

Lonnie Zarum (Schaffer) Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton, interviewing Lonnie Schaffer at 2230 Carondelet, which is the sanctuary of Anshe Sfard in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is August 30th, 2007. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Lonnie, do you agreed to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Lonnie Schaffer: Yes.

RH: Lonnie, could you just tell me, first off, the year you were born?

LS: I was born in 1967.

RH: OK. And where were you born?

LS: I was born in London in the United Kingdom.

RH: And talk a little bit about your Jewish and your general education, and then how you ended up in New Orleans.

LS: OK. I came from -- I come from a Modern Orthodox background. I went to Jewish school all the way through from nursery to high school in London, and that was a very excellent experience, being that it was like a big community school, and we were able to do all the things that other kids did, but in a Jewish environment. So sports and arts and everything was open to us. And the school was in the middle of London, so that was an experience. After that, I went to university. My degree is in performing arts. I was a major in dance and education, and I continue to do that today. And then, how I came to be in New Orleans is a -- my husband is from Montreal. We met and married and

London, spent two and a half years there, and then business took us to New York. From there to Dallas for seven years, and then we had one child in New York, three in Dallas, and then we really wanted to leave, and come to somewhere that was more cultural. And since my husband does a lot of business through the port here, in New Orleans, we decided to come here and try it out since it's a more European-style city. And both of us coming from more European-type cities, felt there was more of a match here. So, we came here in 2002.

RH: How did you find being Jewish in New Orleans? Especially since you've lived in a lot of other places. What's that like?

LS: Well, my first impression was when we came to visit, was that there was all these different shuls and communities, but I think they were holding the Lehrman (sp?) Learning Series, and that it was really cool to see all these communities coming together for learning. And that was something that I was kind of pleased about, because sometimes you find in the biggest cities that there's a lot more factions, and this person doesn't talk to that person, and this synagogue doesn't get on with that one. But for some reason, it just seemed to work more here. And it is more of a struggle, definitely being Jewish here or being observant, because I think there's the different levels of what you do and what you don't do. Keeping kosher is definitely more -- you have to try harder. Because in New York, everything's right in front of you in most supermarkets. Having the feeling of Shabbat, sometimes, is a little bit of a challenge, because if everybody around you is, I don't know, going to play soccer in the morning, and you're going to shul, it's different. So, it's trying to keep your Jewish, or your observance, that you want to keep for your children -- it's trying to just to keep it alive, so that you can feel that you're Jewish and that there's some things that you want to keep special for yourself or your family. So I definitely think that you make more of an effort when you're here.

RH: You have four children?

LS: Yes.

RH: And why don't you just tell us their names and their ages?

LS: OK. We have four children. Arianne (sp?) is the oldest. She is twelve and a half now. She just celebrated her bat mitzvah here. Saul is ten, Talia is eight, Ana Renata (sp?) is seven.

RH: And are they -- where are they going to school?

LS: They all go to Lusher charter school. It's an arts/alternative school. A public school.

RH: So, they're not having the same kind of Jewish day school experience that you're having.

LS: No. We do Hebrew school and Jewish studies here at the shul on Sunday, and then we supplement at home, just by doing what we do. And the kids go to Jewish camps in the summertime. And any chance that when we're visiting family, or even after Katrina, there were two and a half months at Jewish day school that I went to as a kid.

RH: Oh, really?

LS: And they went there. Loved it. We do what we need to do. What works best for our family, here.

RH: So, why don't we get into the Katrina story? We'll just kind of dive in here, and tell me where you were, and when you became aware of Katrina.

LS: Where we were, we were here. It was a Friday evening. We'd heard that -- we thought Katrina, basically it was, we knew had hit Florida. It was supposed to go round the panhandle and go up the west side and then go back into Florida again. And we all know that didn't happen. But we didn't have an inkling that it was really coming in until,

I'd say, Saturday morning. Now at that point, we don't really have TV on Friday night, so Saturday morning. So, we came to shul, and some people kind of knew that it was coming, and some people didn't. In fact, one of my daughters was at a birthday party. She was at Prytania, and everyone was talking about, what are you going to do? I happened to be here with another couple of kids, and people were talking about the same thing. So, Shabbos morning, basically, we thought, OK, well this thing is heading a lot closer. So Sunday, we were basically boarding up our house. We had a generator. We'd already evacuated last year for Ivan, which was a nightmare. Twenty-two hours in a car to Houston was not fun. And decided at that point we were actually going to stay for the moment because we had all these things ready for our house. And like I say, I guess when you were bitten once, you just didn't want to go through that again, specifically, because there was a big media hype about that. So we decided at that point to stay. But it came to Sunday afternoon, and our entire street was a bit of ghost town. There were odd people here or there.

RH: Where exactly do you live?

LS: We live on Audubon Street uptown, near Tulane. So we boarded up the house, we had done everything, and then we thought, you know what? Let's see if we can get out. So we attempted to go out, and we got as far as just the other side of the airport. Very quickly. Through Veteran's, stayed off the I-10, which was basically a traffic jam all the way there. It was a car lot. Nobody could move. So we did that, and then we didn't move for forty-five minutes, and we could see really big black clouds rolling in behind us on Sunday night. And we thought, not a good idea is being stuck on the I-10 during a hurricane, and decided either to try another route on 61. That was just as bad, and the rain started. And we decided that this was a bad move and that we should go home. At least we knew the house was safe in that -- boarded up, we had a generator, we had gas, we had food, we had water. We had all the basic necessities, as we believed. And so, we went back and brought the kids downstairs to sleep, and I got all the candles

ready, and everything that we could possibly do. And just waited, basically. And about 1:20 in the morning. That would be Monday morning, AM, that we know the power went off. We think it was turned off, because nothing was very strong at that point, still. And around seven o'clock, it started to get really windy and rains coming down, and the howling, and all the things you'd expect from a hurricane. And we kind of watched it. We were inside a very -- a sheltered area with no windows. But occasionally, we'd go out and explore in the house and look out through the top windows to see what was going on around the house, and we'd get a pretty good view. It is quite high up. See the water being blown down the street, the trees bending over in half. Heard the tree hit our neighbor's roof, and just crash into it -- a massive, massive tree just ... We saw our other neighbor on the corner. The water just pushed down their entire fence, and they now had a pool in the backyard that was not there before. It was -- though it was a little nervy, it was actually very exciting to kind of watch. And we kind of had to keep it light, because we had four children there, as well. And not to get them scared or -- you know, it was an adventure that we were going to be going through at this point.

RH: Wow. So you did have a generator, so did you --

LS: We had a generator, which I think we have off during the actual hurricane. But it stopped. The hurricane passed by about four o'clock in the afternoon, and we'd go outside and take stock, and we see there's about two feet of water. So, it's coming up to the second step of our house. Our house is raised five feet, thank God. You just see what's going on. So, that was that evening. And then the next day, it was Tuesday morning, and we basically had a plan that we'd kind of do some work stuff in the morning and then rest in the afternoon because then it was just going to be so hot. I mean, we weren't running ACs, we were running a fridge, and you know, the TV to see what was kind of going on as well, and that kind of thing. So, while I was in the water, pulling out branches and debris, so that either a boat could get through, or the mosquitoes weren't going to just start living on the street with us. My husband was dealing with sucking gas

out of cars, basically, just to make sure that we could easily access it for the generator. So, you know, everyone was kind of doing their thing. We heard around, I don't know, maybe twelve-ish, or something, that the levees broke. Didn't really mean that much to me at that point, I have to say. Because we figured the pumps will kick in, and you know, it'll just take all the water out again. But all the water that had gone down Tuesday morning, you know, pretty much back to level, was starting to very, very slowly start coming back. Very slowly. Didn't even notice it for a couple of hours, in fact, at one point. And around, I'd say six, it started to come up a little faster. And you know, it has already taken a good day to get to us. And then I had met a few people on our block -- on our street, rather, not block, but a couple of blocks down -- who were also helping to pull things out of the road, and one of them was a medical student. And like I said, about in the afternoon, he said he was going to go and find out about the lay of the land, how much water, where it stopped. So he's lifting his bike up high and walking through the water until he get to some bike-able area. And he comes backs, he said the water goes down to about Freret Street, which is about ten, eleven, blocks from where we live. And then it seemed to be dry. So we did invite, we said come in, have something to eat, something to drink, because he didn't have power and all the rest of it. So, we did that, and he'd watch on the TV that the mayor has announced that the water is going to be eight to ten feet by tonight, and that's going to be bad. So he went back to his place and managed to get his roommate's car -- truck working. His old truck. And he brings it, apparently to Broadway, which is the next block over from us, and there's a [cam bus? Canvas?], so he's able to leave it on there without the water damaging it. And he walked -- trudges back through the water, and he gets -- tells one neighbor he's leaving, comes back to us, tell us he's leaving. And as he's turning to go away, he says would you like a ride? And my husband and I look at each other as we're trying to schlep this big generator up to the second floor, going, uh, yes. We'd like to do that. Because we realize that our cars were going under water steadily at this point, and the water is all the way to the backyard. Two feet there, it's about three feet at the front now. And we don't

know when it's going to stop. So it's seven o'clock, 7:30, and we start getting the kids ready. Everyone go and collect your bag --

RH: This is like, Wednesday?

