David Freedman Transcript

RH: Okay. This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing David Freedman at his home, 5210 Conti in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Friday, December 8th, 2006. I'm 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. David, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

DF: I agree to be interviewed and I understand that the interview will be video recorded.

RH: Okay, thank you. Why don't we begin with your Jewish and general education, and tell me about how long your family's been in the New Orleans area?

DF: Well, my parents moved here, actually met here, and were married. So they moved here after they'd gotten out of college. So we're a first-generation New Orleans family. My father moved from—he had gone to the University of Kentucky, and studied as a medical technologist. He grew up in the Boston area, and then I think later they moved up toward New Hampshire, up to Woodville, New Hampshire. My grandparents were extremely poor. My grandmother came over in steerage and essentially was an indentured servant to some relatives, some Firestones that lived in New York when she came over. She thought she was going to come to the land of—I don't know, opportunity, and I guess escaping the pogrom, she lived around Pinsk, it probably was. But it wasn't the opportunity she thought it was going to be. But then her marriage was arranged by a shidduch and my grandfather Morris, I'm not quite sure, I think he came from central Europe, maybe Poland. They were just as poor as they could be. He collected rags and never had a sense of business. I can tell you about that later. So that's my father. My mother was born in Savannah, Georgia. Her family was hard shell Baptist. Let's see, that family was from central Europe primarily. She was trained as a

registered nurse in Savannah and then she came to New Orleans to practice. They all wanted to come to Charity Hospital because Charity Hospital was a great place to see medical cases that you couldn't see anywhere else in America. It was the free medical service that Huey Long set up and it was truly a place if you were interested in medicine to come. So my father, the medical technologist, came to New Orleans. My mother came to New Orleans. They met. They got married. This was around 1941 I want to say. I was born in 1943, and early on they were giving me an ecumenical formation. We moved very quickly from a place uptown off of Saint Charles Avenue to an area called Carrollton. We were probably two blocks away from the archdiocese and from the center of a huge Catholic enclave. The Saint Rita School was there. The church was there. The archdiocese was there. Later Dominican High School was built there. I remember the convent where the nuns were. So that was a big influence and all our neighbors were Catholic. She would take me to Catholic Mass at the church half a block away. She would take me to Baptist services on Saint Charles Avenue. But eventually, they settled me into Temple Sinai. I went to Sunday school there and that's really—I grew up Jewish as a Reform Jew at Temple Sinai, and we had Christmas. We had Christmas trees, Easter, Easter bunnies, and we had Hanukkah. Gradually, the Christmas trees and the—although the Christmas trees still obtained until I was maybe 13 or more because my sister and brother who were ten and nine years younger than me still had Christmas. So that one still kinda hung around. But we quit going to churches and stuff early on, and I was brought up at Temple Sinai as a Reform Jew. Now it's interesting you mentioned Goldring because Bill Goldring was in my Sunday school class along with—I don't know, a whole bunch of other people that were from a completely different social milieu. My parents were building their lives from the ground up. They were bootstrapping themselves into essentially a middle-class existence. But they had no money when they came here. The people at Temple Sinai that I was in Sunday school with, many of them were extremely wealthy, and they tended to go to Newman. I went to public school. They wore very expensive clothes. I wore what I could. I felt very set

apart in many different ways from the Jews in New Orleans that I was in contact with at Temple Sinai. Not to even mention the ones that were Conservative and the Orthodox shuls who knew Hebrew and knew these strange traditions that I didn't, couldn't even begin to parse. I remember just being an awful pain in the ass to my teachers in Sunday school. And Sunday school was the primary vehicle for me to get whatever I got in terms of some sort of Jewish affiliation. We would go to Friday night services occasionally. Friday night was the big night at Temple Sinai. Saturday morning not so much. But we didn't go that often. We always went of course to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, everybody has to do that. That was very big and very impressive in my life. Somehow I was one of four or five people at confirmation. We didn't have bar mitzvahs at Temple Sinai. But at confirmation, I was one of the four or five people singled out for my scholarship in Jewish studies. Frankly, I don't think I learned bupkes about anything that has to do with Judaism. I think it was a very shallow kind of knowledge of Judaism. So when I was through I was kinda left on my own to figure out just these deep questions that the world religions can help us with, and I got involved with Existentialism primarily. This was in high school. I was reading Sartre and Camus and people like that, and I remember going to a service. Julian Feibelman was still the Rabbi there at the time, and he is an icon in New Orleans. Gave incredible sermons and was a man of great moral fiber. I had a lot of respect for him. His direction was moving toward—which is the Temple Sinai tradition, was to move toward the Christian community here in New Orleans. So he may have been one of the first Rabbis to wear a robe for example in services. I remember hearing the stories that that was a moment of truth for the congregation, and there were other moments of truth. During the Civil Rights Movement when he called in civil rights leaders to Temple Sinai when it was just not heard of to have Blacks participate in anything that whites were doing. But he gave a sermon where he excoriated Camus, and that was it. I was done with Judaism as far as I was concerned. Any man who couldn't get the existential dilemma of our existence, then I wasn't interested in hearing anymore. So I was done with Judaism. That's my

background.

RH: OK. So did you move back through? Because you said you've been on the Board of Temple Sinai. So at some point—

DF: Yeah. It's an interesting cycle, of how the stuff works.

RH: So you're not totally done with Judaism.

DF: No, no, I was done at that time, right, right. No, not at all. I moved to California after I did five years of graduate work in French literature at Stanford. Just before I did that I got married to a Catholic woman who wasn't very much of a practicing Catholic at the time. In fact, she was—that's an understatement. She had enormous troubles with the Catholic Church because she felt like she had a good mind and when she asked good questions she was penalized for it. So she was pretty much alienated from Catholicism. So we moved to Palo Alto and eventually after I finished my graduate work I moved to Santa Cruz, California over the hill, and I built a public radio station, KUSP. It was while we were in Santa Cruz and our marriage was falling apart, we'd been married about eight years, and we spent the last two years of our marriage really kinda grieving but working through at least the best we could so that when we parted we weren't vituperative or blaming or anything like that. We were friends despite that. But I guess the point of the crisis was when she went off one night and got involved with an Indian yoga master by the name of Madhusudandas. He's from Gujarat. She came back and she was I have to say something like in a bliss state of some sort and then things just devolved from there. I just remember the morning that I came down for breakfast and I had this concoction of olive oil and grapefruit juice and something else in it and I just thought she was sending messages here. I've got to get out of here. So that's when I left the house and we eventually separated. We eventually divorced. But then the yoga master moved into the house and created an ashram in the house and we had separate bedrooms. I had my own room, my own study. So he moved into what had erstwhile been my study and he

set up an ashram at the house. And this troubled me because I was concerned for her because I didn't—this was an era of Jim Jones and there were a lot of strange communes and things all over the place, and I just wanted to make sure that she was okay because I truly believe that people have the freedom to choose their religion and their spiritual path and I didn't want to interfere with her making a choice, but I just wanted to make sure she wasn't being brainwashed or in some way being exploited. I remember calling over at the University of California in Santa Cruz and asking some of these really—now they're very very well-known psychologists. They were developing something, I can't remember the name of it now. It's a type of psychology. Anyway, I can't remember. But reframing psychology. Using your mind for change. Those are some of the titles. I'll think about it later. But at any rate, I asked, I said, “What should I do, I have this dilemma, how can I tell if she's being brainwashed or if she's just making a choice that's within any human being's realm to make”? And they just said, “We can't help you with that, we couldn't tell you.” So what I did was I went back from time to time and I wouldn't tell them when I was going to come, I'd just drop into the ashram and see. You have to remember this was Santa Cruz, this was California. My aunt who'd been living in Los Angeles, I showed up one day and she was living in the ashram. My aunt has tried every form of New Wave philosophy and methodology that's known to man, probably some that aren't. But when I would drop in they were not in a bad way. I could see everybody. I could see that they were in a good frame of mind, in a good—that I didn't get any bad feelings. Madhusudandas said to me one day. He said, “Why don't you come to take initiation?” and I was very resistant to it. I was very much a rationalist. I would say my position would have been agnostic, that I can't know anything and anything I can't prove I can't know. I wouldn't be an atheist because I couldn't disprove God any more than I could prove God. But I was. So, I said, “I just don't really want to take initiation.” To me it's mumbo—I didn't say it but I was thinking, “It's mumbo-jumbo. I can't get involved with this.” And he said, “Well, when you're hungry you go to the grocery store, the grocery store doesn't come to you.” That's all he said and he let it go.

So they continued to implore me—both my aunt and my ex-wife—to take initiation. So I came one—and now I had moved across to Silicon Valley. I was working for a computer company in Menlo Park but I was living on the other side of the mountains in Los Altos Hills, and it was a very exciting time. I shared this house with this guy who was working for some strange organization called ARPA. The A stands for Army. Can't remember the rest of the alphabet soup. But he was in his room with a monitor, big old like old-time, it looked almost like an oscilloscope only it was square, and a keyboard. He was doing some really secret stuff and I couldn't go into his room. It was not allowed. I was not allowed to see what he was doing. Well, what he was doing was he was one of the first guys working on the Internet. Because ARPA, the ARPANET was the first progenitor of the Internet and I was working in DOS systems back in—this was in 1976. It was a very exciting time in terms of the development of all that technology. So I would go across the mountain every once in a while. I had a Thanksgiving break, so I went over one Thanksgiving and they said, “Oh please, please take—you just got to try.” I said, “OK, tell you what I'm going to do, I will take initiation but I don't want you to tell me anything. I don't want you to give me any suggestion of what I'm going to experience or what it's about, don't tell me a thing, just do it and let's see what happens.” So it was—this particular—and I have to say before that I'd gone to some of the public meditation sessions that Madhusudandas had. He had these mantram, these chants that he would sing. There was one called the Bij Mantra, which is a Seed Mantra, and you'd go into a deep meditation. Different people had different things. They call them kriyas and some people would be like their arms would be flailing. Other people would be—I snored. But I just fell asleep.

RH: Your kriya.

DF: Yeah, yeah, right, but I did feel some very deep peacefulness.

RH: Shakti?

DF: No, no, peacefulness. Yeah well, it was based—it was Shakti but it was just a real peacefulness that I felt, a deep satisfaction you might say. But that was it and I just basically—I just didn't want to go in that world. It was too strange. So when I took this meditation, then he did do shaktipat and he patted me at the base of my spine and with a peacock feather and I did have this experience where I saw this kinda purple something as I close my eyes, I could see—

RH: Blue pearl?

DF: Well I didn't have a name for it. But it's just like a purple thing I could see and so I had some kind of experience. He gave me all kinds of—he gave me a tape of the Bij Mantra and he told me all kinds of things I was supposed to do like take rose petals and throw them in the water in San Francisco Bay and I was supposed to meditate. All I could say from that experience was that I clearly knew then—oh but he did teach me some things too. I clearly knew then that there was some other realm. That's all, that was the main lesson I learned from it. But he did teach me some other things like when he had these public sessions there were some wonderful teachings. One of them was that he would do this thing which is just de rigueur in India. I don't remember what they call them. It might be satsang darshans, I don't know. But anyway, when they started the session you would bring an offering to the yoga master. So you'd bring a piece of fruit. Let's say you have a mango. And so everybody would line up and they would get in the line and they'd go up to him and they'd give him a mango and then he'd bless it and he'd put it in a pile. Then before you left he would pick up another piece of fruit from the pile and give it to you. So in a Western framework, this is a very transactional situation. I give you something, you give me something. But it was the lesson for me was learning that the act of giving and the act of receiving a blessing around—it wasn't the thing, it wasn't the fruit, it wasn't the mango that was important. I walked away with another—if it wasn't another mango it was an orange or something. But I walked away having given something and having received something and it had nothing to do with the

