Miriam Waltzer Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: -- St. Charles Avenue, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Thursday, September 28th, 2006. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive, and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Miriam, do you agree to be interviewed, and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Miriam Waltzer: Yes, I do.

RH: So, let's just begin with where you grew up, and your Jewish education, your general education, your family--

MW: Well, I'm born in Germany, in 1935. During the war, my mother and my two sisters -- I'm the youngest -- we were in Germany, my father was in Switzerland. My education took place now and then. When it was now, it was usually with the nuns, where we were staying, and if it was then, there wasn't any at all. Soon after we left Frankfurt, which is my hometown -- I was actually going to the first grade -- what you call kindergarten, or whatever, and then we were quote unquote, "evacuated," and my mother took us. So, we... my education is very spotty. And when the war was over, I was ten years old. And I had accumulatively, maybe, missed two years of school. And so, when the schools opened up in Germany, which took awhile, because nothing was working, kind of like here now -- (laughter) -- we were in a schoolhouse where there were teachers brought back that had not been members of the Nazi party, and they were stone old. And there was no equipment, no books, no nothing, and the schoolhouse that I was going to had at one point been built by Sir Weinberg, who was a very, very wealthy Frankfurt Jew, who had also established a racetrack, and hospitals, and was one of the dye...

RH: Tool and dyes?

MW: Not tools and dyes, but dyes for fabrics, that preceded I.G. Farben. And he actually sold his company, together with his brother, to what became I.G. Farben, which was a big, big conglomerate of chemical companies in Germany. And so, I went to that school, and that school had a sign, that if you heard a bell, you should immediately lay on the floor because the school was not safe. (*laughter*) So, that gives you an idea of what kind of a school I was going to after the war. And, of course, the schools here most probably were like that to begin with, some of them. So, when school came along, I was just not interested. I was simply not interested. I had two very brilliant sisters -- still have two very brilliant sisters, and I was the dummy, and so when... my mother was called to school all the time, and she was always told, "If your daughter would only apply herself -- she's the brightest in her class. But she just won't do it! She -- she isn't going to participate." So... I was very good in foreign languages. Barely cracked a book. I come from a family of linguists -- my father spoke seven languages, all self-taught; my sister spoke languages... so -- in any event, I never finished high school. At age 16, I just came home and I said, "I'm not going back. That's it." And you see, what you have to do in Europe, at least in Germany at the time -- I don't know whether that's still the case -- you can go in two different tracks. You have to decide, on one track, whether you just finish high school, where you have to take a big long state exam -- and it's the same all over the country. Or, you take an exam to go into the university. Well, I didn't take any of those exams. And -- I just wasn't interested. I mean, I didn't fail anything -- don't misunderstand me, I just did enough, you know, to get by. And so, at one point in time, I decided that I wanted to live in Paris. So, I became an au pair, and I went to Paris, stayed a year in Paris, and when I came back from Paris, I went to a synagogue. I had started to come very interested in what Judaism is about. I had been raised with no religion whatsoever -- my father an absolute atheist, he could explain everything to you scientifically. And my mother, a very believing Christian -- devout. So, I wanted to find out about it. So I went to synagogue, and the very first time that I went there, I went with another friend, and there was this young man, who had just come from the United States,

and as he tells it, when he saw me, he knew he was going to get married to me. Now of course, I had no clue. As a matter of fact, I didn't like him very much. He was telling me that his car was coming from the United States, and that he had -- you know, he had a fiancée, and she was going to come soon, and he wanted to drive me home -- you know, nothing was working, in Germany. By the time I got married nothing was working. So, I remembered saying to him distinctly, "Look, I don't care whether you drive me -- wherever you drive me, you're nothing but an American capitalist pig." And I left him standing there. So -- I also didn't understand that if he had a fiancée, what did he want with me? I thought that was very disloyal. Well, he called now and then. And my father hung the phone up on him. You know, just wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't let me talk to him. And then I saw him sometimes -- he had a big convertible, you know, that kind from the United States, and he had all these babes in it, you know, and they would go into this big place, and I would go with all these young other people, and we would maybe have, you know, a cup of coffee or something. In any event, one fine day he called me up, and he said, would I be willing to go with him to a museum? Museums had started to open up -- I said to myself, “This is a different kind of a guy,” I said, "Well, what happened to the fiancée?" "Oh, that's over," and so on and so forth. Well, we went to the museum, and he was actually quite nice. And, one thing led to another, and we got married, three and a half years after I met him. I did not know, until much later, that he ran a spy net. And that -- he spoke German, he ran a spy net, and he would go to the Eastern zone of Germany; he parachuted into the Hungarian Revolution; he always called me from all these places (laughter) -- I say to myself, "What kind of a soldier is this? He never wears a uniform, he calls up; one time it's from Vienna, the next time it's from Athens...” You know, stuff like that. So -- in any event, I found out by sheer happenstance that something was going on, because I took his arm one time, and I could feel a gun. And I said, "You carrying a gun?" I was petrified of guns, and petrified of soldiers. "You carrying a gun?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I have a friend to pick up, and I have to be with him." Well, the friend he picked up was an atomic scientist

who had originally come from Germany to the United States, and he had come to visit his family in Germany, and he had to protect him. So, the three of us went out together. And of course, I had to walk in first, just in case somebody (laughter) shot this guy, you know? And whenever this guy went to the bathroom, so went Bruce, you know -- I felt really strange. And so I asked him, I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I work for counter-intelligence. Don't ask me another question." And so I never did. And then -- but all these other things I found out later. And so -- then I came to the United States. We got married in Germany. It was an incredible -- I was involved in a conversion process, because... you know, you don't have a Jewish mother, you're not Jewish, that's it. So, I'm involved in this conversion process, and I'm not finishing the conversion process, but I would have had a very hard time coming to the United States with him. So...

RH: If you had had the --

MW: If I had not been married. I mean (laughter) -- you know.

RH: Oh, had you not been married. Right.

MW: So he said, "I'm not leaving unless you go with me as my wife," so we got married, and we had a civil ceremony in Frankfurt, in one of the most historic buildings that has been replicated after it was destroyed -- Roman emperors have been crowned in that place, heretofore before it was bombed -- but they built it up, stone by stone; and we got married, and there was a celebration for three days; my father complained bitterly that nobody was sitting down, why do they all eat standing? And why would they have little pieces of green stuff with cheese inside? -- and I mean, he just couldn't understand all that. In any event -- and I arrived in the United States. And my husband had asked for my hand -- we practiced it for weeks. And, my mom and I -- we were at the door listening when he said it in German to my father, all these nice things, and my father said, "Well, sir, how do you intend to support my daughter?" And so, Bruce said very proudly, "I have

a GI bill of $156.57, and I promise you, sir, I will do everything I can -- I'm going to law school -- I'm going to do everything I can to support her, and I have saved some military pay." That was it. And of course, I had a dowry -- come from a very old-fashioned family, I have two and a half tons of a dowry -- I had everything including, my mother apologized to my husband and said, "I didn't buy underwear for you, because I just don't know, you know, where to find it." So... in any event. So -- came to the United States, was on a boat; my husband went back in a troop transport. I went on the *SS United States*, which was one of the fastest ships crossing the Atlantic, and parenthetically, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were on the boat, and everybody on the boat decided, how would they address them? And of course, I said, "They're not even going to speak to you, (laughter) why should you even worry about it?" But in any event, we arrived in New York. And, it was just -- I had no idea how America would be -- I had read Kafka's *Amerika*, and in my mind, it was kind of like a big black hole, I would just fall into it. And arrived, and then we were immediately ushered to his parents' house, and we met the whole family, and--

RH: So, was he from New York?

MW: Yes. From Brooklyn. And I met all those cousins, and all those uncles, and all these intimidating people. And they had a house, and we were there for about two or three days, and then we drove off with a little TR2, which is a two-seater, from there to the South, to New Orleans. My two and a half tons of dowry were en route. And we lived in the barracks, which were at the time -- there was a stadium, next to Tulane, called the Tulane Stadium -- there were barracks that had been erected for military people. And we lived in the barracks. And we had nothing. Because my dowry hadn't arrived. And so we had student quarters, and he started law school. He had started law school in December; I came in January.

RH: So, you ended up in New Orleans because he had applied to Tulane Law School?

MW: He had gone to Tulane undergraduate school.

RH: Oh, OK.

MW: And so, he had applied to law school, and that's where he was going to go. And by the time we came, I didn't know anything about segregation. I had no idea. I had just come from a place where, (laughter) well, segregation isn't the word for it, but it was pretty tough -- you know, there were gypsies, and there were gay people, and there were Jewish people, and there were all of these people who were, as my older sister would always say "inelegant." And here I come, and I'm finding out about "colored only," "white only," -- this, that, and the other. And my husband, from the very beginning -- that he went to law school, worked for a man who was a civil rights lawyer. And, right from the first day of law school until he practiced, until 1967, when he left this partner, he was involved in civil rights. And -- that was an experience for me that was incredible. I mean, I had three jobs, he had two or three jobs, we tried to live on the $156.57; I had about, I think about a hundred recipes for hot dogs, different ways, you know. And, we ate a lot of tuna casseroles, and all that. And finally the dowry arrived, (laughter) and it was unloaded in the barracks... it was interesting. But at any event--

RH: That must have been quite a sight.

MW: Yeah. And then, of course, finally there was this question about children. And I love children, and so we wanted to have children, and -- it just didn't work out. I had several miscarriages. One time I almost died, and so we decided we were going to adopt a child. Meantime, my husband is all over Mississippi, and Alabama, and integrating this, and voter drive that, and... and whatever. And we applied for this adoption. And so finally, in 1961 -- well, we had to move out of the barracks, because we finally had enough money to get air conditioning, and if you got that, you couldn't be there. I mean, it was just too expensive a taste, in terms of electricity, so we found a place in the Quarter, and we lived there for a while. And then, if we wanted to have a child, we knew

we had to have better quarters than in the Quarter, because -- you know, there were all these bouncers walking around -- it was very colorful, you know... but not a place for a child. So, we built a house on Fleur de Lis -- that house was done under the veteran's GI bill, again -- I think the down payment was something like $250 -- I thought it was the end of the world. (laughter)

RH: So that's -- and Fleur de Lis was out on the lakefront?

MW: Yeah -- it is now, devastated. Just drive down it now. So, in any event, so -- we had that little house. And, soon thereafter... then, I had been going to school, to the university at Tulane at night, and it took me five years to accumulate 30 credits. And then we lived very close to where now UNO is -- it was LSUNO, and it had two barracks and two buildings. And so, I figured, "Well, maybe I'll go there and take some more courses." And I am literally, was probably the only person that had a zero in the math test -- I took remedial math, and they asked me whether I had graduated -- when I had graduated, or when I had been to high school last, or something to that effect, and I wrote down “1961, Weinberg High, Germany.” No one asked me a word about graduating or not, and... so, and that's where I really became interested in knowledge. I mean, I still remember walking out of biology class and saying to myself, "My God, I have all this stuff inside of me! You know, the heart does this, and this does that, and if you dissect a worm, this happens. Could you believe... ?" I mean, it was just -- I was so fascinated by it all, but the math was kind of a problem. And so finally I took a logics course -- I could do that. I'd just simply memorize the book. And, it's -- I graduated on the top of my class. No one ever asked about whether I graduated from high school or not. And, I would have most probably done it faster if I had had more money. But, I mean, we just didn't have the money. So, my undergraduate career was eight years, my law school career was four... and so, my Jewish education -- I completed the conversion classes here, I was converted by an Orthodox rabbi. Parenthetically, those papers have now drowned. I can no longer prove I'm a -- hm?