LS: This is Tuesday night.

RH: Tuesday night.

LS: Yeah. The cars are already making noises. All the electrics are starting to get damaged. They're not going to drive out at all. So we knew that we couldn't leave in that way. Except we had this very kind offer. So the kids all kind of got stuff together in a little duffel bag, and their own things. And my son, meanwhile, was trying to build a raft. He's like, mum, I've got it, I've got this raft. It's the top of a bench. And here's a piece of plastic blind. There's one problem. It can only take one person. So here he is at nine years old, or eight years old, and just trying to be helpful. Just trying to do the only thing that he could do was that, so ... You know, they all get their bags, and we carry the kids out on our backs, because my husband's like, well let them walk. I'm like, they're going to be under it. It's like here. So we carry them out, get into the car, come back, I did about three journeys, backwards and forwards, with the kids. And the last -- on the last one out, actually -- and by then, it's pitch black. It's totally dark. You can't see anything at all on the street. And I go back to get food for the kids -- and he's like, don't worry about the food. I'm like, there's nowhere to get anything on the way. You're not going to be able to get anything. So I walk out, and the water is here. I'm walking half a block up the street, down Cohn Street, and I walk into a tree because I don't see it. And then I just keep walking. When I hit Broadway, they've got the headlights facing me, so I can actually walk down the street, and the water's up here. I was trudging down the street, and then we get everybody in the car. There's eight of us in this Nissan Pathfinder, I think -- 4x4. Whatever. Old, old truck. And all the kids are dry because they've been carried. And the three adults are soaking wet because we carried them all. They've got

-- my neighbor has her large poodle in the back with anything that we managed to decide to take with us. And then we get in the car, and there's water -- obviously quite high. And I'm praying that this thing is not going to stall. I'm like, please don't stall, please don't stall. And we drive down the street, and there's a tree, so we have to go down into the water a little bit more to get down it -- around it. And eventually, after about five, ten minutes, we get past the water, thank God. And then we just head straight down to the river, over the levee, and then we got diverted by National Guard. I'm not sure exactly. I know we go up over the levee, at one point, and then I'm not really sure. I had a child on me for the next four hours. And so, that's how we got out of the actual city.

RH: Wow. Where did you end up at night?

LS: At night, we found a shelter in East Baton Rouge. There's a gymnasium in some -- I'm not sure where, exactly. I just know it was East Baton Rouge. So they gave us blankets and -- here's the floor, basically. Lots of people in there. Very quiet, in a way. Everyone's kind of like, collecting their thoughts. Like I say, we traveled with our neighbor's large poodle who -- and we arrived there about midnight, and one of my kids had -- everybody had showered and had put on clean clothes before this all had happened, and they were all clean still, before dinner. And we had carried them out. My, now eight-year-old -- then, I guess, six and a half-year-old, whatever -- is wearing this little flowered dress. Her hair is all brushed down, she's wearing a little headband, and she's taking the dog for a walk around the shelter. It was at midnight. It was the most surreal picture. And everyone is kind of looking, and just, she looked like she should be somewhere else, like by the park, or -- but it was just a little bit of --

RH: As if she was walking the dog in Audubon Park.

LS: Yeah. And that's what it looked like. And they were just looking at her doing this. So this little light coming down. I don't know, it was just kind of, just trying to keep certain things normal for the kids, makes you just look at things in a different way. It doesn't

become about you, it becomes making things OK for them. So we slept on the floor. About five o'clock, I was so cold, I had to get up because I'm still wet and stuff. So I go outside, and the light starts coming up. The next day, we got a ride to friends of ours whose kids are at LSU in Baton Rouge. And we all traipse in there with all the people who had been in our car, and everyone goes to have a shower, and they made food for us. And we just sit -- and like everybody else says it -- and watch the TV. What the heck's going on? And we just see. Meanwhile, my husband's hired -- managed to hire a car from Baton Rouge. Everyone's like, "Well, how'd you manage that?" I said, "Well, I guess nobody flew in, so all these cars are still here, waiting to be rented." So he rented that. And then we drove to Houston that night. So that would have been Wednesday night. Stayed overnight in Houston, and his company flew us to Chicago the next day to stay in a hotel, and figure out what we're going to do now, basically. So, we get there, and we've got very little with us, of course. And I remember walking down the street with the kids on Michigan Avenue, and looking at the homeless people on the ground, you know, panhandling for -- and I just felt that they were in a better position than we were at that point, just because we just didn't know where we were going to go. We knew we couldn't go back, and we didn't know what was going to happen over the next few days. We were in what we had, and that was it. And it was just weird, listening to people on their cell phones, talking about the most mundane things, complaining about the smallest things, and you just have a different appreciation of the world after something like that. And so we were a couple of days in Chicago, and then we went to my sister-in-law's house in Madison. And their whole community had collected whatever you could possibly think of for children and people. The whole of their downstairs floor was covered in boxes and donations and new stuff, and certificates, and da, dada, dada -- everything. So we sifted through that for the weekend, had Shabbat there. And we went back to Chicago for a couple of days. And the company wanted to put us up in a condo in Chicago for a month, and sounds very nice and everything, but I'm thinking, what are we going to do after a month? You know, obviously still not going to be able to go back.

The kids need to go to school. And so, I decided that I should take the kids to London. Where my family was there, all the Jewish holidays were coming up. I did not want to be in a strange place, in a condo. I don't care how nice it could possibly be. But, just on your own, like this. So we agreed -- my husband and I agreed -- that I would take the kids to London. And we stayed two months in London at my parents' house, and they -- the kids went to the Rosh Pinah Day School, which they loved.

RH: So, and that was your day school.

LS: That was the day school, although it was in a new building now, it was where I grew up, basically. And my brother and my sister. And so here and now, my children, in time of need, going there. And they were so welcoming and so warm. It was really -- it was really good. And the kids were just -- they'd not been in a Jewish school before where they could -- you know, they felt so comfortable. Lunchtime was amazing. They're like -- can we eat here? And they're like, yes, you can have anything you want. And they loved it. That was great. They didn't have to ask and check what was kosher, what wasn't. So that was a really good experience. And meanwhile, my husband is in Chicago. He's working because they have offices there. And he's feeling, obviously, a bit lonely. His family is not with him. He'd spent a few days with us. And he wanted us to come back and join him. And he managed to secure an apartment or a condo. And we ended up going back at the end of October, to Chicago, where we had a place on Lakeshore Drive, and the kids were signed up to go to the Walt Disney Arts magnet school. Not the best experience, I have to tell you. This school was not as warm. The kids felt kind of like, out of place. The children at the school hadn't been told where our children were coming from, and so I think that was difficult. The Jewish community was fabulous. The people in the condo, "What can we do to help?" I'm like, well, Friday night would be really nice because I'd have nothing to cook with. And it was just very difficult. So we were invited out for Friday night meals. And we went to shul on Sabbath, and people invited us to come, and that was really nice. It kind of felt a bit normal.

RH: What synagogue were you --

LS: We went to Anshe Shalom. Rabbi Lopatin's shul in Chicago.

RH: What was the name of the Rabbi?

LS: Rabbi Lopatin. L-O-P-A-T-I-N. Yeah, Lopatin. There is actually something else before that. The very first Shabbat we spent out of New Orleans -- I thought it was Madison -- it wasn't Madison. We were in Chicago, and it was coming up to Shabbat, and I'm thinking, what are we going to do for Shabbat here? It's a bit strange. And my sister-in-law in London -- married to my brother -- her dad was actually coming to Chicago for his nephew, or cousin's bar mitzvah in Evanston, which is a suburb, as you know, of Chicago. And she says, "Well, what can I do from here?" I'm like, "Can you get us an invite? Can you get us an invite for Friday night?" She says, "Sure, I'm sure we can do that." So they call up, and they're having -- but I mean, they've got a lot of a family coming in, and they invited us in, and it was just very special just sitting there, doing Shalom Aleichem. Just singing that, and all these people are there. I haven't actually thought about this for a while. And just, it seemed so normal. It seemed so normal.

