Ben Jaffe Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: -- which is at 726 St. Peter in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Wednesday, September 6, 2006. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Ben, do you agree to be interviewed, and understand that the interview will be videorecorded?

Ben Jaffe: Yes.

RH: Thank you. Let's just start with your background here in New Orleans, and tell me a little about how many generations you go back, how your family got here, and kind of bring me up to where we are this moment.

BJ: OK. I am a first-generation native, second-generation local. My parents moved to New Orleans in 1961. And it's my understanding that my mother and father are from, originally from Pennsylvania, my father from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, small coalmining town, home of Jingling Beer. And my mother's from Bala-Cynwyd in Philadelphia. And my father went to Valley Forge Military Academy on a music scholarship to study tuba-- sousaphone, actually, and then he continued on his studies at University of Pennsylvania, where he attended Wharton. And it was in Philadelphia where he met my mom, Sandy. And--

RH: Just say your dad's name.

BJ: My dad's name, Alan Jaffe. And my father was in ROTC, and he-- I believe part of his duties were to serve a certain number of weekends. I'm not sure if he was through ROTC, or whether it was-- because it was around the time of Korea, or the Korean War, what was going on, necessarily. He had to-- but he was coming to Louisiana, and I

believe it was either Alexandria or Shreveport that he had to be stationed in once a month or something. And he's-- that was the first time that he was introduced to New Orleans during those trips for basic training. And he and my mother honeymooned in Mexico for an extended period, and on their way back, came through New Orleans. They were driving back to Philadelphia. And it was here that they-- it was then that they stopped here to see whether or not any of the jazz musicians whose recordings they had been listening to for all these years were still alive and playing music in New Orleans. William Percy Humphrey, Billy and Dee Dee Pierce, Sweet Emma Barrette, The Eureka Brass Band-- all these bands that they had heard on these recordings-- it was actually a series released by Riverside Recording. And they came here and came to the French Quarter, and as my mom explains it to me, it was very much like the Village at the time, or the Left Bank. It was just this very bohemian place where-- that attracted artists, and poets, and musicians, and-- my parents started meeting people who were involved with New Orleans music. And they met Richard Allen, who was involved with the Tulane Jazz Archives, and he invited them to a lecture series that he was giving at the Cabildo, for, I think, a-- you know the-- what is it, the Sisters of the Civil War or something? I don't know what the-- some strange southern organization. And he was delivering this lecture on New Orleans bands. And afterwards, they had a parade that started in Jackson Square and marched through the French Quarter and ended where I'm sitting, right here. In this location at the time, it was an art gallery, and it was run by Larry Bornstein. And his-- he was a jazz lover, and an art dealer. And his idea was, I'm going to have an art gallery, and at nighttime I'll have musicians come over, and it'll attract people off the street into the hall, and they'll hopefully buy my artwork. And it did. It became very successful, and it became so successful that he decided to move locations, and still had a lease on the property, and offered the lease to my parents, who were still intending to go back to Philadelphia. And they took over the lease and decided to stay a year, and make a go of it. And came up with the name Preservation Hall. It was an evolution of the name from a-- the Society for the Preservation of New Orleans jazz. And they named

it Preservation Hall. And once they were here, they decided to stay, I think it was either through-- I think they decided to stay through ’64 through the Civil Rights. Once the Civil Rights laws were passed, they thought, OK, we’ll make it to ’64, whenever the laws are passed, and then we’ll feel like we’ve done our duty, and then we’ll go back home. And by that time they were, they were sucked in, and they had become such a part of the New Orleans community. And Preservation Hall had started to receive so many accolades, and the band had to begun to tour nationally and internationally, that they set up a home here, actually in the courtyard, back in the back here, in the old slave quarters. And my brother was born in ’69, Russell Jaffe. And I was born in ’71. And when I was born in ’71, we moved two blocks away to St. Anne’s street, and that’s where I grew up, on 19 St. Anne’s Street, between Bourbon and Royal-- oh, I’m sorry-- Bourbon and Delphine.

RH: Wow. So you grew up in the French Quarter?

BJ: I grew up in the French Quarter. I went to grammar school at McDonough 15 on St. Phillips Street. My first music teacher was Walter Payton who is now the bass player with the Preservation Hall band. I went through school with his son, Nicholas Payton. And I graduated N.O.C.A. with Nicholas.

RH: So, were you a musician? Were you playing music, or were you doing art, or--

BJ: I played music. I played music (laughter). I wouldn’t say I was a musician. I definitely played-- I played music. I grew up playing a small horn called the baritone horn, which is a-- it’s like a small tuba, and it’s the-- sounds like a trombone, except that it has valves. And that’s what I grew up playing. And I used to tag along with my dad when he would play at funerals, jazz funerals, because besides being in the Preservation Hall Band, he was also in the Olympia Brass Band, with Harold Dejan who was my godfather. And whenever I heard Harold pull up, and he had a-- he had this funny horn that he could program in his little Mustang, in his-- you know, he could put like a-- I don’t

know what the little Mexican-- dah dah dah dah-- dah dah dah dah-- dah-- or--

RH: Dah dah dah dah-- dah dah dah dah dah dah dah dah dah dah.

BJ: Yeah, yeah, whatever, like something really funny. We also knew it was him. And he'd pull up and my dad-- we didn't have a car, so Howell always had to pick my dad up for gigs. And I usually would squeeze into the back seat with his tuba, and go off with them. And then also, I started performing with the All-Star Brass Band with James Andrews. It was a-- his first brass band, and I guess he's better known as Satchemo of the Ghetto now. And-- and he also is-- his younger brother was-- wasn't even born yet, Shorty-- Trombone Shorty. And he would come by, and it was pretty much a ritual, once I was in middle school, probably about-- starting at about sixth-- probably about seventh and eighth grade on the weekends, to come by. And I would hear them coming down the street, making, you know, racket-- because they all lived in [Chermaine?], they would come down St. Anne and whistle in front of my house, and I'd come out and join them. And we'd go over to Jackson Square and play for three or four hours, and maybe make about 30, 40 dollars a piece. And that's really what--

RH: So, you'd just put out a hat in the front.

BJ: We just put a hat out, and we would play songs that we would pick up from parades around town. And that-- those were my first musical experiences playing. And then, of course, being here at Preservation Hall, and standing in that doorway, listening to masters of jazz play. I mean, James-- I mean, the bass players that I got to hear-- James Prevost, and Chester Zardis, Frank Fields-- those were the three musician-- the three bass players that had the biggest influence on me. And they were regulars here, so I got to hear them every week. And it's not like something you just do once. I got the-- I mean, every week. I was-- I mean, I was here probably four or five nights a week, listening to music, whether I was just chasing the cats around, or selling lemonade or whatever it was I was doing, I was absorbing all these sounds and all these rhythms, the

same way you do-- the same way people in New Orleans absorb the church music. You know, you go to church every Sunday from before you can walk, you know. And it's amazing, I mean, you can't-- it's not something you can ever pick up in a book. Real experience.

RH: Yeah. So--

BJ: A real education.

RH: So, tell me, you know, this area-- do you still live in the Quarter?

BJ: I live just outside the French Quarter. I live in the Marony, near French-- right off Frenchman Street, where-- which is sort of the new-- not the new. It's the great place for where locals go now. It's-- used to be the last affordable neighborhood close to the French Quarter. And gradually, everybody got pushed back into the by-water. And Frenchman Street is, you know, where all the, within a block there's probably five clubs that have live music every night of the week (inaudible). And I don't-- I mean, that doesn't go on anywhere else in the world.

RH: Right. So, tell me what you love about New Orleans, and why you stay here, and what-- (laughter). It clearly has shaped you. It's made you who you are.

BJ: Oh, definitely. And I've been very fortunate that I've been able to travel so much in my life, that I've been a part of a band that has-- tours 200 days a year. And I got to-- I mean, since I was a little child, and my father would take us on the road with him. Fortunately, he knew the Principal at our grammar school, so she gave us-- you know, she'd give us work, and we would go out on the road with my dad. And got to really feel like, I guess, a citizen of the world, in many ways, because I got to experience so many cities over and over again, you know. Like New York and San Francisco. Not so much Chicago. I don't know Chicago too well. And I've always appreciated going to those cities now, because it gives me more perspective, and it gives me-- it allows me to really

appreciate the uniqueness of New Orleans.

RH: Can you describe what you feel like that uniqueness is-- makes it different from New York and San Francisco?

BJ: I always find it so strange when people say to me-- first of all, when they find out that I grew up in New Orleans. They think that's weird. If they don't-- if they're not from the South-- don't worry it's just the building settling. We're safe, I think. It's-- when people hear that you're from New Orleans, they immediately-- you know, that's just like-- it's very exotic. It's unusual, and then to find out that you actually grew up in the French Quarter. I never really thought of it as being very peculiar, or anything abnormal, because it's all I've ever known. And it's really until recently that I started thinking about how many other people I've known who actually grew up in the French Quarter. I only know five other kids besides myself who physically grew up in the French Quarter, that are my age. And that's a really small section of the population, you know. I mean, you're up there in, like, the same kind of odds as, like, being a prime minister or something-- I mean, you know?

RH: Right.

BJ: I mean, it's really a small portion of the population. So, when you--

RH: There's not a lot of-- it's not a lot of kids down here.

BJ: No, not a lot of families with children. I mean, there are couples and there are grandparents. Just not as many families, and even less now. So, that's--

RH: And you, you kind of grew up hanging around African-American kids, at a time-- I mean, still, even in the early '70's, that would have been a little different.

BJ: Not for us, it wasn't. It was-- the school I went to was, I guess, was a precursor to this-- the multi-cultural, you know, method of teaching, that most schools have

incorporated now, where it's art and theater, with English and mathematics and history and writing. We-- we were-- I mean, I guess all the-- you know, all the teachers there were all hippies, and, you know, and from--

RH: Is this NOCA, or--

BJ: This was McDonough 15.

RH: It was McDonough 15.

BJ: McDonough 15 was revolutionary for its time, I mean, absolutely cutting edge, especially in New Orleans, for a public school, and the public school system just kind of let it do what it did, because it had so many benefactors, like my father and a lot of other people who were involved. And most of the kids that I lived with there, their parents were involved in the Civil Rights movement. My best friend from grammar school, Norman Healy, his mother was Aretha Castle Healey, who, you know--

RH: Street--

BJ: Yeah, I mean, we didn't know that as kids, we just, you know, knew it as Sunday's mom. You know, these were just people to us. These were just people who we hung out with who cooked us lunch, you know, on Saturday afternoons. And it wasn't really until, you know, you start looking at a, you know, you look at a picture of Martin Luther King, and you're like-- you know, wait, that's Sunday's mom, you know, with her arm in arm with, you know, Martin Luther King. And then you realize, wow, we're not that far removed from the people who were responsible for making this all happen. I mean, the Civil Rights movement, jazz. I always think of New Orleans as being this, we're all big fish in this really small pond here. You know, everybody, especially now, particularly now, since it's even a smaller city, the contributions of an individual are just amazing. And I can see the loss of certain individuals when they do leave, and then the contribution of certain individuals when they return.

RH: Growing up, did you have an appreciation of your Jewishness in any way?

BJ: I was, we grew up, I guess, very Jewish. I mean, you know, my grandfather was-- went to synagogue every Saturday and Friday. And my--

RH: Here, in town?

BJ: No, no, in Pottsville, which was, I mean, a very small Jewish community. And it was unusual to me-- it was really my first experience going to synagogue was with my grandparents, was the first time that-- my first memories of going to synagogue were with my grandparents, either in Philadelphia or Pottsville. And they both walked to synagogue, and they were both, I would say, Conservative in their beliefs, and in their practice. Not politically conservative, just religiously Conservative. And they both, you know, lit candles on the Shabbas, and it was the first time I saw a Tallis, or saw men openly wearing yarmulkes on the street. I had never seen that in New Orleans before. And I had never been in a community, like my mother's parents, that was predominantly Jewish, where you walked out on the street and there were other people like you. I just-- I didn't have that experience. I always grew up being the odd person, kind of, you know-- I never thought of myself as being the odd person out. I just was, whether it was the fact that I was white, or Jewish, or a kid growing up in the French Quarter. I just never-- I never had any community of peers to latch onto. So, I was really-- I really was attracted to the idea of community in that way-- the religious community. And then, at-- I always found synagogue-- and then I also had-- well, I have a bunch of-- there's a Hasidic sect in my family that comes from my grandfather, and-- and then, I guess it was probably-- we started going to synagogue in New Orleans, probably when I was, I don't know, maybe six or seven years old is when I first remember starting to go to Chevra Tillom on Clayborn.

RH: I have-- I'm not familiar with that. Tell me about it.

BJ: It's not-- it's not even-- it's still there. The building's still there. It's on Clayborn. It's a block above Napoleon going towards Tulane. If you look to your right on the lake side of the street, going uptown across from the Walgreen's, you'll see a building on the corner that has large stained-glass windows. And that used to be Chevra Tillom. And that was the Conservative congregation in town. And that was the closest thing we had to a Jewish, literally, a Jewish neighborhood, since all of the membership walked to synagogue. So, Zali Levine, who was our bar mitzvah teacher, lived within, you know, five or six blocks of the synagogue. And that's where we first started going to Sunday school, and it's first-- where we first started attending Hebrew school. No, actually we started-- we were attending-- we attended Hebrew school uptown at Gates of Prayer, is where the Hebrew school was, near Loyola. And then it moved from Gates of Prayer to Touro on St. Charles.

RH: Did, like, the whole community-- like the Hebrew school, was it for all of the congregation, or do you--

BJ: Oh, yeah. It was mixed. There weren't enough kids to make up just one school for-- it was, like, children from all over, from Metairie, from uptown. You know, the few of us from downtown would all go to this one-- would all go to-- that was the one Hebrew school at the time.

RH: OK. It ended up at-- being Touro eventually.

BJ: It ended up at Touro.

RH: How big was your class, do you know?

BJ: I think my class had about ten kids in it. Yeah. And I-- every now and then, I meet somebody who was in the class with me. It turns out that a kid that I ended up becoming lifelong friends with. I didn't even know who was in my class at the time. You know, he swears that we were in the same class together. I have no recollection of us being in the

same class together-- Aaron Wolfson. And he grew up in Metairie, and we became friends when I started going to middle school uptown.

RH: So, you were bar mitzvahed?

BJ: Yeah, I was-- my brother and I were bar mitzvahed at Chevra Tillom, at, gosh, I don't know what year. I guess it was about '84 that I was bar mitzvahed.

RH: So, was-- what was your involvement was your-- in the Jewish community, was primarily through your synagogue?

BJ: Either through the synagogue, or through the JCC. Yeah, we were the-- we were real active in the after-- not after school, but the weekend activities that went on at the Jewish Community Center. They had a real active weekend sports league when I was growing up-- flag football, track, swimming-- I think those were the big ones that we participated in. And that was my-- the first time that I ever played organized sports, was at the JCC. That's when I-- that's where I fell in love playing organized football. And they didn't like to see us coming either, because we were this little gang of downtown kids. It was my brother, my two cousins, who actually lived above us on St. Anne Street, and-- the Lambert's, Aaron and Howard Lambert. Aaron's older than me and Howard's younger than me. And they would bring us-- you know, we'd go uptown-- we'd all fit into my aunt's car, go uptown. And--

RH: So, you had some other family here in town, too?

BJ: Yeah, we had my mother's sister.

RH: Did they move here at the same time, or had they lived here?

BJ: They-- my parents asked-- offered them a position-- no, I'm sorry. I'll take that back. Larry Bornstein offered them a position here in New Orleans, and thought that they

would, you know-- he knew that my parents-- Risa used to come to New Orleans to maybe work periodically in the summertime, here at the Hall, in the early '60's. And then Larry, you know, really liked them and offered them-- you know, he said, if you come to New Orleans, there's lots of opportunities here. And he, of course, was thinking about just the energy of having youth in the French Quarter. So, that brought my aunt and uncle to New Orleans.

