

Myron Goldberg Transcript

Rosalind Hinton (RH): This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Myron Goldberg at his business, M. Goldberg, at 502 Leontine, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is July 5, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring-Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Myron, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Myron Goldberg (MG): Yes.

RH: Well, my first questions are just basically about you and your family. Tell me when you were born and your -- who you're married to. How many children you have.

MG: I was born on January 9, 1945. Son of Abe and Alice Goldberg at Touro Hospital in New Orleans. And I'm married to Marcie Fox Goldberg. Her parents were Albert and Honoré Fox from New Orleans also.

RH: And, you have two children?

MG: Two children. Two boys. Jonah, who is 31 and Aaron, who will be 28.

RH: OK. And, tell me about how long your family has been in New Orleans.

MG: My family -- well, I'm a first generation American in my family. My mother was from Russia. My father was from Poland. My father immigrated here after World War I. My mother immigrated to the St. Louis area when she was a baby, and she lived in Fairmont City, Illinois, where she grew up at in St. Louis. My dad, who is [five] years older than her -- he was born in 1901 and he came here --

RH: We're going to stop? OK. Let's stop it.

[break in audio]

RH: OK. Where we left off. I'm very -- this is so interesting about your dad coming.

MG: My dad is a very interesting story.

RH: Yeah. So I'd like to hear a little about it. Are we going yet? OK. So you had just said that he was born in 1901.

MG: He was born in 1901 in Poland and -- in a town called [Gunyentz?] and don't ask me how to spell it because it has a lot of different spellings, but his father had immigrated to America in the late 1800s.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: Actually, it wasn't -- it was more the early 1900s that he had immigrated, and this whole idea was to earn enough money to bring his family over to America. Well, when he was -- he had come and was a peddler in New York and he had left his wife and they had four kids in Poland and they had a farm that did everything for them. They raised their own food and they had cattle and that's how they lived in Poland. And, World War I broke out. And that's just when my grandfather was about to send for his wife and kids here. He had earned enough money to bring them over. Well, unfortunately, World War I broke out and he couldn't get them out of Poland because of World War I. And it wasn't until after the war that he was able to bring his family over except for my father. My father was the oldest of the four children and he was drafted into the Polish Army because they came to the farm and saw a strapping young Jewish boy who was stout and strong and took him and put him in the Army. And he left -- his mother did not know where he was. Just took him off the farm, and that's how he got drafted. That was the European Polish trail. And it wasn't until after the war when he went back to his town that he found that his father had left money with one of his brothers to help him come to America. And, my father came to America on his own and that was one of his great

thoughts in life, was that he got to come to America and got off -- not at Ellis Island, but at the New York docks, because he had enough money to buy a second-class ticket to America. And he was just so proud that he got off the docks and walked -- there was another relative that had met him and from that point on ended up coming down to Louisiana. My grandfather had relatives that were in Bogalusa of all places and related to the -- this relative had relations to the Singermans. And my grandfather was very, very religious. And he did not like being in Bogalusa. And he only stayed there a little over a year and brought his family to New Orleans and they lived on Decatur Street where they had their business, lived above the business, and lived there for a number of years and moved to another location within two blocks on Decatur Street, before they settled at 925 Decatur, which is where they were in business for over 60 years. It was I. Goldberg and Sons was the name of -- was the business.

RH: Was it dry goods?

MG: Dry goods.

RH: Hmm.

MG: It was a dry goods business.

RH: And what synagogue did he belong to?

MG: He belonged to Beth Israel.

RH: Oh, he did.

MG: Belonged to Beth Israel. Actually, my grandfather belonged to Beth Israel and he belonged to Anshe Sfard and I don't recall if Everett Tillman? was around then or not, but he ended up participating in that, too. But mostly Anshe Sfard and Beth Israel.

RH: Mm-hmm. And so for you, where exactly did you grow up?

MG: As far as a synagogue?

RH: Well, I meant your residence but also your Jewish and your general education.

MG: My -- my -- by the time I came into the world in 1945, my father and mother married late in life. They had a long courtship. My father was here. My mother was from the St. Louis area. So, by the time that I came along, we were living in the upper area of New Orleans on Perrier Street. 6028 Perrier. It was a triplex. And that's where I grew up at. I was half a block from a public school, the La Salle School, where I went to school. And I have a sister who is eight years older than I am and she was with us also, but, at that time, we had some cramped quarters. I remember growing up in a shotgun -- in a one-bedroom shotgun. It was a mother and father. At that time, if I remember, I had my grandfather -- my mother's father was living with us, and my sister in a one-bedroom, for all of those people. Quite an experience.

RH: Wow.

MG: My experience and that was until my -- my grandfather died a year after my bar mitzvah and, until that time, my bed was my -- my rollout bed from the closet that would come down.

RH: Every night.

MG: Every night. Every night. My sister had the sofa bed in the front. My grandfather had a small, single bed in the room itself. We lived modestly and we all survived and grew to love family in the same way.

RH: Did your father -- was he in the dry goods business?

MG: Yes. He was in the dry goods business with his brother, Israel.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: And his father, at that time, when I was around, he was retired and not well. As a matter of fact, my grandfather ended up going to live in the Jewish Home in Memphis at that time because he was very religious and there wasn't any place here for him at that time. We didn't have a Woldenberg at all. And, none of the households, of his children had been living here, could take care of him because of what his needs were. So, that's how Memphis came into being.

RH: Hmm.

MG: And he passed away just before my bar mitzvah. So I had both grandfathers -- and my grandmothers died when I was five and six years old, so I really have very little recollection of that.

RH: So, did you -- did all of your family, your grandfathers, too, go to Beth Israel?

MG: Yes.

RH: Did you grow up -- what were your memories of them growing up?

MG: Beth Israel--it was my life. I mean, that's -- I'd go to public school, to the La Salle School, and then the school for -- the Beth Israel school bus would pick us up, pick me up in my neighborhood and take me to Cheder everyday. We went four days a week. And then Friday night we would go to the synagogue and Saturday morning I'd go to synagogue and Sunday morning I'd go to synagogue and Sunday School. So, a lot of my life revolved around Beth Israel growing up in that livelihood. I have great memories of that.

RH: Can you tell me one or two memories that you have from that period that stand out?

MG: It's hard because the synagogue was so beautiful -- I remember I was fortunate that I got to be in the choir at a young age and I made my bar mitzvah and the cantor we had

-- we had a very -- we had a really big congregation. There was close to 400 families at that time, for an orthodox synagogue. And it was a beautiful synagogue. Really big. On Euterpe Street. And, for my bar mitzvah, the cantor that we had came to me and asked if I wanted to be in the choir. That was one of the biggest honors a kid could have.

RH: Wow.

MG: And I did that at that point and just was more involved on a singing basis because I enjoyed singing the cantorial musics that we had. And we had a great cantor that had his own music that he wrote. So there were great melodies and he had a great teacher when he was growing up. But the choir was really an enjoyment because you could do things that other people couldn't when they went to shul. The choir would be in the center of the synagogue and we'd be facing the cantor and also facing the rest of the congregation. And the rabbi would be behind us and the president of the congregation was behind us on the bimah. So they didn't see what we were doing. And actually the other people in the synagogue really couldn't see us because we had a big bimah in front of us, but we could see the cantor and look upstairs at the women's section. We would always comment as to who was dressed better. Who was the nicest looking woman who was coming in to the -- we had our own jokes that we did back them from the choir. And, it just -- it was just a different atmosphere then you'd see today.

RH: Do you remember the cantor's name?

MG: Schram. Bernard Schram.

RH: And, you must remember then the move from Euterpe to the Lakefront.

MG: Yes, and my parents also moved. When they were going to build the synagogue out on Lakefront -- my parents had lived on Perrier Street for so long, finally were going to move -- my sister was gone and it was just -- just me and I was already at that point living in an apartment, being a single guy, and they moved down to the Lakefront just two

blocks from Beth Israel.

RH: Now, in New Orleans, did orthodox Jews drive to the synagogue?

MG: Yes. It was -- in New Orleans, orthodox Jews drove at that time. There were a few that were shomer Shabbos but not as much as you'd hear about today. At that time, people just drove -- I think people who belonged to an orthodox synagogue, and I guess the same reason that I feel today, is that we just liked it. The more traditional aspects of the liturgy and the service and not so much that you observe the Sabbath completely. My dad was in business. Even though he was religious, he worked on Saturday. But they used to have minyans, early minyans, for people who had businesses. So, men that still worked on the Sabbath went to the early minyan. And even on the week days, there were early minyans that they had. And they went to it everyday. So they fulfilled their obligations as best they could and still maintain their work relationship.

