Jonathan Cohen Transcript

Stuart Rockoff: Just talk in a normal voice.

Jonathan Cohen: I am talking in a normal voice. [laughter] Hello, hello. A little echoey in here.

SR: It is October 11th, 2007. This is Stuart Rockoff. We're in the dining hall – what's it called?

JC: Dining hall.

SR: No, what's the Israeli word?

JC: Chadar Ochel.

SR: Okay. I'm here at the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, and I'm here with Jonathan Cohen. Do you agree to be interviewed for Project of Katrina's Jewish Voices?

JC: Yes.

SR: You do so willingly?

JC: Yes.

SR: I want to start with some easy questions, and [inaudible] state officially for the record, please tell us your name, where you were born, and where you grew up.

JC: My name is Jonathan Cohen. I was born in Howard Beach, New York. I grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi, and grew up in Mississippi, left for a while, and have been back in Mississippi now for several years.

SR: What's your job?

JC: I'm the Director of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp.

SR: How long have you been the Director?

JC: Coming on eight years as Director.

SR: This might become important, it might not, but tell me who your wife is and what her position is.

JC: My wife is Valerie Cohen. She is the Senior Rabbi at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson.

SR: Since I've gotten you sort of under oath, if you will, I'm curious, tell me about how you became – this is an easy story – how you became a Jewish professional? How does a kid from Tupelo end up in the Jewish world?

JC: That's a great question. My Jewish professional journey started here at Jacobs Camp when I was a teenager, both when I was a high school student coming as a camper and when I was a staff member. Every summer somebody from Hebrew Union College would come to camp and recruit. The then director, Macy Hart, would always stick me in the room with the recruiter to talk about Jewish professional opportunities, and I ended up at the School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, and from there went on to work in camping, first in camping in Texas, and then in youth work in New York, and then that brought me back here.

SR: So you've been involved in Jacobs Camp for a long time. So, let's think about prior to the storm, prior to Katrina. Talk about what role New Orleans, New Orleans' Jewish community played in the camp and the region.

JC: Okay. Are you going to ask me about previous hurricane evacuations?

SR: No.

JC: Well, you should.

SR: Okay.

JC: Okay. Well, the Jacobs Camp was founded in the summer of 1970, but its roots go back to the mid-1950s, when Jewish parents, initially from the Mississippi Delta, started getting together, talking about establishing a camp for their kids. The Jews from the Delta tried, and they knew they needed to get more people at the table. So one of the first big partnerships they made was an outreach from Mississippi to New Orleans to a gentleman by the name of Henry S. Jacobs, who was the youth director at the time at Temple Sinai in New Orleans. They got him involved in the fundraising for the project, and he became not just a fundraiser but a real believer in the project and passed away a couple of years before the camp opened, and they named the camp in his memory. Since that time, New Orleans was a key part of building the camp and has always represented a good quarter of the camper population, and that includes all the congregations combined.

SR: We'll get to the previous evacuations. But let's get to Katrina, and we'll circle back. Do you remember when you first heard about the storm, when that first sort of came onto your personal radar?

JC: Yeah. I first started hearing about it, it must have been the Tuesday or Wednesday before. We had had a little bit of history of people from New Orleans coming to Jacobs Camp as an evacuation place, and so those people started calling, saying, "Just in case we get evacuated, can we come to Jacobs Camp?" So we were tuned into it as early as Tuesday or Wednesday. It was Friday that we started making housing arrangements. We had a group that was coming in that weekend for an event. We had to consult with them about how to handle having the extra people in the camp. It was one of the, I'm

now blanking on the name of the church, but it was a largely African-American church out of Jackson that was having a church picnic here with five hundred people on that Sunday before the storm. So we were in touch with them. I came out to camp on Saturday and began putting up sign-in sheets, posting where housing was available, and trying to make arrangements for people, because we started having evacuees roll in here on Saturday.

SR: So, this had happened before, people would come up. How did it become known as sort of a shelter?

JC: Initially, the first time it happened, which was before I got here, it started out with basically a group of people from the Northshore Congregation in Mandeville, who were talking to each other about where they should evacuate, and they called the camp and said could they come to the camp, and they ended up here. So word had spread around the New Orleans Jewish community that Jacobs is a place you could go on your way out of New Orleans to evacuate. That's a part of it. The other part of it is that starting in 2001, we had a contracted arrangement with this place called the Davis Developmental Center. Now, the last time a hurricane rolled through New Orleans, which I guess was in the mid to late '90s, after that hurricane, they required all residential facilities in the greater New Orleans area to have a documented evacuation plan. A contract with an institution to which they would go in case they needed to evacuate, and we became the evacuation site for this Davis Developmental Center. Davis Developmental Center, by the way, no longer exists. It was wiped out by the storm. The Davis Center was a center for developmentally disabled adults, residential treatment, and residential care. They found us, very interestingly, Henry S. Jacobs' grandson was one of the residents at the Center. That's how they found us. When their board started looking for a place, his son Roger Jacobs, who recently passed away as well, Roger said, we should go to Jacobs Camp. That's a place where we can go. We had had a relationship with them, this was actually the second time that the Davis Center had evacuated to us, and there had been several almost evacuations over the course of that five or six-year period we were in

contract with them.

SR: Are they a Jewish organization?

JC: No, they are not.

SR: Okay. Wow, so there's that kind of relationship. Then you have the huge, five-hundred-person church event, and then who else was coming up from New Orleans?

JC: We had just an assortment of Jewish families from New Orleans. At one point, we had the rabbi and the cantor from Touro Synagogue, as well as members of that congregation. A number of people from the North Shore, Gates of Prayer families, and a few Sinai families. Some people passed through on their way, and they kind of checked – one of the things about that evacuation was people were evacuating while they were making plans. So people would end up here for a couple of hours and sort of use this as a base to figure out where they were going to go from there. But we had probably on Saturday, we probably had seventy to eighty people roll in here Saturday before the storm. During the day on Sunday, in addition to the residents and staff of the Davis Developmental Center, which was about seventy people, we had another – I've got to do my math – probably another hundred people roll through here on Sunday. So by the time Monday morning rolled around, we had about 250 people on the grounds, who were staying here.

SR: Now of the Jews, how many of them had camp ties? You know, either had sent their kids there or –

JC: Maybe a third. Maybe a third, maybe half.

SR: How did they hear about Jacobs?

JC: The congregations had sent out an email saying that Jacobs Camp is a place you can go.

SR: So what did you do to prepare for this onslaught [inaudible]?

JC: Well, we did several things. We made sure our housing was in order. We pulled out a lot of linens and had a lot of linens and sheets ready to go. It was soon after camp, so we still had a lot of food in the freezer, so food wasn't really too much of an issue, at least initially for that first crowd, not knowing how long they were going to be there. But we had food. We made sure everything was turned on, pulled out linens, put up some sign-up sheets, and then sort of let it happen. We didn't really have a system for it. People were calling and saying, "Can I have a room?" We just sort of took the – they showed up, put them in a room, and filled the beds as they came.

SR: Did you have plenty of space for them or – ?

JC: Yeah. Well, we have over three hundred beds on the property. We had room for everybody.

SR: So you had enough room

JC: That's correct. Can I mention something about the church picnic?

SR: Please.

JC: So there was this large church picnic here, and we had communicated with them that we were going to have all of these extra people, and the minister when he had all of his congregation together out in the breezeway outside the dining hall, which was his 500 people plus our 125 at that point, he stood up and said Jacobs Camp was taking in evacuees. Please don't take so much food the first time you go through the buffet, so there's enough food to feed all of these extra people, and they had a lot of food. There

was a lot of food eaten that day. But they embraced having the extra 125 people who just happened to be at camp at the same time. So it was a nice little bonus.

SR: So when they got here, they got here Saturday and Sunday, what did they do?

JC: Well, Sunday afternoon, the fact that there was this church picnic going on made for a little bit of action, but mostly they just hung out together. They just visited each other. There was a lot of monitoring the TV and the radio. We still had power on Sunday, everything was hunky dory. So people were in the staff lounge watching satellite TV or listening to the radios, and sort of talking. You know, people expected to be here for a couple of days and then leave, so they were just making friends, visiting with each other, and waiting it out.

SR: I guess you didn't have an idea, but did you have a sense of how long these people were going to stay or how long the process was going to be?

JC: I was fairly certain it was going to be a big storm. No one knew what was going to happen in New Orleans for sure, but we knew it was going to be a big storm. But in past evacuations, we'd ended up with people here for two or three, maybe four nights, depending on the situation. That's what we were assuming. The storm would come through, and then probably by Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, people would be on their way back home.

SR: This might be a dumb question, [but] it might be a good question. Did you charge them, and did it cost to stay per night?

JC: No, we didn't charge. No, we didn't charge at all. The Davis Center had a financial arrangement with us, but that was more of a rental thing. But everyone else, we invited them to give a donation, but we didn't ask anyone to pay.

SR: What do you remember about the night before the hurricane? Were there any particular events or activities or things that kind of stick out?

JC: No. Really no. Really it was everyone just waiting.

SR: Where were you? Were you here at camp?

JC: I came here on Saturday and stayed here. I went home, I actually went home Monday afternoon during the storm, but we'll come back to that. But I came out here to be organizing, and to be on-site, and to be available. My assistant director at the time was at a bar mitzvah in New Orleans –

SR: This was –?

JC: Abram. Abram Orlansky was at a bar mitzvah in New Orleans, so I was the person here.

SR: So where was your family?

JC: Family was back in Jackson. My wife and kids were at home doing whatever they were doing at home.

SR: So Monday, when did you go back?