RH: Was it at Beth Israel?

MW: No, at Chevra Tilion.

RH: Oh, OK.

MW: Parenthetically, I can no longer prove that I'm Jewish. That's it. So -- and so we had the Jewish wedding here. I went to the *mikvah* at Beth Israel, which was up on -- was it Terpsichore? Whatever it is. They had the only *mikvah* in town. And I went there. And, because we were very afraid, if I would have a child, my child wouldn't be Jewish, right? So, the children didn't come, and finally, the Volunteers of America -- I almost gave up. It was around the fourth of July of something, of 1963... I said to Bruce, "You know, we never are going to get a baby. We asked two years ago, we applied two years ago." And the difficulty was that if you adopted a child, the birth mother could decide what religion this child would be raised in, so you can't imagine -- we would have taken anything, right? Nobody wrote down Jewish -- I mean, that wasn't going to happen. You could only get a child if the mother said, "Raise the child Jewish," or said, "I don't care." So, it so happens that this particular Jewish woman -- God bless her -- she gave up this little boy. And he was an abandoned child, and we got a letter to pick him up -- it was right over here, on 8th street, or where the orphanage was, or home was -- and we picked him up, and we took him to our house, on Fleur de Lis, and we had a son, and that's where his *bris* was; I mean, he had already had a *bris*, but we had a symbolic one, a big celebration, and, it was just a joy. And we had an intermediate judgment of custody for him because they tried to find the father because he was abandoned. We knew nothing about him, other than -- I said, "Does he have any particular talents, in his family?" "Yes, his father was a scientist, or a doctor, or something, and his mother is Jewish," and that's it. Nothing else was told to us. And I was fine, I mean, that's the way it was done. So, in October of that year, to my utter surprise, the most extraordinary stuff happened. October of 1963, my husband had participated in the first integrated lawyers'

meeting ever, in the state of Louisiana. It was at the airport, because you see, that was a federal -- that was under the, you know, the airport's under federal control, and everything around it, so the state law didn't apply. But in any event, I was home, he was at the meeting -- they had been very successful in registering voters here and were very successful in Alabama, and Mississippi, and all kinds of other places -- and in my house, people were in and out, you know; I just was cooking, who's sleeping here now, and who's not sleeping here now -- you couldn't imagine, in Lakeview, in that little-bitty house, with my baby. And so during the day, the bell rings, and outside there's a person who shows me what I now know was a warrant to search the house and to arrest my husband. And of course, I wasn't a lawyer at the time. And the house was surrounded by state police, the sirens were blasting; I was alone with the baby, and I couldn't call anybody. They told me to sit on the couch, and I sat on the couch, and they systematically searched my house. And they threw on a pile, Hebrew Bibles, Greek books, tapes that my father had sent to me, the Declaration of Independence that my father-in-law had gotten from Roosevelt... and what disturbed me most, of course, was they found all the adoption papers. I mean, they found all the intermediary adoption papers, because it hadn't gone through. And I immediately said to myself, "Oh my God, what am I going to do? They're going to take this baby!" And I kept on saying, "Look, you want to know where my husband is? I'll tell you, he's at the airport. He has a professional meeting." You know? And so they said, "Well, we'll find him. Don't worry about it." I said, "Please call him up. He'll be here. You don't have to go through all of this," you know? "Shut up," you know. "Sit down." So, I'm -- I'm like this. I mean, I'm just petrified. I mean, I had just come (laughter) out of all this European stuff, and so I said, "What is this?" So... about three or four hours later, the bell rings, and that's my husband, and he comes home, and they arrest him and take him to jail. He was charged with the overthrow of the state of Louisiana and the United States, in that order. We had a law that was just taken off the books two years ago. They took him down to jail, and there was his law partner also, whose house they also had searched -- they had gone to

their offices, rifled it, took all their case -- their folders out, and everything else. But -- now I was alone in the house. Because he was -- you know. And that evening on television, the mayor and Leander Perez and all those folks said, "We got those N-lovers," you know. And of course, a friend of mine came by and said, "Miriam, you know, they're going to bomb your house. You better get out of here." And I said, "I'm not leaving with that baby. Because they're going to think I'm going to abscond, and we'll see whether we can't bond Bruce out." Lawyers can't post bond for other lawyers -- that's the law. We could find nobody, except one man, who was most probably as apolitical as anything -- he's dead now, may he rest in peace -- he put his house up as security for Bruce. And it took about a day and a half, and he came out of jail. And that's when things really got hairy, because -- what they had intended to do was, they had intended to destroy his practice, all his credibility in the Civil Rights movement. Oh, there were articles in the papers, you couldn't believe it, I mean -- the times were unbelievable, you just cannot believe it, what happened here on a daily basis, and all over the South. If I tell my children, they don't believe me, but we have movies of it. So -- now came the idea of "What am I going to do if they going to take this baby?" Because the adoption agency said, "Look, I mean... you're unfit parents. He's going to go to jail -- what's going to happen here?" And so I decided -- I still had a German passport. I decided if worst comes to worst, I'm going to take this baby, and I'm going to Mexico, and they're never going to get this baby. There's no way that that's going to happen. And I became an American citizen months before this raid took place, so I had just become an American citizen, so I figured I'm entitled to a passport, right? I go to the passport office -- there's such a thing as the McCarran Act. And I couldn't get a passport, because my husband was under indictment. So there. So, in any event, so all of this lasted, and we had to find a lawyer for our defense; nobody wanted to take it locally; the indictment came down, the attorney general did it, not the district attorney, to his credit; finally, the case was removed -- well, it all sounds very simple, but it took a while. The case was removed to the federal court, Judge Wisdom of blessed memory wrote a dissent; the other judges

said, "We should abstain, let the State act, we're not going to act, we're the federal government. Let the state do it. Serve your 25 years," or whatever it is. And -- but, Judge Wisdom wrote a dissent, and said that it had a chilling effect -- and this is a sentence you'll hear in every law case now -- he used it first, and ultimately the Supreme Court of the United States used it -- "There's a chilling effect on the First Amendment, that you arrest lawyers who help other people to vote, and to achieve citizenship rights, all over the United States. And you're interfering with that," he wrote, it violates this, and it violates that, and Bruce's partner Ben Smith carried the handwritten opinion from Judge Wisdom to Washington, filed it in the Supreme Court, and we went up for the argument -- the same day that we went up for the argument for the Supreme Court, my husband was admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court -- I mean, needless to say, he was the defendant in the case (laughter) -- he said, "While I'm here, I might as well." (laughter) So, one of the lawyers said, "May I introduce to you, from the deep South, my esteemed colleague Bruce Waltzer who was, you know, admitted to the Bar in Louisiana," and he was admitted to the Bar at the Supreme Court. So then came the argument. (laughter) Justice Black recused himself -- now you had only eight Justices -- because his sister (laughter) had been in an organization of this quote "subversive organization" that was under scrutiny. Because Mr. Dombrowski was the head of this organization here, and he was one of the defendants. So his sister -- the Justice's sister -- belonged to this group, so he said, "Look, I have a conflict, I have to get off." And Justice Goldberg was still on the bench, and all I kept saying is, "Oh my God, if this goes down four-four, we're screwed." In any event -- so, the argument is made, and there's this empty chair of Justice Black, and ultimately, the Supreme Court -- and I have to tell you, they really acted fast. It usually takes a long, long time, but they could see what effect this had -- it stifled everybody else because everybody was afraid they were going to be arrested and charged with sedition. So, the opinion came down in '65, and that was barely two years after the arrest, and they almost verbatim quoted Judge Wisdom's dissent, and we won the case. And it was unanimous. So, in any event, now that was over. But we still didn't

get the judgment for the adoption of my son. So finally, finally, after two and a half years we had the judgment. And of course we had already applied for another child, since it took so long. We figured we better start now. And of course, they said, “Forget about it, not you.” So we went to the Jewish Federation, and there we got this cute little girl that you met. So, but this was the background in that. And then of course when I promised that I would raise my children Jewish, I did that. And I took the position that I couldn't expect anything of my children, like learning how to read Hebrew or anything like that, unless I knew it myself. I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous to say to your child, “Do this, it's very important,” and you yourself -- stupid. So, whatever they learned, I learned. And my son, who was so smart he became deviant, finally we put him into the Jewish day school. I'm very opposed to private schools. I'm the product of a public school. In Europe, if you go to private school, there's two things operating. Either you're a snob, or you're stupid. That's the only reason you go to private school. So, I thought public schools were OK. But we have three or four levels of -- Black ones. White ones. Private ones. Catholic ones. So finally there was Jewish day school. And reluctantly I said to my husband, “OK, send him there for half a year.” He's going to do Hebrew in the afternoon, and he's going to do English in the morning. I, in the meantime, had gone to law school. I was one of five women in the class, the biggest women's class ever. I started law school in 1967. And I graduated in 1971. And I was on law review and the top of my class. And so I was practicing, and so I said to myself, “Well, it's a good thing. Then I don't have to schlep him to Hebrew school all the time.” And he gets Hebrew right there at the Jewish day school. And we became very active in the Jewish day school. And my husband became the -- he was the Chair of the Board of Directors. Cannot tell you how many years this all lasted. And of course, Lainie also went to the day school. In the meantime, I was practicing. And this is interesting. I certainly thought that when somebody goes to law school with two kids and a household and jobs, they know how to budget their time. I thought that was evident. When I applied for my first job, they wouldn't do that anymore today, right? They said, “Is your husband allowing you to do

this?" And I said, "Well yeah, I've gone to law school." "How many more children do you intend to have?" After the fact, you think of all the things you should have said. I should have said, "Look, I don't think I can have children. I have two -- ." I was so flabbergasted by all of this. And then, would I mind, if they really gave me a job, would I mind if I used my name M. G. Waltzer? Didn't dawn on me. They didn't want to write down that I was a woman. And as I was walking out I said, "What is this? Would I be willing to work in a collection department?" That means somebody doesn't pay their bill and I'm behind a -- I'm a skip tracer, glorified skip tracer. And of course I would have done it. But when they asked all these questions and they didn't give me the job, I said, "Well, this is useless." So I got a job in the Court of Appeals. I finally worked for a judge and I worked for the Chief Judge, and he hired me on the basis of my writing skills and my research. And there I earned the glorious amount of $600 a month. And I said to myself, "Wow, 600 bucks a month for something I've been doing for four years, researching and writing. And I even like it, I could spend all this time doing this." I was very excited about it. And then the year was up. And then I decided that I would like to learn how to try a case. I would want to be a trial lawyer. So I applied to the District Attorney's office for an Assistant District Attorney. And the DA was a classmate of my husband's. And he became the District Attorney in 1974 and I worked in his campaign. And so I became the first woman Assistant District Attorney for the Parish of Orleans. And I started to learn how to try cases. And then I finally was promoted to the felony court, and I was senior trial assistant and all this kind of stuff. And it wasn't easy, because again, I was the only woman. And parenthetically, we didn't have women jurors until 1974 because women jurors would -- you could volunteer as a woman, but they would never take her. So, I would try rape cases in front of a bunch of 12 White men because African Americans still weren't on the jury to any great extent. And so, here would be these White men, and I would try the case, and they would say things to me like, "Are you the secretary here?" And it was just incredible. At the time, for an aggravated rape, you could get the death penalty, and I was the only woman -- I was very ashamed of myself -- The only woman

