Helen "Lainie" Breaux Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Lainie Waltzer Breaux at 6316 Pratt Drive in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Sunday, September 17, 2006. 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. Lainie, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Lainie Breaux: Yes I do.

RH: Thanks. Let's just begin with – tell me about your family and then tell me about your extended family, your parents, and how you came to be here in New Orleans.

LB: I was born and raised here, a couple blocks –

RH: What is here? Tell me about the neighborhood.

LB: Here is New Orleans, and we are in – we're not in Lakeshore; we're in Lake Terrace actually specifically. We're in Lake Terrace. My parents adopted me when I was a few days old. I have an older brother who was adopted when he was a few months old, so we're three years apart. He's older. We moved to Cartier, which is just a few blocks, I guess that would be west of here. Basically, I spent my whole life at that address. My brother and I went to Lakeshore Hebrew Day School, which was located in Beth Israel. He went through the eighth grade there and then went to Franklin High School, and I went to the day school through sixth grade. At that point, they had moved to Metairie, and then I went to public school after that.

RH: What public school did you go to?

LB: For seventh and eighth, I went to McMain, and then for most of my high school years I went to Franklin. I also went to the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and actually ended up graduating from McMain.

RH: What was it like as a kid at the Hebrew Day School? Do you remember how big it was?

LB: Well, I thought it was great. [laughter] How big was it?

RH: Like how big your class was.

LB: I think it was – your kindergarten's always largest, and by the time I left there were three people in my class, which is pretty much why we left. But I think that we had like fifteen in kindergarten, and I think there's an exodus at fourth and fifth grade because that's when a lot of people have to get into the other schools. We did half a day Hebrew studies and half a day English studies. The Hebrew teachers that were teaching, the way I remember them, to be more Chabad people. The Rabbis had payes. I remember Rabbi (Compel?) had a beard that was very long, he'd roll it up. We always thought that was the coolest thing, when he'd unroll it for us. For me, it was a good experience until I think I hit fifth grade, and they told me I couldn't play kickball anymore because I was becoming a woman – apparently. Nobody told me that. I certainly didn't feel that way, and then I got very resentful because I just didn't – I was like, “Okay, so I'll run the bases. I don't have to touch anybody.” They said, “No, no, you can't do that anymore.” I didn't think that was right. So, all that was really good. To go on with the Jewish background, when I was, I guess, nine, I went to Camp Judaea in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and I went there for a month. That was a little bit young to go away for that long, I think. Then, the next year, I went to the same camp my brother went to, which was Camp Ramah in Conover, Wisconsin. I continued going to camp there through my junior year of high school. I think I was there for six years in total. That was great. I'd recommend anybody who enjoys a Conservative way of life and would like their kids to feel part of a

community, that's the way to go. I have intentions for both of my kids to go to Ramah. There's nothing like the Ramah experience. You can be in a Jewish world without knowing you're being Jewish, I guess because everybody is like that. You know what I'm saying? And then everybody looked different. It wasn't like all the people were stereotypical Jewish-looking people. They had blond-haired, blue-eyed people like me; they had red-haired people, just every shape, size, and color. So, there wasn't any one way to fit or not fit in. I'm not saying I've ever not fit in, being blond-haired and blue-eyed. But I have heard, "You don't look Jewish." I say, "Oh, I look a lot like the mailman." That usually gets a laugh.

RH: Well, this is interesting to me because, of course, this is a very different experience than the majority of the Jewish community here in New Orleans that go up to Camp Jacobs, which is, I assume, more of a Reform camp.

LB: Right.

RH: That must have played in the decisions your parents had, they wanted you – or do you know?

LB: I remember them coming to show the video. Well, our family is definitely Conservative. Judaea, I remember thinking not that they quite didn't do things right, but I could tell that there was a difference in the way they prayed or they davened and the way we had been taught. Not saying it was right or wrong. It different, like I said, like knowing a different melody, if you will. So, why did my –? Why did that happen? I don't know. They came, and I remember going to the JCC and watching a video on Ramah. It was beautiful. Now, I don't remember seeing any videos on Jacobs, but I remember seeing it was beautiful with lakes and lots of trees, very green. Then, they showed a library, and I was sold. Once I saw they had a library, I was like, "I'm in. That's my kind of place." There were, I think, probably there was maybe four or five of us who went to Ramah from New Orleans. We all went. It was good. I'm not sure if you're saying why

would there seem to be more bunch of people going to the Reform ones that are closer. Certainly, cost more to fly us up there. I'm sure.

RH: Well, I wasn't really trying to say anything. I'm just noting the difference and that your family chose to go up to Wisconsin.

LB: Well, maybe this has something to do with it and it leads into the extended family, is that my father wasn't from New Orleans. He's from Brooklyn and my mother's from Germany. So, perhaps a lot of these people that sent their kids to more localized camps is because either generationally that's where they've been going, or it's just – we didn't have any connections to Jacobs the way other people might have. Maybe that's the difference.

RH: But you loved your experience.

LB: Loved it. Loved it.

RH: And you are going to send your kids there.

LB: Absolutely. And there's a Ramah Darom – there's a Ramah outside of Atlanta now. I'm torn because I'd like them to go to the Ramah I went to. But it's easier to get to or whatever, and I don't know the phrase – you can't go home again. Everybody loves Ramah that's gone to Ramah. So, I'll probably just send them to Ramah Darom.

RH: Okay. That was one of your experiences of being Jewish. Are there any other ones that you can recall here in New Orleans that were particularly poignant, or that stand out to you?

LB: Well, there's different memories I have of when Shir Chadash, which is the synagogue we belong to, was called the Conservative Congregation, and it was located on Napoleon. I remember on Simchas Torah dancing out in front of the parking lot with

the Torahs. I was young. I was four, something like that, and I thought this is really cool. Little scary. A little cool. It was cool though. I remember feeling the rocks underneath our feet because it was the asphalt. That was fun. I don't even really know what you call junior congregation for the littler kids, for the kindergarten, first graders. I did that for my high school years. Every Shabbat, I would go and be like the teacher's assistant and help her, which is probably why they asked me to be the USY advisor – this is before kids – and I was like I don't really know if I can do that or if I want to do that, but if I have a helper or somebody to do it with and share the responsibility. So, my husband Tad is like, “Sure, I'll do it.” So, that was a lot of fun. We got to know a nice group of kids, and we still keep in touch with them as they're becoming adults now.

RH: So tell me a little about that. USY is?

LB: USY is the teenage group for – USY is for Conservative synagogues. Each synagogue – Reform or Orthodox – has their own teenage group. Sometimes you have socials together, and sometimes you don't. So, they would have meetings once or twice a month. They would have activities once or twice a month. They would have social action programs, social action meaning you have to do something good for the environment, for the city, or for the community. They would have ice cream socials, and you would eat, or you had a pancake breakfast or a bunch of different things. Then they would have conventions, and you would meet all the other kids in another city. Of course, they would never go to sleep [laughter] and all that. You would lead discussion groups. Then, you would be a host city, so all the kids would come to your town, and you’d have to make the arrangements for all the kids to sleep over. So, we did that, I think, for two years. That was an intense involvement. It was great for my husband Tad because he missed out on that. So, he felt the groove, felt like he has become more part of things than he had ever before. We still see the people around. They are just finishing – if they went to graduate school, they're just finishing graduate school now, so it's nice now they're grown up.

RH: Right. Watching them grow. So also, what are memories of New Orleans?

LB: As a Jewish town or just New Orleans?

RH: Well, you can say it as a Jewish town. But then also your interactions other than through the Jewish community with the city at large. What kind of New Orleans things did you like to do and were you engaged in?

LB: As I was thinking about our interview this morning, I was thinking about that. I remember being in Ramah and somebody asking me where I was from, and saying New Orleans, and they said, “Oh, do you live in one of those old big houses?” And I was like, “No.” They said, “Oh, do you do this?” And I was like, “No.” I remember not really thinking that my city was anything special because it was my town. Everybody has like a French Quarter-type place, and everybody has Saint Charles Avenue and uptown and the music and everything. But truthfully, I've never really felt – I'm not crazy about jazz music. Love to go to Jazz Fest, but that's a different issue. Things I'm more akin to is the JCC on Saint Charles Avenue. I grew up there and went to camp there as a kid. I felt like I owned the place. Then, I ended up working there, being their Jewish enrichment director. What else about New Orleans? Eating. We're incredible food snobs trying to find a decent place to eat in another city. I think one thing I’ll always appreciate about New Orleans was the variety of culture, lots of different kind of people, different ways of speaking, different ways of eating, different ways of relating, of expressing themselves. I really have always liked that. I've traveled around the world a lot, and I don't see as big of a mixture as I see here. But I've liked that about New Orleans a lot, and I don't think it's always been a peaceful side-by-side symbiotic relationship. As I've gotten older, I've gotten to recognize the poverty around me. My graduate degree is in social work and I went to Southern University to get that.

RH: You did? That's kind of unusual.

LB: Yeah, I think there were two white people in our whole class, which was a very interesting experience.

RH: Why did you pick Southern and not Tulane?

LB: One, because I could afford it because I was paying for it myself. At the time that I was picking, people would say, “Oh, Tulane is more direct service and Southern is more administrative.” If you were to get me talking about it, one, I'd be like, “Oh, I want to do that. I want to save the world and talk with people individually,” and then if you talk to me [about if] I want to save the world on more of a macro level – “Oh, I'm there too.” Southern was down the street from me. Five minutes from my house. I had no qualms about the type of education I was going to get. I'm sure it was not going to be the same education, but that was okay. So, I didn't really see any reason to go to Tulane. I'm glad I went there. I think I got a great education. People are usually surprised when I say that, yeah.

RH: Well, predominantly African American, so that's part of the story you're talking about. There's a lot of cultures but they're not always mixing.

LB: Right, exactly.

RH: So, you were bridging that.

LB: I don't know about bridging. I’m certainly one to listen to what people have to say, [and] certainly have my own opinion, but my parents were very involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and I was never raised – it's like if you see somebody who's of a different color or dressed different than you, do you notice? Of course, you notice, but does it make a difference? Until they actually begin to speak and you get to know them a little bit. You have to register some information. I guess I'm talking about racism in general. Somebody gets in the elevator with you, you check them out, and you may feel whatever. “Good morning, good morning.” And as you talk to them, you get more

information about them. It was a good experience.

RH: So, you're also talking about the Civil Rights Movement, and your parents were active here in New Orleans. Do you have some memories of that?

LB: No, that was really before I was born. My mother will tell you how anybody that was involved in the Civil Rights Movement – remember I told you my brother was adopted – that was un-American activities. So, I remember that they were – I can't remember if they came to the house, but they were threatening to take him away. My mother was like, “Either you better cut it out, or find another way to do what you're doing because now it's getting a little bit too close to home.” But I think she fully supported him. Women had a different role, although my mother's an anomaly with that in those days. But yeah, he went to jail. I'm very proud of him.

RH: So, what part of your Jewishness do you think made you – you talked about saving the world. Is there a part of your Jewishness that informs that? Or just the way you were raised or a combination of these things?

LB: No it's totally the Jewish education. Totally. Tikkun olam. I might have a little over-evolved superego. But I remember my early kindergarten, first, second, and third grade. And they were teaching you – I don't really think – I don't remember so much as – or maybe I didn't internalize it as this is what it means to be a Jew. It was this is how to be a human being, and this is how you treat other people. The Torah tells you how to behave. I don't remember how old I was when I had the revelation that all this has been gone through before, thousands of generations, and don't fight it too much, because they already know what they're talking about. You know what I'm saying?

RH: What a comfort.

LB: It's like when you have a decision to make and you don't know where to go, that's a pretty safe place, just like you said.

RH: Tell me – because I should have asked this earlier – when you were born. How old are you?

LB: I'm forty this month.

RH: So, you were born in –

LB: '66.

RH: Well, you came up somewhat in the Civil Rights Movement, but a lot of the activity you're saying was –

LB: Well, my brother was born in '63.

RH: Bull Connor was shooting the –

LB: I think I remember Martin Luther King being shot. I think I remember that. I definitely remember when Elvis died just because I was at camp. Elvis who? No, I don't recall. I remember other things like having to leave the building at Beth Israel, which is where our school was and having to walk outside. I remember the teacher telling the boys to take their kippahs off. I was always the inquisitive one,. "Well, why do they have to take the –?" Because you never took the kippah off. They said, "Oh, because the wind is going to blow them away." Which I remember thinking to myself, we run around outside and play kickball and football and whatever, and you might take your kippah off and shove it in their pocket but it's not because the wind is blowing. There was a little rumor mill that there was a bomb threat at the school. I remember things like that.

RH: Do you, by chance, remember Shir Chadash's move from –?

LB: Oh, sure. Because that was right around my bat mitzvah time.

RH: Oh, really?

LB: Yes. I think I was the first or second person to have my bat mitzvah in that building, and I remember the building wasn't ready yet, so my other friend, who was the same age, who was supposed to be the first person to have her bat mitzvah in the building, had to have it at the JCC.

RH: So, is there anything distinctive about the Jewish community that if you were going to characterize it, this New Orleans Jewish community?

LB: I'd like to sleep on that because I know the answer – I would like to say yes, but right now, I'm not in that space. They're mine, but are they different, or are they –?

RH: It's a hard question to answer within. If you'd been to twenty different communities, you might –

LB: Right. I know, like we have like matzo ball gumbo, things like that. I would speak more of a Southern Jewish experience than a New Orleans Jewish experience. I think Southern Jews are very much different than Northern Jews or even Western Jews or just in general. But there is a great film done by a friend of mine – now, of course, I can't remember the name of it. Brian Bain.

RH: Shalom Y'all.

