name kept coming up, and I actually had taught his brother years ago at LSU [Louisiana State University] – David (Zeitz?). I broke down, and I turned my film over to David, and the next thing I know, Dave and I can work. We're working together to this day. It's one of the great blessings of the storm is that not only the work that I did through Katrina has been produced in a timely manner, but I'm now able to go back and work with David to print things that I hadn't been able to print in the last ten years. I've sort of resurrected a tremendous amount of photographic material that I've been wanting to work on for years and a new collaboration. It changed the way I work, and I'm loving it, and it is one of the great blessings for me personally.

RH: Well, I've got to ask this now. Were you using rolls of film or digital?

JP: Real film.

RH: Roll of film?

JP: I have a digital camera, and I took two digital pictures during the storm, and I said, "No, film."

RH: Why?

JP: Well, history. One, it's going to last forever. Two, I'm most comfortable with it. I can visualize. I know when I click the shutter what is going to be on that piece of film. Digital

is still new to me, and I can't totally control it or predict it because I haven't worked with it enough. Also, you get into issues of batteries and recharging batteries in digital, and my camera can work without a battery. Mostly, it was the comfort level of knowing my machine, knowing my materials, and knowing what it would produce. That it should hopefully hold up forever if it's worth holding up.

RH: Did your feelings about your own Jewish identity change at all through any of this?

JP: Maybe just reinforced them.

RH: Reinforced them?

JP: Yeah, because of all those feelings about World War II I mentioned, my momma, and that kind of wisdom that I was taught all along through her actions and her discussions we'd had totally prepared me for that moment. As I've told some people, and it's hard for them to understand this, I don't think it was as bad as it could have been. I think worse is yet to come. I think people better get better prepared individually, whether it ever happens or not, it's like a good Boy Scout. You should be prepared.

RH: Do you mean worse is yet to come here in New Orleans or –

JP: No, yeah, I think this disaster was big, but I think there's potentially bigger ones. I think when the earthquake happens in California it's going to be much, much more layered. I think you're going to be talking about millions of people with the inability to move or drive – I've told my California friends, "Don't think you're going to jump in your car. Don't think your cell phone's going to work. It might be two or three weeks before you ever connect again with your son that lives on the other side of L.A." I ask people questions, "Have you had the discussion of where you might meet in three weeks if you all have to get out of town and you have no communication?" People think – no cell phones work. They didn't even work when I went to Baton Rouge. They didn't even work for three or four weeks. Landline service was really impossible. And that's what I

mean by, as a nation, there could be much more challenging, larger, natural or manmade disasters, which we need to be prepared for. I mean, as a nation, why don't we have locations around the country prepared to deal with 100,000 people that need to eat, drink, and sleep for a week or two? We are not prepared. We kind of absorb through hotels and friends, and drive to Timbuktu, but I don't think that's a good plan. You know, Chicago, New York, all these places. 9/11 was relatively – I'm not diminishing 9/11, but it was relatively easy. A few square blocks. Everybody went back to work the next day, and the phones and everything worked. This is just a forerunner of what – when things start to snowball and break apart, how do people react? And fear. And where's the food come from? And where's the water come from? What if it happens simultaneously in two parts of the country? What if a week after this hurricane, a big earthquake had hit in California? I think we should be more prepared. I'm just glad I grew up knowing how to be prepared and able to take care of myself and people around me. My momma would always go, "Don't assume when you push that button any lights are coming on." I especially see it in younger children now, this idea that if I push the button, and it doesn't work it's like, call somebody. Buy another one. We have a blessed existence in the United States of America at all levels of society, and we need to just be more prepared, both in our personal leadership, our political leadership, [and] the way we expend our monies as a nation.

RH: Have you in any way connected more to any kinds of institutions, Jewish institutions, civic institutions –

JP: Since the storm?

RH: – since the storm?

JP: I don't think so.

RH: Okay. Can you give me your understanding of how God works?

JP: [laughter] Strange, mysterious, and cruel ways. [laughter]

RH: Okay.

JP: Look, there's certainly some higher power that triggered this whole thing we're in, and to live without respect for that is just impossible for me to imagine.

RH: How do you live with respect for it?