RH: That must have been -- that was your first Shabbat. Oh my God, it must have really felt like a resting place for a --

LS: It really did. It was something normal in a very un-normal time. So it was very special. And you know, I think the next day, then we went to Madison. But it was very nice to have that and just to feel the -- you know, the warmth. It was good. That's how special I think the Jewish community is when this stuff happens. Because I heard from people from other communities who, you know, not Jewish communities, and they didn't have the same kind of stuff. They had some of it, but not this warm embrace that we got everywhere in the Jewish community, which was just outstanding. In London, the Jewish

community in Chicago. Not the school so much, because it wasn't a Jewish school. That was a mistake. Should have done that. But you do what you -- the choices that you make, kind of thing.

RH: Well, what was that first Shabbat service? Was -- that has to be part of it too. Just the familiarity.

LS: It was Friday night. Yeah, it was in the house, actually. We were just so tired already because it was a bar mitzvah. They did the -- the family held the service in the house so that -- you know, they just had so many people there that they were able to do that without having to go anywhere. So that was -- it was nice.

RH: I'm just stunned by how many places you were so quickly.

LS: We had a lot of travel -- Yes. That whole year, it was more travel than I'd done in a while. My sister ended up getting married in April, that following -- in Israel. So we all traipsed off to Israel in April. But we were already back in New Orleans at that point. But we had so much travel that year, it was just -- it was unreal.

RH: Well, you said the school in Chicago was not a great experience for your kids.

LS: No.

RH: Was part of that their isolation from other people who had experienced what they had experienced?

LS: Obviously, in London, there was nobody else but us, but it was a very different feeling. Like I say, the kids had been taught -- had been spoken to, I guess, before our children had arrived. And the community had, and they knew we were coming. And there was just this warmth, and "What can we do?" The kids -- "Would you like to come over and play?" Just so they felt connected. And that didn't happen at this school in

Chicago. A public school that had such a great reviews. We had actually looked at these before when we were thinking of moving to Chicago. And maybe twenty years ago, it was doing well, but now, it just was not the -- it wasn't like the same community thing. Not like the school we have in New Orleans. The art school, which is so warm and community-minded. And it just wasn't -- I remember walking in the first day. It was actually Halloween, would you believe? So you'd think that that would kind of be kind of a fun time. And the older kids walked into their areas, and they were received quite warm. But I'm walking in with a kindergartner and a first grade, and not one parent comes up to me and says anything at all. Like, "Oh, you're new, welcome. What is it? Da-da, we've heard, da-da." Nothing. Nothing at all. It was very isolating. I have to say. It just -- and I'm a pretty warm person. I can get out there and meet people. And the school started at like eight and finished at like 1:45 every afternoon. That was a bit weird. They took out all recess because the teachers had asked for it, so they'd finish earlier. It just so was not a good fit at all. At all. Which is one of the main reasons we ended up coming back.

RH: So, you were there from --

LS: October 31st. And we finally left January 16th. We were in Florida for a few days in the winter. The grandparents brought us down there just to chill out, literally. Well, warm up, actually, because it was so cold in Chicago. Something else I certainly wasn't used to. The kids -- you know, the snow is fun for a while. Then it gets old when you have to walk through it to school every day. So, I don't know. Chicago is wonderful in the spring and the summer. If you're not used to that winter, it's quite hard. I remember my daughter almost going airborne out of the condo because we lived around the lake. She walked out, and I had to hold her so tight because she nearly flew down the street, it was that strong. So you know, I just think a mixture of many things made it kind of difficult to stay.

RH: So you kind of started into the next school year? January 16th.

LS: Oh yeah. Yeah. Well, actually, the school opened on the 17th of January. So we -- when we were in Florida, our family took a vote. And I'd found out -- I was finding out the school had contacted me, say you need to tell us by a certain date when to come back. So it's about January 5th, and I'd called back and said, "Well, when do you need to know by?" And she said, "Well, basically by about tomorrow. Just to definitely make sure all your children has places, since there's quite a few of them." So I remember going back to it -- we were en route home to Chicago, and we're in Atlanta airport, and we literally have a family meeting in the airport. We sit down, and we talk about how in New Orleans, the school is great -- fabulous school. The kids are going to be there. Obviously, that's most of their day. And everything else around it is a mess, basically. And things are going to be very different. It's not going to be the same. It's going to be difficult. But that's the scenario in New Orleans. In Chicago, everyday life, kind of around you, is kind of normal, but the school was definitely not a good fit. They were having difficulties. They needed -- two of them needed to be in the gifted program. There wasn't space for them. And it was not working out well at all. So, you had a dilemma. And we decided that the school, since the children are in that most of the day, and they needed to have their, kind of, mental health, I think, taken care of more. We decided, everyone took a vote, everybody voted to come back to New Orleans. So we did. We got back that January 16th at nighttime.

RH: What did you just, instead of drive the car to Chicago, you just --

LS: Oh no, we were flying. We had flown already home to Chicago, the 5th or 6th of January. And on the 16th, we flew out again, and that was that. And we came back. And my husband -- the day we came back, he flew off for business for three weeks, so I came back to the house on my own.

RH: Oh my God. Oh, so was this your first time back in the city, on the 16th?

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

RH: And you were with the four children?

LS: Mm-hmm.

RH: What did you do? Where did you go?

LS: We went back to the house. The house had been cleaned up to a certain extent. Like one of the old -- one of the fridges was OK. It was still functioning. It had been cleared when I left. I had already cleared it. The other one had died and had been taken out of all the nastiness that had obviously happened inside that fridge. I just remember our bags and stuff just being in the front hallway for like almost a week, until I could slowly unpack everything. There was no gas in the -- I want to say upstairs -- because it was a duplex, which is now a single-family home. And so we had hot water for baths and stuff downstairs, but not upstairs. I didn't have gas to cook on. I only had a microwave. We did have power, we had water. And it was cold. I do remember it was cold.

RH: People don't realize how cold it can get in New Orleans in the winter, because of the moisture.

LS: Absolutely. So I was looking for the little space heaters because all the R-H-VAC was destroyed. The heating, air conditioning system -- all the ducts run to the house, and the water had reached the porch, so all of that had been saturated. The furnace is gone, the condenser is not work-- everything is not working in that way. So yeah, it was cold, and we're trying to find the heaters to -- we have to heat the rooms because it was cold. But our street was back. Our street was back. Most of our street was back. And the kids going to the school were back. So everybody was very warm. You know, hugs and "How are you doing? And what is going on?" And you know, all that kind of stuff. Basically, we were just getting ready for school the next day. Just get the kids to bed, feed them something. I don't remember whether we -- obviously, we couldn't eat at

home, so we must have gone to get something to eat. And then just got them ready for school the next day. I must have bought them sandwiches because I didn't have any food. And I think Saver's Center was only staying open until six o'clock at that point, I think. It was a very curfew time back then. And so that was that. And the next day, everyone turns up at school. It's my daughter's birthday as well. And school opened with a big -- everyone was so pleased to be back.

RH: So you were there for the first day of Lusher?

LS: Mm-hmm.

RH: Wow. What was that like? You took them to school?

LS: Yeah, yeah. We walk to school, usually. Walk or bike. I can't remember if we biked because I'm sure the bikes were somewhere high up in a shed somewhere. So we walked to school with whatever, and just met up with people, and you know. The whole community hug, kiss, see how everyone is doing. And just everyone in there is just taking a leap of faith that this is going to be OK, because nobody knows. It just all seems so early on. But Kathy Reidlinger, who's the principal there, she gives the opening kind of speech. And you know, basically how brave everybody is to be here, really. And we're going to make it work together. That's it -- and I was lucky because all my kids happen to be on one campus for that next six months. From kindergarten through fifth grade, I had all my kids in one school, on one site. Didn't have to shuffle anybody anywhere. So that was at least nice. They were all together. And Tulane was also doing a healing program for the children because now Lusher and Tulane were twins. They were sending people in, which really helped the children a lot. My son has some difficulties, and he was having a really hard time.

RH: Was it because of Katrina and all the change?

LS: Well, that was part of it. I mean, he had difficulties anyway with change and anxiety and all that, but obviously, this kind of thing doesn't at all help. So that helped. And he couldn't do the -- I remember he couldn't do the class healing things. He had to do it in a smaller group, because he just denied that there was a problem, and he was feeling fine. So, I think he just felt that we went through this, but nobody else did. And you know, there are other people who I think had way worse things. You lose your house entirely, or you get airlifted up in helicopter, or you get boated out of places. You know, it's -- you don't know what other people are feeling, and half the time, when I first have to retell a story about how we get out, you don't realize how bad it is until you watch other people's reaction. And then that's when it first hits you. And that's when I first would feel it in Chicago. Because before that, you're just on automatic pilot, and you're just dealing with that. You know, being strong for the people around you.