LB: Shalom Y'all. Brian and I grew up together. Oh, we watch that with such pride and knowing all the spots where the pictures are taken and knowing it's a part of home. One of the things Tad and I have done is when we travel now – we're married thirteen years, and we've done a little bit of traveling, always like to do more, but I think after about four years of marriage and we kept going we decided to go visit Jewish sites. So, if we're in a place, we'll go check out whatever there is Jewish around there in Venice, Germany, and Amsterdam. Then, when we're driving through the Natchez, went through like the synagogues there. That's really neat.

RH: Did you feel different at camp as a Southerner? Were there things you did differently than –?

LB: Oh, we were never good enough. I don't think we were ever – it's probably true across the board. I don't know if it was Jewish enough, smart enough, classy enough, religious enough, or educated enough. I mean, it is true that the education I received at the day school for a fifth, sixth-grader, or seventh-grader, whatever it was, I was not performing on the same level as the kids who went to Solomon Schechter. That's true. Because I started – at Ramah, you have to go to class; you have to go to kitot [classes]. So, half an hour, you might do language and the other half an hour, you do history or whatever. I remember my language was below the other levels of the other kids who went to a comparative day school if you know what I mean. There were kids there who didn't go to day schools, but obviously I was above their level. Anyway, definitely felt like we were looked down upon a little bit. Special, but like the younger sibling or something like that.

RH: Okay. Well, we'll transition now because it gives us a little background here, to your Katrina story. You grew up here, so you're used to hurricanes.

LB: They've gotten more prominent, I would say, in the last ten years. I don't remember evacuating with my parents, I really don't, and then of course I was away for college and that sort of thing. I think that I pretty much started evacuating with Tad, the last thirteen years.

RH: So, this storm, when did it come on your personal radar screen?

LB: My personal radar screen was after I gave birth and my best friend was standing next to me and she goes, “Oh, I hear there's a hurricane.” I was like, “Yeah, yeah, right, whatever.”

RH: You were a little busy. So, why don't you tell us what you were busy doing right before the hurricane.

LB: Well, I had given birth. I gave birth on August 23rd, and so after he was born, my friends came to visit me that evening, so let's say 8:00 or 9:00. My friend Kim said, “Oh, I was watching the news and I saw that there's a hurricane headed our way in the Gulf really.” Happens all the time. They turn, go to Florida or Cuba or Mexico. It didn't need to be dealt with on Tuesday.

RH: So, this is your second son?

LB: Yes, the second son that was born. That’s right. I have a seven-year-old Benjamin, and Zachary who just made a year. I can go on from the story from there if you like.

RH: Yes, please.

LB: Zachary was supposed to be born September 9th, and right when my son Benjamin started kindergarten – well, one, the first day of school, I think a little water came out – I forget what the term is. Then, we checked it and everything was fine. Then, the following week, which was the Monday, was Dr. Ivker told me that you're supposed to feel the baby like ten times an hour. Maybe I felt him ten times an hour. So, I called and I said, “I really don't feel him ten times an hour.” “Go eat some candy.” Ate some candy. “It's not doing anything.” She said, “Well, go to the hospital.” The problem was that Benjamin had a very hard time coming out. Might be more details you want. Benjamin was a difficult birth. Almost went to a C-section. I don't know if he was so big or I was just so small, but it was not a goodness of fit and he was difficult to get out. So Fran wanted to make sure that everything went smoothly. This was her last baby that she was going to deliver, and she's a personal friend of ours. She was afraid he was going to be too big, also because I was a diabetic, a gestational diabetic. So, she sent me to the hospital. Baby was fine, but she goes, “You know what? I don't like it anyway. Let's just

get this over with." She'd much rather have control of the situation, and she'll induce. Actually, she had tried to induce me when the water came out before, but it didn't work, so she'd tried to induce me the week before. So, this time, she induced me, and it worked. Easiest birth on the face of the universe. I would highly recommend it to anybody. That's the funny thing. I was yelling, "You better get her in here because this baby is coming now." Apparently, the epidural worked a lot better this time. Anyway easy birth, piece of cake, eight pounds, beautiful, not too big, not too small. Now, when my older son Benjamin – I don't remember how old he was. Can't remember if it was before the bris or after the bris but he turned blue. He was in his bassinet, the little swinging bassinet, and my friend and I were eating chocolate in the other room, and we decided to go check on him, and he was blue. He was swinging underneath a tree like a Ficus tree inside, and I remember saying to my girlfriend, "Is my baby blue?" She goes "No, your baby's purple." I picked him up and held him to the light. I guess I'm a little disbeliever sometimes. I'm not one to freak out. His color came right back to his face immediately. I didn't even call Tad to tell him. I said over the dinner table "Oh, by the way, Benjamin turned blue. I didn't take him to the doctor." Well, that night with Benjamin, I flipped out and I called the doctor. Because the doctor was like, "I don't see anything wrong with him. He's breathing fine." Because now, I'm putting the baby to bed, I'm going to bed, and I'm not going to watch him. All of a sudden, the cogs start working in the brain. It's like wait a minute, here. I was not going to let it go. 2:00 am, the medical people come out and give him a band, a monitor, and the doctor [gave him] theophylline, and he was on the theophylline, I think, for three or four months. So, because Benjamin had that episode, I couldn't take a chance with this happening to that baby. I think we were just really lucky – there are angels all around me – to have caught that. So, Zachary was born on Tuesday. On Wednesday evening, they did the test. I forget the name of the test.

RH: Is it apnea?

LB: It was basically a sleep apnea test but the test has a specific name but whatever. The doctor called Thursday when I was about to be discharged, and said, “I do not like the results of this exam at all, and I want to monitor him. I want him on the medicine, and we're going to retest him on Sunday.” I was blown away that he couldn't come home. I was very upset that he wouldn't come home, which is kind of interesting. You'll see why later. One of the reasons I was very upset was because Benjamin has been praying for this baby, and now he's not coming home. So, what am I going to tell Benjamin? Benjamin comes to the hospital, and we do that whole thing. So, next day is Friday. Friday, we go to the hospital. I'm breastfeeding him and pumping and the whole thing, So, Friday [night], really Saturday morning, 2:00 am, I'm watching the news. I kind of tilted my head, watching that storm. Waking up Tad – “I think we need to make a reservation.” So, immediately, he gets our old numbers because you have your list. You save a block of rooms. You save ten rooms, and you call all your friends, “Do you have a room yet?” because it's a whole gamble, and you like to be with people. So, finally, we got a reservation in Houston. I called my parents. I called all of our close friends. And so, the next day –

RH: What are they doing? Are they –

LB: Everybody's sleeping. Apparently, nobody else is worried about it. The first moment I had really thought about the storm was when I gave birth on Tuesday. It was off my radar after that. Because you watch it anyway. You watch it, and you don't think anything of it. Let's see. So then, Saturday rolls around. I remember stopping Tad and saying, “What are we going to do about the baby?” Tad doesn't always deal with things directly. So, this house was still under construction, so we had stuff everywhere. We had just moved into this house. I would go every four hours [to the hospital]. My mother came over. My parents had gone to shul. Then I called my mom, saying we decided to leave. I don't really know what to do about this. So, we were trying to call the doctor. The momentum in the household is what I don't think people understand because you

have to secure your house, you have to secure any other property. If you have windows, you have to try and bolt the windows down or cover the windows, get flying objects out of the way. People move their cars to the hotels so they don't get flooded. There's a whole lot to do, especially if you hadn't really thought that you're going to have to deal with it. So, my mother went with me to the hospital, and I remember the Thursday or – no, this was Saturday. So, Friday I remember noticing that all the other babies in the nursery had their own clothes on and their own blankets, and I remember going, "I want my baby to have stuff from us." So I remember bringing – and at that point, I brought – actually, it was the outfit that Benjamin had come home in and his carrier. We had been calling the nursery. We're trying to get in touch with the doctor. By the time we got in touch with the doctor, it must have been 2:00 [p.m.], which is really late in hurricane timing for anything to happen.

RH: 2:00 Saturday?

LB: This is 2:00 Saturday. My father was off moving the Torahs from Shir Chadash over to Federation to the second floor of Federation. That's what he was doing. My mother was all frustrated because she couldn't get him. I couldn't really talk to Tad too much, even though he had cell phones and he had help. But we have several properties, and he was trying to figure out that. Plus, Benjamin – trying to deal with the five-year-old. So, you just roll and do your thing. I remember showing up at the nursery door with the baby clothes and the carrier. The nurse was like [gasp] and I said, "Don't worry, we haven't made a decision yet." I said, "So I don't know what we're going to do." And we tried to find – finally, at that time, is when the doctor – we were able to talk to him – who is not our normal pediatrician, incidentally. He said, "You may take the baby if you have the monitor and if you have the caffeine, the theophylline," or whatever it was. "If you don't have it, you will be taking him against medical advice." I'm hemming and hawing and thinking I'll stay at the hospital. Said, "Okay, if I stay at the hospital, what am I going to do for the three days, A. B, because they don't really let you stay in the nursery

because they have really sick babies in the nursery. So you can really only come in for five minutes at a time for a while. If the storm is bad, and they evacuate, they're not taking me. They're not going to take me. So, I was trying to think, “Well, what else –?” So, that's option B. I wanted somebody to tell me what to do because I guess I didn't really want the decision myself. Then Tad said, “You know what? We're beating ourselves up. We want him with us, and that is the motivation for us to take him. But the reality is he's going to be fine. He's in his bassinet. He's got the best babysitters in the world. He's got his medicine. He couldn't be in a safer place, especially since we don't have a monitor.” I said, “I guess you're right.” Well, who knew the levees were going to break. We had evacuated with Benjamin four times in a twelve-hour ride to Houston, which is a five-hour drive. So that was probably Saturday around 4:00 or 5:00, must have been around 4:00 because Tad went back for the 8:00 feeding. I said to him – because he hadn't seen him all day. Last time he saw him was Thursday night. I’m pumping. He says, “Aren't you going to go feed him?” I said, “I think I'll feed him, but if we're leaving, and you haven't seen him, I think you need – not that it's your turn, but we both can't go. Benjamin has to go to bed. There's still things that has to happen. You go.” So he fed him, and that's when the picture was taken. [inaudible] cry. So, Tad came back –

RH: It’s hard.

LB: It's okay. It gets worse. I'm just thinking about how proud Tad was of those pictures because it says – the lady wrote, the nurse wrote underneath the picture – and I have it in my stuff. “Me and my dad. Aren't we handsome?” That was real sweet. That was our only picture we had of him. Anyway so the plan was we packed up the Navigator. We have this big dog and a big cat, and Benjamin and our CPU, and two small suitcases, and that's it. The dog's pretty big. The dog needs a big space. It's really relevant. You don't think about these things. I remember Tad saying, “Do you want to bring the dog?” I’m like, “Hell, yes. Hell yes, we got to bring him. We can't leave him here. That's just

not right." Plus, he gets scared of storms. So, I remember we met out at the parking lot, and we convoyed to Houston.

RH: What parking lot?

LB: The parking lot at West End and Robert E. Lee, where Robert's is and the whole thing. So, there was myself, my parents, my brother and his family, and our friends the Whitfields. We drove. I have to say the counter-flow worked great. We hit at the right time. And I do remember pulling into – getting on the expressway, where it meets – basically where Jefferson Parish and Orleans Parish meet the I-10, 6-10, whatever, it meets. The traffic at 4:00 in the morning, there were just headlights for miles in every direction. I had a slight little panic attack, saying, "Oh my God, I'm leaving my baby." And I thought, "But he's fine." I thought, "Why don't we just go back and get him?" It was totally the other way. It was out in the east. We didn't say where that was. He was out in Pendleton Methodist Memorial out on the east on Read Road. So, before Tad had left the hospital Saturday night, he had gotten the number of the nurse, and so we would call her every so often, Nurse Colleen, Colleen Brewer. He would call her. I didn't realize he had the telephone number. The phone rings. "Oh, it's Colleen," he would say. "Oh, well, that's good." So, let's see, nothing really big happened. There was no big deal. We left basically at 5:00 [a.m.] because my parents were late. We left at 5:00, got to Houston at 5:00 [p.m.], got to the hotel. Hotel didn't allow animals. It was funny, so we had to sneak the dog and the cat up the stairs to the eighth floor. Monday, the hurricane came, but that's really normal. So, we went to the Galleria [on] Monday. We spoke to them, to the nurse, Monday morning. I hadn't heard. I think the hurricane hit in the morning, and I remember by 6:30 – 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, and we hadn't heard anything. We couldn't get through. I remember starting to get a little nervous. I'm not a nervous person. I was getting a little concerned. And then at 6:30 [p.m.], the phone rang, and it was Nurse Colleen's sister calling from San Francisco, saying that her sister just called her and everything is fine. They have power. They have food. Everything's fine,

everything's as expected, as it should be. Oh, I remember breaking down in tears, blubbing in tears and everything, and telling Benjamin how wonderful people are in the world that this lady had called us from San Francisco. And Tad's like, “I think you better calm down because he's not getting that you're happy. He's not getting that you're happy about this.” So, I'm still pumping every four hours because you have to keep up that feeding schedule. Oh, that was hard. Watching the news again. And then I get news that the levees broke.

RH: On the news?

LB: On the news.

RH: That's how you found out?