mango. It was a great lesson to learn. It was the beginning of an opening for me, like aha, it's a way of being, it's a way of seeing, it's like instead of just being transactional it's something that is—it's a feeling, it's a feeling of generosity coming and going, it's an opening of the heart that way. It was also very clear to me that this guy was not—he wasn't a shyster, he wasn't an imposter at all. He was like kind of a backwoods circuit rider you might say. He didn't have a big fancy ashram. He didn't have a big following. He would go out on walks with his flock of people from the ashram and he was an amazing guy. He was like 80 years old and he would walk faster than they could walk, and yet he didn't look like he was walking fast. I went on one of these walks with him. I didn't know how he did it but it was like everybody would go out for this constitutional and they'd be panting to try to keep up with him. Yet he didn't look like he was doing anything more than just walking regular pace. So I basically went away changed in my mentality that this mumbo-jumbo world that I didn't understand probably had some stuff going for it. But I quickly fell out of the practice of doing the meditations and I just didn't pursue it. But I had a different feeling about it. Then I was like, “OK well this is interesting and this is something that you come to a point,” and he was the one who brought me to it, to say that there are, just as there are people who have athletic prowess and have great talent with athleticism or for that matter with intellectual abilities, like the people I saw at Stanford who were virtuosos. There are also people who have spiritual prowess and live a very spiritual life and they're more developed than others of us. So it never occurred to me that that might be that kind of dimension, and I gave him total credit for being one of those people who had developed that ability. The other thing that he said to me, and this is extremely interesting because I'm going to tie all this back at the very end—is that he said, “You know, all this stuff that—the spiritual stuff that I'm dealing with here is in Judaism. You know that.” So I just tucked that away. Then I moved to New York City. The company that I was working for in Silicon Valley opened up a sales office on Fifth Avenue and they sent me out to work in the sales office there. I got this call from my ex-wife, this is like 1979 say. She said, “I'm in New Orleans and your brother is taking

shaktipat and Madhusudandas wants you to come down for the ceremony." Now my brother and his wife. I said, well I didn't want anything to do with it. I said, "I can't do that, you're calling me up, you want me to —I don't have any money, I can't fly, this is an absurd thing." I didn't say that but that's what I'm thinking. "You don't just call me up and just come—I don't want to have anything to do with it." She said, "Well he's already bought you a ticket." So I said, "Oh, well a free ride to New Orleans, I'll come. I can come down, I can see my mother and I can get to New Orleans. I'll do it." So I came down. They had the ceremony in my brother's house at the time and he said, "Well you sit with us while we do this. And then close your eyes." Then he gave me shaktipat again, which the story is that they don't do that, once you've had it then that's it, and I had a very strong experience. It deepened my appreciation for the practice. I went back to New York and tried my hardest to meditate and use the Bij Mantra. But after I don't know, five or six months, maybe weeks, I don't know, I drifted away. But each time this happened I really went away knowing that there's more going on there. I didn't know what. So then I moved back to New Orleans in 1980. My father died and I came back to help my mother settle her affairs. The sales office had closed, and I was having a hard time finding another job in New York City. So it all just came together. So when I came back I got this call from my aunt. I can't remember what year it was, but it would have been in the mid-'80s, probably maybe '82, '83, or something like that. She said, "There is an Indian yoga that's going to be in Oxford, Mississippi, and you just have to go see him." Basically, at that point, I had no particular practice at all and I had no particular interest in yoga. But my aunt is someone, that when she calls and she says, "Go check this out," I will listen to her because she's arguably one of the most knowledgeable people about all this kind of stuff. And she is—because she's tried them all. So she wouldn't send me to Oxford for a charlatan. So I went. This particular fellow's name was Vethathiri. He was from an area in the Tamil region, the southern region of India. The word was that he had a huge following in India. He was as Mel Brooks says, "World famous in the Tamil country." He had ashrams in Los Angeles and then eventually in other major cities,

Chicago I think I remember. When he would come around—he'd make a world tour every year and he'd go across from east to west. He eventually had ashrams in the Philippines and Korea and all across the world and so he would stop. Everywhere he stopped he would have maybe hundreds, whereas he was surrounded by thousands and thousands in India, it was hundreds and hundreds in Los Angeles and in other major areas. He had another one in it's either Tucson or Phoenix, I think it was Tucson. But it was his practice every year to take two weeks out from his arduous journey across the face of the earth and just go into a quiet retreat at some friends' homes in Oxford. Of course, that's a really great place to lose yourself if you're an Indian yoga because ain't a lot of people looking for you in Oxford. And so where it was thousands in India and hundreds in Los Angeles, it was like tens in Oxford. So I went up and he gave me a shaktipat again initiation. But he had a different method. It was called SKY, Simplified Kundalini Yoga, which is basically a Raja Yoga technique in which there's no mantra, there's no chanting, it's just basically if anything I guess it's guided meditation. He would suggest images and then you'd go into a guided meditation thing. Well, it wasn't long before I was really taken with this guy, because he was—there's so much of the spiritual work that is just basically moral and ethical teaching, and he was very heavy in that. But what he was saying just made a lot of sense. There were a lot of lessons he would say expectations are planned disappointments and just little gems he'd throw out. He had this incredible theory of how the universe was put together. I promise you that if I showed you the literature that he's written or—I actually taped him. I taped him extensively. That you'd never be able to make heads or tails out of it. It's trying to use the rational mind to wrap yourself around basically quantum physics and then translating that through Indian mysticism is just a very very daunting proposition. But he would spend hours trying to get me to thread that needle and in the meantime, I taped him extensively. I'm in audio, so I was fascinated to record him. He actually also wrote some beautiful poetry and chanted. He would write out a rough English translation of the Tamil and then I would render it into much more poetic English and then I did some recordings

with him. So I was reading the English translation and he was chanting the Tamil and then he played that all over India and apparently, I'm world famous in Tamil India too. And I really was deeply affected by Vethathiri and he actually gave me shaktipat I think twice too, I don't remember, but he certainly—it doesn't matter what he gave me, shaktipat, he gave me—he really opened my eyes to spiritual work. So then I was practicing deep meditations and I'd go into like 45-minute longer meditations and they were—people have very confused ideas about meditation. A lot of people say a lot of things and like this business with the purple and the blue pearl and all that stuff that you were talking about, they live for those peak experiences and for the specialness of it, and that's not my experience with meditation. My experience of meditation is that when you finally get past the monkey mind and you get to the place where you simply lose track of time—it's not that you lose track of time, you enter a place where there's no time, and the way you know that is because you go into a meditative state, and you'll think when you come out of it, "Well I didn't have a very good meditation today, it didn't last very long," and somebody said, " Well you've been sitting there for an hour." There's some actually very good work being done now about how the mind processes time, which I can show you. I don't want to go into a speech about it, but there's actually some good—using this FMRI stuff where they can actually locate centers of the brain and what they function, what they do. I think there's some promising work there in terms of how that biology works. But the experience is that you simply go so deep into a place where it's just a different state of consciousness and you're not aware of time. Then you come out of it and you feel at peace and you feel there's a wonderful sense of wholeness and wellness. There was something else, I guess it skipped my mind. But the point of all this was that at this point now I was like I was reading as much as I could in the literature of yoga and that was my path. I had it in my mind I wanted to learn Tamil but I was also wanting to learn Japanese, I also wanted to learn Hebrew. So all these different things. So then it was my habit to go to I think the best and most traditional coffeehouse in New Orleans, which is the Morning Call out in Metairie where they serve chicory coffee and cafe au lait.

It's like Cafe Du Monde but it's the real thing. The other one's okay, but this one's—so cognoscenti know that's where you go. There was a guy out there who was on the Board of Temple Sinai. He was Black, and he said to me, “They're having a Hebrew class at Temple Sinai and I'm taking it.” I said, “I've always wanted to learn Hebrew. So I think I'll go and see what it's about.” So I went to the class and the instructor was black also, Marian Moore. It was a what do they call it? It was like how to pronounce the letters. They were just teaching you the alphabet, baba booboo, that's I think what they call it, just to know how that particular calligraphy makes that sound and how that vowel sounds and so forth. Couldn't have been simpler. You graduated from class when you could do a brachah, could do a simple blessing. It was a challenge for me, it was a real challenge, I've had foreign languages, I did study Japanese and I studied French and Spanish and German and Latin. But the Hebrew was a real challenge for me. But I got to the point where I could read Hebrew. Not fluently and certainly not for meaning but just for sound. At the same time, they offered a class that was an introduction to Judaism and then they morphed that into some sort of a b’nai mitzvah for adults. And Temple Sinai, there was a sense that there were some winds of change at Temple Sinai because you have to remember that this was the most classical Reform temple probably in America. They prided themselves on that they ate shrimp at the annual Brotherhood fundraiser. It was a badge of honor. So for them to be talking about B’nai Mitzvot, they still were using the—and still do actually use the Union Theological prayer book from the 1930s, the little black book that doesn't have too much Hebrew in it. And it has beautiful, it's exquisite in terms of the English language, except you stutter all over the “these” and the “thous” and the “ests”, the knowest thou thee this and all that. But the language is exquisite. But any rate for them to be having a b’nai mitzvah class was like, “What is this.?” I was fascinated because I was raised Jewish and I remember what Madhusudandas had told me and I said, “Well then my project is now I want to learn how this is connected. I want to see what he's talking about. So I'll take this introduction class, and I entered in the b’nai mitzvah class in the same way that I entered into agreeing to take shaktipat the first

time. To chant Torah and have a bar mitzvah, that to me, at the age of 55 was just as—I don't know, entering into the unknown as the other. Eventually, I got caught up with the idea that— and in the process by the way I met so many people who seemed to be looking for something. The people who were taking this class, and the people at Sinai, but weren't getting it. Whatever it is they were looking for they weren't getting. So I started trying to make connections between the lessons that I'd learned in yoga and the Hebrew and Jewish teachings. I realized it's just daunting, I realized that Torah is—just to go into the tradition, Torah and Mishnah and Talmud and Tosefta and then even just prophets and the Tanach, it's just enormous. But I got engaged in it and then it evolved from that that when we—our little group of five of us that were like a core that came out of the b'nai mitzvah class, and this was oh how many years ago, this is right around 1997 or something like that, and we decided that we wanted to, that there was something about the services that weren't right, that we were just performing these prayers perfunctorily, we didn't have any idea. Actually, there was a Cantor there by the name of Shochet, Michael Shochet, and he started showing us how when you look at the Union Prayer Book you can't understand how the prayer's put together because there was an order to it, there was like a buildup and the Shema and the Shmoneh Esrei, which of course doesn't even exist in the—it was all truncated and cut and pastiche, and so he went back and showed us how the original, or at least the—I guess the traditional prayer service is put together and how it works. So we decided we wanted to make our own prayer service, and we called it the Sabbath of the Soul, and it was a radical departure from Temple Sinai traditions. We were studying people like Larry Hoffman who talks about the difference between a theatrical prayer service where in an intercessory prayer service where the Rabbi essentially does the praying for you, you sit in a theater and you face forward and you watch the Rabbi do all the stuff for you. And responsive reading where you just go through the words. There were a bunch of things. So we changed it radically. In the chapel, we seated people in the round. We gave all the prayer parts to all the people in the congregation who came. We insisted on people learning Hebrew

and learning the prayers in Hebrew, which was probably the most radical thing that we did. But at that time the Rabbi was having a big spat with Cantor Shochet because he insisted on wearing a kippah and at that time Ed was adamant that Michael not wear a kippah. In fact, Michael, quickly after a big blowup that we watched, left and moved on to—what's it called in Virginia? Falls Church, I think it is. I'm not sure, I think, but he's got a very nice shul that he's with now. But there was this sense of being torn between the minchag and the traditions that Sinai was so fiercely proud of and all this whirlwind of almost like too much Jewishness that was happening in Sinai. Especially all this talk about God and spiritual stuff and we were at the center of all that. I think on Saturday mornings we managed to get maybe 70 people to come into shul. Where before there were like ten -- or if that many. Then they asked me—and I don't understand it because it was very—I just followed the bouncing ball, but they asked me to be on the board and then to head the ritual and worship committee. Which I actually was pleased to do because I felt there were so many people that were thirsty for something, I was using this awareness that I had of things that had been made available to me through the yoga experience. But I was using a Jewish vocabulary. I found that there is a meditative tradition in Judaism, that there is a deep core of resonance with mystical practices that go way back, and certainly the Hassids in the 18th century, 19th century, there are all those traditions. But it certainly was at odds with the emergence of Reform Judaism which was if nothing it was all about being Jews of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. But people were thirsty for it and even as a chair of the worship and ritual committee I had like 40 people show up at a committee meeting, which was unheard of. I undertook with them to explore what prayer was, because why do we even—if a change is going to happen it has to happen through modeling and not through just making a pronouncement this is new—it's not ultimately the prayer book is just a cookbook. But you have to do the cooking. So we changed the whole emphasis on what individuals do in service as opposed to what the words are in the book. Which seems to me always be the fixation. We have the same problem, right now everybody wants to go get