RH: Do you remember any -- how did the orthodox community mix with the larger community in New Orleans? Do you remember that?

MG: I don't think there was any mixing or differentials that we see today. I had gone to a public school, and I was the only Jewish boy in my public school. I didn't have any other Jewish friends other than the friends that I had in Beth Israel until I went to junior high school. And my mother, (of shalom) had to get me a permit to go to McMinn Jr. High. Otherwise, I was going to go to -- I think it was Sophie Wright was the school I was going to go to. There wouldn't have been any Jewish kids there. And she wanted to make sure I was amongst Jewish children, so she got me a permit to go to McMinn. And then from there went to Fortier High. But that was my only contact with other Jewish kids other than from Beth Israel and there was no differential like there is today. You had reform and you had conservative and you had orthodox, but I thought everything was fine, even -- there was a Jewish boy's group that I was in in junior high. It was called the Gamma Club. And, in high school, there was a fraternity called SAR, at the same time, BBYO

had their organizations for AZA and BBG for girls. And we all integrated with each other as far as anything -- there were no stipulations like there are -- like you see today, as far as how religious are you in. It's just a matter of doing things. Because, just like you said, we drove on shabbos and there weren't that many real religious people other than the rabbi and the cantor and maybe one or two other families.

RH: Did people keep kosher?

MG: Oh yes. We kept kosher.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: People did keep kosher. We had a couple -- at one time, I think there were three butcher shops in New Orleans for kosher meats back when I was a kid. And actually maybe it was four.

RH: I feel like I interviewed someone who was with a -- Gothard -- Jackie Gothard's?

MG: Her father -- her father had a delicatessen. And Ralph Rosenblat had Ralph's. He was the last one to be here. But, before that, we also had Katz's Deli and there was also one called Shapiro's. And then you had Bill Long's, which wasn't kosher, but everyone went there for the challah they had. They made really good challahs for shabbos. And they were just down the block from the other delicatessen. I do remember when I was a real small child there was a kosher butcher on Dryad Street that could kashrut the chickens. But that was when I was real small. I don't have recollections other than stories of that.

RH: Mm-hmm. Was it a nice life in New Orleans? Did you like it?

MG: Oh yes.

RH: Was there anything distinctive, do you think, about Jews in New Orleans?

MG: I don't know if it's just in New Orleans -- I think people just do for others. There was always a caring, there was always a -- at least in my household that I grew up in. When the High Holidays came around and my mom cooked and my dad and I went off to shul, Rosh Hashanah or any of the holidays, they would always bring a serviceman back.

RH: Oh really?

MG: To our house for the meal. It never failed. There was always somebody. And there were always families like that. Always caring. Even growing up when I was older in high school, all of the families were terrific. The JCC was a centerpiece of activity -- not so much the synagogue that you went to for your prayer for Sunday School when you finish [inaudible] but the social life and for activities, the JCC was primary for meeting and being with other Jewish kids.

RH: And so what kind of things did you have at the JCC?

MG: The JCC had Saturday night parties. They had a swimming pool. They always had just activities where you could partake in. Whether it was summer camp or just spending the weekend playing basketball in the gym. And you got to interact with so many people. Grown-ups and men would have their card game upstairs. My dad used to play cards up there --

RH: Really?

MG: -- on Sunday. Yeah.

RH: Wow. That's the first I've heard of card games.

MG: Really?

RH: Yes.

MG: There was a room upstairs and Charles -- I don't know if you've heard of Charles, the janitor. He was the old janitor they used to have. I'm sure he's not around any more. But my dad smoked cigars and they had these men smoking cigars or smoking up there and Charles would look forward to getting whatever cigar he could get. If anybody needed a drink or something.

RH: Oh, wow. For your children, what was kind of the center of Jewish life for them do you think?

MG: For my kids, the Center had to be our home and had to be the synagogue because as I was raising a family, the city was now more expanded and it was not as close as it was when I was growing up. My oldest son went to school in Metairie. He went to Ridgewood. My younger son went to Newman. So you're constantly transporting from one to the other and going to different areas. So whatever Jewish content there was to be taught to my kids was going to be in the home and through the synagogue.

RH: And, were there any -- what particular did you do in your home?

MG: Well, we tried -- it was as much of a Jewish home as possible. We didn't -- we didn't keep kosher. We kept southern kosher.

RH: Tell me what that is.

MG: Southern kosher was we didn't have pork products in the house and that if we went out we'd have seafood. But no -- again, no pork. Just regular food was OK. And the -- so, we didn't have the -- that aspect of it, but what we did was try to observe the Sabbath as best as possible. But it wasn't easy because both Marcie and I work and raising kids, they were small and growing up, and even having a business -- just being ourselves the few primary people in our business was very difficult, trying to do all of the things that you'd like to do. But still partake in the customs that we would normally have.

RH: So, you were still out at Beth Israel?

MG: Yes. We've always been at Beth Israel. Always been members there.

RH: And you've been involved pretty much at Beth Israel. I mean, you've been president.

MG: Yes.

RH: When was that?

MG: Gosh. A long time ago.

RH: Really?

MG: It was a long time ago. About -- I can't remember exactly what years it was. It was a while ago. At least 15 years ago. But I had done so much at synagogue and I think my growth at the synagogue was over a time when I was still single and we had a young rabbi that we had just hired. His name was Jeffrey Bienenfeld. And, he was coming in [phone rings] and I was on the -- I was asked to be on the board as a young person and in meeting him one time, he was talking about forming a youth group and he had come to me and spoke to me about helping him with it. And I had no ties to tie me to anywhere other than to say, "Sure". He was very energetic and I liked him and I said, "Sure, I'll be glad to help". And he got me involved with Jewish youth group for orthodox and I helped him with that and it kind of gave me a different insight to Judaism because at that time, I had gotten older, gotten out of my teens. Early 20s. I might have drifted to a point where I didn't do much or care for much except he kind of got me interested in partaking again. It's a time that I think a lot of kids go through as far as where are they going, what are they going to do, and he got me involved in this and kind of steered me in a different direction that I enjoyed and got me participating more at the synagogue with functions. And, I got involved with doing various things at the synagogue, fund-raisers and social

events that we had -- that we would do. As a matter of fact, one of my first dates with my wife was bringing her to a spaghetti dinner that I had organized. And it's history from that point on as far as our relationship.

RH: So it all began with a spaghetti dinner. Is there anything else that you think I should know about New Orleans in an earlier time?

MG: New Orleans was just very quaint. People were gracious and always knowing people. My family, I guess, is well-known for being in business and I had a lot of friends because of the Jewish organizations that I was in. The Gamma Club and SAR. SAR was really a great boys fraternity. As a matter of fact, if I look back, that was one of the great experiences of growing up and being Jewish in New Orleans and being part of this group. These were great guys that today are still great friends in life. And, it was a fraternity, not in the sense of a college fraternity but in the sense of a high school fraternity. We did a lot of things. We had fun. We did religious things besides that. But we all together enjoyed whatever we did. It was from all different aspects. We were reform. We were conservative. We were orthodox. We were all good guys, and we ran the club ourselves.

RH: Oh.

MG: We did have some advisors but they were never around. We just really ran it ourselves and did that, like I said, the guys that I grew up with in this group are still together.

RH: Wow. That seems to be something that is particular about New Orleans -- that people have friends for 30 years. You know, for long periods of time.

MG: Well, not just -- you might not have seen them for a while. I have one friend of mine that I've just started to contact. I heard he's not well. And I haven't seen him in years. And he and I e-mail each other about every other day now. And he was in the fraternity

with me and I just want to go -- I want to go see him. He lives across a lake and he has some serious back problems and he can't get around at all. And I want to go over there. I'm trying to find the time when I can do it, that he's free to be visited. And this is from a relationship from back in growing up.

RH: Tell me about your business. When did you start your business and --

MG: We started our business, my wife and I, started our business over 30 years ago. As a matter of fact, this coming month, August, will be exactly 30 years we've been in business.

RH: Wow.