RH: OK. So, then--

BJ: That's a--

RH: -- there were two.

BJ: Then there were two.

RH: (laughter) There were two families.

BJ: There was two families. There was-- it was Alvin, Alvin, and Risa Lambert. And Risa's my mother's sister, so their maiden name is actually [Smollen?].

RH: So, JCC went to police about getting these uptown-- these downtown kids showing up at the--

BJ: It wasn't so much that. It's just that we were a little rougher around the edges, than the uptown and Metairie kids. You know, we had grown up playing in cement yards, and gravel fields, so, you know, to be able to play football on grass to us was like-- this was revolutionary. (laughter) We, you know, flag football became-- I mean, the flags were just sort of secondary to-- for us. It was, you know, yeah, I mean, when I was living downtown, I was playing-- I mean, the only other experience I had playing organized football was at a [Nord?] Park with my friend, Sunday, on Saint Rock.

And yeah, there's that playground at the end of Saint Rock, if you make a left off of Saint Claude. And that's where I first started playing football in pads, and I was the great-- they used to call them-- the coach called me the Great White Hope. So, you know, when you come from that background.

RH: Yeah, who was the cook?

BJ: The coach.

RH: Oh, the coach.

BJ: The coach.

RH: Oh, called you the Great White Hope (overlapping voices; inaudible).

BJ: Yeah, so when you come from that background, you know, I guess the JCC was, you know--

RH: You were a little on the edge of that community, too, and--

BJ: I was definitely on the edge of that community. Definitely, I mean, just the way we dressed, the way we acted. We were, you know, we were-- we just grew up with much more-- with more freedom than they did, less structure than they did uptown. And that was encouraged growing up was that, and I think that actually, it was probably synagogue that was the first time where I ever felt the idea of-- I mean, felt-- understood the concept of sitting and being quiet and paying attention. It was the first time that I was around the adults that would sit there and pay attention and be quiet. And I had never experienced that before, and it was-- it was really important for my dad. For my dad, it was real important that we observe all the High Holidays, and-- which was really interesting to me, because he never talked about Judaism, or about God, or about religion. He just-- I think it was more of his-- him trying-- him being a good father, and

doing what dads do, and that's, you know, make sure that their kids go to synagogue. And those-- which was hilarious for my dad, because he was, you know, not traditional in any way, shape, or form.

RH: So, you-- but you did make the High Holidays in synagogue.

BJ: Uh-huh. We made the High Holidays, and you know, I would-- there was a period where I was feeling, towards-- you know, getting close to my bar mitzvah, where I was feeling very pious, going to synagogue every Saturday, and then Hebrew school, and my lessons with Zali Levine, and-- to study my Haftorah. And then my bar mitzvah.

RH: Reflect back on that time. Do you think it was-- are you glad you did it? Was it a good thing, or are you glad you have all that?

BJ: I am glad. I am glad. I am glad that I had that background. I'm glad that I was exposed to those older gentlemen that, at a heartbeat, would start-- you know, would-- I mean, I used to-- I never knew what the heck was going on in synagogue. There was always this tug of war going on between the old guard in the congregation, and the Rabbi and the Cantor. And these guys, I mean, if they mispronounced a word, or if they stumbled on something, there would be a-- they would start screaming at the pulpit, and you know, howling. It was-- you know.

RH: Really?

BJ: Oh, it was-- I was-- it was great. I mean, they were a peanut gallery, these guys. I mean, there was a whole crew of them, and they all had their chair, you know. It was designated-- I mean, you just didn't sit in certain places. And it was my first experience feeling-- I don't know if it's pressure, or just feeling that there was this certain confidence in the way that these gentlemen approached religion. It was just-- it was so black and white to them. It was just-- you know, whatever it was, it was law to them. So, and to get that from these older gentlemen was a-- is an amazing experience to have had-- to sit

there, and to sit by them, and to read the English translation, and to have them explain it or not. Or to sit there completely confused, you know, why is this even relevant, you know? Why, you know, why are we even talking about lambs, and you know, and all of these things. And how does this relate to me today, and I-- you know, it's-- for me, it was-- I loved going as a kid. It was also great, because it was going to a-- it was a field trip for us to get out of the French Quarter, and to--

RH: You didn't have a car. How did you get there?

BJ: My aunt had a car, so we all piled into her car. And that was always fun. She was actually the more-- she was the more responsible, Jewish presence in our life-- Risa, my aunt Risa. She was the one who would-- still cooking brisket, and would make, you know, the matzah balls, and would have gefilte fish, and you know, all the things that you need. And make-- she was one who would do Seder, and she has a way of making sure, you know, we'd make sure we get to synagogue, and to Hebrew school.

RH: And so, did-- were there any home rituals? I mean, did you have Shabbat dinner, or--

BJ: The only home ritual was Chanukah. That was the only real ritual I remember.

RH: Can you remember about that-- what?

BJ: I mean, for us, it was, you know, it was me and my brother fighting to see who gets to light the candles, and then, you know, waiting in anticipation to see, you know, whether or not we were going to get the Atari this year. You know, it was like the big-- you know, to-- and then, of course, it was, oh, Gosh, my dad's sister lived in Arizona in Flagstaff, and we would always go out there for Passover.

RH: Oh, really?

BJ: And that was just a very traumatic experience, because her husband ruled the Seder with, like, an iron fist, you know. Nobody's-- no, this is gonna-- we're not-- we're reading every prayer, and we're doing it my-- at this tempo, and if I'm happy with it, then we're not going to get served this, and then, you know, the afikomen, and the, you know, just the whole thing was, it was a ritual-- it was just-- it just felt so barbaric, though. Going to their house, I just-- I used to love being there, because all my cousins were there. I just used to hate it, though, because he was so dogmatic, I guess, about the whole process. There was no real joy in the process. And I guess, maybe there shouldn't be during Passover. Well, I guess there should be. I don't-- he-- I mean, I never saw any when I was going to his-- when we sat there-- when we had to sit there for four hours, before, you know, we could finally get, you know, tasteless baked chicken, and whatever it was we ate-- boiled potatoes, and you know. I mean, they are originally from Pennsylvania, and they moved to Flagstaff, so their tastes were a lot different than ours, coming from New Orleans. Salt was about the only seasoning that they were familiar with, and that was not, you know, in real high demand in their household. (laughter) I don't know, it's just--

RH: So, you grew up with, actually, kind of two very interesting communities. You grew up watching and being in the presence of these older, Jewish men. And you grew up being in the presence of these older, Black musicians. Any similarities, any experiences--

BJ: Oh, yeah.

RH: -- from yourself, that you drew from both of them?

BJ: I loved, you know, I loved the way that they were just matter-of-fact about life.

RH: Both groups.

BJ: Both groups. Not-- never in a hurry. Everything was very matter of a fact, you know, matter of fact, it was just what I do. What do you do? You know, I play music. I play

clarinet. Nothing weird about it. Nothing strange, it was the life that they lived. I really learned as much, just being a part of the community here at Preservation Hall, as I did being a part of my Jewish community growing up. It was-- I mean, it was a very large part of our upbringing. It's not anymore for me. It was then, it was-- it's gone, now. That community, most of them have passed away or moved to Metairie, and the synagogue exists and merged with another synagogue. Now it's on West Esplanade near the JCC. I don't know what--

RH: Did it merge with Shir Chadash?

BJ: Yes. Now it's Shir Chadash. Yeah. Is Gates of-- is Gates of Prayer across?

RH: Gates of Prayer is there, too.

BJ: OK. So, what's the synagogue near Loyola? That's Sinai.

RH: Sinai.

BJ: Sinai is where we went, actually, the first time, for synagogue. It was Sinai, and then from Sinai it moved to Touro. I got my friends, all my Metairie friends went to Gates of Prayer.

RH: To Gates of Prayer.

BJ: Yeah. And once the synagogue moved to Metairie, I stopped going to High Holidays. I stopped feeling-- a little bit before that, I stopped feeling a-- up until then, I felt like, OK, it's the High Holidays. You just go. I never questioned it. You just went. And I started feeling like, well, maybe I don't need to go, and maybe I don't need to feel guilty about not going, if it's not really where my heart is, or if I don't understand it, or if I don't like the way-- maybe I'm not really a Conservative-- maybe I don't practice Conservative Judaism?

RH: So, how old were you then, when you--

BJ: Just out of college. Yeah. Once I stopped going to synagogue in college, it was more difficult to get back into it, once I-- when I came back to New Orleans. And also, the community of friends that I was around weren't Jews. So it was-- I didn't have someone calling me up, and like, hey, I'll pick you up for-- you know, come on over, we're having Shabbas, you know, whatever (laughter).

RH: There ain't one.

BJ: You know, you bring the horseradish, I'll bring the gefilte fish. It wasn't--

RH: So, where did you go, to College?

BJ: I went to Oberlin College in Ohio.

RH: OK. Were you in the music conservatory?

BJ: I ended up graduating from the conservatory. I started off in the college.

RH: So, were you still playing baritone then?

BJ: No, I had started studying bass in middle school. I started studying the upright bass, and that's what I continued to study through college. And that's what I graduated in-- a performance. I was a performance major on bass.

RH: So, then you came back home.

BJ: I came back.

RH: You probably had a little edge on a lot of those guys, but you were also kind of the jazz musician in this sea of classically-trained--

BJ: Yeah, you know, it was the same thing as, like, when I was going off to the JCC. I had all this street-level knowledge, all of this very important experience under my belt, but I wasn't very refined as a musician or person. And I gained that going there. I chose Oberlin, because I knew it could afford me the time to really dedicate the energy to studying the instrument, the technique of the instrument to learning from people who I would never have an opportunity to study with. And I took exactly-- I got exactly what I needed there, and that was a traditional classical, Western approach to music, and that was what I didn't have in New Orleans. And now, since I'm back here, I'm able to forget a lot of the stuff that I learned there, and just take what I've needed, and incorporate it into what I do musically. It's given me the-- it's the other half of my foundation.

RH: So, are you playing now?

BJ: I'm not touring anymore. I retired from touring as of Mardi Gras.

RH: Really?

BJ: Yeah. I toured with the Preservation Hall band for 13 years, and I retired this Mardi Gras, to stay home in New Orleans-- pursue my other musical interests, to operate and co-manage Preservation Hall, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, and to be the Director of the New Orleans Musicians Hurricane Relief Fund. And to also, to be a more responsible husband.

RH: OK (laughter). Well, it's got to be hard on a relationship to be traveling all the time, because that band travels a lot.

BJ: It does. They're on the road, you know, 200 days a year, 180, 200 days a year. It's-- again, it's one of those things that, you grow up with it and you don't, your father's never there, so you don't realize-- you don't understand that there's an alternative. Because everyone around you lives that lifestyle. All the musicians, all the people in your immediate community, are musicians. They're constantly on the road, so you're used to

people going in and out of your life a lot, and I had never been in a, I guess, a relationship where it all of a sudden occurred to me, like (snaps fingers), there's a-- there's this other way to live you life. (laughter) You don't have to be on the road all the time, and I also-- my personality made me-- made it easier for me to be on the road, because I was so concerned with the quality of what was going on, and making sure that things would run correctly, and I was really concerned that-- about my parents' vision, artistic vision, and making sure that that was being met.

RH: Tell me what that vision, what you see that vision is, and also, when you kind of started to assume responsibility for their legacy of Preservation Hall.

BJ: Originally, the Hall opened as a venue for aging New Orleans jazz musicians, and most of them were African-American. And my parents walked into-- I mean, these carpetbaggers walked into New Orleans-- I mean, you know how we take the carpetbaggers down here, I mean, we still don't like them very-- at all. We don't, I mean, whether they're from the North or anywhere, we just don't like people coming into our home, telling us how to do things. We have our own way of doing things. And my parents came into this world, and created, helped to create this place that became an oasis for Black musicians. And it was, I can only imagine the struggle that it was for them. The things that we take for granted, they weren't back then. They were commonplace, I mean, Jim Crow was-- that was the law of the land. You didn't-- you just didn't have blacks and whites mixing in any type of social environment, let alone in an environment where jazz musicians are playing to a white audience, and sometimes white musicians are playing with black musicians. It just was unheard of, to go to black musicians' homes, to go into black neighborhood, to attend black funerals. These things were just, you know, just-- it just-- they didn't happen. It was--

RH: Did they get into some trouble for that?

BJ: Oh, often, I mean, they often got into trouble. They got run out of a bunch of Parishes. They got dragged downtown a few times, you know, thrown in jail. My mom's a bit fiery, and she always talks about this judge downtown, the night judge who got them up in front of, you know, he said, you know, he was wagging their finger, you know, she always tells it, you know, he's up there wagging this finger at them saying, we don't like to mix our coffee and our cream down here, you know?

RH: Oh, God.

BJ: You know, I mean, here we are, the home of Café Au Lait, right? (laughter)

RH: Guess you argue with that, though.

BJ: You know, at that point, you just-- you can't change everybody. You have to-- I guess the most important thing I've learned from my parents is that you just have to live righteously, and you make the decisions that are right. And whether other people catch on, and come along for that, you just-- at a certain point, you can't concern yourself with changing everybody. You have to be an example to the community, and through example, be a leader.

RH: So, when did you take on-- you came back from college, you--

BJ: Uh-huh. Well, actually--

RH: Were you playing around town here?

BJ: No, actually, I was debating what to do when I left college. I graduated, and I had opportunities to go to New York, and pursue a musical career there. I also have an arthritic condition that makes it difficult for me to be in cold climates. And I didn't particularly want to go to New York. I don't particularly like the lifestyle there, although I was driven to be the best musician I could be. And I guess, I, in a certain way, I fell back

on an opportunity and joined the Preservation Hall Band, literally the day out of-- after graduation. I flew off to Paris and joined the band. And the bass player at the time was aging, and not traveling as much. And I very easily stepped into his role as the bass player with the band. And it was-- basically, that was it. I was-- never had a day of freedom, like the rest of my other, you know--

RH: College buddies.

BJ: -- college friends, yeah. And it was different for my friends who were musicians, because we were so serious about what we did. We were very intense about music, and very militant about jazz, and about performing, and about performing with incredible energy. We were coming out of a generation of musicians that were strongly influenced by John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman, and Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Thelonius Monks. We were children, really, of the '60's and '70's, playing jazz and we had Wynton Marsalis as our Michael Jordan at the time, and that's what we were trying to emulate and what we were trying to be. And we were struggling at the time. I mean, there was the-- it was the late '80's, early '90's. There was, suddenly, you weren't black anymore. You were African-American. There was the entire PC movement, and I was at Oberlin, you know, during the whole PC movement, I was, you know, I was like the middle of Generation X. And that was a-- and we were this little club of very intense jazz musicians. And it was, actually, at Oberlin for my senior recital-- took me four years to figure this out. For my senior recital, I wanted to perform one New Orleans song on my senior recital. I thought that that was something really important to me to do. And I could not teach the best musicians-- the best jazz musicians at Oberlin, I could not teach them how to play The Saints Go Marching In. And it was so frustrating to me.

RH: They couldn't swing it, huh?

BJ: Oh, they couldn't do anything. I mean, I-- it was honestly one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. These were the top college musicians, probably--

definitely in the country, and probably for their age, some of the best musicians in the world. And I cannot get them to play and emulate a New Orleans band. And it, all of a sudden, it just hit me like a brick, that I had been given this gift growing up, that I never had to study, that I never sat down and formally practiced. I had this thing inside of me, this rhythm and this knowledge and experience that none of these kids had. And then I started thinking about it, I was like, I started thinking, you know what? I bet you none of these jazz musicians do. None of the guys that I-- a lot of the guys that I admire couldn't do it, either. And it--

RH: You mean big names, (inaudible).