instruments for the kids in school and we desperately need music in the schools, we don't have many music programs now, that's one of the core identities of the city is its music, but it's not the instruments. Kids can learn those rhythms with two sticks and a box. It's what they do with those sticks. It's the same way, it's not the prayer books, it's what we do with them if we even need them. But people were really hungry for that. I felt that somewhere deep in the power structure at Sinai that there was a very great dissatisfaction with this change that seemed to be happening. So I just withdrew. I didn't want to get into any confrontations with anybody. It didn't take long before the service disintegrated. I wasn't the only one involved with it. There were other people, but we all felt the same thing. At least the ones of us who had created it. And then when we withdrew the temple attempted to—it was like a brand. It's like Harman Kardon at one time made premier electronics, but when they sold the company to another company that basically still sold the brand but then they cheapened the inside, they didn't really have the same concerns about the quality, well Temple Sinai wanted to do the Sabbath of the Soul but they wanted to do it on their terms, and they didn't really get it. So it just eventually just fell to pieces. I don't know if they're still doing it or not but it has no real life to it anymore. From that experience I did discover that there were so many people that really want something from their religion that they apparently aren't getting. I, on the other hand, while I was at Sinai, was saying things like, “Well now in the year 2000 anybody who's Jewish is a Jew by choice, I don't care what your birth is or how you came by it, because so many Jews are voting with their feet that really to stick around, that's a choice. And,” I said, “How can you make a choice if it's not an informed choice, if you want to be a Reform Jew for example you have to know what the hell it is you're reforming from.” That's the only way you can make an informed choice. So you have to really learn tradition—in fact, it's harder to be a Reform Jew than to be an Orthodox because, in my opinion, to be Orthodox you just have to learn the drill. This is the way you do it, don't worry about it, this is what you do, this is how you do it. In Reform, this is what you do, how you do it, and then you get to choose how you want to relate your

spiritual practices to that tradition. “Do I want to incorporate this? Why do I want to do this?” These are questions that are very difficult to find in the Orthodox world, and I think if someone's serious about spiritual work in Reform Judaism they have to ask. So then the project is you have to learn more about what Judaism is. So I started going to other services, to Conservative services, and eventually to Beth Israel to Orthodox, modern Orthodox. It was the same experience of walking into the unknown as having my bar mitzvah or taking shaktipat, as a Reform Jew who really didn't know anything about Judaism, to walk into an Orthodox shul, which by the way my grandfather and grandmother had moved down to New Orleans in their last years and that's where my grandfather went, was Beth Israel. But that's when it was uptown on Carondelet or Baronne or one of those streets in the old Jewish quarter, and now of course it was out on Canal Boulevard, which is not far from our house in Lakeview. It was just really scary because you didn't know when to stand up, you didn't know when to sit down, and you couldn't keep up with the Hebrew. I felt like—and I was Jewish, and I felt more alien from that service and those people having that service than I could have if I would have walked into a Baptist church. My girlfriend in high school was Episcopalian, I was amazed when I walked in—and her father was the preacher there, and I was amazed when I went to an Episcopalian service with her one time, and it was like they were singing the same hymns and they were singing, and it looked like the prayer book was just about the same prayer book if you ever compare them, it was like I felt really comfortable there. There were things I didn't say, but by and large, it was no problem. Going into an Orthodox service was terrifying, but I hung in there and then I learned that there were so many things that were going on in there that you could connect back to the things that I was exploring when I was developing the Sabbath of the Soul service and studying prayer because it had a lot more to do with the individual's engagement in prayer, which is what I was—I didn't know, but I seemed to be heading in that direction. So then I became very interested in the Orthodox prayer service because again it's the basis. So I found myself going to all the congregations now. I liked Gates of Prayer

because they were more inclined to use more Hebrew and there was more chanting, there was more music. The Reform service was a great service to pray in because it's so spacious, there's hardly anything going on, it's all theatrical, it's all sitting watching somebody else do something so you can lose yourself in the service, and it's really a nice ambiance to pray in. You don't have to read the responsive reading, you can meditate or you can just take—I would take one phrase like Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov, mishkenoteha Yisrael, and I'd just take that and I'd think about that phrase for the entire service sometimes, and so much in there. But then I'd go to Conservative and the Rabbi there, Spector, was hands down the most scholarly and articulate Rabbi that we had in the community, so to hear his sermons was a blessing. They had a Torah class there that Barry Ivker led and Barry was arguably one of the most educated Jews in New Orleans. He layned Torah for Shir Chadash and he also led the Torah class. So you run out of film? Yeah, yeah, so he—

RH: We have a little time.

DF: Oh, time, oh you're out of time.

RH: No, no, not yet. We have a little more.

DF: Oh, okay. So I would go to Barry's class and that opened up a whole realm for me because he was citing works like Nechama Leibowitz and other Rabbinic writers and he taught me what the traditions were in terms of some of the traditional readings of Torah. But he was also such an enormous scholar that he brought in anthropology and literature, and so it was just fascinating to open that lens to reading Torah, and I got fascinated with Torah. So I'd go to Shir Chadash for the Torah study, sometimes I'd go for the service, sometimes I'd go to Gates of Prayer. I always loved to go to Beth Israel because I felt like I was deepening my Hebrew and my personal prayer experience in the context of the service. I never have found anywhere though a totally satisfying Jewish service, but each one gives me something. The Rabbi at Beth Israel and I became close

friends, Jonathan Glass. Jonathan and I hit on some projects, and I recorded him, we recorded the entire Torah, him layning the entire Torah, over a period of time, and so I have recordings of every parsha. I was studying, he would have me also learning to chant Torah, and that was a wonderful thing. In the course of working with him on that project, one day he whipped out a guitar, and it turned out that he was not just a Rabbi, but he also was trained as a Cantor, and he also before that was a music student in college. He plays drums and plays guitar and he's actually incredibly talented. He did this thing that sounded for all the world like some sort of an Indian alap, the tuning on the guitar sounded more like a sitar, and so I was fascinated, I said, “Well let's just play with that a little bit”, and so we had the recording equipment and quickly that evolved into a project that lasted for a couple of years, and we ended up producing a CD called Knower of Secrets. I can give you a copy of it while you're here. It's almost like he channels and he never really knows, it's all based on text out of Tanach, but the musical forms are cross-cultural, and he plays multiple instruments, and we only recorded on a single pass. We did all the recordings in the synagogue at night. We started at Beth Israel, then we moved to Atlanta, I'd go to Atlanta and we'd do the recordings in the synagogue in Atlanta. He would be playing four or five instruments simultaneously and singing, and there was no overdubbing, it was just amazing to watch. I still don't know how he did it, but he had like bells strapped around his ankles, and he had his drums, and he played the guitar like a drum, and then he had the guitar and it was pretty spectacular. You got to stop, sure.

RH: We're going to stop on this one.

END OF freeman45-1.mp3

RH: In New Orleans before you move into your work what it was like to be Jewish here in New Orleans. OK, let me do Tape 2 with David Freedman for Katrina's Jewish Voices.

DF: OK. So at the same time, I was getting deeply involved in Torah. And so there's a saying that “Everybody should write a Torah in their lifetime.”

RH: Oh really?

DF: Yes. And in my case what I decided to do was to create on my computer a Torah with commentary from as many sources as I felt had things to say. My problem is Torah is so immense that I can't keep it all in my head. So if I read a parsha this year and then next year I go back to it it's like I have to learn it all over again, I can't say I kind of remember that. But who can do that? So my project was to write—to do the entire Torah by parsha by parsha and do the Hebrew with an interlinear translation, which I use basically the Rashi-based translation, so it's line by line. Then each line will have its commentary within footnotes and I use the entire JPS, the five-volume set of JPS commentary. Then I use any number of other sources like Nechama and it's all over the place. I might use ten sources. So I've got all those comments on each line just wrapped around that one verse and then I've got like three or four translations because each translation is a drash, because you can't possibly render the Hebrew. If you just read one version then you're not seeing it, you have to have this parallax to see the various ways it's translated. So I've got the Tyndale, which is probably the oldest translation of the Bible in English, or one of the oldest. It may not be the oldest, but what recommends the Tyndale is that it's the closest because English hadn't been developed as a pre-Elizabethan, the connection between Hebrew and English is much closer than any time since, in the way that the translator treated the language. It was Chaucer before that, so he didn't have the kinds of developments in the language that Shakespeare, for example, set things in stone. It's fascinating, it's fascinating to read the Tyndale.

RH: So what year is it?

DF: I'm going to say 1500s, maybe 1600 something like that. Right after that was King James, which is one of the great translations of all time. So I have the Tyndale, I have the King James, and then I use the Fox. Because he, again, Everett Fox really tries to pick up the poetic and Hebrew devices that a lot of the translations don't use. So those are the three, and I'm really fascinated. I just like to see the different versions in there because it really helps you to get a sense of how you're circling around the text. So those are all the different books of Torah up there.

RH: We were wondering. That's the Torah you've written, okay, we actually panned that.

DF: Oh, did you? Well, I'll get you a copy, you can see what it looks like. So this is—oh yeah, also I have the Hebrew as it looks in Torah because that way this is if I want to chant Torah, then I've got what essentially the Torah's going to look like without the vowels, and the Hebrew stam. And then here's the Fox. Actually, this is one I have—I'm going to get you another one because this is part of the development. Let's see. Now this is a presentation I did. Let's see. Yeah, this is it, here we go. I did a presentation this last year on Haazinu. I created the translation, listen. This is Moshe, his last speech to the children of Israel before they go into the Promised Land. He goes up to die. I developed a presentation for Shir Chadash. They asked me to come do a Torah class and it was basically I treated it in terms of deep listening, the practice of deep listening, and so this was my presentation that I worked up for that particular Torah class. But this is how Haazinu would look in the—well it was in the Tikkun and Torah as well. After that then I have the Hebrew with the vowels so I can read it if I want. Then this is the Tyndale.

RH: Right. Wow.

DF: You can see it—

RH: So that's before—

DF: This is before Elizabethan English. Yeah right, right. It has a Chaucerian kind of feel to it too, then this is the King James, and then this is the Fox. The colors are according to the—

RH: When was the Fox written?

DF: Oh the Fox was very recent. It was around 2000. I think yeah around 2000, something like that. But the colors are coded according to the source, you got the Yahwist source and the Elohist source and the Deuteronomist, and then the Priestly source. So when you read it you know like a sense of at least a context of what the point of view was that created that. Now these are some of the commentaries. This is Avie Gold and Nechama Leibowitz and Richard Elliott Friedman. Jeffrey Tigay from the JPS commentary. And actually, when I did this presentation I think I only did the first verse. I think it was an hour. This was the verse. See, this is the first verse and that's the Hebrew and that's the English translation from the Rashi-based interlinear and these are the footnotes, the commentary. This is from Hirsch and they just come from all different sources. So that's what it looks like and—

RH: Amazing.

DF: Yeah because that's the texture and the richness of Jewish tradition. I'm finding the deeper I go into it the worse it gets because it's—

RH: Is this for you a meditation on Torah? Is it a study of the Torah? Is it a form of worship?

DF: The project for me is, I was introduced to a world that was so far removed in terms of spiritual work and practices and experiences that through yoga, and now the project for me is to find that world in Judaism. The purpose of it is twofold. One is it creates a

kind of closure or harmony for me because my formation was Jewish. I was raised Jewish. So I want to know about this experience in Jewish terms and not in terms of Indian or Hindu terms. Secondly, it gives me a vocabulary to talk to other Jews about, and I know that they're very thirsty for this. I gave this particular presentation up in Baton Rouge too to another group that's called—it's not called terrible Tuesdays, it's called something Tuesdays. Anyway—

RH: I think I remember this is—

DF: Terrific Tuesdays.

RH: Yeah this is a new thing, right, that they've started after Katrina, right?

DF: That's right, and they loved it, and the people at Shir Chadash wanted copies and so I know people are thirsty for this, and they're just not getting it. They want me to come back and do it and I just don't have the time, but I keep working on this because every once in a while I'll see where I have a window to develop some of the—I'm developing material and then every once in a while I'll see a time when I can kinda bring it together and present it to this group or that group. It also deepens my own understanding of Judaism enormously. The more you put into it the more you get out of it, that's just axiomatic. So for me, it allows you to go to the next level or the next step. It's like everything else. People say, “Well I go to services and I pray and I don't get anything out of it.” But the reality is like praying is like becoming a musician, it's like you have to learn how to—it's a practice you have to develop the techniques, just like you have to develop embouchure, you have to play your intervals, and you have to do a lot of work. Then if you do the work then you can enjoy the fruits of it in terms of the practice. My standard operating procedure up until this point had been you go to temple and in the service then they read Torah. So you scramble and you get the plot and you flip to the page real quick and you try to read it real quick while the Rabbi's—if they even do it in Hebrew, I think they do, yeah, they read it in Hebrew. So they're reading in Hebrew and you're

reading the English so you can catch up with the story. That ain't it. I said I was going to bring it around to completion, because I just got back yesterday from Chicago, and Jonathan's up in Chicago now, and now we're doing a second project. I'm recording him doing some Hasidic nigunim, which are rather obscure traditions, some of these may be recorded, but some may not be. So it's important to get them on tape. While we were doing that he's now become involved with a group of Hassids up in Milwaukee, the Rabbi is Michel Twersky, and so I went up with him to daven and we went in the mikvah and then I converted, by the way, I converted to Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, back in, I don't know three, four years ago, because I wanted to not be in a position that I was Jewish but I wasn't Jewish. So—

RH: Did you have a service in Atlanta?