MG: And we went into business for ourselves because I was having some problems with my dad's store. Not with my dad but with his -- my uncle. We weren't seeing eye to eye on things. I just felt that I needed to get away and Marcie and I thought about it. We said, we need to start our own business. And we opened up our store in Uptown Square. 1,100 square feet on a second level there. We didn't know what we were really doing at the time. We were just a young couple who had only been married four years and felt we had to go into business for ourselves. And, today, 30 years later, we have a beautiful store and we worked hard over a time period to get where we are today.

RH: 1,100 square feet to what now?

MG: We've got 3,000 feet. But we own the building where before we rented.

RH: Right.

MG: So now we're our own boss.

RH: And --it wasn't easy.

MG: It wasn't --

RH: Retail is not easy.

MG: No.

RH: Is it -- what were some of the challenges do you think?

MG: Oh, the biggest challenge when we first started was getting -- getting -- going into business because where we were, we were setting up another business in Uptown, New Orleans, and I thought, as long as I had some money in my pocket I could go buy whatever I wanted to. And found out that I couldn't because of competition. The other competition didn't want another business coming in carrying similar merchandise or the same merchandise. So I had a problem with trying to start -- finding the right merchandise that I could work with to sell to people because of competition from other stores in the areas. And that was a big obstacle, the first to overcome. And once we did that, and were in business for a year, then we had no problem getting other companies to sell to us. I saw that we were liked. That was very difficult at that time. Another part of that business was when we first started, we had a very -- I remember we were in debt through loans to start with and interest rates during the Carter regime were very high. And, it was a big stranglehold on us but we overcame it and settled in. We got through those times. Those were -- those were pretty big challenges. Just maintaining a good business with credit and having good customers that were loyal over the years.

RH: So, tell me now about Katrina and just -- and when it -- when you realized this was serious. A serious problem. I think that will be OK.

MG: Katrina. Katrina is a story in itself, which I'm sure you've heard a number of times. We kept tracking the storm here at the store and not thinking that it was going to come to New Orleans of course. And finally that Saturday, I went out and got gas in my car and even bought some extra bagged ice to have at home because whenever we had a storm,

we'd always lose power. You know, we'd want to have some ice to chill things with. Just normal hurricane preparations. And Marcie had made reservations for us, if we had to evacuate, that we'd go to a pet-friendly hotel in Houston, which we made reservations at. And we came to the store. Waited here and did some business.

RH: On Saturday?

MG: On Saturday. We were here. Did some business. I really had no thoughts of the fact that -- just watching the storm. And I was thinking it was going to turn north at some particular point when it was crossing the Gulf. And, it wasn't happening and finally we weren't -- business had slowed up in the afternoon and we went home and I had some -- some steaks I had taken out for dinner and we just barbequed the steaks and sat around and relaxed and then the mayor came on and called for an evacuation and I wanted to leave that night and my wife said, "No, I don't want to leave tonight. Let's get some sleep and we'll leave early in the morning". And the next morning, we got up and packed up our things that we had. Whatever food we could take with us. A couple of days of clothes. And got our four-legged daughter, we call her Murphy, and started to trek.

RH: Was there anything you felt like you needed to do here at work?

MG: When we left that Saturday, we never had a thought about anything other than just locking the doors and going. We never thought about any problems that we'd have in the store at all, because we never have thought --

RH: The windows or anything?

MG: Well, the windows I could not do anything with anyway because they are so big. It's impossible to have any protection other than tape them, which we did. We did tape the windows. The same thing at our house. We taped things at our house as far as windows. But, we just kind of left thinking it was going to still go north and we'd come back home with no problem. And, we ended up getting in a mess trying to evacuate the

city and 10 hours later we had just gotten to Baton Rouge. So spent the night with a friend of a friend in Baton Rouge the night the storm came. And the storm showed it -- it was going to go east of the city and we were just excited. We couldn't wait. We'd be going back home the next day. That next day is when we heard about the levee breaches.

RH: Monday or Tuesday?

MG: That would have been Monday because the storm came -- because, you know what, the storm came -- yeah, that would have been Monday afternoon because the storm came Sunday morning. Sunday night.

RH: Monday morning.

MG: Monday morning.

RH: Monday morning. The 29th. Monday morning.

MG: Monday morning. And, it was later that afternoon that we got the news about the breaches and Baton Rouge had lost power and we just felt we had to go on from where this house was because this fellow that we stayed at was very nice and he had -- he had his son with him. He had a six-year-old boy and we just felt that it would be best for us to leave because he could go to someplace else where he had power, electricity. And he was there just because we had no place to go. And he knew that. He didn't say that, but that's what my wife and I thought. So we left there and tried to go to Houston, which was our original plan. Cell phones weren't working and we got as far as Lafayette and I pulled over to a restaurant and used a phone to call Houston hotels and everything was filled up. Everything was taken. And, I just got back in the car and told my wife to pull out -- we have a map in the car -- "Pull it out and let's just go to Atlanta". My oldest son lives in Atlanta. My youngest son, Aaron, was in Gulfport, and he got washed away. But he had already evacuated to be with his brother in Atlanta. Because we told him to get out of

that area knowing that it was going to hit there. You know, a couple of days before, so he had already gone to Atlanta. And I said, "Let's just go be with our sons in Atlanta". So we then had to drive -- we couldn't go east to go back to Atlanta. We had to go north. So we went -- drove all the way north to -- I-22, I believe that's what it was. Across the country. And, got on that and drove and drove through small towns in Louisiana to get to this part, until we got to the I-10. And then when we got there -- we were driving across Louisiana. We got to Mississippi and could see all of these tree-cutting trucks coming down to our neck of the woods. We said, "That's great. They're going to clear that area up and we'll be back in no time". And, now we're getting low on gas, though. Tried to find gas and every time I pulled off the road, every gas station was closed in Mississippi. And realized that they didn't -- they didn't have gas because they lost power because in that part of the state the storm [break in audio] power all the way through Jackson. And we came to one town in Clinton, Mississippi. And there were two gas stations with lines. We got in a line for about -- like an hour-and-a-half to get gas. But I had no gas and I couldn't go further on and we got gas finally and continued on the road and we'd been driving for hours. Since the morning. And I was getting tired. I had driven 10 hours before, stressed out, going to Baton Rouge, and now I'm driving to Atlanta. It's getting dark. I'm tired. Start pulling off the road to find a place to stay, a hotel, a motel, and there was nothing. Everything was filled up. And besides that, we can't use the cell phones. The cell phones in Mississippi weren't working either. So there's no place for me to call and finally I get to -- we cross into Alabama and we're really tired. I thought I had a friend of mine who had a store in Tuscaloosa that I knew and at about 9 o'clock at night when I called him and he was -- he and his wife were really glad to hear from me because they had just saw the news -- their power had just come on like two hours before and they saw the pictures of New Orleans, which we knew nothing about what was going on at the convention center or anything. And I said, "Alex, could -- do you have room for my wife and I and we have a four-legged dog with us, to spend the night on our way to Atlanta?" And he was -- he said, "Sure, it's no problem at all." He told me

how to get to his church off the interstate and he met us and then took us to his home. His wife and he couldn't do enough for us to make us feel comfortable. We talked to my son in Atlanta earlier and he said, "Just come on. I'll find some place for you." And the -- that next morning we woke up, got cleaned up, went and had breakfast with this family and went on to Atlanta like nothing was the problem. Just drove, relaxed, and went to my son's place of business. Got there and talked and he told us we were staying at -- he had arranged for us to have a house to stay at. There was a friend of his that was leaving town for a couple of months that we could use for a home, which was terrific. And that's how we lived for a month-and-a-half.

RH: Wow. So, in Atlanta -- I mean, by Tuscaloosa, you pretty much knew you couldn't go back to New Orleans?

MG: We knew we couldn't go back. We didn't know how long it was going to be or anything. That was the whole idea, just going to Atlanta to get ourselves and wait for the news as to what to do weeks after and how to do things. And it wasn't until I got to Atlanta that we started getting information, and we were wondering about the store. I wanted to know about our house. I wanted to know, you know, what the water situation was. Our house was such that when we had these major rainstorms years prior, we would get a little bit of water in our house, a foot, maybe, in our lower part of the house. But not knowing what this was like, we figured, well, maybe it's just the downstairs part of the house, three, four feet of water, at the most, which would have been just the downstairs area -- we have a four-level house and so that was what we kind of felt. And also the store, we were getting reports of looting and I was able to contact the police friend of mine in the second district, and he said, Myron, we passed by the store and it looks fine. And we -- the mannequins in the window were never touched and the store is elevated so the Tchoupitoulis St. was the main drag for the police. And they could see the place looked fine, except they busted in the back door and cleaned the store of about 80 percent of the merchandise.