BJ: Big name guys. Big name guys. And I started realizing that the specialness of New Orleans. And then I started thinking about the way we cook. I've never had good New Orleans food outside of New Orleans. I've never heard a great, a great New Orleans band outside of New Orleans. There are good ones. There are guys who can copy the style really well. From a performer's perspective, there's something about the percussion of a New Orleans jazz band that just can't-- just doesn't exist anywhere else. It's so African. Its feeling and its rhythm is so organic, and you know, it's because we still play music here to dance to. We still play jazz in the streets. You might go out, you may not like the music that the Rebirth Brass Band plays necessarily, because it's a-- you know, they play funk, they play hip-hop, and you know, at a moment's notice, they'll play Lord Lord Lord, or an old spiritual, A Closer Walk With Thee, and sound just like the Olympia Brass Band did back in the '70's. They know how it's supposed to sound. They've chosen another path. And-- you know, I think that's a beautiful thing. I mean, because a lot of people argue with me about that, and usually it's the same people that like to-- you know, they're probably the same people that, you know, yell at their kids about, what is that racket you're listening to these days, ah-h-h-h!

RH: So, that's-- you kind of answered this, my next question, which was, you know, a guy coming right out of college. You wouldn't think he'd want to go play with the Preservation Hall Band. You wouldn't think he'd wanna be with a trad jazz band.

BJ: Yeah, it was--

RH: You want Art Blakey, maybe.

BJ: That's who, that was my-- I wanted to be in Art Blakey's band. I had four dreams in my life, well, five. I wanted to be in Art Blakey's band, I wanted to be in Elvin Jones' band, I wanted to be in Tony Williams' band, I wanted to perform with Ahmad Jamal, and I wanted to be in Wynton Marsalis' band. Those are-- if I achieve that in my life, I would have-- that's it, I would have been happy. And now we've lost three of them. And I don't know if it's my Jewish guilt or sense of responsibility that brought me back here. I know that without my intervention here at the Hall, without my involvement here, it wouldn't be here today. And that's where-- that's something that I am very proud of, that I gave up something in my life to be a part of the-- an organization that's much bigger than me, and much more important in bigger schemes of things than me-- going on tour with Art Blakey. Because I know in my heart of hearts, I could have nailed that gig. I could have nailed any of those gigs. This was my calling, and that's why I came back here. Nobody knew these musicians like I knew them. Nobody had the-- my father's knowledge of the way the business was run. My-- the way that my parents operated, the relationships with music venues all over the world. And I didn't want to see this place go down like that, and it was-- there was a transition going on in the early '90's. We were losing a lot of our first-generation music-- a lot of our second- and third. The band that had become so famous, the Preservation Hall Band, the one that had performed on Saturday Night Live, and had made five records for-- you know, for Sony, and Columbia Records, and Atlantic. Those guys weren't even in the band anymore, and there wasn't someone giving clear direction. And the mission statement was-- wasn't as clear anymore. And I

came back, and it took about eight years to really feel like I had made-- I had transitioned the band and the Hall into something that I was really proud of, and then, of course, Katrina came. And now we're back to, I'm not even going to say square one. I don't even know where we are right now. I know it's a-- it's nervewracking for me. It's also, I feel like I've finally been given that kick to go do and pursue my other artistic interests outside of Preservation Hall.

RH: So, let's talk about Katrina. Let's-- tell me just some basic stuff, like where were you when you figured out this might be a problem, this storm?

BJ: I didn't hear about the storm until Thursday night. My wife and I, we don't watch TV, and I don't really read the paper much, so I kind of get my news the old-fashioned way. You know, if I run into somebody, and tell me something, then I kind of have to believe it's true. And I came to the Hall that night, Thursday night, and one of the piano players told me, oh, man, there's this huge storm brewing in the Gulf, and it's coming fast, and you've got to get out of town. It also happened to be this guy who's very long-winded, and his stories are extremely fanciful, and I always take everything he says with a grain of salt, especially when it's about a hurricane, it's coming our way. I always, you know, we always look at it as a long-- you know, we always look at hurricanes as our long weekends. You know, you get to go out of town for a couple days, if you're fortunate, you get a hotel room somewhere, or you stay with friends. And I also never worried about it, hurricanes that much because Preservation Hall had withstood Betsy and Camille so well. And my father had always told me that if a hurricane ever came, to just get everyone to Preservation Hall, that you'll be fine at Preservation Hall. Yeah. And we are half a block from the St. Louis Cathedral, which I think is-- I don't know if this is true or not. It's my only-- it's my belief that it's the highest point in New Orleans, and which would make sense. I mean, if-- in the 1800's, if you had to evacuate somewhere, you would go to the church. You know--

RH: So, is that what you did?

BJ: No, we stayed at home. We stayed at our house. We helped--

RH: The Marony?

BJ: We stayed in the Marony. Our friends-- Saturday we started talking about leaving, and-- but we-- my wife and I knew that we weren't going to leave. We just were talking about it, just kind of be like, well, because everybody on the phone was so hysterical about it, and we were so calm, that it didn't make sense to us. And we were, just to appease people, we're like, well, we're thinking about going, yeah, yeah, OK, duh-duh-duh. You know, make mom feel a little better so she's not worried. And Saturday we-- I said, well, let's go down-- we came here Saturday night. We had a band here Saturday night.

RH: You did?

BJ: And I went--

RH: Who played? Tell me about it.

BJ: It was the Preservation Hall Band, John Brunious, Ralph Johnson, Lucien Barbarin, Carl Le Blanc, Rickie Monie-- I can't remember who was on bass-- I think it was Walter was playing bass, and Joe Laster was on drums. And they all wanted to come in to work, and they, you know, they came in and there were still tourists here. We had a nice little crowd. And I, you know, told everybody-- I said, that was the first time that I started to get nervous, because our guest vocalist was, like, hey, man, this is really big. And you guys really need to consider getting out of town, because it's not so much the storm you have to worry about. It's the aftermath. You know, what are you going to do after the storm comes? And--

RH: Who was the guest vocalist?

BJ: His name's Clint Majon. Clint Majon. He has a band called the New Orleans Bingo Show. And we went up to Whole Foods-- we had so many provisions, I mean, we-- you know, we have, you know, water and my friend's a bit of a survivalist, so we had plenty of stuff. We knew we were going to be OK and, in terms of food, and generator, and fuel and all of those things. And we went uptown to Whole Foods just to get a few more things, and it was closed. And that was a little alarming to us. And it was only nine-- it was eight o'clock. So, I said, well, let's go downtown, and let's go the Hotel Monaco, because I know that they take dogs. And let's get a hotel room there, just in case it really happens. We can take the dogs and we can go to the Hotel Monaco. And that's when we got there, and they were escorting people out. And they said, no, we're not-- we're actually asking people to leave the hotel. So, I called my credit card company and asked them to find us a hotel room. And I just gave them my number to call back, and my wife and I went and had dinner on Decatur Street at our favorite restaurant. And then--

RH: Which is?

BJ: Maximo's. And then we were the last-- my wife used to work there. And then we were the last people to eat there, and we said goodbye to everybody, left, went home. The next morning, got a call about 7:00 am, and it was my cousin. And he says, I'm getting out of town. And I had another friend in town who was here helping me with-- orchestrate--

RH: Was this now Sunday morning?

BJ: This was Sunday morning. My cousin calls, it was 6:30, 7:00 am. He's leaving town, and this is the one, my cousin who used to live above me, on St. Anne Street. And I had a friend in town from New York who I went to college with, who was helping me orchestrate some songs for a performance the band was doing with an orchestra. And

his biggest fear in life is a hurricane. He always joked to me, I mean, he would always-- I mean, whenever, you know, the-- it would-- even if he saw it was raining in New Orleans, he would call me. You know, you guys under water? You guys under water? And he was here, staying at an apartment on Bourbon Street. And I called him, I said, get your stuff together, Howard's coming to pick you up, you guys are going to Florida. And he said, well, you know, it's just-- you know, it was really unnerving to him. And then, my wife and I, since Friday, that Friday, had been calling Narvin Kimball, who was the first banjo player with the Preservation Hall Band, and he was 96 years old at the time. And his wife-- and I was their care-- I wouldn't say their primary caregiver. I was really their only family in town. And I would go up there a couple times a week to care for them, and cut his hair, and make sure they had groceries, and whatever else they needed done around the house. And I told her Friday, I said, "Saturday comes, you guys have to make arrangements to get out of town. Get your nurse to take you to Baton Rouge, or—." Saturday came. "We're not leaving." I said, "OK, Miss Kimball, if it's still bad on Sunday, I'm going to call an ambulance, and I'm going to have you brought to Ochsner," because Mr. Kimball can't, he's basically bed-ridden, he's had several strokes. And I finally got through to an ambulance service on Sunday, about 8:00 am. They went to pick them up, and this is a gentleman who's, I mean, basically bed-ridden. I mean, he is bed-ridden, and she's blind from glaucoma. And they wouldn't take them, that it's only, they said they were only accepting life and death situations. They said that they would take them to the Superdome. And I said, no, no. Stay at the house. You're better there. I even had my friends, who was a doctor Ochsner, and lived about a-- about six blocks away, run over to move them. Do you want to break?

M1: Sure.

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

BEGINNING OF AUDIO FILE 2

RH: -- for the Katrina's Jewish Voices. And so, you were talking about--

BJ: Narvin Kimball.

RH: Narvin Kimball. So, tell me--

BJ: My best friend, John Wells, and his wife, live right off Lindsey, live right off Clayborn Avenue near them. And oftentimes, he would go over to their house if they had an emergency that needed to be attended to. She's the doctor at Ochsner. And she ran over to try to convince the ambulance to take them to Ochsner. And they, even with her there, they still wouldn't take them. So, that's when I knew that this was bad, that it was bad. And I got uptown as quickly as I possibly could. And I went to my friend, John's house, and we decided that the four of us were going to stay in town. John, his wife, Sarah, and myself, were going to remain in New Orleans, and we were all going to be at our house.

RH: In--

BJ: In the Maroney--

RH: -- you're (inaudible).

BJ: -- because we all thought that that was the safest place to be. And after we helped them move a bunch of stuff up to the second floor, and secure their windows, we went over to the Kimballs' house. And I went in, and I said, Miss-- and she, at this point, she had no idea that there was-- that it was still coming. I mean, and I said, Miss Kimball, this-- you-- we said you really have to get out of town. We're going to get you-- we have a hotel room for you in Baton Rouge. My brother has three children. He had a kid-- my anniversary's on the-- Jesus-- I don't know, 16th or-- the 16th or 17th of August is my anniversary. We got married on the 14th, legally, and then-- so, and then my brother had his baby right around that time, right before the hurricane. And he--

RH: Oh, really?

BJ: Yeah. And he had an infant and two daughters, two young daughters. So, he always went-- as soon as he hears about a hurricane, he gets hotel rooms in different cities. He gets one in Memphis, he gets one in Baton Rouge, and Houston, because he never knows where they're going to end up. You know, they might get into Baton Rouge and feel like they want to keep going to Houston, so he just goes ahead and he pays for them. So, he had a room in Baton Rouge. And I gave Miss Kimball the address, and I just-- I begged her to have the nurse drive him there. If need be, we were going to do it ourselves. We just still had work to do. We still had to come back and secure Preservation Hall, we had to go secure our house. And she was saying, "No, no, we're not going to do it, we're not going to do it." I said, "Miss Kimball, oh, my Gosh—" she's a quite stubborn person, and she was showing me how she could get up on the roof, and I'm-- the whole thing was, I mean, a bit of Elvis & Costello-- what was that?-- no, not Elvis & Costello, whatever. You know, I mean the comedians.

RH: Right. That's right, I think.

BJ: Is it? It sounded right.

RH: Yeah. Abbott and Costello (laughter). Abbott.

BJ: Abbott and Costello. I grew up with their poster in my bedroom, you know, the Who's On First poster. And she's in there, going back and forth, like trying to explain how she can pull the ladder down, and how you're going to carry Mr. Kimball up. And it's really-- and it also occurred to me, how difficult it is for us to realize what it's like to be living in six feet of water, you know. We can't even conceive of it. I mean, we don't-- to us it's so far beyond what we're capable of imagining. And finally--

BJ: So, where was their house?

BJ: It's on Calhoun, and a block off of Fountainbleau-- a really badly-hit area. And their house is new construction-- new, I mean built in the '50's, on slab, in an area, low area that doesn't have good drainage. And it floods there when it just rains a little bit in town, so I knew that this was going to bad if it really came. So finally, we just-- it was, you know, Miss Kimball, if you stay, chances are your house is going to be flooded. If it's bad, your house is going to be flooded, and we're not going to be able to come and-- we won't be able to get here to save you, you know. So finally she agreed to leave. She got, I mean, this all happened in about 45 minutes. She-- I said, "Just get your medicine, get Mr. Kimball." We picked Mr.-- we had to pick him up, put him in the front seat of the car, got her in the back seat, no luggage, just their medicine. And their nurse, and one nurse in the back seat, and their other nurse in the front seat, gave them the address of the hotel in Baton Rouge, gave them some-- gave them enough money. You know, gave them, I don't know, 300 dollars, all the money I had in my pocket at the time, and told the nurse-- the nurse didn't know, she grew up in New Orleans, and she's probably 67 years old, and didn't know how to get to Baton Rouge. And-- which is also something people don't realize about New Orleans, you know? People from New Orleans don't really leave New Orleans. I mean, this woman has been here her whole life, and has never driven on I-10 before. And she's terrified of heights, and wouldn't drive on I-10. So, I had to-- I showed her how to get to Airline Highway, and I just said, go straight and just keep going.

RH: That was probably better that-- by then, I don't know.

BJ: Probably. Probably. I mean, we're talking-- yeah, it's Sunday, early Sunday morning. It's like 10:00 am on Sunday morning, at that point. I just-- and they drove-- they took Airline Highway all the way, and as soon as they left the house, they-- I got her to give me a set of keys for the house. I got them on the road and they left. We went back in the house, and we took all of their photographs off the wall, and I took his three banjos from under his bed. And that's the only thing that survived. That's it. Everything else is gone.

RH: How brilliant of you, though.

BJ: I don't-- I mean, I don't even know what I was thinking, because I didn't really believe that the hurricane was coming either. And that's-- and now our banjo player today, Mr. Kimball, they lived in that hotel in Baton Rouge for two months, and eventually got to South Carolina, to his daughter's house, and that's where he passed away, at 97.

RH: Just recently, then.

BJ: Prior to Jazz Fest. Maybe in March or April. They came back to town. He died in South Carolina, and wanted-- they had burial plots in New Orleans at Lakelawn. And I was talking to his daughter about making the funeral arrangements. And I'm talking to her like I'm talking to, you know, someone my age and kind of fast, and I realize that she's in her 70's, you know. And a lot of time she forgets things, and, you know, doesn't-- I-- just because he's his-- he used the word daughter, you think young. And I'm-- oh, my Gosh. So all the funeral arrangements came down on my shoulders, and I had to find-- I had to get enough musicians in there. That was a time when there was hardly anybody in town. We got a small band together to play at the funeral. I mean, the logistics of the whole thing were a nightmare, because of the paperwork that didn't exist anymore. The morning of the funeral, I get a call that they're not-- the night before the funeral, they say they're not-- they can't have the funeral, because they don't know where the burial plot is in the mausoleum. And this is the mausoleum that had been under water, and all the paperwork is gone. And Mr. Kimball's paperwork is gone. And she's blind. So, I pick her up at about six o'clock in the morning, the morning of the funeral. And it's chilly out, it's wet, chilly. And we go over to the Lakelawn Cemetery Funeral Home, and we're in the mausoleum. There's probably over 5,000-- probably, gosh, probably 10,000, in this mausoleum, places to put coffins. And I'm in there with one of the gentlemen from the cemetery, dressed in my suit and my shoes, running up and down this mausoleum that hasn't been cleaned yet since the hurricane. All of it, the

lights still don't work, it's still in complete disrepair. And this was the place that Miss Kimball and Mr. Kimball prided themselves on being able to afford a spot in this location. And after looking for about a half an hour, I had-- I went back out to the car, and had to get Miss Kimball to come in and try to remember where it was. And she has a impeccable memory. And she walked in, and she said, well, there's going to be a couple steps. OK, now keeping walking towards the (inaudible)-- you're going to see the Virgin Mary up ahead, and there's the Virgin Mary. OK, you make a right there, and there's going to be a little place on the left where you wash flowers, and then you walk through this atrium. And she goes, now it should be somewhere right along the wall here. And I mean, it's pitch black in this place, you know. And she touches-- she's touching the wall, and she stops. And the guy comes over with his flashlight and shines it on there, and it's her mother's spot. They had three spots-- one for her mother, and then one for Narvin and Lillian. And they both had their names on them without the dates-- just their birthdates.