DF: Yeah.

RH: Was it Jonathan's temple?

DF: Yeah, he was the Rabbi there at basically a Conservadox—Modern Orthodox, but it was a very liberal Modern Orthodox shul. So then we sat and we studied Torah with the Rabbi, with Rabbi Twersky, and I have to tell you it was just profound, and if I hadn't done all this work I couldn't have been sitting at that table, because you don't just sit at the table, you ask questions and I have a saying I always tell people when I teach Torah, I say, “You don't read Torah, Torah reads you, and so either you can be there bodily, but if you're not there totally then everybody knows.” I just finished this Torah work—I say finished, the basic laying in of the commentary and all the translations, everything I completed after Katrina. I'd done most of it before and then for a year, I had to stop because I had to put my life back together. But then I finished it about three months ago and I guess the first layer, which is the hardest layer. Now the way it's set up I can always add more. So it's a growing thing, so but I'm not on a tight schedule now because I was just trying to get that much done. I drank a glass of champagne and celebrated that

I'd finished this Torah which was one of the things that you can do. But having done that now I had the Torah, see it's on my laptop. So I have my laptop with me so before I went to see Rabbi Twersky I was able to look at Vayishlach and review the work that I'd done and so when I go to the Torah table to study with this guy it was very profound for me. It all comes home because the work then is not academic, it really has to do with changing the way you see your life. I think if there's anything that characterizes spiritual work it's transformative. I think that is what people are hungry for and the people I meet here in New Orleans in the Jewish community, they're looking for something that's transformative and it's not going to happen to you because you show up every week in services and say the words.

RH: So what would you like to see here in New Orleans?

DF: I don't have any need to see anything. Personally, I would selfishly like to have a community that I could do this work with where we could grow each other. That would be a selfish thing I'd like to see. I think that every congregation has its own universe, and they need to define what they want to be, and I think one of the things I really feel strongly about is that no Jew should be badmouthing the way other Jews practice their Judaism, and I'm very grateful to Sinai for being the gateway that led me back and this black woman who taught me Hebrew. It's such a beautiful thing. So Sinai had a very strategic role and just because they're not marching to the same drum that every other Jewish institution—now I'm not saying every other but Jewish Reform Judaism now is moving way to the center, toward Conservatism. I think Sinai's catching a lot of flak for that because it doesn't seem to be in step, but maybe that's its purpose. Maybe it serves a very important purpose to be the easy access gate.

RH: So do you often go? You really were on a retreat in a kind of way.

DF: This weekend?

RH: Yes.

DF: Yeah it was. It really was, and I was there for about three days and I did more than just that. But that was the highlight of the trip, yeah. No, I don't. That's the first time I visited Jonathan since he moved to Chicago, which has been over a year and a half. It was easier when he was in Atlanta, I'd drive out there. But I do go on retreats. I've been to retreats with Rami and with Oberman and Zalman and I've been exposed to some of the most profound and I think significant Jewish spiritual students or teachers really that we have in America.

RH: Now that I've got your background, your spiritual journey, we place what's happened to you in the past 15 months of your life into that context, and so why don't we just start with the narrative of Katrina?

DF: Yeah. Well, it was a Friday night. We looked on television and there was a category one hurricane going up the armpit of Florida and didn't think anything of it, didn't even pay attention to it, and I woke up at 7:30 the next morning and it was a category three headed right to New Orleans, predicted to be a category five at landfall. So I was here for Betsy, and I rode out Betsy, and there's nothing so thrilling as to ride out a hurricane. It's a real rush. The wind's whipping around and the storm and it's like as long as you don't get killed it's a beautiful thing. But after a hurricane is like all rushes there's a real price to pay and you don't ever want to be anyplace where there was a hurricane of major proportions after, because there's no electricity, the heat and humidity are more intense than any steam bath you've ever been in, quickly, if you ever had it run out of ice, you start to run out of food except for stuff in boxes and cans. When your batteries give way you're sitting in the dark and you don't know what's going on. Mosquitoes come out in droves. It's just not a place you want to be. So I don't even think in terms of the catastrophe that may happen. I think in terms of the electricity's going out, I'm out of here. I want to sit in an air-conditioned motel room somewhere and watch it on TV. So

by noon I was packed and gone, me and my wife, and when I left we'd had this evacuation drill year after year for the last three or four years it seems. So most people had gotten a little blasé about it, it's like OK here we go again. I always looked at it like if I think the electricity's going out I just take it as a good excuse to go out and take a little road trip out into the country. So it's not an inconvenience or something I don't want to do, it's like it's an excuse to go out and take a trip. So I didn't have any problem with that but for some reason this time I really took it more seriously. I packed more clothes than I've ever packed and took the books I really cared about the most. But I never dreamed about a flood, I just thought in terms of the hurricane. We lived in Lakeview and it was in a camelback house, so that there were two rooms upstairs and there were two rooms downstairs and I was more concerned with the rooms upstairs. I'm thinking in terms of the windows, water coming in the windows, I'm thinking in terms of the roof. So I'm putting all my efforts into putting all the books in the interior because I've got this big library, I don't want it to get destroyed by water, and I'm putting it into the hallway and away from windows and did a lot of that. But I never thought to move anything away from downstairs. Well, it wasn't the hurricane that killed New Orleans, it was the flood, and the flood was caused by a levee system that was really not a very good levee system, and to me it was a manmade disaster that could have been avoided. The levees weren't overtopped, the wall just simply pushed away, and it could have easily pushed away on the other side. We had an equal chance that the water could have gone in Jefferson Parish and then we'd be high and dry, but it turned out it was our wall that gave way first, and we took 11 feet of water in our house. And I lost I don't know, at least $10,000 worth of books. I had the entire Anchor Doubleday Bible series and all my Haggadot, and all that were just downstairs. Along with a lot of furniture and my shofar and all that kind of stuff, so because that was really the center of our Shabbat and our Jewish living I guess, was in the living room, which got totally flooded. So but we went up to Hot Springs, where I thought might as well take in some hot baths while we're out on this little jaunt. For some reason, whatever reason, we usually would go to the

Buckhorn or one of those fine old hotels but somehow we booked ourselves into the Comfort Inn, which is really like a businessman's motel, very modest, but the good thing about it, it has the best pipeline, it has the best broadband service that you could possibly get in Hot Springs. That became really important because the cell phones didn't work because the 504 area code was totally dysfunctional and using landlines is just too expensive out of a motel and too difficult. The only way to communicate with people was through the Internet, which was our lifeline. We made it up to Hot Springs I guess by midnight on Saturday night, settled in, and watched the rest of the events unfold on television just like everybody else did who was around the country. When the flooding occurred we were hoping against hope it wasn't us and then as it dawned on us that it was not only us but that the city itself was just totally demolished, I think I know I went into a fetal position, I was just paralyzed, and my mind was just—I'd think about things, and the thing that concerned me the most was that New Orleans, as we knew it and loved it, was not going to survive, that they could rebuild the physical city but that there were some very intense issues that I couldn't see any way to resolve that have to do with the way we live our lives here in New Orleans. I am the General Manager of a community radio station and it's a noncommercial public station that listeners supported. Our whole mission is to celebrate the cultural diversity of New Orleans and we do that by playing music from 17 different traditions. Jazz and blues and gospel and Zydeco and Cajun and Caribbean and African and bluegrass and Irish and Latin and Brazilian and it just goes on and on. Because those were the cultures that among others, but those were the cultures that were formative as this port city took in all these people from around the world, and this is really a crossroad city, everything—you had the culture from the east, from Africa, that was so important to New Orleans, the rhythms, Congo Square—the only place in America where the slaves were allowed to maintain their customs and their traditions on Sunday morning. They could dance and play drums and that eventually became the locus and the basis for the development of jazz as after the Civil War brass bands were everywhere and north, south, everywhere. The difference is that in the North

100 years later the brass bands are still playing the music as it's written on the page but in the South and especially in New Orleans the rhythms, the African rhythms, infected the brass band music, the military music, and then they started playing pop music with these rhythms, and eventually—that's a very inadequate explanation of how jazz evolved, but anyway it's just what the basis of jazz is are those rhythms, and the basis of New Orleans culture as an identity is the rhythms. That transfer of that knowledge moved to the school systems and the marching bands in the city and the choirs, the church choirs, were the incubators of our culture that became the basis for blues and jazz. My concern was that, and rightfully so, that if the musicians couldn't come back to New Orleans, without housing they couldn't come back, and without musicians and without marching bands, traditions like that, I always felt the churches, somehow they always managed to come back in some shape, way or fashion, but the marching bands are definitely at peril. That's our cultural carrier, and the saying is that a drummer from New Orleans can play with anybody, but a drummer from outside New Orleans just can't play with a New Orleans band, there are certain rhythms, and every high school had its own cadence. These rhythms are taught, it's like a guild system where the master musician, the band director, would pass this on. Sometimes dynasties like father to son. The music comes out of the formation that these band directors give to the students in schools. Of course, after the flood, the state rightfully took the opportunity to seize the New Orleans Public School System because it was so dysfunctional and so corrupt. But their emphasis is on academic performance. And they did not want to set up any kind of school system themselves. So they opted for a charter, so we've got this extraordinary—this is a real social experiment, I know there are charter schools around the country, but I don't know any city that has four public schools and everything else is a charter school or a private school, and that's what we've got and I think that's not a panacea. I think that charter schools were successful at the outset because those are the parents that really cared about their child's education, so they yanked them out of a dysfunctional school system and created their own schools. But I taught in school for a year at Abramson, and I can

tell you that if the parents aren't involved in the education of their children, then no system is going to work, and there is a deep problem that parents either can't or won't be involved in their child's education, that the value system among the population of New Orleans as far as education is concerned is very low. We had 3,000 students at Abramson and sometimes we'd have PTA meetings, and we'd have more teachers than parents show up. So, anyway, the charter system is where they're going. Well, what that means is that every charter school has its own board of directors, it's its own policymaking body. The only thing the charter schools really have to concentrate on is the fact that if 70% of their children don't pass the standard tests, the LEAPs, and the SASEs, then they're going to lose their charter, and they can't stay in business. So they tend to focus on teaching the test, which is the general experience that the so-called no-child-left-behind program has created where all extracurricular activities are treated just like that, they're extra, and they've been lopping those off left and right, and all they're getting is math and English. So in New Orleans, if you do that then basically you're killing the very essence of our culture. We used to watch, and our station was located just outside the French Quarter, and there was an elementary school two blocks down the street, and we used to watch these kids walking home from school every day blasting their trumpets and their trombones. We didn't realize it but we were watching New Orleans get recreated before our very eyes, because of all the great music and musicians that come out of New Orleans, that's the basis for it. Ellis Marsalis says' "The culture bubbles up out of the sidewalk here." It's very true and right now I think there are three marching bands in the entire city, there are only 12 music programs, so I'm working as hard as I can on top of everything else to see what we can do about getting our school music programs back. Because it's unthinkable to me that we'd have a city like New Orleans and we don't have—and that has been—translates across the board. For example housing. If we see massive development come into this city where they raze houses en masse and then recreate essentially the four-by-eight cookie-cutter versions of housing that other cities have, then the city's lost a lot of its character. I'm aware that

this is a city of guilds. It's a city of plasterers and lathers and people who have—at least it was. Those traditions have been dying out. But I'm aware for example that the Italian government is sending over its craftsmen to help try to restore some of these houses. Not big fancy houses, just houses that have character to them, the ones with the nine-foot doors that you can't buy at Home Depot. Things like that. So that was the kind of stuff that was going through my mind when I was up in Hot Springs, how do we get our soul back? We can always build the stuff, but how can we get our soul back? We stayed up there for a week and then I got a phone call, I got a couple of phone calls.

RH: Who were you trying to get in touch with once you realized?

DF: Well, first I had to get in touch with my staff.

RH: You might as well name your radio station.