RH: But you didn't know this, though?

MG: Until the police finally -- when I kept getting reports I said, "Please go check the back door."

RH: Who was giving you reports?

MG: This police friend.

RH: Oh.

MG: That I had. I had his number.

RH: OK.

MG: And he didn't call me often. It was just I'd leave a message for him and Mark -- it turned out that Mark Shaw that works for me, he had a friend that he was in contact with who stayed in New Orleans and didn't leave until after the storm and he knew about the problems that were uptown as far as looting. So, I had those reports, but they didn't know to what extent. Nobody really told me to what extent we were looted. My police friend didn't tell me.

RH: Did he just decide not to tell you?

MG: Yeah.

RH: OK.

MG: He didn't want -- he didn't want to tell me what the situation was here, and even for my house, when I asked about what's the situation with my house, of all of the things I heard from a cousin of mine, who was in the National Guard from Texas, who happened to be here with the National Guard, and I asked him to check my house because he knew where the house was and he called me back a day later and he couldn't get to the house

because he couldn't cross Claiborne Ave. The water was too deep. So, I still didn't know what to make of the water situation, which was at my home.

RH: So, tell me what your home address was.

MG: My home address was 1643 South Jeff Davis, which is right off of Fountainbleau Dr. And when my police friend finally called me about the house I asked him -- I said "Walter", I said, "Just tell me where the water line is on the outside of the house." And he said, "You know, Myron, you've got that white picket fence outside." I said, "Yeah." He said, "That's a four-foot fence." "Yeah." "Well, it's above that." So that told me that it was not just on the first level was history. That meant the next level, which was our dining room, living room, kitchen was also destroyed from the water. That's how we knew that -- those two areas which knocked out really everything. And that's the information that we had in Atlanta and that was two weeks -- we'd been there for over two weeks in Atlanta when we found that information out. So we had -- another two weeks had gone by. We were just trying to deal with contacting the insurance companies, finding out what we had to do, what was going to be -- and at that point, Roz, actually, even before that, when we first got to Atlanta, I had manufacturers were calling my son up after where we were because everybody was concerned about us from around the country. We had friends all over, but they knew my son was in Atlanta working for the H. Stockton store there. So they all contacted him and he had a whole list of people who had called wanting to help. I had -- manufacturers sent me clothes because, again, we didn't have anything that we had with us.

RH: Wow.

MG: It was a very moving time when people did things for us. Contributions were made to us, like I didn't want to take them, but they were helpful because it helped us do things. We didn't have anything. We had no bank to go to. We had nothing because [Whitney?] everything was --

RH: You were [Whitney?].

MG: Yeah.

RH: That was rugged. No national bank.

MG: But there was nobody to go to. I mean, there was nothing here.

RH: Right.

MG: And it turned out really a great story was I have a cousin who lives in Mobile who got in touch with us. It was one night after a couple of weeks and just in talking, wanted to know how we were. I said we were all right. After I hung up with him, I just realized that we knew the CEO over the Whitney. It was a friend of ours. But he had a son who was the manager of a Whitney bank in Mobile. So, got his number, called him up. Spoke to him. He was glad to hear from us. He convinced us that his mom and dad were fine and he would watch our accounts. Whatever we needed, just let him know, and he would make sure that we were financially taken care of as far as taking care of, because we were worried about automatic deposits. We had automatic withdrawals from our checking accounts for different insurance, health insurance, and so forth. To make sure nothing lapsed. These were concerns we had. Having him was a great blessing.

RH: That was kind of a great --

MG: Yeah.

RH: -- connection to make.

MG: Exactly. Exactly.

RH: You're the first person who kind of thought of the other Whitney, a Whitney somewhere else. That's very clever.

MG: It just came to me, and it was good that I did.

RH: Now, how did you two cope? You know, I mean, I think of your position as just so much more rugged because your whole livelihood, and other people's livelihoods were, too, but I picture this retail business --

MG: I was fortunate. My son was in the same business in Atlanta, and the people he worked for were good to me also. And they let me go to the store -- his store -- pretty much everyday. Hung around there. Made phone calls to people and people who needed to call up looking for me also. It's not just (I ran --) keeping up with things and my son tried to keep me busy. And I was not great. I was not in a great state of mind. I was pretty depressed. Just not knowing what to do when we got back here. What we were going to go through. I just knew I wanted to get back and get to it. But, he had tickets to a baseball game and -- to go see the Atlanta Braves. And I'm a baseball fan, a sports fan, and I really didn't want to go. And I said, "Marcie, why don't you go? You like to go to baseball games." She said, "No, your son wants to take you to a baseball game. Let him take you to the baseball game." Well, I knew what I was getting involved in because from where we were staying it was like an hour-and-a-half drive to the Atlanta Stadium for the baseball game. And just long drive and not feeling really good about, you know, I'm being with my son. We get there. We get to our seats and go through the -- you know, have a nice hot dog at the game and so forth. And I'm sitting there and watching other families with their kids, just enjoying the game, and I'm looking -- and I said, "You know what, snap out of it." I said, "These families are having fun. I used to do that with my kids, and now my son is taking me to the game. That's kind of cool." So I started being a kid with him taking me -- and so the rest of the evening went well. I just had a different appreciation of it from that aspect and that's the way I kind of looked at things from time to time. But focusing in on one day at a time, especially with the insurance, the knowledge of what was going on. Well, what had to be done -- I had one insurance company that was our flood insurance contact and this guy just scared the living

daylights out of me by saying -- because we get the word that we can come back to New Orleans by the end of September and he said, "I wouldn't rush back." He said, "You might not be able to get into your house and it might be contaminated and you've got to tear it down." And I said, "Tear my house down? Really?" And he just scared me and I said, "No, no, no. I don't think so." So, we made our plans to come back to New Orleans. My contractor, who was also a cousin across the lake, had been back to New Orleans the week before. He was a big contractor. He was able to come in and he saw the house. And, again, he didn't tell us the extent of the damage. Nobody told us the extent of the damage, not at the house or at the store. And he came and boarded up the window that was broken. We had a broken window in the front. One that was broken that [they?] broke in through and the back door being busted, they boarded up. So nobody really told me that. But anyway, he said, "You know, come on and we can start clearing out the house." And I said, "Well, be sure you take pictures before we start doing anything so we could show the insurance company what the place looked like." And he did and when we got back to New Orleans we came back at the end of September and I'd been in contact with my doctor also. He'd contacted me that he was back in New Orleans. And that we needed tetanus shots before we got in. So, his office was down in Metairie and he was actually the first person that I saw in the city, or the city proper, when we got back. And he gave me a tetanus shot. He gave me a mask to wear to -- when I go into the house, for breathing purposes. And the next morning, my cousin -- my contractor cousin met Marcie and I at the house and we saw that and kind of grimaced. And, then went to the store and walked in here and saw this place and I just cried. I already knew about the synagogue being destroyed and this was just before Rosh Hashanah. And, we were staying with some good friends in Metairie that, the Paillets, -- whose house fortunately did not have any damage at all, or anything -- they were gracious to us. Stay at their house. And those first few days trying to go between their house and our house, trying to salvage what we could. Just going into our home and trying to save what we could. But you could only stay in there for a while because

you couldn't breathe the dirt, the stench, was terrible. It was absolutely terrible. And the heat, there was no air conditioning. Nothing. So you go in and there's mildew and mold and what you're breathing while trying to do things is indescribable. Very hard on both my wife and I. My youngest son was back in New Orleans at that point and he was a tremendous help. He really did most of the packing up of the stuff that we had that was salvageable from our home.

RH: What were you happiest to see or to recover when you got back?

MG: Just to be back in New Orleans.

RH: Just to be back.

MG: Just to be back. Knowing, and seeing what we had to face. Just to be back.

RH: It was real and not in your imagination.

