Michael Ferrand Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Michael Ferrand at 2029 Dauphine Street. His new address in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is November 1st, 2006. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive, in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Michael, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be videorecorded?

MICHAEL FERRAND: Yes.

RH: OK. Thank you. Why don't we just begin with some basics, like how old you are, and a little about your general and Jewish education, and then how you came to New Orleans.

MF: Sure. I'm 44 years old. Jewish education, my mother was deeply involved in Conservative Judaism. I grew up until -- I grew up as a child in a kosher household, so I'm familiar with the laws of kashrut. She was, basically was one of the founders of a synagogue in Staten Island, New York, and was, I think, the first Hebrew school teacher there as well, as well as President of the Sisterhood, and so I had a pretty strong feeling with that. She died when I was fairly young, but I kept it up for awhile.

RH: What was the name of the synagogue? Do you remember?

MF: Beth Israel. And then, when I went -- and the problem with Jewish education, a lot of times, at least for a lot of people that I know in the Conservative realm, is you were taught, in Hebrew school, how to read Hebrew and the alphabet, and you memorized prayers, but you really didn't know that much about what it all meant, A, and B, you didn't understand what you were reading. So you learned to read, but you didn't know what the words meant. And so, that was a part of the picture that started coming together for me

later when I went to Israel, and I studied in a Yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem, called the Yeshivat Aish haTorah. And I did that for about a year. And that's where I learned a lot more Hebrew, and I studied a little Gomorah and Mishnah, and whatnot.

RH: So, how did you get to New Orleans?

MF: Well, after going to Israel, and I was bike touring through Europe, I came back from about almost a two-year trip, and I spent a month in New York. My sister was trying to let -- my middle sister was trying to convince me to stay in New York City and go to Columbia. But I had other ideas. I went to Chicago, and it was the coldest winter in recorded Chicago history. So that's where I lived before going on this trip. And a good friend of mine who had finished college in the two years that I had been gone wanted to work at a law firm down here. So I looked at the weather in New Orleans, and it was about 75, and Chicago was 90 degrees below zero with the wind chill factor. And I thought, OK, let's go to New Orleans. So, we jumped on the City of New Orleans, and took the train down. And his girlfriend at the time, their family had a farm in Champaign, Illinois, and they detassled corn every year. And as a result, some of the musicians from New Orleans would come up -- because you would make a lot of money. It's a lot of hard work, but you make money, make a lot of money in a short period of time detassling corn. So --

RH: Now, what does that mean?

MF: That's like taking off the sexual parts of the corn plant, removing them and taking them away so they don't pollinate the field. OK, so it's a very specific job, and you have to know exactly, you know, you have to do it. It's very repetitive, and you're out in the fields for a long time, but you can make a lot of money, or you could, back in the day, in a short period of time. And so, one of the musicians who's one of the fine piano players down here would come up there for this job. And so, we stayed with him and his wife, when we first came down to New Orleans. And we stayed with him for, I don't know,

probably a month or so. And in the second --

RH: Can you tell me who that was?

MF: Larry [Seaworth?]. And -- do you know Larry?

RH: I sure do.

MF: Yeah. So I stayed with Larry. And at the time, he was married to Stephanie, and -- who's a jazz singer. And I think the first day in New Orleans, I knew Larry and Stephanie. And the second day, they had a party at their house, and I think just about everyone who was everyone in the New Orleans jazz scene was at that party that day. By the third day we were in New Orleans, any jazz club we walked into, we were already on the guest list. So that's pretty fun for a year, we'd walk in anywhere, and it'd be like, oh, OK, no problem.

RH: So, about what year was this?

MF: 1982? '81, '82?

RH: OK. So, tell me about your attachment to this region. You'd stayed?

MF: I think anyone who lives in New Orleans for any amount of time, and has lived either anywhere else or has traveled anywhere else realizes how magical it is. It's so unlike any place else in the United States. People like to sit on their porches and talk, and people are a lot friendlier here, I think, than a lot of other places. It's a very special place. The architecture is special, the climate's special, and most importantly, the people and the music are very special, and it's something that I enjoyed a lot. It's kind of its own little fishbowl. I mean, I lived in the Old City of Jerusalem, which was also a fishbowl compared to the -- as the French Quarter is. But it's a different fishbowl, and I really enjoy it.

RH: So, tell me about the neighborhood you lived in.

MF: The Faubourg Marigny?

RH: Yeah.

MF: What would you like to know about it (laughter)?

RH: Well, you know, why did you pick this area? Why not Uptown, Broadmoor, you know.

MF: To live or to work, or --

RH: To live and work and --

MF: Well --

RH: -- the whole nine yards.

MF: Back -- when I first started my shop, actually, I was in the French Quarter for a small period of time, and we actually got evicted for no reason. But the person who evicted us was a Clerk of Court, and married to a judge, and so it didn't seem like we were going to have any luck contesting that, and it didn't seem smart to have an antagonistic relationship with your landlord. So it's like, OK, you want us out, we'll move. And just by happenstance, we've managed to get a place on Frenchman Street, and it just all fell into place so luckily. And back then, in the early '80's, they said, hey, Frenchman Street's an up and coming place. Well, it took a long time, but in fact, it has become quite the trendy part of town. But I've always liked it. It's always been the place, I think, where locals go to enjoy music without too much tourism, and just the right mix of eccentrics and people from all walks of life.

RH: And is it, do you have any kind of a social center? What is your social center? Where does your world kind of revolve?

MF: I'm not sure if I understand the question.

RH: Well, where do you spend most of your time?

MF: Well, I'm a self-employed businessperson. Most of my time is spent at the shop. The time I don't spend at the shop I'm at home, or with my children, and -- because I'm self-employed, my children spend a lot of time at my store, because that's just how that goes when you work long hours in a retail --

RH: So, what kind of store?

MF: I have a bicycle store. Full-service, everything from retail sales, new bikes, used bikes, various price -- from the very basic transportation to high-end racing machines. We rent bikes to tourists, which is one of the nice things about my job, is we do repairs, rentals, sales, service, so at any given time, there's a lot of different hats to wear, and it keeps things interesting.

RH: So, tell me a little about the Jewish community, and your connection to the Jewish community here in New Orleans?

MF: Well, I think the Jewish community -- I think it's taken a little while for me to get to know the Jewish community even a little bit here in this town. It's not as strong as it is in so many other places in the world. My children have been fortunate enough to spend some time in with the JCC in their pre-school program, and I think that was helpful to them. But I think it's really difficult to have a strong Jewish identity here. The -- I don't feel that comfortable in some of the synagogues that are more Reform, or more Reform (laughter). And that's what a lot of it seems to be here, and there's only really one or two -- it was a Conservative synagogue, but they closed. They were on Claiborne, I think,

that was Chevra Thilim. And then there's Anshe Sfard, and Anshe Sfard has been my favorite synagogue since I became aware of it. And it's also part of, one of the last parts of a Jewish community that's kind of gone, out near Dryades Street, I think, was a big corridor at one time for Jewish businesses and Jewish life.

RH: So, there is the Metairie Conservative, and have you ever -- does that interest you?