JC: I left camp, I left the grounds, I was here until around 2:30, 3:00 in the afternoon. Yeah, [laughter] I drove in the storm – it wasn't my intention to drive in the storm. I was here when the storm moved in, which was around midday that the storm moved in, and I just needed to go home and make sure my family was taken care of. So, had food service people here, had my maintenance people here, by that time my assistant director

was here, and we got everyone settled, had made sure everyone had a bed, arranged for meals, and I drove back to Jackson in, well, it was in the heart of the storm. I didn't realize it, but as I was driving up I-55, I saw a billboard blow away, I saw a transformer blow on the side. We actually had just on that Friday before, taken – no, that morning, excuse me, that morning had taken our daughter to the doctor, and she had a prescription, and I went to the pharmacy where the prescription was, and at that point, they had already lost power. It's funny to talk about it now, but I was basically banging on the door, going, "I need medicine for my baby." [laughter] They let me in, and I paid cash for the medication, and they wrote out the paperwork, and I took the medication home and was in the house with my wife and kids while the storm was rolling through Jackson.

SR: When did the camp lose power?

JC: Lost power early Monday afternoon.

SR: So, how did you stay in touch with camp when you were up in Jackson?

JC: I went back to Jackson and encouraged my wife – basically, after dealing with everyone here, went back and helped make arrangements for my wife and kids to leave Jackson as well, at least while the power was out. Because we lost power here a lot earlier than there, but once the power went out there, we started working on trying to get to Jackson. Cell phones were still working, and that was really lucky, so I was able to call people here on cell phones and the like. But that Monday night, I just stayed at home.

SR: So, where did your family end up?

JC: Valerie and the kids left early Tuesday morning for Memphis. They stayed with some people in Memphis for a few days. The power in our house came back on Wednesday or Thursday.

SR: Of course, I know this, but just for the historical record, how far is Utica from Jackson? How long is the drive?

JC: It's about a forty-five-minute drive in fine conditions.

SR: In the hurricane, how long did it take?

JC: It took me about an hour and ten minutes. Plus, the stop at the drug store.

SR: Were there other cars along the way or –?

JC: Yeah, there was a lot of traffic. It wasn't jam-packed, but there were trucks – there were cars and trucks out on the road. Yeah. In hindsight, I probably shouldn't have done it, but at the time, it just – you go where your family is. That's what you do.

SR: Did you have any contact with URJ, the Union for Reform Judaism, or other national groups prior to this storm?

JC: I'd had a little conversation with my supervisors in New York just to let them know that I had 250 people in camp and that this was happening. Then after the storm came through Tuesday, they were calling me, and we were in touch with each other, and that was pretty frequent. Plus, there were conference calls happening at the Union for Reform Judaism Headquarters about what their response was going to be. I was on the conference call, I think it was on Wednesday – it was either Wednesday or Thursday – with all of the rabbis and congregational presidents. It was a conference call, but it happened pretty quickly. So they were very on top of it, I was their guy in the field. I was the one who was here.

SR: Going back to the power, so when the camp lost power, were you prepared for that? How did you deal with it?

JC: We were not prepared for it. We did not have any generators on the property at the time. Really the first day we were fine without power, it was coming into Tuesday, late Tuesday, when we started running out of water, that's when it became a real crisis – because we pump our own water. So once we lost power, we couldn't pump water. So one of the things I did on Tuesday when I got back here was calling anyone I could to get my hands on a generator. We ended up with a contact in Memphis who loaded two generators into somebody's car and a camp alum who loaded two generators into a car and drove them down here. We had those portable generators here on Tuesday night.

SR: Were they gasoline-powered?

JC: They were gasoline-powered generators. On Wednesday – I might be messing up, no, it was Wednesday – and then Wednesday night, we had also, there was a member of the National Camp Committee at the time who was an executive at Home Depot, and he was arranging for us to get a big commercial generator. He was working on getting a commercial generator to us. It was very interesting because he had arranged for a generator out of the Depot in Atlanta, and they were going to load it onto a truck at 6:00 in the morning, and FEMA came in at 5:00 in the morning and laid claim to all the generators. So they called the Dallas Depot, and they were able to pull it off the shelf before FEMA walked into that Depot too. So there was a big generator on its way here on Wednesday.

SR: How'd you get fuel for it? Did you have, you know, any problems getting fuel?

JC: Yeah. I mean, it was hard to get gasoline. There was a lot of creative ingenuity happening with the people in the camp. We ended up with a very interesting mix of skills. We had a doctor and a psychiatrist here. We had people who were in business. We had a computer programming expert, so when the power came back on he was pulling up people's houses, you know, using satellite imagery on computers, and doing all this stuff. We had someone who was, she was just a wheeler and dealer, and she went

looking for gas and convinced a gas station in Crystal Springs to consider us – at that point, the gas stations were pretty – that gas station was restricted to authorities, to police, and fire, and the like, and she convinced them to consider Jacobs Camp, as an evacuation center, an emergency place. So we were able to go there and get gas. It was kind of a weird arrangement. I remember being in a gas line on Tuesday because I drove out here and then went into Vicksburg to get gas and ended up in line for about an hour and a half at a gas station just to try and fill up my truck so I would have at least a vehicle here that was working. So we got our power restored very quickly. We had our power back on late Wednesday night. We were very lucky. The reason we got our power so fast was – it's such a fascinating story. When the camp was founded – now people live out here, but at the time, it was at the end of the road, and the founders of the camp had made a deal with Mississippi Power that if Mississippi Power would run lines to the camp, the camp would pay a flat rate, year-round for, it might have been ten or twenty years, I don't really know what the terms of the contract were. So Mississippi Power ran power lines here in '69 and '70, before the first summer, and they chose the path of least resistance, they put it right next to the road. After here, the people who live down the road from us, the power lines cut through the woods, and it's a whole different thing, but I was able to call the power company, and I had spot-checked the line myself. I drove, I said, I'm driving next to the line, I'm looking at it, everything looks fine and clear. Wednesday night, this Entergy truck pulls into camp, I remember we were all, it was very hot the next day. We would talk, we'd sit there and go, boy, the Lord is – I remember sitting up at 4:00 in the morning on Tuesday sweating. It was so hot, and it was so dry, and going, boy, yesterday it was 150 mile-an-hour winds, today we can't even get a damn breeze. It was so hot, and this truck drove in, and we all, you know, at that point, there were 150, 200 of us at camp, and we all watched this truck drive into camp, and it drove in, and it turned around, and it drove back out. No one got out of the truck, no one talked to them, they never stopped. They were all kind of watching it, and they were up by the front gate. I walked up, and he was just parked there. I said, "What's going on?"

He said, “This light comes on, I get to have dinner. If it doesn’t come on, I have to go back to work,” and he sat there about twenty minutes, and the lights came on, he said, “I’ll see you guys later,” and he left. So we had our power back on Wednesday night. So I turned the generator around, the generator at that point was in Louisiana. I called them and said, “We don’t need it, send it back to somebody else.” We had power Wednesday night, which was a blessing. Now, at this point, we already had generators going on Tuesday night. We were, I, the director of the Davis Developmental Center, and this doctor who had ended up here were all trying to figure out a place for the Davis Developmental Center people to go because with no power, no water, this was a very dangerous place for them to be, and I didn’t want that responsibility on my hands. So we were all trying to find a place for them to go. So they ended up leaving here Wednesday morning. Most of them went to a residential center in Alexandria, I don’t remember the name of it, but they went there. And a few got dispatched somewhere else. It was a weird thing because we were – and that was just sort of happening. There was so much happening in camp that that was just one of the things we were working on. They moved out, and it was like, oh, it’s a relief that they have a better place to go that has some power.

SR: Were you all able to follow the news at all? I mean, after, once you lost power, did folks know what was going on in New Orleans?

JC: Yeah, people were listening to car radios. Someone had a TV they could plug into their car, and they were picking up a signal, and we were keeping track. Plus, everyone’s phones were working, so people were getting lots of information.

SR: So when did you realize this was not going to be just a few-day evacuation?

JC: Once we started seeing the footage of the flooding in New Orleans, that really was the indicator because, with all the New Orleans people here, that meant they weren’t going back anytime soon. It was something.

SR: So, how did you deal with that? I mean, when did you communicate this is not a permanent shelter? How did that – or was it?

JC: I don't know if I ever communicated that. We had people, the longest-staying people, who were here for ten weeks. We had people here through right before Thanksgiving, a few people. The big mass of people, by the end of that week, we had gone from 200, 250, down to about 75 or 80. That 75 or 80 stayed with us for a couple of weeks, and then it went down to about thirty, and then it kind of shrunk from there. But we had people ongoing for a long period of time.

SR: So where did most of these people go?

JC: There were people going to wherever their relatives were. People had places to go, relatives, a family to go to, found them and went there. We had a few people who were waiting to get back into New Orleans because not everything was flooded, so there were people who were able to get back home. I don't remember now when they opened the city, I think it was the next week that they opened the city up. So we actually had people who had evacuated that actually came here and waited here so they could leave early to get into the city the next day.

SR: So of the group that stayed after the Davis Developmental Center left, were they all Jewish, or were the –

JC: Most everyone was Jewish or had some Jewish connection that got them there.

SR: So you basically told them, basically stay as long as you need to?

JC: Correct. Yes. They quickly set up systems to succeed and systems to keep the camp working. That was partly –

SR: Like, what do you mean by that?

JC: I'll tell you. I mean, I will tell you. I mean, it was partly, set up these systems partly to keep themselves busy and to give themselves something to do, and that was really important. So we had, you know, we had a woman who organized a team, and they took over the housekeeping operation. They were doing the cleaning, they were doing the linens, and they were doing laundry, and they were doing all that kind of stuff. We had people who took responsibility for cooking, and I had kitchen staff who were here, but, you know, after five or six days when my kitchen staff had been working non-stop, they said we'll take over and we'll cook for ourselves. There were people doing work around the camp. Also, the people who were here ended up being the first staff members for the Jacobs' Ladder also, because we were – I know we're going to come back to that – the camp was the front office for the Jacobs' Ladder. And so they were staffing the office, and they were, I mean, they ran the camp.