RH: Amazing (laughter).

BJ: Yeah. Yeah, it was unbelievable. And that's a-- I mean, there was a lot of other things that happened. That's the gist of it, though. That was-- I mean, I just stood there. I don't-- I mean, she-- I mean, I was lucky I was holding her, because she collapsed when, you know, when I told her that that was it. None of us could believe it.

RH: Wow.

BJ: Yeah. And all that had been under water, too, so that's just one of my many miracles that have happened since the hurricane. Yeah.

RH: So, you rode it out.

BJ: Yeah, we stayed here. We stayed at our house. I guess it was about seven o'clock, we brought my friend's boat downtown. I mean, we were really prepared to take this

thing.

RH: Yeah, you really were.

BJ: Yeah, I mean, we knew that the only way that it was going to get us was if the Mississippi levy broke. That if the Mississippi broke, then we were gone, our city was going to be gone, and we didn't want to be here anyway. We didn't want to, you know, necessarily be on earth anymore, if that was the case. You know, I mean, if the Mississippi River broke, I mean, it would wash the French Quarter away. I mean, you see what it did in-- to-- along the Gulf Coast. It was just unbelievable. I mean, to move those hotels. You know, and the little breach-- I mean, not the little breach-- the breach that happened in the Ninth Ward, I mean, what it did to those houses. Imagine the force of the Mississippi River coming through New Orleans. I mean, I don't even know, like, you know, if the buildings in the CBD would survive. I really don't know. So, that was the only thing that really scared us, would, that we were uncertain of. Everything else we were very certain about. We had the provisions, we had the boat, we knew we had our exit strategy, we knew which buildings we were going to go to if we needed to get to higher ground, and-- and then the storm came, and it wasn't that bad. You know, the storm came through the city, and the most amazing thing about it was the wind never stopped for the duration of the storm. It was this constant blowing of wind. It was just this sh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h for hours. And the water wasn't, it wasn't falling this way, it was falling, it was being shot. It was going like parallel to the ground. And my street never flooded. And my street always floods. That's-- and I-- so, that's why I just assumed that the rest of the city was OK. Because if our street floods (snaps fingers), up to our house very quickly, if it's a heavy summer rain. And it didn't. So, I was very, you know, I was real happy. I went to bed, and I woke up the next morning. Everybody else was asleep, because they all stayed up to watch the whole thing. And I woke up, I cleaned the front of the house, and realized that, you know, that the whole neighborhood was a wreck, and went down to Frenchman Street, and started helping people board up their houses. And

went around the neighborhood, and started closing people's doors. A lot of doors had blown open. And we did-- we went around to our friends' houses, and made sure that they were OK. And it was really when we got back to Elysian Fields and St. Claude, that we realized that there was, that it was going to be, that there was a problem. Because that's who-- I had never seen that flooded before. I had never seen, you know, growing up in New Orleans, I had never in my life seen water in the by-water. And then, I'd never seen water on Esplanade before, and that just stopped me in my tracks. I'd never seen water in the downtown before. So, we checked on all our friends, and our house kind of became this little center where people would come and check in, to make sure that they were OK. My friends, we drove my friend out to Ochsner, on River Road, and we saw when they-- we saw the-- we were there at the Wal-Mart, driving down Tchoupitoulas, as people were-- as, like, as the doors opened to the Wal-Mart. And we just parked the car and just sat there and watched it happen. You know, I mean, cars just sh-h-h-h-h, finally, I mean, you know, there were hundreds of cars there-- police cars, I mean, everybody was there. I mean, people were just pushing racks of-- just racks out onto the street, of shoes. It was actually really organized. You know, I mean, people weren't running. The only time I saw people really desperate, one time a car almost hit us, and I think it was because they were trying to make multiple runs back and forth to their house, in filling up one load, going back, dumping it off, going back again, dumping it off. And that was the only time that, you know, I saw things get out of hand. And then we got out to Ochsner, and dropped her off, and went to his house, and found out that his phone worked. His land line worked. So, we went back downtown, and started collecting people's phone numbers. We said, we'll call, if you have somebody you want to call-- I collected about, I don't know, about 20 names of people who wanted me to call their families, let them know that they were OK. And we went back up there the next day.

RH: It was like Tuesday.

BJ: On Tuesday morning, we went back up to his house, and I started calling people. And that's when I realized how bad it was, because everybody I called, it was that moment where they don't know if their kid is alive or dead. And I didn't know that. I didn't know that that was the fear, because we all knew we were all right. None of our immediate friends that we knew were in New Orleans, they were all alive, and we knew that they-- we knew who was here. And to be the one who had to call each one of their parents, I realized after about the second time, I said, Jesus, this is like being that military guy walking up the pathway to the house, knocking on the door, you know, saying, you know, is this Mrs. Jones? Yes. I'm friends with your son, Eric. And then silence. I just-- I'm just calling to let you know that he's OK. There's that moment, though. You realize that this person who, for the past 36 hours, hasn't known where their child is. Oh, you're the one delivering them that news. And I didn't realize that, until about two months ago, what that did to me mentally, the impact that that's had on me, to be the one that was, that had, that made those 20 phone calls. Because I was just-- I was just going through the motions of doing it, letting them know that they were OK, they were OK, they were OK.

RH: Wow.

BJ: Yeah. And my friend at the time was going to walk over to the Kimballs' house to see if it got flooded. And he came back about 45 minutes later, and he said, we got to get out of here. The water's-- the water rose eight inches since I left, and I don't know if we're going to be able to get out of here, if the car's going to float or not. We gotta get, we've gotta get out of here fast. So we just-- we locked the house up, and then split.

RH: Where was his house?

BJ: And-- on State Street and Clayborn.

RH: Oh, OK. Yeah.

BJ: And we got out of there, got back downtown, and that's when we first started hearing about the flooding. We heard rumors of it on Monday, and then by Tuesday, we started hearing about it on the radio, and they were talking about the 17th Street, you know, I didn't-- I-- whoever refers to it as the 17th Street Canal before, I never heard of the 17th-- I mean, I knew exactly where it was. I mean, we used to play there. I never knew that was the 17th Street Canal, that, you know, oh, yeah, that's the canal that runs through Lakewood North and South. That's, you know, 17th Street Canal, or the Industrial Canal, I never heard them really, I mean, I knew it was the Industrial Canal. I just would, always heard of it being the canal over by the Ninth Ward. And then it's what side of the canal. Is it the Orleans Parish, or the Jefferson Parish side? Is it the lower Ninth Ward side, or the by-water side? And we didn't know. So it was really, really frightening. I would have rather just not had the information, than to not have all the information at that time. And we were listening to the radio, and the reports, I mean, there was no one in charge, so they were just taking, people would call and they'd say that they've seen something, to the radio. And they would just say it. They would just broadcast it.

RH: So, did you guys feel like you wanted to stay put, or did you feel like--

BJ: We got nervous, I got nervous when-- the first time I got nervous, I was with my wife, and we were trying to get back to St. Claude to check on our friend on St. Rock. And we had to get off our bikes and walk, and push them down the neutral ground. And then we had to wade through the water. And once it got to about here, we stopped, and we were able to see him down the street, and he waved to us, and let us know he was OK. And we were like, well, if you get out, come to our house, we got, we've got everything you need. And on our way back-- this is Monday morning-- we run into a Sheriff on the corner of St. Claude and Elysian Fields, and I was-- I told her, I said, oh, my gosh, we'll get, this guy's going to yell at us, and like, maybe even take us in, because I know we're not supposed to be here. And he calls us over, and we go over there, and he goes, so, how far back can I get? You know, and I'm thinking, why is he asking us how far he can

get? He-- we should be asking him. And you know, and then I told him, it was like, well, you're not going to get very far. The water gets to about four feet as soon as you get to St. Rock. And, you know, his radio wasn't working, and he was just standing out there by himself, no radio. I mean, you would have expected him to be on a radio or something. And then on Tuesday, people started showing up at-- well, on, I don't know if it was Monday or Tuesday people started showing up at our house-- someone showed up at our house with a gun that they were carrying, and that made me really concerned, that someone who I've known my whole life, first of all, who doesn't even have a gun went and found one, or was given, it was given to him by someone. And you know, he said, oh, yeah, man, if I'm staying, I got-- I have to have protection. And I'm thinking, what is going on? You know, that's the last thing we all need to do is arm ourselves right now. And we were coming back from being uptown on Tuesday, and I was given directions to a guy from the Wildlife and Fisheries. And I was leaning in his truck, and on his radio, there was this APB came across about our police officer down, our helicopter shot at, police officer down. And it was-- I mean, it was out of a movie, it was that (whooshing sound), APB, you know, (muffled voice), Police officer down, duh duh duh duh, we need all units (inaudible). And this guy who had no idea where he was was asking me for directions. He's out from, he's from the country somewhere-- just takes off. He has no, I mean, he's just-- he has no idea where he's going. He just starts driving. And that-- and my friend are just staring at each other. He was in one window, I'm in the other window, and literally he takes off and we're standing in the middle of Elysian Fields, looking at each other, you know, a car length apart. And that's when we decided that it just wasn't worth it staying, that it-- that it was going to get worse before it got better. And we still didn't know what was going on in the rest of the city. He ended up staying. My friend ended up staying, and his wife ended up working at Ochsner. And I took my wife and two of our friends, and we took our animals and went to Lafayette. And our friends went, continued to, went north to Maine or New York. I think they ended up in New York.

RH: So, that was, like, Thursday?

BJ: No, this was still Tuesday. By Tuesday night, late Tuesday night, we decided to leave. We gave my friend, John, my keys to my house. I told my friends where the generator were-- was, in case they wanted to break in and get and use my generator. And we literally, we just took what we needed for the, for like a week. We just grabbed at some clothes real quickly, got our dogs in the car, took our bikes, because we thought we were going to end up in North Dakota, where my wife is from. So, we thought, well, we'll go live with your mom for a couple weeks, until this, until, you know, the city dries out.

RH: So, when you got to Lafayette, you started looking at TV, or--

BJ: Well, we stopped to check on the Kimballs first in Baton Rouge. And, you know, it was amazing. I mean, at that time, we're showing up at these hotels, and people are asking us these crazy questions. And we're like, you know, questions that made me think, like, were we even in the same city that you people are talking about? They're like, "Don't you know what's going on in the Superdome and the Convention Center?" And I'm thinking, we drove, what do you mean? I drove, I was a block away from the Convention Center. I didn't-- it was the only street you could drive down, Tchoupitoules. You know, I never saw any military, I never saw any police, I never saw any of this stuff. I never saw that many people. You know, I think that-- I guess it really speaks to how isolated the French Quarter really is, you know, from the rest of the city in so many ways. You know, and now it's-- then, when we got to Lafayette, and that was the first time we saw a news report, and just completely freaked out, I mean, flipped out. Fortunately, they didn't have cable, so we weren't glued to the TV they had. They just had, you know, whatever, like a, rabbit ears so we could get, like, the morning news. And our friend was online, and I'm sure we-- I mean, looking back on it now, we were just in shock from the whole thing. I mean, you know, and I don't even feel like what we saw was that gruesome. It was just personal experience. We didn't really, we never saw any dead bodies, we never saw-- the most flooded areas we saw, you know, were still, you could still move through, you could still move down Canal Street, and you could still move

through the CBD, and you could still move on Elysian Fields. It didn't really get bad until the other side of, after you get past 610, on the other, where, on the other side of Gentilly, where, on the other side of the tracks, where that canal flooded, where it got bad out toward UNO.

RH: Did you ride your bike around there?

BJ: You couldn't. You couldn't. There was too much debris. Trees were down everywhere.

RH: So, you now had a use for the boat, either, (inaudible).

BJ: Not at that time. My friend ended up using it uptown, but we never used it downtown.

RH: So, where-- how long did you stay in Lafayette? (inaudible)

BJ: We were there-- I was in Lafayette about-- we were there for about eight days, I believe. And it was in Lafayette that I started receiving phone calls from musicians, asking about, asking for money, or, "hey, can I help out, what's going on?" And I just started thinking about what's going to happen. There needs to be a benefit concert, or there needs to be something. What's going on, and Harry Connick was doing this big benefit. And I started feeling really desperate that I needed to do something, participate, and I needed to be in New York, to be in the middle, be in the mix. And that's when we decided to start the New Orleans Musicians Hurricane Relief Fund. Sarah and I were in Lafayette with our friends, and said, OK, we're going to start this foundation, this fund. We're going to start a 501-C3. This fund, its primary goal is to provide musicians with emergency relief. And we packed up the car and drove to Nashville, where my cousin, Anna, who used to live above us on St. Anne Street, is married to a wonderful lawyer, [Marn?], in Nashville. And I called him, I told him what we're doing. And he called all of his friends, and they all pitched in and got this done in a weekend, and got the paperwork

done, we got up there and discussed, you know, how it all works. And by the time we got to New York, maybe a week later, we stopped--

RH: You drove to New York.

BJ: We drove to New York. By the time we got to New York, we stopped in D.C. to do NPR, and then continued to New York. And by the time we got to New York with our record, the distributor for our record label gave us office space. We were staying, the same people who we stayed with in Lafayette have an apartment in New York, that we were sleeping on their floor. And we were just, that's where we, that's how we were living. We didn't have access, I mean, we were terrified about our financial situation as well. I think everybody was concerned about their home, their family, their job. Nobody knew anything. And, you know, well, everybody, you know, everybody back then was, you know, we're online trying to find our house on that weird website, you know. What we know, is there water there, and is that our house, or is it-- wait, but what building is that? That doesn't look right. Well, yeah, because half the buildings were gone, you know, that's why you couldn't find your house, because, you know, it might have been washed away. You know, and that was, it was actually in New York for the first time, that I started hearing that people had died in the hurricane. Because I had completely blocked out the news, and just focused on this foundation, and just put all of my attention on, in this. And we get up there, and I'm like-- and someone shows me the, you know, pictures of the Superdome, and I'm just, I'm freak-- I couldn't take it. It just-- I couldn't believe it. I mean, all of my faith in humanity was just, was shattered, like, in that one moment. Not even in the moment that Oprah really goes into the Superdome. Just her on, outside the Superdome, talking to Nagin on, in the entryway, about going into the Superdome. And just the idea, you know, just the back and forth between the two of them just, I couldn't watch it, I couldn't take it. I mean, I still haven't watched any footage of the storm. I don't feel like need to. I feel like, you know, I was here and everything else, all the gruesome parts of it, I don't feel like I need to see that to make me feel angry

about what happened. Because I'm, I was, you know, I'm angry enough about what happened. And we got to New York, and got the fund up and running, and it was unbelievable. I mean, within, I don't know, three weeks of filing our papers with IRS, they approved it, which is unbelievable for a 501-C3. I mean, it usually takes, I don't know, a year, you know.

RH: Yeah, a year.

BJ: A year, you know? And then you don't even know if it's going to get approved. We put in a very solid application. And I also think that the government realized how much they had screwed this thing up, and were trying to backpedal, and were approving-- I mean, I had impeccable resume, so it was difficult for them, you know, to find anything wrong with it. And we were up and running very quickly. And we just started raising money, and distributing funds very quickly.

RH: So, you were getting-- guys were calling you, I guess, at first. Some of them had your cell phone. They passed your number--

BJ: Oh, all the musicians do. All the musicians that work at Preservation Hall have it, you know. Yeah.

RH: So, a lot of people needed help.