who got the death penalty for -- I wanted the guy to go to jail, but I didn't want him to die. Besides the fact that it was right before Yom Kippur, and I really felt guilty for doing that. The jury comes back with death, and so in any event, I go through this whole trial, and these people think I'm a secretary. It was almost like I didn't exist. And the police officers were all men. The DAs were all men. The judges were all men. The whole building was full of men. It was like the papacy, except I don't know. It was just incredible. So, but what it taught me is that you can do that. You can even tune them all out and just simply -- I always would say, “I can't hit you, I'm a lady, but I can outsmart you.” One time I told one of the guys, I said, “If I were a man I'd throw you down the steps. But I won't do that. But I'm going to outsmart you.” And we became friends afterwards. Because the experiences were just incredible. And so after that, I opened up my own firm. A woman practicing on her own. Now I was going to be a defense attorney. And I was going to be a plaintiff's lawyer, and I had made up my mind that I would never ever work for a corporation because they're only “its." They're just some creation, some unnatural thing. I wanted to deal with people. And so, I had a lot of police brutality cases, and I was very successful with them. And I taught my clients how to read and write. How to make out a check. How to invest their money. I decided that when they came and they would tell me their story and I would -- I had domestic practice too. Divorces, separations, that sort of thing. And by the way, at that time, we still had a head and master. I had one sitting at home. Here were all these people sitting in front of me. So, it was an interesting time to practice law. And there were three things that happened in 1981 that were so -- that shook me up so bad in court that I just said to myself, “I'm going to kill the judge.” And I came back from the court, and I said to one of my colleagues, I said -- I had made enough money to buy a building from my police brutality case. I had my own building, can you believe it? And I told this colleague of mine, I said, “Give me your gun, I'm going to kill the judge, either that or run for office.” And he said, “Why don't you run for office?” So, in the very same criminal court where I had been first woman prosecutor, there was a vacancy. And I decided. There were

actually three vacancies. I decided I was going to run for the one where I had been a prosecutor. Because I knew the section. And here, this had never happened, in the whole city, New Orleans. There had never been a woman on that court ever, period, there was no woman on civil district court, nowhere. And so here I was. I ran for office. What did I know? Jewish, foreign-born, a woman running for the criminal district court. And during the campaign they red-baited me. They had a flyer going around with my husband's mug shot from when he was arrested. I found out later the police carried it out, put it in every barroom, under everybody's windshield wiper and everywhere else. What happened was the Black community was so outraged by that, the week before the election we took a poll. I had about 65% of the vote, White or Black, it didn't really matter. And the week before they put that thing out, and then all of a sudden, my White vote went down considerably, and it tied me in with Dutch Morial because Dutch Morial had been a very good friend of ours. And parenthetically, I integrated the Lafayette Hotel with him, their coffee shop. And we were very disappointed he didn't get arrested, he looked White or Spanish. So, in any event, so, here comes the election, and I beat a legend. He was Irish, he was a Vietnam veteran, he had only one leg, his father had been a judge, his grandfather had been a judge, and his great-grandfather had been a judge. And he was one of the good old boys and nobody gave me a shot. But I beat him.

RH: Who did you beat?

MW: O'Hara. And so, now, I became the novelty in the criminal district court. So it went all over again. The police tried me, tried to not obey me. Lawyers were funny. And they soon learned that there was nothing they could do. I told one time somebody, “I'm not your Mama.” Because he said, “Mama, you can't give my client ten years.” I said, “Oh, yes.” I said, “My signature's as good as anybody else's. And besides, I'm not your Mama, now get off my bench.” It was just a daily struggle. And the press was hanging there all the time. Nobody got watched more than I, I was on -- I had always flowers on

my bench. I watered them. And the jurors adored me. By that time, we had women on the jury. And they really adored me, and we had a very good thing going. And then I decided that these young people that appeared before me, first of all, I thought I was very lucky, very lucky that I had good family. My children were respectful, they were good students, they were nice, they didn't go to jail, they weren't on drugs, and I had a nice husband, thank God. Look at these poor individuals. They have no chance at all. They live in boxcars with an auntie, and they don't have enough to eat, and they don't have a shot, they see people overdose and all this kind of stuff. And they're being promoted in a school system without reading and writing, and of course, I had never finished high school. So I had a real feeling for that. So, when they would plead guilty, they had to fill out a form. It was called a "waiver of constitutional rights." I had it printed, so -- showed it to them. And then, I put them under oath. "Do you really going to plead guilty?" "Yes." "Read me that." And they would look at the first word, and they would say "wave-er." And I said, "What does that mean?" They go like this, wave. So I realized they had no clue, couldn't read and write. And so when it was evident to me that some of them most probably were salvageable, and that if I had been in their position, I most probably would have taken a machinegun and shot everybody down, but they didn't do that, they just stole a radio or smoked a joint or whatever they did. I said, "OK, we're going to have a program. I'm going to figure this out." I called it PEP, Probation Education Program. If it was a nonviolent crime, I would put them on five years probation, I wouldn't put them in jail. They had to sign a contract. The contract would say that they committed to come every Tuesday to my court from 3:00 to 7:00. And the aim of coming to court would be to learn how to read and write and to get a GED, and if they got their GED -- I would help them get their GED -- if they got their GED then I would go ahead, and I would help them find a job. And these were the conditions. First of all, you have to get yourself tested, so I know what grade level you're on. Second thing is, you have to show up every time. If you don't show up two times in a row without an excuse, a valid excuse, you go to Parish Prison for the weekend, that's your warning. The third condition is that you have to go

with me every once a year, you have to go with me to the state penitentiary. We're going in a bus. You're going to help raise the money for the bus, and you're going to be taken in the state penitentiary as if you were there, and I want you to take a look at it. You miss that, your butt's gone, OK, because I think you ought to see how that is. So they sign up, and I find a psychiatrist, and he checks them out because I didn't want anybody to burn the place down, right? Check them out, have a doctor check them out. Most of them had never been to a dentist, never been to a doctor. The only time they'd ever gone to the doctor's been in the emergency room at Charity Hospital when they had a gunshot wound or stabbing or whatever it was. And so I said, “As soon as you get your GED, you're off the program, you're out of here, I'm going to take your conviction off the record.” So I'm -- my middle-class values, right? I'm thinking this is going to be next week. I'm getting the results back. No one can read better than on a third-grade level. Nobody can do math better than on a third or fourth-grade level. These are supposedly kids that are 18 and 19 and supposed to have gone to the 11th grade or graduated even, and they can't do that. So, what I found out was -- and I found volunteers from the telephone company, I went to the telephone company, I said, “Look, you have middle managers that are black, I need volunteers, I need mentors. I have 25 of these kids, I need them.” I went to a bookstore of a Jewish lady I knew, and I said, “I need books. I need a blackboard, I need this, I need that.” And guess what? People gave it to me. You know why? Because I was a judge. It's just incredible. So the worst thing about the experience was they wouldn't show up, or they'd be late and amble in, or they would say, “I'm sick,” and things like that. So couple of them went to jail. And then I found out that some of the things that I thought they would learn really quick, they would be interested in, they weren't interested in. So I decided that I would say to them -- there were some that I thought were very bright. I said, “Look, if you could read and write, what would you want to do with it? What would be your most important thing to do with the ability to read and write?” “I'd get a driver's license.” “Oh, good. You get the application for the driver's license, we're going to study that.” And he got very interested. So this guy, I didn't have

to worry about him. His mentor and he, they were going through this like crazy. Then I had another one. He says to me, “Well, I'm working in a construction company.” I said, “You work in a construction company, do you have to read things?” “Yes, I have to read things.” “Well, how do you take care of the cement or whatever it is?” “Well, the others take care of it for me.” I said, “Well, what would you do if you could really read and write, if you could really figure things out?” He said, “I have such a problem measuring. I don't know how to measure things.” So, he gets the measuring thing, we do math. And we measure, and we do squares and all this kind of stuff. Then one of them had a beautiful voice, and he got to sing in a band that I knew. They would let him sing. And he came to the program, and I said to him, “What would you do if you could read, what would be your thing?” He said, “I would like to read the lyrics on the sheet.” So, we got all this music, and he learned the lyrics. And one of them came, and I said, “What would you do if you could really read?” I don't know whether he wanted to impress me or not. He said, “I'd like to read the Bible.” I said, “OK. I'll assign some kind of reverend to you, and you take care of this thing, I can't read the whole Bible with you, that's just not possible.” But what was interesting was that after about six months or so, they jumped a grade or two. And after about a year, it was amazing how quick these kids learned. And then I had two of them, they were really, really bright, and they actually took their GED, and they actually found a job. In the meantime, they had to go with me to Angola, which was also interesting, because when we got there, I would call the warden up, and it'd usually be the hottest day of the year so that they'd know how it is. Of course, I would have to sweat too. We have a garage sale in front of the criminal district court and sell all the schmattes that I brought from home, and everybody else gave us. We had a carwash, and so we finally got $400 together for the bus. And go all the way to Angola, which is in the Tunica Hills, I mean, it's awful. And so, they would be taken in and get there, and the warden goes through with them and tells them, “You are not a free man anymore. You will not walk in front of a free person. You are an inmate.” And so they were treated as if they were inmates. And although they had been laughing and joking on the way in and

playing their radio and saying that their uncle was in jail and their father was in jail and how great all of this was, by the time they got to death row and saw the people in there and by the time they saw all of that, they could have turned green. They would have. And we always had a prisoner talk to them. And our first trip, it was Wilbert Rideau. I don't know whether you've heard of Wilbert Rideau. He is a prizewinning journalist who was in jail for murder, and we had nametags on, and so he looks at me, and he says, “Is your husband's name Bruce?” and I said, “Yes.” First of all, he didn't know what to do with me. Here's this woman judge, what does she want here with these goons? And so he says, “You have a husband named Bruce?” said “Yes.” He said, “Tell him, thank you.” “For what, Mr. Rideau?” “Well, I was on death row, and he and his friend A. J. Levy had ten or twelve death row inmates, and they attacked the conviction of the death row inmates. They would have all been electrocuted. On the basis of systematic exclusion of Black jurors from the grand jury. And because of that, I had to get a new trial, and in the new trial, I didn't get a death sentence. So, I would like you to tell your husband, thank you.” I'm standing there in the middle of a prison. I said this is going on and on. So, in any event, we became friends. Wilbert and I became friends. And he's out now. But in any event, so that was that program. And for some reason or other, word got around that I did this, so *20/20* shows up, and *60 Minutes* shows up, and people sending me money from all over the United States, and judges from all over want to replicate the program. And I kept on saying to them, “Look, I get no federal help, I get no -- I don't want to fill out forms, I don't want to get in trouble with anything. We're doing this all by ourselves.” And the thing was so successful that I couldn't go to any restaurant without seeing a waiter that had been in my program or a cook or banquet chef or whatever. It was just incredible. So that was the first program I did. Second program I did was with young people in the Orleans Parish school system. I approached the school board, and I said, “Look, on next civics class, why don't you bring them to jail and to the court and come to my court, and I'll write a book how the court functions and what happens from arrest to conviction? And how everything is done, how many jurors you