MF: I've been there, but it's like -- you know, it's pretty far to go to, and again, it's -- the idea of community is that it's part of the community, that it's general. For example, I mean, I'm not that religious, but if you're really Orthodox, you have to walk to synagogue. You know, walking to the Metairie Synagogue would be two-hour, two-and-a-half hour process each way. And I know, I've done it, you know, back when I didn't have a car and I wanted to go. I wasn't aware of other synagogues. But, you know --

RH: So, tell me what you like about Anshe Sfard.

MF: Well, it seems more traditional, you know, not -- there's a lot more Hebrew in the service. It seems like a lot of other synagogues -- frankly, I feel like I'm in -- some of the synagogues I've been to in other places, not only in New Orleans, but elsewhere, made me feel like, more I was in a church than a synagogue. And I don't like that. So, I definitely know that they're reading the Torah, they're reading it in Hebrew, they're, you know -- for example, in Israel, like, the Rabbi is the teacher. He's not necessarily the gentleman who leads services, because anyone who speaks Hebrew can lead the services. And in a lot of synagogues in this country, the Rabbi is the only guy who knows enough Hebrew to lead the services. So, I kind of like a place where more people are familiar with the liturgy, and you know, perhaps it's a little less. You know, it's --

RH: Is it kind of lay-lead, then? Do you have a Rabbi?

MF: There is a Rabbi there, but it -- I mean, I don't think, the point is, I don't think it really matters as much. You know, the Rabbi's there to lead it, but it's also about -- what the

Rabbi's chief job is to teach, not necessarily to lead the service, because everyone kind of knows, and that's the difference. So, I mean, I just -- to me, it's just more, it feels more like a synagogue, you know, and it's more about learning, and you know, that they're more apt to talk about the, during some of the services, some of the philosophical parts of the ceremony. And to me, I mean, I'm very comfortable with hearing more of the service, if not all of it in Hebrew.

RH: And so, do you have any, either in the Jewish community, or in the city as a whole, just a kind of a vivid memory of some time that kind of speaks about either the Jewish community or New Orleans?

MF: Do I have a --

RH: Since you've been here.

MF: Do I have a memory that speaks about the Jewish community in New Orleans?

RH: Yeah.

MF: Sure, there's lots of memories. I mean, I remember Rabbi David Bockman at Chevra Thilim doing his jazz Shabbats. That was kind of neat, you know, and --

RH: What were those like?

MF: Oh, it's just having, you know -- and they've done them in other synagogues, and they even did it at Anshe Sfard, but just to have people playing jazz music, either after Shabbat, or as part of a holiday. That's special New Orleans, I think, and that's nice. And sure, I mean, I have good memories from the JCC being really nice to me when I was really poor and helping my kids out, and that was nice. But other than that, not -- and, of course, the Hanukkah of the River Walk is a nice tradition, I think, and --

RH: What is that tradition?

MF: Well, they just laid a -- they have a big Chabad, I think it's a Chabad function, and they have a big Menorah, and they've done it for a lot of years, where they light candles on one of the nights of Hanukkah, and the kids all get to go, and they have, like, Israeli restaurants that do blintzes, and sell gelt and whatnot. And it's just a nice little family outing, I think.

RH: So, tell me how many kids you have?

MF: I have two children.

RH: And how old are they and what are their names?

MF: Miriam is 18, and she's a Freshman at LSU this year. And her name is Mirim Hannah. And my youngest is Maya Shoshana, and she's 14, and she's in eighth grade, and she'll be in high school next year.

RH: And where does she go to school?

MF: She goes to school at Luscher.

RH: And high school, do you know where she'll be?

MF: She hasn't decided yet. I mean, half her friends are going to Ben Franklin, and the other half are going to Luscher, because --

RH: Luscher's going to have a high school?

MF: Absolutely.

RH: Oh wow.

MF: They already do.

RH: I didn't know that.

MF: They've expanded into that Fouche building in, on Freret Street, and you know, they're doing all sorts of great work, which is still under construction. But they're doing, they're going to be all wireless Internet, and you know, they're really fixing it up. But I have a feeling that Franklin, from my experience at Franklin, is more like a college. It's like, you go there, it's kind of like a New York City, you know restaurant that has a lot of, too much business. Eat it and beat it, you know. It's like, come in, get your stuff, get outta here. Franklin's like, they're not too much on the touchy feely. It's like, you do the work or don't do the work, and we'll give you the grade. I think Luscher is going to be a lot more supportive emotionally. So, it's just a different style, and I'm -- it's just a question of what she's going to be more comfortable with, and we've talked a little bit about her and I'm sure she can get into either one. So, she'll just have to make her decision.

RH: Well, so, let's move into the storm, here, with Katrina, and --

MF: Sure.

RH: Tell me about when you first became aware of it, and what your decisionmaking process was, what to do.

MF: Well, I mean, anyone who's lived in South Louisiana for any amount of time is no stranger to hurricanes. They seem to come every year, and we all know the weathermen seem to revel in that one time of year to fearmonger. And a lot of us who have gone through all of storms and the calls take it all with a little bit of a grain of salt. So, I think I was aware of it, like, a week out, and it was a funny storm, because it kind of -- there weren't -- they didn't think it was going to come this way at first, and the way it was moving through the gulf. And then it kind of started moving pretty quickly, and before you knew it, it was in the Gulf. I guess I looked at it, what was it, maybe Friday or Saturday, I

think Saturday morning, or Friday, I went and made sure all my vehicles were gassed up, just to be on the safe side. Kind of thought about, a little bit, what might happen, but I wasn't really that concerned about it. Saturday went to work as normal, you know, planned to come to work on Sunday. Sunday, Saturday I'm looking at the news, you know, that's a big, pretty big thing coming right towards us it looked like. All right, we'll see what happens in the morning. People are evacuating like crazy Saturday, still planning on coming to work, in fact, I think we had some folks who had rented bikes still out on rental. By Sunday morning, early, it became pretty obvious that this was a really big storm, and it was coming straight for us, and it seemed like leaving was a good idea. I had talked Saturday night with my ex-, to see what her plans were, and I had suggested that we call, that if she leaves in the middle of the night or in the morning, to call me and maybe we could coordinate. But as it turned out, she just left in the middle of the night. She had been borrowing my car, so she had it in her driveway. So the next morning, I called all my employees, I made sure that they had safely evacuated.

RH: How many of those employees do you have, about?

MF: I have, like, six or seven, and making sure that everyone was, had either left or was planning on leaving, or that we knew what was going on, because I thought that was important. One of my employees was one of those folks who said, you know, I'll never leave, never leave, never leave. So I called him, trying to, getting ready to talk him into leaving. He had already gone. So, to me that was a pretty good indication that, OK, maybe I'm the last one. So, I went in the morning, and I took my motorcycle to where my ex lived, and I saw that she had gone, because her car was gone. And my van was in her driveway. But obviously, I couldn't pick it up while I was on the motorcycle, so I took the motorcycle back home, put it back in the garage, got a bicycle, took the bicycle back uptown, threw my bicycle in the van, came back, loaded it up, and probably afternoon on Sunday, drove out of town. Went to Baton Rouge, and --

RH: Did you do much to your business, to prepare for the storm?