LB: I think so. I remember somebody saying something about the levees leaking, but I was like, “Well, whatever, that's fine. That's no big deal.” I really didn't understand a storm surge. I didn't understand anything about that thing. When I was working in the JCC, one of the programs I did was I'd have speakers come. I guess this was right after Ivan; we had the national Homeland Security come – [Terry] Ebbert – for our local area. Nobody came except for one person. So instead of it being a big thing, it was a little thing, us sitting around a table. I remember him saying, “Lainie, if a hurricane comes, you get the hell out.” He was dead serious. And, of course, you think this guy is supposed to be serious. But I remember the look on his face. He says, “I am not going to have enough body bags.” Ever since then, “Okay, we're leaving. I'm leaving. You're coming.” After Ivan, it used to be okay, we're now leaving a few days early because nobody wants to sit in the traffic. Anyway, back to Houston. I remember thinking, “Oh my goodness.” I remember calling American Express because we pay for everything with American Express, and American Express is going to have every detail of everything we bought to justify what we have in our house. That morning is when everything started rolling. All the men were on the phone making their claims to the insurance companies

because we had seen on the video – you're watching the video, and I remember them showing stupid things. I remember wanting to scream at the television, “Show the neighborhoods. Show people's houses.” They would show the French Quarter, and they would show downtown, which is important, but if your city's flooding and you have a million people living all around, they want to see their neighborhood. Fine. Show downtown once or twice but show the rest of the world, please. They did show the corner of Paris and Robert E. Lee, and you could see the water a foot below the ceiling, seven feet high. I went, “Whoa.” And my friend Mindy went, “Oh, there goes my house. My house is seven feet underwater.” Well, that point is equidistant between our two houses. So, we knew we had had it. At that point, I really still wasn't concerned about it. There was a big – I remember also that I had gained a lot of water weight. My ankles and my feet were huge, just ugly. When I woke up Tuesday morning, they were back to normal. I lost thirty pounds in ten days. Amazing. It really was amazing. But all my clothes didn't fit. All I had was maternity clothes. One pair of shoes and my Crocs, nothing else fit. It was interesting. Then, I remember this particular hotel had like a little dining area that had a big TV, and just the whole room was filled with all kind of people – rich people, poor people, Black people, white people, Hispanic people, every spectrum. Everybody's staring at the TV. “Oh, you flooded.” “Oh, I flooded.” “Oh, you didn't flood.” The whole thing. The children sitting there watching it. I took Benjamin out of there because I didn't want him watching it. To my friends and my brother, I was like, “Why are you letting them watch this?” “Because they need to know. They need to understand.” I'm like, “They hell they do.” They will get it. Everybody was glued to the TV. I remember being furious about that. And my main goal – maybe it was the social worker – I know these kids have to go do something. They cannot sit around all day, starting at 7:00 in the morning, watching this. So I took Ben – well, the phones were also an issue. I took Benjamin to our other friends, who didn't get a hotel room where they are, to the pool. And then, my friend Kim and I used her cell phone, my cell phone, her husband's cell phone, and their three phones in their suite to make phone calls. We had all the

phones going at the same time. I don't know what Tad was doing. I don't know what they were doing, but I had to get out of there because I couldn't participate in that.

RH: You couldn't participate in the cell phone thing or the –?

LB: No, staring at the TV.

RH: Oh, at the TV.

LB: I am an active person. I am hands-on. So, we got the phonebook out. We called Red Cross. That didn't help. We called everybody. That was probably the only time – when I could not get a helicopter, I couldn't – we were calling every hospital. When you look at the timeline, it really is silly to think that the levees broke at 7:30, 8:00, whatever, Tuesday morning. They're not going to have all the babies out by noon, by 2:00. That's really just not feasible. Trying to figure out – I was finally – "I'll just go get him. I'll go get him. It's not raining anymore." It was flooding, but we can fly and land. I'm sure the hospital has a helipad. Finally, I got a company, because a lot of the helicopters were already gone in Houston. Meanwhile, we're calling the Red Cross and every hospital in the five states that we could dream up, 4-1-1 on the computer looking up children's hospitals and women's hospitals and whatever we could think of. We didn't know – are we looking for Baby Breaux? Are we looking for Zachary Breaux? Are we looking at the child of Helene Breaux? You don't really know how to address the kid, either. Anyway, I feel like I'm rambling, but there's so much happening.

RH: So, let me just understand a little bit here. You get the call Monday, and that's really the last time you understand that Zachary is okay.

LB: Right.

RH: And then you're getting the sense, or you find out the levees are breaking, and you've got no phone communication with the hospital.

LB: Oh, yeah. Right.

RH: So you're assuming they've been medevacked out? Or you're assuming you need to go in and get him? Do you remember exactly?

LB: Well, yes to both because I knew I know, I would think – I hope to know – that of all the human beings that people worried about, it's usually the babies. So, I was certain that they would take either the sickest or the most fragile. So, I figured they would be the first ones to leave. On the other hand – and that's why I was concerned, because if I do get a helicopter and go there, he may not even be there. I didn't know what to do. I just need a course of action, and I'm going to go in that direction, and if I get stuck, I'm just going to change my direction and have as much control over it as I can because I can't sit here and not do anything about it. That's when I got stopped again, was when the guy said to me on the phone – I said, "I need a helicopter. I need to go get my baby." He said, "I have a helicopter, and I can take you. I can take you on Thursday." "Fine." At least I was getting somewhere. He says, "But you're going to have to get FEMA's approval." My hands just went up in the air. I was like, "I just don't know how that's going to happen because we had been calling Red Cross. We had been calling FEMA. Every number they flash on the screen – every everything. Nothing was happening. I just remember – and I did remember – I was crying all of thirty seconds. I think I felt like I had to keep it together because I couldn't lose it, A, because it's not productive, and B, because Benjamin wouldn't be able to handle it. He wouldn't be able to handle it if I wasn't functioning. So, that might make him feel a little better. I think I was there for a good five to six hours and remember the cell phones wouldn't call each other. I couldn't call Tad on my cell phone.

RH: So, this is Tuesday.

LB: This is Tuesday. Well, none of the time we could call each other. I don't think it was weeks before we could call each other on our regular numbers. The hotel that we were

staying at was terrible. Terrible. I'm going to write them a letter. They were just terrible. I remember Mindy saying, "I know that you have received a message." I went down there, and they said, "Oh, I don't know." They were looking. Anyway, that was very frustrating. Anyway, we get through Tuesday night. We had only made a reservation for three nights, which is normal – Sunday night, Monday night, Tuesday night. So, the next day we had to move. We wanted to move anyway. I was terrified of moving because every number that we had given out was this particular hotel's. I just knew that that was going to get screwed up. On the other hand, nothing was working anyway. It was not like – but I have to say that the people on the phone were marvelous. "I'm so sorry to hear that. We will keep an eye out for him. We do not have a baby that matches that description. Try this number." Again and again and again.

RH: Who were you calling?

LB: Hospitals. Hospitals, emergency rooms, you just never know. Just stand for a second. Who would you call? You're looking for a baby. Who would you call? Could go any state – Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas. You just never know. You never know. And as a matter of fact, that's where they all ended up. All spread out to the winds. So, we had to move hotels. And at that point, my brother and his family, and our friends the Whitfields decided to go to Dallas because everybody had to obviously come up with a more permanent plan, and they knew people there. Part of me is a little angry about that, and the other part of me completely understands. Any help that they could do was on the telephone. And they could do the telephone anywhere. So, they left to go. We moved to a Courtside Marriott Inn, Marriott Courtside. They were great. All of Houston was amazing. Trying to make you feel welcome. Trying to give you free passes to places, and helpful, and all kinds of resources they were trying to give to people when we were checking in. And so we, Tad and I and Benjamin shared like a little suite, a townhouse-looking kind of suite, with my in-laws. My parents basically lived next door. My brother had said, "I think you should

call CNN." I said, "Don't be ridiculous." Then, I was like, "Okay, well, why is that ridiculous? Why is that ridiculous?" So, I tried to call CNN in New York. I was very angry with the operator because she could not find CNN New York. CNN is Atlanta, but I didn't [know], so I gave up. That's got to go this way. Anyway, apparently, Tad got in touch with them. Well, remember I said we had to move hotels. Well, we did move hotels, and our good friends, the same ones that I had shared the telephone with Kim, ended up getting a flight through friends, a personal flight, a private jet, to fly their family to Boise, Idaho. That's another story. But anyway, my friend Kim is talking to the lady at Million Air, and she goes, "Oh, you heard about the hurricane. What's going on? And what are you all doing to help?" The lady said, "Oh, we have sent a number of planes. We've sent a number of helicopters." She goes, "Oh, well, I'm asking because my friend's baby is in the hospital, and she's stuck, and she's trying to get her baby." The lady behind the counter's like, "Oh my God, I don't believe it. Really?" Kim told her some more. She goes, "I have a friend who's a producer at CNN. I'm going to call her right now." And that's how CNN got involved. So CNN calls Tad, and meanwhile, the media started to get a little bit of a wisp of the story of the missing baby Zachary. I don't know. Three or four of the local news stations started coming to our hotel room. They would show us on the computer, and they would show us on the phone. We'd get calls back, and the whole thing.

RH: What were they showing you on the computer and such?

LB: Well, one group wanted a picture of Zachary. Zachary had had his little newborn picture taken. They had told me that they posted it on the website, so that's the way I got his little newborn picture, which is funny, the first time I saw it. It had gotten onto their website by then. Looking up hospitals in areas, we had to go buy all new cell phones; we had to go buy all new laptop computers. The amazing thing is that we have the means. Not everybody has the means. We're not rich people. We're nice middle-class people with credit cards. We'll use them. They would show us doing all that sort of thing. Then,

the other side to that is that Tad's grandfather was missing. His zayde “Pinky.” He wasn't staying in Willow Wood; he was staying at the Azaleas. The last hurricane –

RH: The Azaleas is where?

LB: Azaleas is the living area or the apartments associated with Willow Wood.

RH: And Willow Wood is –?

LB: Is the Jewish – I don't even know if it's Jewish – nursing home now. The last hurricane, for Ivan, we had insisted zayde evacuate with us because they left late – fifteen hours in the car, which is absurd for a ninety-four-year-old man. He’s like, “I'm not going.” Well, at this point, we didn't know where zayde was. That was really scary. We’re looking for him, doing what we can. Everybody’s telephoning. So, Tad's talking to this producer. And he says, “Lainie, they want us to appear on the [Anderson Cooper] Show,” and I didn't even know who [Anderson Cooper] was. I said, “You go,” because he had been dealing with them, and I was like, “You go, I'm going to stay here with Benjamin. I'll keep making phone calls.” Because nobody else is making calls. My parents weren't making calls. My father-in-law was just staring at the television. Just glued to it. I was getting a little angry about that. He said, “No, you're going. You're going.” “Okay, fine, I'm going.” So, my father-in-law got in the car, and we went over there. Right before we left – this is funny. Right before we left, I saw my neighbor on CNN – Mrs. Coco. And it was like, “Oh, look at Mrs. Coco on TV.” Apparently, she had been at the Superdome. At lot of people had their ideas about who was at the Superdome, and I can tell you that Mrs. Coco – she's probably not a wealthy lady, but she has the means. I know she has a car and can drive out of the city. So what was she doing at the Superdome? Well, as we drive up and park, a car parks next to us and look, and there she is. I'm waving at her, “Mrs. Coco, Mrs. Coco. I saw you. Why were you on CNN?” She goes, “I was in the Superdome.” I said, “Why were you in the Superdome?” She says, “My mother had just had heart surgery, and I wasn't going to

leave the city with my mother had just heart surgery. [I thought] it's going to be over in three days." You know how it goes. I said, "Oh, I'm sorry for your troubles." Her fifteen-year-old daughter was with her. They were trying to figure out – they wanted to go two separate directions, and I remember saying, "Well, why don't you just like meet back at a certain point at a certain time?" She's like, "I don't have a watch." I remember going, "Oh yeah don't have a watch." It was hot on the asphalt.

RH: So you didn't tell her.

LB: Oh, I did. "Oh yeah, by the way, I lost my baby." She goes, "Oh girl, it'll be all right. It's going to be fine." I said, "I know it's going to be fine. We just got to find him. I'm sure he's fine. I'm sure he's fine. Just don't know where he is. I'm sure he's been airlifted. I just don't know where. Just don't know where."

RH: So, no contact still with the hospital, and the hospital hasn't found you.

LB: No. No. I have a vague memory of seeing it on TV, but I don't remember – an aerial shot of the hospital with the water around it, but I don't remember if it was before or after we got the baby back.

RH: Okay. We're going to switch to another tape.

LB: Good.

[END OF TAPE 1]

RH: – Rosalind Hinton for Katrina's Jewish Voices with the second tape with Lainie Breaux. Lainie, we were talking about – you got in touch with the press, really, to try to help find Zachary from feeling like if people saw you on TV –

LB: Well, they knew the baby belonged to somebody. I knew they would know that, but where we are; we're here, you never knew, you had no idea where the baby was going to

go. No idea. Oh I can hear him. I don't know if you can hear him on the tape. Anyways, let's see. We drive out, and I kept saying to Tad, "Do you have a press pass? Do you have a password?" We are going to the Astrodome. We're going to the parking lot of the Astrodome. I worked in television a little bit so I knew what that was going to be like, and you just can't drive in. Don't forget that buses and buses and buses are going by full of people. There are people getting dropped off, there are people dropping off supplies. I don't want to say it was a zoo, but it was a zoo, just the amount of people in one area. Boom, we're in. Like nothing.

RH: So, this is to go in for Anderson Cooper?