BJ: Oh, they all did. They all did. About 70 percent of our musicians lost everything. The eight members of our band, six of them lost everything. That's a staggering statistic, you know. I mean, they didn't just lose one or two things. I mean, it's difficult for us to imagine losing everything. And we've all seen it. We've all seen what it looks like to lose everything. It's not a pretty sight, and I don't know where a lot of these gentlemen find the strength, because they-- it's been so emotionally wearing on me, you know, just to live here and to think about it every day. And I haven't had that many losses. I mean, I lost a bus company-- we had a bus that the Preservation Hall toured in, and that was a

company that I owned. That was, you know, that was a huge loss. I lost a company I had started with two other partners, called One Music. And they, we did artist management, something that didn't exist in New Orleans. And these guys were from San Francisco and Miami, and brought a whole, this whole new energy to New Orleans, and this very youthfulness about doing business. And it was just an amazing company that we had going in the Maroney. And that Saturday, before the storm, we had the moving trucks coming to move us from our temporary offices around the corner, to the new offices that we had been working a year on renovating, that Saturday. I mean, the amount of sweat equity that we put into that company, I can't even measure. I can't even begin to think. I mean, I-- we're talking, you know, 16-hour days, that type of thing. You know, like, you know the kind of, that that Wall Street, you know. "All right, we all got stock options," and that kind of energy. That's what, that was the kind of youthful energy that we brought to this, to the music industry. We really believed that we were going to change, that we were going to make a big difference in the way New Orleans music community was viewed by the world. Right now, the music in the United States is ruled by Los Angeles, Nashville, and New York. And we wanted New Orleans, that produces more musicians than any other city in the world, to be the center. Why can't New Orleans be the center? Why can't New Orleans be the recording capital? Why can't we be the studio capital? Why can't a movie come to town, film here, and make their music here? And that's what, that's what we were creating, this beautiful thing. And we struggled with it, because we all had artists that we were managing, and they had to, they couldn't come back. The artists don't stop touring, especially if they're not from here, because of the hurricane. You know, it's like, OK, well, I'll give you a month to kind of get your life together, and then after a month, you really have to get, you have to up and running again, if you're not just relying on New Orleans as your source of income. And our business wasn't relying just on New Orleans. It was relying on artists that were touring internationally, people like Charlie Hunter, who's an amazing guitar player. He's, he was one of our artists, and--

RH: Wow.

BJ: Yeah, and we had Stanton Moore was one of our artists. And, you know, we had, we were really becoming a formidable-- not just in New Orleans, people on the net-- around the country were like, wow, was it-- and we had a great name. We were called One Music, you know. And that was just amazing.

RH: So, what happened to the business?

BJ: It just-- it fell apart. It was-- the principle of the business was four businesses under one roof, working together except not profit-sharing. So, it was my record label and my artist management company, my friend Chris [Clavis'?] artist management company, Spire Management, Lee Frank, artist manager. And then we had a woman, Maize, Inc., who did artist, did financial services for musicians. And we were all in this one little building, that's half of a shotgun, all on top of each other, with all these employees, you know. And you never knew who you were going to pick up the phone and talk to. You know, you didn't-- you had no idea, I mean, it was amazing. You didn't know if it was, like, someone from Metallica, or Primus, or, I mean, all these guys would be calling our office, you know, to talk to Chris, or to talk to Lee, or to talk to me. And it-- that, I mean, in my whole life, I had never seen anything like that going on in New Orleans. And it just, it was such a beautiful thing. And we lost all of those businesses, those people, those individuals that I was talking about, those people, the big fish in a small pond, are now dispersed around the country.

RH: They just haven't come back, and--

BJ: They're not going to.

RH: They're not going to.

BJ: They can't. How-- I mean, financially, even if they wanted to come back, the struggle is, how do you, where do you find the time and finances to come back? And that's the struggle that I see so many other musicians up against. And that's what they're dealing with, is you're stuck in Houston. Maybe you have a retirement, maybe you don't have a retirement. Maybe you have savings, maybe your house kind of survived. What are you choices? There just-- there aren't a lot of choices. And I've--

RH: So, you just see more people just starting wherever they ended up, just starting over there.

BJ: Definitely now. I just lost-- it broke my heart over the weekend. I met with a-- our banjo player this weekend. He's a, someone I consider one of the great musicians from New Orleans, Carl Le Blanc, a real asset to New Orleans, not just as a musician. As an individual. Someone who's in the community making a difference, whether it's teaching students, or doing outreach programs. This guy is out there walking the walk. And he went through the process of fixing his home, fixing his parents' home. All of them were flooded. Fixing his grocery store, his corner grocery store. Still an African-American-owned corner grocery store, which you don't find much anymore. And coming back and realizing that, "I'm going to put my parents on the Seventh Ward on a street where there's nobody for five blocks, except for, you know, these people who are making homes out of these vacant buildings. And they have no family here, there are no services. And their daily life is going to be a struggle. Everything about their life is going to be a struggle." Packed them up and moved them to Los Angeles, and he told me on Saturday that he's moving to Los Angeles. And I gave him my blessings. I said, you know, I wish you would stay. I can't find a good reason for you to stay, though, right now. In fact, I'm finding less and less reason for me to stay, and that's what's really heartbreaking-- is that as much as we're fighting for New Orleans, as much as we love this city, at what cost? Is it worth your mental and physical health to be in this struggle for a community that is not, cannot return? They've made it financially, economically

impossible for most African-Americans to return to New Orleans that were living here before the storm, that were living in poverty before the storm. There's no way. And I think the city and the federal government are, that are content with that. They're OK with this city being 200,000 people, you know. I can see the numbers going through their heads, and I can see it, I can see, you know, saying, "OK, great, we don't have to worry about that portion of the population anymore. We don't have to worry about those public schools anymore. We don't have to worry about public services in those areas anymore that weren't paying taxes in the first place." I hate to think that people process information that way. Unfortunately, I'm seeing it-- we're all seeing it right before our eyes. And it's very, very discouraging, and can really beat the hell out of you, especially if you're from here, and if you grew up with my parents, who fought so hard to, for the, to achieve basic rights for a community that they really had no reason to come to New Orleans to do what they did. And it, it's, it is truly discouraging, and I do feel defeated at least several times a day on different, different things'll happen, and I feel completely defeated, and just, the wind will be knocked out of me.

RH: Let me go back just a minute, and tell me when you came back. When did you come back into town, and why? What was your decision? How long were you in New York?

BJ: There was no doubt that we were going to come back. We just didn't know when we were going to come back. We finally, a friend of ours who worked for a hotel got us a small apartment with a kitchenette that we moved into with our dogs, and I was out on tour with the band. And that was a real struggle. I was trying to keep the band afloat. In New York, and, I mean, I can't really get into each individual stories. If you can only imagine, though, I mean, our band members ended up in the Convention Center. We had band members that ended up in Vancouver, Canada. We had guys who boarded buses and end up in, outside of Little Rock, Arkansas. I mean, we weren't able to contact any of these musicians, because nobody's cell phone was working. Even if your

cell phone was working, you had to get to a phone to make a call. And, you know, there was about three weeks there, where it was impossible to track people, the way that we're accustomed to tracking people these days. And we all finally made a reunion in New York. We all were able to locate each musician. And I brought them all to New York, and that was incredibly difficult, because it wasn't just bringing the musicians to New York. You realize that, I'm bringing the musicians to New York, and they're leaving their families behind, wherever they are, and they're coming to New York to make a living to pay for-- I mean, it's just-- man, it's like, you know. You-- I mean, there's no way to be prepared for something like this. You can't ever, ever, ever imagine this happening. You just have to be the strongest person that you can be at that time, and do the best you can. And we went back out on tour. We went back out on tour to Europe, which was incredibly difficult. And we all decided that it was the best thing for the band. We all needed the money to be on the road, to be on road. And yet, we're overseas trying to manage our lives back home, and our families. I mean, I can't tell you how diff-- I mean, my wife in New York with two dogs in an apartment building, two dogs that are used to having a backyard and grass, and have never been in an elevator before. And my wife managing that, and me being on the road in Europe. It was a very difficult time, personally, for me. And after Mardi, after Halloween, my wife moved back to New Orleans. She drove the car back to New Orleans with a friend, and I flew back in November. Around November 1st, and came back.

RH: What did you see when you came back?

BJ: Nothing. I didn't see anything. It looked-- I had come back a couple times before that. I had come back once to get my passport, music, sheet music, and our trumpet player's trumpet out of his house. And we drove. We drove right down, we drove down Elysian Fields, out to Gentilly. And I was-- I mean, this is the neighborhood I've driven through my whole life, and I didn't recognize it. There was that gray that, like, film on everything. And it, and I mean, it didn't look real to me. None of it looked real. And that

was the first time I actually went into someone's house that had been under water. And went in and found his trumpet, and took some pictures for him, to show him. He was the only person who didn't have any family that was reporting to him what his house looked like, and-- and I brought him back, and I remember, I got off the plane, I went to the hotel, met him, met the band at the hotel, and I showed him the pictures. I-- I asked him if he wanted to see them, because I said, they're really powerful images, and there was a lot of destruction. And I showed him his cars that had been under water. I showed him his house that was destroyed. And I showed him where I found his trumpet. I found his trumpet in his sink. And he had told me that he had left it on his bed. So, it had floated, or had been washed through his house, and ended up, you know, once the water receded, in the sink. Unbelievable.

RH: So--

BJ: And, you know, I-- I'll tell you what really was weird, was the city without people, and without children. That was the strangest thing to me, is the city without children. And you realize that something's not right. You just don't, you don't know what it is. You just, something's not right. Something's not, doesn't feel right, and then you realize, wait, there's not one kid here. Not in the city, maybe out in Metairie where some of the schools pushed to get open very quickly. In New Orleans, there wasn't one child. And I--

RH: So, obviously, your work was here, your work wasn't here. I mean, you've got these businesses. They're bleeding money. You're not opening Preservation Hall, if there's nobody here to come. When does all this start to happen? When do you get back in the Hall, and--

BJ: We didn't open until April. Yeah. We didn't open till April, and I was really struggling with my brother and my mother, to help me with, to, I was looking for direction. I didn't know where to go, I didn't know what to do, because it wasn't like pre-Katrina, where you could just open the doors, you know. Build it, and they will come scenario. It wasn't that

at all. It was, yeah, I can get a band back here, and I can, I could open the doors, and they're not going to come, and I've proven that to people, you know. We've had a couple successful nights here. We're just a business that survives on a brisk tourist trade, and that doesn't exist, and I don't foresee it existing for awhile.

RH: So, now, it's a labor of love--

BJ: It is.

RH: I mean, just to the musicians, to give them work, and--

BJ: That's the only reason we're open, because we're not, I mean, we're not making any money. I mean, we're losing money every day that we turn on the light here, we're losing money. I, you know, I don't know what to do. I've thought about options, and thought about the world without Preservation Hall, this place, you know, these walls. You know, it saddens me terribly. And I also realize that this is a much bigger issue than I have anything to do with, that this is something that's completely out of my control at this point. I can do my little piece, and I can service this one little community that I love so dearly, this New Orleans cultural community, that that is my passion. And I also realize it, you know, we've lost civilizations before. And we've lost, you know, we've lost the Mayans. And we've lost the Incas. You know, it's not unfathomable to think that, you know, that we will lose New Orleans Jazz, and we will lose Mardi Gras Indians, and we will lose Second Line parades, and we will lose brass bands. We might not lose them the next ten years, you know. But there was time in the '40's and '50's, where they thought they were losing New Orleans jazz. And that was for a different reason. That was for a different economic reason. It was because there wasn't a venue for musicians to play in. The music was considered old-timey and out of fashion. And who wants to live to that old, raggedy jazz? And, you know, and big band swing was the thing. Everybody wanted Benny Goodman, and Count Basie, and now-- then, jazz became bee bop, and these are where these guys who were the originators of music, and were, you know, had

been forgotten about. And then there was this renaissance.

RH: Well, which your father helped create.

BJ: Yes. He, my father created, not only created a place for musicians to work. He also created a demand for music. He taught people, him and my mom, taught people that they really wanted this music, you know, that they wanted to be a part, that this was an important thing to be a part of.

RH: Did you ever think you would be rebuilding all that again?

BJ: This--

RH: And here you are.

BJ: -- is more than they dealt with. This is bigger than what they dealt with. This is completely different, you know. If it was a matter of me going out there-- it's going to come back different. It'll come back differently. That's, I guess, that's the biggest struggle right now, is does Preservation Hall die with the tradition, or does it continue with a new tradition, with the new New Orleans?

RH: Is the new New Orleans going to be a place you want to live in?

BJ: I like living here right now. If I can separate when I, when I'm able to separate in my mind the devastation, I think that this is an incredibly magical time to live in New Orleans. I think that artistically, musically, there's more going on here--

RH: Even right now?

BJ: Oh, yeah. I feel like there is, there are bands playing here, because, I feel like the bands that are here playing, are here because they really, they can't be anywhere else.

RH: And you mean they can't be anywhere else, like, emotionally, and--

BJ: Emotionally--

RH: Psych--

BJ: -- and also musically. Where're you going to stick, what other city are you going to stick the Rebirth Brass Band, or Hot Eight Brass Band, or New Birth or Tremaine Brass Band in? Where're you going to put Kermit, I mean, or the Jazz Vipers, or the High Club of New Orleans, or Charmaine Neville, or-- they can't exist anywhere else like they can in New Orleans. There aren't venues like that. I mean, how many jazz clubs do you know anymore in the U.S.? I mean, besides, you know, a few in the larger cities. I don't know, there's what, maybe a several dozen jazz clubs, and most of them are restaurants that have jazz as a sidenote to what, to the food and drinks. You know, we don't have a-- you know, I was thinking that New Orleans, right now, is like a tradition that we have a culture here than can survive till this generation dies. And then, who's going to be the generation that comes behind them? Our traditions are aural. I mean, A-U-R-A-L. They're taught, you know, on the street, someone walking there right next to, you know, the kid walking next to his father, marching down the street. That's where the tradition is. That's where the exchange takes place. That's where, if the church doesn't exist, where's the kid going to learn how to play drums, or learn the repertoire? And you know, I'm not a worrying kind of person, so I try not to concern myself with things that I don't have control over. It's just, it's unnerving that we know what the answer is, and yet we're just, the people who can make a difference, the people who control the money to make a difference, they're making a difference, just not in the areas that I care about.

RH: What's your vision? What would you like to see, because really, you're saying it's got to be on a larger scale than, you know--

BJ: I'm torn. I'm torn. I love change. I love the fact that the hurricane has forced people to, and I don't think this is true for everyone. I know it's forced me to reevaluate what's important to me, and the direction that my life is going in, and the direction that

Preservation Hall goes in. And consider, and to consider what our options are at this point. If you can't make a living doing what you do traditionally, which is open up and, open your doors, sell records, and have people pay eight dollars to come listen to music, if that's not going to cut it, then what will, without sacrificing your, too much of your vision. And that's what I'm struggling with now, you know. And the truth is is I used to tell people, I said, you know, if Preservation, if there wasn't a band to play here, or if it just became too big of a pain to run anymore, you know-- and I can never actually do this, I would always, you know, whenever an employee or a musician would, you know, bark at me about something they didn't like, I'd go, "You know what? I said, you know what? It's not even worth it. I'm just going to turn the place into a Daiquiri shop, I'm going to buy a BMW, I'm going to move to Metairie, and that's it. You know, I've had it. I can make more money selling corn dogs and cold pizza and daiquiris than I can running a business," you know. And running a business like Preservation Hall. Because we don't sell drinks. I mean, we make, you know, I don't drive a BMW. And now, I can't even say that, because a daiquiri shop here wouldn't make it right now either. And that's a little alarming. That's more than a little. That's very alarming to me, when you start seeing tee-shirt shops. As much as I dislike tee-shirt shops, when you see tee-shirt shops unable to stay open, you realize that the economy that was responsible for Preservation Hall's success doesn't exist anymore.

RH: But, you've got a funny thing going here, because you've got an, you've got something that's not really tourist, like you just described, depending on the tourist industry.