need, how all of this works, from the police on up to the jail." So I wrote a little booklet and gave it to them, and I said, "What I will do with them when they come, I'll explain everything for the class, and then I'll put them in as jurors. Make believe they're jurors. I hear a case. Of course, I'm not bound by their judgment. They're going to go upstairs. They're going to deliberate. They're going to pick a foreman or forewoman. They come down and tell me what their judgment is. And then I write my judgment and send it to your class. And all my legal reasons why I find this way. And they can compare it with their own. And maybe it'll keep them out of the system." So that became so successful that Magee School, you know, dressed, mixed up with Booker T. Washington, and sat on juries. There was a jury here and a jury there and a jury there. On a Friday, I did this when I had misdemeanors. I never had lunch on Friday because the kids came from the public school system. And it was so popular the cops would sit in the first row and wanted to know, "What are the kids deciding? What is going to happen here? What's going to go on?" And so it really was very, very successful. And people from Saint Bernard wanted to come, and people from Jefferson Parish wanted to come. And of course, I said, "Look, there's just so much I can do." There's a big commotion. And so there was a second program. And the third program I had was that I thought that when rape victims came in, especially children, that they should have somebody who, from the time the rape case is filed, they should have somebody that they could always call and that they could always relate to and that would be with them in the courtroom. Because usually, their parents couldn't come in. Their mother couldn't come in because they're witnesses. And they could come in the courtroom, and they could be their confidante. And just be there, don't be -- so it was a pilot program that I did with the women lawyers. And that worked very well. And then I wrote legislation that if a child was -- if there was a child abuse case, it was two statutes that I amended. I wrote the legislation and said if a child had a case -- no matter whether it was a guilty verdict or a not guilty verdict -- that the trial judge would have the power to order that the child get treatment. And I mean, in criminal district court treatment being ordered for a child from a judge? It had never

heard of. And I went to the Legislature with pictures of children that had been abused, cigarette burns and gashes and all this kind of stuff, and I was laughed out of the committee. And God bless the Republican women, it was Voters' Day or something, they all came in with these flags on and the hat with the elephant on it, and they hear me making my plea: "I would like you to amend the law, doesn't cost you anything, just give me the power to do it." "What is it going to cost?" "Well, it's going to cost you nothing. I'm going to pay it out of court costs, whatever. It's worthy. And please protect the children. I don't care what else happens." So, they were very nasty. And so, I dumped my pictures on the desk of the committee, and these Republican women come in, and they hear all of that. And they grow irate. They swarmed upon this committee, they almost killed them. The thing got passed. So, I thought that was a wonderful thing to accomplish. And then we -- Flo was the head of Park and Parkways, and she assigned a couple of parks to us that we cleaned and we painted. My probationers. We cleaned and we painted the warehouses and things like that. And then came a time when I just really got tired. I worked day and night. People came in the middle of the night. I signed warrants. The police officers knew where they could reach me. The people who were supposed to be there never showed up. And I just thought that if somebody knew there were hundreds of pounds of cocaine someplace, you shouldn't let it go out of your sight just because you have a beer someplace. I was home, they called me up, OK I come out, sign the warrant. And so it was day and night, and my husband and I, we finally just left each other notes. And so, I think I would have cracked up. I finally ran for the Court of Appeal, and I was elected -- and I almost said graduated -- I retired from there in 2002. And that was completely different work. I now reviewed all the records. I no longer had the power to tell somebody I'll put you in jail if you don't show up. And my program died. The judge who succeeded me was a Black judge. He told everybody he would keep the program up.

RH: OK, it's a good time.

END OF PART 1

RH: I'm with -- interviewing Miriam Waltzer.

MW: Well, the reason that I retired from the Court of Appeal was there is a mandatory retirement age of 70. I was 69 almost. And my term was up. And so, I literally would have run for one year. I couldn't do that to the -- too much money to spend, first of all, on my part for the election and for the population. Why would they have to have another election in a year? So, I said to myself, it's been long enough. I've done my job, and I get off. So, in any event, I did retire. And in the meantime, on the Court of Appeal, I had much more time. And what I started to do is I studied Torah, and I studied Biblical Hebrew. And I actually was at a point with my Biblical Hebrew where I could pick up the Torah and I could -- all of these things says “Moses,” it always says, “and Moses said,” it always starts, “and Moses said,” and I could from the context of the sentence I knew what they were talking about more or less. And so, then when I studied that, I would go to synagogue. I had prepared it already. I would have read the Torah instructions on *Haaretz* and on the *Jerusalem Post*. And I would see what they would -- how they would interpret this particular portion. And I would see how I would interpret this particular portion. And then I would look at what other people had to say about it. And so, by the time Saturdays I got to services, I was loaded to bear. And so, it was just interesting to do that. And, of course, I had made my bat mitzvah when my son was bar mitzvah because when you're called up to read from the Torah that's enough, you really don't have to have all that other stuff. And I had the first aliyah at my son's bar mitzvah, so that, in effect, was my bat mitzvah. So, but, I didn't get into the study of Torah and Talmud. Bruce and I started to study Talmud. I don't know whether you've ever seen Talmud. There are little bitty pieces of the law, and then there are 50 commentaries from Rabbi this and Rabbi that, from Maimonides and from this and that, and Rashi, what he said about it. And in a fit of optimism, we bought all five volumes of the Talmud. Do you know, it took us six months to study one page. And I said to Bruce, “I will never make it,

that's it." But we went on. We've gone beyond it, but then I just before, about a year before the storm, I became very active in the synagogue. Became a fundraiser in the synagogue and --

RH: Tell me the name of the synagogue.

MW: It's now called Shir Chadash. It used to be Tikvat Shalom, and before that, it was just the Conservative congregation. And we had belonged to Chevra Thilim because as students for $25 a year, can you imagine, they let us in, and no sooner were we members, they sued each other because a majority of the congregation had voted to have men and women sit together. I had no clue. Why would anybody sue each other over that? So, they go to a court. This is in the beginning when I came here, you know. Because the rabbi from Chevra Thilim performed the marriage with me, and I loved the people. And they were so nice for 25 bucks. And so they go to the court, sue each other over mixed seating because they had a covenant to have the synagogue established under Polish rites, whatever that is. And it went through the whole court system, and of course, finally, Supreme Court of Louisiana said, "We have no jurisdiction, you should go before a religious court." So, there was such a breakup about it the people that broke up from Chevra Thilim, me included. We became the founding members of the Conservative congregation. And then that became Tikvat Shalom, Hope of Peace, and we were in this little rickety building, and then we built a synagogue out in Metairie. Shir Chadash it became when they merged with Chevra Thilim, the very people that we broke away from. But, in any event, I was fundraiser for them, and I was determined to raise a million bucks, and I only got $735,000. I was supposed to get $200,000 and some odd more thousand right before Katrina from some foundation. But it never was to be. But what I had also done in the meantime is I was going to -- I had read from the Torah when my son was bar mitzvah. He's now 43. He did this at age 13. So, my daughter made her bat mitzvah, and I read from the Torah. So that's a long time ago. She's now 40. And so I said, "Well, it would actually better to learn the Haftarah." That would be the

whole thing, and I could pick which Haphtarah I'm going to do, and I could study for it, and if I don't do it, I'll do it next year. So there is a Haftarah, and it is the Haftarah that has to do with the friendship between David and Jonathan, and it's one of the most beautiful Haftarot in the whole Bible, if you ever read it. It's really beautiful how they're friends. And actually, there's a hint that they were gay or that there was homosexual relationship or whatever. But, to me, it always meant that they were friends and that they were protecting each other at great expense to their own safety. And so, that Haftarah is read not just once a year, it is read sometimes four times a year because it is traditionally read when the Sabbath falls on the first day of the month. So, it's a Rosh Chodesh and a Shabbos, then you read that. But never else. So, I figured, "Well, if they read it three times a year or four times a year, if I'm not ready, I can always let somebody else do it, I do it next time." So, my friend Betty Coopersmith and I, we studied. And three weeks before Katrina, she -- we had a storm hit, it was called Cindy. We had no power for about a week where I was living. It was nothing like Katrina. Her house, on the other hand, got flooded. So, I have my notebook, and I have the Haftarah, and I have my Bible, and I go there every Tuesday afternoon, and I study, and we're sitting, and the people are working and trying to fix things up that have flooded. And so now Katrina comes. Well, first of all, my husband never wants to evacuate. He's protecting the furniture. This is the kind of guy he is. I say I don't care about --

RH: Exactly where are you living now?

MW: We're living in Dallas.

RH: Well, but I meant right before the storm, excuse me.

MW: In Lake Terrace.

RH: In Lake Terrace, and what street were you on and --?

MW: On Cartier, we were four blocks off the lake. And three blocks away from the break of the levee.

RH: The 17th or the London --

MW: No, London.

RH: The London.

MW: And, of course, the 17th is down the road. So, we got it from both sides. But in any event, he didn't want to leave, but the kids said they were going to leave. And then came mandatory evacuation. The difficulty was that my daughter had given birth on the 23rd of August to a boy, and he was beautiful, but he had a breathing problem, and his brother Benjamin had a breathing problem also. He was on a monitor for a year and took medication. Zachary had this trait in spades, it was much more pronounced. So, Lainie went home from the hospital, and the baby stayed, and he was in intensive care. And they said, “Well, by the time his bris comes, he’ll be fine.” So, I'm preparing for the bris. And I've had all the brises of all my grandsons. I have four grandsons at my house. This was going to be the bris of all brises, right, so Friday comes along, and they say, “This is going to be really a storm, you better get out.” So, I said to Lainie, “Look, let's go to the hospital, let's find out whether we can take the baby with us. We're not leaving without the baby, if we're leaving at all.” Bruce said, “Oh come, every time we evacuate Monday, we come back, it's not going to be anything.” Our grandson Eli was born when George was supposed to come. We have this kind of fortune. So Lainie and I go to the hospital, and we're talking to the nurse, and we're saying, “Look, we'd really like to take Zachary with us. We're going to evacuate most likely on Sunday morning 5:00 or something like that. We'd like to take him.” And so the nurse says, “Well, you can't take the baby unless you have a monitor unless you have medication. If you take this baby and you're in the car for hours and hours and hours, the baby may die.” Because we sit in a million cars going to Houston or wherever. It took us 13 hours to get to Houston from here. So

we're feverishly trying to locate a monitor. I'm calling all over. I'm calling for medication, calling the doctor. Back to the hospital. I said, "Look, we can't find a monitor." Because everybody was packing up. This was chaos already in the city. Said, "Look, we'd like to stay at the hospital, my daughter and I, we're not leaving the baby behind." "Well, if we have to evacuate the baby, you're on your own, and you can't stay in here. You have to sit somewhere out there, and if we throw you out, we throw you out. We cannot take the responsibility." So, I said to Lainie, "Well, talk it over with Tad. The baby will be evacuated if anything happens." He was on the third floor of a hospital, for God's sake. And I said, "The baby will be evacuated, he'll be in good hands." I would absolutely kill myself if we did something wrong. They say we can't stay here. They're not going to take us if anything happens. So they decide to leave the baby. And we're leaving, cat, dog, Lainie, Tad, Benjamin, Bruce, I, my son, my daughter-in-law, their two kids, and the in-laws, the whole *mishpuchah* is leaving at 5:00 a.m. from the parking lot except Zachary, and we're driving to Houston. And all the way as we're driving, there she calls the intensive care unit, "Everything's fine, Mrs. Breaux, don't worry about a thing." We get to Houston, we check into this fleabag because they accepted the dogs. So we had to go to this fleabag. So, we say, "Look, we're in such-and-such a room. Call us if you get any kind of call from the hospital." And she calls the hospital every so often. Everything's fine. And this is going on and what did I take, two pair of pants, two pair of shoes, threw in a swimsuit, a book. I had taken the cookies that I had baked for the bris, and I took it and took some food that I had fixed and said, "Oh, we're going to be back Monday. Nothing to it, it's going to be the same old story." Monday comes. She calls to find out about the baby. She still gets contact. And by later, several hours later, all contact is dead. I was still not worried. You say well, electricity is off, nothing is working, we're going to hear. Tuesday comes along, nothing. Lainie gets a call from somebody who is the sister of one of the nurses in the intensive care, and she calls from California, she said her sister called her, that everything was all right, not to worry. By Wednesday, I'm in a panic. I mean, an absolute dead panic. Everybody's in a panic. Now, I hate the