RH: What did you do for yourself when you got back? How did --

LS: I think one defense mechanism that women have is that you talk to people. You can talk to your friends or your neighbors. And I think women find that a lot easier to do than men do. So that helped. But as far as time-wise, not very much. I ended up -- people were calling me about the synagogue, and I ended up throwing myself into doing other things because being in the house was so hard because it was so cold. Although I had to do stuff in my house to deal with stuff, it was hard to be there, and to do it on your own for a long time. So I know that I -- not volunteered. I did some subbing work at Lusher. I was asked to teach some of the dance classes while the director was off doing different meetings to get other things. I would do that just because I needed to do something, just to keep my -- not just be thinking about this all the time. The Katrina, the house, the this -- to take my mind out of things. To be -- to be able to be creative still. So in a way, I guess I threw myself into doing more things because it was just so hard to be able to think about stuff. And then people kept calling about the synagogue, and like, you know, please can you do something, because nothing is being done? We started looking at the

shul and seeing how was here and what could be done. And that started another whole chapter of life, just coming back and dealing with Anshe Sfard, and being -- and just trying to get that community back together again.

RH: When you were away, did you -- who were you cont -- did you contact anybody from around New Orleans?

LS: I spoke to some people in our community, and people contacted me when I was in London or Chicago. They had cell phone numbers.

RH: In your -- the Anshe Sfard community?

LS: Yeah, I remember speaking to the president a couple of times back then.

RH: Who was the president?

LS: It was Hyman Talmus (sp?). See what's going on. And not much, unfortunately, was the answer to most of that. And just odd conversations. I'd get a random phone call here or there to see how we're doing, that our phone was working or something. Cell phone they could get through to us still. But contact was very hard, because most people, if they didn't have a cell phone, or if it was a 504 cell phone and it wasn't working because everything was down, you couldn't get a hold of people. So really, it was quite intermittent contact.

RH: Did you realize the federation had a website and did you ever utilize that in any way?

LS: We did. I do remember using it. I remember using it when I was in Madison because various times when my sister, who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and we would be there, I think at Thanksgiving and another time and another time, and I remember going online there because I didn't have a computer at home. I think in London, I might

have checked it out because I remember looking at lists of names, and who was where. And we'd signed on that we were in London. So I know we did. And then I think we signed on that we were in -- had gone to Chicago. So I remember that -- looking at that. But there was a lot of things going on, so...

RH: Right, right. You were kind of in survival mode just with your family.

LS: Absolutely. Right. And we did that with -- and my husband, to his credit, did all that paperwork. Anything that needed to be done with FEMA, or even the Jewish Federation. There were grants to come back. He did paperwork and all that kind of stuff. And I did family stuff and dealt with the schooling and the housing, and ... Well, just making it comfortable for the kids. He would get us housing. So it was just really division of things that everyone had to feel that they were doing something.

RH: So, people were calling you about what can we do for the shul, and to see who's here, and you kind of started to take on a leadership role?

LS: Well, quite honestly, at the time, I didn't really want it, because there was so much happening with my own family, that I thought, well, how am I going to be able to do this and do it successfully? But after a while, we realized that the president was not coming back. He was in Texas, and he's eighty-odd years old. And realistically, he wasn't coming back. So, this is very hard, because it deals with people who I think had very strong attachments to the shul, and couldn't give up things like leadership, and thought that maybe, the people who were here weren't going to do a good enough job, and so didn't want anything to happen at all. So, we had to really fight to get back in. And then once in, we had to fight to have it stay open because there was some problems. And the past leadership didn't want us in here, and actually changed the locks on us.

RH: Changed the locks.

LS: Yeah, a week before Purim.

RH: So, they weren't going to come back, but they weren't going to...

LS: They wanted to try and do it from Texas and tell people how to do what and this, that, and the other. Which, as you -- if you've come back, you couldn't do anything from afar. You have to be here, on the ground, doing it. And pulling people in, and looking at the neighborhood, and talking to the people in the neighborhood. Because it's not just the shul sitting on a block. There's a youth hostel, there's some families, there was a -- this condo that was being -- people were coming back into -- it being constructed. There used to be a halfway house here for people who are mentally ill. I think that was actually closed right before Katrina, and they were build -- they built these condos. So it wasn't just about us on a block, it's about the neighborhood. And you have to be in contact with these people for safety, for seeing how things are running in the neighborhood, what you can do, and these people did not understand that, the people who were still in Texas. And so those of us who stayed, we had a very, very hard time. We were running, even board meetings in the JCC, with a conference call to two people who were trying to run things in Texas. And it came to a point that this is totally ridiculous. There was a vote to put somebody who said who might come back but didn't, as president, and some of the older members decided to go with that vote because they'd been talked into it by, I guess history, and that these people had lived here all their lives. And here was I, a new person. The younger people, or the people who were living here, thought that I would do a better job because I had already changed -- not changed -- had already made other things happen. I had started a Hebrew school. We had been having functions at the synagogue. There were young people coming back in. All those kinds of things that led the younger people -- like I'd say in the forties and something -- to believe that I could do a better job. So it's a bit of a fight. So it comes to the first Rosh Hashanah after the hurricane, and it's 2006, I guess. And the people before us -- the people before us, they'd --

RH: Do you need to stop?

LS: No, it's OK. We're OK. They had hired two student rabbis to come in with their families and had a basically, a very big show about what they were doing. Spent a ton of money that we couldn't afford. And it was not a very fun Rosh Hashanah, because some of us had been locked out at the building for many months, and coming back in, it was very weird, basically. Anyway, after this Rosh Hashanah, the rest of the members --

RH: So where were you having the Hebrew school if you were locked out of the building?

LS: We did it in my house, and at the JCC. That's where we ran Hebrew school. Didn't stop it. We continued at my house and at JCC. JCC was fabulous. Arlene Barron, wonderful. "What do you need, Lonnie? We'll give you -- well, do you need a room? What do you need from me? Anything you want, no problem." So, like I say, here, everyone else here was fabulous, because if you lived here, you understood what it meant to be back. So here we are, we had a rough first rough Rosh Hashanah. Now the older community can see that this other leadership is not going to do anything, really, that's substantial for the shul.

RH: Did they come back for that Rosh Hashanah?

LS: One of them came back. The other one did not come back. And was promising all kinds of things to the community who are looking at each other going, he's not going to be able to do that. There's no money. Where's he going to do this? How's he going to do this? And he wasn't here, would be ordering certain other people on the board to do things. But not here, not hands-on. You need to be hands-on. You got to get in there. You can't just say do this and do that, and expect everybody to run around, and you're just sitting there doing nothing? Not going to happen, unfortunately. So basically, after Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, we had an emergency meeting -- board meeting. No, emergency members meeting and friends of Anshe Sfard. People who were interested to see this place continue. And they had a vote that basically took out the old president

and the new one that had been elected by him. Kind of this weird board meeting vote, and they elected that I'd be the interim president until we had official elections. And that all started in October 2006. The voting went on January 2007. The slate went through, whatever. The named boards -- I became president with this board. The new board. Some of them from the previous board as well. And now we were able to do things. Within four weeks, we had all of our windows redone that were -- that had no glass in them, and it was boarded up, which looked horrible. We had money for our roof. We had the insurance people in here. And things were starting to happen. It was simple as that. And there was a great incentive. My daughter's bat mitzvah was going to be four weeks later. But I remember receiving a check about three days before the bat mitzvah for the insurance of light for the roof. So this is something that should have been done over a year ago. These are the things that our president needed to have been doing and hadn't done. And people were coming into shul. People who would come in sporadically were now coming every week because they felt that they were being part of something. You could feel it. You could feel the community, you could feel that people were calling. "What can we do?" And I don't know, there was a -- instead of this real drain of energy and anxiety about stuff, you just felt there was some hope at one point. It was hard. I know I lost about five, ten pounds at one point, which is not -- that's a lot for somebody of my build, so it's not good. Not good at all, not good at all. And it was really all the stress and anxiety of all dealing with this and my family, and just living here. And that was very hard. And then also we'd had a request. We'd been given money from the Harry [Liverant?] Fund, and we were being fought about that. The previous leadership was giving us difficulty about claiming it. They were saying, oh, now we're not running it. You're not Orthodox, da-da-da. Hopefully, we feel that this Rosh Hashanah -- by this Rosh Hashanah, this will be sorted out. And that the money that was left for us to continue the shul and to be, you know -- we can actually use it. Because it's been a struggle. They're saying, "Well, why don't you have a rabbi?" We've got no money. You're holding it. You won't let us get to it. Anyway, hopefully, that's going to be sorted

out.

RH: So, they were saying you weren't Orthodox because you didn't have a rabbi?