BJ: Yep. My dad was a brilliant person.

RH: (inaudible) (laughter) Paradox of life here.

BJ: It is. It's a true paradox. I mean, the truth is is that Preservation Hall has been responsible for many ways redefining what New Orleans jazz is, and what's expected of

New Orleans jazz musicians. We've been the torch bearers, and we've been the guiding force. We've been the ones who've defined the repertoire. We've been the ones who've defined the crowd's expectations, the instrumentation of bands. Preservation Hall's been at the very top, and always been that beacon of light that people have looked to for guidance in the music community. And also, when you come to town, you know, when people come to listen to music here, they know that they're getting, you know, great New Orleans music, played by New Orleans musicians, not guys dressed up to look like New Orleans musicians. They're like real New Orleans musician who grew up in the Lafitte housing project, and in Chermaine, and uptown, and in the Ninth Ward, and in Gentilly, in the Seventh Ward. That's, you know, that's, it's real, because they're all guys I grew up, who influenced me musically. I'll tell you why else I'm not too sad about the prospect of Preservation Hall being different in the future. It's because I remember in '84, when the lease for this property was going to be coming up. My parents didn't own the property at the time. And my dad started discussing with my mom, and me, and my brother, what he should do. Should he keep it open, or is it time to just close it? And I couldn't tell if he was just blow, you know, like trying to, you know, get us kind, you know--

RH: Worked up?

BJ: Worked up, like, "No, no, dad, no, you can't close it." Or if he was really concerned, I was too young to know the difference. I always just assumed, oh, it'll just be here. So I never concerned myself with it. And I wonder now if he was really concerned. I think he was asking my brother and myself whether or not we wanted it, if it was something that he should keep open, so that it was something that we could have. And I-- he passed away in '87, so he never got to see, you know, me take over and the evolution of the Hall to where it is today. And I don't know how he would have handled it. I don't know how he would have handled this whole thing.

RH: Do you want to have this open--

END OF AUDIO FILE 2

BEGINNING OF AUDIO FILE 3

RH: When you said a minute ago, you know, your priorities have changed since the storm. Why don't you tell me how your priorities have changed since the storm.

BJ: My life's a lot simpler now, than it was before the storm. It's, I always enjoyed going to vacation, and in communities that, on the outside, I guess, appeared very simple to me, very-- dealt with the basic necessities of life. I liked going to France, and Italy, and Spain, because food wasn't just something that you squeezed in, you know, in the middle of work. It reminded me much more of New Orleans, how it was something that was a ritual, whether it was breakfast, or lunch, dinner. It really reminded me of growing up with my dad, when we still had the French Market to get our groceries at, and there was still a fish monger in the French Quarter. And there was still a butcher. I like going to, I like the idea of returning to a simpler time where we don't, where everything's not in these [megal?] of complexes, where-- I mean, I can't even tell you the last time I went to a shopping mall. I mean, I pride myself on not having to live that way, to-- and I wish it could be even nicer. I wish it could, I wish that I had the luxury of waking up every morning and making my groceries every day, for that day. That's the kind of life I like to live, and I've found myself forcing myself to work less, and forcing myself to care for myself more. Something I preach to everyone is, you can't take care of others until you take care of yourself. You may think you're taking care of others. It's kind of like staying up till four o'clock in the morning, working on a term paper, you know. At a certain point, you're just, you don't even know, you know, you could be writing Yankee Doodle Dandy (laughter), you know, it's-- I, at least for me. You know, you just-- I mean, at a certain point, you just burn out. And I've also become a much more patient person. And I think I've found myself actually returning to my dad's, the way my dad conducted himself in business, which was, if you wanted to find my dad, there was two or three restaurants he

may be in, or he was at the bank, or he was here at the Hall, or at our house. Or he, if you didn't see him in those places, chances are he was on the road, so you had to wait till he was back in town. And I feel like our society has gotten so out of control, and has for so many years, with the cell phones, and the internet, and the computers, and know, and Wall Street, that we've gotten so far from the farm. We're so far removed from the farm, that I don't even know that-- I don't even know that kids today even know that apples grow on trees, you know. They, I don't that. I mean, I don't even know when I was exposed to that. I know my parents, you know, I was able to see that when I visited my grandparents, or you know, when we went to St. Bernard, to see, you know, where they grow the satsumas, or pontchatoula, or you know. And there was that moment right after the hurricane, those, that day, the day right after the hurricane that Monday, where we didn't know what had happened, and I thought it was the most beautiful day ever in New Orleans. There were no cars. The people who were here were the, like, the, a little crazy, because we decided to stay, you know. And we decided to stay, and we had resources to get out of town-- very different from people who didn't have a choice to stay. You know, I mean, who didn't have a choice to leave. They had to stay. And we chose to stay, and it was a beautiful day. It was a beautiful day. I wished, at that moment-- I've often wished that they would just block off St. Peter Street at night to traffic. And I said, if they're going to block off Bourbon Street, and if they're going to block off Royal Street, why can't they just block off, you know, this one-- they do on holidays. You know, on New Year's Eve, they block off St. Peter Street one block, because of Pat O'Brien's. And then, you know, then I started thinking, man, we should just block off the whole French Quarter, delivery trucks in the morning, you know, like they do in certain parts of Europe. I mean, there's no, there's places much older than the French Quarter that deal with this stuff all the time. And just block off the whole French Quarter. You want to get around the Quarter, you got a bike. And then, here comes the hurricane, and I'm sitting there Monday, not realizing that there's people drowning or-- and there's people stuck in the Superdome, and I'm looking at the city, saying that this is

a beautiful place without cars. This is that small city again. And I don't really know how to-- I'm conflicted about it. You know, I'm conflicted that I, it made me, that I was so happy that day, and there was all this destruction. I guess if I had known there was destruction, I would have felt differently. I just, there was that moment, though, standing out there at nighttime, feeling like I was back, I was out in the country, not one light. I couldn't see, I mean honestly, I almost tripped on my front step, because I went to open my door, and it was already open. And I couldn't even see, I mean, I couldn't see out of my front door. And that's how pitch black it was. I've never, I mean, I don't know that I've ever seen this kind of pitch black before.

RH: Well, it seems like it's one thing to have the city, in the way you're describing it, because there's a-- it's another way to see it choked into this size.

BJ: Forced, or--

RH: Forced, or, it seems like--

BJ: I'm not even talking about the size, necessarily. I'm just-- I'm an idealist, you know. I want to live in a biking community, and I want to live in a community that has coops, and that, you know, where, has communities. I mean, my friends, we are a community. You know, my circle of friends, we care for each other the same way that Second Line clubs care for their friends, if someone gets ill or needs help, or needs a ride somewhere, or needs a little money to help with their rent. Those are all the things that my group of friends, we're all an extended family. And I've always loved that about New Orleans, is how strong family is here, the sense of family. It doesn't-- I don't really sense that in any other city, where you'll have several generations living within blocks of each other. Or you'll have kids growing up in the same, living in the, you know, they're 80 years old now, it's the same house they grew up in. And where else are you going to hear a trumpet player playing out on the street, you know? Whatever, eight, six, seven o'clock at night, I mean.

RH: Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

BJ: Yeah, somewhere.

RH: So, you, though, stopped performing with the band in, did you say, February?

BJ: February I stopped touring.

RH: Touring with the band, not performing.

BJ: Yeah.

RH: So, is that part of the, you kind of trying to take care of yourself, and--

BJ: Definitely.

RH: (inaudible)

BJ: Definitely. I had been thinking about it for years up to Katrina, and had never had the, I don't know. I don't know what it takes to make a decision like that, where you just give something up that's been a part of your life for 34 years. And I don't know how you just-- it felt like I was turning, you know-- yeah. I-- the turning point for me was, we were marching down Charter Street on Mardi Gras day with our crew of friends, and got to Canal Street right as Rex was passing, the Rex parade. And from where we were standing, there's a hotel on your left, and really high buildings on your right, so you can't-- if you're looking at Canal Street, you can only see, it's framed perfectly. And as we arrived to Canal Street, from the side of one of the buildings came the third float of the Rex parade, which is called Le Beouf, which is the cow. And behind-- and that's a traditional float that always goes in a-- they always have-- the first three or four floats are always the same for Rex. And that was the float that the Olympia Brass Band always marched behind. And that was the float that my, that I marched behind, the first professional gig I ever had when I was nine years old. And it just, it struck me so hard at

that moment, that as much of a service as Preservation Hall has done to the New Orleans music community, by bringing music to the world, and by providing hundreds of musicians with an incredible livelihood, and opportunities that they would never had without Preservation Hall. It also took away from community, here in New Orleans, by bringing these people out of New Orleans. And I want to be part of the community here.

RH: Oh, wow. So, you kind of stopped touring to concentrate more on New Orleans.

BJ: Oh, definitely. That's, I always tell people that. I'm-- I feel like just living here now, all of us, every individual person, I don't care if you're a lawyer, a doctor, or whatever you are, a clerk at the grocery store, bank teller, we're all heroes. We're on the front lines of this war, this war against-- you know, they're really trying to take away all of the-- and maybe not even knowingly-- through their actions, through the actions of the government and the powers, the financial powers that control this city, they're taking away something that is incredibly sacred. And the further we get away from that moment, that time, the more it becomes a memory to us, the more difficult it's going to be to bring it back. I see that every day. I see people leaving and not coming back, and I see people who have left and aren't going to come back.

RH: So, as a general in this war, or a gorilla fighter, what's-- what do you think needs to be done? What are you trying to do?

BJ: What am I trying to do? I've had serious doubts that the work that we've been doing has-- is the answer for the future.

RH: And what kind of work is that? What do you mean?

BJ: Through the Hurricane Relief Fund.

RH: Really?

BJ: I-- we have worked so-- we have done more for the New Orleans music community than, I believe, any other musicians' organization. We've brought bands back to New Orleans. We've brought musicians back to New Orleans. We've helped clubs reopen. We're on the ground. We're really the only musicians' organization, besides Tipitina's, and maybe one or two others, that are on the ground, making a difference by getting places, like Louisiana Music Factory back open. By getting offbeat, you know, getting them to-- off the ground, and giving them a grant to get their first two magazines going again. Giving grants to Second Line organizations to have parades, and to Mardi Gras Indians, so that they can parade on Mardi Gras Day.

RH: Backstreet Museum.

BJ: The Backstreet Museum. The-- we have touched, I'm not going to say the forgotten-- because these people weren't-- nobody knew about them to start off with. They didn't receive the kind of recognition, cultural recognition, that they should have before the storm. And we have made a difference. We've made a significant difference. I believe without our organization, the New Orleans music community and cultural community would be in a much worse off place right now, without our, the work we've done for the past year. I truly believe that. What do we need to do for the future is a whole different question. I could bring back, I know how much money it would take to bring back musicians, to get studios running again, to get the clubs running again. I ask myself, who's, who cares, though? Who's coming to our aid, at a certain point? I'm not the kind of person that likes to go out and ask people for help. I like people to arrive at their own decisions, and to see the need, and to come to our aid. And it's been very difficult for me to change the way that I conduct myself, from being, from sitting on the, in back, waiting for people to come to me. And now being on the front, having to educate people about what we do need, and asking for their support. I've also, I'm not, I've also, my position at Preservation Hall has always made me be, it's always a balancing act. You're dealing with your musicians, you're dealing with the public, you're dealing with

presenters, you're dealing with whoever, different communities all over the country, and you have to make tons of people happy, and everybody has to be happy for the whole thing to work. And right now, I've lost, I've stopped biting my tongue in certain instances. And I'm not, I can remain very polite and be very honest about what the situation is here. And I feel like I've done an incredible job of educating people about what the real situation is in New Orleans, and what our real needs are. And it's going to take 25,000,000 dollars dedicated to an organization like ours, to bring back the New Orleans music community as strong as it was before, and to build, and to have infrastructure in place, so that you're not just preserving what we had, you're perpetuating the tradition for the future. The last thing I ever want to do-- and that's why I always fight about the name, Preservation Hall, is I hate preservation. I hate the idea of recreating something, and that something is soulless. I don't, I think there's an incredible, there's a, it's incredibly important to study the history of jazz, and to know that history. I also think it's incredibly important to not spend your life trying to recreate something that existed a hundred years ago. That it's incredibly important to recognize who you are today as an individual, what your traditions are that you came from, as, and as an artist and as a part of a community, to perpetuate that tradition throughout it, and to spread that tradition, your tradition. And now I, we're all seeing these un-, we're going to start seeing these completely unfamiliar traditions now. I mean, maybe not now. Maybe our children and our grandchildren will see this, and we'll be the last, I'll be the last bass player that studied with Chester Zardis, and you know, that'll be-- my calling card is, you know, people come from all over the world to see Benjamin Jaffe, because he was--

RH: The aged Benjamin Jaffe (laughter).

BJ: Yeah. Look at him, oh, my gosh. He studied with Frank Fields, and Walter (inaudible) (laughter). And then to think that there's going to be, you know, someone someday who's 80 years old and are going to go, like, he studied with Benjamin Jaffe, you know. And the guy, you know that guy who studied with Chester Zardis, and, you

know.

RH: So, you don't-- I mean, you've said this a number of times. You don't see change as bad, and what might happen in New Orleans--

BJ: I don't at all.

RH: -- might be a good thing, if-- but it still needs--

BJ: I don't think change, change is not bad. What I see as bad is what, is this crime that's being perpetrated on our citizens.

RH: And that-- name the crime, please, just-- what do you mean by the crime?

BJ: The flooding. I mean, the genocide that's happened here. That we've allowed that is unbelievable to me.

RH: We, as a nation?

BJ: As a nation, as a, as people, as citizens, as a government. I've never met such-- I don't know, in the past eight years, I have met some of the most hardened people around the country, just angry, bitter, cold people. And when you meet them, you realize this is, they're angry about something, and I don't know what. And they're angry, I think, because they don't know, they're not exposed to, they live in a very insular community, very small communities, rural communities. And I love rural communities. That's what's so frustrating, that I find myself, I find ultra-liberal people and ultra-conservative people have, share these very weird things in common, you know. You know, they don't want the government in their back pocket, snooping around listening to their phone calls. And they don't want the government telling them what to do and what not to do. And you know, the Liberals have to support, you know, First Amendment rights, and they have to support gun control, and I don't know. The whole thing is just-- it gets really strange

about, you know, how it all works, or doesn't work. I don't know anymore. It's just-- I know, for me, to go around the country, and I feel frustrated when I have to explain to people why I think this was so racist, why I think it is so racist, what's happening, what's happened here and what is happening here. Whether it's class racism, or social racism, or economic racism, it's happening. And a lot of people don't see it that way. And I think it's unfortunate that the leader of this country hasn't been, is not more humble, is not humbled by what happened here. And there wasn't a time in my life-- and I-- I'm going to-- I have to go back a little bit. The Preservation Hall band was the second band to be invited to perform at the White House for a state dinner for the Indian Prime Minister from India.

RH: So, you were there.

BJ: I was at the White House. And during Clinton's administration, he had over 100 musical acts perform during his eight years at the White House for events. He had over 100 invited artists from around the country perform at the, either at the White House, or at an official White House function. This was the second function-- not during his second term, during both terms, that a group had performed in the White House. And I was really torn about what I should do, whether or not I should accept the invitation or not.

RH: You mean Bush?

BJ: Yes.

RH: Bush had-- this was the second time he's had any musicians.

BJ: Any musician entertain at the White House. And I was really torn about whether to accept the invitation or not. And ultimately, my decision was, out of respect for the institution of the presidency, and out of respect for the country, and the honor of being invited to the White House. Not to show support for the administration. I accepted on behalf of the band, and we performed there months before the hurricane came to New

Orleans. And I remember watching Bush, the first time he met with Nagin, on the Tarmac, and come up to the microphone, and you know, I think this is why he and Nagin get along so well-- and in a very cavalier way, start talking about, oh, those nights, yeah, I spent probably a few too many nights on Bourbon Street. And I swear if my hand could have reached through the TV screen and grabbed him by the neck, and shook him, I would have. There is nothing, nothing funny about what happened here. And it-- if there was ever a time that we needed a leader, it was during that time, to rally your people, the citizens of this city. And to say, you know, "This is an atrocity, we will find out what happened, we fill find out what went wrong, and we will rectify this situation." You know, it's-- and it's embarrassing to me, when you think that the only reason nothing's getting done is because of money. That's the only reason. And it's completely opposite of what I was raised, how I was raised.