telephone with a passion. I don't see a person, I can't do this, I have to face a person. I get on the telephone. I must be -- have been on the telephone for three days flat, I called every person I knew, the senator, the head of the National Guard, the governor, the Red Cross, every hospital in Louisiana because we kept on seeing children were being evacuated to all these different places. And I'm just praying at night, and I'm saying to myself, “God take my house,” which, of course, God did. “Take my house, just give me Zachary.” This kind of childish thing, “I will never again do this and this and this and this, if you give me Zachary.” I'd be living in penury, I don't care. And it was just awful. And so, I must have called every hospital in Louisiana that a friend of mine went on the computer, printed out all the numbers and everything for the hospitals. Called up one that -- called every hospital in Houston, called every hospital in Dallas, called them repeatedly because I figured maybe he's going to be delivered later. I'm on the phone, I'm running up a bill like crazy. No Zachary. So Lainie and Tad are so beside themselves they go on CNN. And all they have is the picture of him being born, and they say, “He has a little thing on, he has a blanket that we left with him at the hospital.” And all I could keep thinking is this cute little baby, somebody's just going to steal it right off. I didn't know everything had flooded. I had no clue. Who knew what had happened in the city? All you could see is downtown, looting, all this kind of stuff. But where we were, where the hospital was, we had no idea. Then we get word that the water is rising in the hospital, it's now up to the second floor someplace, and friends of ours are in there. Dr. Barrocas, Chief of Staff, he's in there, he's a friend of ours with his wife. We called the -- so on CNN, “Please call us if you have the baby.” And so call up and called the owners of the hospital. We say, “Look, have you evacuated the hospital?” “Oh yes, everything's fine, we sent a helicopter, the children have been evacuated.” Sigh of relief. “Where to?” “Oh, we don't know.” OK. More calling. Nothing. Called somebody else in Atlanta, the daughter of Barrocas calls us and says, “Look, they haven't evacuated, my father is hanging in there. Snakes are going floating around, 200 people coming in, drug addicts are coming in, they're looting the hospital.” And all we want to know is, did they take the

children out? “No.” Said to Lainie, “Look, I'm going to buy a helicopter for so-and-so many hours, I'll pay, whatever it takes.” I didn't even have a checkbook with me. It took me four weeks to get a checkbook because my bank flooded with all my papers in it. I have no longer identity. So, in any event, so to make a long story short, they were so beside themselves. In the meantime, Zayde, the little boy's great-grandfather, 97 years old in Woldenberg Village, was being transported for 22 hours to Houston. And we didn't know where he was. Three people died on the way, going through Mississippi, wherever. So they go, they want to go on television again. And it is in front of the Astrodome, where all these Katrina evacuees are arriving that have been in the Superdome. And they're there, and we get a call at -- I don't know how many phone calls I made. We get a call from somebody who says, “You know, there was just a transport of children to Cook's Children's Hospital in Fort Worth.” I had never called there. Who thinks about Fort Worth, right? So, I'm calling the hospital. They said, “We can't give out this information.” And I'm just -- so I called Lainie up, and I said, “Look, I think he's in Fort Worth, call up.” So, he was there. And then the miracles just started to happen. An organization called Angel Flight furnished a pilot and a plane, picked him up with a limousine, took Benjamin, Lainie, Tad to Fort Worth. They stayed at the hospital for a day or two. They checked the baby out. The baby got medication. He was still on a monitor. And they brought the baby to Houston. Meantime my son and his family had gone to Dallas because they had good friends there. And, I mean, the children had to go to school. My grandsons had been in school two days, and the storm came. Life had to somehow get normal. So, they were in Dallas already, and my son-in-law Tad has a cousin in Dallas. And we decided well family should be together as best as possible. And the first thing that I said was well -- and they also found Zayde on the same day. They found the grandfather alive.

RH: And where was --

MW: He was at Golden Acres in Houston. So, now came -- I got immediately I get into the planning of the bris. Zachary has to have a bris. Zayde can't travel from Houston, he's been traveling all the while. The bris has to be in Houston. We all have to schlep from Dallas to Houston to do this because that old man can't travel. So finally, after calling a mohel on the phone, making arrangement with this very fancy-schmancy synagogue, everybody was so helpful. We had a very beautiful bris. We all looked like schlumps. You should see the pictures that we have. Flip-flops we had on -- I mean, what did we have? We had nothing.

RH: So, you had already gone to Dallas. And then after --

MW: Because they picked up the baby in Fort Worth. And then we went to Dallas. So, in any event, so we had the bris in a very small part of the chapel. And we had a reception in the ballroom, and the entire Jewish community that was in Houston, everybody knew about this. They came, they just kept coming, it was just an incredible thing. And so now back to Dallas and now --

RH: Tell me what it was like to be in that bris, to have you all together for -- is this your first service? First coming --

MW: No, there was a service before where we were all praying for some kind of deliverance because nobody knew what had happened. People had died, we found out later what happened, which was even worse, in Zachary's case. I got the -- get the shivers every time I think about it. In any event, the bris was there, it was done, we went back to Dallas, and now where are we going to live? Because we all live with a cousin. She hated dogs. So we have this huge dog. And a cat. And so, she gets on the Internet and writes an email to her congregation. She's born in New Orleans, and her father was the president of my synagogue, where we belong.

RH: Shir Chadash?

MW: Yes, and her maiden name was Golden. So she's now in Dallas with her husband, who's a lawyer who buys -- it's around holiday time. It's around Rosh Hashanah. We have no clothes. We have nothing. We don't have a bed. We don't have pots. We don't have pans. We hope to God they take our charge card. We don't know what's happened to anything. We can't call. Our phones are down. We have a computer. We watch television. And we see this tragedy unfold about the city. We have no idea. So, in any event, so she gets on the computer, and she sends out an email to her congregation saying does anybody have a house for rent for a family with a cat and a dog and a baby and so on and so forth. So, this man responds, and no one has ever heard of this man. The whole Jewish community says, “Who's he?” So, we get the address, and we get in the car, and we drive over. It's a beautiful house. It's a neighborhood. And we see it has a pool and it's empty and it has a for sale sign in front. And I said to Bruce, “Look, when you talk to that man, you better tell him we can't buy a house. And we can't have this house just for a month and then move again.” We've now moved from this place to that place to some other place. We're going to have to have a place where we are and find out how much it is. This is such a beautiful house. It's going to cost too much money. We're not going to -- we have no income. We don't know what has happened to my husband's three offices. So, in any event, so I said, “Make sure that you find out whether this is for a longer period of time, how about signing a lease for a year.” So, he goes together with Tad and talks to this man and tells him exactly what I said. “Mr. Rozen, it's very nice to have this house, you're offering it to us, but how much is the rent, and you're having it for sale, and we're really afraid that you're going to sell it and we have to move again.” Man takes the sign. Says, “The house is no longer for sale, it's for you. For you to use free of charge until you're on your feet, and we want you to break fast with us.” So, meantime, I was at the Jewish Federation. Ashamed of myself that I was going to the Jewish Family Service because I was told there was assistance. We had nothing. And I said to myself, “Here I am. I've always given money. I've always been the giver. I should go there, I'm not poor, I have money somewhere, I just don't have a checkbook. I

just can't get to it, that's for poor people, it's not for me." And so everybody said, "Go to the Jewish Family Service." I went to the Jewish Family Service, there was the second miracle. The thing was set up like a store. Leave it to Jewish ingenuity, you got a personal shopper. "How many people are your family? Oh good, you keep kosher." I said, "Yeah, in another life, I kept kosher, but here I don't have a pot. I don't have one pot, much less two." So, OK, fine. "How many in the family?" Oh, this, this, this, this, good. So now, you got this thing, and this woman went with you. "OK, the little boy's how old?" Put the clothes in. Was all arranged by size, by sex, by everything. Somebody had given them -- and they only accepted new stuff. They will not -- they would not accept used stuff. The mayor of Dallas, Jewish woman, and the CAO very, very powerful, much more powerful than the mayor, they're Jewish. They got on the phone, they didn't wait for FEMA, they just said, "I need, I need, I need." And they got. So, in any event, by the time I had gone through this place, I still kept thinking I shouldn't accept this, I was so embarrassed, here, why, and so they put kosher roast on there and all kinds of stuff. And aluminum pans and what they didn't give me. Clothes for me. Pair of boots, that somebody gave them 1,000 pair of shoes. They were all lined up by size. Blouses, sheets, I had a thing like this high by the time I left there. And so, then this woman says to me -- this is a Friday. She says, "What is it that you need most?" I said, "We have no beds. We're sleeping on the carpet. We just don't have it." "Not to worry. Leave everything here, come with me." So she drives me over to this place, and I thought, "Soon Shabbos is coming, she's not going to work anymore." We get there. Man is there. "What can I do for you?" She says, "How many people are there, what kind of beds do you need?" And I said, "Well, two couples, two children, one of them is a baby." And so, "OK, we want this mattress, this mattress, this mattress, this mattress." I said, "I haven't got the money to pay." Said, "Not to worry." She pays. And then the man says, "When do you need them?" And I said, "As soon as possible." He said, "Would tomorrow morning at 9:00 be all right?" This is Friday afternoon. I said, "Oh yes, that would be great. You really would bring them in the morning?" "Oh yes." Next

morning we had the mattresses. And I said to this woman, “As soon as I get a checkbook, I will pay you for everything that you've given me today and then some, and especially for the mattresses. I want you to be able to do it for somebody else.” She said, “Don't worry about it.” And when I got a checkbook, I did it. In any event, we lived in this house that was --

RH: You wrote a check?

MW: Yes, I wrote a check to her, and she just couldn't believe it. I mean to the Jewish Family Service.

RH: I was curious because I recall reading a story that your mother was a great and generous giver and that you had learned not to shame people.

MW: My mother always, always, always gave things. My mother would do things like, and I never understood this, she would cook this big pot of soup, and she knew these people had nothing to eat, and then she would say, “Look, take the soup over, knock on the door, and say that it would really be wonderful if they would accept this soup because we have so much soup we don't know what to do with soup. They would do us a favor.” So that's how I was brought up. And then she would stick money into an envelope, and she said, “Go to these people, shove it under the door, don't ring the bell or anything, don't ever tell them that you did this, this is a secret, they should not be shamed.” And I don't know how often my mother did that. So --

RH: So, here you were.

MW: Oh, God.