MG: Just to be back here in our own city. Not having to be on a superhighway in a strange place trying to get from Point A to Point B. Knowing where we are. Knowing the surroundings. Knowing the people who were back. Just that friendliness, that togetherness, was important. When we were out in Metairie, just before Rosh Hashanah, my friend got a phone call that Shir Hadash was going to have services, that they organized -- that a rabbi was coming in from California to help hold services. So the first night of Rosh Hashanah, Ken and I went over to the synagogue and walked in and the rabbi was a female who I grew up with.

RH: Really?

MG: She was a Lollie Brenner. Her father used to own Universal Furniture. So we -- and she was a rabbinical student out in California, a reform rabbi. But she had come to help organize the service. When she saw me, she came and hugged me. Just -- it was

kind of emotional. And then I was talking to her and somebody comes up with a microphone and puts it in front of me and said, and I don't know who it was, and said, "Were you affected by Katrina?" I said, "Well," I said, "My home is flooded, my store was 80 percent looted and my synagogue was destroyed. What else would you like to have happen to me?" And it turned out that was NPR. And, not only that, but they took pictures when we were davening. From outside they took pictures of me and Ken. Well, a week later, I got phone calls from around the world. The picture ended up in the Jerusalem Post. Up in the New England area, I had customers and friends up there that saw the picture of Jews praying for Rosh Hashanah after Katrina, and then the NPR piece was played on the radio. And I had friends that listened to NPR that almost went off the road when they heard my voice. So, you know, it was kind of a strange and eerie feeling, but good feeling. That things were getting out, word was getting out, what feelings were like here.

RH: We're going to stop one minute. I hate to stop you.

MG: OK. It's OK.

RH: We're going to run out of tape if we don't.

MG: All right.

END OF AUDIO FILE ONE

RH: -- about being at Shir Hadash.

MG: Right. The first night we were at Shir Hadash and it was kind of different because this was a conservative synagogue. It had a reform rabbi. And the congregants -- there was about 40 people that were from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform were in this

edifice.

RH: What was the edifice because I thought they had flooding at Shir Hadash.

MG: They did. But the little sanctuary -- they pulled out the carpet, so we're walking on sticky tape, but they cleaned up that little shul that they had and that's where we had our services, in the little chapel. Some members really cleaned it up as best as they could. That's where we had it. And the rabbi -- it was just different having a reform rabbi do this for people who were mostly Conservative Orthodox. And even had some from Chabad that were there, because there was no place to go to do anything.

RH: Wow.

MG: So, the next day, for the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the rabbi seemed lost as far as what to do with everybody. More of the members from Shir Hadash had come up to me and said, could I take over and help her? And I said, "Better yet, I'll get us a few of us from Beth Israel," and we had -- remember, I told you about the choir.

RH: Yeah.

MG: Well, also who was back -- Eddie Gothard, Jackie's son was back, and Eddie was -- got a great voice and his dad was there, Saul. The three of us then kind of took over the service to a cantorial resolution to the services. We needed more entertaining for what we were there. You know, I was trying to have a little bit more like instead of what was sort of being called -- just straight out religious. And we gave -- we did the service in that matter. And it wasn't as true a service as you'd want to have, but it was better than what we were getting. And it was -- it was very entertaining. I think it made people feel good about what we were doing. And so we sang our way through that first day of Rosh Hashanah. And we didn't have services the second day. They didn't think about having services the second day. The next week, then, was very interesting. Beth Israel had organized its own Rosh -- Yom Kippur service. Jackie had worked to find a place to have

our own services and a motel out by the airport had donated their conference room to us to use. And people had set up a Mechitza to separate the men from the women.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: They had -- the system was set in place. We didn't have a rabbi. But Eddie had spoken to Union of Orthodox Rabbis and they -- within 24 hours, they had a rabbi and two students on their way to New Orleans with a Torah, with prayer shawls, with books, with everything that we needed for Yom Kippur service. Very emotional. We had a set up that was -- we had the Torah. We had set up a couple of tables with some mementos from the shul. The -- we had a menorah that they cleaned up and the large bimah cover for the bimah had never gotten wet. It had floated. The bimah had floated in the sanctuary and landed on the women's section, which was higher, and its cover never got wet. So we had that cover that we put over the table and it just had a breast plate from some of the Torahs we laid down as being our ark. And there was a box of Kleenex about every three or four feet for people. And it was a very emotional Yom Kippur event and the next day -- but it was really something. And then it gets to the beginning of trying to start [recovering?]. And from that point on --

RH: Was that one of the reasons it was so emotional, it was like what -- it couldn't. It was too early to think about it as a new beginning wasn't it?

MG: Well, it was a -- it was a saying that we weren't dead. We were alive. And we were going to go forward. But it was a real, real difficult time. I mean, when we -- one of the things that Jackie had talked about, she always talks a lot, but the -- the amazing part of getting everything done so fast that -- Union of Orthodox got these people down in New Orleans, sacrificed their time to come help us. Books -- side story: we had a gabbai that died during Katrina, Meyer Lachoff. And the books that we had came from a place in upstate New York and they had sent the books to us and had dedications inside the book dedicated to our gabbai who had died and also, they had a gabbai that died, so it was

these -- two of these two men and they had enough time to put these dedications in these books and get them to us. This was within 24 hours, so you can imagine the teamwork in getting these done. But the books that we got had originated from Tikvah Shalom Synagogue.

RH: You're kidding.

MG: Some 30 some odd years ago, they had donated to this place, some old books of theirs, so these books made a round-trip ticket.

RH: Wow.

MG: It was a good story.

RH: Yeah, that really is.

MG: A lot of symbolism in that.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: And from that point on is when Rabbi Loewy offered part of Gates of Prayer for us to be able to use as a sanctuary until we got ourselves in our place, which has been tremendous. Great -- great gesture on their part.

RH: So, have you been -- you've been out there ever since?

MG: Yes.

RH: And is there any other type of a mixing with the -- with the Reform congregation there or --

MG: No, because we have -- our services are at sundown for Shabbos. Sundown, not at 8 o'clock at night. In fact, there was a really fun event just a couple of months ago -- there

was a community event where a rabbi, a famous speaker I can't remember what his name is, but he had come to town and he was going to speak at Beth Israel and he was going to speak at Shir Hadash. He was going to speak at Gates of Prayer. And he was going to speak at Chabad. And he was going to spend the whole weekend and Friday, he was going to start with a Shabbos dinner at Gates of Prayer. This -- it was going to be a kosher dinner, so the rabbi from Chabad, Rabbi Nemitz, came across the street to kasher the kitchen of Gates of Prayer so that we could then have a kosher Chinese dinner. I don't know if you know Shirley from Royal China on Veterans -- it's a great Chinese restaurant. She has a lot of Jewish friends. As a matter of fact, she's got a mezuzah in the door of her restaurant she has so many Jewish customers. Anyway, she came to cook a kosher Chinese dinner for -- at Shabbos for about 3, 400 people.

RH: And what's her restaurant?

MG: The Royal China.

RH: The Royal China on --

MG: On Veterans.

RH: I know that name.

MG: On Veterans.

RH: Yeah.

MG: And we -- we had the dinner first, and then we went to our services because we were at sundown, so we were earlier than the 8 o'clock that Gates of Prayer was going to start, and this rabbi came to our service and then he left us and went to their service at 8 o'clock and when our service ended, we went to Gates of Prayer's service to finish up -- because there was going to be a kiddush -- afterwards. And that's that Friday night.

Saturday morning, all of these places were within walking distance and the rabbi went to Shir Hadash and spoke at their services. Saturday night, he went to Havdalah service at Chabad. Sunday, he was back at Gates of Prayer for a -- for our morning minyan and breakfast at Gates of Prayer. It was quite an eventful weekend. We had all of these congregations together for this speaker -- for these functions. That was community. And something that you will not find anywhere else. Anyway, I'm sure you're not going to find some places where you'll get a Chabad rabbi come in to a kosher kitchen for a kosher Chinese dinner for Shabbos.

RH: Wow. You think the new community can sustain that?

MG: The new community being --?

RH: The new Jewish community. The --

MG: Oh, I think so. I think it's going to be much more inclusive than it has been in the past.

RH: Really.

