

Zoe Oreck Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON (RH): And I'm -- we are at 1545 Exposition. I am interviewing Zoe for Katrina's Jewish Voices, which is sponsored by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and the Jewish Women's Archive. Zoe, do you know you're being taped, and do you agree to be videotaped?

ZOE ORECK (ZO): Yes.

RH: Thank you very much. So just start with how old you are. Start with when you were -- what year you were born. And then, tell me a little about what it's like to grow up in New Orleans and be Jewish.

ZO: I was born in 1989. So right now I'm 18. New Orleans has been -- I've never lived -- well aside from the storm -- I've never lived anywhere but New Orleans. This is probably my favorite place in the entire world. I love everything about it. It's my home.

RH: Like, name one thing you like to do.

ZO: I just -- I love everything. I just love the culture. I love the music. I love the unique experiences that I've had growing up, like Jazzfest, or Mardi Gras. The people that see you here. Just everything about it so unique and wonderful, and I couldn't have asked for a better childhood here.

RH: Oh yeah?

ZO: Yeah.

RH: Do you have a favorite memory from childhood? Any kind of memory.

ZO: Just have memories of -- well, probably some of favorite from Jazzfest, which is a huge music festival, where a bunch of musicians come down, and it's like, outside. There's food and dancing, and crafts, and just growing up around that sort of thing is just really --

RH: Looking forward to it every year?

ZO: Yeah.

RH: You go out with your friends now?

ZO: Yeah. Well, now I do. I used to go with my mom.

RH: And you started with your -- with your mom?

ZO: Yeah. My mom's a big Jazzfest fan, so --

RH: You started with her, and now you go out with your friends.

ZO: Yeah.

RH: Did you go to Sunday School?

ZO: I did, I went to Sunday School. I was confirmed. I had a bat mitzvah.

RH: And where did you go to Sunday School?

ZO: I went to Sunday School at Touro Synagogue on St. Charles. There's two Reform synagogues on St. Charles. One across the street is Temple Sinai, and further down past Napoleon, is Touro.

RH: And so, tell me a little about how you studied for your bat mitzvah and what that was like.

ZO: It was actually pretty basic and easy. I just sat down with the cantor, and he's like, here's your portion. You can do this much, or you can do that much. And we can cut it this way, or that way. And so we just kind of went through, and I found something that was best for me. I have a pretty good memory, so it wasn't that hard learning the chants and whatnot. The service wasn't that bad to learn. It was pretty hassle-free for me. It wasn't that hard.

RH: And I saw the pictures in the other room that I want to get them on video. The paintings. So what was your party like?

ZO: It was fantastic. My mom got Mardi Gras Indians to come, and -- so we had a second line, which is like a dance thing that we do in New Orleans. And she got a gospel choir to come sing at my party, and that was a lot of fun. And there was just a bunch of dancing and color, colorful decorations, and -- it was at the Praline Connection in the French Quarter, so that was fun.

RH: That's a soul food restaurant, right?

ZO: Right. And then at night you can rent it out for parties. My sister had it there, too.

RH: Really? Oh, wow. So, about how many people showed up? Do you remember?

ZO: Like, 300? 200?

RH: Family, friends.

ZO: Family, friends, everyone in my class at school. Yeah.

RH: And, where do you go to school?

ZO: I go to school at Isadore Newman School on Jefferson Avenue. It is a hundred years old. It's a great school. I've been going there for 13 years, from kindergarten until senior

year, and I just love it there. Everything about it. The community, the area, the teachers, the classes. I've had -- I had a great experience.

RH: You have a favorite subject?

ZO: History.

RH: Really?

ZO: Yeah. I'm actually History major at UGA.

RH: OK. UGA being --

ZO: University of Georgia.

RH: Oh, was your last year kind of sad, or was it fun?

ZO: It was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun. Kind of sad knowing that, you know, we were all leaving but, I know I'm going to see everyone again. Because everyone has such a connection to New Orleans, especially after the storm. Just being able to come back and having somewhere to come to. It's just more of a -- our class is more bonded than it was before, and it's -- it was sad having to leave everyone, but I know I'll see everyone again.

RH: So, did you go to camp?

ZO: I did. I went to Henry S. Jacobs camp in Utica, Mississippi, which is -- it's a small camp. It's like 200 campers. I was actually on staff last year. Yeah, I was a Machon, which means, kind of like a worker. I worked in the kitchen. I got supplies for counselors, I set up programs, helped counselors with kids. And then we all kind of lived in a separate village area with two cabins: the boys' cabins, and the girls' cabins. I went for four weeks, but I didn't have a chance to go back and be a counselor this summer, because I was traveling, so --

RH: Tough choice.