MF: I mean, not really. Really not a whole lot to do, I mean, we have iron gates all around it. You know, there's stuff everywhere (laughter). There's, you know, there's just only so much you can do, and there's only so much you're going to do in an hour, or two hours. So, it just -- I just said, OK, took a look around, and in my head I knew that, when I left, it's possible that this was the last time that I'd see it the way it was. I understood that. And so, I got in the car and drove, and drove to Baton Rouge. And my experience really wasn't so bad. Instead of, like, normally it's about an hour to Baton Rouge. I think it took me about two, because, I mean, I went -- they had that whole contraflow program, so, you know, I went up Veterans as far as I could go, and then got on it, whatever it was, Clearview or Williams, and jumped on the interstate, and it was slow going for a little while, and then highway speeds, and then slow going a little bit, and then back to highway speeds. And before I knew it, I was in Baton Rouge, and so then, you know, listened to the storm and the storm wasn't that big of a deal, a lot of winds, and I guess the big deal the next day, when a tree landed on the neighbor's house, and pulled all the electrical wires off my girlfriend's house. So, even though, so we lost power for a week in Baton Rouge, but and the neighbor's house had --

RH: So, where were you staying, in Baton --

MF: In Baton Rouge.

RH: OK. And whose house were you at?

MF: My girlfriend's house.

RH: Oh, she lives in Baton Rouge.

MF: She lived in Baton Rouge, so it wasn't a --

RH: So, you didn't even have to get a hotel room, or anything.

MF: Didn't do a hotel room. I just went to her house, and then, you know, it was like several, a lot of days of phone tag. One of my employees actually evacuated. He met us in Baton Rouge. I don't think he had a place to go, so we offered that he could stay with us. And he had just taken his EMT certification, and just -- he hadn't gotten his paperwork yet, but he had passed it all. And, so he went and volunteered. And so he ended up having a deal where he would go in for maybe 48 hours of EMT work, and search and rescue. He hooked up with a doctor, an emergency room doctor, and he was doing search and rescue on a boat. And then he was doing, like, right by the Causeway, they had a trauma -- what are they --

RH: Kind of a M.A.S.H. unit or something?

MF: Kind of a M.A.S.H. unit, but also where they determine -- I'm looking for a word, where they determine what's wrong -- a triage center. So, he was triaging with a lot of -- so, here's a guy who just passed his stuff, and he went deep, deep, deep in right away, like, more experience in those two weeks than he probably would have gotten in a lifetime before that. So, he would come in, work for two days, come back to the house, fall asleep, you know, be up for a few hours, and then go back out again. So, it was, we were getting kind of reports about the state -- the status of the city from him. And he was telling us about shots being fired and, you know, he had been fired at, and all that sort of stuff, as well as, you know, the fact that, hey, the French Quarter looked pretty good, and the store looked OK, and -- I had an idea that it wasn't so bad. But they still weren't letting, you know, just common folks back in the city at that time.

RH: Were you watching any TV? Were you watching --

MF: I was watching TV and listening to news, which I have a bit of a -- I'm somewhat of a news junkie, I listen to NPR every day, I read several online newspapers every day. So

I was continuing that, and it was just too much. Mostly, I spent my time -- there's a lot of people coming in and out of the house who had evacuated or whatnot, or that we were friends with. So, I spent a lot of time cooking, which I find very relaxing. So, I'd cook a lot of meals.

RH: So, tell me what you cooked.

MF: I made an awful lot of risotto, like broccoli rabe, risotto, a lot of steak, a lot of chicken, a lot of salads, a lot of simple, like, rice meals with chard, or rainbow chard or spinach, or -- simple good food.

RH: That's a nice way to kind of keep the uncertainty at bay (laughter).

MF: Go to Whole Foods, buy lots of garlic, chop it up (laughter) cook it, lather, rinse, repeat like it says on the shampoo bottle.

RH: So, when you kind of found out that you couldn't stay, what happened then --

MF: Stay --

RH: -- when you couldn't come back, you couldn't come back to --

MF: Well, I had a lot of things going on already in my life. For example, my nephew was getting married in Israel, and so I already had tickets to go to the wedding. And it was, like, about two weeks or so after Katrina. So, obviously I couldn't leave through the New Orleans International Airport, because that was in no condition to be an airport, at that point. So, I was able to change the tickets to Houston. So, I was driven to Houston, and then took a flight from there to Israel. Went to the wedding, and then after the wedding was over, the night of -- the wedding was like a pretty big wedding, like a 500-person wedding, and at the end of the wedding, I drove to Tel Aviv that night, and got on a plane back to the States. And Rita was coming, so I ended up -- I arrived in Maryland at BWI

Airport, and all the flights to Houston were cancelled. So, I had a -- I was -- and I had been up for an awful lot of time by this point, because I had been up the whole day of the wedding, I'd been up the entire flight back, and -- which is about a 15-hour, 13 ½- hour flight, I think, 14-hour flight -- and ended up driving to Maryland. It was either I could go to Maryland to visit a friend, or go to New York and visit a different friend. But Maryland seemed a little closer. So, I went to the Eastern shore in Maryland. I kind of got stuck there for the weekend until they, Rita passed through and they reopened the airport, went back to Houston, and then immediately -- they had the International Bicycle Show, which I also had tickets to, in Vegas. So, I immediately went to, flew to Las Vegas for the bike show, which was an even more surreal experience, because imagine going on a buying trip when you don't know, haven't been back to your shop in a month, you don't know what, if your customers are going to come back, or what you have in your store, or if you've been looted, or, you know, what the future's going to be. So, it was very strange. But it was nice seeing industry friends, and whatnot. And, you know, and one of my employees met me out there, which was nice, because I hadn't seen him since pre-Katrina, and from there I went to -- I went back to Houston, drove to Austin, where my kids had evacuated to. I hadn't seen them in a few weeks. And they had enrolled in various schools, and said they hadn't had a chance to do anything fun in Austin, so I took them tubing. You know, we went out to eat, and went tubing and had some fun. And then I drove from Houston back to New -- I mean, from Austin back to New Orleans.

RH: So, you drove right into New Orleans from Austin?

MF: Uh-huh.

RH: And so, when, about when was this?

MF: I arrived, like, back in New Orleans, like October 6th, or 7th, 8th? Something like that.

RH: So, you've had like a month-long odyssey.

MF: I had a month-long odyssey. I had an evaca-cation (laughter).

RH: Evaca-cation (laughter). That's nice.

MF: Yeah, so --

RH: So, did it feel like an evaca-cation, or did it feel just like --

MF: No, it was very --

RH: -- you were in a parallel universe, or --

MF: It was very, I mean, it's definitely very stressful. You know, because, you own a business, you have responsibilities, you know. There are things going on every single day, and so, you need to -- and there's a lot of people counting on me, so I didn't -- I wanted to get back up and running as soon as possible. And also, I thought it was an important part -- it was going to be important for the community. You know, a lot of people are going to run away, just because it was going to be too hard. Or a lot of people didn't want to be the first ones back, or a lot of people -- you know, there's a lot of perception to fight, I think, so, you know, I wanted to come back as soon as possible, and just get it rolling.