SR: What was their emotional state? Do you remember anything?

JC: Up front, everyone was pretty calm and putting on a good face. Once everyone knew the status of their personal possessions, everything got a lot calmer. But for me, it seemed as if – my assessment of it was that we were witnessing people moving through the stages of grief while they were here. We, by the way, also had two crisis counselors who ended up here.

SR: Just by –

JC: They just evacuated here, and they ended up here. So we had all of these internal resources that were right there to help people, but, I mean, people were just moving through the stages. You know, the not believing it, the doubt, the anger, the acceptance, all those pieces were happening right before our eyes. Everyone was moving through it at a different cycle, and we had a broad age range. We had a pregnant woman, some older senior citizens, and a big range in between. So it was very fascinating. But they were really taking care of themselves. I, by day three or day four, was in the relief supply

business, and I was dealing with that, and they were kind of running camp by themselves. It was interesting, so when people would come into camp later, you know, we had people who would end up here at different times, they would take them in, they would take care of them. I'll tell you one story of many – there was one that was very interesting. The mayor of Utica called me, I think it was, I don't remember the time, Thursday or Friday, and said, "I have a big extended family from the West Bank of Louisiana here in Utica, and we don't have a place for them to sleep, can we send them to you?" I said, "Sure," because I had the beds at that point. They were from Westwego, and they had been at a family reunion in Port Gibson, and when the storm rolled in on Sunday, they had, I think they had one or two cars between them, there were about fifteen or sixteen of them. The best I could tell, because they didn't talk too much about what had happened, they just started walking or traveling north from Port Gibson and ended up in Utica and, you know, just kind of stumbled into town, and Utica was being very active and engaged at that point –

SR: What's the size of Utica?

JC: Utica, pre-Katrina, was 900 or so. Post-storm, it was about 1,500, or about 600 extra people in town. So this family ended up here, and the grandfather was on oxygen, and was essentially an invalid that they were moving around. They had cousins and extended family that had a couple of school-age kids in the group, and –

SR: They were African-American?

JC: They were African-American, and this became a group that everyone else really took in and welcomed, and we were providing medical care for them, and we were providing counseling services, and we were looking for more permanent shelter for them. Everyone

was just so excited to have some other people to serve and to work with, so.

SR: How long did they end up staying?

JC: They were here for about five days, and then they just went back. Westwego was okay, so they went back home.

SR: Was there any –? this is a Jewish camp [inaudible]? Were there any Jewish content or Jewish rituals that were done during this period?

JC: There were a few people who wanted to pray, and so they organized some worship services for themselves. We did a little bit of Shabbat on Friday night with the people who were here. We didn't have a lot of stuff to do that with, but we, you know, we tried to, we got some challah, and we did a little wine, and we let them celebrate Shabbat. Again, some people prayed on Friday night, and some people prayed on Saturday morning. But it wasn't a lot. We weren't being programmatic. We were just trying to keep the place open and deal with everything else going on, so everyone was really fending for themselves. I want to mention about, also, you made me think of it, they were organizing classes for themselves.

SR: What kind of classes?

JC: We had yoga, a woman who did some yoga instructing, and so there were yoga classes going on. Some of them did art, and this computer tech we had was showing other people how to do things on the computer, and they would take hikes, and they would do nature activity – I mean, they really figured out a way to keep themselves entertained, and to keep themselves busy, and to keep themselves distracted. Self-generated completely.

SR: Wow.

JC: Yeah. Forgot about that.

SR: Is there anything else about that period when this was a shelter that you want to talk about? I mean, it seems like there are just so many incredible stories.

JC: I know and sitting here I keep remembering more things that happened.

SR: Yeah, that's fine.

JC: It...well, I was very impressed with the ingenuity, and I think we were very blessed by the range of skills we ended up with, and that to me is, of the ways that God was involved in this process, I think that was one of the ways that God was involved in the process that we ended up with such a mix of people here who had skills that could not only help each other but could help other people as well.

SR: When I evacuated to Houston when Jackson lost power, I ended up staying with my parents, and with the close quarters, and tensions were stressful, and did you ever experience any of that sort of, you know, tensions, problems, and you don't need to name names or anything.

JC: Well, the advantage of having 350 acres is a blessing. There was plenty of room for people to spread out and do what they needed to do, plus everyone had their own housing. After that first weekend, we ended up with an Israeli and his wife from New Orleans. I think they had ended up, I think they had evacuated to Jackson. Yeah, they were in a motel in south Jackson and somehow got connected to the temple in Jackson and ended up here because they needed to get out of the motel. They were in an unsavory part of town. The two of them were just stir-crazy. He was on a mood management medication, well, he was supposed to be, he'd gone off his mood management medication. So we had this couple that was in very deep distress that

came into the community, and within twenty-four hours, the community wanted them out of the community because they had very quickly figured out a way to feel very safe and comfortable with each other, and then on the one hand you had, at the same time you had this family from Westwego show up, but they became part of the family. Then you had this couple, this man in particular, who was in real emotional and psychological distress, who became a distraction to the community, and I essentially had to evict him, which was, you know, for all the many reasons it was a very difficult thing to do, but I also recognized my need to protect the people who were in camp. They had quickly formed a community, and they had taken care of themselves, and here was this stranger who came in. But that was the only time. Otherwise, it was a delightful experience. They became real partners in keeping the camp running, and they were very helpful.

SR: Have you, I mean, were there any lasting bonds that came out of that community? I mean, do folks still stay in touch? I mean, are you aware of anything like that?

JC: I can tell you that the people when I've seen those people who were here, it's a very warm and friendly greeting that we share with each other. The family, the couple that was here the longest, later came back and had Passover with my family. We invited them back because I had become close with them, and after, once about week three or week four, once the Jewish High Holidays rolled around, I was encouraging the people here to go into Jackson so they had a chance to interact with other people and have some community experience. We arranged Rosh Hashanah, and we had people hosting them for meals out of Jackson. Yom Kippur, by that point, the relief side of the operation had twenty or thirty people, I remember having all of those people for pre-Yom Kippur dinner at my house. So they made some connections with each other, but I don't in any way want to claim that they're all lifelong friends because who wants to be reminded, I don't think they wanted to hold onto those friendships so strongly that they wanted to be reminded of what had transpired.

SR: I should probably mention this, but you had said that – don't you have a social work degree as well?

JC: Yes.

SR: So you are sort of an expert, or, you know –

JC: Yes. I was the social worker on the team. We had a psychiatrist, we had a doctor, we had, I was a social worker on the team.

SR: Yeah. Boy, that's an amazing story with that kind of community generated.

JC: Yeah.

SR: Did Hurricane Rita, which came about a month later, have any impact on this?

JC: Yes. We had another hundred evacuees come in here for Hurricane Rita. A few random people we ended up with – the Mayo Clinic had a field hospital set up outside of Lafayette, and that area got evacuated. So we ended up with the Mayo Clinic Field Hospital here for two days. We also ended up with an extended family and their RVs from south Louisiana who were related to my bookkeeper, and so in this end, down here in the dining hall and this end of the camp was, were these, you know, very intense doctors, and nurses, and medical professionals from the Mayo Clinic, and up on the ball field was this very country family that brought their own frozen food and were just kind of cooking for themselves, and it was very interesting. So, again, and it was an extra 80, 100 people rolled in on top of, at that point, about the 50 people who we already had here.

SR: Wow. How long did they stay?

JC: Just over the weekend. That wasn't, that was pretty quick.

SR: So, when did you first hear from the URJ after the storm?

JC: I was in touch with them – before the storm, I was in touch with them.

SR: [inaudible; overlapping dialogue]

JC: I initially was speaking with the Director of the camping system, a gentleman by the name of Paul Reichenbach. His immediate supervisor was Rabbi Dan Freelander, now a Vice President, he was a Vice President of the Union then too. So those were the people I ended up being in touch with, and there was, at that point in New York, they had set up a little task force, and there was a lead person on that task force, a gentleman by the name of David Berkman, who was working in the camping department. He's now a camp director out on the West Coast, but at the time, he was working in New York, and he was the point person in New York for me once things were happening, which were conference calls, initially, conference calls to assess what was happening in New Orleans, and then this decision to get into the world of relief work, and that was all happening very quickly.

SR: How did that decision come about?

JC: Once our power came back on, once our power was restored on Wednesday, I was immediately being flooded with emails, and our phones just started ringing very quickly – actually, let me jump back. People knew what was happening. The first stories about Jews on the frontlines of Katrina were Jacobs Camp stories, and that was because of a very weird sequence of connections, the Foundation for Jewish Camping, which is this umbrella organization of Jewish camps, had a PR firm. The PR firm was the first people to put stories out in the Jewish press about Jacobs Camp having 250 people in the camp when the storm came through. Those stories hit the Jewish press on Wednesday. In the midst of the no power, brutal heat, and sweating, I was being interviewed by a PR firm and by reporters who were calling just trying to get a feel for this for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. People got a call from the New York Times at one point in that first

couple of days. I don't know how they were getting my cell phone number, I guess they were getting it from the Foundation for Jewish Camping. So Wednesday night, we got the email, the phones started ringing, and people just started offering to send stuff. Weren't really clear on what they were offering to send, they were just offering stuff. At that point, once we had power on, the situation here was worlds better, but we were hearing, and we knew what was going on in the communities around us. We knew about Utica and Natchez, and plus everything happening down on the coast, and I said, "Just send it. We'll figure out something to do with it. You want to do this; just send it to us." I was naïve. I didn't know anything about the relief supply business, so people just started saying they were going to ship us stuff. That was happening Wednesday night and Thursday. I mean, I was offered individual pack pita and hummus, which, by the way, never made it here. I was disappointed because I was in the mood for hummus after that. There was a call from a subsidiary of Disney Video that was going to send children's videos, and just clothing and food, and people were just saying, "I just want to do something."