DF: Oh, WWOZ, yeah, and my staff was scattered from Dallas to Atlanta. My Bookkeeper was in Atlanta, my Chief Engineer was in Dallas, my Program Director was busy seeking out his grandmother and so he was just out of pocket, he had seen on CNN, he had seen a woman standing at the Convention Center, it was his 88-year-old grandmother, and she had been pulled out of the guest home where she was—nursing home, and just dropped on the sidewalk in that incredible hellhole. He freaked out and he called the Red Cross and he said, “Where's my grandmother?” And they said, “We don't know.” He said, “Well, where'd you evacuate her to?” “Well, we didn't track people.” So he said, “Well where are your evacuation centers, so I'll call each one and find her?” They said, “We can't give you that.” So it took him about ten days to track her down. My Board of Directors was scattered all over the place. One was in Dallas, one was in La Jolla. Basically, we lost the whole base of operations. So I had to just start by trying to patch that together, just to get people just to even find out where they were and that was the hardest part. Somehow my engineer, my Chief Engineer, found me, and once he found me—and how he found me was that the cell phones weren't entirely down but for a

while there you had to make three or four calls to complete a call and you had to make at least ten calls to get one through. At the outset, I don't know how hard he had to try to get me but he found me. Once he found me and I had an email address, then we were able to start piecing things together. Then I got another call from a friend of mine in New Jersey who is the General Manager of a community station up there, WFMU, his name is Ken Freedman, and he's not a relative, but—I think he is, actually, because when I look at him I see features that I see family features. But we're not aware of any, we spell our name the same way, which is also unusual. But anyway, he said, "I got a big computer, I got a big server, and I've got all these MP3 files of New Orleans music, why don't we set up a program service online until you can get back on the air?" So we set up something called WWOZ In Exile. I was recording spots on the telephone explaining to people what had happened to us and also asking for money. So he was recording the spots and he was then slicing those spots into the music stream and so for the rest of the country and the world as far as they knew we just had a blip and we were back on the air. It's an interesting experience, we asked for people to send us air checks, and recordings that they'd made of programs because our music program is so unique and particular that a lot of people make recordings of our programs so they can listen to them. We got to hear DJs that had been dead for years on our stream service, it was pretty amazing, our station became its own—it wasn't just the music, it was the station that was now being reflected in the stream.

RH: What did you call that? Air—

DF: Airchecks.

RH: Airchecks.

DF: Yeah C-H-E-C-K-S, that's just an industry jargon.

RH: Thinking of Ernie K-Doe, remember Ernie K-Doe?

DF: Exactly Ernie, well that was one of the ones, Ernie K-Doe—

RH: Those wonderful radio shows.

DF: "I'm cocky but I'm good." He'd go into these rants, "I'm a Charity Hospital baby and proud of it." He was definitely one of the stars. Duke of Paducah, Big Mama—

RH: Oh yeah, Big Mama.

DF: We heard a lot of people that we hadn't heard for years and people had these tapes and they all came back to us and we put them on the stream. Then I got a call from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and they were calling all the stations in the state in the Gulf area and essentially they just said, "Look, here's $20,000 walking around money, just take it and start doing whatever you got to do and we'll get back to you." Then I got a call from the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, which is an organization of 200 community stations around the country, saying, "We're with you, let us know what we can do." So that kind of mobilized me. I decided that what I had to do was get as close to the periphery as I could, to the city, and start rebuilding the radio station. So we ended up leaving after a week, and some friends of ours had evacuated to an Episcopalian guesthouse in Franklin, Louisiana. It was not your average guesthouse. It had just been renovated to the tune of $2 million. It was a magnificent old mansion and our friends and Anne and I were the only ones in there, then our friends left and we were the only ones in there and there was one other couple that came eventually. It's in the Evangeline country with the moss on the trees, it was just a wonderful place to be, and we were so tempted to just stay there. But we knew we had to get back and get our lives put back together. So we left after about three days. All that time when I was in the motel room in Arkansas I basically just lived on the computer. In the motel, I had broadband. Once we moved out of there then my office became coffee shops with wireless. I'd just sit down for ten, 12 hours a day and I started getting more and more emails and the press was getting interested in us. I had conference calls. I went to KRVS in Lafayette, another public

radio station and we assembled a think-tank to come up with a game plan, like, “How do we go about getting this thing put back together? And how do we get the money and what are we going to do.” Because we had—

RH: Who was in the think tank? Was it local? National?

DF: National, it was national, yeah, I took the best people I knew and put them in—and some of them were local, it was a combination, but I was using the best people I could find to help me poke my way through this. Then the $20,000 check from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting became a very interesting pivot because I said to them, I said you can send me a check, but I got no way to cash it. I said I don't personally write checks, I authorize all the expenditures, but I don't write checks. So if I deposit that check I can't get to it. My bookkeeper's in Atlanta, in fact, I don't even know if I knew where the bookkeeper was at that time. But the people who can sign the checks are all over the country. We have no process for this. So we agreed to have them send the check to Louisiana Public Broadcasting to act as a kind of honest broker because they could get to the money, they could deposit it, and set up an account for us. That brought me to Baton Rouge and it turned out that my brother's wife's sister had a spare bedroom that we could camp in. So we landed in that bedroom in that house and we stayed there for not too long, less than a week or thereabouts. Then because my wife works for Jewish Family Service as a social worker. At that time Jewish Family Service was pretty much just out of business. There was no Baton Rouge office, and the New Orleans office was obviously shut down and all their people were scattered. So my wife in Baton Rouge started to work with one of the temples there and she began to set up some kind of a service, welfare, social service for people who had obviously more issues now than they ever had. Through that, an apartment was made available to us for first responders and social workers. It was like a starter apartment for newlyweds you might see on campuses somewhere. It was basically a two-room efficiency. We were very grateful. It was probably—we felt like it was the last one available in Baton Rouge. At any rate, it

allowed us to do what we had to do and we stayed there for about two months.

RH: Two months.

DF: Yeah, it was impossible to get into the city. I went into the city about ten days after the flood and—

RH: What was that like?

DF: Well now I have five blogs that you're welcome to check on the website at wwoz.org. They'll give you much more detail than I'll give you now, but essentially I went in the first night and when I went in that night to assess the damage to the radio station, I had a trooper's pass to get through, and the city was still mostly flooded. The city was still almost 80% still flooded, the water just sat there for the longest time, and it smelled like brackish water, it was salty and musty as you entered the interstate. There was no traffic whatsoever. No lights, no people, it was like a neutron bomb had gone off and the buildings were still there. Because actually the buildings that I saw, because you couldn't get to where the flooded part was, so where it didn't flood, the 20% where there was no flood damage, the buildings didn't suffer that much. Every once in a while you'd see a building that had been torn up by wind damage. Mostly it was the eastern edge of the roof that was torn off. Didn't even see that many broken windows. I saw a lot of trees that were toppled, and a lot of telephone poles that were snapped. There was debris all over. But the buildings were pretty much intact. But no people, absolutely no people. In fact, it was pretty hairy. We went out to the transmitter site on the west bank and we were challenged by some people in a car that wanted to know who we were. We were going, “Well, who are you?” And then they pulled out their guns and said, “Well, we're the authorities.” I can't remember what they said, they never really identified themselves, and so we told them who we were and then we went on our way. But that period in New Orleans was—which I wasn't around that much, but I know that that period was absolutely—all the layers of civilization were pulled off, they were like a loose tooth

anyway in New Orleans but it really was much more Lord of the Flies at that point. So I went by the radio station and I saw that about a 30-by-30-foot portion of the roof tiles were blown off. And we had right underneath that roof we had all of our CDs and we had like 25,000 CDs and thousands of LPs. That was an essential collection of New Orleans cultural music, Louisiana cultural music, that couldn't be reassembled. So I decided I need to get back with a roofer and put some kind of Visqueen or tarp or something over the roof. So, miraculously when I went back to Baton Rouge I was able to find a roofer that was willing to go down and do that work.

RH: Wow.

DF: He only charged me twice as much, which was a bargain. I was happy to pay. So I called the State Troopers' Office to get another pass and they said we're sorry but the city has told us that we can't issue any more passes and that you have to get all passes from the Mayor's Office now. So it took me about four hours to find somebody who represented the Mayor's Office. It was their press secretary or whatever they call it and she was in Dallas or Houston, I think it was Dallas. In the meantime, Rolling Stone got a hold of me and they wanted to go down with me and do a story on it. So I called, and when I got a hold of the city representative I explained to them what we were trying to do, and they said, "Well the only way you can get in is to get a pass from the mayor or the CEO of the city." I said, "Well would you mind passing our situation on to them and see if you can help us get a pass?" And she said, "No I'm not going to do it." She didn't hang up on me, she just put the phone down, and I could hear her talking to other people and telling them, "No." That was the city's response. So I called LPB, and by that time I had a relationship. In fact, we grew a very strong relationship with Louisiana Public Broadcasting, to the point where we moved our station into the building there and we actually operated out of the LPB building until we moved back to New Orleans.

RH: In Baton Rouge?

DF: To Baton Rouge, yeah, we used a satellite dish to get our signal to the city. The deal was that our transmitter was up on a building that was 25 stories high and the water had flooded the basement and torn up all the electrical so it was totally useless. So we had to stick a generator on the ground and essentially have a 25-story-high extension cord to the transmitter and every ten days we would have to service the generator, which meant running up 25 stories to turn off the transmitter so we didn't blow it up when we turned the generator back on and surged the electricity.

RH: So is this in New Orleans?

DF: This is in New Orleans, yeah, right, and we were shooting a satellite feed from Baton Rouge to the transmitter and then operating like this. Sometimes the wind would blow the satellite dish and we'd go off the air. All of our show hosts on WWOZ are volunteers, they don't get paid. So they were driving, and more and more they were relocating back to the city, and they would be driving up to Baton Rouge, which at that time instead of an hour-long drive it was over two hours because the traffic was so bad. The price of gas had gone up so they were paying like $20 to do a show in gas costs. Then they were like spending two hours to drive up, two hours to drive back, and maybe they'd do a two-or-three-hour show, it was like a seven-hour slice of their life just so they could do a show, volunteer for ‘OZ and they were doing it. They'd get up there and maybe the dish had blown a little, it would just take a little bit and move it, and then we'd be off the air, so they'd drive up there for nothing. It was like being in the Marines. Everything was improvised and, “How can we work around this and work around that?” So I called LPB and I said I'm having a hard time getting in, and the head of LPB, Beth Courtney, said, “Well don't worry about it, WWL-TV's here and you can go in with them so we'll go in with them”, is what she said. And it's all in the blog. So I said, ”Well fine.” So I showed up with—the roofer was going to meet us. He was in La Place and he was going to meet us as we went in. But the Rolling Stone photographer came with me and she had her own car because she was going to go do something else. We had these two

cars and then she said, “Well I'm not going in,” she said, “But WWL's going in and you can just get in their caravan.” She gave me a letter that she had written saying that we were doing essential work for Louisiana Public Broadcasting. Then she also gave me a logo, which—for WWL-TV, which essentially anybody could have done, it was like going into their website and grabbing their logo and then printing it out on an inkjet. I put that on my dashboard and with the letter, and off we went. We got to the checkpoint and we let the WWL guys go in first, and they were easy because they were used to letting them in, and then I went in, and then the Rolling Stone photographer went in. The last one to go in was this guy with a truck and a roll of Visqueen and a ladder and I'm thinking, “I don't know if they're going to believe that this guy is from the press.” But they let him in, so we got in. And we went to the station and we covered the roof. By that time actually, I got a call from Senator Landrieu's office and they were concerned. They'd read about it in the paper. Dave Walker covered the story. So we would have gotten some help, but not from the city of New Orleans. I took the opportunity to drive to my house. It was like you didn't know, you drove as far as you could drive and see how far you could go. So I went down Esplanade Avenue, you could see the waterline, the water by that time was down on Esplanade, and there was water but not enough that I couldn't drive along Bayou Saint John. I went through City Park and the trees were everywhere, power lines were down. So, but somebody had been through with a plow or something, and like made a very primitive path through this. So I just followed this path snaking around fallen trees and things and got to Harrison Boulevard and I guess that's Marconi, where the bridge is over that canal. I came up over that canal and it was like a lake and my house was in that lake. And that's as far as I could go. So that was what it was like.

RH: Did you see the rooftop of your house?

DF: No, because my house was on Marshall Foch, which is like three blocks in and three blocks down. So you could see the rooftops of the other houses, it was very placid, it was like if you were—the way it looked like all the world like if you ever went to

someplace on a coast like let's say in New England or someplace where there were cabins right on the water, and it was this just beautiful pine tree, reflection in the water, it was very still. And these wooden structures and they were reflected in the water. It was just very peaceful and very like a seacoast-scape somewhere. That's what it was like. I had to wait for weeks before I could—

RH: What went through your mind when you saw it?