JP: Oh, carefully, or at least consciously aware of my actions or inactions and how it affects other people. And certainly, through photography, it's been such a great vehicle for me to express some of those feelings about God, frankly, and about the miracle of what we're living in and the magic of life. But yet, I'm well aware of the cruelty of life. So, I think basically, I always think about my momma when you bring that up. To me, she was God. I mean, she's a God. She's God. She wasn't perfect but look what she rebounded from.

RH: Are there any particular photos that you took through Katrina that revealed the miracle of God?

JP: Well, I'll tell you what. When you open up that thing, and you got that light, and you got this ancient modern thing kind of staring at me in the face, I think there's a message there, and I was put there to see that. I happened to have a camera to now present it to other people and say, "What do you think?" I don't stage things. I do not set up things for my pictures. I do not rearrange. I do not ask you to move over there to make this mean that. I might take out of context this framework, but I didn't put that stack of computers next to those Torahs. They were there, and I witnessed it. And frankly, I called the series I did on Katrina "Eye-I Witness" – E-Y-E-capital I-witness. And that, I think, is what Judaism might just be about, is witness.

RH: You're going to have to explain that.

JP: Because I remember my momma saying how it was important to never let people forget what she had been through. Being a witness to life is really a key part of what she believed in. I may not be answering your question exactly right, but it is what I see my role in the [inaudible] as a witness. It's like I've told people over and over, you look at my pictures, just remember it's just the window that I was in. I wasn't stuck on a roof, I wasn't stuck in an attic, and I wasn't in a neighborhood with twelve feet of water. But where I was, this is what I witnessed. It's my view. So it's only one view. But it is clearly a counterpoint to what most people think happened in downtown New Orleans. When I take a picture of a woman, [an] old lady on a hotel rack that you put your luggage in when you go in, in front of the Convention Center, and right here, without me placing it, is a sign that says "Trash your city, trash yourself. Imagine it clean." That's the picture. And that, to me, encompassed the seriousness of what was going on. I'll show you the picture at some point. Powerful moment. I mean, for me, it's just powerful moments that – I basically never got off the bike because I didn't even want to lock it up and leave it because I figured it'd get stolen. Everywhere I went, people were taking the side, "They're going to beat you up and take your camera." Who's they? That's what I love about life. They. Who is they?

RH: Who would say that?

JP: Lots of people that would see me on my bike with my camera. The ones that would have their guns in front of their house on Saint Charles Avenue, ready for the war or whatever they thought was going on. I don't know. "You're going to get shot and killed." I don't think so. Now that you've said it, I'm wondering. [laughter] I felt under the radar most of the time. I think it's my personality to just stay – I was always an observer. I kept quiet as a kid. I watched.

RH: Did this whole Katrina event – has it sent you in new directions? You explained one with – is it David (Zeitz?)?

JP: Yes. Yeah. It probably accelerated a notion I've known all my life. Life is short. Certainly, as you get older in your life, you realize it more and more. It has accelerated what I prioritize and what I stress or don't stress over. I'm sure anybody you interview goes through this. Their definition of what's important has either been fine-tuned and focused or reevaluated. Hopefully, to let go more of the trivial and focus more on the important because life is short. I certainly, approaching sixty in the next few years, know that I'm in the last third or maybe just the home stretch. So what I say yes to, what I decide to do, what I take on in life. So, tying into my own career, it's about getting in there and getting these photographs produced and out there, and hopefully more preserved –

RH: Getting more of your own work.

JP: Yeah, preserved for the future. Because long before Katrina – I've got a very interesting life, frankly. I spent a year on trains in this country in 1976 for the bicentennial. Not just a train, a red, white, and blue steam engine train – big project they put on – and got to see the United States of America through the underbelly and take pictures. 1976. When they did the World's Fair in downtown New Orleans, I documented downtown New Orleans being transformed into a World's Fair and did a book of that. So there's a lot of those kinds of projects, away from commerce and day-to-day feeding myself with my art gallery, that I feel obligated to at least get produced so that it can be considered in the future as whether it's worthwhile. But people like me, I don't think, even bother unless we deep down – we have to have a big enough ego to think it is worthwhile to keep doing it, producing it, and in my case, I think it's significant.

RH: Is there anything you've learned about yourself that [inaudible]?