SR: It was intended for people here at camp?

JC: Well, initially. They heard about it, and they were saying, "We know you have people here. Let's help you." I would say, "We're okay now, but we'll get it to people who need it." So it was initially these offers, and that was happening throughout the day on Thursday, along with everything else going on. Then Friday morning, about, 9:00 – it was 8:00 here, it was 9:00 on the east coast, I get a call from David Berkman, who was the point person for the Katrina Task Force – the Disaster Relief Task Force in New York, and he said, "You're getting calls about stuff, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm telling people to send it." He said, "Well, we're getting calls here, too, in New York." I said, "Great, send it, we'll take everything." He said, "I don't think you understand what I'm talking about." He said, "We've got people offering to send 18-wheelers filled with stuff." He's like, "Are you sure you want to do this?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Well, if

you're going to take in 18-wheelers, you need a warehouse, you need a loading dock, you don't want to do this in your gym." A light bulb went off in my head, and I said, "David, I'm going to call you back." I said, "I'm going to call you back in an hour." He said, "Make it fifty-five minutes because I have a meeting in an hour." I got in my car, and I drove to Utica to talk to the mayor. Now, several years ago – again, it's always amazing how you have this accumulated knowledge, and it all comes back to you at once – several years before, we had been looking, exploring the possibility of doing community service during our summer programs in Utica. So I learned a lot about what was in Utica, and one of the things I learned about was that the town owned a warehouse. The building was called ¬– they always referred to it as the shirt factory. The town had built it in the late '60s or early '70s to attract business to town so they could find jobs for people. So they had built this building, the shirt factory had been there through the late '80s, I believe, and had moved out, and the town just owned this vacant building. I had actually been in it the year before with a construction person and a couple of other people. We just sort of went on a tour of stuff that the town owned, and we went into the shirt factory, so I knew that they had this building. I went to town, and I went to City Hall, and sat down with the mayor for five or ten minutes and said, "I want the shirt factory." He said, "What do you want it for?" I said, "I want to bring in relief supplies and move out relief supplies," and he handed me the key. I still have the key, I haven't given it back to him. [laughter]

SR: So there's no rent?

JC: There's no rent. They said, what the deal – I mean, we later formalized more of an arrangement, but at that point, he said, "It's fine. You want to do relief work."

SR: Who was the mayor?

JC: Charles Stokes. Recently got elected to a county position, the County Tax Assessor, but he was the mayor at the time. Initially, on Friday, was just, "I'd like to use

the building." He said, "What are you going to use it for?" I told him. He said, "We'll pay for the power. You do what you need to do. Here's the key." Went down, unlocked it – well, actually, got the key, went back to camp, called David in New York, and said –

SR: All within an hour?

JC: All within an hour. I said, "I have a warehouse. What's next?" And he said, [laughter], "Okay, let me go into this meeting, and I'll call you back." So they go into a meeting, and he calls me back thirty minutes later and says, "Okay, we're in the relief supply business." So Friday afternoon, I mean, the building needed some stuff. It needed to be cleaned, it was very dirty. The doors on the loading dock did not work. It had no fire extinguishers. By the way, I didn't know anything about being in the warehouse business. So, Friday afternoon, we contracted with a company to put in the doors, to put in new rolling doors on the building. I made arrangements with the First Baptist Church in Utica for some people to come out and do a cleaning of the building on Saturday. It was BYOB, Bring Your Own Broom, and made contact in Jackson with Lynn Crystal of Jackson, who, among other things, owns warehouses and was in the warehouse business. So Friday afternoon, I learned the warehouse business. I learned about stacking plans. I learned about – I said, "Here's the shape of the building." I drew them a picture. I faxed it to them. They sent me back a drawing [and] told me exactly how much stuff I could keep in the building. They arranged for a donation. They paid for a forklift so that we would have a forklift and some pallet jacks and told me who I could call to get some pallets to get started. I learned the warehouse business in twenty-four hours. I'm no expert, but I learned how to do stuff. The other thing that had happened, again, this was Friday morning at 8:00 in the morning, I was just taking in stuff. By 9:30, I was a relief worker. I had a friend, her name is Natalie Goldfein. She's from Chicago, and she called me Wednesday night, Thursday, and she said, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yeah," and she said, "Can I do anything for you?" I said, "No, everything's okay now." She said, "Well, if you need me, you just call me, and I'll come down there." So over the

course of Friday, as I'm both learning the warehouse business and realizing that I have this assortment of stuff coming in and realizing that I have to get the stuff out because we only had 10,000 square feet, and that's not a lot of space; apparently, I learned that that was not a lot of space. I called Natalie up on Friday late afternoon or evening, and I said, "Was your offer real?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "I need you to come down here and set up a distribution network." She was down on Monday.

SR: Now, what was her background?

JC: She was, I had originally met her through some Jewish educational conferences. She had been a trainer and a personal coach and was just one of those people who were, you know, one of those people like you know in your life that you know if you need someone to make something happen, she's the kind of person who can make something happen. So she came down here Monday, and she developed expertise in the distribution side of the relief business, which was amazing. Monday afternoon, and Tuesday afternoon, we're at a meeting with the Salvation Army Disaster Relief Team. We went to Salvation Army Headquarters in Jackson and had this very fascinating meeting where we told them what we were going to do, and, I mean, they chuckled. I mean, they said, "You guys are crazy." They said, "Relief business is, you know, it's a very big thing, and you're not managing what you're taking in. You don't want to do this." We said, "Well, we're kind of already committed." They went, "Well, it is great that the Jewish community is going to do this, and you guys are going to learn a lot, and good luck." They gave us a little bit of logistical advice. We ended up, by Wednesday we were sitting in on the meetings of the Mississippi VOAD, which is Volunteer Organizations Assisting Disaster. There's a national VOAD, and we were sitting in on the meetings of the Mississippi VOAD, which went to those meetings for several weeks, and initially, the first couple of weeks, it was local people who had just sort of ended up in the relief business, and we were networking. We were trying to figure out what to do with the stuff that we were taking in. The other thing that happened over the weekend was we were

figuring out what we would and would not take because we didn't want truckloads of chemicals, you know, it was all this stuff that was happening over this weekend, but we were all sort of learning –

SR: Excuse me, who was we?

JC: Me here, David Berkman in New York, and he had a team of people there who were figuring out all these pieces and by Monday morning they had announced to their congregations around the country that this relief effort was happening. They had set up some paperwork so we had documentation of this is what is acceptable, this is what we'll take, this is what we won't take. All this stuff was on the web. By Monday, we were in a big operation. There was a back office in New York sort of coordinating all these congregations, I had the people who were living here running a front office, who were taking in calls and coordinating truck scheduling and routing because it wasn't until about five or six days in, by then the Union for Reform Judaism had set up a volunteer system. It was also rotating various members of their staff down here to help run the operation, but the first four or five days, it was just us.

SR: So, let's step back for a second. You're full-time camp director; you have a shelter full of people, why didn't you just say, "Look, send the trucks elsewhere, we can't manage?" What led you to open this up? I'm trying to understand that.

JC: You know what? I have to say, maybe it was just an innocent mistake. [laughter]

SR: Was it important that the Jewish community do this? Maybe that's a better question.

JC: It became important that the Jewish community do it. Well, over time it did become important the Jewish community was doing this, and that was clear from the settings that

we were in because no one – again, I'll come back, but in these VOAD meetings, for example, I mean, these were people who were, you know, by week three these were real disaster relief professionals, and there had never been Jews at the table on the disaster relief front. Now, the national Jewish organizations are all affiliated with the VOAD nationally, but they had never been on that end of it before. It was clear that – I will say for me, what was happening in New Orleans was almost, for me, a little bit secondary in terms of being a place where people evacuated to, that was primary, because everyone was from around New Orleans, but in terms of the other part of it, what was happening in New Orleans was almost secondary. What I was very tuned into was what had happened in Mississippi and the level of destruction that had happened in Mississippi, and the volume of people who had ended up in this part of the state. I mean, Utica had picked up an extra 500 people. One of the first contacts that we made on the distribution side was with the United Way of Natchez. The population of Natchez had doubled. I was also very aware – it's so, had the levies not broken in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina would have been a minor event because it would have been a Mississippi event. So the luckiest thing to happen to Mississippi was that New Orleans flooded, in a way, because that really brought national attention in a really big way that's still ongoing. Had New Orleans not flooded, it would have been a Mississippi event, it would have been off the news in a week. The negative of that, you know, the plus was that New Orleans flooded, the negative was that New Orleans was getting all the attention, and it was very clear, we got the information, we're learning very quickly about the amount of devastation in south Mississippi all the way up to the Hattiesburg area. The number of evacuees and this was, particularly in Mississippi, and in many ways in New Orleans, this was a poor person's disaster. So this was not just random evacuees, these were people who were in need and in distress, who had ended up in Mississippi, and it just was too big not to do something. You know, I'm a Mississippi boy, I guess, it just seemed like the right thing to do.