LB: Well, those are the directions: go to the CNN van, the big media van. Go to the CNN video van, and the producer will know you're coming. It is located in the – I forget what they called it – the media circle or the media center, where all the media kind of hangs out in the same area, and that was it, at least that's all that Tad told me. "We are not going to get in there." Boom, in like it was nothing. I'm telling you, there's little angels all over the place. So, we drive in, and that's when I saw Mrs. Coco. It was so hot. Hot. It was 5:00 in the afternoon on asphalt; if you have ever been on asphalt at that end of the day, it's hot. So, I was kind of aggravated because here we are, standing around. We knocked on the doors. They said, "Oh, good, you're here," and basically slammed the door. You'll be on, and they wanted you there an hour ahead of time. So, Tad is on the phone, and Tad is on the phone. I get on the phone. Occasionally, my phone might ring. I remember my friend Jennifer calls, and she goes, "Hey girl, how are you?" I said, "I'm fine, but we can't find my baby." She goes, "Oh, you had the baby?" [laughter] I was like, "Yeah, but we can't find him right now." She goes, "Really?" I kind of made light – being down in the dumps doesn't help anything, and that's just my [personality]. "We can't find him right now. We're looking for him, though. I heard her go, "Wait, wait, what?" I said, "I can't talk." I said, "I'm sitting in the CNN parking lot. I'm about to go on Anderson Cooper, so I got to go, but we can't find the baby." "Okay," she says, "You're

about to go on TV, and you can't find your baby. That's what you're saying?" "Yes." "Okay, goodbye." So then, five minutes later, I'm fussing at Tad. "Tad, it's hot. Get in the car." Because by this time, we decided to sit in the car with air conditioning, and he was not following my directions. He's not listening. He's on the phone. Then, finally, I looked at him and said get in the car. So, he goes in and sits down, sits down in the car, and he's talking, and all of a sudden, he's getting all nervous, and you get that sense. He doesn't want to say anything. So, I'm in the front seat, my father-in-law is in the driver's seat, and Tad is in the back seat. I turned around and looked at him and said, "What is going on?" [inaudible] He says, "My name is Tad Breaux, and I'm looking for my son." Somebody says that they think [they] have him. Oh my God, I'm still shaking. "What, what, what?" He goes, "Oh my God, where are you?" He didn't know what city they were in – Fort Worth. He was like, "Oh, God. Oh, I'm so glad to talk to you." I'm like, "What?" He's like, "Okay, they found him," because I wasn't putting it together. I looked out the window, and I saw Mrs. Coco, opened up the door, and I ran to her. "They found him, they found him!" She was like, "Oh, girl, I'm so glad. I'm so glad." I said, "I hope your mom gets better." She goes, "She will, she will." I was making such a ruckus. Tad came out of the car by then, and we hugged. All of a sudden, the media bloodhounds start – "Oh, what's going on over there?" They said, "What's going on?" We said, "What?" So they started getting the news. "When are you getting him?" "Which way is Fort Worth?" I said, "I guess we're going to start walking or driving. How far away is that? What time is it? How long will it take to get there?" So, at that time, we were supposed to be on the [Anderson Cooper] show, and they had pushed it back because obviously we weren't ready. So, everybody got settled and ready. As it turns out, we got the right information because – now, see this is the Jewish line. Tad's aunt's boyfriend's brother's wife's sister – please, God, I hope I got that right, and I don't even know her name – called the right hospital at the right time. He had been there half an hour, and when they said, "I'm looking for a baby boy from New Orleans," they said, "We can't tell you that." Yay – because everybody else was, "No, we don't have him." It was like, "We

can't tell you that. No comment." You know what? I'm really happy that people would say, "No" – HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] and all that –whatever. I was like, "Thank God." So I went on the [Anderson Cooper]. Actually, I didn't really get to say anything. Tad was going off. It was kind of funny because I'm the talkative one, and he's the quiet one. He was just saying how glad he was that we were going to get the baby back. So, after that, I remember feeling a lightness. When you get such big news – okay, now what do we do? Now, what do we do? I guess we go leave. So, we drove back. It was half an hour, twenty minutes back to our hotel, and Benjamin had seen us on TV, and he's bouncing off the walls. "I saw you on TV. We're going to go get Zachary" and everything. My dad says, "I want you to know that Adam Bronstone, who has since left the Jewish Federation of New Orleans, has arranged a flight for you through Angel Flight," which is a privately-run volunteer organization of pilots who own their own planes, who will fly anybody, anywhere, anytime as long as they have a medical need. So, we were on the air at 6:00. 8:00, we were on a flight. We were at Cook Hospital in Fort Worth at 11:00. Actually, the thing is that it was – I kind of figured it was twenty-four hours since he left the hospital. It took him twenty-four hours for him to leave Pendleton and for us to get to Fort Worth, which is really amazing because I remember in the paper there were still babies that weren't placed back with their parents.

RH: So what was Zachary's journey? Were you able to piece it together?

LB: I pieced it together. For a long time, I didn't want to know. CNN came with us, by the way, on the plane.

RH: Really?

LB: Well, they did a whole thing. They did a whole thing on us, a whole segment, I guess. I had to bring Benjamin because I couldn't leave another child. Oh boy, that would be great. What was the question? Sorry, I spaced out for a second.

RH: My question was did you ever piece together Zachary's journey?

LB: Yes. My understanding of it is – because we did see – the next morning, we went on Good Morning America, and I need to tell you some things about that as well. We saw the nurses, and the two nurses told us what happened.

RH: From Good Morning America?

LB: No, because the nurses got there that night, and all they wanted to do was go to sleep. Right? We went on Good Morning America. They left the hospital at 11:00. I actually need to pause and go back for a second. Thursday morning I got a phone call from my same friend Kim who had spoken to the lady at Million Air was online on the synagogue website email thing, and she saw a notation from a friend of ours, Natalie Barrocas Cohen. In that email, Natalie had mentioned that her father was still at Pendleton Methodist Memorial Hospital. When Kim saw that, she emailed Natalie and said, “Oh my God, that's where Lainie's baby is.” Natalie and I have known each other forever. So, they're talking, and Natalie was able to get in touch with her father, who is the chief medical officer at the hospital and he was there. So, Natalie had called us early in the morning that Wednesday [Thursday] morning, so we knew Thursday morning that he had been airlifted out Wednesday night; we just didn't know where. I mean, it was helpful, but not that much helpful. It was helpful in the sense that okay, now you really knew that he was out of any danger, but you really didn't know where he was and where you were going to get him. So, we had gotten that information from Natalie and Kim. I guess I brought it up because it's just another Jewish connection of how things went. Well, they had left, which we knew at 11:00 Wednesday night. They were flown on a helicopter to the side of the expressway.

LB: So, he was taken out with a nurse or with a –?

RH: Well, I didn't know until kind of recently that there were two babies. It was Zachary and another baby, and they each had a nurse. There must have been more people, but I never got any more information because I can't imagine that they would just take two nurses and two babies on one helicopter and fly out of a hospital, but that's all that I've heard. They're flown to the expressway, and they told me which one, but I have pointedly forgotten because I would have to drive by that spot of the day, and they sat on the side of the road for about half an hour. Nurse Sue, who was actually Zachary's nurse, not nurse Colleen, said, “The hell with this,” and saw a cop car coming and flagged the cop car down. Now, I don't know if there were more people around. I don't know all that. I can't imagine that a cop car could just drive by masses of people and not anybody else stop them, but anyway, the cop took the two nurses and the two babies to the airport, where they sat for eleven hours. I remember them saying that they kind of isolated themselves in a little spot, and then eleven hours later, they were flown out to Cook Hospital in Fort Worth. I remember saying to nurse Colleen and nurse Sue right after we finished, “Remember I brought a blanket and an outfit?” [laughter] You remember that? “Remember I brought that?” I said, “Do you have it?” I guess it's a stupid question, but it was Benjamin's, and I kind of wanted to save it, and I don't know. “No, all we could do is really stuff our pockets with milk.” My son was eating. He was eating four ounces every four hours. That's a lot of milk over that many hours. I remember at the hospital, we stayed at Cook Hospital with him until Saturday; we left on Saturday. I walked around the bassinet, and I saw a bag, and the bag had a stamp on it – “personal items.” I'm thinking to myself, “What, with this little baby, personal items would he have that would need to be saved of all things?” I was like, “Oh, the blanket. Oh, the outfit.” But I already knew in my mind that that wasn't the case. I picked it up, and it was crusty, and I just put that back down and forgot about it. It kind of made you stop and think, with a little more detail, about what –

RH: What he was in?

LB: Yes. He must have been drenched with milk, and what kind of diapers did they have? Remember, we're the lucky ones. That's what we have to remember is that we are the lucky ones.

RH: You've told this story to a lot of people, and one of the reasons why you like to – you don't mind offering this story.

LB: Well, we were the first good news. Our story was the first good news to come out of New Orleans, the very first good news. There was another part of the story that I wanted to share with you because it still fascinates me. We got to Cook Hospital 11:00 Thursday night. We kissed our son, and he was fine. Benjamin was exhausted, [so we] put him to bed. We went to bed. At 3:00 AM, the phone rings, and it's my friend Natalie. Now Natalie had written the email to my friend Kim. "Lainie, you were wrong. You said on CNN that Pendleton was evacuated, and it hasn't been evacuated." I have never heard such panic in somebody's voice in my life. Oh, God. I had to make her slow down. "The water is rising. It's at the second floor, there's snakes, there's alligators, there's no power, there's no water, people from the neighborhood are swimming in" – you can't blame them – "swimming into the hospital." "I have the notes. I can find the notes. Let me get a pen, Natalie. Let me get a pen." There were four critical patients, and ten staff or something like that, and eight hundred neighborhood people. "They're stealing the food." She goes, "I don't know what's wrong with my mother." She goes, "My mother will not come to the phone. There is something wrong with my mother. I think my mother is having a nervous breakdown. Lainie, you have got to do something. You have got to do something." When the lady had said to us when we first arrived that Good Morning America wanted to interview us, again, I'm like, "I'm not interested. Tad, you go ahead. I'm too tired. I've got a five-year-old I got to worry about. I don't know anything about this other little baby. I don't know what he's going to be eating like, sleeping like, whatever. I'm not making any promises. You go ahead." When Natalie calls and is going on, I said, "Natalie, I will do everything in my power to bring this to people's

awareness." We hadn't talked about my family too much, but my mother's a retired judge on the appellate court. My same friend Kim's husband's brother used to be an aide to Mary Landrieu, and I just called everybody. I woke everybody up – "Tell somebody. Do something. Make a phone call." I got the finger now – that's the finger. Somebody's in trouble. I called the CNN producer who had flown with us, and he did not answer his phone. I let that ring – t would have rang for an hour. I was waking his butt up, and he got on the phone; finally, he said, "Lainie, what? Lainie, I haven't slept in two days." I said, "I understand, but …". I must have been talking fast, too, and I said, "I was wrong. The hospital is not evacuated. We need to go do something. You need to call somebody. I need a number. You need to provide me with some information at CNN if somebody can do anything." He thought I was telling him that I said it wrong on the tape, and his response was, "Lainie, that's okay. We haven't edited the tape yet. We can fix that part on the tape." I'm like, "No, no, I need something now. I'm not talking about for tonight's thing that you want to air." I said, "I've called CNN." I called whatever. I said, "I can't get through to anybody." He says, "Okay, here's a number." I said, "I am calling you back if this doesn't work, so this better be a good number." He said, "I don't see why it wouldn't work." So, I called, and a nice little lady answered the phone. It's so nice when somebody is working with you; it calms you down immediately. I said, "I'm calling about this hospital." She goes, "Are you calling about Pendleton?" I said, "Yes. "She goes, "Oh, we've heard. You're not the only person who's called." It probably was Natalie [laughter] who called in, too. She goes, "I've heard. To be honest, I don't have anybody." She says, "I don't have a producer. I don't have a camera crew. As soon as I have one, I will send them over there." She goes, "I will do what I can." You could tell – "I will do what I can, but I don't have anybody." I said, "Thank you very much. I hear you. Here's my number if you need me." I went to bed, and I was up at 5:00, an hour later, and took a shower – same clothes I was wearing – and I was ready to go. I went down to – just like we are set up right now – and I said to the producer. Meanwhile, I had Tad up, and he was doing his thing. He participated as well. With the baby in our arms, we go

down. I said to the producer, “I've got something to say.” She said, “What do you have to say?” I said, “I have to tell them that the hospital isn't evacuated.” Oh, and that was the other thing. I can't believe I forgot that. FEMA was diverting the supplies that the parent company was sending to the hospital. I don't know if it's true or not, but I was livid. “That’s what I have to say,” I told her. She goes, “Ooh.” I'm like, “What do you mean ‘Ooh.’” She's like, “Well, this is kind of a good interest story.” “Fine,” I said, “How long is the segment?” She goes, “You have thirty seconds.” So, we get on with Diane, Diane does her little thing, and she goes, “Well, thank you so much. We're so glad you have your baby back, and he's beautiful.” I said, “Thank you so much. We're so relieved. Thank God. My heart goes out to everybody who's not as [lucky] as we are now. I mean, now we're together, and now we can move on.” And I said, “But Diane, I'd like to say one more thing.” I could hear it in my earphone, and she's like, “Oh, well, what is that?” I've never seen it. “I need to tell whoever knows what I'm talking about that Pendleton is not evacuated. It's not. There are approximately eight hundred people there. The water is rising, there's no power, there's no food, and there's nothing around them. The lake is around them. People are panicking, and people are looting, and I'm afraid people are going to die. So, if you can hear me and you know what I'm talking about, please go get those people. Thank you, Diane.” “You're welcome,” is all she said. I never heard. I didn't hear for a long time. 9:00 [a.m.] they were evacuated. I have no idea if it was because of what I said. I don't know if there was a plan, but I'm glad they got out.

RH: That was 9:00 –?

LB: In the morning.

RH: On?

LB: On Friday. So, we went on at 7:00. At 9:00, they were evacuated.

RH: Wow. Did she find her father?

LB: Yes, we spoke on the phone, he's fine [and] her mother. They're all in Atlanta. Obviously, all the doctors are gone; the doctors don't have any practices around here. The only people left are the lawyers. [laughter] Great. And I come from a family of them. But they're all alright. People will say, “Oh, I've heard what went on in that hospital.” I'm like, “I don't want to know.” No need for me to go any further.