DF: I don't know, I just felt stunned. My job was to go out and find out what the deal was and then figure out what to do, and that was my mission for the radio station, that was my mission for the house. When we finally got to the house it was unbelievable, it was like you can't—just as no one can possibly convey the devastation to the city through media, we take people on the blood and guts tour all the time, and they say I had no idea, I just could not get this if I didn't see it for myself, and I can't convey what it's like to go into a house where the biggest pieces of furniture—I had this huge Hoosier, like no single or two people could even lift it, and it was just flipped over on its side. The biggest pieces of furniture are the ones that were tossed around the most it looked like. The slime and the mold and the dank-ness and the smell in that house and the floorboards had warped. You crunched your way over CD cases and broken glass and china and stuff to go through that muck, and you couldn't breathe, and the mold was just everywhere. Then I lived in a camelback, so as I walked up the stairs, to the second floor the floors were polished and it was just peaceful, and everything was just as I left it. So it was like my life upstairs and my life downstairs. The difference between an engineering job that is what it says it is and an engineering job that isn't what it says, just words. Because if it had just been the hurricane we wouldn't have all this. Now the hurricane admittedly was 65 miles to the east and if we'd taken a direct hit then we'd have had all that in spades. But that's not what happened. There's a wonderful article in today's editorial if you haven't read it yet explaining all this one more time, that I think is really like probably now it's the quintessential primer because so many people around the country don't get it. We sent a

letter, Anne sent a letter to Leonard Pitts saying you really got to come down and see this. She doesn't know Leonard but she reads him. She just said, “You really have to come down and see this.” And he did. So we took him on a tour of the city and then he wrote about it. That little article in today's paper probably says it as succinctly as it needs to be said in terms of how all this stuff came about.

RH: OK, let's take a stop here.

END OF freeman45-2.mp3

RH: You were talking about New Orleans and when they heard the radio station, people thought, “I can come back into the city.”

DF: We did. We got emails saying, “When ‘OZ went back on the air then I decided to come back to the city.” When we first were back online, when we got that WWOZ-In-Exile thing up so fast I can't tell you how many people told us that that became like their lifeline to the city. On top of that, our webmaster had created a site where people could list the whereabouts of musicians. Many people were concerned about where the musicians were so we had this enormous list. “So-and-so has been sighted here. So-and-so is there. So-and-so is OK.” It came down to a handful of musicians that people couldn't locate, and that became a way for us to start looking for them really hard. So people really relied on the station in a lot of different ways. It makes total sense to me. The media just came out of the woodwork and covered WWOZ, besides Rolling Stone the New York Times and National Public Radio, CBC, BBC, and Fresh Air did—no, Talk of the Nation and Lehrer News Hour did stories on us.

RH: It’s so compelling because community radio's not like commercial radio.

DF: Right, well I think that's—the way I say it is this, that New Orleans if you go back and you study the city's history, and I recommend a couple of books, one that I highly recommend is Sidney Bechet's Treat It Gentle, because Bechet, a world-renowned

clarinetist, and one of the foremost promoters of jazz as it developed, and lived in France most of his life, adult life, but as a child, he watched his grandfather, a slave, dance, and drum in Congo Square. We're not that far removed from the very basis for all this, it's like two generations and then two generations. When you read his book, what you read about is a city that was saturated in musical culture. It was a way people lived. Everybody had a piano in their house. It was not uncommon for bands to play at parties in houses. There was just music everywhere. There's another book that was just published just before Katrina. It was called—something like Bring the Beat Back to the Street or something like that and it's a history of brass bands in New Orleans. You see that that culture was still alive and well before the flood. There's something called cutting eights, and people would have a party and they'd put a wine jug in the middle of the floor and the band would play and the game was to see who could dance the fanciest and closest to the wine jug without tipping it over. Whoever tipped it over, then they'd have to run down to the wine shop and get another jug of wine. It was on them, so that was a party game. Well, people were still doing that in 2003. I'm not saying they were doing it all over New Orleans, but that these—second line, the whole tradition of social aid and pleasure clubs, when the slaves were freed they were still poor as dirt, and they couldn't even bury their own. So they formed these social aid and pleasure club organizations that were like benevolent societies, and essentially when one of their members died then they would either have a party to raise the money or they'd pass the hat or some way they could find enough money to bury that person properly, and then the musical culture extends to the jazz funeral, a funeral service that was—or a tradition that hearkens back to the French way of having a caisson and people walking behind the caisson. The family is the first group of people to walk behind the casket and horse-drawn, and then the second is a jazz band, and then behind the jazz band all the other friends and followers. That was the second line, those people who followed the band. The social aid and pleasure clubs then at some point developed a practice of appropriating a particular Sunday to go out and march in the streets without a funeral, with their brass band, or

their jazz band, and that evolved over a period of time to where before the flood there was at least I think 40 different organizations, and each one had a Sunday, and they would publish these sheets. We'd get them at the radio station, and they were like—people don't do mimeograph anymore but that's as close as it looked like it was mimeographed, it was just handmade sheets that were copied and they would have nine or ten different places that were stationed along the way that they would stop and they were all bars. The idea was you'd go out and march in the streets on a beautiful Sunday day and until you've seen the dance steps that are associated with this, in the jazz funeral they're very elegant, in the brass band tradition they're incredibly athletic, and complicated, and the rhythms and the music and the exuberance, and if you haven't marched in the streets in a second line with 2, 3,000 other people for four hours, you just really haven't experienced something that's very central to New Orleans. These social aid and pleasure clubs are all based in neighborhoods and they have names like Black Men of Labor and the Baby Dolls and the Money Wasters and they're very colorful, and the shoes, they could spend $1,000 on a pair of shoes and the outfits were just extraordinary. But it's just a celebration and that's what we do in New Orleans better than anybody that I know anywhere is to celebrate. People often said, “And it's like you're laughing to keep from crying,” because the situation for many people is so dire that this is a release. The Mardi Gras Indians, another tradition that basically is based on African and Caribbean traditions of masquing and then became morphed into an association with the myth that the Native Americans gave harbor to escaped slaves. So as an homage to that relationship, the Indians masqued. They were really in the '30s were really gangs of thugs who did masque Indian and they had traditions with flag boys and spy boys and big chiefs and they were gangs. On Mardi Gras Day they would wander around and if they met another gang they would literally hatchet each other with stone hatchets and guns. It was gang warfare, but just like the Puerto Rican gangs in the '50s and '60s where they started to morph into who could dance the best, in New Orleans these Mardi Gras Indian tribes morphed into who could be the prettiest, and the Indian

chiefs would spend a whole year just sewing their costume, their Indian mask made of the most exquisite feathers and beads and sequins and finery that they could buy. An Indian costume could cost $15-20,000. A man would mortgage his house and spend the entire year sewing this costume and only wear it twice a year, on Super Sunday and on Mardi Gras Day. Then the old tradition, which they don't do anymore, they'd burn the suit. So what kind of a world is this? It's not our world. But if you can understand that world it's a world again that goes back to the brass bands and the marching bands I was talking about. It's a world of guilds, it's a world of passing traditions from father to son and from generation to generation. In a way to me, it resonates with some of the Jewish traditions and so it's very interesting because it's not a homogenized cookie-cutter type of life. Just as I see aspects and elements of Jewish tradition that are not cookie-cutter and homogenized but very much have a kind of an inner significance that—think of a child that's raised in that tradition as opposed to a child that basically just watches television or listens to rap music, it's the difference between richness and what. And so people are quick to judge and say they're illiterate or they're this or they're that. They don't have to be illiterate. Donald Harrison's an Indian chief and he's not only just extremely literate but he's also a very successful jazz musician. His father was a chief of the Guardians of the Flame. So but that's the kind of culture we have here in New Orleans. It's unlike most cities in America. Very unlike most cities in America. And WWOZ's relationship to that culture is that we are the way that people around the world can gain access to the roots culture of the city. There's something in roots culture that resonates with a certain portion of the world. Not everybody, but for some people who are looking for a life that is richer and full of texture than say mass-production kind of culture gives them, we started in I guess the '50s, maybe before then, with mass-producing, franchising our foodways, our food culture. Now in this century, we are actually now mass-producing and franchising our culture. One company owns over 1,200 radio stations and one company owns 100 plus music venues. The record companies have been in the business of trying to confect culture for us for the last 20 years. So as we see our culture become devalued

a station like WWOZ is a throwback to a time and place when radio for example was operated by local owners, mom-and-pop radio. It's really the difference between the corporation, especially the multinational corporation, and the sole proprietorship or family ownership of a local business. We see that in our institutions in the city. The Krauses and the Holmes and the Solari's and all the different—Katz & Besthoff, all the different home-owned, they're going through that in Chicago now. I was just up in Chicago and they're mourning the loss of Marshall Field's is now Macy's, so this is a trend that's just happening all over the country and all over the world where it seems like the local expression, cultural expression, is being replaced by some sort of bland or at least homogeneous kind of—and mostly functional—it's all about function. We always found that the mom-and-pop operators weren't necessarily the best businesspeople in the world in terms of being able to make the most efficient use of their money, but in some ways, they had more wisdom because they could think beyond the 90-day cycle of dividends, which corporations just can't afford to do. If you're a CEO and you try to explain to your shareholders why you're making a five-year decision that's going to affect the bottom line on their dividends, you're not going to be around for five years to see the fruits of it. So that's how we have to think from 90-day cycles. So WWOZ represents a different world where people do—our show hosts don't get paid, we've got 75 different people go on the air, and no one gets more than one show and they have better collections than we have. Our CDs are still up in Baton Rouge where we carried them up to save them out of the house, out of the little tree house that we were broadcasting from. People don't even—we can tell, but most people don't even know, it still sounds like WWOZ, because they're playing the CDs that they bring in grocery bags to play and their LPs and their 45s. So 'OZ represents, it's not about the money, it's about the passion and the feeling and the richness of what life can be when it's not just about the money. I think that is if anything, it's emblematic of the huge loss that New Orleans is facing as a result of this engineering fiasco. Because in the '40s, this had happened under FDR, within six weeks I'm convinced we'd have had an army of craftsmen with hammers and saws and

whatever it takes and half of New Orleans would be rebuilt by now. But in this century when you have a catastrophe it's an opportunity to enlarge your supporters who've given you the money it takes to get elected. So you outsource, and whether it's Iraq or it's Katrina what we witnessed was a process of outsourcing. Times-Picayune documented this. It's not just some sort of data of mine. They documented the, I think, it was $2.8 billion that was allocated to pick up the debris after the flood and so the contract went to I guess it was Shaw, and then Shaw outsourced it to somebody else, and they went through seven levels. So I take half and I give half to the next contractor and the next contractor and then so it's down by a factor of seven before the money hits the ground here. We knew and read of stories where workers with trucks to pick up the debris who were looking for a windfall and driven here from Kentucky and all over the country picked up their trucks and left because they couldn't make enough money. What was left here to pick up the debris? And we know that after the $2.8 billion was spent we still had half our debris on the streets. So it's a different world that we live in now. It's not a very pretty world but that's the landscape. I think events like Katrina really highlight the difference between this world and the world that created the myths that we grew up believing in. We thought of the United States of America and the federal government as being some sort of entity, and I think our experience on the ground was that I felt sometimes we were more like a colony, like maybe Puerto Rico, Washington, DC, Louisiana, we weren't the right color state, we weren't in the President's fraternity, we really didn't have their attention. There is still fighting over whether they should save the coast from—we're losing a football field every 90 minutes, and it's still a question of whether anything should be done about it. This doesn't feel like the same country that I grew up in when I was taught that it's—well and see in the '40s we didn't call ourselves that, but we were all really socialists, at least American character was, in this sense, most people or a lot of people, many more people still read their Bibles. There was this feeling that if your barn burned down then everybody would group together and you'd have a barn raising, we'd get your barn back for you. Well, we know that that's not happening in

New Orleans in 2006.