RH: So, was there anything you did in that whole month, that was kind of special that you can think of, to help that kind of nurturing, or to you, or --

MF: I mean, it was nice -- you know, like, it was nice talking to a lot of people who you hadn't heard from, perhaps, in awhile, who had used the hurricane as a pretext -- you know, I've been meaning to call you, but this is a really good time (laughter). But it was nice being in touch with people with that. That was special, and you know, I certainly, it was nice -- not that I don't do this anyway, but I did it a lot more. I cooked -- I cook every

night anyway. But we cooked a lot, and we fed a lot of people, and we drank a lot of wine, and you know, we commiserated together. So, I think, you know, that stands out as an important memory, and obviously, going to a wedding is a big thing, you know, as my oldest nephew got married, and I was happy that I could be there, you know. I mean, it was, all and all, it was pretty chockfull. And then, it hasn't stopped (laughter).

RH: So, tell me about when you first came in, and what -- what that experience was like, when you first drove into the city?

MF: When I first drove in, and pulled up on the shop, at the shop, and I think my car was, like, the only -- or maybe there was one other car on the whole block of Frenchman Street. Now, Frenchman Street, as you probably know is -- you know, like especially last night -- there's a lot of people out all the time. There was nobody. I mean, you looked down the entire block, and no cars. There'd be National Guard, you know, guys in Humvees cruising by now and again. But it was -- it felt like the Wild, Wild West a little bit, a lot of flies. There's no electricity in the Marigny, which -- I think the French Quarter had electricity. For some reason, our area of the Marigny escaped electricity for longer than anyone else (laughter).

RH: So, how long were you without?

MF: Well, they were out without that whole month, people who had stayed, because some of my neighbors stayed. But I think when I got back, it was, like, maybe ten days, two weeks at the most, and then power came back. So it wasn't so bad. I mean, it was hot. It was still pretty hot, even in beginning of October. But in the -- there weren't very many restaurants open, there wasn't a lot of food. And when I came in, we stopped in Baton Rouge, we went to the Whole Foods, we brought as much meat and ice and food as we could. And at night, every night, we'd do a big barbeque on the street, and cook, you know, hot kosher hot dogs, and New York strips, and --

RH: So, who came by?

MF: Who came by?

RH: Yeah, for the food.

MF: I mean, just pretty much anyone. You know, there's a lot of people who had just gotten back, or had been here the whole time, and were kind of, like, wandering around, seeing who else was in town. And a lot of people have had that kind of shell-shocked Katrina look, either from just coming back and being, couldn't, not believing the devastation, or people that had stayed, and were just in their own reality. And I think all of them appreciated non-packaged meals.

RH: (laughter) Right. So, did you get your business back up? When did that get back up?

MF: We were open immediately. We were open, like, pretty limited hours, from like ten to three. And we did that for actually quite some time, just ten to three, and we're busy, from ten to three.

RH: Who was coming in?

MF: Everyone and their brother. I mean, people who had bikes that had gotten flats in the storm. People would come back that didn't have bikes, because they either got stolen, or they were -- you know, the Katrina water did them in. You know, pretty much non-stop.

RH: How did you do this without electricity?

MF: We set up stands on the sidewalk, and when someone needed parts, we'd go in the shop with flashlights, because we have lots of batteries and flashlights, being a bike store, and got the parts they needed, and sold them to them.

RH: Did you sell some bikes on the street that way too?

MF: Sure. It was hard, but, you know, it got easier once we had power. And then, you know, it was nice. Once we had power, you know, you don't take it for granted. I mean, we had power for a while, and that was before we had hot water. Gas came later, so -- and we had the cold showers, and (laughter) --

RH: It was kind of like camping.

MF: It was kind of like camping, but I'm a camper, so when I evacuated, you know, I left with camping equipment. I had tents and sleeping bags, and stoves, and you know, and silver panels for my sailboat, which didn't make it. But I could still generate electricity, if I needed to.

RH: So, tell me, you have a sailboat?

MF: Had.

RH: Had?

MF: (laughter)

RH: What did you have?

MF: I had a 25-foot sloop, just a little sailboat, out at Municipal Yacht Harbor. And I checked it before I went to Katrina. I bought new lines for it, made sure it was tied up well. And all the cleats, when I came back, all the cleats had pulled out of the dock, and there were huge boats where my boat was, and my boat was hundreds of yards away, in a pile right by the road on West End. It was like, it was half on a dock, half in the water.

RH: Salvageable at all?

MF: And there was two other -- well, I mean, technically speaking, you could -- I mean, it's missing a mast, it's missing an engine, it's missing the sail. You know, it has some other damage, but, so, it could be fixed technically, but the amount of money it would take to fix, plus they were charging -- I think someone was charging $2,000 to move boats. Yeah, it's just not worth it.

RH: So, you just kind of left it there.

MF: Well, I had no other choice. There was two other boats on top of it. (laughter) I'd need to move three boats to get mine, so it was just not, probably not worthwhile. But I feel pretty lucky, if the worst that happened is, you know, my sailboat died, I feel pretty lucky.

RH: So, did you bike around the city? Did you -- how did you get around the city? Did you look? Did you do anything, or like --

MF: At first, I kind of had some, a little bit of resistance to, you know, do the tour de destruction. You know, we've all seen it on TV. Certainly, just looking around, even in our little area, there's plenty of houses that have blue roofs, and have had roof damage and whatnot. And just going and talking to friends, you can, you know, you see a fair amount of stuff. I got around by bicycle, by motorcycle, by car, and I walked. And eventually, a little while later, one of the guys, one of the -- there was a Coast Guard guy who had done a lot of search and rescue, and he put together, like, a tour, mostly for people that were visiting, to spread the word, or to tell the locals to spread the word to their friends, let people know how bad things really were. So, I went on that with them, and it was a bike tour, and it went through -- and it was pretty early on, and it went Uptown, and Lake Front, and down through Chalmette and Ninth Ward, all by bicycle. And I'm happy to report, I was one of the few people not to get a flat.

RH: (laughter) So what did you think when you saw it all? Any thoughts?

MF: Yeah, I mean, it's still hard, you know. It's so hard. So many people, you know, so many people, especially in -- my heart goes out so much to the people in the Ninth Ward, who bought their homes, owned them outright, and didn't have any insurance because they owned it outright, or were told that they weren't in a flood plane and didn't need insurance. And, you know, they're not going to be able to buy another house. You know, and especially, so many musicians lived down there, and you know. It's creating a real shortage, and one of the things that makes this city so special is the diversity. So, it makes me sad. You know, I certainly don't want to see this town becoming a Disneyland for adults.

RH: Are you afraid about that?

MF: Oh, sure, sure. The French Quarter's starting to head that way already, has been.

RH: Yeah? What are some of the indicators that you see? You're here every day.

MF: I mean, you know, all the tee-shirt shops, and you look at events like last night, when so many college kids come in for Halloween and whatnot. That's like, it's that kind of thing. And it is, you know, there's so much cultural stuff that we don't take advantage of so much in the city that, you know, and we lose it. Just by having so many cars going in through the French Quarter all the time, you know. That's killing a lot of the old buildings. You know, it's not just here. They have the same problems in Italy, and in Greece, and Israel, and all over, from pollution. And some countries, you know, in some places they say, OK, no cars. But we're really slow to learn. We haven't even admitted that there is Global Warming yet (laughter). So it's going to be awhile.