SR: So from the outset, you knew that this stuff was going to be sent down to the coast of Mississippi –

JC: If people wanted to send stuff, we were going to get it to people who needed it. Yeah, absolutely. And again, because the government resources were going to New Orleans, and the big organizations, the big relief organizations were using their networks, so they were getting to bigger population centers. All very important, but the number of people who were scattered in rural communities, I mean, the Jacobs' Ladder became a source of relief supplies for small and isolated places. That's who we ended up serving. We didn't know who we were going to serve when we started, we were just going to take stuff in and distribute it out and do what we needed to do, and we ended up becoming a little niche group because we had a little bit of everything and because we started connecting with people. What would happen was we'd say, we had this, and this, and this, and we'd be in the formal meetings, and they'd go, well, you know, maybe Gulfport, maybe Biloxi, maybe in Jackson, but then you go out in the hallway, and someone would say, you know, I know this town outside of Brookhaven, that they have a whole bunch of people there, and there's a church there trying to do what they need to do and help them. United Way in Natchez – that's another example. They were the first people that we sent a truckload, and we ended up sending three or four truckloads to Natchez. They had all these people. They, within four or five days, had created their own distribution system, they just didn't have access to supplies, and we started bringing them stuff. We ended up with all of these people who weren't able to get resources from the other traditional routes for whatever reasons, and we ended up working with them.

SR: Where were the trucks coming from? Who was sending trucks?

JC: There were trucks coming from congregations, geez, all over the country. We had trucks from California, and from Washington, and from New York, and from Florida, and a lot, several trucks from the Midwest that had flowed down here. We also had, there were people who were in businesses related that suddenly we'd end up with a truckload of one particular item that was just, you know, some guy had a company that did tuna fish, and suddenly we'd end up with tuna fish, or whatever it was. But most of the trucks were trucks that got parked in a congregational parking lot and people emptied their closets, or emptied their pantries, or maybe they went shopping and loaded it on the trucks. That, by the way, I learned something in the disaster relief circles, people emptying out their closets and their pantries and loading them onto trucks thinking they're making a difference. In the disaster relief world it's referred to as "the disaster within the disaster." Because the things that people empty out of their pantries are things that are in people's pantries for a reason. So you end up with this random assortment of stuff. We were able to, because of the population we ended up serving, the fact that we had a random assortment of stuff was okay, but the big boys in disaster relief don't want to be dealing with, you know, your shirts that are torn and you don't wear anymore. Or your old underwear, or your four cans of creamed corn that are dented and old.

SR: So, what kind of supplies were you receiving?

JC: We initially were dealing a lot with water and non-perishable food. We had a lot of water – a lot of water came in. But again, interesting, the other part of it is that the needs are very, very immediate. So water was not a need a week later, but people sent us trucks of water. So, you know, week or two weeks later we'd end up with all this water that people didn't need anymore. Again, the pace of disaster relief is very interesting and how quickly things happen. By week two, we had a lot of canned goods, a lot of non-perishable food, and a lot of juice. We had diapers and a lot of baby supplies and baby needs. They became very hot commodities in these smaller communities. By week three or four, we were dealing with school supplies, we moved some furniture through at

some point. You name it, just about anything you could name that wasn't crawling, you know, walking, you know, we didn't end up with pets, but we ended up with, just about anything else ended up passing through that warehouse at some point.

SR: Who funded this project?

JC: The Union for Reform Judaism had set up a disaster relief fund very early and they were getting financial donations all along the way, and they were funding the operation. They were paying for sending the staff down here and were reimbursing us for expenses related to the warehouse and were actually reimbursing us even for the food for the people who were staying here.

SR: Was there any kind of UJC involvement, or was it exclusively URJ?

JC: We were not connected with UJC. UJC was dealing with New Orleans.

SR: Right.

JC: It was unusual for the Union for Reform Judaism, it was unusual to get into a disaster relief period, and it was unusual for them to get into a direct service disaster relief project that wasn't about serving Jews directly. Just hadn't been there before. But they took it on, and they took it on with great gusto, and ended up, you know, really funding that project for its two months of duration.

SR: So why the change? I mean, why URJ all of a sudden was trying to help largely non-Jews, because, you know, there are very few Jews on the coast –

JC: Yeah, I guess it – Stuart, I don't know the answer to the question. I think, you know, not to be arrogant, except to say that the fact that Jacobs Camp was right down here and right in the midst of it was a big part of it. I was, you know, at that point, I'd been working for the Union for thirteen, fourteen years, I was an established player. We were a very

important institution. We had ended up in this role, and they supported us in that role. The other part was that I think because of the scale of it as an American disaster, I think people really wanted to do something, so they had a lot of interest. There were people around the country who wanted to fill trucks. There were people who wanted to donate money. Once we started talking about direct relief, people started getting excited about being involved in that. It was very organic.

SR: Did you get phone calls from people who said, "We want to help Jews?" Or was it just, "We want to help in general?"

JC: Initially, it was just we want to help, period. We want to do something. Later, there were people like that, but again, by week two, we already not only were experts about what was going on here, but we knew what was happening in the Jewish community. We had all these other outreach connections. So we were able to redirect people. We were in partnership with the UJC people working in New Orleans, for example, and we had a lot of contact with Baton Rouge because Baton Rouge really got flooded with people. So we were in contact with all of those people. We were tuned into it. Our niche became serving poor people, which for a very social justice-oriented organization like the Union for Reform Judaism just made perfect sense to them.

SR: We have to take a break.

JC: That's fine.

[END PART ONE]

SR: This is the beginning of tape two, an interview with Jonathan Cohen. So we were talking about the kind of development of Jacobs' Ladder. As this is going on, you're here at camp. Where is your family?

JC: I mentioned earlier that during, on the Monday when the storm rolled through I went home, and encouraged my wife to go to Memphis, and she and the kids went to Memphis. I came back to camp on Tuesday, Tuesday afternoon, and boy, it was – to come in and see – everyone just looked worn out. That was also – I'll come back to that, but just to mention also, one of the side things, and you know, with everything else going on, we also had a little bit of damage to the camp, which was a tree had gone through the drain system on our lake, and our lake was losing water. So I come into camp Tuesday at about 10:00, and the lake is half empty already. The first stories I hear are, you know, people were standing by the lake at 6:00 in the morning going, "Boy, we had so much rain yesterday, why does the lake look so empty?" So, Valerie and the kids had gone to Memphis. They came back from Memphis on Thursday. Thursday, it was Thursday. The power had come up in the neighborhood on Wednesday or Thursday, they came back Thursday. One of the families here was the family of Phil Gaethe. Phil Gaethe is the educator at Congregation Gates of Prayer in Metairie, and when my wife came back on Thursday, and she came back and, you know, there was so much going on in Jackson, and there was so much going on here, and I said to Phil, I said, "I want your family to go stay in my house in Jackson." He said, "Oh no, we couldn't impose." I said, "No," I said, "I want your family to go stay in my house in Jackson and take care of my kids so that I can stay here and my wife can take care of her congregants." So the Gaethe family moved into our house on the Thursday after Katrina and were with us for five and a half weeks in the house.

SR: How many children do they have?

JC: It was Phil and his wife, and their two children –

SR: What's his wife's name?

JC: Fay.

SR: Could you spell the last name?

JC: Gaethe. G-A-E-T-H-E. Fay's mother was with them as well, so there were five of them. They went and stayed in the house and became the childcare. They were my childcare because school was closed. Gabriel was a preschooler, the school was closed a little bit, and Marisa was an infant. They took care of my family for five and a half weeks while I was here taking care of people, and my wife was taking care of folks in Jackson. So I came back on Tuesday, and the next time I left camp other than, I was running into Jackson for meetings, and I was running into Utica for stuff. I remember the day Natalie arrived from Chicago, which was like Monday or Tuesday after, Monday the storm. I met my wife in South Jackson for lunch. I picked up Natalie at the airport, and we met for Thai food. I remember sitting in this restaurant, and everyone around looked so normal. They were just sort of in their normal routine. They were talking about the news and the storm, but they were so normal. I'd been here for five days, and I was in this relief mode, and Valerie was exhausted and dealing with everything happening in Jackson, I remember it being a very surreal experience. I'm eating my pad Thai going, you know, I shouldn't be here, I should be somewhere else, and these people aren't doing the right thing because they're all calm, and this is craziness. I came back to camp, and the next time I was in Jackson with my family was at the Shabbat service at which Rabbi Dan Freelander, the Vice President of the Union for Reform Judaism, had come down to Jackson to be on the front lines. I made everyone who was here who was Jewish go to that service. I made everybody go, and we had some people at that point who were working in the warehouse from around the country, and they all went, and I remember it was a packed service. I got there late. I remember I just sat on the floor in the back of the sanctuary. My kids saw me, and they came over to me, and I just sat with my kids on the floor and then came back to camp.

SR: What was that service like?

JC: Oh, it was very moving. Rabbi Freelander spoke, I mean, he spoke really beautifully about Noah, and about floods, and about how Jews have suffered, and how we worked through it. It was a very beautiful sermon, and at one point they invited all of the hurricane evacuees up on stage for a blessing. The number of people who moved onto that stage for that moment was very powerful, and so many of them were here. You know, we had brought our 50 people from here, and they were up there, as well as all the sundry of people who happened into Jackson. I don't remember much about it. I remember his speech being very good. I remember that moment. I remember just having this an hour and a half of calm in what had been two weeks of craziness and more craziness to come.

SR: Let's get back to Jacobs' Ladder. So when did it, when did you actually, when did trucks begin to arrive?

JC: We actually had a truck here before we were in the business. We had a truck here on Thursday that had come from Texas that had been organized by our sister camp.

SR: The first Thursday or the week after?

JC: The Thursday three days after the storm. Greene Family Camp in Texas loaded up a bunch of stuff and just brought stuff here to help us deal with the people we had in camp. They were actually – it was Wednesday. They were here Wednesday, and they were here when the power came on. That was the first truck. The first Jacobs' Ladder-specific truck came in on Sunday. We unloaded the first one in camp because the rolling doors for the warehouse were coming on Monday, and the forklift was coming on Monday, and we had no personnel at that point, so the first load of stuff was here in camp. We had our education center classrooms filled with stuff. The stuff that ended up here actually ended up becoming our provisions for camp. We were eating off of that,

and people were pulling clothes from there, and the like. So the first real significant trucks were about Wednesday. We got the building ready to go on Monday, and by Tuesday we were learning the distribution business and our first truck, I believe, it was probably Wednesday. So a week after the storm, which is pretty fast.