RH: A lot of people are talking about all the people down here from—

DF: That's right, the American people, the American people, not the government, the American people definitely have stepped up to the plate. We've watched streams of people come down here, and what's really interesting is that volunteerism among very young people, teens, and 20s, is up around the country. They're the ones giving up their spring breaks in Florida to come here and to help us gut our houses, not just them, but more than had been the case in the past. That generation's getting involved, but the American people have been incredibly generous and forthcoming. In fact, the tragedy of it is that they've wanted to help and it seems like not only is the government totally incapable or unwilling to be a vehicle to help, but that the larger organizations, like the Red Cross and other organizations that are raising the most amount of money, are also incapable of somehow making that get translated into really addressing situations on the ground. They seem to be so large. In my particular area, I work with musicians, and so Habitat for Humanity has raised millions of dollars for a site that's called Musicians Village. The reality on the ground was that they're basically a church-based or faith-based group that's a large organization that builds houses for poor and low-income people around the country, maybe around the world, and it's a wonderful deal, they basically say give us 350 hours of sweat equity and qualify for financing and we'll give you a house that you'll pay half as much for on a mortgage note, you'll own it yourself. It's an incredible opportunity. But they are a large organization and it's like they're a one-note song. So when they came to New Orleans and they raised all this money for musicians, well it turned out that the musicians couldn't qualify. Only 10% of the musicians could qualify for financing, because their lifestyles are so radically different from faith-based universes that either they had poor credit, which could be rectified, it could be cured if somebody would give them counseling and work with them, but there's a lot of musicians frankly that work in the gray economy that only get paid cash, they

don't report income, they don't do income taxes, and they could never qualify. It's like if you look at Musicians and when I was up in Hot Springs I was thinking you got to call Habitat, they're the first ones that can come and help us with getting our musicians back. But now I'm seeing that they really can't. They've got 80 units over there and I think they've got -- I can't remember now, maybe 28 musicians. Their goal is to get 50% of musicians in this. They've raised millions of dollars. They've told me—and I think it's inaccurate that they've told me it costs $200,000 for each unit that they've got down there. Everybody I talk to does the same thing, they look at me like, “That can't be.”

RH: They got some overhead if that's what—

DF: Well, that's it, I don't know, I don't know, but—

RH: Somebody’s not getting a good deal.

DF: People don't believe that but what's I guess symptomatic, it's just like it's a metaphor. They only have one floor plan and they're building like these essentially they look more like the encampments that you see on the plantations before the Civil War.

RH: That's exactly what they look like.

DF: Yeah.

RH: They look like slave quarters.

DF: That's slave quarters, and the only gesture they've made is to paint them in different and bright colors. But you would think that an organization that builds that many units would have at least six different floor plans that would be viable and that could give some sense of—and then coming into the culture of the city of New Orleans, where diversity is us, and where artistic expression of the architecture, not just the music and the food, but the architecture, is an essential quality, but they are just not able to see that. So we

really have a culture clash. This is more of the same, so in essence even as they help us they're hurting us, and they hurt us in two ways, because what they leave behind with us is not the city that we had, and we can't be ungrateful for the fact that they're out here doing this and that they're providing housing, but we still can't help but notice that we'll just -- if you take this as the solution then we've really destroyed New Orleans once and for good. It's like New Orleans will only be another stop on the road to nowhere when it looks like the rest of America. When you get out of your plane and you can't tell what city you're in, that's not New Orleans. The other way that they're hurting us is that people think that the musicians' needs are being addressed, and you can't even tell when they say they have 28 musicians, you have to squint necessarily maybe to see what musicians are there, who knows, some are real musicians, some aren't. Even if you gave them all 28 or however how many they have in there now, that is not taking care of the problem. But people will say, well, Habitat raised all this money and the musicians are coming back. Well, I happen to work in this arena, and I work with the Grammy Foundation, I work with Tip's Foundation, I work with the Jazz and Heritage Foundation, and with the Preservation Hall folks that have their own New Orleans Musicians Relief Fund, and we all know we think that maybe 10 or 12% of our musicians have come back and that's it. So then the question becomes, “What is the critical mass that it takes to maintain a living musical culture, the kind that you read about in Bechet's book Treat It Gentle?” The difference between people representing their culture to other people, especially tourists, I say that's a dead culture, and the difference between that and people who express the way they live through their music, which is a living culture, is the difference between a New Orleans that's still New Orleans and a New Orleans that basically is a postcard to the past. That's the struggle that we're facing. When we have organizations, the most visible profile organization we have is Habitat for Humanity when it comes to this issue, and they're not capable of even—not only are they not capable, they're in the way—Dave Matthews gave them $1.5 million or something like that, he thinks he's doing something for them. Harry Connick, Branford Marsalis, and it's not

against Habitat. They do what they do and they do it well, but it's just like the Red Cross. We saw a lot of stuff that didn't—when the Red Cross, our experience was the best I can say is I got a great tetanus shot and some other shot, hepatitis shot, and they did that really well. But when they came about providing the relief they gave us a number to call that you couldn't get through and it was a time when the only way you could call was with cell phones, and so it was like this, it was like ultimately we got some money from the Red Cross, but to put people through the process of calling a number you can't reach with a phone that doesn't work at a time when we were totally stressed—I don't know, it didn't leave me feeling like they—and we were in much better straits than other people. When we were here we watched the Red Cross come through with sandwiches and water and brooms I think it was. I mean, we didn't need that. I don't know what they were—they probably did some good things, but from my personal experience, it looked to me like another fiasco, it looked like an organization that was posturing for the cameras or something, they were here and they were raising a lot of money. I did see them with centers where they were passing out disinfectants and cleaning supplies and stuff and people were making use of it, so I don't want to like just make it one blanket statement, and it was a difficult situation admittedly. But the organizations and the government were on one side of the picture, and on the other side were people. The people who came down here were magnificent, just magnificent, they came down, they gutted houses, they helped wherever they could, they're still coming, and we were left with this just awe at the American people. Government, big relief organizations, not so much.

RH: Where did you end up living? How did you find a place to live since you had 11 feet of water in your house?

DF: Well, we networked with friends and we actually had two places that we could have had and we chose this one. The guy who lived here chose not to come back to New Orleans. He lived in this apartment and rents downstairs. And he wasn't sure what he was going to do, he was going to lay up for a year. So we took a shot because we like

this place better, in fact, this place is nicer than the one we lived in in Lakeview, frankly. We took a shot and we took this one and we still don't know what he's going to do. He may sell the house. We may have to move out. We may buy it. I don't know, I mean it's just— everything's in flux. It's really hard right now to make any kind of informed decision about those kinds of issues because you could get screwed so quickly, just like all those homeowners that got screwed with the flood. Again it's in the paper today. I don't know, you have a house that you've almost paid the mortgage down, and then all of a sudden now you're having to take out another $300,000 loan to rebuild it. Yet, you can't get flood insurance or you get flood insurance, it's going to be sky-high, and it's not going to cover as much, and the electricity's going to—Entergy wants to salvage its damages on your back. I'm hearing from my friends in Baton Rouge that pretty much all this federal money is going to go north of I-12 and that they're not interested in New Orleans. This is kinda like payback for—I'm not sure what they're paying us back for, but I know when I go to West Monroe and people ask me where I was from, that stopped the conversation. So I think now we're going to see. So no one really knows what the forecast is for the city. So to make an investment of any kind is very problematic, you just don't know what to do. It could be a great time to speculate, it could be another—to put good money after bad and throw it into a sinkhole, and of course, it would clarify things if we had another flood, which we felt this last year we really dodged a bullet, because the Army Corps kept pushing back its deadlines for even setting up the simple pump situation that they were going to be their temporary solution for the flooding in the canals, and they couldn't get the pumps to work, and they were vibrating, so by the time we got through the hurricane season I think they—I don't know if they've ever solved it, but we kept reading about the end of hurricane season and the solution to the pumps were somehow chasing each other.

RH: You seem to have made an investment in the community.

DF: Well, I personally am here to fight for New Orleans that I love, that I was born here, that I grew up here, and that being the General Manager of this radio station I personally am not going to take this radio station anywhere else. It's got to be in New Orleans. We've got to fight to build—we're a community radio station. The station is actually doing quite well. We're getting a lot of support from outside the country, 36 radio stations on their own without us even contacting them raised money for WWOZ, something like $72,000, when we were living hand-to-mouth and month-to-month. Then we had our first membership drive in the Spring of last year because obviously, we couldn't have one in the Fall. We raised almost twice as much money as we had ever raised. Because we had such a successful drive, we rededicated the money that we got from these radio stations and we bought what I call a big-ass truck and it's got three rooms in it, so it's an air control room and a production room and a lobby. It's got its own transmitter and its own antenna so if we have another weather event we can drive that puppy out of New Orleans and then three days later we can be back in here broadcasting from the truck. In the meantime, we're going to use that to take to music festivals around the country and of course, any of the stations that encounter any kind of problems, if they go off the air, we'll send the truck up there, they can broadcast from it. We're painting the call letters of all these stations on the side of the truck, and it's going to be called The Katrina Network. So that's one thing that came out of it. So if the station represents the New Orleans-ness of New Orleans, and so it's unthinkable that we don't do our part best. Our issue is the station's back but our community's not back. There's still, I don't know, 250,000 people that haven't returned, that got one-way bus tickets to—they don't know where they were going and there's certainly nobody buying them bus tickets back. So we're working very hard to figure out how we can get our musicians back, and we're working very hard to get our marching band traditions back. Because without those I don't think the city as we know it will survive. It'll just like I say just be a memory. Something that we show tourists, but it won't be the way we live anymore, and that's a huge issue because all the stuff is neighborhood-based, and I don't know what the answer is if there

will be an answer, but we're here to fight and struggle for it and if the life gets sucked out of the city because it turns into just another American way station—

RH: Mall.

DF: A mall, right, then I'll move, I'll go live in Jerusalem or someplace where there's still life. But I'm not interested in being in a place that doesn't have something in the air that—it was a great place to live.

RH: It seems like 'OZ's been able to do something—we're talking about all the things that it's been able to do that are unusual, but one thing that keeps striking me is that there are very few mediating institutions that are interracial.

DF: Right, right, well that was always the unspoken agenda. Our mission is to celebrate the cultural diversity of the city and in that process, we felt like the most important thing we could do was model that. So our staff has always been at least 50% black and 50% white and our board has always been at least 50% black, 50% white.

RH: So it's been very intentional?

DF: Very intentional, and the notion is that we don't do politics, but what we do is we want to open people to the various cultures, and so if they hear something that they like and they stick around, they may actually by osmosis become more creolized than if they just stick in the universe of black or white. If you look at the other radio stations, it's one flavor, one station. So listen to urban music, then you're in the black mainstream, and if you listen to country and western you're in the white mainstream, and those kinds of generalizations. But people tend to stay in the world they know, and I'm not very big on tolerance, I don't think that tolerance is a very great virtue, I really see much more value in embracing the other as a way of really learning about so many different things, and if you got to take those leaps sometimes just like taking a shaktipat or a bar mitzvah or going into an Orthodox shul and davening even though you don't know the first clue.

When you go into those universes it just expands your possibilities. So that's how I see that. Let me say one more thing about that, because in the process of doing this work what we find is that so much of the trouble comes from isolation and from misunderstanding, and there are a lot of cultural cues that we misread because we simply don't have any way to know what they are. In the black community, for example, it's extremely important as we found out in our office that you walk in in the day and there's somebody sitting there, you say, “Good morning” to them, you see them, you tell them you see them by saying “Good morning.” If you don't then it's really not just an oversight, it's a statement that they're invisible and that that can set the stage for all kinds of bad things that flow from that. So we did some workshops with some people who worked with issues of racism and one of the exercises that they gave us was to—whites and blacks—give us a profile of white culture and black culture. So when we did the black culture it was very rich, you could talk about soul food and you could talk about the music and you could talk about just everything that we know. Then you got to white culture and you couldn't really get a handle on it. It was like, “Well,” so where people went with it was into ethnicity, and they could much more describe what Irish culture was, but white culture doesn't really evoke a lot. It really made me think about having grown up in New Orleans as a white person, and first of all not even being aware of what it was to be black. Knowing certainly there were so many blacks you couldn't say I wasn't aware of blacks, but I just didn't know what their world was. After all, domestics, black domestics lived in our houses and knew who we were, but we didn't ever live in their houses, live in their world, couldn't cross that line. We were operating in total ignorance here. But in the process of thinking about what it meant to grow up white and also as a Reform Jew whose unspoken project was not necessarily to assimilate but to dedifferentiate. There's a book out that something like When Jews Quit Being Blacks or something like that, that was the project, was to get to the place where we weren’t being excluded. Being Reform was a great help, didn’t wear a yarmulke, it makes it a lot easier. So what I began to perceive in this exercise was how rich black culture is, and

that there was this movement back in the ‘60s, Black is Beautiful, and it was a whole notion of people as civil rights opened the door for people to claim their heritage and to claim the richness of their heritage. I said, “Well, I don’t want to be black, I don’t want to go to Second Lines, I don’t spend a lot of time trying to be black.” But my analog was I could spend more time being Jewish. So it had a profound impact on the way I perceived the value of developing, for example, a Shabbat ritual, because as a Reform, well, first of all, we didn’t even do Shabbat in our house, but then, so what do you gain by not doing Shabbat? Nothing. So there was a very profound lesson in working in this multicultural modeling that we were doing that I didn’t foresee.

RH: So tell me about your Shabbat dinner.