RH: Go ahead.

LB: I was just going to say that was probably the most trauma. So, we flew back Saturday, and we had the baby back, and all we wanted was for our life to get back to as normal as possible.

RH: You flew back to Houston?

LB: We flew back to Houston, and then on Sunday, we went to visit a friend's house, just like a normal, friendly family visit. It was very nice. Then, I think the next day, we drove to Dallas. We decided to go to Dallas. I should say that when we were on CNN, of course, the whole world saw us, and Tad's second cousin who lives in Dallas saw us and said to her husband, “Here, boys, I'm going to Fort Worth,” and she showed up at the hospital. They said, “(Karen Crane?) is here to see you, do you know who (Karen Crane?) is?” “(Karen Crane?)? Who is (Karen Crane?)” Then, we realized it was her married name. It was (Karen Gold?). “Oh my God, (Karen Gold?).” So, she came up, and we ended up living with her for three weeks. She doesn't like animals and took our dog and our cat and our new baby and my mother and my husband and my kid, and we all stayed there. The Jewish Family Service – we had nothing. People don't realize you nothing – the clothes on our backs. I didn't have a thing for the baby, not a thing, except for a credit card. (Karen?) sent an email out to her Sisterhood, and the Sisterhood sent it to the other Sisterhood, and so on. By the time we got to her house, she had a room as

big as this, stacked with stuff for the baby, some things for Tad, some things for Benjamin, and some for me. But diapers and formula and playthings and just everything under the sun, and it was fabulous. It was fabulous. And car seats – new. All stuff was new, wrapped. It was like, "Boy, it kind of feels like a baby shower." Tad was like, "Yeah, it's like a baby hurricane." That was phenomenal, and she was phenomenal. Then, the other thing was, through the same email list, a gentleman saw – well, everybody saw us. He had a house that he wanted to loan us for whatever we needed, rent-free. It turned out to be the same neighborhood where my nephews and our friends' kids were going to school in Dallas, which was a public school. Eventually, I moved Benjamin to Solomon Schechter, which was great, a great school. They were very, very nice. Everybody was very accommodating.

RH: A Jewish day school?

LB: Yes. So he really only went there for – when the high holidays came around right now, and he wasn't in – because he started off at the day school here, and it bothered me; he didn't know it was Rosh Hashanah or apples and honey time. It really bothered me that he wasn't in that mode. But the (Rosens?) were the ones who loaned us the house, and I lived with my parents for a while until we left. They have since decided to stay in Dallas and have bought a condominium. Their house flooded – six inches, but it really is irrelevant; what's ruined is ruined. I'm very happy. My brother's house flooded, and they moved uptown, and they're staying. Our plan is to leave New Orleans.

RH: So, tell me a little about that. How did that decision come into play for you?

LB: I've always wanted to move out of New Orleans, at least for a little bit. I've been to enough cities to know that while New Orleans has something very special, it's not all that, if you know what I mean. Tad's entire family is here. I have only a little family, but it was here. He was always resistant to moving, and he's very frustrated now with everything from the mayor to the racial business that's going on to the slowness of the recovery. It's

not to say that things aren't better because things are better, and if you really look at the whole picture, the whole thing is so massive, so incredibly massive. I mean, every aspect of every aspect is affected. It's just such a huge problem. So much to do. My bottom line is that Zachary wouldn't know any different, but Benjamin knows different. If I'm generous and say it will take five years, it's five years. Benjamin will be ten or eleven by the time it's fixed, and that's an important part of his life, I think, and I don't want him to have that burden. My husband is a contractor. He used to be one who builds homes. As you can see, he's got kind of a special taste, very contemporary taste, and our three houses that we've already done have sold in two weeks. He can't build new houses because nobody is building anything, so he's taken some nice homes and redid them in his style, and they're offered at a fair price – $450, $500-plus. There's seventy-eight houses in that same bracket for sale. That's a lot of houses. Anybody that's listening on the tape that knows we're talking from our street, Pratt to West End, from Robert E. Lee to the lake, 78. That's a lot of houses at that range. The houses around two and three are selling a little bit. Right now, it's slow because it's hurricane season; we were expecting that. Also, to be a little on the depressing side, State Farm recently announced that they're not writing any new policies within a mile of the lake, which is where all of our property is. So anybody that wants to buy our house and has State Farm has to find another way to do it. So, it's a little scary, but remember, I'm the lucky one, and I didn't lose my stuff, and I didn't lose my kid, and we're fine, and my husband is still able to do what he does, and I'm still able to do what I do. So, if we don't have as much cash or whatever – could be worse. It could be worse. It's just that everything is a little bit of a struggle. Just little changes.

RH: I'm going to circle back a little bit. You stayed in Dallas for how long?

LB: I stayed in Dallas for five months with the kids.

RH: Until February?

LB: Exactly.

RH: And your husband came back?

LB: He came back in October, early October; as soon as they were allowed into the city, they came back because our house didn't flood, so this was Hotel Breaux.

RH: So, how did you find out your house didn't flood?

LB: My father came back. My father was very concerned about some documents or something. I don't know. That's kind of vague. Somebody was going back. My in-laws had already come back, but they live in Crown Point, which is outside of the city. They just wanted to stay until the baby was back. Then they had their own – we had to care about Zeyde. We did find Zeyde, by the way. Zeyde was in Fort Worth, also.

RH: That was my next question.

LB: Zeyde is fine. He's ninety-five.

RH: How did he get to Fort Worth?

LB: On a bus, which is really scary because I don't know if you saw on the news when that bus exploded for Rita. That a Jewish, old – I mean, this was after Hurricane Katrina, but you think about all those oxygen tanks. Zeyde is not on oxygen, but I'm sure all the other people were. That's kind of scary. But he's fine.

RH: So when did he get out, do you know? I guess you were a little preoccupied.

LB: Probably that same day. In talking about the preoccupation, Spike Lee came out with his movie, and there was a lot of talk about that it was from African American or from

the Black perspective and what does that mean. I actually happen to like Spike Lee. I think he's got an agenda, but don't we all? Anyway, it was on TV the other night, and I just happened to catch it, so I sat up until about two or three in the morning watching it. I feel that if you understand that it's from Spike Lee's perspective, and it completely – I don't want to say disavow but does not recognize Chalmette or Lakeview or any of the other areas that flooded, and just look at it from solely a Black experience pretty much, you can just hang on to that thought, damn it's a good movie. It is something else. There was video on that that I had never seen, and I don't know if it's because I missed it all or because it wasn't shown; I don't know, but I was not watching a lot of television, and I missed it. But I'm really glad we are doing this interview after the anniversary, after I've seen that, and after 9/11.

RH: So, tell me why. How do all those events factor in?

LB: I've always been a strong person and a very resilient person. I used to work at the Covenant House, which is [a homeless] shelter for teens, and I've heard a lot of bad stuff. When I was a kid, I'd read horror things, and I would read a lot about the Holocaust. All of the books that come up off the top of your head, I've read them all. And now, I can't take it. I can't see a scary movie. Probably the most other person's pain that I can absorb is, “Did you flood? Did you not flood?” That's pretty much – because that's a daily conversation you hear in the supermarket. But I can't take it.

RH: So, this interview coming after all of the 9/11, you kind of –

LB: Anticipation. The news media was crazy before the anniversary or the upcoming anniversary. It was all about it, and on the news, it's every day. Rosalind, they had these two hurricanes nearby. I flipped a lid. I had my lists. I'm a list person. I had my lists. I told my husband, “You have to go to mark what suits you want to take.” Because the funny thing is – oh, you just get a new wardrobe. That's hard. I don't know about you buying clothes, but it's hard for me to replace. No, you mark your list. What are we

taking? What are we not taking? Where are we going to put things? A good place to hide stuff is in your washing machine.

RH: A Katrina hint?

LB: A Katrina hint there, yes. I hid stuff before I left.

RH: Really? Well, you didn't flood.

LB: I put my tanakh in there, which is the bible. I put my bible in there, a couple of things in there. I have enough in me right now to hold it together. Most people say, "Lainie, you didn't cry over this. You didn't really show a whole lot of emotion." I was like, "Well, I got it in different ways." I'm probably more controlled. Denial is a good thing. How far do you want to go into thinking about the what-ifs? Well, see, now I can sit back and say the "what if" didn't happen, and it doesn't help to delve any more than that. People say, "Oh, what you went through." I'm like, "I just kind of hung in there."

RH: So, your house didn't flood. I wonder if you could just describe – because you're right up against the London Street Canal. It's a little island that didn't –

LB: Thumbnail. They call it the Thumbnail. What is it like? It's kind of scary because – we didn't talk about that. This is our third house. Our first house was on Pratt, that direction. That's where Benjamin spent the first few years of his life and that's where the Whitfields are, friends the Whitfields, and that's why we're friends because we lived so close together. I came back in November. I came back in November for thirty-six hours. I wanted to see my house, I wanted to see my stuff, I wanted to see, and then I couldn't go home. That not knowing was terrible.

RH: So, it was kind of a ritual of just –? Do you see it that way?

LB: I was insane. We were also adopted. I haven't talked about the wonderfulness of the Dallas Jewish Community, but we were adopted by our friend Sandra and a couple of her friends. We got a house, which was great, but nothing in it – not a bed, not a pot, not a roll of toilet paper. It's amazing how little you need, but you do need something. Anyway, she helped us out a lot, and she came with me here. First of all, I just told my husband to give me the car, and I just drove. I went to every person's house I know.

RH: So, he was already back?

LB: Oh, yes, he'd been back, and everybody was staying here. They had beds all over the place.

RH: So, yours was a little commune. What did you say you called it?

LB: Well, it would be a brothel but it was only men. [laughter] There was only men. There was one friend who was a girl who would come stay here too, but, boy, when I went down that street, that's where Mrs. Coco was, that's where my hairdresser was, that's where the Whitfields were, that was where the Kaplinskys were, it's where our first house was. When Benjamin was born, Tad painted on a wall. He's an excellent artist, and he had painted a scene from John Lennon, and there's mildew all over it. It was so sad. You know, when you get in the houses, I don't know if you've been in one of those houses, you bust the door down, you just kick – the back door actually because you couldn't get in the front door. You know why you couldn't get in the front door? Because all the furniture was piled up because that's where all the water would come through. See, I think the National Guard came through and busted the doors open, and the furniture was all piled up in the front, so we had to go around. I went in every person's house I knew. I went in my brother's house, and I would just take things. My friend Jane, she loved art – I still don't know where Jane is, but she loved art. She was very proud of her art, she's an art historian or whatever, and they would always have these big heavy drapes so their paintings wouldn't get destroyed by the sunlight, and she lived right down

the street from Joel, my brother. I said, “I'll go to Jane's house.” That’s what I was like the whole time. “Let’s go to Jane’s house,” and San’s just running behind me. “Just don't fall down and hurt yourself.” Man, they got it bad. There was a picture, a framed glass picture – all the pictures were gone, the piano was overturned, and I was like, “Where are the pictures?” I said, “Oh, thank God, they must have come.” But there was one chair with this hieroglyphic-looking thing. I picked that up, and I still have it; it's all wrapped in bubble wrap. I wiped it off, bubble wrap, and I'm trying to find Jane to give it to her. I went into the Kaplinsky’s’ house. I got their menorahs and Kiddish cups. I looked so hard for Barbara’s jewelry. My friend Mindy had done all her laundry before and had it all set out on her guest bed. The bed was all turned over, and the clothes were everywhere. I would just go and – her daughter Madison is a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. She's ten years old, and her belts were okay. I got her belts, sent them to the dry cleaner, the whole thing. It was hard. That thirty-six hours was just insane, getting everything. Waving to all the workers. That’s the other thing that’s strange around here: workers everywhere. I have had five flat tires.

RH: In 36 hours?

LB: No, five flat tires since I've been back. But there’s always the worker-guys with the stop sign. I’m driving by. I can’t imagine standing for eight hours holding a stop sign. Slow. So, you wave to them or whatever. I was so happy to see everybody and whatever. We’d drive by the supermarkets, and it stank. I've never smelled anything like that before. On Carrollton Avenue, there's a Winn Dixie, and there's a Save-a-Center, and then you drive into Metairie, and everything is fine. It’s just crazy. I suppose it just as easily could have busted on their side, really. It was the same Corps of Engineers. It just so happened that it was on our side. I could go on and on about that. That was something else.

RH: Let's talk for a minute about the response of the government at every level.

LB: Response? Was there a response? Sorry. Sorry.

RH: So, you weren't too impressed.

LB: God, of all the people in the world, I'm the most likely to be the person to give somebody a break. The whole situation is so surreal. I mean, that's just my best way to explain it is that it was so surreal, just watching it and knowing those places and seeing those people. They're my people because I know those people. I mean, I worked with – basically what you saw for the most part on television – poor Black people, basically. I work a lot with poor Black people so I feel very close and recognize – and they feel like family in a lot of ways. What the hell were they thinking or not thinking? Were they thinking it would just go away, or did they just not thinking it was so serious?

RH: And by "they," you mean the government?

LB: Bush.

RH: The federal? The state?

LB: Yes, I mean, actually, you learn a little bit every day. I'm not studious on it I have my life to lead, and I don't focus on this so much. Something that was interesting was in this Spike Lee movie. He was saying that there is the FEMA commander, Brown; it was a famous shot of Bush saying, "And you're doing a good job, Brownie." Brownie doesn't look so good, in that. If you look at that, he's like looking down, "You don't know what you're talking about." But there's a man above him, and Brown couldn't do anything until this gentleman who looks like Anwar Sadat – I don't know what his name is.