RH: The other end, the receiving end for the --

MW: It was so incredible. It kept getting better. The wife of the man who gave us the house, who was not a very believing person, I always tell him, I said, “Mike, if you come to your Maker, if you've been a real bastard all your life, that one thing is going to save you, what you have done here. You'll get entry wherever.” And he glows when I tell him. So, his wife comes to me. Now, what are we going to wear for Rosh Hashanah. Have no clothes. So I didn't know how much money we would have. What income would we have? Could I really spend something for a blouse or whatever? So, the wife of Rozen comes up, beautiful woman, and she said, “Miriam, you know, my mom died five years ago. She said she had Ferrault and Chanel and Escada, and I think she had your size. I'm not going to give it to you, but I'm going to loan it to you. If you want to, you can even go and have it taken in. Because my mother had a big bosom.” I don't have a big bosom. I said, “I can't do that.” She said, “Please. I'll bring it over.” This woman brings me a wardrobe like I have never been able to have myself. So, now I'm feeling bad again. I'm going to take this Escada jacket and have it taken in, so it's going to fit me, and then I give it back to her. This is her mother's clothes. I just felt so bad. I said, “I can't do that. I can't have these clothes tailored in. I'll wear them as they are, I don't care, let them hang there.” And so she said, “Do whatever you see fit,” and so I wore this beautiful Escada jacket over a pair of -- over whatever, over a skirt and a pair of shoes that I bought. And we went to services, and every synagogue and every Jewish institution took us in. Texas was incredible. For my daughter, the phone rang, and the doorbell rang, and people delivered stuff for this baby. We had stuff from the floor to the ceiling. We spent hours just taking the diapers and the Enfamil and all this kind of stuff apart for this baby. People had heard about this baby. We had so much food for this baby, I don't think for months we had to buy. Every doctor that my daughter needed. She needed a pediatrician for him. She needed an internist for herself. She needed a gynecologist. All my doctors are gone all over. They're all gone. All my friends have left New Orleans. All their offices are flooded out. They have -- the hospital is gone, their houses are gone. So here we are. Everyone took us immediately. No charge. Because

I was so afraid. I said, “How do we pay for all of this?” And what was really, really nice is that it wasn't just the Jewish community. It was generally like that. I remember going into Chico's, which is moderately priced. And so there's this lady. And we must have had this look about us like schlumpen. And so she says, “You must be an evacuee.” “Yes.” She said, “Listen, we had a sale, and I just took a lot of clothes for myself that is very, very inexpensive.” She said, “You look about like my size.” And I said, “Please, I cannot afford much, I just want something, pick out something.” She said, “Why don't you take my clothes?” Said -- just gave them to me. Every time we went through a tollgate, they saw the Louisiana license plate, you got waved through. And all of Texas has tollgates. This -- Nordstrom's, Target, Bed, Bath & Beyond, Sports Authority. You came in, you showed a Louisiana driver's license, 20% off. And they said this is an indefinite offer, this isn't just for now. And I felt like a beggar. I felt really bad. And after a while, once we found out what happened to our house and, parenthetically, the first thing I do when a storm comes in my house, I did this numerous times, I had family pictures, a wall that belonged to my son, a wall that belonged to my daughter with their pictures, a wall belonging to me with a few pictures I have left from Europe, with my husband had a wall. When the storm came, I would go down this long hall in my house, take every picture down, stick it in my car, take the silver, my cutlery that I have inherited from my grandmother and my mother and things like that and stick it in the trunk of the car, park it in the fifth floor of the Hilton and pray that the garage wouldn't be blown down. So, my car was still in New Orleans, and I didn't care about the car, I cared about the pictures. So, I said to my husband, “Do me a favor” -- you couldn't get in, it was martial law -- “go to the Hilton, here's my slip, my ticket, it's going to cost you an arm and a leg” -- didn't cost anything, but -- “go up and find out whether my pictures are intact. I don't even care about the silver, just the pictures.” Because I had nothing left. So he came, and the first thing he saw that how devastated the house was, and he got immediately some transportation guy, Goldwasser, arranged to pack everything up as it was. All the upholstered stuff was thrown out. And then they left stuff behind for me to go through if I

came to New Orleans. And then he went to the Hilton with a special pass with a friend of mine who was a judge, and he got there, and there was a sheriff that we knew, and Bruce said, “My wife's car's on the fifth floor.” And he said, “You're very lucky it's on the fifth floor, because if it were on the third floor, everything was taken, and we had a firefight.” And so Bruce said to him, “What do you mean, you had a firefight?” “We killed quite a few.” So, he got on the fifth floor, and there was my Jaguar, and it was filthy like all hell and had a couple of flats, but it was there with the pictures. So, I was so happy. And then I came back. Well, first of all, we found out what had happened with Zachary. An attempt was made to rescue him from the hospital. Some damn fools on the ground shot at the helicopter, so the helicopter turned around and left, and my Zachy's on the third floor of the hospital sitting there without a generator, without anything. Second attempt is made to rescue them, they're turning around again, and of course, the people who own the hospital think it's happened, right? And Barrocas, who's inside, who's going bonkers, and his wife is going bonkers, the nicest, nicest man. He finally takes it on his own and calls the hospital corporation, and he says, “On my own word, I am now going to order a helicopter here, and I hope to God it comes here because you haven't sent one.” Now whether they did or didn't, I don't know, but we know that they shot at the helicopters. So, when I heard that, I was devastated that I would live in a city where people would do that. To even think of it, somebody to go onto a helipad, rescue people, and some people on the ground shoot at it. That was just -- that was beyond it all. And then we found out that Zachary had been -- finally, they got him out, they took him to Armstrong Airport. He was in a MASH unit for 24 hours, and all my fantasies about this baby being stolen, after the fact -- it really almost was like it was true. Somebody probably would have stolen him if they had seen him, he was so cute. And so, then they put him into the helicopter and brought him to Fort Worth. And then, the miracle happened. Parenthetically, he's a gorgeous baby. He's as big as a house, he is really enormous. And it was the silver lining on this whole thing.

RH: How does it feel to be a person who has been in charge of her life and really directed in so many ways the lives of other people in so many positive ways in this city, to not be able to get a response on the phone, to not have the control of the situation?

MW: It isn't easy. It isn't easy. But you know, what you learn is that it's a really equal opportunity shocker for everybody. The phones don't work, the radios don't work, you don't have money, you don't have identification, you don't have anything to wear, you don't have a house, your doctors are gone, your friends are gone, the city is in chaos, and you've gone through it once before because when the war was over my hometown looked like the city now does. And people would leave little notes, “We have gone here.” Then you would go there. And that would be destroyed. You looked for people all over. I still remember that. Bridges destroyed. Things just sticking out, things smoldering. When I was a child. How often do you have to do this? How often do you have to see this? I just -- again? You know? And it's just -- in my mind, it has made me very humble. Listen, little bitty things like this not working or that not working or somebody making a curtain for me that's too short, you wait for the damn thing for six weeks; finally, it comes, it's too short, so you have to start over. I just laugh. It is nothing. Everything is insignificant in terms of -- it's an inconvenience, that's all. The main thing is you have your family, you have your health, you have the resources to start over again, and you're halfway -- halfway -- sane. Because I couldn't read a newspaper. I used to be a reader like crazy, I couldn't read four sentences, I didn't understand that. I couldn't remember my children's birthdates. I didn't know where I put what. And it took months for all of this to come back. And I'm a person who has a very good memory. And so, and to see my children and the relationships of people around me, how chaotic all of this was, everybody was acting out. Friends of mine that had very tenuous relationships, they got a divorce, other people committed suicide. It was just like everything that was a little bit torn, it ripped completely. And by the same token, if you had a firm relationship, it even got firmer. Now my husband, who had promised me to retire when I retired, never did, because he couldn't let it go. He ran around with three telephones. Had to protect the

practice for his son and all this kind of stuff. Forget about it. We found out two -- one practice in the east had drowned, one in Mississippi had drowned, but the one across the river was as if it hadn't been touched, there was electricity, can you believe? They hit the ground running, they were the first law office that was open, they were commuting back and forth from Dallas by car or plane. On a Friday, I'd pick him up at Love Airport like children at a school, and on Monday, I brought him back. All the Louisiana cars would line up, and this is how we lived. And so, in all of that, I am just so grateful because I know of so many horrible stories. People who have literally lost it all. We had an apartment house that gave us a nice amount of rent on Fleur de Lis where we had our first house and dealing with insurance companies on a daily basis. An absurd thing, you'd like to tell them, “I'm going to sue your butt,” well then they put you on the bottom of the list, you see. So, I can't order them around anymore. But I'm now chomping at the bit to file a lawsuit in Orleans Parish against the insurance company that doesn't pay me because everybody knows me, let them come into that court. Every one of those judges has lost everything. So, if they hear how they have monkeyed around, they're going to get it, and I think they know it. So it's just -- it's an -- you can't describe it. I feel a lot of gratitude. I feel -- I had never been in Dallas in my life. I had a very negative impression about Texas, which is really the height of prejudice because I didn't know anybody from Texas, I just imagined I knew people from Texas. And they are wonderful people, everybody has a work ethic, everybody says thank you, everybody helps, two of the things that they say all the time to me is howdy, and then when I tell them I'm from New Orleans, they say, “Oh bless your heart.” “Bless your heart” comes up all the time. And we live in a Republican Mecca in Dallas. In the apartment house where we now live, we bought a condo, there are now ten Democrats. Four of them are from New Orleans. You feel a little strange. But that's all right.

RH: How are you connecting into the community now? Or are there any things that are helping you?

MW: Well, first of all, my contacts through the synagogue.

RH: Which synagogue is this?

MW: This synagogue in Dallas is called Shearith Israel, and it's a Conservative congregation, and they have a satellite congregation where we lived. Which was in the north of the north of Dallas. I mean, it's almost Plano. And the other one is where we now live in the south. Downtown, it's a very beautiful huge building, very intimidating. And I prefer to go back to my old one, although it takes me 15 minutes or 20 minutes to drive there. So, people have been incredibly helpful. They bring you challah over -- “Here it is, come on over” -- invite you for Shabbos, then you make friends. Then I have made friends with people from New Orleans that I knew but I never was close to. And they introduce you to somebody. And then I called Hadassah up. I changed my membership from here to Dallas and so I met a lady who's from my old hometown. She even speaks my dialect. She's 85. And I know exactly where she lived, and she has a cousin who's from my hometown, and he's 90. So --

RH: That's a little gift too.

MW: Yeah, so and then we have joined a food and wine organization, and you guessed it, lots of people in there are Jewish. So, I've learned how to make goat cheese and I volunteer at the Farmers Market, and I work with schoolchildren to show them how proper nutrition goes. They cook themselves. I work in the gift shop, get 10% off in the gift shop. Of course, when do I buy something in the gift shop? But in any event I have lots of -- and we go to the symphony. Have fabulous, fabulous cultural things. What Dallas spends on culture is just unbelievable. Fort Worth has museums. They are just to die for, so gorgeous. And everything is available and not that expensive. And it's not New Orleans but --

RH: So tell me what that means, it's not New Orleans. What do you miss in New Orleans?