RH: So you could stop cars in the French Quarter, with that attitude.

MF: Exactly.

RH: Did all your employees come back?

MF: All except one, yeah.

RH: Did -- how did they fare?

MF: Well, one of my employees lost their house. Another, you know, Joey, Joey was not an employee then, but he is now. He lost his house, so -- and they have different approaches. Joey's waiting, kind of doing a wait and see thing, see what the government is going to do, and see, at least, if the pumps are going to be brought back to any kind of capacity, because, although there was a lot of lip service being paid to bringing the, bringing pumps in, and making sure the levies were safe for this hurricane season, you know, we all know that they failed miserably at that, and didn't even approach what they said they were going to do. So, rightfully, he's pretty skeptical, and he's playing wait and see, and seeing what his neighbors are doing, and all of that. And my head mechanic is, he's going ahead and rebuilding, so -- he had his house razed, and --

RH: Where'd he live?

MF: He lives in Lakeview, on French Street.

RH: And do you have new employees now. You said Joey is one.

MF: Joey's new. Yeah, John's new. John was a customer. He's new. There are a couple of new employees. I mean, business has got -- has been busy for us, post-Katrina. Unfortunately, some of the bike shops that were in the city no longer are in the city, after Katrina. So, there's -- some of them are gone completely, some moved out to the suburbs.

RH: So, your -- how's your income? Is it better, is it the same, is it --

MF: We're --

RH: Are you sustaining --

MF: -- busier. Our income is better than it was before. So, I mean, it's -- it hasn't been a horrible thing in, you know, from that point of view. I mean, it's a lot more work, but --

RH: Do you notice any difference in your community at work? I mean, are you all closer, or are you -- you're always been close?

MF: I think we've always had a pretty close community. I mean, that's why I think everyone but one guy came back, pretty much. You know, I think we have -- it's a nice place to work.

RH: How about your family? How did they fare?

MF: You know, well, I mean, my girls went to a lot of different schools this year. I'm really pleased that my oldest got to graduate from Ben Franklin this year, and I think it's kind of a special graduating class, the Katrina class. It's kind of unfair that her senior year was spent at two different schools in Austin, De La Salle here, and then finally, second semester, graduating at Franklin again. It's a -- you know, you always think senior year is going to be your cakewalk year, and you're going to be, you know, cock of the walk that year. And, you know, she kind of had a rough time of it, I think, but you know, it's a good lesson, too. You know, I think you learn a lot about life with that kind of experience, so --

RH: Has she ever reflected on that with you? What did she say?

MF: I think so. I mean, we haven't talked about it lately, because, you know, she's been involved in her college experience. But when she was going through it, you know, she was aware, she thought it was unfair at first, but she's also realizing, you know, that you just can't take some things for granted, you know. So I'm hoping it makes them be a little less materialistic, but we'll see.

RH: Well, is there anything that, you know, she turned to you for, or that you felt like you could help her with, or anything like that?

MF: Yeah, I mean, we just -- nothing sticks out particularly, but I mean, there's always things that come up. We're pretty close, and you know, things come up, and you know, kind of try to deal with it one step at a time. I think it was just emotionally very difficult, you know.

RH: When did --

MF: You know --

RH: -- when did she finally get back? When did your kids get back?

MF: They got back within a week that I -- from when I got back. You know, they were already settled in to schools in Austin, and they were like, no, we want to go home.

RH: Were they part of the decision to come home? Did they want to come home, or --

MF: I think their mom was pushing harder, you know, I think, I mean, I was like, ok, why don't you wait till January, at least, and things will get a little better and more organized, and the schools will get, you know -- but they're like, no, I want to go right now. All right.

RH: Are there any things you miss since the storm that used to be around, that you don't have anymore, or don't see? You mentioned the diversity. So, there's people you miss.

MF: Sure. Sure, there's a lot of people that are gone. A lot -- you know, music is different. You know, a lot of people -- even people that still play here are doing it from remote location, you know, like, are coming in for gigs once a month (laughter), because they live in L.A., or Baton Rouge, or wherever. But sure, there's so much that's changed, you know, in terms of just, you know, certain restaurants aren't there anymore, and certain people are gone. And, you know, I think it hurt a lot of the -- you know, we had a

-- there was a retirement home on the corner. So we had a lot of interesting characters walking through the store from there, and a lot of those folks just didn't make it through Katrina. I mean, I think --

RH: Is it open again?

MF: Oh, yeah. But, I think it was really hard on the young and the old. You know, some of us middle of the road folks, you know, we can bounce a little better. But I think the old -- I mean, a lot of people just didn't make it. A lot of people died.

RH: Yeah. Did you know some of the folks over there, or are they just kind of like faces that are just not --

MF: No, I know some of the people, for sure. There's Larry -- Larry used to come in all the time. He stored one of his bikes there, and he was an ex-boxer, and colorful, colorful guy. And he was in Texas, he never made it back. He died over there. But, you know, I mean, it's sad. So many changes, so many people have moved away.

RH: Yeah. All right. Do you kind of resent some of them leaving, or --

MF: No. I mean, you gotta do what you gotta do. I think everyone's got to make their own decision and choice, and I don't resent anyone's decisionmaking process. If you're going to go, go.

RH: How do you think the government's response was to this? What's your thought about that?

MF: I mean, it's laughable. It was pathetic, you know, they spend billions of dollars on homeland security, and this is the result. How are you are going to be -- ready for any kind of emergency or terrorism, if you can't even take care of this kind of thing? It's just beyond belief.

RH: Do you have any thoughts on race in the storm? Do you think race played any part in --

MF: I don't think it's a huge part of it. I mean, it might be some part of it, I don't know. I think it was mostly incompetence, you know. I think they downsized FEMA and emergency management so much, and Bush put one of his little cronies inside, and knew about grooming horses, or whatever. And just, you know, they just didn't take it very seriously.

RH: Who do you think's responsibility was it, city, state, federal --

MF: People's responsibility is all along the board. I mean, so many people at all levels said, oh, we never knew this was going to happen. Hello? You know, you live in Southeast Louisiana, everyone knows that you conducted an exercise just, not even a year beforehand, where they told you exactly what was going to happen. You know, it's just criminal neglect on all levels. It's not my job to say --

RH: Criminal neglect. That's strong. Yeah.

MF: And it's, and I think it's non-partisan. I don't think, I don't blame it on Bush only, because it comes down to 30 years or more of the government of the United States not doing what they were supposed to do, which was save the wetlands. You know, if you had wetlands, this wouldn't happen.

RH: So, tell me about your -- you've done some work, kind of, I guess you'd call it civic work or whatever, in the community, around environmental awareness, or --

MF: On a few different things. I -- a friend and I taught for two years in the Orleans Parish school system, and we taught bicycle safety. So, we'd do it -- we'd go into schools, mostly, like poor schools, and we'd spend three days in a week, usually, in a school. And the first day, we'd introduce ourselves, we'd show some video about bike

safety, which was usually like a rap bike safety video, which the kids like. And then we told them to bring their bikes the next day. Second day, we'd fix all their bikes and get them out and see what kind of skills they had. And the third day, we'd do a bike rodeo, and teach them the skills that they needed to stay alive on the streets. Because when you're in third grade, you're at that crucial point between riding on the sidewalk and riding on the street. Well, you can't tell kids not to ride on the sidewalk and to ride on the street if they don't have the skills to survive. So, we had to teach them the basics, how to turn, you know, that adults often do the wrong things, you know, what to look for.