JP: My mom. Again, my mom, but I remember her telling me to be careful about friends. I was very young at the time when you think everybody is your friend. And friend's a big deal. And in particular, she was talking about somebody I thought was the best friend in

the world, and she said, “You just remember what I’m telling you.” And so I’ve become very more tuned to that than ever, which is who you can really count on and who you can’t count on in those moments that – I got to experience with Katrina. I remember talking to some friends in those first few weeks. You’d make a decision, and you’d have to make a new decision two minutes later because the factors and the information changed. If weren’t nimble and agile in both your mind and your approach to problem solving, I don’t think – I mean, I just watched it. I might see Rita and Mark at 1:00 o’clock, they decided this, and I decided that, and at 3:00 o’clock we saw each other, and we [were] ninety degrees different on what we’re doing now, or tomorrow, or tonight, next day. Yeah, I think if you go through any kind of major thing like that, and it could be as simple as the death of a best friend, to a major disaster where you have to witness the whole society as a group kind of struggling, these are moments when you realize you’ve got to – so I’m more particular than ever about who is a friend, and about what and who I’ll say yes to, and what my remaining time is all about. And hopefully, what it’ll do is just force me more and more into the service side of my life rather than the commerce side.

RH: Could you explain that a little bit?

JP: Well, I think we have an obligation to give public service, right? And I think Judaism has a lot of that built into it. And so, if anything, I’m more and more conscious of wanting to do more and trying to do more, whether I succeed at that or not, I don’t know.

RH: Is that playing out in any particular ways now, or any ideas that you have?

JP: I think in helping the local artist community, the photography community I have been involved in. I did some fundraising – I mean, that side of thing. I really respect doing things without people knowing about it. I'd rather, I don’t think – when you have a momma that goes in the temple and sees everybody’s name on the plaques and all that, and you hear her say, “Names on the wall don’t mean anything,” it makes you think, and it sticks with you your whole life. “Momma, when you die, you’ve been a teacher here at

the Sunday school for fifteen or twenty years, they'll probably put a plaque up there." "I don't want a plaque."

RH: Is there anything that you were most grateful for?

JP: My friends. And my brother's family, my remaining family. My parents are both dead. So, yeah. Friends.

RH: And this is a question we ask everybody, and I want to ask you, what is your concept of home, and has that changed any?

JP: Concept of home?

RH: Yeah.

JP: Isn't it something about where your heart is? [laughter]

RH: Well, it can be that, but you're in and out, your city is under siege in some ways, and you decide to come back. How you recreated home in Baton Rouge when you were away.

JP: I think you just said it. [laughter] Home for me has always been whatever I make it; if it gets ripped out from under me, I'll make it again somewhere else. But New Orleans is in my blood, and it's in my thing, and this is my home. It is more than just a physical structure because long before the storm, what I love about New Orleans, is it is one of these towns that generally embraces everybody. I've always felt comfortable here because this home allowed me to do what I wanted to do when everybody else told me I couldn't, or shouldn't, or I was wasting my time. I think to be in a community that allows a person to pursue, long before they know exactly what they're pursuing, so that they can discover themselves and do what maybe they were meant to do, is a blessing. New Orleans at that time, when I jumped in here, and while I was here, and still to this day,

allows me to do that. Houston and other American cities may not have allowed me that opportunity. So it was that incredibly warm feeling about people in New Orleans, in allowing eccentrics to kind of pursue a path that's not in the job manual. I was educated for everything but what I wound up doing. I am the American dream, I know that it's fantastic. I took a passion for an avocation, and it became my vocation. That's pretty rare, but we are capable of doing that. But in the concept of home, New Orleans provided a structure, not just physically, but emotionally of a community, and I thought it was the greatest thing in the world. [laughter] You want to open a gallery and show photographs, go ahead. Where all this half of my life was going, but man, you got two big degrees from a major university, you should be making a lot of money. You're wasting your time. You're too gifted. You're too talented. No, this home allowed me to know my gift and pursue my gift to this day, which is something to do with visual – kind of what we've been talking about amongst this whole story. I have some kind of gift for visual, documentary history through a camera, mostly. Had I done what people thought, or even I probably thought was the right thing to do, which was take the job, take the career, I might never have really developed the gift which God gave me. And gave me a great mother to even set up the possibility for that gift to grow because it's very – I mean, I just feel like most of the time you're conventional, you follow this little path, and you're going to wind up there. It's what do you want to be when you grow up? Doctor, lawyer, engineer, nobody ever says be an artist. You love photography? Figure out a way to make a living off photography. We don't generally get raised that way, generally. Let me tell you, my mother was supportive. My father was not. It was the two things, you know? Especially in those early days, he was like, "Man, you can't go live in New Orleans, and start an art gallery, and live on two hundred dollars a month. You should be making ten thousand dollars a month working for the biggest accounting firm in America in Houston, Texas." That was really the choice at that point in my life.