DF: Well, for us it centers first of all in meaningful ritual. So I work at doing my own translations of the prayers and the blessings so that when I finish a ritual, I want to feel like it was a transformational experience, not just a performance or a pro forma kind of thing. Well, we did that, we had to say—so I go to a lot of people's houses and they frankly can barely stumble through the Hebrew, or they read the words without meaning, and it's almost like reading the Torah quickly during services trying to get the story, it's like okay, so I read the prayers and I'm trying to just say the prayers I just—it's like I have to pronounce this but there's nothing going on in here that I can see, it's not coming from inside. So that's how we want to do Shabbat, is we want to do it in some way that comes from inside. It means working and so we're constantly evolving and working with different elements of Shabbat and also Havdalah. But all of those, but it's like how can I get at the essence of this prayer for me, how can I get to the essence of this ritual for me, what does this mean, just if I bless the challah and I put salt on it let me think about what does that portend, and some things I still haven't figured out, I'm still working on it. Just like it's a work in progress and then other things, aha! That's a breakthrough.

RH: Do you feel you enrich New Orleans culture by embracing your Judaism?

DF: I feel that for some people I'm a resource, just as other people are resources for me. It's my wish and I see it almost as an obligation, but it's also something I want to do, to help people wherever I can to find their path through Judaism because I've been blessed and like I say, I don't think I asked for any of this, I think this was given to me, and so I feel it's like that movie Pass It On, and my dilemma is that I just don't have time to dedicate to do as much as I would otherwise do. But wherever I can I will. If somebody asks me I will do it if I can.

RH: Has there been any frameworks that have been particularly resonant with you these past 15 months within Judaism?

DF: No, at least not locally. No, I can't think of any. I think I watched half the Jewish community leave. I watched most of the congregations go into semi-paralysis for a while. They're coming out of it. They're all damaged. I don't know any of them that aren't weakened in terms of the congregations. With the possible exception of Chabad. I don't know much about them. They don't seem to be as affected as the other congregations.

RH: What do you mean by semi-paralysis?

DF: Well, I mean I think that there were some congregations that just ceased to function very much in terms of support systems, and there was a time when people were just scrambling to help themselves, and I watched also that structures that had been built up around various Jewish centers just fell through. People like some people who had a notion of God had a huge problem with, “How could God let this happen?” I always say if you ask the wrong question you'll get the wrong answer, so they may have been working with asking the wrong question prior to the flood, and then their shock was to either figure that out or abandon the whole notion of using Jewish tools to cope with their crisis. I think some of the Rabbis gave more service than others. I think some of them just

disappeared for a while.

RH: Do you have a sense or an opinion about the Jewish community as a whole and how they managed the crisis?

DF: Well I think it's in jeopardy the same way that the music traditions are in jeopardy. Right now we're on life support. If it wasn't for all the money that was flooding in from outside to keep these congregations going, I shudder to think what would happen to them. They're basically living on other people's money right now. So when that stops then what'll happen? There's not a service you can't go to now except again with the possible exception of Chabad where you're just seeing a fraction of the people show up. Shir Chadash used to be vibrant and now I think it's seriously just holding on. Same for Gates of Prayer and Beth Israel, poor Beth Israel, they were already—see I say that Katrina is an accelerant for all the trends that were already happening. This was already in the works for the Jewish community, but this really accelerated it, and I do make a connection between the overall trend that the Jewish world is fretting about, which is the dissolution of Jewish customs and practices and, for that matter, religious centers. Synagogues, the trend is synagogues and temples are merging and closing down and shrinking. The ones that shrink, their membership is shrinking and so I don't think anybody would dispute that as a trend. I think that there's a direct relationship between that and the paradigms that they've been working on or under since I guess the 1900s, and it seems that they are so committed to those paradigms that they're not going to in many cases make the adjustments that they need to make. Where that adjustment needs to be made, in my opinion, is that essentially if I'm not providing nourishment for you in that this shul when the crisis comes and you don't get what you need you'll go somewhere else. That's what I think is basically on the table here, and there are many different ways that people can be nourished, and in some ways, a community can nourish people, and that they can get, and social action and tikkun olam, that they can get, but there has been a tradition, certainly in Reform and probably in Conservative, to

try not to talk too much about the “G” word and that's not serving them well at this point. There was a reason why so many people showed up for a Shabbat of the Soul service and they don't show up for the other, for the more traditional services. What is that reason? It may be the same reason that the Jewish community's in so much trouble now. You know that there are a lot more Jews than there are people involved in the Jewish centers of activity, right? So why is that? Does anybody really want to know what the hard answer is or do they just want to lament it and say, “Ain't it awful?” There's horrible stinking thinking about, well, we've got to save this institution. If you tell me that you had a business that was going out of business, why would I want to do business with you, there's a reason why your business isn't working. If you told me that you’ve got to remember the Holocaust and all those people died and you've got to somehow—say why would I want to be involved with something where I'm associated with annihilation? There's a living breathing spiritual practice that is in the heart of Judaism that has been ignored, and you pay a price for that I think. It's not just Judaism, the Christians have the same problem.

RH: I guess your perception is somewhat different than some of the perceptions I'm hearing about how the Jewish community as a whole stepped up to the plate and performed well through Katrina.

DF: Yeah, I think that—

RH: So that's one reason I'm pressing—

DF: —the nationals did, I definitely think the nationals did and I think some of the locals did.

RH: Did you turn to the Jewish community for any aid in any way?

DF: No. No, they came to me, we got the $700 like everybody, and we got the apartment.

RH: Was that helpful?

DF: Absolutely, I was very grateful, it really was helpful. It really was, no question about it but—

RH: Was there also help, a different kind of help?

DF: That's not what I'm talking about, you see, I'm talking about people who—that's what we do best, it's like we can go out and buy instruments, but we don't know what to do with the instruments, and we can go out and we can give you $700 but we don't know what to do for the fact that your very soul has been corroded by this floodwater. Your whole basis for how you believe things are put together has been totally put into chaos and question. I don't think that the local community or anybody for that matter stepped up to the plate that well. I think people are living in the ruins of what they had built as their spiritual house, and I don't think that's true, I would challenge somebody to show me why that's the case.

RH: Why that's the case?

DF: Why the Jewish community local or national for that matter has addressed those issues? If that's true I'd like to know about it.

RH: Okay. How would you like to see it addressed?

DF: I don't have a program that I want to see, but I think that if someone were sitting down and asking me this question like where do we go from here—

RH: Right.

DF: I would say you really must now take this as a wake-up call as to what all your assumptions are about what the hell it is you're doing here as a center for Jewishness. Somehow you're going to have to figure out a way to put more of your resources into the

content of your spiritual practices and less into the building fund and into the outward manifestations and even for that matter the social action that you do, that you look at any budget of any of the shuls anywhere in the country probably, certainly in New Orleans, 5%, 3% go into the content and 95% goes into the operations and the edifice and all the rest of the stuff. If this isn't a wake-up call for you I don't know when you're going to get it because what was happening was we were slowly leaching our memberships. They were going down, down, down, I was on the Board of Temple Sinai, I know what the figures are. We were losing, but just by inches. Now we're losing by yards, and if this doesn't serve as a wake-up call then I don't know what it's going to take. I don't need that to happen, sometimes living in New Orleans I've never had direct access to—except for the happenstance or—I mean finding Jonathan was just okay, but that wasn't an institution, that wasn't an organization. I found others, David Bachman, Fran Zell, the Cantor, Spector and his scholarship, and Barry Ivker and his wonderful knowledge. There were individuals, Robert Loewy, there were individuals. But the projects of the organizations themselves are just—it's just this is way out of their radar. In a way, it may be that if you—well I'll just say it like this. It's easy, the form of decision-making in terms of to-do lists and in terms of activities is a lot easier to achieve than people saying, “But what is the wise thing to do?” I don't ever hear in board meetings when people -- nobody talks about wisdom. If I'm going to make a difference I have to start with myself, and I think we start in these boardrooms with the assumption that we pretty much got our stuff together and we're going to go out and do, and this is what we're going to do.

RH: So we may not be doing all that much if—

DF: Well, it's an interesting conundrum, because if you do but you don't have wisdom, then it really will be counterproductive. And if you have the spiritual wisdom but you don't do then what's the point? There's a balance. But I don't see the balance. The balance is going to be reflected in things like budgets and in activities. Those activities and those budgets are really more a mirror for the people who are making the decisions, so you can

almost read them back and say OK so building is 95% more important than the programs. If I look at the programs then this kind of program is more important than that program.

RH: It reminds me of a teacher that used to say, “Your operative theology was your checkbook.”

DF: That's right, that's exactly right, that's right.

RH: So have to wrap up this tape.

END OF freeman45-3.mp3

RH: I'd like to get on tape what you just said, and I said it seemed like a model, one of the models that seem effective is WWOZ, you talked about its grassroots.

DF: Yeah, WWOZ is basically a volunteer operation, there were 450 volunteers before the flood. Now after we've had a hard time because people either aren't back to volunteer or they're busy putting their lives back together. But the whole dynamic of the station is that each person represents a taproot into that section of the community and everybody brings their particular passion and their knowledge. The idea is that we have no program, no playlist, and we don't tell people what to play on the air. But what we look for is people who are passionate about and knowledgeable about their music. There's a certain spaciousness, there's latitude for people to make their own decisions, and they make good decisions. I think of the top-down model that most of the congregations have, and I think that it's just a different model, and I'm wondering if maybe that kind of volunteer sense of participation isn't another model that might serve in some way.

RH: It also seems one of the issues with the recovery is that people coming down with their vision of what New Orleans ought to look like.

DF: Well, the RAND Corporations and the Concordias and the other planners that come in, how could they possibly have a notion of cultural continuity when they live in a land of Dunkin' Donuts? For example, the West Bank has a charter school and there's a corporation that designs their curriculum, and I don't know where the corporation is, let's just say, Indiana, to take the worst possible case, and they have a music curriculum they created, now they wouldn't know the New Orleans musical traditions if it bit them in the ear. So, I don't even know what they're teaching over there at that school but I guarantee you it's useless to us in terms of the things that matter most.

RH: Talk a little about it just for a minute, cultural continuity, and what you mean by that and why it's important.

DF: Well, it's interesting now that you bring it up, it's an interesting parallel, isn't it, between the dilemma that some Jews feel that they're facing and what we're facing here in New Orleans now. In a way, Katrina is just an accelerant for all the trends that were already happening. Many Jews are decrying the fact that there are fewer and fewer people being affiliated with congregations, that the congregations are shrinking, that the congregations are merging, in fact, that in many ways people just don't practice any Jewish practices. In New Orleans, where we had such a strong musical tradition, people live their music here, it's not just something that you go listen to in a club, much less just on a CD or radio, it's a whole culture, it's a whole way of life. And now because we've lost 250,000 of our people and our neighborhoods are destroyed, I'll give you an example. If I go to the French market, there used to be, not even so much now, but if I go to the French market I could buy Creole tomatoes and okra and so that's the marketplace. A person will come to New Orleans to visit and they want to hear jazz and they want to hear authentic music that's played, because we have the best musicians in America, there's no question about that, and we have the biggest—there's 5- or 6,000 musicians living in the city before the flood. It was a vibrant musical culture. A musician might play with ten or 11 different bands in one week. New Orleans was expected to not

just play jazz, but they had to play polkas and mazurkas and everything else, it was all over the place. So they would play in different size bands and with different kinds of music, they cross-fertilize their own artistic expressions, push each other's envelopes as they got creative, and they were -- wrapped around that was a knowledgeable musical audience that could give them immediate feedback. It's almost a feverish kind of music culture, and I compare that to the culture of Vienna at the height of the development of classical music when you had all these musicians and these wonderful audiences and it was just a vibrant music culture. Now that we've lost all of our people, we really face the decimation, if not the dilution and complete loss, of that culture. We don't know what the critical mass is going to be. In New Orleans, we only had 12,000 people that were said to be Jews in New Orleans, whatever that meant. Now I think the number's maybe 6,000, I don't know, whatever that means. So the question is how small does it get before critical mass you've got absolutely no Jewish life here. So cultural continuity really—and this was a trend that was going on before the flood but now it's been highly accelerated—cultural continuity for the Jewish community is maybe even more relevant of a question than it is for the musical culture of the city, but they do parallel.

RH: I want to give you the floor and let you finish with whatever you feel like you'd like to say that maybe I haven't asked or we haven't directed time to.

DF: I really can't think of anything. I think you've done a really thorough job of plumbing, and I loved your questions. I just can say that even in a place that doesn't have a very deep and wide Jewish community as compared to so many places in the country I've found that I've been able to have incredible Jewish experiences. I'm very grateful for that and I hope that people in the future will have that possibility, because I think it would be a loss to them if they don't at least have the option and the opportunities that I've had.

RH: Thank you.

DF: Sure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]