MW: Well, the first time I got back to my house, I had a mask on, and I had gloves on, and I was weeping all the way from the airport. And that hasn't changed, I'm still doing that, and I saw all the stuff and I got into my house. And I saw the Torah that I had studied with my friend Betty. There it was, all soaked, all messed up. My notebook, all messed up. Every prayer book, every Talmud, every Haggadah, everything that I had ever used, messed up, all in a pile. Called my friend Barry Ivker, and I said, “Barry, this stuff has to be buried. I can't take it. It needs to be buried. They're holy books, they can't just be thrown on a pile of garbage.” And then I went through all the other things that were still there. Oh, this is what we used at the bris, oh, here's this, look at that, it's all messed up, and it wasn't the house, and it wasn't my Japanese garden, as beautiful as it was. It was what happened in that house. And the things that I used in that house to make it happen. And everything reminded me of something. This is what we did when my son was -- here is this, we used this, I kept kosher, used to have five sets of dishes. By miracle, the one for Passover remained right from the dowry, there it is, way up, it's fine. Everything else is messed up. My aluminum pots are corroded, silver things are corroded; they've been in my family for hundreds of years. Two chairs that I have -- that were handmade, we call them farmers' chairs. They look great. They're absolutely -- they look like dogs have chewed on them. It's just like you personally violated when you see all of that. And then I got very sick physically and emotionally, got very ill. I coughed, I was swelling up. And I had to go back another time, and all I could think of, “I want out of here, I can't be in this place, it's just utter destruction.” And what do I take and what do I leave and what -- how do I throw -- all my career, all the speeches I had written. I picked them up. They fell just like that. And so it's that kind of stuff that separates you from New Orleans and from the place. And then when we were all done, there was a television set left, and there were some -- there was a record player or something left, tape player, something, my son lost everything, his house, his office. He

didn't have a thing of a piece in Lakeview. And so, I said to him, “Look, I have a couple of things here that are still good that didn't get messed up. Come pick it up.” This was before Thanksgiving. “Come pick it up. Hurry up about it.” He said, “Mom, where am I going to put it?” I said, “Well, find a place, because it's molding here.” Well, we close up, we go for Thanksgiving to California to celebrate with our family that we have there. We come back. My husband says, “What did you do with this TV set, what did you do with this tape player, what did you do with all the wine that we had left?” because we found some wine. I said, “I gave it to Joel.” Said, “It's not here.” Somebody had stolen it. So, it was like the kick in the pants at the end that people just went down the street, and when somebody wasn't there, they loaded everything up and took off. And there was never an end to it. And it is so unbelievable to me that people would do such a thing. And the only reason that they didn't loot my house before is because it had water in it. Eight foot of water, they didn't want to swim in that, they didn't want to walk in there. They came after. So it's -- New Orleans has meant -- look, I've been in this country for 49 years and lived in that house for almost 37. And so, everything that was in it I had collected. Everything that was in it I had picked up. I had traveled to Egypt. I had traveled to Africa. I had traveled to Ecuador, Brazil, whatever, all this stuff was in there. Every little piece meant something. That wasn't important, but what I had done with it, every Sabbath my grandchildren came over and spent the night, every Sabbath. They took a bath together in the tub, the three of them, dirty as they were. And every Saturday morning, they got their breakfast from their Opa. He made them scrambled eggs, and they would say they're the best in the world, and we would go to synagogue, all of us. Gone. Can't recreate that. That's what that house was about. And so it's not New Orleans, and now that we’re there, everybody treats us as if we were traitors, what they don't understand is that my -- “Well, why don't you come back to New Orleans, be part of the solution?” I said, “I can't be part of the solution. I have a husband who has serious heart problems.” Hospitals aren't functioning. I have to have a hospital that functions for him. I have to have a hospital that's staffed. I personally get so depressed, I can't stand

it. Every time I come to New Orleans, it takes me five days when I come back to Dallas to come back to some sort of a normalcy. I can't do it. I'm done with it. I'd be happy to visit. I've been to seven weddings now. They all have been postponed since last year. I love it. I see all my friends. They're all over the place. They're in Chattanooga and in New York and in New Jersey. I have no more doctors here. Nothing. The synagogue has lost about a third of membership. My grandson Benjamin goes to the Jewish day school. He's one of 21 children going there. How do you like that? And when you see the politics of it all, I've been in politics for a long time. When you see the politics of it all, I had certainly assumed that once we were all down, we would all try to get up. And that they would all try to get over their racial stuff, and there is no doubt this city's been screwed over by the federal government, by the state government, by every government there is. This is an American city. They're being treated worse, we've been treated worse here in this city than any enemy country. And I don't care whether people say it's just because it was a Black city. Everybody got screwed. I'm not from the Ninth Ward. I'm from the Seventh Ward. We got wiped out. The Fourth Ward got wiped out. Everybody lost stuff. All I'm saying is what people have done in the name of government and what they're still doing, and how they're politicizing it all makes me ill. And the only thing that makes me feel good is that there is personal initiative of a caliber that I have never seen in the city. The newspaper finally acts like a newspaper, that's number one. The school board is irrelevant. As crooked as they were, they stole $40 million, $41 million, that have never been accounted for. Now they're gone. Now we start with charter schools, and now they have this and that, and it may be hard, but it's better than what it was. And maybe it is true that we don't have transportation. Maybe now people help each other. You need a ride, I give you a ride. Maybe the RTA, who's the trough of all theft, together with the airport; they now have to cut down, and they now have to live within their means. And they have to learn this and that. And people expect more of their elected officials now. I hope. Now we reelected the Mayor. I have to tell you I feel so sorry for him. He's a friend of mine. I have never known him to be a racist. I've never

known him to be anything but a wonderful human being who is very capable. Something happened to him. Like it happened to all of us. The difference being, he's the Mayor of a city, and he's responsible. And I just cannot for the life of me understand that things take so long. And where are our priorities? Why would I even think of coming back when in my area there isn't even a telephone connected yet? Just yesterday, they started -- $500 for water bills. We haven't used it. We got a bill for the television set. We haven't used it. Insurance now $30,000 -- who can pay that? And no one has it in him to say the truth and say to people, “Look, you can't come back to such-and-such-and-such a place because it is flood-prone, you don't have police protection, we can't get electricity there, we have to find some other kind of solution.” And there are solutions, there are good brains that can figure these things out, but they sure aren't working here. And it is very discouraging when you hear on one headset, “Come back, come back, come back.” To what? And I've walked on Canal Street because there's no bus and no streetcar and all that. I walked on Canal Street. It looked so bad and so dirty. Now we can be poor, we can be down, do we have to be so dirty? And I love this city, don't misunderstand me, it hurts my heart. We have the most talented people here, musicians, cooks, we know how to have a good time. We are colorful, we're different, we're 300-year history, but you know what? Something to be said for order. And for things working. And I think at age almost 72 -- my husband is 74 -- we have deserved some comforts. We both retired now. We worked all our lives. Why would people have to live in this kind of hardship? And maybe someday I come back, but it won't be soon. It's just too difficult to figure out. It's just too long to wait for four years of a term to be up and for two years of a term to be up and for this person to be changed in government and to wait until the Bush administration is replaced by somebody else. It's just I haven't got the time. I just -- by the time all this happens, I'll be dead. So, my son who'd like to build the city up with his own two hands, I salute him, I'm so proud of him – “It's going to happen, Mom, we don't need FEMA, we don't need Bush, forget about it, we're going to do it all of ourselves.” So he lives in this little shotgun house. And there's barely enough room for plates and

dishes and everything, and he's perfectly happy. And Lainie wants to move. And so why should I come back if she wants to move? So it's difficult. Most of the people that I really love have moved away. And aren't coming back. So it's -- maybe a miracle will happen.

RH: It's hard to sit in the middle of the devastation.

MW: I couldn't -- I said to my husband, “I cannot on a daily basis go back to a house where I see nothing but devastation around me.” I cannot hack it. So we sold the house as is to my son-in-law. He fixed it up, and he has it now for sale. OK, I will never go into that house again. I will never come close to it. I don't want to see it. I don't want to know what happens to it. I'm done, I want to -- I just -- I want to be done with that. And my son-in-law has a beautiful house, what did they do? They built this floodgate in front of it, and they got this big old thing that lights up like a Christmas tree. And who knows what happens to this levee? Have no idea. Why should I trust government? I have zero confidence in government. Zilch.

RH: You're a government official. You've been a government official.

MW: That's it. Forget it. First of all, I know too much. And secondly, it's only proven to me that none of them really wants to take responsibility. You could even do it wrong, just do it. And they won't do it, it's politically not expedient.

RH: We're going to have to stop for just one minute.

END OF PART 2

RH: ...Miriam Waltzer, and this is tape 3, and what I just asked you was what you did for your first Seder after Katrina, post-Katrina.

MW: OK, I told my -- the contractor who did our -- updated our condo, we bought it in November, I said, “I have to be in this condo no later than the 1st of March. He said,

“Why?” I said, “Because it's Passover.” And he said, “I will have you in.” And I say to myself, “Well, I can really put 12 people around the table. I used to have 37. How am I going to do this?” So, I went downstairs to the manager and I said, “We have a social room here, right, in the condo, there's a social room that we can rent or get.” Says, “Sure.” Says, “When do you need it for?” I said, “For Passover. How many people does it seat?” She says, “Oh, you can seat 40. Let me show it to you.” So here's this room and it has a little kitchen there. And I said, “Ah, this is great.” She says, “What kind of party are you going to have?” And I said, “Well, it's called Passover, and it's a family affair.” “Oh, who's going to cater?” I said, “I'm going to cook.” And she said, “Really, you're going to do that?” I said yes, and I said, “And I need to know where to find tables to rent, and I need to find out where to get tablecloth, and I need to find out where I” -- I had said, “I have silverware, because we'd been eating with paper plates and silverware from my grandmother.” And so I said, “I need to find out where I can get glassware. And please write it on the book.” So Passover came. We were in, and I invited everybody to come to Dallas who didn't have their own Seder. Couldn't afford their own Seder, couldn't find the stuff for their own Seder. And I cooked upstairs in this place. And the good thing about it was everything was new, I didn't have to kasher it. See, some good things happen. And I cooked and I cooked and I cooked. And I schlepped it down to the social room. Put it in the non-kashered kitchen, wrapped it with aluminum foil, warmed it up, hired two people to help me, and we were 24 adults and 11 kids. It was bedlam, absolute bedlam. And it was the most beautiful thing, it was so nice. And of course, they had a fight over the afikoman – “I found it,” “No, you didn't,” “Hide it again,” blah blah blah. And so each child got a gift and bargained out the afikoman, and the people from New Orleans were here. The kids were here, were there. And it was just very happy for me that they came, and Lainie kept saying, “Why did you do that?” I said, “Well, there's some things I'm not going to give up, ever. It's very important to me.” And I said, “Promise me that wherever you are, you will come to my Seder, unless I can't do it anymore, then you have to do it.” So, I hope she will. Because it's a lot, a lot of work.

And I love doing it, and I have to tell you, I made the best gefilte fish I've ever made from scratch. And I went to the Albertson's there that sells kosher stuff. I was like a kid in a candy store. I bought just because I could. I have never seen such an assortment of choices. The butcher says, “How big do you need the roast?” He brings this thing out, he cuts it fresh for me, I'm not used to this, and I don't have to give explanations of what I'm looking for. It's unbelievable. I'm in this store, and I'm just buying and buying and buying. As a consequence, I still have a lot of matzo meal left. I look forward to many other -- we celebrated Hanukkah there. And we had that, we had Shabbos there. We had Shabbos, and I learned how to cook a brisket in an aluminum pan. It really works. My Le Creuset pots came through the flood. You get what you pay for.

RH: Wow.

MW: Didn't rust, didn't fall apart.

RH: They'd be in that little section of the paper where they talk about evacuation and things you can do and the Times-Picayune. You could say, “Buy Le Creuset.”