RH: [Michael] Chertoff.

LB: Maybe that's what it is. But it seems to me it was his responsibility to put the ball rolling, to declare whatever he has to declare; I don't know what he was waiting for, but

I'd like to hear it from him. I understand the powers that be, that people – you have to wait for certain things to happen. The most amazing thing in this article – remember, I told my friend – there was a picture of a fire-fighter, one of the fire-fighters from Chalmette. You know who were the first people that reached her in Chalmette? Canadian Mounties. I can't imagine what it would be like to be in charge of such a thing, and of course, six days into it, it's much easier to deal with you know what I mean. Six days into it, somebody can probably run it a lot easier than that person that's in the middle of it or that day. There were stories of people taking their car and driving from Arkansas or Mississippi, driving to the Convention Center, putting people in their car, driving out, dropping them off, and turning around and doing it again. College students. And they couldn't get water to people.

RH: So, has it changed –? I mean, did you have a kind of a sense before that that in the disaster, people would be taken care of? Has it changed how you feel about government?

LB: Well, my problem really – the reason why I probably got through the whole Zachary thing was that I had faith in humanity, that this would be taken care of. And then when you look at it, it's like, oh my God, maybe it's not. I still have faith in humanity. People screw up. I'm right on the line on saying that it was a racial thing. I'm right on that line. My heart does not want to say that the federal government did not respond because of race, i.e., if every face that you saw was a white face, would help have gotten there sooner? There's a big part of me that says yes, but then another part of me says, generally, it's just screwed up. I'll tell you, I'm thinking about those faces right now. There's an author here who works for the Times-Picayune, and he wrote a book, One Dead in the Attic. Like I said, I don't really like to handle that too much. But at the Jazz Fest, I decided to pick up the book. I was alone. It's great when I have alone time. I picked up the book and flipped through the book, and my finger landed on a page, and I opened the book, and there was a picture of the Convention Center. In the foreground

was a man with a gun, but he was facing in the other direction, and he was a dark silhouette, and you saw the gates, the barriers, and you saw the sea of people, all Black faces, all Black faces, and one man holding up a baby. I had to put the book down. I had to put the book down. Part of me says, "Lainie, you got to stay here and rebuild the city." I was going to say I would if I thought that they were honest people. But I don't think there's enough honest people. I don't want to say smart people, but I guess I just don't have the faith. I really don't. I mean, this wasn't that great of a city to begin with, I don't care what anybody says. The reality is it's a lovely place to come and visit, and people are wonderful, and the food is great, and we had a wonderful cultural life, but business wasn't so good, crime was terrible, [and] poverty was awful. It wasn't that great, and I had really high hopes that this would be able to turn it around. Some would say that the hurricane was the best thing that ever happened to the public school system because that was going nowhere. I saw it every day. I was a social worker. I taught in the public school system. It's kind of hard to walk away, but I don't really see – I do believe that one person can be a powerful force. I just don't see how it's going to happen right now. God, I feel so down, but I mean, that's really the way it is. Nagin – boy, I had such high hopes for him, high, high hopes. I would have voted for Nagin or Landrieu, as my mother would say, holding my nose for either of them. Blanco? I don't know. I think they're all laughing at us. I mean, they were always laughing at us, but that was okay because we were New Orleans.

RH: You say they're all laughing at us; you mean the rest of the country?

LB: The rest of the country, Congress, whatever. The Big Easy – I never thought the Big Easy was such a great term in the sense that, yes, it's a nice place to be to relax. The name of the city was the city that forgot to care, the city that care forgot. I don't know.

RH: So, you're frustrated – you mentioned a while ago – with the slowness of the recovery.

LB: The problem seems to be, in my eyes, and I'm not necessarily so educated on it, but the problem seems to me that there is not an agreement on what should be done. Now, I'm talking about the Ninth Ward, and I'm talking about New Orleans East, talking about Chalmette, I'm talking about Lakeview. What is reasonable? What do we expect? Where do you start? I think when people say – and I said it – it's slow. I guess it's because is where we are is we are – like I said on that thumbnail – and from basically this house, these two houses, from there, that way is destroyed.

RH: So, between your house and the river?

LB: Well, until you get to – basically, yes. Nearly St. Charles Avenue, pretty much. Well, Broadway doesn't go that way. Freret. That's one of the reasons – I'm better now. It's a shame to say you kind of get used to it.

RH: What's it like living out here when there's a wasteland between you and the next part of civilization?

LB: I grew up in this neighborhood, so all these are familiar landmarks to me.

RH: They seem empty. It seems like a lot of people haven't come back.

LB: Well, everybody is waiting for insurance money. All the people on Pratt Drive, like I said, they're waiting to see what's going to happen. Do they have to raise their house? What is it? Eight feet, ten feet in the air? They have one of those over there, by the way. Our neighborhood looks pretty good from that way. If you drive through, it looks normal. Lots of houses for sale. I would say two houses every block. That's kind of sad. But the lawns are kept up. You go in the other direction, it's checkerboard – trailer here, a nice house there, overgrownness here, broken windows, piles of trash, dead trees – the trees are really sad, especially since they are all like going to get dry and brittle and going to fall on people now. I guess that would be a slowness because somebody is going to get hurt. Big old magnolia trees are all going to fall down on people.

RH: What kind of routines did you lose? Can you speak to that?

LB: Well, I have to remember that my life changed on two fronts. My life changed because Katrina hit, and my life changed because I had a baby, so all the things that I was used to doing – I have to figure – just realize that I can't go out to a friend's house and stay out past 7:00 because I have a baby. You know what I'm saying? That came up because one of the other major things I've lost are my friends. All these people are gone, and so you start over again.

RH: So most of the people you were talking about, who you seem to find and know where they were in Houston, haven't come back?

LB: Well, they moved around. My friend Kim is in Boise, and my friend Mindy and the Whitfields are across the lake. You say it's just across the lake, but when somebody is down the street and drops their kids off for you to babysit them, you know you go back and forth; that's a life change. You had dinner together all the time. That's different. Our other friends, the Kaplinskys that lived next door to them, are in Chicago, and we used to always watch Sex in the City every Sunday night. I don't have that anymore. We used to go see foreign films together. I don't have anybody to do that anymore. These are relationships that have been going on for eight years, ten years, so it's not new. It's comfortable. I quit work right before the baby was born. Interestingly, I was working at the JCC when I left, and it was amazing how many people I know. I used to do the film festival and the book fair, and I met a lot of people from that. You see, a lot of people are here, and a lot of people are gone, but mostly, it's connections. The synagogue isn't the same. Of course, synagogue cannot be the same because we have a new Rabbi. I mean, I feel bad for that poor guy. You know our Rabbi Spector left just a few months before the hurricane. Rabbi Lichtenfeld started.

RH: He came right before the storm?

LB: Pretty much, yes, just a few months.

RH: So, how do you see the Jewish community change? How has Shir Chadash changed?

LB: Well, I used to like to go to the Shabbat morning services, or even evening services, and I can't really do that so much in the evening because of the baby and the morning because of the baby, but even so – and maybe it will change because we're just past Rosh Hashanah and maybe they'll start like a little junior congregation thing – there's nothing for Benjamin to do. He's running up and down the halls. I guess people used to do that in the old days, make your kid sit down for two hours in synagogue, but that's just not how it is with us. So, it's not an enjoyable experience.

RH: So, there's no babies there now? There's no small children?

LB: No. Well, I don't know. Rosh Hashanah is next week, and I'll call you and let you know because that's always a good gauge of actually who's around, but we have also joined Gates of Prayer, and we're going to have a dual membership.

RH: So you're moving to –? That's a Reform synagogue.

LB: Right. But they do a lot. They have a very strong, young parents thing going on. Benjamin knows that's where his cousin is going because his cousin Eli, my nephew, doesn't live in this neighborhood anymore. He lives uptown, so he doesn't see him like we used to get together. Kids from his old school – he used to go to JCC nursery school – a couple of them go there, some of his best friends. It's the first Sunday School, so he'll have more access to more friends by going there. It was his choice. I didn't want to send him to Sunday School. That's why I sent him to the day school. He's going there now. But I think Shir Chadash lost half of their population.

RH: So, are there any other ways that you try to keep your family and you together? Are there any rituals that have taken on more meaning now than before this storm? Or things you weren't terribly intentional about before that maybe you're more intentional about now?

LB: I'm going to think about that because I have to go to the bathroom.

RH: Okay. [laughter]

[END OF TRACK 2]

RH: This is tape three with Lainie Breaux for Katrina's Jewish Voices. We were talking a minute ago. I asked the question, are there any things that you're more intentional about, or any rituals? Think broadly of rituals. Think of just family rituals that you might be more involved in or engage in more, or even some things that you put aside that you don't worry about as much.

LB: Well, I don't know if there's anything specific family-wise. I've always tried to do Shabbat on Friday night. In our family, that's a big whoop-de-do, and you have family and friends over and have a big dinner, and it's a whole big shebang. I don't know if that's become more poignant, but I still really try to do that, and it's really hard to do it when you have a little baby who would like to help you cook and gets into everything. But what I do, and maybe also turning forty, has made me become more aware of community in general. It's been an evolution, I think, because before you're married and when you're young, at least, I didn't necessarily connect to the community. You know you're Jewish, you know you belong to the community, but you may or may not really do anything with it. Then they asked us to do the USY thing, and that was pretty cool, and then I ended up working – oh, then actually, I didn't mention – briefly, I was on the Jewish Children's Regional Board, and I was on the Clinical Case Committee. At least I felt like I was doing something for somebody. But my profession is a helping profession. So, I'm

already in that mode. But when the Jewish Family Service in Dallas, the Jewish Family Service in Fort Worth, and the Jewish Family Service in Houston – it was crazy. It was amazing, the response that our story brought. People showed up at the hospital with money. People showed up at the hospital with checks. People showed up at the hospital with phone numbers. After we did – I don't remember if it was CNN or Good Morning America – the PR lady for the hospital says we can't take the calls anymore. Here's the stack, and we're done. We all laughed. She says the first guy that called says you have a house and a job in Denver. Come. I was like, “That sounds like a pretty good idea to me.” Denver's nice. My mother tried very hard to teach me good manners, and I tried to call every one of them and say thank you. I got through, and I had to leave a lot of messages because I want them to know that they didn't just – I appreciate it because I'm that sort of person too – that I appreciated their efforts. But what it did show me was that I guess when you don't really know it's there, it's there when you need it, and it's there so much better. And now it's time for me to do my part, participate, and make it work for the next person, or make it work and make it strong. Katrina was the first time I felt it, and then when I was turning forty, knowing a little bit about human development, I was like, “Yeah, I guess it's time for me to step up to the plate and not just play like I play with my friends and do things like that.” So, I've been trying to figure out what my niche is. I'm not a Sisterhood kind of girl. I'm a little more hardcore. I guess if you do clinical counseling with abused children, Sisterhood is kind of frustrating. My mom used to get really frustrated with that as well. Not knocking the Sisterhood, sorry. I would help do the nearly new sale, and I enjoyed that. I've been talking with a lady from Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women, and I think that might be more of where I go. I think I'm very upset by the division in Judaism of the different – I don't know what you call them, sects or groupings that Orthodox people think they're more Jewish than Conservative people, and Conservative people think they're more Jewish than Reform people. Reform people certainly think that they're better than somebody who doesn't believe anything at all. I know that's the case because I'm Conservative, and I really

can't deal with organs in synagogue. Or silly things like that.

RH: Gates of Prayer have an organ?

LB: I don't know but it's more about them, but I was surprised they had as much Hebrew as they do. Whereas a more Orthodox [person] probably wouldn't like our choir too much at Shir Chadash. My boss at the JCC, Rabbi Kurtz-Lendner – wasn't working in that capacity. He goes “Not in front of the non-Jews.” Got to be talking about things, and how can they do that, and we should all just like get along, get together, I don't know what the point is. If anything, it's all about respect. It'll be dilemmas like the JCC has a pool, and I want the pool to be open to everybody [so] that everybody has the same opportunity, or at best, [inaudible] use the pool. Well, the problem is that more Orthodox women won't go swimming with men. So, we tried to open it up at certain periods of the day or whatever, or if we were doing the film festival, you'd want a film that didn't offend anybody because we had a film about homosexuals in Mea Shearim.

RH: Trembling before G-d.

LB: Yeah. Anyway, probably, if there's any niche for me, that's where it would be.

RH: Would be –?

LB: Would be trying to maintain – I think there is, to some degree, a respect that whatever your view is, neither one of us are more closer to God than the other one, and we all have our own responsibility to the world to make it a better place. To have the holier than thou attitude is hurtful and not necessary. I didn't even know – this is just an aside, but I didn't even know there was a problem between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardis. What is that about?

RH: Do you think there is one here in New Orleans?

LB: Of course there is. Well, I've been told there is. I don't feel that way. I can't think of his name at the moment; he's not here anymore because of Katrina, but he owned Kosher Creole, and he was Sephardi. He would just say – I told you I did the book fair. I met Roya Hakakian. That's something else – I got to tell you about that – who wrote – oh, it'll come to me. She wrote a book about being a Jew in Iran [Journey from the Land of No] and what that was like. She grew up in Iran around the Ayatollah and the time of the revolution. She was the one that told me about this rift because I don't pay attention to such things. It was fascinating. It was fascinating. She goes, "Oh, yeah." Then I started asking little questions, and sure enough, there was. [laughter]

RH: So, if you're going to characterize the Jewish community in New Orleans pre-Katrina and post-Katrina, what would you say about it?