MG: If it -- you know, at some point, I know that we've contacted a new rabbi who was waiting to come in. He should be in in the next week or two, and we hired him on the basis of being a missionary, so to speak, to help us reorganize, find a place, build a congregation. So, at some level, better than we are right now because we're struggling. And, he's also on the basis of being inclusive. He's from a Yeshiva that believed in inclusiveness, not separateness. And that was one of the key parts of that irony. So we're definitely going in that direction, and I think other congregations are going in that direction. I think Rabbi Loewy at Gates of Prayer was a part of it by letting us use a part of their facility.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: And it's -- I think it'll go forward. It will definitely go forward.

RH: I have so many questions.

MG: OK.

RH: In this difficult period of time, what was the thing that sustained -- how did you and Marcie sustain each other and how -- what sustained both of you?

MG: Well, I go back to the part where we were going to take one day at a time. And we first focused on the store. There was nothing we could do about our house other than the fact that -- wait for insurance to help us and see what was going on there. We were also trying to get laborers to do the work, because he still had customers under contract so we still had obligations, also. So we decided to focus in on the store and he helped us take the store back to be repaired. They -- the floors in the store had to be re-done because there was a gumball machine that was broken into and gumballs were on the floor and got stomped into the wood floors. So we had to refinish the floors and I was able to go and find the floor man, I knew where his place was, and I went and found him because the phones weren't working and begged him to come and please re-do my floors. And I got the insurance company couldn't have been more helpful that we had for the store. They knew what their losses would be here. We had to prove it. We showed it to them. And they wanted us to get opened, because we had really good coverage, with business interruption besides other things. So they wanted to get us opened as fast as possible. They didn't want to hold us up at all. They arranged for salvage people to come in and take the stressed merchandise that was just strewn around and people had stomped on that were -- because we were thinking people lived in the building for at least three days during the week of chaos, I call it, that first week of the storm. So there were -- the insurance company for the store was terrific. They really were. So much so that we were able to get the store back in order and get my suppliers to start shipping merchandise to us and we had worked hard at that. And it was hard getting merchandise

because this was already late -- middle-to-late October and we would buy our goods eight months in advance and things aren't the same when you're trying to scramble for goods. A lot of manufacturers don't have the selection we had beforehand and what we were going to be doing. We didn't know what kind of populace was going to be here, but we just wanted to get the store opened and see what we could do. Everybody just wanted to help us. All of the manufacturers were terrific. They extended us credit for a longer period of time, whatever they could do -- I only had one that was bad, it was a small one, and I'm still paying for that, but, for the most part, my industry was terrific with helping -- helping us out and helping -- they could let people out also. Trying to get back up and running. And by November 1, we were open. And still trying to find what -- who was going to be here and what was going to go on. And once we got ourselves open, we had to sort of turn our attention to the house.

RH: Were you worried about having customers?

MG: Yes. That's what I'm saying. We had to see what was going to take place here. We didn't know who was going to be here, but I figured they'd be helping, being part of the rebuilding process of the city, people are going to need clothes and they're going to be here. And, as long as we had the right things -- I mean, one of our companies, Bill's Khakis, sent us dozens of pants to give away to people.

RH: To give away?

MG: To give away.

RH: Huh.

MG: Absolutely. We had clothes to give away and any way we could help people we did. And that's what was so good about us being open. We -- again, we just took it daily and -- but once we got this open, we wanted to get our -- start working on our house to see what we could do there because we had not just flood damage, we also had wind

and rain damage from above. We had roof damage. And I got ahold of a roofer that took him a while but he finally came and put a roof on because we couldn't -- we couldn't do anything in our house until the new roof was put on. And -- if we had thoughts -- like our contractor wanted to get us to get back in the house and live upstairs, then he could work on the downstairs part of the house. But at least to get us back into the house into our own bedroom and bathroom. We were living with our friends for three months in Metairie.

RH: The Pailets.

MG: The Pailets. And that was getting harder because of commuting everyday, especially trying to go back in the evening, was long, because everybody was commuting from Baton Rouge and the interstate was really hard going back in the evening. A lot of -- it took us almost an hour every day to go a normal 15, 20 minutes.

RH: Wow.

MG: And, it was just not easy. Nothing was easy. But we decided we needed to move -- move close to here. Because we had the business open, we then could afford to do things. We found a little cottage six blocks from here that we rented. It was 800 square feet. We paid \$1,600 a month rent for 800 square feet. It had -- the bathroom was so small, I had to go in sideways. Neither one of us could be in there at the same time. It was just impossible. But at least we had our own place, had a little yard for our dog to go in to do her business, and we just made do. The store was going to be our home. This other place was going to be where we slept and ate.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: And we'd get up in the morning and come here and this place -- I'd relax in it. We couldn't relax in the place where we were because we didn't have furniture. We went and bought a bed and bought some TVs and used the boxes that the TVs came in to be

the TV stands.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MG: Just had kitchen utensils that we got. We just made do for that time period. We lived like that for six months and then, by that point, we had a new roof and our contractor was able to fix the top floor of our house and last -- it was over June a year ago that we moved back into our house, living upstairs. No kitchen. But we had a refrigerator upstairs. Marcie had the washer and dryer upstairs now, where she wanted it all the time, so that's a new thing for us. She liked having that. We have a microwave and a toaster oven. And that's how we've been living for the last year. Still living like that.

RH: Still living like that?

MG: Yeah. We're about two or three weeks away from having a kitchen.

RH: Really?

MG: Yeah.

RH: Wow.

MG: We had problems with that roof that was put on at that particular time had to be replaced with another new roof because the roofer subbed it out to somebody else and they didn't do a good job. So we had leaks. We had to re-do the rooms that were being painted. And finally it showed that this roof was not good so we had to put a whole new roof on, because the original roofer just put one roof on top of the other, didn't take the old roof off.

RH: Oh my God.

MG: So, the roof got repaired and he made it good. We've been dealing with somebody who is reputable.

RH: So, when the kitchen is done in that area in a few weeks, is that pretty much the house?

MG: That's pretty much it. That's pretty much it. It's looking really nice to me.

RH: Two years later. Hmm.

MG: It's looking really nice.

RH: Wow.

MG: It's going to be -- but when we moved back into our bedroom, it was last year, that was so nice, being in our own bed, using our own bathroom -- that was just a great moment in itself.

RH: What about, though, your neighbors, because there's not -- it's still kind of spotty where you are, isn't it?

MG: No. Not --

RH: No?

MG: -- not where we are. They've been coming back. We're the last ones on our block to come -- to -- well, not anymore, there's still on or two, but all around us there are people coming back. Especially behind us on Vendom. And the next block over from us there were a couple of houses for sale that had been re-done and re-bought trying -- they fixed them up to turn them. No, that area is definitely coming back. We're not an island. We're very grateful for it. And just -- I love the fact that we're back having more of our home to use, but once that kitchen is done, it'll be fine. I can't wait to fix an egg. You

laugh, but people ask me, what's the first thing you want to cook because they know I like to cook. And I say, the first thing I want to cook is fry an egg. I haven't fried an egg in my house in over two years.

RH: Wow.

MG: You can't fry it in the microwave.

RH: No, you sure can't.

MG: But I'd say we've coped with things. We've taken it on a daily basis. We've had ups and downs. We're constantly taking one step, two steps forward, and then take three steps back, because there's just always something along the way. We've had insurance problems with our house we've finally had issues with. Got that settled. And we're trying to work with Road Home money.

RH: Have you gotten that yet?

MG: We're working on that. We got turned down, and then we reapplied with that. We have a -- we have a contractor that gave us an estimate to put our house back to where it was, because we changed totally, but to put back where it was, it was going to cost \$280,000. And we had \$250,000 in flood insurance, we had the maximum of flood insurance, so we were looking for the \$30,000 differential. So we've applied for that and the Road Home came back and turned us down for the fact that we had \$250,000 insurance and, besides that, they figured it would only cost \$144,000 to make our home livable. Now, what does livable mean? We're still trying to find out. So that's where we are. We've reapplied for the money and who knows. Hopefully, we'll see it. If not, we'll still go on. Nothing is stopping us from moving ahead.

RH: Did you -- did you see any differences in you or Marcie as to how you coped? Or even like a gender difference in how you divided up tasks?

MG: Pretty much we shared everything we did as far as tasks go. I dealt more firmly with other things but, at the same time, patience was the biggest lesson learned in this whole Katrina. Patience. And, that is the biggest lesson we've learned. Yeah. No more rushing to do something. It's being patient with people. When you get on the phone with somebody who says hold on a second, I say, OK, I'll hold on. And I'll hold on for a while. But, being patient and some -- it's hard for a married couple. You know, we've always -- not that everything is rosy, but we communicate very well I would say. Even arguing would be communicating. But patience is the key. I guess it's hard with spouses trying to be patient, when you expect everything -- that's the biggest lesson. Being patient and loving with each other.