LS: But we hadn't had a rabbi -- they hadn't had a rabbi before. We've only had a part-time rabbi before that. They'd hired this gentleman who just came in, was Mr. Nahum Amosi, to come in and lead services and be the -- although he's not -- he doesn't have *semicha*, he's as qualified. And that seemed to be OK for them, but suddenly for us, it wasn't going to be OK anymore. And my thought was, yes, we do need a rabbi, but we need to build our community first because we've got to be able to attract somebody who wants to come down here with a family and say yes, we are worth building. And as people were coming back and bringing their children, and people were making a commitment to the shul by joining -- actually joining as opposed to just arriving, which we -- this shul has always had open doors. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, you don't need a ticket to come in. Just come, right? So people were making a commitment to come in. And that, as other people see these people making a commitment, they want to do more. They tell their friends, they start coming in. I mean, it's still considered a small community, but the people here are very -- it's like a family. It's really nice.

RH: Well, this is really, I would say the only shul that's grown since the hurricane, from my understanding.

LS: Well, we weren't that big to start with, but you know --

RH: True.

LS: But you know, like I say, people who would stop in occasionally were now coming more regularly and actually signing on the dotted line, as it were, and showing the commitment to the synagogue.

RH: Do you know how many are here now?

LS: We always say we have about fifty families. I don't know exact numbers. A lot of those are older widows or widowers, but there's more younger ones coming in, and that's nice. That's nice.

RH: What was your daughter's bar mitzvah like? Because that would have been the first one here.

LS: First one in about twenty-five years. Forget just generally here, after the storm. They hadn't had one in years. Years, and years, and years. It was a -- everyone in the shul was very much looking forward to it. It was a big event, literally. You know, we just -- we had a change of leadership. So, not only am I president, but my daughter is having her bat mitzvah too, so that was kind of a big thing. It was very special. It was reported on in the newspaper. For herself, she could feel that this was an event. And although it -- you know -- I don't know how to describe it. Just seeing her come in and reading -- doing her d'var Torah up here, which I don't think has ever happened before. I think the way that they did bat mitzvahs in past was very different. But just knowing that we wanted our shul to be Modern Orthodox so that women feel there's a role in here, but sticking absolutely to the Orthodox laws, but knowing what -- knowing what you can do. And having been in the synagogue in Chicago, and in London, and seen how other Modern Orthodox shuls run, it's like, we can do this here, and we have Gary Reimer (sp?), who is also very used to these -- this kind of -- that kind of shul. Lived in other places. I think that's what our board, with our members who'd come from other places, could bring. I felt that the past leadership, all they really knew was New Orleans Orthodoxy, and how it had been very big, and how it was dwindled, but they didn't know how to bring anything back. Whereas, when you have people who have come from other places and seen it, can say, well we can do this, we can do that. I had to contact, and how do we do this? And is this OK if -- is this -- if the *mechitza* is at this level, what can we do? What's acceptable? And we have people to ask. And it just felt a lot more open. We extended the ladies' area. Instead of being five rows -- people used to call it

the cattle barn, because they just felt so cramped in there. And now we extended it down, and people feel -- the ladies feel part of it. There's upstairs, which is a wonderful gallery. I'd prefer to be up there, actually. You can hear much better, you can see the Torah when they're reading it. But some of community can't walk the stairs, so now they just felt a lot more connected. It's making it an alive shul, somewhere that people want to be part of.

RH: What is your kind of -- your vision here for the shul?

LS: Well, obviously, that we can still continue to attract the younger families. Have more children here. I'd like to expand our Hebrew Jewish school that we have for Sundays so that children who are in public schools, or even in Jewish schools can come and have some learning. I'd like to follow the lead from the synagogue that we went to in Chicago -- Anshe Shalom, where there's a real women's presence in the synagogue. But again, very strict in how they're doing it. As more people are coming back into New Orleans, I'd like to see more people settle in the area, which is slowly becoming more, I'd say like, I want to say, gentrified. I don't know if that's the correct term. But a lot of the element that was discouraging for the area is not coming back. They're building condos, they're doing different housing, and it's more amenable to families than it was before. So, that's the idea, is to build up a base that's around the shul, that people can actually walk here, and that it becomes open again on a more regular basis, that it's not just somewhere you just come to pray. It's somewhere where you come to hang out. You can meet other people. Have some of the senior groups come in here, as well. I've offered it to the JCC for their senior group, at any time. Hillel, I said anytime you want to use a space, a hall, we're here. And just make it that we're on the map, we're not this old shul with old people anymore. That we are definitely part of the community. And it's nice to be included. And we are. We definitely have a presence here now, that I think was definitely lacking before. And that's been because everybody on the board did something. It's not just one person. It does take a lot of people to do this.

RH: How did you feel the response of the larger Jewish community here in New Orleans, you know, to Anshe Sfard and to you, personally? Did you connect with them when you returned?

LS: Well, the people I spoke to were all very helpful. They were all going through their own struggles with their own synagogues, so you could talk about certain things. But they wanted to see us merge with Beth Israel. Many people wanted to see us merge with them -- and I want to do that. I would love to do that. Nothing would be greater than to have two shuls who were obviously even struggling before, come together. Their issue always seem to be on location. They don't have a shul. They don't have a building. And so they -- and we offered them our shul. If they wanted to meet in here, as (inaudible) close, and they decided that they wanted to stay in Metairie, which I think was very disheartening to our community. There's so much history, I think, as an outsider -- as I felt as an outsider coming from London, and just other places, and seeing communities that really needed to bond and then fight to stay apart. I didn't understand -- I don't -- I still don't understand why we're still not together. We do some functions together. There's so much history with Beth Israel, and people have so much feeling that Anshe Sfard is this shul and Beth Israel is that shul. And when they moved out to the lake, they made that break from the lower garden district, that some of their older members don't want to come back to that. They feel it's a step backwards. But I don't feel it's a step back, I think it's a step of unity in joining that will actually ultimately be a step forward. Because I think divided, it's going to be very tough. And ultimately, with an Orthodox shul, you want to make sure that your people can actually walk to shul. Those of the people who want to walk to shul, can walk to shul. That is, whereas other communities may not have that, that is something in an Orthodox community that you're looking for. And we do have people who walk to shul. Sometimes a mile and a half, sometimes two miles to get here, but they want to come here. I understood that at Beth Israel, nobody was able to walk. So to me, it didn't make sense, so why stay in Metairie, if no one -- if everyone's going to drive to shul anyway, what's the difference? Be here, be there. We

have a building -- let's do stuff together. You know, try it for six months, a year, if it doesn't work, then do something. Like I say, there's a lot of history here, and I think it's -- the people have become a bit blinkered, and they can't -- they see, OK, well we'll try it, and if it doesn't work, it'll die. And that seems to me like a very waste of resources. The building is here. Just do it. And I still don't understand. I mean, we've done Purim together. We had such fun. We were down here, we had a lot of people, live music. We had over a hundred people here. And I think -- like a lot of their old -- because they have a lot more older members. They don't really have young -- younger families like we do. And they saw what youth can do. You know, there's people out here that were doing things. We've done a -- we did a Friday night service together in Beth Israel. Rather, obviously, in the building of Gates of Prayer. But you know, not having your own building, it's just not -- it's just not the same. You know, it doesn't have the character. I'm sure Beth Israel had character if you went into -- what was it -- what was it, Lakeview, or even on Carondelet Street. I'm sure going into those shuls had character, but right now, they're in a hall, basically. And we made the effort to come up, we really wanted to do things together. They asked if we could do Shabbat service with them sometime, but we can't, because we're a drop-in shul. There's people who come and visit, stay in the French Quarter, who need a shul to walk to, and they always come to us. We don't know if they're coming. They just arrive. So we can't shut our shul down on Shabbat, ever, because we don't know who is going to come. In Metairie, they did shut down a couple of times, and they've come and joined us for services together, and that's been a very fun experience. But we can't shut our shul down on Shabbos, because we are a landmark, and people do come to us. And we provide a service. I just got two letters today, thanking us for being here. Recently, people were visiting and had come here for Shabbat, so happy to find a minyan that they could walk to. And it just said, actually, this is now my New Orleans shul. And that was such a -- and I just read this morning before I spoke to you. So that's -- they're glad to find us. And I know that we are serving a purpose. We're the only Orthodox shul now, in walking distance of the French Quarter.

And it's history. We can't move the building. And if we could, we'd be losing a part of history. We'd lose the Jewish community out of this part of the city, and that would be bad. I think that would be a bad thing.

RH: How about with the Federation, and your contact with them? How has that gone?

LS: A bit trying.

RH: Oh really? Sounds like a longer story. So we're going to wrap up...