LB: I would probably – the same the way they are everywhere, in that, you have a bunch of people that care and work really hard and feel part of the community, and then you have some that are very religious, and that is really where they are, and their job is to make the Jewish religion easier for those that want to practice with the lulav and etrog and the whole nine yards. And then there are the secular Jews who don't really do a whole lot either in the cultural world, but are more interested in Israel per se. I think it runs the gamut.

RH: Was it hard for you to be on the receiving end after you spent most of your life as a helper?

LB: It's definitely humbling. It's definitely humbling to be so grateful – embarrassing to be so grateful. At the same time, God commands us to take something if you need it. I was okay with that. It was a learning experience for me, too, because I clean out my closet as well when I give to people. Sometimes, the honest thing is you just want to get

out of your house, and you put it in the bag. So we'd get stuff that was beautiful, brand new, and then [we'd get] stuff that was dirty. It was a little life lesson with that.

RH: What was the life lesson for you in that?

LB: If you're going to give something to somebody, make sure it's worthy of being a gift. I'm not saying you have to like it. Like, if I don't like this shirt and if the shirt's fine, I can still give it to you. You might like it. If you don't like it, pass it on, but don't do it with a big old gravy stain in the middle. You know what I'm saying? That's just a waste of everybody's time. Something that was amazing was I received a check from the Jewish Book Council. They had collected for my family, which was amazing – and gift cards. Because they would say, "What do you want?" "I have no idea. I need everything." As it turns out, later on, I didn't need everything, but I was still in a place I didn't have anything of my own, if you know what I'm saying. They would send gift cards from Target. I told – (Marie?) was her name – "[inaudible] books. My books are gone. I love books." "Oh no, your books." Here came two boxes of books from the Book Council, and it was great. You know what I mean? The goodness of the world is also amazing. People want to help. They want to do something. They just don't want to do something and write a check to the Red Cross. They want to know that what they did affects – they don't have to know who that person is, but somebody will be directly affected by that. We made some wonderful friends. As a matter of fact, we lived on Fortson Avenue, which is the street that we lived on where the guy gave us the house. It turns out I went to Camp Ramah with a girl who was living on the street, and she heard it from somebody else. "Did you hear about the family?" She goes, "I'm from New Orleans." Amy says, "Oh somebody from New Orleans, and she's Jewish. Oh, that's nice. I didn't know they had Jews down there. Oh, and she's blonde. Is that Lainie Waltzer?" "No, it's Lainie Breaux." She goes, "Oh, I bet that's Lainie Waltzer." She came down the street and knocked on the door. It was like, "Amy, how are you?" She became very good friends with my parents, who are still there. It was nice.

RH: So your parents have decided to stay, and you decided to come home. Can you talk a little about –?

LB: I came home so I could make a decision. I came home because we had a little baby who was growing and changing, and really, his father was not part of his life. It was expensive to fly back and forth, albeit it was a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars roundtrip. But four times a month adds up. It's a nine-hour drive, which is really too long for a weekend. I missed my husband. It was difficult to live with my parents. I had friends, but I didn't have – my sister-in-law, my brother, and their family were there, and our friend the Whitfields were there, but I really didn't see them because they were going through their own stuff. So, I felt a little alone. We were trying to decide what to do, and it was really hard. So, I wanted to make sure the air was fine, so I had the air tested because I didn't want to bring the baby or anybody over here. My mom grew up in Germany, and she grew up during the war, so she had to live through Frankfurt getting rebuilt, and she wasn't going to do it again. I don't know if she internalizes things more, or I internalize and let it go, or I'm more of a backboard, and it bounces off of me, and I won't let it in. But I can function, and she can't function here. She gets very upset and gets angry. We're all a little angry. But she can't deal with it, and so I think my dad is just biding his time. So, my mother needed a project because she had just retired from being a judge, and she's a very ambitious, energetic, amazing lady. And she better have a project. That was, her project is they bought a condominium and they ripped it all apart, and put it all back together again, and here they are. I think it's almost harder for the older generation than for my generation. My parents were looking forward to the easy time now, and instead, they had to start over again. Their friends are all gone mostly. A few are here. I feel more bad for them. I'm still relatively young, so I can still do it. It's sad because my parents lived around the corner from me. It’s a shame that we can't go ride our bikes over there, especially now that Benjamin's old enough to go ride his bike over there. They used to have them over Shabbat dinner, and I miss that. They come in, but it's also made it a little easier to talk to them. Made me appreciate them a little more.

I think that Dallas is a good place for them because there's a lot to do there. There's a lot culturally there. They are making some friends. My dad's taking his little Torah class. My mom's a secretary of the Sisterhood, and they're doing their thing.

RH: So, really, the Jewish community is embracing them. They're making their connections to the Jewish community.

LB: Really, everybody that we came in contact with, the (Rosens?), who gave the house, my parents still talk with them. The (Baynashes?), which is Amy, my mom still talks to them, even though they moved off the street. Sandra, who adopted us. Sandra's friend Elizabeth – they still go out and do some things. And they're okay. I guess they're better than to be expected. Remember, we're the lucky ones.

RH: It's a hard thing to keep in mind, but I will try. You've got a sale sign on the front of your house, and you already mentioned that you guys are trying to work it out to leave, and you talked a little about the decision-making process in that and you've picked Park City, Utah.

LB: We have picked Park City, Utah, with Boise, Idaho, as a second.

RH: Tell me about that and why.

LB: Well, we spent the summer traveling. We've been to Dallas. I've spent some time in Dallas. Dallas is not my kind of town. It's a nice town, lots to offer, but it's really big. It's almost like scary big, in the sense when you drive on the expressway, and you come across one of these huge intersections. Jewish community is fabulous. Can't get better than that, I don't think. We went to Austin. Austin is nice. We went to Charlotte, North Carolina, very nice. We went to Memphis. We went to Nashville. I've been to Chicago. I love Chicago. But the bottom line is, all in all, I made a list of things – what do I want out of a city? If I get to pick, what do I want, right? I get to pick.

RH: Right. [laughter] So what was on that list?

LB: I could show you the list. The list consists of a nice Jewish community. It doesn't have to be big – active is probably a better word. An active Jewish community. Nice weather, which is the key. It is hot here. I don't remember it being so hot. In the Spike Lee movie, and I've heard people say it here – Africa-hot here. It has been Africa-hot here. I don't remember being so affected when I was my kids' age because we'd be out all day. But I want him to go outside and play. It's hot. I want to take Zachary out for a walk, and it's hot, and it's muggy. So, that being said, it's hot, and we want a little change in that department. I wasn't a drinker. This is a big drinking town for kids. I was never one of those. Maybe when I got in my college years maybe a little more. But I'm really scared of that for my sons, and I don't really think that's what I want for them. At least, I want them to have other options. Go ahead and break your leg skiing or something else like that, a little more adventuresome if you will. I'm very adventurous. I've bungee jumped. I've SCUBA dove. I practically run with the bulls. If I was there, I would have run with the bulls, that sort of thing. Knowing somebody, we have decided, is very important. We know somebody in Park City, which is Tad's old business partner, and our best friends, Kim and Gary Wiener, are in Boise. The good thing is there's just five hours between the two cities. Park City's nicer than Boise. Park City's more expensive. But Tad was more excited about the building opportunities and what he saw was being built there. He was excited about that. As Tad would say, he thinks Boise is more like Baton Rouge. But you go an hour in any direction from Boise, and you can go whitewater rafting, and you can go skiing, you can go duck hunting. I'm not a duck hunter, but they're more outdoorsy there. They have a really cool old synagogue, probably the oldest one west of the Mississippi. Their rabbi wears Doc Martens or whatever it is to synagogue. What are the shoes?

RH: Doc Martens.

LB: One of them. What else about Park City? Oh, then all the things that New Orleans isn't. It's clean. The people are polite. My major problem with it, it is lily white, lily-white, and that is so strange coming from a place like this. I like people of color. I like different cultures. Applebee's is not my choice to go for fine dining, but it's a give-and-take. Charlotte was nice. Charlotte fit the bill for a lot of things, but we didn't know anybody in Charlotte. We didn't know anybody there. They did have a nice community. Great community. Let me rephrase that. They had a nice JCC. Nice synagogue.

RH: So, you went around on this summer tour.

LB: Yes, we did.

RH: Did you go tell the Jewish community or different people, “We're coming to visit?”

LB: We didn't tell them when we're going, but when we showed up, that was pretty much the first or second place we went to.

RH: You went to JCC?

LB: JCC.

RH: And said, “We're from New Orleans.”

LB: “We’re from New Orleans. We're coming to check out your city. What you got?”

RH: And they would –?

LB: “Come, let us show you. Here's the name of a realtor. This is where all the Jewish people are.” That’s what we would say. “Where are the Jewish people? Where do they live? Not that we're going to live there, but we don't want to be too far.” Zachary's going to go to nursery school. We want to have play dates, and you don't want to be living in East Jesusville. You don't want to be living so far away.

RH: Literally, in that case.

LB: Yeah, and they were great. Even in Charlotte I ran into Thea, and Thea was the Athletic Director of the JCC, and that's where she ended up.

RH: Are you talking about the Metairie campus of the JCC? I just wanted to clarify.

LB: Where I worked?

RH: Yeah.

LB: Both. My office was uptown, but I ran programs in both. In both. Anyway, yeah, we decided to go around and check it all out. I would have voted for Chicago because I like Chicago. It's big, but I like Chicago. But too cold. Too cold. And Boise, as my friend Gary, who just left, would tell you, is a high desert. So it doesn't really get below forty. That's not so bad. Not so bad.

RH: So you're really going to make yourself over. Taking this moment of Katrina to begin a new life.

LB: Well, it's an opportunity. I think I'm tired of being – I've never been particularly depressed about it, but I'm really tired of living in this moment. I'm really tired of living in post-Katrina. It's very wearisome. Everywhere you go, everywhere you see, nearly every moment of every day has something to do with Katrina. Silly stuff. There's a restaurant on Harrison Avenue, which is in Lakeview, that just reopened. I said, “Oh, good, look, they opened up. I'll stop by and get a menu.” So I grabbed a menu, I'm driving away, and looking at the men. It's two-sided. I'm like, “Ooh, they have a big menu. That's good.” So, I flip it over, and the other half is in Spanish. I had to laugh. I just had to laugh. It's fine there are Hispanic people here, but just I had to laugh. They're doing so much business that it had to be –

RH: It's different, though. It's not the city you grew up in.

LB: Oh, I would care less. It was just funny. It was just funny. On the same token, things are the same. I got off the airport coming here, still on the verge of trying to decide if I was going to stay or if I was going to go and went to the bathroom in the airport. It was so nasty. I know that they just had billions of people there. I took that into account. It didn't look any different than when we left. Just how poorly things are run, the lack of money. If this LRA [Louisiana Recovery Authority] money comes and is a godsend to the city, thank you. There's a lot of smart people here. There's a lot of capable people here. I don't know what it is about this town that just has such trauma over it. Even pre-Katrina, all the bad things. I don't know. I don't know if Atlanta is such a great thing. It has a nice population. Doesn't have the charm New Orleans has. I don't know.

RH: Was Atlanta one of the ones you looked at?

LB: Didn't even consider it. Yeah, didn't even consider it. I wanted to go to the Southern North, the Northern South – whatever you want to say because I wanted that change of seasons. I know there's Jewish people there. I think it's beautiful. I'm a green kind of person. The bottom line is, we can always come back.

RH: Is your son in the Jewish day school right now?

LB: Yes.

RH: How do you feel about that?

LB: About him being there or how it's doing?

RH: Yeah, it's smaller.

LB: Well, it was never gigantic. Well, that was a really big dilemma because Benjamin tested into Lusher, and Lusher is like the public school to go to. It's a magnet school. He

tested in, and so you have to test in if you don't live in the district, and the older you get, the harder it is to get back in. I was petrified because I moved this kid. He left nursery school, went to a new school for two weeks, left there, didn't go to school for a week. Then started school. I wasn't crazy about it, so I took him out, sent him to Solomon Schechter; then we came back in February. Went to Lusher. Moved him all over the place. But I really wanted him to be settled. And it's like, what happens if the school folds and they don't open up again? It was like, “Well, I'm leaving anyway,” That's part of what I said. Then, I think he would probably test-in again if it did fold. But I can't make all of my decisions – you can consider things in the future, but you're going to get yourself bogged down by that. I think everybody should send their kids to the Jewish day school because I think it's a wonderful experience for them. He comes home singing every day. And that's a great thing. He’s singing Hebrew songs, no less. That's awesome. So, I feel good about it.

RH: Do you ever worry about how small the classes are? You're a person who went to McMain, and you've done the tiny three-person class.

LB: Yeah, sort of. I think that there's two schools of thought. I think that my goal for my child is that he has a firm connection to Judaism. I want him to feel comfortable in any synagogue or any Jewish situation that he goes to. Where kids get that, I think, is their first through fourth year in school, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth. After that, if the bed is not laid, then it's got to be something else. So, I have that opportunity to do that for him. As far as the size goes, it's K through Third, which used to be K-8, had nearly a hundred kids before; they've got twenty-one now. It really is more like one big class. That's pretty much why he's going to Sunday school. I think it's his choice because he sees his friends. So he did come home today and say, “Okay, I already know everything they're teaching.” I'm like, “Yeah, you're there for your friends.” Hopefully it'll grow. But if I don't set an example and do what my heart tells me to do which, is the right thing and I feel that this is what's good for my kid [inaudible] kid ought

to be doing, well then I better do it. If not me, who? Right? My husband's like, "I think he ought to go to Lusher." [laughter] He's not going to Lusher, baby, he's going to the day school. He's happy with it. He's okay with it.

RH: So, you're talking a little bit about what you want for your kids. Where do you want your family to be in five years? And that's you, too.

LB: My immediate family?

RH: Yeah.