SR: Who were the workers?

JC: There was a small team of people who were evacuees here who were involved. The people here ended up being the front office. Jacobs' Ladder eventually got a cell phone and had its own phone number, but for the first week and a half, all the calls were coming here, and all the intake and coordination was happening here. It was a mix. There were teams of URJ staff who were coming down. The initial teams were people who knew the stuff. There was a camp director who had been very involved in disaster relief in a hurricane several years earlier in Miami. He came down the first week, and he knew how to drive a forklift, and he knew how to load a warehouse. We had a lot of people who had various expertise, and by the second week, they had people who were coming down just to run, you know, receiving, and to run distribution, and then a team of people who were working in the warehouse. Also, by the second week, there were teams of volunteers. People were volunteering through the Union for Reform Judaism to come to spend a week down here working in the warehouse. All those people were based here at camp, they were living here, and we were serving breakfast and dinner here, and actually packing a lunch and delivering lunch from here over to the warehouse every day. That was a lovely community moment because there were these, you know, thirty, forty, fifty people who were here who, while they were not being direct recipients of need, were from New Orleans. They understood the need for relief supplies, and this group of fifteen or twenty people changing every week who were here to be in the relief business. So it was a very nice little community happening here, and they were making nice dinners for themselves. At one point, about three weeks in, we had a family from Memphis who just wanted – their kids just wanted to do something, so they came and cooked a fancy meal

for all the relief workers and the refugees, if you will, who were here. So that was really nice. I mean, the people who were working the warehouse were exhausted. Because we had no control over when trucks were coming because most of the trucks were being driven by people who were just driving the trucks. So they would just show up. So, like, they'll be sitting here at dinner, oh, we got a truck coming tonight at 8:30, suddenly the warehouse would be open at 8:30, it would be opened at 6:00 in the morning, and people were just moving in, and out of here going back and forth. The other thing was that because we only had 10,000 square feet of space, once you got two 18-wheelers' worth of stuff in the building, the building was full. So what we ended up doing, we initially weren't going – we were going to get other people to come pick up stuff. That was our original plan, which was that we would just be a place where you could get stuff. It was clear that wasn't going to happen. So by Monday or Tuesday of the next week, we were renting trucks. We had two trucks that we had rented. So we had people who were just loading trucks and driving, making deliveries all over the region. The other thing we'd do is any time there was a truck that was being driven by volunteers, what we would do is we would unload their truck, and then we would immediately reload their truck and have them make a delivery themselves. People loved that because the people who were volunteering, you know, they were real action – I want to be where the action is. We would say, “Okay, drive this truck to Gulfport,” “drive this truck down to south of Hattiesburg to this town.” So everyone who worked in the warehouse had the opportunity to bring relief supplies directly to people who needed them. I went about, I guess it was about two and a half, three weeks in – all the time blurs – I wanted to go down to the coast myself and just see it. My wife actually came down to camp, and she went with me, and we drove a truck full of relief supplies down. Well, actually, excuse me, we had a convoy. We had a truck from Boston that had come in, and we had reloaded, and they left first. Then we loaded our two trucks and went down to a relief depot that was being run by the county sheriff's department in Gulfport, and unloaded our trucks and came back, and got a chance to drive a little bit around the coast and see

what was going on down there.

SR: What do you remember about that?

JC: Well, what I remember is, first of all, I remember we pulled into, it was the sheriff's – they were running the depot at a detention center. So they had convicts who were helping on their end unload the trucks and organize everything that they had.

SR: Trustees are what they call them.

JC: Trustees, excuse me, trustees. So the first thing I remember is pulling up into this parking lot and seeing this man and woman from Boston, who had been there, get there an hour before us, posing for pictures. They had a banner that the youth group kids had made, and they were posing with the people who were working in the warehouse, so there was this mix of, like, these two very enthusiastic Jews from Boston and the sheriff's deputies that were armed, and these people who were released from detention temporarily to work in this warehouse, and there was sort of that. You know, we sort of chit-chatted with people who were in jail. The jail was right across the street. I mean, we could see the jail. They were bringing them over and working this little distribution center and then sending them back. It was very fascinating. Then we ate in a restaurant in Gulfport that was only open four hours a day because that was all they could staff. So we had a meal, and then we drove back and drove through what was the path of the storm. We went down through Hattiesburg and down. That was the first time I really – I knew that there had been destruction in Mississippi, but I really saw it on that journey down to the coast that one time I went.

SR: So those people coming from Boston, or wherever. I mean, for some, it was probably their first time in Mississippi [overlapping dialogue; inaudible] small town. What do you think their experience was, and their preconceptions?

JC: Well, I could theorize on what everyone's preconceptions were, but I'm not going to touch that. But I will go with it as it was – again, everyone who came down here really wanted to be here, and it was very hands-on. Everyone was loading and unloading, there was not a separate crew. Everyone was touching everything, everyone had their hands, and it was a very tactile experience. Also, because we were serving underserved places, they had the opportunity to be very welcomed. Every time they showed up someplace, the people there were so happy to see them and so happy to have them there, and they would get a chance to not just unload the truck and help unload the truck, but they were often touring the facilities, and getting the bird's eye view of what was happening in all these other towns because the towns were both stressed out but also proud of what they were doing. To talk to the people who were doing these little things and making a big difference, just because, again, like us, they had no choice, it just seemed like something they had to do. I think it was very powerful. I mean, and again, because it was a poor person's disaster, they really had a chance to experience Mississippi poverty at its most extreme, which is people who don't even have anything.

SR: So, how long was Jacobs' Ladder in operation?

JC: Jacobs' Ladder was in operation for eight weeks. We moved our last stuff out at the end of October.

SR: What caused you to end it? I mean, what was the –

JC: Well, the Union for Reform Judaism had – the leadership in New York had really decided it needed to be time-limited. We knew right up front it was going to be time-limited. The cycle of disaster relief suggested that by week six, we had done our duty. You know, and so, in week seven, in those last couple of weeks, we were liquidating. We were just trying to get everything out that we could and emptied the place, and we did. There was nothing left. There was a little bit of water that was left in the end, and that water came to camp, and we put it in storage here. But it was eight weeks, and we

had volunteers in – there were Union staff, and there were volunteers who were working every one of those weeks. You know, a real mixed assortment of people from members of the Union's board of trustees to brotherhood and sisterhood members to just random people who wanted to get into the action zone and found the Union for Reform Judaism as a way to do it. We had a few people who were here with us the whole time. We had a student who had been a student at Tulane, a freshman at Tulane –

SR: What's his name?

JC: Andrew. He ended up here for seven, eight weeks. We had another young man, his name was Joel, he was from New York, who was here for about, he volunteered to stay down here for eight weeks and he actually, just a couple of weeks ago, got engaged to a woman who he had met who had volunteered in the Jacobs' Ladder warehouse for a week. Unfortunately, they don't want to have their wedding in the warehouse. I have offered. [laughter] But she had come down and volunteered, and they met each other, and then when he left here he went back to stay with her for a few weeks, and now they're engaged. Amazing what happens.

SR: So, aside from that wonderful story, do you see any lasting impact from the project? Two years later, I mean, think of in terms of the camp, or the community, how the Jewish community's perceived, either or all of those.

JC: Well, I think the lessons we learned as the front lines for the organized Jewish community was that we really needed to leave disaster relief to the big boys.

SR: Why do you say that?

JC: Well, when we interfaced with the other disaster relief, you know, the really big players in disaster relief in the country, because there are some organizations that's all they do, Salvation Army has a big disaster relief arm, United Methodist Church has a group called UMCOR, their branch was disaster relief as well as some of the other big

players. It was clear that they knew what to do. They knew, I mean, their professionals knew exactly what was needed and when. They knew that day one, two, three was water, and day four was food, and day five was clothes. You know, they had that whole – they really knew what they were doing. There were some meetings in which I remember suggesting at one point that what the organized Jewish community needed wasn't just the Union for Reform Judaism, so what the organized Jewish community needed to do was to establish its own niche in disaster relief. That the niche of the Jewish community could provide in a very organized way would be professionals – medical professionals, psych professionals, social work professionals, legal professionals, and a lot of people with legal issues – and could establish itself as a second-wave relief entity. The first wave was the direct supply people, and the second wave was the people who were coming in and dealing with housing issues and those sorts of issues. I, again, was very heated and wrapped up in disaster relief, so it made sense to push for that. You know, I put those issues out there, wrote some things, and I don't know what's come of that. I think for the people who were part of the project, as well as the people who were here, it was very real and very positive, and moving, and hands-on, and transformative in so many ways. I know that the people who passed through here won't forget that experience. For the camp itself, it really set us out there. It said to both the local community and our congregational family, you know, congregational communities in the region, that it wasn't just about serving kids at Jacobs Camp, was about something a lot bigger. The whole experience, Jacobs' Ladder, the being an evacuation center, and the other things that I was involved in over that period of time were, for me personally, very, very, very important. At the time, it was a very difficult year. It was a very tough year professionally, there was a lot going on professionally, and there was a lot going on personally. It was just a very busy, stressful year that didn't feel very good. We went into the summer of 2005 and had a very difficult summer as a camp director. Kids had a great time, staff had a great time, but had this very – I'd come off essentially a very rough twelve months for me. Then on top of it, camp ended, and

two weeks later, all of a sudden, there's this hurricane rolling in. At some point soon after the hurricane, and it was some point in that first week, week and a half, I realized that up until that point, I was going, “Oh, being a camp director is hard, and being in the region is hard.” It was just very frustrating. After Katrina, I realized that I was part of God's master plan. That God needed me to be here, yes, to run a camp for children, and to help impact their lives Jewishly and socially and communally, and to be there for the staff, and to be part of the life of the congregations in the community, but God needed me to be here just in case. And so I was part of a master plan that ended up being very important. It changed, that year before didn't matter anymore. It was, yes, are there still family stressors? Yes. There are still professional stressors, yes. But I came to understand myself in a very different place in the universe, and so what I now refer to as what was my mid-life crisis ended with Hurricane Katrina. So for me, that was very, very meaningful, and it certainly is inscribed in me. That's not something I'm going to let go of anytime soon.