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

RH: All right, this is tape two, with Lonnie Schaffer at Anshe Sfard. And I sense that it's all volunteers here, and there's no paid ED like some other places have had. And it sounds like just trying to get the business part of running the shul -- it sounds almost typical, what you've gone through, of what a lot of little nonprofit businesses -- and other small businesses who are trying to get loans, who are trying to get help have gone through. So what have you had to do?

LS: Well, like I say, Jewish Federation very much wanted to help, but they would ask for so much paperwork that we couldn't produce because it was such a small shul on a very shoestring budget, and everything was being done voluntary, that we just didn't have anything [majorly] officially. There were records of money coming in and going out, but where everything went to just wasn't there. So we would try to produce --

RH: So the past, the records weren't kept.

LS: The past weren't kept. And now they are. Very strictly kept, so that we will not go through this problem. We also, it seems, although we were a nonprofit, our papers, everything was -- our taxings had not been filed for so many years that we had kind of dropped off the record. So, we had to reapply for tax IDs. We have to apply now for

501(c)(3)s that we just -- we're not on record as having because this place has been here since 1909. The shul and the building since 1926. And I guess things have changed over those times, and you need to produce paperwork to show that you're a nonprofit and a synagogue. So we are going through that 501(c)(3) process now. So getting loans and grants that other synagogues could do very easily because they have people who are paid to be there and do these jobs, we just didn't. And as people are building their own lives, also trying to help with what spare time they can here. So that's been a -- biggest difficulty is showing paperwork in order to get funding from the UJC that wants to give it to us. So that's been a bit of a struggle and a fight. And we are still the only synagogue that has not received funding from UJC. I know there was a program with the Jewish Endowment Fund of -- they would give money according to how many families you have, if your organization could match. Like OU. We weren't members of the OU, because nobody had signed us up.

RH: So you weren't even members of the Orthodox Union -- so...

LS: So, we couldn't -- we weren't going to see funding from there. So, we didn't get any funding from anybody after Katrina, at all. So, that's been a big struggle. We basically fell off the map. Whereas, Beth Israel was getting a lot of press for this, being members of OU -- when our leadership and our board came together this -- we were floored that this shul had not kept that -- or had not kept it up, or it stayed, or that anybody was even looking just to see. So we are now starting to be able to find some matching funds to take advantage of this Jewish Endowment Foundation offer. But we're two years later. We're two years later, and we're having to pick up so many pieces that got dropped before. So, that's been hard.

RH: And there's also still this money that was given to this shul, and that's still tied up in a court battle.

LS: Not court, thank God. No, we're not in court. Just on some legal issues, but again, these should have been rectified in the last week with certain documentation showing that we are an Orthodox synagogue and that all the voting that went to bring in the new leadership, it was all done legally, fairly, and followed all the proper procedure that it should do for the charter. So, all that's gone in, literally, in the last week. Again, this is a full two years afterwards, and we're still trying to just keep everything strong, whereas, I feel that so many synagogues, in a way they were lucky. Because they had people who came back and could immediately go back to their jobs. We had to fight just to be able to lead. Fight to lead.

RH: Right. Well, and -- one of the reasons I wanted to talk about this is because your challenge as the president of this shul has been enormous. And putting it together and such as that. The other things that I'm kind of curious about is when were you able to start having services again here and who leads the services?

LS: The previous board had hired a gentleman, Mr. Nahum Amosi. And he came to them. He had been here, apparently back in the 1980s -- late 80s, as a *shaliach* -- and emissary from Israel -- to come and do -- I don't know, bring Israel to New Orleans. Whatever it is. I'm not sure exactly what the *shlichim* do, but they bring a taste of Israel to whichever community, and they help enrich it in many ways. So he happened to be traveling through New Orleans, to Atlanta. Or he was doing business there. And he came to the shul, found it locked up. He'd called the president and said, "What's going on?" He said "Well, we're kind of closed right now," because, whatever reason he gave that they were closed. And Mr. Amosi, "Well I'd like to help." So, I guess they came to some agreement that he would come, and he would lead services and read the Torah. And I believe that they opened around, I want to say it was June time, 2006. So, the shul had stayed shut from March -- maybe, I'm trying to think whether we had any services during Pesach. If we did, it was with the people who were here, and I don't think we made minyan every day. But it was more that we opened it as opposed to -- you know,

that somebody had been given a key back to open with these new locks -- the door. And to let people in. But it was very disjointed because there wasn't any leadership. So I remember coming in to be in a service around Shavuot time. So that would have been like May, June -- June I think. I know I traveled. And I know that they held something for Tisha B'av. They held a service for that. And that -- I'm not sure how many Shabbatot they did. I don't know whether then, it was every other week and then every week. But slowly, it was to be building up until Rosh Hashanah, and then it stayed open.

RH: 2006.

LS: 2006.

RH: Yeah, OK.

LS: Yeah, so a year ago. You know it's all a bit hazy, to be honest with you, because I was at that point stepping back -- I had to step back, just for the good of the shul, I felt.

RH: Has your relationship to the Jewish community changed a great deal since Katrina?

LS: Changed. You know, we've always been the little shul that's kind of a little bit out of it. But like I say, with this new board, and this new activity, we have a new presence in the Jewish community, so we're being included in many more things that we were kind of left out of before. And I think they left us out, not to be mean, but I think they did it because they didn't feel there was anybody else who was going to be able to do it. There was these ten men that would meet for Shabbos services, and there was nobody who could -- who had the time to do this or the energy to do this. So, now here we were, these people who were just able to be part of it, and take part in Independence Day things and Memorial Day things, and the Israel for Sixty thing that's coming up. You know, be able to disseminate material to do with the Milton school, because we actually had people to talk to about it. So that we were -- we now felt very active parts of the shul. Our kids were taking part in wrapping gifts for kids for Chanukah because there

were kids to do that now. I have a good relationship with all the people at the different synagogues, whether the rabbis or the educational directors. They know me, I know them. We talk. So in that way it's still strong. And there's a respect there. Yeah. I'd say that as far as --

RH: How about you, personally? What has being Jewish meant to you going through this?

LS: It just shows you how strong this community is. It doesn't matter where you are in the world. The Jewish community is always there for you. And I know walking into any synagogue that I walked into, it felt like home every time.

RH: Has your relationship to your Judaism changed any?

LS: Yes. I think for any person, as you go through life, your relationship with your religion and your family -- everything changes. It evolves, hopefully. It's finding that balance. You know, I go to an Orthodox shul. I'm observant in that I keep kashrut, and I don't work on Sabbath, although I drive to come to shul, which is not the way I was raised. But it's finding the balance that works for you in any community and your family. So if I lived in walking distance, even a mile, I would easily walk to shul. But three and a half miles is too much. We have a building that my husband and I bought when we first looked to coming here that's about a mile from here. It's in the CBD. And that was the plan, was to build -- to make that into our family home, that you know, OK, well this is our local shul, this is where we'll go. That plan -- it's still there, but it's kind of a bit on hold. Our whole family went through very trying times of being together and not being together, and we're still working on that. And even the choice of staying in New Orleans has been a tough one. People are looking to me personally as this leader for the shul, and you just wonder whether you always have the strength to do that.

RH: How do you feel about staying in New Orleans? How's it going now?

LS: It's going. How's it going? It's always -- it's still a struggle. The kids have started back at school, so that's good.

RH: So, you've been away in London for the summer?

LS: No, in the summer, we've been in Wisconsin and North Carolina, and Atlanta. We tend to do a big bit of a tour. My oldest daughter is at B'nai B'rith camp in Wisconsin, which is a fabulous sleepaway. Again, that was a fabulous thing that the Jewish Federation offered. They offer scholarships, and B'nai B'rith offered scholarships. So last year, my daughter went for two months for free. My son went for a month. My other daughter went for a week or so. And what a great experience to be in a Jewish camp, and away from New Orleans, with everything that was going on. And she went back again this year, my daughter, for two months. And it's fabulous. She has a real connection with all the kids who go there. Invited to various bat mitzvahs this year, she's looking forward to going to. And has a connection with Jewish kids from around the country, which is very special. And although it's hard here, she knows that there's this connection. So that's a great gift that the Jewish Federation -- that the people wanted to do, is to make sure that any kid that wanted to go to Jewish camp -- sleep away, could do it. And that was wonderful. And they're still able to take advantage of it this year because there was money leftover. So they're just carrying it over to these children, which is wonderful. Where were we? I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought.

RH: I was asking about, originally, just if you thought you could stay in New Orleans. And it's a little in the air, it sounds like.

LS: Yeah. I mean, because my husband and I are going through our own difficulties in having been separated. But if we had stayed separated, then I would probably have been looking to move out. Because I don't have the family support here, to stay. And without your unit, it's very hard. So I was looking, maybe to move out, and -- for the kids, for education-wise, so that they could have a more grounded Jewish education. But as

we are now, trying again, to keep our family together, it's easier to stay in a place when you're a complete unit. Even if things are hard in the city.