RH: And, if -- if there was anything that you're the most grateful for throughout this entire experience, can you describe it to me?

MG: I'm grateful that I was able to be with my family together. That, the ones dearest to me are fine. We have our health. We have our lives. And we have a future to look forward to. And I'm grateful for the fact that I wasn't burdened with my father or any elderly person to make things more difficult. Not that I'm -- maybe that's the wrong thing to say. Just -- I didn't have -- I didn't have kids to worry with, just my wife and I. My kids were grown. I feel for families that had younger kids, those are the ones that really, I think, had a very hard time trying to come back to this. What were they coming back to? There were no schools. No medical facilities were up to snuff. They had a hard time. And those that left, I don't blame them for leaving, because their families come first, and that's what I'm more grateful for because I have my family.

RH: Now, do you -- do you have a different type of relationship with the Jewish community here now than you did before?

MG: Well, I'm not active within the Jewish community other than my synagogue. I've just had so much on our plate for the last two years that I haven't gotten involved with

anything. I find great resolve internally for myself when I do go out to Beth Israel and I try to go -- it's daylight savings time, so I'm trying to go on Friday evenings for Shabbos. I can't go Saturday because we're open, but I go on Friday nights when I'm not on a trip or going somewhere. That I've enjoyed. It's -- my wife lets me do it, too, and that's a good feeling, too. It's about the only thing I can be religious to because prior to Katrina, I used to go to synagogue not every day but once or twice a week. You know, I could make a minyan in the morning and do things, but we don't have a daily minyan today so it's just -- Friday night is the only time that I can really go and feel like I want to say Kaddish for my family and for other people. And I do. That's my expression of trying to maintain my Judaism.

RH: What has being Jewish meant to you throughout this? Any particular thing?

MG: I don't think that it's been an experience as far as thinking about that. Being Jewish is not -- I looked for a way to be Jewish. I looked for a way to express my inner feelings and I feel that when I'm in prayer, whether I'm doing it in my own home, which I was doing also, prior to anything happening, I was praying at home -- and those are the -- that's where I find my solace when I get into prayer.

RH: How do you understand God?

MG: I don't understand it. I just -- I think my prayers were asking for guidance and for help and as far as I'm concerned, God has answered me. I have a lovely business, a successful business, a wonderful wife and family, so, I think my prayers have been answered.

RH: How do you think the Jewish community has conducted itself during this crisis?

MG: I think it's been commendable. For me, not partaking, I really don't know all that's been done other than the fact that I get e-mails and things that they're doing -- there's a lot that's been going on and I think they're doing a yeoman's job. Without knowing all of

the details.

RH: Did -- did you -- did you take the \$700-something dollars that the --

MG: Yes. Sure did.

RH: As a person who, I'm sure, grew up with tikkun olam and tzedakah, how is it, what is it like to be on the receiving end?

MG: I'll tell you a story about that.

RH: OK.

MG: When we evacuated to Atlanta, very first Sunday that we were there, the Jewish Community Center had organized a gathering of Katrina evacuees in Atlanta area. And they had arranged to have all of the Jewish services offered to people to come there and make themselves available to Jewish families who were in need of clothing, housing, schooling, whatever was to be had that the people needed -- they had all of this gathered in Atlanta at the JCC. And there were about, oh, 30-40 families that were there. And, we got to have a breakfast and we sat around talking. It was like a -- well, you know, each person, oh, "How was your thing and how'd you do with your evacuation?"

RH: Did you know some of them?

MG: Oh, yeah. We knew most of them. They were all from New Orleans. And, they all had some connection to Atlanta or -- it just happened to be the place that they chose to go to. The head of the Federation of Atlanta speak to us and welcomed us and if there was anything we can do for you, these are the different agencies and it went on to different talks. Excuse me. And said, "Does anybody have any questions?" Nobody raised a hand or said anything. And there was a community rabbi who was there also. He got up and spoke and he said -- he said, "You know, I don't know if you all realize this

but you are all in shock that you just haven't been able to comprehend what's happened to you and that for the first time in your life, you've had to be a receiver instead of a giver." And he hit it right on the head. That's what it was. So, yes. There was -- it's difficult, but when you realize for so long that you've been giving and then for this one time you're receiving -- it's a good feeling that you can receive.

RH: Hmm.

MG: And give back.

RH: And give back?

MG: And give back.

RH: Do you have a different sense of giving back now that you've been on the receiving end? How you do it?

MG: No, I've always been -- my wife and I have always been very charitable to, not just to Jewish organizations but to other charities. We had a big fundraiser for our store last year to raise money for NOCA. We raised close to \$20,000 for them.

RH: Really?

MG: And it didn't come from New Orleans people. Well, it did come -- because we gave a percentage of our sales that we did from the promotion, but most of the money came from our suppliers. I had an idea to have this fundraiser but to get the money from our suppliers to donate to NOCA. Usually suppliers when it comes to a fundraiser will give you merchandise -- they'll give you a suit, some shirts, do this, do that, you have a raffle and be done with it. I said, "I don't want that. I want money. And this is what it's for." And our suppliers responded to that too.

RH: Wow.

MG: From every -- I got from \$100 to \$1,000 from people. It was terrific.

RH: So why did you decide to do that?

MG: I wanted to give back to the city. I had been wanting to do something and we had not had a grand opening for our store. We had just moved into our store six weeks prior to Katrina, so we never had a chance for a grand opening. We were almost going to have -- our suppliers were going to come in and be part of the big celebration. And I thought, let me tie a celebration in with giving charity-wise to some charity. We did some research and talked, asked around, found out that people were giving to children's hospital and to the zoo and all of that -- they always had a lot of different people. And NOCCA was -- came up with -- I thought NOCA was a great idea. And we did -- NOCA was terrific. They helped us. We sent out invitations and invited people. Did a great job of it.

RH: Wow.

MG: The people that came in from out of town, our suppliers, came from Canada, they came from the west coast, they came from all over.

RH: They came to the store or for the --

MG: I not only wanted their money, I wanted them to come. I wanted them to stay in a hotel in the French Quarter. I had hotel rooms reserved. We had -- I think we had 15 hotel rooms that we used over that weekend.

RH: Wow.

MG: It got to the point that when I first came up with the idea, I had a letter that I had taken to New York on a buying trip. Around this time, in July, that I go into New York last year, and with this idea and not knowing what the response was. So everybody I gave

the letter to said they'll come. And I got on the phone with Marcie when I was in New York and I said, "Honey, we've got a problem." I said, "Everybody wants to come," and I said, "If they come for the weekend, and we get hotel rooms -- we'll have a party Saturday night at the store but, Friday evening, I don't want them just running around loose in the city. We've got to do something for them." Luckily, we were able to get Galatoire's had a room available and we had everybody for dinner there. And they just -- people still talk about that weekend when I go to market. Because it was a really nice weekend, where they all came in besides paying a big donation to NOCA. We had a fun time. So that was a good effort there. This was -- this year coming up is going to be the second ann -- well, the first anniversary of it. People are saying, "What are you going to do?" And I say, "I'm not going to do what I did last year." That was a bit -- that was a bit hard. I think we're just getting over the debt from that. But we always --

RH: Wow.

MG: -- tried to be as charitable as we could be. Any charity.

RH: So, we're talking a little about the city now and how do you feel about the city of New Orleans right now?

MG: That's a -- that's another good question. I have mixed feelings about the city. The administration -- everybody knows too much about already and nobody likes, which I'm in that number two, but I just -- I'm just very optimistic. I feel that where we have gotten today so far since Katrina is because of the people itself, me being part of that -- my wife and I being part of that. And that's what's going to make this city go. And politicians come and go. People who want to stay here and help rebuild and make it work -- and that's what I think is going -- the future is going lie within the people itself. That's what's driving it and that's what's going to continue to drive it.

RH: What kind of things would you like to see different?

MG: I'd like to see better leadership. That would be a key. I think the leadership is, from the very top, is not exemplary. Especially the times we've been through. And absolutely, I think it starts there. If it doesn't start there, that's where -- it's just down to the people. But it needs to start there.