RH: So, what's a rodeo look like, a bicycle rodeo?

MF: It may be as simple as any parking lot, we can make a rodeo and some cones, just teach people how to stop, how to control their bikes, how to, you know, when you stop to look left, right, left, and go in an intersection, and why. How to do turn signals, and how to do turn signals -- you have to teach enough skills so when you do a turn signal, or you look behind you, that the bike doesn't weave. If the bike weaves into traffic while you're doing a turn signal or looking, you're going to get hit. So, you know, we just try to teach them basic skills.

RH: So, have you done any other --

MF: I've been involved --

RH: -- environmental kind of stuff?

MF: Not so much environmental, but we've been involved with, like, a lot of bike advocacy. We, I was involved with a group that got the Linear bike path built on, you know, from Audubon Park, and joins up with the Mississippi Levy Trail System that goes up to Minnesota, so -- so those part, you know, went to a lot of meetings with that, and you know, put some stuff on [Wizner?]. And you know, I've always been a big advocate of, not just bike paths, but share the road philosophy. In other words, instead of just

saying, you know, bike route, if you put share the road, it lets people know you're supposed to be there in the first place.

RH: So, that's some real quality life kind of things.

MF: I think so.

RH: It makes the city a little nicer with it.

MF: Well, I mean, that's one of the big problems with a lot of American cities is, you know, like Baton Rouge. You know, you can't ride anywhere, it's all designed for cars, and now that -- a lot of the design of cities is racial, I think, you know, trying to keep people separate. So, I think, you know, being able to get around is a real quality of life issue, and I think the more, you know, have problems with energy that comes to the fore when people say, oh, I'd love to commute to work if I could do it without dying, so --

RH: Right. So, what do you feel like you want to be involved in in the kind of recovery of New Orleans? What, what --

MF: Well, I think I do it by just being in the bike business. You know, to me, getting more people riding bikes instead of on cars, is a real good start. You know, try to save the world one bike at a time.

RH: (laughter)

MF: I think people that, when you ride a bike a little bit, it relaxes you, and when you get to work, you're a happier person, you're in better health, and you're nicer to your neighbor, and I think that's a good place to start.

RH: All right. Are you worried about New Orleans and what it's going to look like?

MF: I'm not a worrying type so much. I mean, am I concerned? Sure. I have concerns. But I mean, this city had grave problems before Katrina. I tend to be an optimist, maybe foolishly so, but I think that we have a lot of opportunities here as a society, and you know, there was a historian, Edward Carr, that said, you know, basically that the rules of history are those people that show up and make history. So let's show up and make history.

RH: Anything you want to see here? What would you like to see with these opportunities?

MF: Well, again, I'd like to see this to be an easier place to get around, and I think by, you know, more public transportation, less cars, you know, more bike trails. I think quality of life issues are going -- what make -- is going to be what makes cities not only great place to live, but great place to visit. And I'd like to see us be less dependent on things like the Saints, and -- which I -- you know, and gambling, which I think is a really poor plan, in general, for a city. You know, some cities have been successful with it, but you know, I think we need to base things more on, the industry on intellect, and the -- we're lucky and unique in that we have so much culture here. You know, there's a -- tourism can be based largely on the history and culture, if we don't destroy it all first, or --

RH: Do you think that's kind of a fear --

MF: Absolutely. Progress. Yes.

RH: In the name of progress.

MF: In the progress, so much has been destroyed.

RH: Uh-huh. Are you --

MF: I mean, look at Armstrong Park. They destroyed, like, so many traditional jazz historical landmarks to build a park that people would just get mugged in. You know, where's the thought that, you know, they destroyed where Louis Armstrong grew up.

RH: So, are you --

MF: Storyville, God. Progress.

RH: (laughter) Progress. So, OK. We're going to take a break for a second, and then --

END OF AUDIO FILE – PART 1

RH: -- and talk a little about your involvement in that community, and making a minyan, and things like that. OK?

MF: OK.

RH: So, are we ready? Oh, we already started. So, this is take two of Katrina's Jewish Voices, and I'm talking with bicycle Michael. So, Michael, talk a little bit about the Jewish community that you're engaged with right now.

MF: Well, my favorite synagogue is Anshe Sfard, and it's on Carrollton, it's on Carondelet, right by Jackson Avenue in the lower Garden District. And both before Katrina and after Katrina, I kind of had some trouble getting a minyan, which is, of course, having ten guys, ten Jewish men to read the Torah. And I always felt bad about that, and the problem is for me, it's hard because Saturday is our busiest day, and I can't really bail on my guys all Saturday yet. I'm not that successful. But I have tried in the past, and I think I'm going to make an even more determined effort, and I have since I've been back, to go to make sure they make a minyan, and even beyond. I think it's nice. What was especially interesting for me is the Shabbat I went to in Israel for my nephew, Joshua's, I mean, Ariel's wedding -- Joshua got married last year, Ari got married this

year -- was Barasheit Genesis. So I got to see Gene -- and so I kind of feel like this year I'm starting from the beginning. Got the Torah read at Genesis, this year was Noah last week, so you know, we'll see. I'm looking forward to have a little time in my week to read the next Parsha, so I can be up on it.

RH: What goes through your mind, like, when you're reading and studying Torah, when, I mean, do you think about New Orleans, or do you this about -- like you just said, you're reading Genesis, and there's this moment in your life of a new beginning, and the city is --

MF: I think -- and well, and then you could look at Noah and the flood, (laughter) and of course, you know, they said all the wickedness was wiped out. But I mean, you know, I don't know. Some of the wickedest parts of the city were fine, so -- (laughter) it's hard to say. I don't know if I buy that philosophy (laughter).

RH: Do you ever, like, think about God? What is your relationship to God? Do you ever --

MF: You know, I haven't thought about it that much in awhile. You know, when I lived in Israel and was studying there, I was studying when I was, what, maybe 18 years old. And I was lucky enough to be in a school with a lot of brilliant people, like people from all ages, all walks of life. You know, we had guys who were PhD's from Harvard Divinity School, we had biochemists, we had physicists. You know, we had student. I mean, it was amazing, the minds that we had there. And I was at the point where I was questioning everything, and that's where everyone was. The idea was study, learn, and ask questions. And so I had a lot of questions. But after awhile, I think you just have to move on, and you still have the questions, but sometimes you have to worry about the everyday getting up. And for a lot of people, that's what Judaism is, and for an Orthodox Jew, they've already answered the question for the most part. Yes, they don't worry about their personal relationship with God as much, as to whether He exists or not. And I

think that's the questions that we ask more when we're young, coming from the West. But Judaism, in that sense, is a life system. That's what it was designed to be. It's designed to tell you what to do in the morning, what to do in the afternoon, what order you should do this in and that in, and you know -- and then the Rabbis over the years have devised fences to make sure that you obey the primary laws that a lot of people have problems with, but that's another story. And that's really what Judaism is about, is the life system. And it's not supposed to be hard. You know, you just do it. And my sister doesn't -- she's an Orthodox Jew. She doesn't think twice about it. She just -- for her it's totally normal. Even traveling, it's easy. So, I guess that's one of the things, is the difference between when you're 18 and you're saying, OK, you know, do I believe, am I going to study Wittgenstein and Heidegger, or do I want to study Torah, or do both? And what's, you know, what do I believe in? And I think the religious person, in a sense, has an advantage, because if you're looking at it and saying, OK, I'm a scientist, and I want to believe only in science, you don't really know. You never really know. But if you're a religious person, you could say, OK, well, God created this, and He used science to do it. It's not a big problem, ethically, morally, or intellectually. So, it's just really a different approach.