SR: So how did spirituality and Judaism – this might be too abstract for you–

JC: [laughter] Go for it.

SR: I mean, how did it shape the project? I know there was [inaudible] Jewish, but was there kind of a spiritual component to this? I mean, why were Jews coming down here and working down here? Why were Jews involved with this?

JC: It's too esoteric a question. Because it's, I mean, there are elements of the Jewish values and principles of social justice that very much played themselves out, of course. Jewish values of tzedakah, of helping people, of gemilut hasadim, of being there for the poor, the communal liberal leanings of being concerned about poor and impoverished people. But I think so much of the energy around Katrina was, not just in the Jewish community but everyone, was really just about it being close to home. I think it was just too close. You know, the tsunamis are one thing, and there are always smaller pockets,

you know, a hurricane here or a tornado there, but it had tremendous scale, it was on American soil. I suppose in twenty years, someone might suggest there was a – because I thought about it, I'm not writing the book, though – but the notion that post 9/11, in which there was this big national tragedy that no one could do anything about, and suddenly four years later there was this big national tragedy that people could do something about, I think that might have fed into it too. It just was close. It just felt close to people.

SR: This is the last question [inaudible]. So, when these trucks were delivering supplies in these small towns, was it clear that this was a Jewish organization doing this? I mean, how were y'all sort of received as Jews in these places?

JC: We made magnetic signs for all the trucks, partly for photo ops and partly because it was suggested to us that if we were going to go into disaster zones we needed to be labeled in some way and have documentation that stated that we were doing relief work. So we had these magnets that we made for the trucks, and they had a big Star of David on them, and it said Union for Reform Judaism Disaster Relief Project and Jacobs' Ladder. Generally, they were just happy to have the relief supplies. They were intrigued that, you know, they liked the Jews, it was nice that the Jews were there, that was a nice thing. I want to tell you one particular story about there being a retreat center somewhere in south Mississippi, I'm blanking on the town, it's owned and operated by a lesbian organization. So this is a lesbian retreat center in Mississippi, by the way, when I heard about them, my first reaction was, "I don't want anyone to know that they exist because we're the most unusual camp and retreat center in Mississippi, so I thought, but now there's a lesbian-run camp and retreat center." [laughter] But this retreat center had taken in a bunch of African-Americans from the coast. They were in a town that wasn't particularly hospitable to people of color, and I'm not really sure that the town was particularly hospitable to lesbians. So we initially started bringing them supplies, and they were running their own relief operation, and they turned to us and said, "We don't

have any money to" -- they were housing people. I think 80, 100 people they were housing. "We've run out of money to feed people here, and we can't really afford to keep them, and we don't know what to do." So we went and made a request to the people managing the URJ Disaster Relief Fund to give them some money to do the work that they were doing. And so there was this very odd moment in which the Jewish community was helping a lesbian organization serve poor African-Americans. It was a very weird sort of cycle. But I mean, maybe for some people, there was a real spiritual dimension to it. When you work for a religious organization, you're always kind of doing God's work, so it was just kind of there. Although it was very personally transformative, I can't label a moment that was a spiritual moment, except the whole experience became a spiritual moment.

SR: What was Utica doing?

JC: On the Friday right after the hurricane I went to the mayor and said, "Can I have the building?" A few days later we had to formalize some terms with the town because they had agreed to pay the utilities. We had actually also made an arrangement with the Utica Police Department to provide security at the warehouse. So we had a Utica police officer on duty 24 hours a day out there, and that was with our partnership with the town. So one of the things that we agreed to do was to make relief supplies available to the people in Utica, and so we had set up a Utica day. Once a week, the town, through city hall, was distributing basically an order form to all the people in town who had taken in evacuees. These families would have until a certain day of the week that they could turn in their order form, and on Tuesday and Wednesday, the people who were staffing the warehouse were packing orders for the local community. Then on Wednesday, these families could come and pick up their stuff. Once a week for five or six weeks of the eight-week project, we were taking from our inventory and giving relief supplies directly to the folks in Utica. That was, again, very good long-term for the camp's relationship with the community and the town, but it also just made sense. A lot of people got stuck in

Utica, and Utica wasn't, certainly not on anyone's radar in terms of being a place – again, because all these towns that end up with evacuees weren't, you know, relief supplies were going into the disaster zones, they weren't going into the places where people were. So we became the relief supplier for the town of Utica for several weeks as well.

SR: You mentioned this briefly before, but let's go back to it. What damage did the camp sustain itself?

JC: Physical damage, there was the tree that did damage to the drain system on the lake that resulted in the lake draining, that resulted in the dam holding up the lake deteriorating, which, from the insurance company's standpoint, was a $55,000 job, but it's turned out to be a three-quarter of a million-dollar renovation project, revitalization project of the lake. In order to have the lake again, we had to rebuild the dam and do all this other work in order to have that. There was a little bit of, you know, a shingle here, a downed tree there, but nothing really fell on anything. When Hurricane Rita came through, we had a brown – and we lost some air conditioners. But the physical damage was small, the bigger damage is historically Jacobs got twenty-five percent of its campers from a New Orleans of ten thousand Jews. The next summer, there were not ten thousand Jews in New Orleans. Kids who had even been with us before were scattered all over the place. Truth even now, two summers later, I think it's too early to call what Katrina's impact is going to be on our long-term recruitment and camper population, but there's definitely an impact. Luckily the first year, there was a lot of camp scholarship money available. Any child from –

SR: From where?

JC: The primary funds were created by the Foundation for Jewish Camping. They had set up a fund called Habayita. They paid for any child from a hurricane-affected area to go to camp for free. That made a tremendous difference. First of all, in the summer of 2006, we had the largest camper population that Jacobs had ever had in its thirty-seven

years up to that point because we had over 100 kids in camp who were coming for free. That made a big difference because had that money not been there, we would not have had a hundred kids from New Orleans at camp, we probably would have had thirty or forty. It would have been very devastating to the camp's financial situation, as well as the emotional situation. To not have a quarter of your campers in camp simply because of this disaster would have been a very big deal. But, you know, that money was there the first year. There were some secondary funds available for the summer of 2007, but we'll see.

SR: It still remains to be seen. So those 100 kids that came to camp from the devastated areas, I mean, generally speaking, can you talk about what impact from the storm did you notice on them? I mean, you know, kids are young and whatever, but did you see any sort of impacts then almost, I guess, ten months after?

JC: Well, first, I'll say that we made a conscious choice not to talk about it. We made a conscious decision to say, and we made it out of the fact that we had been in contact with these families for weeks and months, we were in touch with them and had even gone to some communities and seen sort of our kids in exile if you will. I remember being at an event in Houston where we had some kids gathered in some other places. We said we were not going to talk about it. We're just going to let them be at camp, and be kids, and have a good time. It turned out to be a particularly warm – not temperature-wise, warm feeling-wise – and a particularly powerful community experience that summer because you had a hundred campers in camp for whom the camp was a break in what had been a very chaotic experience for them. From their parents who, again, the stories that we were hearing about kids being strong for their families while their families struggled with losing their home or their business, or their home and their business, and losing tremendous amounts of their possessions, that's very emotional for the parents, and the kids were just sort of holding it together. So the kids got to be here and just be kids, and be with other kids, and not have to think about it, and not have to worry about it,

and not have to be involved in it at all. I'm sure the parents were blessed to have the break and have their children be in a safe place, emotionally and physically safe place for a couple of months. We also had about twenty staff in camp who were out of New Orleans as well, and for them, it was both that experience and the opportunity to do something very normal but also very nurturing. It turned out to be a very special summer, even though we didn't really talk about it.

SR: Subtext.

JC: Yeah. It was always there, but we just didn't talk about it. A couple of times, kids brought up issues, but it was really small. They were just happy to be with each other and be in a place they knew that felt safe, that was about them.

SR: Did you sense the same thing this past summer, 2007, or were things different?

JC: The summer of 2007 felt a lot more normal. The issues we had – we knew about kids who were still in distress. There were kids like that that we were dealing with, but for the most part, it was real routine, which is good. Which is, for kids especially, you know, they need to get back into that routine as quick as they can, and some of them were out of it for a long time.

SR: What sort of situations were you talking about?

JC: Well, we knew of families that, for example, families in New Orleans for whom, you know, some people were cleaning their houses six weeks later and were rebuilding their houses ten months later, and everything was normal very quickly. There were people who were still living in trailers and still struggling with that stuff. We still had some kids in camp last summer whose families had moved, so they were in new places, and their parents sent them back here to be with kids that they'd known. But I would say mostly it was the families that hadn't, that for whatever reason they hadn't gotten their stuff back together, they hadn't gotten their lives back together yet. It was now almost two years

later, and they still just hadn't put it together. Those kids were, you know, those kids were coping, but we had to be part of that process.

SR: How were you part of the process?