RH: Which was--

BJ: My dad-- I mean, he was a very fortunate dad. He didn't have to run Preservation Hall to make a living. He was a very intuitive businessperson, with incredible friends. And he went to Wharton at a time when, right before mutual funds-- you know, there was maybe one or two mutual funds when my dad was at Wharton. And, you know, his-- he, they, my parents were very fortunate that they didn't have to rely on Preservation Hall to be the economic basis of, for their well-being. And they could run this place free from any, from the laws of economics. As long as it broke even, it was fine. So, when money comes up as an issue for not doing something as basic as replacing someone's home, that ultimately you're responsible for destroying. And you know what it's going to cost. What's the big, what's the question? And I don't understand what the question is. I don't understand what the issue is anymore. I don't understand-- it's beyond any-- I can't even process that type of thinking. It doesn't even make sense to me. Because how much money do you need? How much money do you need, ultimately? You know, now we find, you know, today in the newspapers, it's-- we find that they just discovered four new

oil drilling sites in the Gulf of Mexico that are the deepest that they've ever found, that's going to be the largest in the, in U.S. history, bigger than Alaska. Now, how much money do you need, ultimately? You know, wasn't-- it wasn't the hospitals that were up and running ten days after the hurricane. The refineries down in St. Bernard Parish were up and running. And yet, my friend, who stayed at my house, who we drove to Ochsner, is performing surgery by flashlight, and worked there for nine straight days until she collapsed, and they had to finally just force her to go home. Well, her instincts and her nurturing instincts and her instincts as a doctor took over, and she saw people who needed help, and she just stayed there 24 hours a day, for over a week, until they literally had to force her out of there. So, I don't know how you, you know-- I mean, maybe more people need that experience.

RH: So, what do you want to tell Bush and Nagin, if you got them in a room? Maybe after you curse them out.

BJ: I wouldn't.

RH: What do you tell them--

BJ: I wouldn't. You know, I don't. I don't get angry at people. I don't think that that's-- I just feel like that they're lost souls, that they've lost the way. I mean, I saw it happen to Nagin like that (snaps fingers). I saw it happen over night, it's the first time he opened his mouth, and backtalked the administration. You never heard anything again from him. And that was-- you know, it was very clear to me what happened. You know, the first time that he came out and said, "You know, they better get their asses down here," that was it. And then there was, you know, a couple more comments after that, about the administration. And then nothing. I didn't watch the Spike Lee documentary, so I don't know if he talks about the administration in there. I know that he thanked Bush for fulfilling his promises that he made on the steps of Jackson Square, in his inauguration speech.

RH: So, you're saying he kind of did a 180 from when he called it down.

BJ: Yeah, he got paid off. He got, you know, in typical, you know, fashion. I think it was incredibly disappointing to me, because I thought he was for the people. There was-- he was up there fighting for the people, and I think we all expected too much from him. We all thought that he was going to be the-- you know, that he was going to be Dutch Morial, who I grew up with, and who, you just, you, when you saw Dutch, he was just-- you know, if I met Nagin on the street, I would shake his hand and not feel any kind of energy-- I mean, I've met him-- I see him at different events, and I don't feel this sh-h-h-h, this glow from him. When I used to meet Dutch Morial, you would feel like, OK, this guy is, man, this guy is grandfather extraordinaire. You know, he's just like, he's the kind of guy that you're just like, OK, as long as he's in power, everything's going to be OK, you know. With Nagin and with Bush, it's a wild card. You don't know what's going to happen, or where it's going to go. Even, I even told, I've told several people that, you know, if Edwin Edwards were in office, and if Dutch Morial were in office, it wouldn't have gone down this way.

RH: So, what do they have?

BJ: And you couldn't-- and you could not get any more crooked than Edwin Edwards.

RH: Right. I know. What--

BJ: You know, and, but I-- and I, you will not find one person in this city who disagrees with me.

RH: What do they have that--

BJ: Charisma.

RH: Charisma?

BJ: They had charisma, and they also had something that we've lost in the South. We, I mean, Buddy Roemer, I think, was the last Democrat governor we had. Foster was Republican, and I think that that was the first--

RH: I think Roemer was Republican, too.

BJ: Was Republican? It was some weird statistic that he was the first Republican governor since the Civil War, or something?

RH: Right.

BJ: You know, the whole South has changed. We've become such a-- this-- I don't know, this weird transformation that took place. I mean, I always met people-- I was never intimidated by people the way that I am today. When I go into certain communities, I feel--

RH: You mean white communities?

BJ: I go into white communities. I'm extremely, I'm terrified. You know, I'm terrified. Especially with my hair. I mean, I'll take, you know, this is just what my hair looks like now, because I have it up to look nice. But this is usually what my hair looks like when I go out. More than this. You know, I can't go, there aren't many places besides San Francisco and New York that I can go, or Los Angeles or New Orleans, looking like this, you know. And, you know, the people in my community have their stereotypes of the frat boy, of the, you know, the red neck, the typical, the Republican, the guy riding, you know, driving around in his truck and his SUV. We have the stereotypes too, us Liberals, you know. We have those stereotypes. And go into those communities, and I'm nervous, and I'm, you know, afraid to have conversations with people about-- because it's going to turn to politics, and it's going to turn to religion, at some point. And how, when did religion become so divisive in the U.S.? I don't remember it being that way. I remember politics being about, you know, the working man, you know, versus, you know. It's like

the do-gooders, and then just people who were, like, more fiscally responsible, and you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of guys were the Republicans. You know, just a little-- you know, they were all the white collar guys, and the Democrats were all the Liberals. And the guys who worked, you know, worked and went to school were a little out there. And I don't know when it all got so far apart from each other. There's only, there isn't, like, this whole middle ground right around here seems void. I don't know, was it, has it always been like that?

RH: Where they can't communicate, and there's this--

BJ: Yeah.

RH: It's like--

BJ: Where politics, it was like a friendly rivalry in politics. I don't know. Maybe I'm just becoming more aware of the ugliness.

RH: You feel like something else is on the table besides politics, or--

BJ: I think everybody's just scared for-- is terrified-- everybody's looking out for their own, that we've become so consumer-based as a society, that it's about the new car, and the next TV, and having this many cable stations, and having this new house. I hate new houses. I mean, I just, I feel so, I feel like I'm in a prison.

RH: But, what do you want to give, if you have kids, even if you don't have kids, you have kids, you know. The kids of New Orleans. What do you want them to have, and why do you think you can help give them, by staying?

BJ: You know, the, when I had the most doubts about leaving town, I had been home for about four or five weeks, and I went to a Second Line that we had, that we sponsored. And it was the first, it was the second Second Line, it was the second parade in New

Orleans after Katrina, and it was the first parade that I had gone to. And I don't know if you're familiar with Second Lines. They parade through the neighborhoods, and you don't just stand on the side of the streets and wave a flag, you actually get in the parade, and you march behind the band. And wherever they go, you go. I mean, if they go six miles, you're going six miles, because your car is back, where, you know, where you left it. So you gotta follow them. And about half way through that parade, we ended up-- it was the first time I had ever crossed St. Charles with a Second Line parade. I had never done that before.

RH: I don't know if I've ever seen that happen.

BJ: I'd, I mean, my entire life, I never heard of it happening. We crossed St. Charles, and ended up way back of town. And we're on the corner, and there's people dancing on top of cars, and there's beer going around. And the band stopped, and they're playing, and I hear this woman on the phone. And she goes, nah-uh-uh. Un-huh, baby, you're gonna believe this! I'm in a Second Line! They got a Second Line going on! And I, you know, she's probably talking to her relatives in Baton Rouge or Houston or Atlanta or Birmingham. And I just, I knew that if, if for no other reason than for my own selfish, you know, to fulfill my own needs, that at least during my lifetime, if the Rebirth Brass Band is still a band, then I'm going to do what I can do to provide the money that's necessary to keep them going. That's, when I was out there, this could be nowhere else but New Orleans.

RH: So, what are your plans with the Foundation now, and what are your plans for yourself?

BJ: I'm going to be retiring as the Director of the Foundation soon. And I'm still going to work with the Foundation, and guide them through the next tiers of fundraising. We released our new, our plan for the next three years, and we're going to try our darndest to raise $25,000,000. We're at least going to let people know that that's what we think it's

going to take to bring back New Orleans music. And we have a plan, which is something more than I can say for the city, and for the federal government. We actually have in writing something that I can give you, that says, this is where, this is why we need $25,000,000. And this is where the money's going to go, and this is who it's going to bring back to New Orleans, and this is, these are real solutions to a real problem.

RH: And why are you retiring from the Foundation?

BJ: I'm retiring because of fatigue, and because it's time for me to pursue my own musical interests, and to figure out once and for all, what to do with this space, because I don't see it being able to sustain itself for at least, you know-- I can't even estimate how long it's going to be. If it-- our business is off 90 percent. So, if business comes back ten percent a year--

RH: That's too much.

BJ: -- it's going to take us nine years to get back to where we were. I don't know that it's going to take that long. I just know that when I'm on tour, and I was in New York City talking to someone, for whatever reason, some, it clicked in my head how ridiculous it would sound if someone right now told me they were going on vacation to New Orleans, or how ridiculous it would sound if they said, oh, I'm thinking about moving to New Orleans. I'm looking for work. I think I'm going to go to New Orleans. I'm not saying it's right. I'm just saying it's a little strange to think, to hear someone say that. When I met a couple the other night who were here on their honeymoon, I was so taken aback that they made this conscious effort. And I engaged them, invited them over to the Hall, and they said, well, we wanted to, you know, to bring some money down here. We wanted to do our little part to get the economy going. (Sigh).

RH: So, you're going to try to do something here with Preservation Hall?

BJ: Yes, we're going to-- I don't know. We're eventually going to need a larger organization that is endowed, that can come in and can care for this place the way that it needs to be cared for, to ensure-- the only way that I can see that this music, and the musicians playing here in the Preservation Hall, can survive, is if a larger organization, like the National Park Service, the Historic New Orleans Collection, or the Smithsonian, or Tulane come in, and take over and endow it. And you know, let me show-- teach them the ropes, show them how it's done. And then just-- you know, the-- sometimes you have to-- I mean, that's what I'm learning now, is that you have to be able to know when it's time to cut your ties and to hand something like this over to someone else. And I think that that time is upon us, where it's time, where something this culturally significant needs to belong in the hands of some, of an organization or institution that can guarantee its future.

RH: Not necessarily as a musical venue, or yes.

BJ: That would always be part of anything that I would ever agree to, that this room, for perpetuity, is always dedicated to music, New Orleans music.

RH: Whatever shape that music is, or--

BJ: Yeah, I--

RH: -- because you've already said you didn't like the, just the sense of an archive of music, you know, someone who--

BJ: I don't like--

RH: -- just does the--

BJ: I don't want this to ever be Disneyland, and I don't want it to be recreating something that existed. I want it to have the energy and the vibrance of what our culture is today.

And that's what Preservation Hall has always been. The music that we play here today, although it has the same instrumentation, and his grandfather used to play here, and his father used to play here, my dad used to play here, it doesn't sound like it did. It's the same with red beans and rice. It's still got the-- you still use the same ingredients, except we just go about cooking it a little different. We got gas stoves today. They used to have to use wood. You know, we can go to, you know, we just have to go to the A & P to get all of our ingredients, and they used to have to go to the butcher, and they used to have to go to the dry goods store, and the vegetable man to make theirs. So the-- ultimately, we arrive at the same thing, the same pot of red beans, ultimately. And that's how I think of New Orleans music, that the soul of the music is the same soul that has been in this city for over 200 years. It's still, in every note that comes out of any of the musicians that play here, you just, all you need to do is ask them what their last names are.

RH: You mean the family names?

BJ: Family names. Barbarin, you know. His great uncle played with Louis Armstrong. Lastie. His whole family basically runs the Ninth Ward, you know, played with everybody, Fats Domino, all the way back. John Brunious is, you know, fourth generation jazz musician. Carl Le Blanc.

RH: Let me ask you another question, because you've got an incredible commitment to things larger than yourself.

BJ: Yeah.

RH: (laughter) And--

BJ: And I'm pretty big.

RH: So, what-- do you see in any of this past year, that is any of your sense of identity as a Jew, as a, watching your family function in the Civil Rights movement is certainly

coming from their Jewish sensibilities. Is any of it kind of consciously come to the fore, and informed some of what you do?

BJ: I definitely know that my father's Judaism had a, played a major role in the way that he made decisions, the way that he processed information. It was very Tal-- how would you say, Talmudic?

RH: Yeah, that's--

BJ: You know. He didn't talk a lot, and you know, we all know that just because you're not talking doesn't mean there's nothing going on in your head. When you're not talking, there's more going on in your head. And he didn't talk a lot, so that just leads me to believe that there was always this, him balancing this information. He didn't make a lot of decisions. Decisions he did make were, always seemed to be the right ones, and I think it's, well, because he didn't make a lot of decisions, and because he took his time making the decisions and thinking about all of the aspects of, and repercussions of the decisions that he made.

RH: So, it's almost like a process and approach to life.

BJ: Oh, definitely. That's what I've gotten from Judaism more than anything, is a-- you know, my wife's not Jewish, and she thinks it's hilarious when I get around my Jewish friends, or my family, you know, and the "oy vey's," and the whatever, the whole thing comes out. And she-- you know, it's like, oh, don't be, you know, the hand gestures, and the bickering. And it's so much a part of my childhood, and my grandmother, you know, just, oh, don't be that way, you know. And you never took anything, and nothing was ever taken so seriously. It was-- and I see that in a lot of Western countries in Europe, that, in Italy, you know, that the duh-duh duh-duh duh-duh-duh-duh-duh. And then, you know, the big hug, and then everything's OK. It's almost a process that you have to get to, and I always-- and I saw that in the old Jewish men at temple. You know, they would

bicker and shout and yell, and well, you know, what are you doing, what are you talking about, oy yoy, yoy yoy! And everything would, you know--

RH: You're still in the same family, even though you're bickering.

BJ: Oh, they're, yeah, yeah, of course. And-- no, I've always admired my dad's-- I mean, he wasn't-- I mean, he and I only talked about religion one time when I asked him if he believed in God. One time, I was really young, you know. He said, yes, and that was about the extent of our religious conversations. He was definitely more of a role model than he was-- he was a teacher through being a role model, for me.

RH: Has the Jewish community, you think, played-- have you-- do you have any comments on its-- how it's played into this culture that is so much a part of who you are? The larger Jewish community, you know?

BJ: Yeah, there is a-- it's interesting. The synagogues in town that I find myself attracted to-- the Hasidic synagogue, and then the very liberal synagogues, Sinai-- are, I mean, I had never found myself attracted to Sinai, because of the music and the operatic singing that they used to have there. I just-- you know, when I was growing up, it was like synagogue was where you just, you came in, and you did your blessings, and you did them a certain way to a certain melody. And that was it, you know. And my dad, for him it was like, well, if I'm only going to synagogue for the High Holidays, then it's got to me men on this side, women on this side. You know, it's got to be like, I've got to really feel like I'm in synagogue if I'm going to go to synagogue. You know, if I'm going to go there for four or five hours, and I'm going to really get my religion on. And I grew up with that, you know, that sense of that's what religion is supposed to be. And as I got older, the things that I used to, kind of, excuse, or just not acknowledge, the musical aspects of Judaism, the celebration of Judaism, have now become so beautiful to me. I've seen my cousins attend an amazing synagogue in Nashville, a synagogue that I just could not have ever imagined that this was what Judaism can be, a place where you go and you're

welcome, and the Rabbi is a part of your life, and he's not just a, you know, this greater-than-life figure. He's a-- or not-- and unapproach-- I guess it's more about being unapproachable. I don't ever remember talking to my Rabbi at, when I was getting bar mitzvahed. The only Rabbi that, we had a great Rabbi-- I can't recall his name right now-- who played trumpet at [Chevrah Tillom?]. And he was great. I mean, he played trumpet. He used to come down here and play with the band, and-- yeah, oh, gosh, what is his name? Hoffman-- Rabbi Hoffman.