RH: Any frameworks, religious frameworks that have come to mind -- you've told me one, Genesis -- through this past year, that kind of frame the experience you've had this past year?

MF: I think I'm going to need more distance, intellectually, to answer that question, to put a real framework. Because I think it's going to take time. I think I'm too deep in it right now. It's too close.

RH: And what else is going on at the synagogue?

MF: Well, I think they're having, it seems like almost like a mini coup (laughter), I jokingly refer to it as, which, you know, they say you're supposed to have a revolution every so

many years anyway. But apparently, the synagogue, unfortunately, had been closed for eight or nine months after Katrina, and apparently it was when the folks evacuated, they evacuated to Texas, took the keys, and someone else --

RH: Folks like the President --

MF: The President, some of the board, I think the President. And then, apparently, the President stepped down, and another President was appointed, but he, too, was in Texas. So, I guess they eventually made it so that the synagogue was open one Shabbat a month and on certain holidays. And then gradually, it's been opening more. But the President's still in Texas. I don't know if there's any plans to return, and you know, it seems hard to, difficult to have a synagogue or Jewish community when your board is, or your President's not in the same city. So, I think there's been a movement to try to, you know, there's increased membership, get more young people to come. And I'm interested in that, you know. I think it's, I think it would be a very, very sad thing to lose the only Orthodox shul in downtown New Orleans -- not only for the city, because, you know, we are an international city, a very small one, but an international city, and people come from all over. And tell them, look, you can't worship here. That would be sad.

RH: Are your kids involved? Do they come with you?

MF: I have -- well, Miriam's in Baton Rouge, so no, but, you know, they've both been expressing interest in learning Hebrew, and they have a Sunday they're talking, they've been doing a Sunday class, I hear, at Anshe Sfard in Hebrew, to learn basic Hebrew. So, if they're really interested, this might be a start. And I do -- they've both expressed interest in going to Israel, and you know, spending some time with their aunt. And you know, my sister lives on a communal farm, what's -- it's called a moshav. They, my brother-in-law's a dentist, so it's not exactly a commune, it's -- but it's a settlement, I guess you'd call it. And it would be a very interesting experience for them. She has

horses, and they have a lot of land out there. And then the synagogue's across the street. It's a very different kind of place.

RH: So, what would you like to see, as the Jewish community is coming back? Would you like to see a -- well, what would you like to see in your Jewish community?

MF: Just more, you know, just more and more interaction, you know. And it just seems that -- it seems like so many Jews here are afraid to be Jewish, for whatever reason, or afraid to, you know, identify with it. It's interesting. I don't get it.

RH: So --

MF: But, you know, I don't think it's my role to, like, develop the Jewish community, per se, but if -- but it seems like Lonnie is trying to, and I'm happy to help.

RH: OK, Lonnie Schaffer?

MF: I believe so. Isn't she -- I think she's fine for the -- she's the temporary President.

RH: Is that right?

MF: I believe.

RH: OK. I haven't interviewed her yet, so --

MF: I believe she's the --

RH: -- I'm coming in it (laughter) at --

MF: Well, this was as of --

RH: -- her reign.

MF: -- Sunday, there was a vote to make her temporary President, I believe. She's from England, right?

RH: Yeah.

MF: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I've -- yeah. She seems very nice.

RH: Have you received any help from the Jewish community, while you were gone?

MF: When I came back, they offered me some money, which was very, very nice. But that's about --

RH: Did you take it?

MF: Sure. I was poor. (laughter)

RH: This whole idea of giving it to the world, repairing the world, then suddenly you're on the receiving end. Was that hard at all?

MF: No, I was appreciative, though. It was very nice.

RH: Have you any thoughts on this Jewish community, and how it conducted itself during the recovery, during the storm?

MF: I don't really -- you know, the Jewish community at large, I don't -- I guess I'm not that involved, you know. I mean, I like my little synagogue. I like the JCC, but, you know -- and they do some things that are Jewish, but a lot that aren't, you know, are no -- not especially. There's a couple synagogues, also, in town, that are Jewish synagogues, and -- but it's not -- it's kind of like one of my mother's favorite jokes was, there's a guy on a desert island, and he's been on a desert island for 20 years. And he gets saved. And so, they come and say, OK, well, they're looking around, they're going, wow, you know, you've been here 20 years. You built this beautiful little area right by, right over

here, and then what's that on the hill over there? And they look up, and there's this beautiful building on the hill, and he says, that's the synagogue, that's where I go pray. Well, they said, what's that over there, on that hill? He says, oh, that's the synagogue I don't go to. (laughter) So, to me, you know, there's a couple synagogues, you know, that I don't go. And it's not, you know, it's just -- I'm sure they're -- I've met a few of the people from there, and they're nice people, and you know, I'm sure it appeals to them psychologically, emotionally, it fills their needs. You know, I've walked in there a few times, and it just wasn't comfortable for me. I have nothing against them personally. It's just not --

RH: So, you'd like to see a little stronger Orthodox community, or Conservative community, or --

MF: You know, I don't know if I'm that guy. You know, I'm -- I guess, the way I look at it is, I'm kind of like Groucho -- I don't know if I want to be a member of any club that would have me as a member, (laughter) you know, so as far as being, like, belonging to this group or that group, you know, I kind of do my own thing. I'll belong to different groups, but not really, you know, it's not really my thing.

RH: But Anshe Sfard has kind of tugged at your heartstrings.

MF: I like it. I mean, it's a small place, you know, and the fact that it's been teetering on survival for so long, you know, if I can be, if I can -- you know, I don't want nine guys to be sitting there Saturday morning going, I wish we could read the Torah. And if only we had one other guy, you know, and I think the -- you know, to me, that's important that they're there. And it's not just for, you know, and it's not as, not just about for me, but it's also for them, you know. And it's for my kids. Maybe one day they'll be interested, and it would be nice for them to have a place to go. Not to say the place doesn't need a lot of work, I mean, you know. They have a -- it's an Orthodox shul, so they have a women's section. If you go upstairs and you're tall, you're going to hit your head on it. It's, you

know -- if you're old, it's going to be hard to get up. They have issues to address, no question, but you know, with the right leadership, and hopefully Lonnie can, I think, will provide some of that. I think good things will happen.