JC: We have a camper care team, we have a social worker, and a special ed teacher who is part of a team helping take care of kids who are in camp. We would, you know, in vintage youth style, no child is going to walk in and say, “I'm having post-traumatic stress due to the hurricane, please help me.” But you could tell from their behavior, from their actions, about how they were coping with things that would happen, that they just needed a little bit more comfort, a little bit more support, that they needed to be handled a little more gingerly because we knew what they were dealing with at home.

SR: Were there some kids, I mean, were there any differences in say, based on age or gender, or it just depended on the situation?

JC: It was very situational. Kids are kids.

SR: So, you're also, I guess, the regional, other than the camp, you're also in charge of the region’s youth program?

JC: Yeah, I have some oversight of NFTY's Southern Region.

SR: You are involved in, and you're familiar with [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

JC: Yes, very.

SR: So from your distant perspective, but informed perspective, what is your sense of how the New Orleans Jewish community is coming together and rebuilding? Where are they now, and where do you think they're going?

JC: It was very interesting to learn very early on that New Orleans had the highest percentage of any city in the country of native-born people. So the tremendous amount of loyalty that people have to the city, it's very powerful.

SR: Jews and non-Jews?

JC: Jews and non-Jews, right? So for the Jewish community to have so many people who are so loyal to the city makes a big difference. People really want to be there. There aren't too many cities like that around the country that have – I don't want to name cities, but I can think of places where, had it happened there, I don't think the number of people would have come back, period, and certainly not the number of Jews would have come back in the numbers and mass that they had. I know that the Jewish community is down thirty percent, but we know that the community lost a lot of older people and a lot of people with young kids. So I don't know what kind of town it's going to be in five years or ten years for the Jewish community. I know the Jewish community is working very hard and really trying, and the congregations are working very hard and really trying, and it's just a matter of getting people to go into that place knowing what had happened there and knowing that it could happen again. They were lucky to have two very calm hurricane seasons. So, I think the Jewish community will rebound. I think it'll be another ten or fifteen years until it's back at the numbers that it was at pre-storm, but right now, it seems to be a very strong and unified community that's doing a lot of good stuff with each other, a lot of the competitive stuff that used to be there in the Jewish community doesn't seem to be there right now. That's good.

SR: So, are you still working to try to find those kids who have not yet returned to New Orleans, do you still keep them within the Jacobs Camp community?

JC: Sure. Yeah, we are. We're trying to keep in touch with kids and get them into a routine. But people work very hard to get back to normal as quickly as they can. It's gotten back into being routine. The recruitment cycle is routine, the registration cycle is

routine. It's amazing. You know, I think back, I mentioned earlier, about going to a restaurant a week after the storm and feeling like I was this alien walking around. Two, three weeks after the storm, I had a national staff meeting in New York, and I went to the staff meeting, and I couldn't be there. I left. I mean, I got in, and I was at the meeting, and I got up the next morning, and I said, “I have to go home.” I said, “I have to go back to camp, I can't be here, I need to be at camp.” We, for the Jacobs Camp, were doing all this other stuff through the end of October, and then suddenly, we were two months behind on everything. There was so much stuff going on at camp that we had to recover, you know, institutionally with the fixing and the repairing because my maintenance staff, and my housekeeping staff, and my food service staff, I mean, they worked the whole two months that people were here. Every day that people were here they were working. So we never got our break from the summer, and we got a little of it in November, and it took a while for everything for us to get back to normal, but normal is a relative term out there anyway.

SR: So, to bring this to a close, stepping back, looking at sort of the national Jewish response, and I guess, [inaudible] you perhaps have touched on this somewhat, but what do you think the biggest strength of its response? I mean, what did it do well? And what were the weaknesses?

JC: I'll speak for the Union for Reform Judaism. Within the Union for Reform Judaism, certainly, the greatest strengths in terms of Katrina were, number one, the very strong passion and commitment to issues of social justice and the like that really fueled that whole process. It all happened because people knew that's what they were supposed to do. That and also the incredible range of resources that suddenly came to use in the organization. As a camp director, I have skills in moving people around, dealing with inventory, managing space, and managing time, and it's amazing how those skills transferred so easily to being in the relief world. Also, in the camping and youth world, you're used to not getting a lot of sleep, and you're used to working all the time, and

you're used to jumping from issue to issue to issue, and those skills, being a camp director came in very handy. Other camp directors were involved in that process, and other people in camping youth work in particular, but also across the organization, people just brought their skills to the table in a different way. So the energy and the skill set were very powerful. I think the weakness, I think the farther you were geographically or emotionally from New Orleans, the less understanding you had. I mean, you know, I remember being at meetings, I remember being at the staff meeting that I was at for about twelve hours and the conversations that happened at the national biennial in Houston that were mostly, where you could just tell, you would be in a conversation with people, and you would go, you just don't get it. You just don't know. Because if you're only following the event from the news, then it was a two-week event. It was really a week with some ancillary stories, and two weeks later, it was minor. So if your only connection to it is the media, you know, the media jumps from issue to issue so fast that you think it was small. But we know, being in the South, the impact of the storm is long-lasting, not just because of its physical damage, but its emotional damage and how it changed so many ways about how people exist in the community. I mean, you're in New York, you're not connected to it, you don't understand that. So the weakness was the classic myopic view of we're in New York, and we think we get it, but we don't really get it. Or California, wherever that is happening. The other, which is not a Jewish organizational weakness, but it's almost an American weakness, is that we like our issues to be tidied up and wrapped up, and we like to put them away on a shelf. A lot of problems and issues, they're long, and they're complicated, and they have tentacles and branches that reach out, and Americans tend to like their stuff tidy. Katrina was anything but tidy. So, people, their memories are short, and that's everybody.

SR: So, if God forbid there was another storm coming, and the camp once again took in evacuees, what would you do differently? Or do you feel like you get it –?

JC: Well, I don't think I'd end up in the relief supply business again. [laughter] I would immediately say, “Let me refer you to the right people,” and I know who all those right people are at this time. The only thing I think I'd do differently is I would get more information from people. One of the things that we didn't do because it was happening so quickly was that we didn't really gather even basic information about the people who were there. If you asked me to produce a list of everyone who slept here at some point during that Katrina cycle, I could name twenty people, but I know there are 400 people who passed through here, but I couldn't give you a name of any of them. Because we weren't keeping records, because we initially thought it was only going to be a couple of days, it didn't really matter for a couple of days. Then suddenly, it had this whole momentum. I would immediately gather more information. I would absolutely do that. Otherwise, you know, people who end up in a community with each other, whether by choice or by force, figure out a way to make community work. I got to see that happen, and it would be an honor and a privilege to see that happen again – although I hope I never have to see it happen again.

SR: Wow, that's a great viewpoint. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

JC: Yes. Can I tell you two other stories?

SR: Please.

JC: OK, good. In the midst of – this is all in the week of the storm, that week after. In addition to having evacuees here and moving into the relief supply business, all which happened in, you know, the storm was on Monday, I'm entering relief business on Wednesday, and I'm full-time on Friday. In the midst of all of it, I would get random phone calls. People would call me, and I would end up poking my nose into other things that were going on. There are two stories that are on my mind. One is that I received a call from, I was on the phone with Rabbi Lawrence Jackofsky, who was a regional director for the Southwest Council of the Union for Reform Judaism, and he's checking

on me and making sure everything is OK. He puts me on the phone with the husband of a rabbi he's at a meeting at in New York, and he says to me, “My mother lives on the Gulf Coast. And she called me, she borrowed someone's cell phone, it was dying, and all I got from her was, I'm at a friend's house, I lost my house, I'm at a friend's house, he has a gun, we're fine.” He says to me, “Can you help me find my mother and get my mother out of there?” Well, you know, I said, “Yes.” I mean, I said, “I don't know what I can do, but I'll do what I can do.” I found out that the best time to call the Mississippi Emergency Management was at 3:00 in the morning because you could always get through at 3:00 in the morning. So I learned about the recovery efforts that were going on, the people who were doing rescue work, and the lost and found people. This woman ended up getting a ride out with, I think, a Fox News crew. But for a period of about eight or ten hours, I was involved in trying to find this woman on the Gulf Coast, just from here just, with a computer and a phone and enough phone numbers to try and figure out who to call. I received a phone call – the other story is, and there were a couple of others like this, but the other one was I received a phone call from an older gentleman, he was a grandfather, I don't think he was Jewish. I'm not exactly sure how he found us, but I received a phone call from him on Thursday morning, he said, “I was evacuated, and I want to get in touch with my grandson who lives in Texas, but I left my address book at home, and I don't have his number and I can't find him. Can you help me?” Now, again, I have no idea how he got my number or how he got the camp's number. I said, “Well, tell me your grandson's name,” and he told me. I said, “Tell me where he lives,” and he told me, and I said, “Are you at a number I can reach you?” I took down his number, and it just so happened that his grandson was from Round Rock, Texas, which is where my sister lives.

SR: Just north of Austin?

JC: Just north of Austin, and I call my sister and I said, “I have a really weird project for you.” I said, “I got this call, and we're looking for the grandson. Here's his name. Can

you find him?" My sister went, "I'm on it." About an hour later, she had ended up finding the grandson, but couldn't reach him, went to his house, sat in his driveway, waited for him to come home said, "Your grandfather is on the coast. Here's his phone number." My sister called me back and said, "The grandfather and the grandson are talking right now." Again, very wonderful stories to have just been a piece of, but the most for me was, so, that happened. An hour later, it was done, and it was, okay, what's next? It was, what's the next thing we're dealing with? So now we're dealing with people with medical needs in camp. Now we're dealing with this. It was just hopping from thing to thing for a two or three-week period of just non-stop. It was unbelievable.

SR: Well, we should probably bring it to a close, Jon, and thank you for taking the time.

JC: Thank you.

SR: We really appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]