MW: Well, I wouldn't want to do that. Frenchmen, why should I help them? But in any event. If you ever come to Dallas I would like you to call me. I've bought things from the consignment store and I bought things from estate sales. As a matter of fact, there are people from New Orleans that lost everything too, and I call them up, “The lady in 9C died, come down here, there's an estate sale.” So got all my Shabbos candlesticks from her. And so we help each other, and I have to tell you it turned out very well, and some of my things have survived, like the wrought iron bed I had made for my husband for the 40th anniversary, it came through in flying colors. But it was wrought iron, what could happen to it? But everything -- so many things, I don't even know where they are.

RH: Are there any things that you go back to in your Judaism that give you a frame of reference to help you just to help you make sense of this past year?

MW: Well, we are now in the holiday season that has part of the Torah that we read says, “God puts before you a choice, life or death, you either get inscribed in the book of life, God decides who dies and who lives.” And it always has struck me as terribly cruel. So, they decided that my mother, the angel that she was, would die at 57? God just simply decided you go this year? It's always looked to me like a very cruel thing. I'm the judge here, you know? But now I have figured it out. There's some things that you just can't help. That just happen. And if you want to make better what happens, there are three things you can do. You can pray, you can be kind to other people, and you can try to make it better if you have done anything wrong to somebody else. Those three things, prayer, loving-kindness and charity and make things better help you over all these things that happen to you that you have no control over. And I don't believe that God does this, I don't think God could care less. I think God says -- whatever God is thinking -- if I could, she thinks -- that “I made a contract with you here.” Abraham made a contract with God, Moses made a – well, first Noah made a contract with God, the flood, then Abraham makes a contract with God, finally, Moses makes a contract with God, and I think that I sometimes have to fault God for not keeping up the contract, because God says, “You make a very special people.” So, whatever that means, and I think that it helps to think of things that just happen that we have no control over. They happen to us. But then things we do have control over. Our actions, our behavior, our relationships with other people, we have control over that, and that's something that we need to understand in the framework of all this other stuff that has happened, and that's really at the end, that's the most important thing. Because what would I do without my family? Do you know how many families have drowned? How many people still are not identified? How many people still haven't been found? How many people will be mentally disturbed forever because of this storm? How many people have committed suicide? Can't deal with it? These are all relationships that you have with others and with yourself. And so somehow or other, it's very hard but, you know, I think we have a framework. Jewish people have never had it easy, and they never will. In this country, we most probably --

Jews have most probably achieved more status, power, wealth, ability and equality than they ever had anywhere, but they'll never have it easy if they have a conscience. And so, that's just the way it is.

RH: What do you mean, “If they have a conscience?"

MW: If they have a conscience and they look at other people and not just look at their own wealth. If they look at Darfur and if they look at Iraq and they look at suicide bombers in Israel and the poor in this country, in this city. I mean, there's plenty to look at. And so, we don't have it easy. It's hard to do. Then when you do something, many times, it gets misunderstood. Like for example, when I had my probation class, “Why are you doing that?” the Black community said. “Why are you doing that? What do you have in mind? That's our job. You don't understand Black people.” I said, “You're right, I don't know how it is to be Black, but I know how it is not to have anything to eat, not to have a place to stay, not having finished school, having all these things against you, and you know why I'm doing it? Because I can. So there.” And it used to irk me because they could have done the same thing. You always get questioned when you're Jewish, “Why are you doing that? Is there some nefarious reason that you're trying to do this mitzvah?” And I don't owe them any -- or anybody -- any explanation. Nor do we ever if we do something right. And so, whatever that is. I will never evacuate again from water. I live on the 17th floor. If water comes up there, God, help me. That's not going to happen. Anything may happen to me, a tornado may strike me, anything may come my way, I can't help that, but I'm not going to be flooded again. That's not going to happen. And maybe we all didn't demand enough of everybody in this city and of our state government and our federal government. We only had five, seven murders a week, so we said, “That's the way it is. As long as I live in my neighborhood, doesn't happen there --”

RH: Do you think that -- you hear a lot about the federal government and what do they owe us, what do they owe those people down in New Orleans, or how much should somebody give to another community to build, and it seems like we're into a situation where we're deciding what it means to be a citizen and what are the limits of government. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MW: Well, let me tell you, well here the war was over, was ten years old, was 1945. I got married in 1957. Things were still not working properly. They had a Marshall Plan in Germany. This was a whole country that was destroyed, not just a city, a whole country. Guess what? They built that sucker up. The Americans did it; they had a guy on the helm of it that said, “It's going to be done.” Now, who's responsible for the breaking of the levees? The citizens? Did I know that they have levee things that go down there, and they're not deep enough, and the stuff underneath it flows, and it's going to break, and they knew all of that? Did I know that as a citizen? No, I didn't know that. But the government knew it, and the Corps of Engineers knew it. And so they have to take some responsibility because we wouldn't have been flooded the way we were flooded if it hadn't been for the fact that the levees broke. And left us vulnerable. Now, you can always say, “Oh, you should have evacuated.” Some people didn't have a car to evacuate. Some people didn't have a television to evacuate. Didn't hear it, didn't know it. They had old, young people that were handicapped. You want to blame them for not leaving? Or you want to say, “Oh, you didn't have insurance?” You know what? They told people, “You don't need insurance, it's never flooded here.” Some of these people lived in shacks where they didn't have enough money to pay anything, much less insurance. And guess who's responsible? The people who built the levees. Neglect of people. The government. The Corps of Engineers, the federal government. And then wait three days and fly over and say, “Brownie, you did a heck of a job.” And drive down in the French Quarter and say -- this is Bush -- “This is the way I remember New Orleans.” And the whole nation sees that. And it's just, government has got to act differently than that. And they're in such disarray. Sometimes it's so absurd I just can't

believe it. People get a trailer, guess what, all the locks on all the trailers are the same. So if I have a trailer and my next-door neighbor has a trailer, and I want to help myself to something out of a trailer, I just go over and use my key. Is that wonderful? And then when you have the trailer, and you finally have fixed the house up, and you ask them, "Would you please pick up the trailer?" They ain't picking it up. And then you call again, and you say, "Could I give the trailer to somebody else who doesn't have a trailer?" "Oh, no, we have to bring it back to Mississippi, we have to refit it, put it on the list, and then see where it goes." Or you deal with insurance companies, you just say to them you have paid a premium your whole life, you never committed a crime, you paid your taxes, you voted in every election, you were a pretty decent person, and all of a sudden they treat you like you are the biggest chiseler that's ever lived. And the $250,000 for flood insurance is underwritten by the government. And it's just, there has to be a different response. And you know what? In other countries, there are different responses. This is the most developed nation and the richest nation on the face of the earth. And they think of us as if we were -- that's nothing but a backwater. We have a fabulous port. We have fabulous rice. We have oil. We have natural gas. We have chemicals. We have music. We have transportation. We have God knows what here, and they treat us as if, "Who are you?"

RH: Well, Judge Waltzer, what is justice?

MW: Justice. I learned a long time ago on the bench there is no such thing as justice. There is such a thing as making things as right as possible within the framework of what you have. And to settle a dispute when you're on the bench. Because sometimes a jury returns a verdict and you say to yourself, "Wait a minute, that's not right." But that's within the framework of the thing. You have settled the dispute. And justice is really making people equal, making better. That's what tzedakah means. Tzedakah don't mean charity. We don't have this concept of charity like the Catholics. We don't do that. Tzedakah, the root of the word tzedakah is *tzedek*, righteousness, to be righteous, to

bring people to a place where they can make it. That's what justice is, in my opinion. Maybe Justice Roberts from the United States Supreme Court thinks differently. But then, maybe he's never had to think about that.

RH: What would you like to see for your grandchildren?

MW: What would I like for my grandchildren? That they never would have to go through something like that again. And that they grow up to be productive, happy citizens, and maybe be Jewish.

RH: What are your hopes and your fear for the future?

MW: For my grandchildren?

RH: For your grandchildren, the future of the government?

MW: Well, I think right now we're in absolute chaos in this country. The rich get richer. The poor get poorer. Even people who work are poor. I hope to have grandchildren who will be smart enough, and they are, they're smart enough to do what they like and to do good. Right before Katrina came, my husband and I were in a program with a lawyer which we call Legacy. We were disposing of our money. We filled out all these forms, what would we like to see happening to our money, how much of it would we like to give to an endowment, and that's when you still had money. We lost half of everything. So then we would -- and what would you like the children to do with it? And so we came up with the idea. We said, “Look, this is what we really would like to do. We can't tell our children what to do with the money. We can't tell them to sit on Jewish boards. They may just say, ‘Oh, I'm not going to do it.’ But what we can do with -- you can give the money to the Jewish Endowment Fund or some Jewish organization and say, ‘I would like this particular committee or this particular fund to invite my son and my daughter to be on the board of it and to participate in this committee.’ And that's how we're going to hook them in. They're going to be like the trustee of this particular money. And we can't

tell them what to do, but when they're the trustee of it, and for my son, it was -- he's an environmental lawyer, he closed the dump out there in the east after all the fight that he did legally. So, I was going to put him on the environmental thing. And my daughter, the social worker, I was going to put her on some committee where she could do that. So it wouldn't be an organized thing, but they would know that I had hoped that their interests would be represented on this endowment for the greater good. Well, we never got to plan it to an end. We now live in Texas. I guess we have to make a Texas will now. But the other thing is that I would hope that they do good things. That we've been a good example a lot. With two adopted children, whenever you do something wrong, they say, "Well, that's from your natural parents." When they do something right, "That's from us."

RH: Are any of your priorities any different now than they were a year ago?

MW: Yes, some of them are so pressing, and that is our health. I've never thought about -- we're in pretty good shape, work out every day, and we're not particularly decrepit, and my husband's had cancer, I've had cancer, and we got over it, and we're fine, and all of a sudden I realized that if anything happens to him, the responsibility that I have. It's come to me that I'm alone. I have to -- he has to count on me, and I have to count on him. I'm not going to count on the kids. They have their own *tzuris*. And how important it is that we are very mindful of our health, that we're the stewards of our own bodies. Very very carefully. And that means eating right, sleeping right, thinking good thoughts if we can, and that's a priority. And then to establish the wherewithal for ourselves and for our children and grandchildren to have resources, to go on. And even if it's just up here (points to her head). Just because they're now 43 and 40 years old doesn't mean that I'm on the sideline totally.

RH: What through this past year have you learned about yourself?

MW: I always used to believe that if I did this for a person and this for a person and this with a person, then that established a relationship. And it does in a certain way. But

there are also some that have changed. And what I have learned, I don't have to do certain things anymore. They are just not healthy for me. They are just not helpful. I have to think about my own self, my own family. I can't worry about all these people that I call, and they never call me back. I can't worry about all my seven godchildren that are all over the United States and the world. If they haven't had the good sense to find out where I am, I am their godmother, then I can only do so much. And I have learned to cut it off. It's literally self-preservation. And that I've learned. And I never had this before. I just would just go on and on and on no matter what people did, take it, now I say to myself to heck with it, I've been through this, I'm so-and-so old, God knows how long my life is still going to be, I could be dead tomorrow. We know that all now after the storm, just like that. So, I just do things that are healthy, and I tell people I love you very much, but I can't do it, and I don't want to be taken for granted, and I don't want to sit there and be used.

RH: What do you not take for granted anymore?

MW: I take nothing for granted. I'm entitled to nothing. Everything I have is a gift.

RH: Why don't we wrap up?

MW: Please.

RH: OK. Thank you very much.

MW: You're very welcome.

RH: I appreciate all you've given us today.

MW: I'm sorry.

RH: It's OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]