RH: So, is there an aesthetic that you-- and I don't want to put words in your mouth here, that--

BJ: It's very confusing. I think it's the difference between going to school, where it was fire and brimstone teaching, you know. You didn't like it, you know, get over the desk and you know, this is, well, now do you believe that this is true? OK, good, now go sit down. And having a Rabbi who's unapproachable, more of just like, OK, this is the doctrine, this is it. And then having a Rabbi who's willing to engage his congregation in building a community. And I had never experienced that before. I was, you know, felt like when synagogue was over, everybody went their separate ways. And now, I, you know, attend, I go to the synagogue to see my cousins get bat mitzvahed, and I realize, wow, this is really a community. It's a community not just, in, within these four walls. It's a community outside of these four walls as well. And that was a real eye opener, and all my cousins, and we always comment to each other about how amazing that is, that, wow, we could have never imagined anything like this, growing up in New Orleans.

RH: Really?

BJ: Yeah.

RH: So, you, even now you're kind of removed from what we'd call the Jewish community, per se.

BJ: I am.

RH: Yeah.

BJ: Yeah. I am to a certain-- I am to the degree that I-- I'm very much involved in the sense that I feel strong ties to my Jewish friends. And I find myself always coming back to my Jewish friends in times of need, not consciously. I just-- I think we're just attracted to each other, because we've had this similar cultural upbringing that we can share and experience.

RH: What are you most grateful for this past year?

BJ: Having survived. Having survived. In February, my wife and I, we had separated. And I was living in an apartment, and it's, maybe in March, Narvin Kimball had died. And I just remember just sitting back here in the courtyard, thinking to myself, I can't, this, it's three months into this year, and it has already been the most difficult year of my life, challenging year of my life, stressful year of my life. I started to think that I could compare, I could put all the stress and struggle and challenge and difficulty of all my life before that, including my dad's death-- which is way up there-- you know, that was like the top. And it wouldn't equal what I've had to go through in these three months. And I didn't lose my house.

RH: So, it was hard on your marriage, too, huh?

BJ: It definitely-- we were-- it-- I think it-- I think the storm washed a lot of facades away, and I think that it allowed us to see what our-- the challenges that we were facing individually, and instead of sacrificing our marriage, we wanted to remain friends, and that we decided that it was the healthiest thing to do was for us to, you know, not to physically be in the same house with each other, that, how can you process this? I've often told people, how can you process, how could you imagine, how could a Native American looking out into the ocean, 400 years ago, process seeing an oceanliner go

by? How-- I mean, this is something beyond-- you know, something they could even fathom. I mean, so how could we ever fathom, how can we process what's happened? I mean, I don't think any of us were prepared. Whatever prepares you to process something like this? I mean, what's the most tragic thing that's happened to any of us in our lifetime?

RH: Well, until that moment, your father's--

BJ: And to-- yeah, it was my father's death was the most tragic thing that happened to me. And I know-- I have friends who've lost loved ones in very-- in-- have been shot. I've had friends who've died in car accidents. I've had-- I've known friends who, you know, died, you know, way before their time. And nothing could have ever prepared any of us emotionally for this. I mean, I really believe that you have to go to Vietnam for the close-- that's the closest thing that we have, in terms of being able to study the effects of what we have gone through as New Orleanians. I always tell people, I said, you can't-- don't, whenever you start feeling weird and crazy, I said, don't beat yourself up about it. And most importantly, don't take it out on other people. Have, you have to find a way to process the information yourself. And sometimes that means not being around people, and not being around your wife. And that's another reason why I'm pissed off.

RH: What's that?

BJ: No, I'm saying, how-- you know, that-- here's something that could have been avoided. Nobody will deny that this could have been avoided, and yet, we're all affected by it. Even if we didn't have a loss, if we just live in the city, we've been affected-- no, everybody lost something. Everybody has a story. There's 1.2 million stories of what happened, and each one's more amazing than the next.

RH: Well, everybody's way of life was certainly changed, no matter where the-- if-- even if they lived uptown.

BJ: Exactly. Yeah. And, yeah, I'm-- I don't hate anybody. I'm just angry, just really, you know, angry about that it happened, and that it's still happening. And we're a year out.

RH: What do you do for comfort? What gives you comfort, what helps you--

BJ: Music. Playing music. Being with my friends, having projects to work on, recording projects. Definitely being with my friends. Writing. I go to Florida to the beach a couple times a month to get away. And every time I go, and you're there, and you breathe the air, and then immediately when you come back and you hit New Orleans East-- even before that. When you hit New Orleans East, though, it really-- that's when it all comes together. You get to New Orleans East, and you drive through this ghost town for five miles.

RH: It's like you're entering this other world again.

BJ: Yeah, it is another-- it's a battle zone. It's a battle zone.

RH: This has been a great interview, and I really appreciate how much you've given--

BJ: Oh, gosh--

RH: -- to me.

BJ: -- we've been here for, you know, probably--

RH: Yeah. Quite awhile. Is there anything else-- I mean, we've covered a lot of territory. Is there anything else you want to talk about, anything else you want to say?

BJ: I mean, I've got-- a lot of the experiences that I've had since the hurricane have been very personal. And I also said that I wasn't-- when the anniversary came, and you know, everybody said, what are you going to do, duh duh duh, and the memorials and blah blah blah? And I drove a couple days before the 29th back to the Ninth Ward. I go out there

a couple times a week, because as a child I used to go out there, to the lower Ninth Ward over the industrial canal. We used to go out there to Sister Gertrude Morgan's house.

RH: Right, the spiritual church.

BJ: Yeah. Everlasting Gospel Mission. And she was an artist, and used to perform here, and have church services here. And we used to go see her in the lower Ninth Ward. And her house was washed away. And I go back to her house. I mean, I don't know if you know the whole story about Sister Gertrude Morgan. She would-- we used to preach on the street corners here on the Quarter, and she used to write scripture on whatever-- on pieces of paper napkins, cans, bottles, tables. She would write-- she would just--

END OF AUDIO FILE 3

BEGINNING OD AUDIO FILE 4

RH: So, tell me about Sister Gertrude.

BJ: She-- Larry Borenstein, the gallery owner from here, used to encounter her on the street corners, and invited her here to paint and display her artwork and perform. And that's-- and I got to know her when we used to-- she stopped coming to the Quarter, and we used to go see her back in the lower Ninth Ward. And her house, very, very small house, and the-- her whole front lawn, and everywhere around her house was four-leaf clovers. And I-- it's one of those things that you don't believe until you see it, because you always hear about the four-leaf clover, you know, the pot of gold at the other end of the rainbow. And here's this house in the Ninth Ward, with a lawn of four-leaf clovers. And I don't know-- I mean, I think, at some point, everybody looks for a four-leaf clover. Have you ever found one?

RH: No. Three-leaf, everywhere.

BJ: Everywhere. Everywhere you look. I think--

RH: Three-leaf.

BJ: -- four-leaf clovers are like one in 10,000. And right after the hurricane, when I first came back to New Orleans, I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't drive anywhere in the city. I just mentally, I just couldn't, I didn't have the wherewithal to go anywhere. And one early Sunday morning I woke up, and I went to the hardware store to get some things to fix up around the house, and I just decided to start driving. I don't even think I decided, I just started driving. And I started to drive out towards the Ninth Ward. And as I got closer to the Ninth Ward, I decided that I was going to drive around as much as I needed to, until I found Sister Gertrude Morgan's house, that I was going to go up and down each street methodically, not knowing at the time what this looked like. And came over the Clayborn Street Bridge and saw the barge that had gone through the levee and was sitting on top of the school bus, and got into the Ninth Ward, and realized you couldn't get up and down most of the streets. So, as I'm coming down the bridge, I just keep driving straight, and I swear to God, I don't know if you've-- have you ever read, I don't know, been reading a book and realize you get to the bottom of the page and you didn't realize what you just read?

RH: Right.

BJ: I don't know what that sensation is. So, I mean-- (laughter). And you don't even realize, know what you've been thinking about. So you have to go back, and wait, what the heck did I just-- I was in that place. And all I remember is making, I made one turn on Decaffin (sp?) Avenue, and drove, and made one more left, and the street didn't have-- there were no street signs up anywhere. And I-- the car stopped. And I just kept saying to myself, I said, "This can't be her house. This can't be it. This can't be it." I said, I just, I was praying. I said, "God, don't let this be it, because I don't think I could take it if this is her house." And it was-- it's just a foundation now. And I went in, closed my eyes, bent

over, and picked the first thing that I touched, sat down on her steps and just sat there. And I didn't open it. And I just-- I didn't have the energy. I knew that if I opened it and it was a four-leaf clover, that that was going to be it for me. And you know, opened it, and it was a four-leaf clover. I couldn't, you know-- that was a-- I haven't told that story, because people don't understand it. I don't understand it. I don't think miracles are meant to be understood. They're just supposed to be accepted. And that was one of many that I've experienced since I've been back here. So, I go there a lot, and it's a spiritual journey for me.

RH: This little place, this one place.

BJ: What-- yeah.

RH: The foundation, the slab of--

BJ: Yeah, of her house. The house was actually-- stopped by a church. It floated-- it's still there. The only reason it's still there is because I went out there with spray paint, orange spray paint, and wrote on the side of her house, Historic Landmark, Birthplace of Sister-- you know, and I just wrote Historic Landmark, Do Not Demolish, Order of-- and I made something up, you know. And I wrote it on all the sides of the house. And it's the only house that hasn't been demolished on her block.

RH: Wow. Well, she had you working for her.

BJ: Yeah (laughter). And then I went back to the Ninth Ward around August 29th, you know. I go out there to meditate, and I was coming down the same bridge again-- and actually, another trip I took out there, I have to tell this story first to make sense of this other one-- I brought Doug Brinkley out there. My wife used to work for Doug at the Eisenhower Center, and now he's teaching at Tulane, and he's been a mentor for her, and I've become close with him. And I brought him to the Ninth Ward, to show him around. And I brought him to the barge to see, and he was writing down the numbers,

made a couple phone calls and found out who the parent company that owned the barge was. Owned by a French company called Lefarge, which is this gigantic shipping company, the fifth largest company in France, he tells me. Lefarge-- so, they get an injunction to not destroy the barge, and then they get another injunction to remove the barge. And I watch the barge, and this barge, in 48-- 36 hours, get dismantled, once the courts decide that it-- or, whoever-- I don't know who-- what wrangling took place to get them to, you know. Defense, the plaintiff attorneys didn't want the barge destroyed, because they wanted it, there was evidence. And for, you know, whoever stepped in made this thing disappear (snaps fingers) like that. And I watched it. I watched it from the first day.

RH: I kind of wondered what happened to the barge.

BJ: Yeah, I watched it. I watched the scaffolding go up, and I watched them take this thing apart, and haul it away on 18-wheelers.

RH: Never to be seen again.

BJ: Un-huh. Not by our eyes. I-- so I go back to the Ninth Ward, just before the hurricane-- I mean, before the anniversary of the hurricane. And I'm coming down the-- I'm like, I'm looking at the neutral ground. And it's kind of drizzling out, and they have all these tents set up, and they're pouring cement there. And I'm like, what the heck's going on? There's lights set up like they're going to be working all night long. And sure enough, they're building a memorial, you know, the week before the anniversary, they're scurrying to get this memorial built. And I'm driving, and there's five cement trucks lined up, spanking brand new white cement trucks, pouring cement to make this memorial. And I swear, if I hadn't seen it and taken a picture of it with my own eyes, I wouldn't believe it, that the-- all the trucks that were there pouring cement were Lefarge trucks. And I don't know if I'm the only one who sees the irony in that. That's when I realized that this whole thing is just economics, that this whole thing is just capitalism.

RH: Wow. Yeah, irony, isn't my word. I thought criminal.

BJ: Criminal.

RH: Wow.

BJ: Yeah.

RH: So then the 29th.

BJ: 29th, I just got on my bike that morning, and I just knew that I just had to ride. I had to retrace my steps the day of the hurricane-- the day after the hurricane. And I wanted to do it on my bicycle. And so I rode through the city, and I ran into beautiful people, all the people that I needed to run into-- Cyril Neville, Barry from the Louisiana Music Factory. I walked by-- rode my bike by the guy who preaches out on Canal Street, who wears the umbrella on his head, the rainbow umbrella. And I went by, waved at him, gave him the "be strong" fist. And he had his bible, and he just-- he went like this. He just stood there. I stopped my bike. I couldn't believe it, he just stood there. I ran into my friend who's running the insectarium they're building on Canal Street, got uptown to Canal-- to Whole Foods, and ran into my grammar school principal, who doesn't even live in New Orleans, who lives on the West Bank. I haven't seen her, maybe once since the hurricane. I mean, this woman who created McDonough 15, created this incredible place. And we just-- well, we don't-- we didn't need to speak. We just hugged each other. And she was someone who was very close to my father. And came back downtown, and stopped at a friend's house uptown, just to say "hi". I got this-- I got a text message from her that she was uptown on her bike. And it turns out that she was just a couple blocks away from where I was, and she had ridden the same route, practically, the same route that I had ridden, gone to all the same places. And we had never, we never talked about it. We just ended up at the same places, at Audubon Park, at Tulane, at Whole Foods, Annunciation, the Convention Center.

RH: Wow.

BJ: Yeah. So, that's how I spent the 29th.

RH: I think everybody wanted to do something in their communities. You know, people weren't for the big events.

BJ: I know I wasn't.

RH: At the arena.

BJ: I wasn't.

RH: They just-- because that's what makes New Orleans, it seems like.

BJ: And I didn't want it to be a backslapping thing either. I didn't want it to be, you know, everything's good, we're moving forward, and all right. I'm-- I also made a decision that day, that I wasn't going to talk about my experience anymore, for the year. (laughter) I made a decision that I wasn't going to sit down-- I have to give so many interviews for Preservation Hall. I wasn't going to revisit that with an interviewer who I hadn't had a history with, or who wasn't doing a kind of in-depth story that required more than ten or 15 minutes on the phone. I wasn't going to address my experience in New Orleans anymore, that it's a-- the information's there, the basic outline of what happened is there. If you need to find it, you can find it somewhere else. I'm just not going to sit down and cavalier-- and be cavalier about this experience. Because I can't speak about it without it being emotionally draining. I know I'm going to go home and just, you know, pass out tonight.

RH: Yeah. This is a special gift you're giving, and hopefully a future to giving it to a lot of-- to the future.

BJ: To the future. Yeah.

RH: So, thank you.

BJ: Oh, thank you. It's been really enjoyable.

RH: I appreciate it.

BJ: (inaudible)…Katrina.

RH: You did?

BJ: Yeah.

RH: Where was she?

BJ: My friend found her and Louis Armstrong's head, and Professor Longhair, in a trash bin.

RH: You're kidding?

BJ: Yeah. They saw the red hat sticking out.

RH: My word.

BJ: They couldn't figure out what it was, and they-- they were coming home from Jazz Fest. And they go in and they look-- they start digging around, and they pull out-- they start pulling the heads out. Yeah. So, one day I walk into the Hall one day, and he had snuck it in here.

RH: (laughter)

BJ: You know. (laughter) It scared the living bejesus out of me. Because nothing has ever been added or changed or anything in here.

RH: Oh, my gosh. So, this was the first time in a long time, huh?

BJ: That something had been added.

RH: Oh, wow. Well, she kind of-- maybe she's going to oversee, you know, the next phase of Preservation Hall.

BJ: Yeah. Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]