LB: I don't want this to be part of our life anymore. I don't want it to be a daily – not daily struggle, it's not a struggle – certainly a struggle for me compared to where it is [for] everybody. In five years, Zachary will be six, which is pretty much where Benjamin is now; it's a year away from where he is now. Well, I have a real concern about – this is more future – what will Zachary hear about this experience, and how will it affect him, or will it even affect him? I don't know. That's always been weighing on my mind like how will this interview affect him when he sees it if he's thirteen, or if he's twenty. He's probably not going to see it before then, but what does he think? I want my family to be happy and productive. I want them to – Tad, my husband, and I are very close, and we have a lot of fun together. I think we need to work more together because our office is a mess. But I would like him, my husband, to be happy in what he's doing and be fulfilled because he's really coming into his own in what he's doing. In five years, Benjamin will be, I don't know, thirteen; I guess coming close to his bar mitzvah, that's a scary thought. That is a scary thought. I would like him to have his bar mitzvah in Israel actually.

RH: Why is that?

LB: I think it's cool. The bad thing about it is that at that age is kids want their friends around them. But I would probably tell him, assuming what finances are, "Okay, fine, this is what Mommy wants because Mommy thinks it's really cool. And it really is really cool.

You have to trust me on that," because he probably wouldn't have gone to Israel by then. "But in lieu of a big party, bring four of your friends, and we'll do it that way." For Zachary, he'll be entering kindergarten. I want him to be a happy, industrious little boy.

RH: So, will he be in a Jewish day school in Park City?

LB: If he would be, it wouldn't be in Park City, it'd be in Salt Lake. Salt Lake is half an hour away. I don't know if Salt Lake has a day school, but I know that they have a Jewish Federation and a Jewish Family Service there. So, Salt Lake is the big city right next door to Park City, and that's where all the stuff happens. If there is, yeah, that's where he's going. Until fourth grade I think that's where he is going to feel happy. Each kid's different. You never know.

RH: I'm going to go back a second here. When you call a bar mitzvah in Israel cool, what do you mean by cool? Define it for you.

LB: Have you been to Israel?

RH: Yes, I have.

LB: Did you think it was cool?

RH: Yeah.

LB: Maybe you want me to say it for the camera. I remember just being a kid and singing about Israel – "David Melech Israel" – singing about Israel, and then going, "Okay, what is the big deal? I live in America. What is the big deal?" Somebody [said], "This is where our people's from. If you're Italian, it's okay to love Italy and to feel that way." I said, "Well, that's not what I mean. I just don't really feel it." But when you walk off the airplane or go to the Wall, it's amazing. I haven't been there since I was eighteen. It's really time to go back. Tad's never been. We really should go. And why didn't we

go – I went to Europe twice instead – I'll never really remember. But why is it important? I guess it's important for him to know about – at different [ages], you have different experiences with things. I could take him now, and it's not going to be the same thing as when he goes. I went as a teenager, on the teenage trip, a pilgrimage or whatever it was, and then I went back again when I was eighteen. So, long ago, twenty-two years ago. But to be part of that. I did meet a very nice Israeli family in Dallas I became friendly with. Their children went to the same first school that Benjamin went to and played soccer with them. I've kept in touch with them. Then, when I was working at the JCC, a lot of Israelis would come through, and I've kept in touch with them. So, I just think it's important. It's what Jewish people do, and there's a reason for it, and there's a reason why we have this feeling inside for us. If you haven't been there, you don't know what I'm talking about. You really don't have an idea what you're talking about.

RH: I think we can start to think about some questions that'll take us home, and one question is just about home. What you've been through, do you ever think about home, what you want home to be, what home means to you now?

LB: It's a many-faceted question because we just talked about Israel, and my first instinct is, well, Israel is my home. When it comes down to it, Israel is my home. When you come down to it, New Orleans is my home. But New Orleans isn't such a good home, I think. I am who I am because my parents taught me, and I don't know how they feel about living in New Orleans. I think they ended up here because my dad went to Tulane, and maybe that's where the action was for the Civil Rights Movement maybe, that's where it was, and there's many beautiful things about this town, and I'm not talking about the French Quarter. I'm talking about the people; the people are really great. But there's nice people in lots of other places too. Has it redefined home? I would say home is my Jewish community. That's what I would say because you walk in, and it's always the same to some degree. You know what I mean? They have the mezuzah on the door, and they have some Jew [inaudible] whatever. That's what I think.

RH: Wow.

LB: I'm laughing, going, "Wow, what?" What are you wowing about?

RH: Well, it's the community that certainly you seem to be – well, let me ask it this way. Through this crisis, are you proud of the Jewish community?

LB: Absolutely. Because, well, I really had the most experience with the Jewish Family Service in Dallas when the people – I really want to give them credit. I was amazed. Here's Jewish Family Service. Here's fifty dollars in cash and a check. We're not supposed to give cash, but the guy didn't have a check. Okay, whatever. They were giving in an organized manner to whoever needed it. To whoever needed it. You could see the lines out there. I don't really know. I've left them messages. I haven't really talked to them too much. But they're really trying to do their darnedest to get everybody situated. I mean everybody. There was definitely an emphasis on the Jewish people, but they didn't turn anybody away.

RH: And how about the Jewish community here in New Orleans?

LB: Well, I am very proud. There's probably a lot more people that I don't know about, but I was involved in my own little thing. Adam Bronstone, who left – I wish him well – worked tirelessly. Will Samuels realized he didn't flood, and I heard he was out in a food line giving food away. He was the first one in the synagogue, just taking care of business, what had to be done. I think that's great. I think it's not a dilemma, but if you're a Jewish community dealing with Jewish things, you're going to take care of your Jewish community and then anything else that comes around. You know what I mean? But I'm very touched by the Jewish communities who sent things. Like, who's the guy who makes the menorahs and the dreidels? I want to say Rosenthal, but I don't think that's it. I think that's the crystal guy. There's somebody who makes the dreidels, and he brought all his dreidels down, and then all the Sunday school kids made mezuzot and made

mezuzahs for everybody. Then I was just at the JCC for something else, and they had a whole display for honey-holders and whatever for people who lost everything. Debbie's like, “Take one.” I said, “I can't take one. I said I didn't lose anything. I didn't lose a thing,” well, except for my baby. But that doesn't count because I already have a menorah. It's funny when I say that. But I think that's great. Unfortunately, it's usually a tragedy that binds people together. I think that's the reality of it. People called me. My friend in New Jersey fell off her treadmill when she saw me. I hadn't seen her for a long time. It was funny. Then my friend who I was talking to on the phone, Jennifer – “Okay, you lost your baby, and you’re going on CNN.” Then she turns on the television, and I got the baby back. She’s like, “I'm not getting it. What happened?” Anyway, I digress. It's such a – what is it when it's two-sided? To see what you see on television, well, I was going to say to see what you see on television with all these people stuck with nothing. And then to, on the other hand, be provided with almost everything I need. I remember my mother saying, “Aren't you just so glad you're part of the Jewish community?” I'm like, “Hell, yes, I am, thank you.” But what I'm not mentioning or what doesn't get mentioned are all the heroes and the good people that did things. You never really hear about that, and that frustrates me, and that's why I wanted to tell the story because it was a good story. There were a lot of good people who did a lot of things – police and otherwise and everybody.

RH: What do you hope for this Jewish community? What are your best hopes for this community?

LB: My best hope is that it'll polarize. I'm really concerned about Shir Chadash. I sat next to Mrs. Rifkin at Weight Watchers this morning and we had talked a little bit. So I don't really know what the state of her end of things is, but there they had Torah Academy, and Torah Academy started, but they were talking of merging Torah Academy and the day school. They can't seem to get it together because there's a little problem of science and creationism versus the dinosaurs and how they would teach that. So, they

just can't get it together. It's interesting.

RH: So your hope is that they get it together?

LB: Well, people say it's just not going to work. That might be asking too much. I hope for the – well, I hope the Jewish community doesn't go away because I know that a lot of the southern Jewish communities do shrink. I don't think that'll ever happen. I don't think that'll ever happen. I think the Reform congregations are stronger, much stronger. I think that they're moving towards a more Conservative way of doing things. My understanding is the Conservatives are moving to a little more Reform way of doing things. So, eventually, they were going to meld anyway. Arlene Barron will love this – I hope that more people belong to the JCC. She's the Director at the JCC because I think that it is a very neutral point for people to get together. I hope they'll go and prosper, go and become, live and become, which is going to be a very good movie for the film festival, Live and Become – a great phrase. I'll let you find out about that on your own.

RH: Are you working on the film festival?

LB: Yes, I'm on the film festival committee. I ran it a couple years, and now they've asked me to be on it. So, I'm excited about that. I'm very excited about the book fair that's coming up. I didn't mention it earlier, but I am working. I'm working at the Jewish Family Service. I just started. I'm going to be working in their Teen Life Counts program. It's for teens to be aware of the signs of suicide and what to do if their friends start looking depressed or acting depressed, thinking about that. Then my other job is to do the Oneg Shabbat for the day school. So, on Friday afternoons at 2:00, I do all the blessings, light the candles, tell them a story, sing some songs with them, and then send them home ready for Shabbat.

RH: So, while you're here, you're busy. This is your community.

LB: Right. Well, I just started. Yeah. It's kind of hard to live and work in the same community, but it's good. Most people I come across are wonderful people. I'm glad to do it, and my son loves having me around. Initially I was going to go teach. I was going to be a teacher's aide. But that was going to be too much because that was going to be 9:00 to 3:00 or something like that, and that was going to be too much.

RH: Is there anything that you've learned about yourself through this amazing year?

LB: Well, I'm still looking at this denial thing with Zachary, wondering if it's a good thing or a bad thing or whether it just is, and we can just move on. About myself? I've never been a really big materialistic person. I like things. Of all the people, I'd probably been the easiest to have it all washed away and move on. I've always been pretty strong. Finding out that I can't handle any more pain is kind of sad. I was going to say it's kind of sad. I really can't handle that. I'm a very loyal person, and to seemingly walk away from New Orleans bothers me. But I'm not the only one in our family, and I have to do what's right for my kids – what I perceive is right. I can always move back. But you asked if anything has changed. I think turning forty and this experience focuses the need for participating in the Jewish community. It's always been there, but it needs people to participate, and you can't just be a sponge and accept it. You have to be part of it, and it's a requirement for us to be part of it and to do your share.

RH: So, while you're here, you're feeling a responsibility to build up this community.

LB: Well, I did the JFS job because it was a little more akin to what I was used to doing. I was doing stuff at the JCC, but it wasn't social work. It was social work but in a different definition. But I'm doing the Oneg Shabbat because they need somebody to do it, and I have to step up to the plate, and they're paying me for it, but they really didn't have to pay me for it. We're the lucky ones. We're the lucky ones, and we're the strong ones, and we're the ones that have to do.

RH: What are you most grateful for right now?

LB: Right now? Well, I'm in a training on Friday, the teen suicide training, prevention. She said, "What are you grateful for?" I was just looking around and saying I'm so glad that I can see in color. It's such an odd thought, but I was thinking about being blind or something like that. I'm grateful for my health. I'm grateful for my everything. I'm perfect. What else can I ask for? What else can I ask for? I have parents who love me. I have a husband who adores me. Two beautiful kids. I'm not bad to look at. I'm fairly intelligent. I'm healthy. I have a conscience. I have a heart. All the bits and pieces that make me. I'm grateful for all of this. I thank God every day. Every day. Because I know what it's like for other people, and that's why. I know what it is like. I don't know how I got so lucky. I really don't know. I do know what goes around comes around. Maybe that has something to do with it. But if I ever see an opportunity to do something for somebody else, I act on it, and it's not because – I don't know if people in the Jewish community like me saying this. There's no thanks necessary. If you thank me, it's because you feel the need to thank me. For example, I hate it when people have to have their names on buildings. Then I thought, well, if you're really wealthy and you don't put your names on the building, then everybody's going to think you're a miser. Maybe that's why. There's no need to do that. It's all not necessary. But anyway, what am I grateful for? What am I grateful for? Most grateful for? I think I'm most grateful for my strength because if I didn't have that, then I probably wouldn't be able to do everything else. It's a steppingstone. Then I think everything comes from that. And my education. Yeah, my parents. See, I always go down the line. My parents. But I think that by being strong and by being healthy and by having that it enables me to do other things.

RH: Is there anything else you want to add to this interview?

LB: Well, we talked because I was really scared to do the interview and scared of what I was going to say. I think it went all right.

RH: I think so, too.

LB: I just wish it would all go away. I don't want to talk about it anymore. People really want to know out of the goodness of their hearts every day. I don't know, maybe that's why I feel the way I do, because you keep getting asked, and you have to keep telling the story, then you still have to keep your guard up dealing with it. I'm sure as soon as we turn the camera off, I'm going to think of something to say. I'm just the lucky one, and I wish I had a magic wand to make it all go away. It's so hard when your friends – I think time heals all wounds, and we just got to keep going. I guess I thank you for the opportunity, and I hope it's what you thought it would be or something like that. I didn't really say thank you to everybody like I wanted to say thank you because there are a lot of people. I don't know if it was the pilot or the nurse, the flight nurse, or whatever, who burst into the hospital room to just check on Zachary one more time before she flew away. It's like little pictures like that come to your head. Nurse Colleen. And Nurse Sue. But why don't we meet back here in five years and see where we all are? Nice thought. Who knows where we'll all be, but this is just one time, and it's a year. Kind of hard to believe it's a year. But I think everything's going to be okay. I guess we're done. I don't know. Do you have any more questions?

RH: Thank you.

LB: You're welcome.

RH: Given a beautiful interview.

LB: Oh, thank you.

RH: Really very appreciative.

LB: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]