ZO: Yeah.

RH: So, what'd you like about Camp Jacob? Because it sounds like you've been a lot of times.

ZO: Yeah. I went for 9 years, 10 years I think. Yeah. I liked -- I just made a lot of great friends that I just kept on wanting to go back to. It's over the years we just, you know, it just kept going like that. And I liked the counselors. I liked how small -- I didn't like -- I didn't really like the feel of a big camp. I liked the smaller camp where you knew everyone, and you know you got to know people you wouldn't necessarily know outside of your unit or age group, per se.

RH: I went to a regular camp, but I never went to a Jewish camp. What's kind of Jewish about the camp?

ZO: Well, you do prayers before every meal. You do Hamotzi before every meal, and then Birkat Hamazon after. There are services on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. On Mondays and Wednesdays they're pretty short. They're like, just 15 minutes, or little services. So they use some Hebrew words for some things. They've got some Jewish cooking, dancing. The names of the cabins were always something in Hebrew. Like they did Hebrew months one year, rabbis, things like that.

RH: Has it kind of shaped your understanding of Judaism, going every year?

ZO: I guess a little bit, because it's a lot different to be Jewish in a camp setting than it is to be Jewish in a, you know, not. Because everyone there is Jewish, and -- you just kind of -- it's helped me just kind of pick and choose what's good for me, and what I'd want to do, and what, you know, I might not want to do, and you know, kind of personalize it.

RH: Oh, nice. Well let's move on to the -- well, no, I have one other question. Do you ever -- or a couple more questions here. Have you been Israel?

ZO: I have. I went to Israel two years ago, with a teen tour thing. We went with our temple. And it was amazing. I loved everything about it. It was a great trip.

RH: And has that changed your perspective on Judaism any?

ZO: Yeah. A little bit. I really like the people aspect of Judaism. That we're all kind of connected through our religion. And just being there -- and Israel just kind of solidified that a bit more, because you know, everyone there is Jewish, and everyone is together, and we all have this common ancestry, background, even though, you know, we might not speak the same language, or live halfway across the world from each other. So it's kind of unifying.

RH: And, are there any places that you and your friends hung out, you know, that are kind of special to you? Either Jewish or not Jewish in New Orleans.

ZO: In New Orleans?

RH: Yeah.

ZO: The Butterfly, up by the levee. It's really nice just to go out there and sit in one of the gazebos, and just hang out. A lot of people go up there sometimes.

RH: Kind of look at the river, huh?

ZO: Yeah. We like to go to a bar called The Boot. It's always fun to hang out there when there're a lot of people around. Where else do we go? I just like hang -- our friends -- hanging out at different friends' houses, going to restaurants.

RH: What kind of restaurants?

ZO: We just have our favorite restaurants. One of mine is Kyoto. It's on Prytania, so we go to dinner there. Cafe? Rani on Magazine Street. We go there a lot together. TCBY out in Metairie. We just kind of go, and not hang out, per se, but just kind of sit and, you know, have a good meal together, and go somewhere else afterwards.

RH: OK. So, tell me about this storm. When did you realize it was a big deal?

ZO: I realized -- well, it kind of came in waves of realization. First it started, I got home one morning -- I spent the night out -- or no, I didn't spend the night out. Friday. Friday, before the storm, storm hit Sunday. We just had a jamboree at school. It was the first football game, kind of thing of the year. And I was at someone's house afterwards, and we were -- it was a bunch of people. I don't really remember how many of us. Just kind of sitting, hanging out, and I was watching the weather channel. And it was just talking about Katrina. Like, a big storm is coming, and I was like, guys, there's a hurricane coming, and it's really basic here, is that a hurricane. There's just always hurricanes, and we've got hit by hurricanes before, just, they weren't very big ones. And so, you know, it's like, oh yeah, we'll have two days off school, and then we'll come back, and we'll evacuate, and this and that. It's pretty standard procedure. But, I remember thinking, it was one of the first times that I have seen it was actually a Category 5. Like a big, big storm. And so I go home, and I keep on watching, and my mom comes in, and I was like, mom, did you know there's a big storm coming? Did you hear about it? Because, like, not everyone hears about, just because it's so standard of, well, there's another hurricane. And she was like, yeah, I did. And so I was like, OK well, I'm going to sleep. And the next morning I wake up, and she's freaking out. And she was like, I just booked you and Gram, my grandmother, and your sister tickets to Houston tomorrow morning. We need to get the house ready. I need you to go to Langenstein's, the grocery store, and pick up this, this, and this. I need you to do this, like, my dad was actually in Las Vegas. And at this point he was trying to get back, you know, to come help my mom do the things, and there were no flights coming into New Orleans, given, because the airport was busy