RH: Where do you take solace? Where do you try to regroup and get some energy? Because you've been giving to everybody.

LS: Well, taking time out like I did in the summertime, and going -- things like canoeing and out to the forest, and hikes, and away, and connecting with nature. I also teach yoga, so seeing people develop -- I'd like to do more classes for myself, but time is a bit of an issue. But seeing people dealing with what they have to deal with -- that's what everybody does here in New Orleans -- in the class, is very nice for me to see as a teacher. Also, starting the yoga programs at Lusher for the kids who are dealing with so much, to help with their anxiety, was very refreshing to see, and how people are excited about that. What else do I do? I've now decided that this year, it's important for our family to take short trips out of the city to regroup before you come back in again. Whether it's over to Mississippi, or camping, or just -- just get away, let your mind empty, and then come back, refreshed again. And just, you know, reading. I'd (inaudible) not been reading for a while, because I was just so tired at night, I just half a page, and I was out. Just trying to find the time, and know that it's OK if you can't do everything. Just some things can just wait until tomorrow or next week, or next month. And that the key things are family. That's it.

RH: Are there any Jewish teachings or concepts that have been present in your mind this past year?

LS: Definitely. If you remember, I was talking about -- we met this student when we were hauling things out of the water, after the hurricane. And I invited him back to our house. It reminded me always of, like, Abraham -- his house is always open so that people could always come in. And it was kindness. And I can only reflect on this because when I was in London, I was asked to speak at a Rosh Hashanah service for

the children's service and the parents who come with their children -- you know, like, elementary school age. And the one thing I wanted to impart was kindness. Because, and at the time, you didn't know it, because I showed kindness and invited this guy to come and eat, never met him before -- in that, never before met him -- come and eat in our house, have something to drink. You know, whatever. He was the guy who drove us out of New Orleans. Hadn't met him, hadn't invited him, wouldn't have had an invite. Didn't do it to get an invite, didn't know. But how kindness -- how being nice to somebody, smiling at somebody, saying hello. If you see somebody walking down the street, try it sometime. Just look at them and just say -- just smile at them. And you'll see that they will reflect what you're showing them. You look sad at somebody, they'll look sad back. You smile, it changes their face. And just, if that's the only thing I could impart to that group, was kindness -- just saying something nice to somebody, it doesn't -- it's free. Saying nice things is free. And that a lot of people think about that they have to collect things. It's all about the stuff that they own makes them. And it's not the stuff you own, it's what's inside you, that makes you. And situations like this, really, you find the character of who you are. It comes out. It's always there in stress, or stressful situations brings out what kind of person you are. Whether you're a leader or a follower or if you can give. If you can give. If you can think about somebody besides you, even in a stressful time. And looking at the leaders in this community -- in the Jewish community, there are a number of people who are able to do that. And it's not easy. It's a very big, major, personal toll. And you just hope that if you can get through that hard part later, it'll come back around.

RH: I'm going to switch gears a little bit because I know this is hard here.

LS: Maybe we can stop for a minute. Can we stop a minute?

RH: Yeah. Stop the tape.

(break in tape)

RH: ... about your interactions with the larger New Orleans community, and if you're more involved or less involved with the larger community, and just how do you see the recovery going?

LS: Well, the recovery is slow. It's a lot slower than I think people anticipated it to be. You know, personal views are that -- I feel the city needed to grow in a more natural way. When the Mayor said, "Everybody come back," that was fine if your area wasn't too badly hit. But saying come back to Lakeview, come back to New Orleans East, come back to the Lower Ninth Ward was a bit dangerous. It was a -- can't find the right word to say -- but, irresponsible. That's the word. It was irresponsible. Because having people have the trust in you to say just come back, without the resources and security, was an irresponsible thing to do. And I've even spoken to this week, this lady who had moved to Chicago with her family, stayed out a year, and then came back, because -- and she came back to New Orleans East to redo her home, and her block is fine. But blocks away, there's nothing going on. And it's dangerous. And there's been robberies, and they don't feel safe, and they have kids. So you have these blocks of people in these outlying areas who don't have the proper resources as in, like, lighting or security or all this thing, and it's draining the city because the city is trying to help them. You know, send power here, and send gas here, and send whatever water there. But it's happening very sporadically, and they're not being taken care of. So instead of doing the brave thing, saying things like, OK, the city now has to be -- these are the borders of our city now, as it was, I don't know, forty, fifty, sixty, years ago, and say, everybody, try and come back into that area, and then let the city grow again naturally. But no, now we have people living here, living there, living in all these spots, and it's not a natural growth. And it's very demoralizing, I think, for the people who've moved out there because they see things are happening so slowly. They've managed to get their house back, but everything around them isn't happening. And the businesses are coming back -- or trying to come back into those areas. And maybe they saw an odd business coming back, and then the homeowners would try and come back. But it's not a natural growth. And

unless they pump a ton of money to help these people build their houses, it's going to stay like that. And only places like uptown that have -- you know, didn't get as badly hit, or that people had the money to come back and rebuild, are coming back. And that's very hard to see. I mean, I took my first trip into the Lower Ninth Ward on Monday. My daughter was filming something for cable, and it's just slabs and grass. I mean, that's it. It just felt that somebody had to take a brave decision and say yes, we understand that your history is here, that your lives was here, that your family is here, but it got wiped out. And that's devastating, but somebody is going to have to be brave enough to say is that, you're not going to be able to go back now. And it may not be for ten years. And we're going to help you try and relocate in the city if you want to come back, but it can't be where you were before. But no one's been brave enough to say it.

RH: Do you think -- what do you think about the neighborhood you're in here with the shul? It's known to be one of the highest crime areas in the city.

LS: Well, a lot of that crime happens more over to --

RH: Claiborne?

LS: Yeah, I guess it's -- yeah, I guess it's -- yeah, nearer to Claiborne. We're just close enough to St. Charles and Jackson -- the main streets here, that this particular area is still in -- it's safe -- safe region. We have a youth hostel that's run by a local guy. Takes up a lot of this block, so that's good. What used to be a mental health facility opposite us, and a halfway house next to us have gone. They've relocated too -- so now we have condos being built. Apparently, townhouses are scheduled to go up opposite. There's more families moving into these neighborhoods. Young people are coming back in. Professionals are taking over these condos, to be able to live. Because they want to live downtown. They want to be close to the French Quarter. Maybe not necessarily in the CBD, but just to have this lower Garden District feel. And they're coming back -- I've seen a difference in the five years since I've moved to New Orleans -- or six years now,

that this place has changed. That you'd be more wary. And now I feel a lot more comfortable around here. There's a more sense of community and neighborhood. Like I know the people who live here and who live next door. And they look out for the shul because we're not open full-time. And they will tell me if something's that they're not -- they think something's not right. We've hired somebody locally to come and check on the shul, as well, to keep it clean from the outside, so it looks like it's in use all the time. And just to keep it ready. And that's a conscious effort because otherwise, it would sit here like an empty building, and that could be a problem.

RH: So, you're optimistic about this neighborhood.

LS: Yes.

RH: And about the shul in the neighborhood.

LS: Yes, definitely.

RH: Where's your concept of leadership? You were talking to me a little bit about that. Because, but just in general, you've taken charge, but you feel like more people on your board are kind of stepping up?

LS: Right. Yeah. I think that to make any community work, it's not just on the shoulders of one person. You know, somebody might have an inspiration or drive to do it, but you have to empower people in the community to feel that they can do this too. That they make a difference. And that even spending half an hour a week on a project is going to make a difference in the shul, whether it's making phone calls or delivering something, or going to visit somebody who is not well, or delivering food to somebody. Or making that call is going to make a difference. And we don't have a full-time rabbi here. We don't have a full-time anybody here. So, everybody has to pitch in. And if everyone pitches in, it'll grow, and that we'll be able to afford to do the things that we want to do. But it's that investment, and empowering other people to do that.

RH: And what do you feel, just in New Orleans -- I'm going to go back to the kind of the larger community for a second. Do you feel that racial tensions in the city are worse now, better -- do you have any -- I mean, you've come from London -- very cosmopolitan cities where lots of different kinds of people have lived. I guess what the differences are here.