RH: Any hopes of that kind of a change?

MG: Not until this administration is over. He's got another agenda, and it's politics. Until then --

RH: What's his agenda would you say?

MG: Only he knows.

RH: OK.

MG: But, apparently, it's something other than being a leader of this city and getting his [inaudible] up not be really getting into it. I mean, there's just so many little things that are big things, and yet you just have to go on. You have to go on.

RH: You think there's a lot of racism in the recovery?

MG: I would think there's more racism today than there's been in a while.

RH: Really?

MG: Yeah.

RH: You think the tensions are higher?

MG: I think that -- I don't know about tensions. I just think that there's -- I think this is just a different -- with the crime that has taken place, I think it's scary that nothing is being done more about it. We have judicial systems that aren't good. A district attorney that

we know now has failed to have his office operate -- I just think there's too many things that are there. Black leadership is lacking. We have a Congressman who was indicted for the FEMA money. We've had one thing after another that's turned sour for the black community and not enough positive. Recently, it was the school board. These are not good things and that -- that creates more of a racial divide by seeing that go on. Especially, I'm not that way. But I can just imagine that people who are not as open as I am would be more slighted toward the racial communities. I'm fortunate that I have friends that are black, really good friends. And I know people who aren't so great about that. So --

RH: This is a place where you hear everything. You could do a poll, and I'm quite sure that there are some people coming in and out of here.

MG: Yeah. That's for certain. We don't talk politics too much in here.

RH: OK.

MG: Not unless we know the people we're talking to are on the same wavelength as we are.

RH: Do you have a housekeeper?

MG: No.

RH: No? Never have had one?

MG: Not -- well, years ago, when the kids was small.

RH: You had someone, an African American women, work for you.

MG: Oh yeah.

RH: For years and years.

MG: Oh yeah.

RH: Is she still with you?

MG: No, she's actually -- she actually said she'd had enough -- before Katrina she had some strokes that caused her to retire and I greatly miss her.

RH: Is she still in the city?

MG: No. She's been in Arlington, Texas. She has a daughter that lives there. She's been there. I call her every once in a while just to see how she is. The stroke's affected her -- the left lobe of her brain, so she can't function. She'll be fine for one moment and not the next moment. And, when I call, it's like one-word answers. It's not a conversation. I'd love to see her. Her sister was in here last week, stopped by to say hello. The sister lives here and she -- she says, we just haven't been able to get back with you.

RH: What -- what would you like to see happen for the city?

MG: Well, I think -- the city -- the leadership is the key part. I think we missed a golden opportunity from the last mayoral election by not having somebody dynamic who could come in and really get in there. Hopefully, that person would have. Who knows. The current mayor is, to me, is not doing a good job at all. And, without that leadership, Roz, I don't think we can have a great progression. There's a lot of things in the paper that I read about, construction, this project, that project, and they're not coming through. There was one project that was supposed to happen by the Hyatt, with a new City Hall and everything.

RH: Right.

MG: That's gone.

RH: That's gone?

MG: Yeah. They're not going to do it. I mean, this mayor came on and bragged about it. It's not going to happen.

RH: Wow.

MG: There -- I think the Charity Hospital situation, kind of because the legislature came through for funds for that and the VA, and I think that will help, a learning hospital for the students with LSU and Tulane. That will be good. But we're talking about years down the road. The progression is going to come, but it's going to be slow.

RH: How do you think Beth Israel is going to be able to build itself up?

MG: I think with a new -- with a new young rabbi that will come in and bring us, the current congregation, together in our own facility, and bring other people who have not been associated with us to come in. There's also hopes that we will have a Koved, that's having -- bringing some other young families down to live within an area of the synagogue, to help us enlarge ourselves and to help us to find new members as they come along, because within the restructuring of the city, with all of the new developments and medical stuff, there should be a lot more people coming back in here. A ton of professionals that are coming from all over the country, because there will be plenty of jobs here as time goes on. And that's where I think that the new members will come from, people coming back into the city. Whether it's the old people -- old members who have moved away that will come back, I don't know -- I think it will also be from people coming in. And that's how, I think, that our growth will come. It will be small, but we don't need to be big.

RH: I guess we're wrapping up now and now that you're almost into your home, and you've had to live in a lot of different places, can you kind of tell me what home is to you?

MG: Oh, home is a comfort zone. It's a place that you can feel good at. I have one area of the house that's an addition that we just put on. We have a deck that I had built on. It comes off our kitchen door and it's covered. It has room to have two chairs on it, a little table and I have my barbeque grill. It's how I've been doing some cooking. And I go out there -- it's been like that for two weeks. I go out there every night and I sit out there and just enjoy the sounds and quiet, let my dog go play in the yard. The comfort of my home is now becoming more so because I'm starting to enjoy just being in my bedroom and my bathroom and home is a special place and that's, again, between my synagogue and my home and my business, those are the three things that are important to me. Home being number one, business two, synagogue three. And there is a story that I just talked about. Recently I found out my dad was gabbai of the synagogue growing up. And after he retired, he was a gabbai, and he opened and closed the synagogue. My mother had passed away almost 30 years ago and he had -- he was a bachelor and he loved the synagogue and he'd open and close it and do things there. I think it was an integral part of it, that going to help open it, because he lived just two blocks away. When he passed away, which is 10 years ago now, the gabbai Meyer Lachoff had come to me and said, "Myron, to honor your dad, we will have white torah covers and white curtain covers for the high holidays. And we'd like for you to honor your father and mother by donating those to the synagogue." And I said, "That will be great." So I talked to my sister. We raised money. Went to some friends and raised money. It was an expensive endeavor to do. It was going to be honoring parents and some other relatives, also. So we did that. A year after that, we had a dedication at the synagogue. We had white curtain covers that had the Tree of Life embroidered on it. We had six white torah covers dedicated to my mom and dad. Went to my dad's two sisters and brother, different people, my wife and I donated one torah cover. My sister donated one. Our kids, my two kids, my sister's two kids, donated one. We had an aunt and uncle that donated one. So we had all of these torah covers. And then we also had the bimah covers. There was a large bimah that the torah is read from. It had In Memory of Abraham Goldberg, who

was my dad. And the small bimah cover had “In Memory of Abraham Goldberg.” Well, as you know, you and I had talked a while back -- you had seen the white torah covers when you were doing something at Beth Israel and I have still not been in there. I still have a hard time trying to go in the synagogue. I have that torah cover that you saw. It's been disinfected and cleaned and I'm going to keep it until we have a new synagogue and then I'll have it framed and donated as a memento. And this is the torah cover that's in memory of my mom and dad from my two kids and my sister's two children. And that's the only torah cover that we found. No other torah cover was recovered. About a month ago, Jackie called me up and said that -- she said that when they went -- she said they had a story for me. When they went back into the synagogue after Katrina, there were groups that went in there to try to clean up the mess and look for remnants and things and she was in one room and there was a garbage bag that they had just kind of moved to the side. They kept working with the loose things. They were on the floor in the mud and the gook and over the months, there were hundreds of people that volunteered to go in there and garbage that was taken out of the place. There was so much activity there that this bag apparently just kept getting moved into a corner. And she took a church group through about a month ago and when she did, she saw this bag sitting in a corner of the synagogue and she said, “That's a bag that I never did go into.” She went over to it, opened it up, and inside the bag was the white ark curtains that had the Tree of Life embroidered, the large bimah cover that had In Memory of my dad on it and a small bimah cover that had In Memory of my dad on it. And there were a couple of other things, but those were key items in the bag. Now, these were heavy, velvet covers. Not a piece of dirt, not a drop of water was on any of these items. It's -- other than -- when I first told you how the bimah floated, that was a red covering that was on that that might have gotten a little water on the fringes that they cleaned off but nothing on this and we figured there might have been an air pocket in the bag and because it was in a confined room, it just kind of floated up and came back down, didn't have enough room to turn around or turn over and nothing affected these items. So when the High Holidays come

around this coming year, these will be used.

RH: Oh my gosh. Wow.

MG: I get goose bumps when I think about it. But, Marcie has heard me tell that story so many times since I've heard it -- it's quite a story.

RH: It really is. That's a good place to stop, don't you think?

MG: Sure.

RH: OK. Thank you.

MG: Thank you. I didn't get too teary eyed --

RH: No.

[END OF INTERVIEW]