RH: We're going to have to stop this.

JP: It's perfect. I don't like ending on that, but it's perfect. [Recording paused.] Listen, we're going to look at about five to ten photographs I took during the storm. Many signs around town. When I say this, and this was early in the storm, I thought it was the most poetic expression of what I was feeling. "The heart of a hurricane is fear on a stage in a monsters' ballet." Do you want to be showing me your placing every picture, or do you want to stop it and restart – [Recording paused.] Definitely the first moment of discovering that there was a collapse systemically in the police department and the fire department, and yet there's this wonderful sassiness of this girl talking to these policemen in the midst of this disaster that is very New Orleanian. But it was very troubling to see a police car with broken out windows and spare tires in the back, going [the] wrong way on my street.

RH: And as being a problem – you see the police car as being a problem.

JP: Yeah. Let's put that on.

Q2: Can I just put it on?

RH: I was saying that I think a lot of people would see that photo and see the woman as the problem, and yet you're seeing the police car as the problem, and I wonder if you could just address that a little bit.

JP: Because, to me, the condition of that police car and what it represented, and the fact that they were now going the wrong way – the title of this photograph is "Wrong Way" – versus her, as a citizen, who either knew them or was just asking them information, but the dialogue stance was very typical of a New Orleans thing. No, I did not see her as a problem. Some people even mention to me that she looked like a prostitute or something, which I always found very interesting. I never saw that, felt that, or did that. But this is what photographs do, they sort of trigger our own little stories and our own agendas to come into it. No, I saw her as a very typical, sassy New Orleans girl in a

disaster where the police were now setting the bad example. And I'm not anti-police. They had the hardest job in the world. Well, I described this in the interview. This was a moment in the project that I was honored to be part of, which was to come into New Orleans and rescue the Torahs from the various synagogues before they mildewed or were destroyed for other reasons and when they opened up a safe room where a number of synagogues had stored their Torahs, the raising of the protective door allowed the light in. This was my first view, and it just stunned me in a beautiful way that the computers and hard drives were stored with these ancient Torahs together, so I call it "The Ancient and the Modern." The word.

RH: [inaudible]

JP: [Looking at another photograph.] Still gives me goosebumps. Corner of Bourbon Street and Canal Street, Tuesday afternoon, just an hour or two after I discovered the flood, three of the five policemen I saw in downtown New Orleans that day. On my bike, in water, and the moment I took it, I realized that I may have done a stupid thing because the click on my camera should have caused him to turn around and blow my brains out. And that's when I went from feeling – when I'm photographing, I'm in the zone, and I'm seeing things like this, you're in a zone, and you're invisible. I realized at that moment that I'd become a little careless because he would not have known whether that was a click from a camera or some other thing. So, I gently, quietly, backed that bicycle right out of there, and to this day, I'm glad he didn't hear me. I thought it was ironic that he was guarding Hustler Hollywood, the strip joint, by the way. Whoops, that one may not want to. –

Q2: [inaudible]

JP: [Looking at another photograph.] This is a moment of beauty in the middle of a disaster, and this is what it looked like the first afternoon. And very representative of me just seeing solo people around town. And, of course, being a woman in the midst of all

this – in fact, I call this “Alice in Wonderland.” And if you note the Mardi Gras beads in the tree, which even Hurricane Katrina couldn’t blow out. [Looking at a photograph of a mother with children.] Never titled my photographs much prior to Katrina, but I do now. This is called “A Mother’s Burden, a Child’s Joy.” There is something about children; even in the worst of circumstances, they just lit up when they saw me taking the picture. But this is truly a situation of intense responsibility for that mother. This is near the Superdome. [Recording paused.] [Looking at a photograph of a trash can on a street; a sign on the trash can reads, “Trash your city, trash yourself.”] We cropped it for editing. I really don’t need to say much. I think that sign – when I turned to see this moment, her, the gentlemen around her, the whole scene, the signage, the champagne bottle, the Times-Picayune newspaper, it was New Orleans lumped – this is the singular picture for me of my project. It’s what it was like.