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

MF: I think, you know, same as any parent, you know. Like, if you at biblical -- in the Bible, everyone wants the same thing, you know, everyone wants green grass and fat cows, and you know, for your kids to have it better than you had it. So, I guess I'd like that, but at the same time, you know, initially I think I had it kind of hard in some ways, but certainly there are people that had it way harder than I ever did. I don't want my kids to have it so easy that they don't appreciate things, and what hard work will get it. I mean, there's a -- they say that thing about entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs that make millions of dollars, you know, and their kids inherit it. They end up losing it almost immediately, because they don't understand what it is to make money, they don't appreciate it. So, I'd like my kids to have an understanding of not only material things, but also spiritual things, and how important it is, and how difficult it is to get and to hold onto.

RH: Is there anything you'd like to see for the city here? What is your vision of the future of the city?

MF: Sure. I'd like to see the city build up an economic base that allows it to be what it is. You know, and without having to always apologize, and just, I think this could be a great city. But it's always going to be a little different, and if they try to model themselves after, you know, something, New York, or Atlanta, or Chicago, they have to do it their own way. They have to write their own ticket. But, you know, I think, in some ways, this place is a lot like a Third World country. Everyone's, like, concerned about their little fiefdom, and I think you have to let that go. And --

RH: Have you been following or involved in any of the recovery plans of your area, or --

MF: Recovery plans. I haven't seen a whole lot of recovery plans. You know, before Katrina, we had garbage pickup twice a week. And at that time, I said, gee, you know, we're a block from the French Quarter, and we generate more income on our block, our own two blocks, than most streets in the French Quarter. It sure would be nice if we had everyday trash pickup. That was before the storm. Now we're down to once a week. And sometimes they come, and sometimes they don't, you know. I'm pretty skeptical of, you know, the criminal justice system, of the ability for the city to get a lot of things done in a timely manner. You know, I don't know if you've followed the whole jazz districting thing. I mean, you know, the city had nothing to do with that. They didn't develop a jazz -- it happened spontaneously, because entrepreneurs and musicians found a place where they could play, and it was fun. And you know, progressive club owners like George Brumat made it happen, and Ade Salgado at Café Brazil, and, you know -- and then the city wants to take all the credit and legislate it. You know, they kind of step in after the fact. So, you know, I think it's going to take a public outcry. And I think if enough people -- I mean, I think if it weren't for about six guys, we'd all be living in caves. So, I think if you get the right public sentiment to get things going, the politicians will latch onto the idea as their own, and rubber stamp it, and maybe it will happen. But I think you need strong people to have a clear vision.

RH: Do you see anybody?

MF: There's a few people stepping in, but, you know, I mean, I think Mayor Nagin, so far, has been kind of a disappointment in the second term. I mean, I don't think either of the candidates -- I mean, it's an impossible job, you know, for either candidate, either of the candidates. But, you know, Nagin wanted it, got it, and he just hasn't been running with the ball as much as I think he needs to. But --

RH: Is there anything that'll tip it for you, that would say, ah, I'm walking away.

MF: It's kind of hard for me to walk away. I mean, I've raised my kids here, you know, I have a business here. But you know, the crime hasn't been so good. But I think I'm too invested. I don't think I'm going to leave, at least any time soon, so --

RH: Here you are in your new home, and we're sitting here, and --

MF: Not yet, but hopefully --

RH: Hopefully --

MF: -- waiting on the city (clears throat).

RH: So, what does home mean to you?

MF: Well, I think ultimately, home is wherever you put -- set yourself down and are comfortable. You know, it doesn't -- you know, when I bike-toured Europe, my home was my tent when I stopped at night. Tonight tent's here in Italy, and we'll be here (laughter). So, I mean -- but I think it's a place you can be comfortable, and you know, spread your stuff out a little bit, not have to worry about moving from, you know, if you're not on a bike trip, moving every night.

RH: OK. And what I would like to know, too, is, is there anything since Katrina changed your worldview? Has your worldview changed in any way since Katrina?

MF: Not really.

RH: I mean, did your priorities --

MF: Again, I get -- I guess it just makes me even more so appreciate, you know, how quickly things can change. But I was pretty cynical before, so you know, it wasn't an huge surprise that, intellectually, I think anyone who has lived kind of knew in the back of our heads, yes, things can happen, and we didn't expect the levies to fail through

incompetence, but you know, did it shock me or surprise me? Not especially. It's kind of like 911, you know. 911 was, you know, it's a horrible thing to happen. But intellectually, was it a big surprise that terrorists might target? No, they tried it already once before. To me, it was a matter of time, and I think same here, if you keep ignoring the well-ins, and you know, proper building codes, and things will happen.

RH: Did you learn anything about yourself this whole past year? Anything new?

MF: Not really. Just, you know, just reinforced what I already knew, you know. Again, I think, you know, people make history are the ones that show up.

RH: Anything you're trying to make more time for?

MF: Definitely trying to make time -- you know, it's been a really hard year for me, just in terms of workload. I've put off some things, so I'm trying to make more time to read. I'm trying to make, you know, put some time in to exercise every day. That's my big goal this year, is you know, spend at least an hour, you know, go for a run, or hit the gym one -- every day. And spend some more time reading.

RH: That's nice. What do you like to read?

MF: I read everything. I just read -- actually, I read a book that I got right before the trip to Israel. I think it's Thomas Sancton, I believe. He wrote a book, For My Fathers. It was a gentleman who grew up in the city, his father -- you know who I'm talking about?

RH: Yeah, I sure do.

MF: Yeah. So, he grew up playing with Preservation Hall, one of the few white kids. And that was an excellent book. So, I'm on the tail end of that one.

RH: Was it good?

MF: It's excellent.

RH: Why'd you pick up that one?

MF: I heard about it, and I went to the Hall, and he was playing. And they were selling the book there, so I got it, had him autograph it, and took it with me to Israel to read, on the various 15-hour flights.

RH: Did you learn anything new about New Orleans?

MF: I did, and it's interesting, just because, you know, you read about it, and having lived here for so long, I knew a lot of the people, you know, so this one did this, and this one did that. It was kind of interesting, kind of put some of the pieces together. You know, nothing grandiose, but it was neat. It just -- it's a funky place.

RH: Yeah. So, are there any heroes for you in this --

MF: Are there any heroes --

RH: -- [year?] --

MF: There's tons of heroes.

RH: [inaudible]

MF: There're a lot of heroes who've done just, you know, done amazing stuff with, you know, with no thought for themselves. And you know, I think just about anyone who came back is a hero. And I'm not saying anyone who left as a dog, but you know, I think it's a personal decision. But, you know, coming back here is, for a lot of people, isn't the easiest, but -- decision to make. But for a lot of us, you know, I think it would be hard to live anywhere else, even if you try. They're like, oh, no, I want to be back in New Orleans.

RH: So, what are you grateful for?

MF: I'm grateful for my health, and the fact that I have a place to live, and my community, and you know, I'm pleased that my business is still open, and there's still demand for my services. So, I count my blessings every day. I'm extremely fortunate.

RH: Anything else you want to say?

MF: Just come and visit New Orleans (laughter).

RH: That's true. I hope someone watches this --

MF: Watches this --

RH: -- in a hundred years --

MF: -- and says --

RH: -- and says, OK --

MF: All right, I think I need, you know, the city needs some help, come on down.

RH: Thanks a lot.

MF: It's my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]