LS: Is it a matter of race, or is it a matter of wealth? The haves and have-nots. I think that's the bigger divide in New Orleans. Because if you have money to live here and resources to live here, you can get by. But if you don't have insurance, and if you're living on social security -- and that doesn't matter what color you are -- it's going to be hard. And I really, truly felt at one point when they were asking everybody to come back, that I felt that if you had needed all those things, you should have stayed where you were. Whether it was in Texas or Florida or whatever. Because you had had resources there. The city doesn't have the resources to give out -- to give outs to people. They need people to be giving in. You know, we need new blood coming in, and there's a lot of young professionals coming in who are giving in. I just felt a lot of the people who came back who were struggling -- yeah, I know it's home, but there was an element of crime that were pulling resources out of the city. And it was making very hard on the people who were trying to be here, and do the right thing. Because you can be poor and be here as long as you're not making it detrimental for other people to live here. And the criminal behavior is becoming -- is bad. There's no two ways about it. And it's not just based on color, because that whole drug problem goes across the board. But that's what I felt. It's just -- if you're going to come back, be here to be positive. If you haven't got anything to give and you want to be a drain, please stay somewhere else, until you have something positive to give.

RH: How do you perceive the Jewish community mixing with the larger community?

LS: I think they do all the time. I mean, just by the nature of being in New Orleans. We are such a small drop in the river, as it were. But just having -- just to watch the recent

WYES program on Jewish New Orleans. Just how such -- even though they are such a very small community, what an impact the Jewish community makes on the city, through its hospitals, through its arts foundations, through its donations of -- in education. The Jewish community is very alive and very seen here in different parts of, even government. And just by what people do in the community. They're not the ones who sit there and wait for a handout. There the ones who are giving it. And I think people really respect that here.

RH: Are you proud of being in the Jewish community here in New Orleans?

LS: Yeah, absolutely. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here. Simple as that, you know? The community here has done a lot to get their people back here. When they said come back, they gave them grants to come back, help with -- but there were some people who needed help with food. They would do that. So when they said come back, they didn't just say come back, you're on your own. They went come back, and here's money for youth, money upfront for you, as well. Not you know, sign the paperwork, and we'll tell you in three weeks whether you're going to get it from FEMA or from Road Home or whatever. Here's some money now to get going. And let us know how you're doing. And as a leader here, I was asked -- "Well, are there people who you think are struggling? You know, give me some names, well contact them. If they want the help, they've got it. If they don't, they'll tell us." And so, I would give lists of names, even if I wasn't 100% sure because people don't always want to disclose that. But if I thought someone was having a hard time, I'd put their name down. And then they had the choice whether they wanted to receive it or not.

RH: Did you and your family take the money that the Federation was giving?

LS: Some of it, yes, absolutely. We were -- we came back, we didn't have stuff. I mean, a lot of our stuff got ruined. And also we weren't sure. When we were in Chicago, and there was a deadline that you had to say what you were going to accept and what you

weren't, we didn't know how much of our house was damaged at that point, either. We knew there was water inside. We didn't know how much was damaged. So yes, we did accept. And it helped us with food, and with accommodation even at some point. I mean, there was six of us. That's a lot of people. And we had felt that even when we were staying in peoples' houses that we wanted to be able to contribute in a way. And so it was very helpful.

RH: Taking things when you're a Jewish person, and you're used to talking about giving, was that hard?

LS: Yeah. Oh my God. Absolutely. Very good question. That was one of the hardest things, I think, in London and in Chicago and stuff, where people would bring over -- and sometimes they would bring their kids over to donate because they wanted their kids to have that act of tzedakah -- of giving and all that. And that was weird. It was very weird. When you're on the other end, receiving. And you sometimes think, well, am I worthy? Should I be receiving it? And it's very humbling. It really is humbling to receive. And you think, well, what do people feel like this all the time if they have to receive all the time because they don't have choice. And here we were, as usually people who were givers, having to receive. It was very weird. I have to tell you. More than weird. And you always feel whether you were deserving. And you guess that at the time, you're just not sure, because you're living it, and you think, oh well, I'm the same person I was the last week, except now you don't know whether you have a house or not -- or have a home to go to. And you have to say, you know what? You have to say yes and accept it with graciousness because they are giving it with their heart. And just know that at some point, it'll come back round again, and you'll be in the position to give again, whether it's money or time. Because people always think we have to give money things. And time is something that is -- that you can give, and that's also free.

RH: Is there a value in being on the receiving end, do you think?

LS: It makes you appreciate it more -- always will make you appreciate it more. What you have and what's important. Because the only things that are ever important are family and relationships. Everything else is just stuff. It can all be replaced. And half the time, you realize that it doesn't actually need to be replaced because you can live quite well without it.

RH: Has it changed you or your children about your ideas about giving?

LS: Yes. Like I said, giving doesn't always have to be money. Giving can be time, it can be friendship, it could be a phone call, it could be visiting somebody who's lonely. And the kids just helping out at the shul. We had a bunch of kids here at one point who were doing dusting. I think we took down all the books, and they got to dust all the shelves, and count how many Siddurim we had, and put all the kid's stuff back where it should be. And that was a -- oh, I think they power-washed the front steps and scrubbed it down before the bat mitzvah. And they felt, we did this -- and the stairs are nice and shiny because we did that. And making the kids feel -- and not only my kids, but the other kids in our particular shul -- that they have a stake in this synagogue as well. And what they do makes a difference. We know why they were always allowed to roam around the downstairs. They don't have to -- as in, in the shul -- they didn't have to necessarily sit still. They could be up on the *bimah*, standing next to the guys while they're reading it. They get called to help wrap the Torah. The boys and girls come up and sing at the end, and join in, and just being -- that this is their shul. This isn't somewhere that their mom and dads go to, and that they have to tag along. This is something that they should feel is part of them. And when visitors come, that they get to greet them like it's their home. And we saw that recently when we had a bar mitzvah. There were a lot of young kids here, and our kids were like the ones taking -- I don't know, the kippot around, or the candies around to throw later. And showing people where to go. And it was a proud moment to see your kids kind of just being part of the shul and making people feel welcome. And I think that they all learnt the value of kindness, and that stuff is not as

important as time.

RH: Tell me what you've learned about yourself.

LS: There's a question. I have an incredible inner strength. That's all I can say – that's what I found. And it doesn't matter what goes on. If I want to do something, I can do it. Sometimes it might take a bit of time, but I have the ability to do anything. And often, I would look back and say, well, what would Sarah do? What would Rebecca do? What would -- you know, those characters, who everyone thinks are these -- you know, never did anything wrong. As you grow up, you hear Bible stories, right? And you hear that -- you hear about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Moses, and you think that these are wonderful people, they never did anything wrong. Life of perfect. And then you get older -- you actually read the stories properly, and you read, my God, these people had such problems, difficulties. You know one -- God said -- Abraham's asked to sacrifice his son. He's got another son with Hagar because his wife says, OK, you need a son. God says you're going to get one, and it can't be with me, so go get one here. And now we have two different nations. You've got Isaac being fooled by his kids -- being directed by their mom, Rebecca, who knows that Jacob has to be the leader here. And so sends her son... I mean, there's so many -- I don't think they could do it any better on the *Young and the Restless*, and if you look at -- you know what I'm saying? Just, there's so much. So you look, you think -- OK, well, this is extremely flawed. There's Joseph being thrown in a pit by his brothers. I mean, there's so many things that are so flawed, and you think, well, they had a tough time, and they didn't have all this stuff around them. What was it about? It was about relationships, and it was about building a people. And then you have to break it down to those core things. We have to keep our people going. And so that's what I look at, is I want my kids to know what it's like to be Jewish. I want them to have a Jewish upbringing. And yes, New Orleans is really hard, and you have to make more of an effort here than you do in New York. Because New York, everyone -- certain neighborhoods, everyone's Jewish, and it's easy to buy kosher food, and Shabbos is

easy to keep, because everybody has basically taken the day off and walking here, and they have lunch there. And you spend the afternoon with the kids, and you go to youth groups. We don't have all of that here. We miss the whole social part that we just don't have here in New Orleans because it's just not as strong. But staying here right now is -- it's a sign or a signal to the kids that also, you can be strong, and you and your religion is what you make of it. And if you choose to keep it, you can keep it anywhere -- and if you choose not to do it, you could be in the middle of New York and not feel like you're Jewish if you choose not to make a connection. So it's all up to you, and you've got to find what's inside you. And sometimes you don't find that for a few years.

RH: What are some of the things that you're grateful for?

LS: Good health.

RH: That's a good one.

LS: Because without it, you couldn't do anything at all. I'm grateful for my family. I'm grateful that people actually believed in what I could do. That's it.

RH: I have another question I ask a lot of people, so I don't want to miss it with you, and then I think that'll be just about it. Which is, now that you've lived in so many places, what does home mean to you, and how do you make home?

LS: That's something that we also discussed, having been on the road for quite a while after Katrina. Home is where your family is. It's the things that become familiar. And the look in your kids' eyes.

RH: I think that's good. I think we can stop now unless you have something else.

LS: I think that's pretty much it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]