RH: Where was this taken?

JP: This was taken in front of the New Orleans Convention Center, at the corner of Julia Street and Convention Center Boulevard, on the fourth day of the storm. Still no supplies, still no support, and thousands of people doing the best they can. [Looking at a photograph of leaning tress.] I think I have a fairly optimistic view of the world, so I still found certain beauty, which I think this picture represents, in the midst of this disaster. It was just sort of a landscape beauty to the power of this storm and what it did to those trees, as if they’re talking to us.

RH: Where was this?

JP: This is on Saint Charles Avenue, near Jackson Avenue, in the very first afternoon. Almost human-like thing. [Looking at a photograph of a pile of mattresses with “Martha

Stewart never slept here" written on them.] And we must keep our sense of humor since it's gotten us through thousands of years of this nonsense. So New Orleans has that, and for months, and months, and months, still, to this day, debris piles have been part of our city landscape that we, fortunately, have cleaned up a lot, but to come across this in the midst of this disaster is just – in some way, it's just terrific.

RH: So this was taken in the recovery?

JP: This was in the recovery. This is about four weeks after the storm. Many people still haven't returned to town, but I discovered that a group of artists on Saint Claude Avenue, at about the 4,000 block, had taken all the debris on all the neutral ground – we call them neutral grounds. You call them medians in the rest of the country and the world – had, in many cases, arranged debris. They had created a theater with chairs. The artists had taken debris and turned it into various art installations. But as I was leaving, I noticed this, and I think it's a great ending to the ten photographs I've shown you.

RH: [Looking at another photograph.] The reason I wanted these photos is you said if you had to start your business over somewhere else, you took about twenty, and I thought if we just see a few of those. And why did you bring this photo with you when you left the city?

JP: Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the great photographers of all time, especially the twentieth century, was known for a term he called The Decisive Moment. And all his photographs exhibit that. This is one of the most famous photographs in the world. In fact, Time Magazine picked it as the photograph of the millennium in 2000. And it shows – I admire this photograph. It's one I'd want to live with if I had to keep something forever. It shows just so much brilliance in the man as a photographer. The use of space – remember, when he took his picture, he never changed it when he went in the dark room, so at the moment he took his picture, everything comes together. So he not only had a great sense of anticipation to time it so the guy's not hitting the water – so it

clearly shows that decisive moment – but to visually see, graphically, all these relationships, all the way up to the clock tower, is a photograph that I highly admire and really museums and collectors all over the world. So in a selfish way, it would have jumpstarted my gallery and given me a quick sale. In a personal way, it was something that meant a lot to me. If I only got to live with it the rest of my life, it'd be one of the ones I'd want to live with. [Recording paused.] [Looking at another photograph.] Well, Ansel Adams' "Moonrise Over Hernandez"– probably the most famous photograph in the whole world. Most known, certainly. And Ansel Adams was a man who, when I had zero resources, loaned me twenty photographs for my first exhibit in my young gallery.

RH: Oh my God.

JP: It was a turning point for me as an art dealer, an artist, and getting to know Ansel. But his generosity and humanity in loaning a person like me, writing him from New Orleans, and trusting me with twenty of his photographs in 1975 – priceless. As you can see, if you ever have the opportunity to witness one in person, it is a magical, magical photograph. There is something wonderful about the symbolism of the graveyard in the foreground, the moon, the clouds, and the whole lighting from one of America's greatest landscape photographers.

[Recording paused.] [Looking at another photograph.] Edward Sheriff Curtis, the title of this photograph is "The Vanishing Race." From the moment I first saw it, in fact – and speaking about Judaism, the whole title "The Vanishing Race," – what Curtis did was spend forty years of his life documenting the remaining Indian tribes that he could find in the late 19th century, early 20th century. He labeled this as his summary piece to the whole project. One of the first photographs I ever fell in love with. The whole North American Indian Project I relate to as an American, as a Jew, and this example, Edward Curtis printed on glass, not on paper. That is his original frame, which he designed, and I believe you'll get a sense of the beautiful luminosity. Very important photograph to me,

history, and any gallery I would have to open after such a thing as a Katrina disaster.

[END OF INTERVIEW]