getting ready to ship people out instead of take people in. And so that day I took time to pretty much hurricane proof my room. I took all the lamps off -- I took everything off the dressers, everything off my desk, put all the pictures in the closet, my computer in the closet. I stuck things around -- I just pretty much hurricane proofed everything, made sure the dressers were clear. Everything I really cared about pictures, things like that, were out of water, per se. There's a lot of trees around my room. And so, what I figured would happen is, if anything, maybe one of the trees would fall over into my room, and it would -- the roof would cave in around it, and then -- so I wanted that to be safe -- all my stuff. And then, so packing for Houston, I figured I would just be at the Galleria shopping mall there for a few days, so I just packed, you know, not very practically. Just kind of some cute things I thought I might wear. And, then that night I went to my friend -- one of my friend's houses with one of my guy friends, with a few of my girlfriends. That's when it kind of started to sink in. It's just kind of this eerie feeling when a storm comes when you just know the city kind of empties out. And I was just looking around on my way home, and I was like, guys, what if this isn't here when we get back? And my friends were like, oh that's silly. Well, you know, they say it's a big, big storm, so maybe -- you know, maybe these trees will be knocked down or something like that. And they're like, oh you know, don't be silly. It actually turns out that area was fine. Just the concept. And so the next morning I woke up early, and my grandmother, my sister, and I went to the airport, and there were -- it was like dead. It was strange. There was -- we were the second to last flight out. I actually saw some of my friends who were going up to Pennsylvania for college. They were leaving the day before, and so they had the last flight out to Philadelphia. And so, we were about to go through security, and I asked my grandmother, what happens to the animals in the zoo? I was like -- you know? What if it floods? Like, what do they do with the animals? And she's like, well they don't do anything with the animals. I'm like no, they've got to move the animals somewhere. And so it's just kind of like -- you know, just thinking about random things, it's always kind of surreal. So we get on the plane to Houston, and we take off. And as you take off from

New Orleans, you get a great view of the skyline, the city. And, I look out, and my grandmother just kind of leaned over my shoulder and said, take a good look, you know, you don't know when you're going to see it next. And, I was like, oh I'm sure I'll see it soon, but you know, if not. Whenever I thought of hurricane, I thought, more of destruction than anything else. The flooding was so far out of what I thought would happen. I thought it would be more like, houses getting knocked down, and the Superdome falling down, and I didn't really think about it in -- I didn't really think about how it happened the way it did. That was kind of a different concept from what hurricane meant.

RH: More like wind damage kind of thing.

ZO: Yeah, more like high winds, things being -- trees being uprooted, things like that. And so we get to Houston. We go out to dinner with some of my mom's friends, and it's just all over the news, and we're just sitting there watching, and my sister and I are trying to joke about it, and make light. Well, you know, enjoy your dinner. It's the last one we're going to have for a while. Just funny things like that -- well, trying to make light of the situation, if you will. You know, talking about what everyone at the table would save. And we were joking around that my mom's friends would save her shoes. Just things like that. And then that night when I went to bed, I really -- it really hit me -- that this was a big, nasty, terrible storm. And the thought of it, I was just -- you know -- the thought of it hitting, it just -- it put me in a daze. I woke up the next morning, and actually, I don't know how I got in contact with my friend, because the cell phones were out. Really out. You tried to call someone, it didn't work. And, we went to the Galleria, and we just kind of walked around in a daze all day. We didn't know what was damaged. We knew there was some flooding by a levee, and we lived near a levee so I thought it was our levee, but I didn't know. There wasn't very good information yet. It was all kind of chaotic. And, that day was -- I don't remember very much. I just kind of walked around the mall with her, and we sat and we talked. And then word came that the mayor wasn't letting anyone

back in the city for like a month, or something like that. And so, you know, I thought -- I was like, well, what do I do about school? And since our school was like, well you know, you're not allowed back in, then we can't have school. So, my mom made plans. Well, if you know, she's trying to figure out what we're going to do. And one of the preliminary plans was to go to Newton, Massachusetts where some of our family lives, and just start school up there for a little bit, because they didn't even start until after Labor Day. The storm was right before Labor Day, so I'd go up and start with them. So, it wouldn't be like I'd have to jump into school after they'd already started. But, because of the nature of the situation, of like, information changing by the minute. Different stories about this, oh no we can do this, we can't do that. You know like, we can go in, we can't go in for another two months. My mom just thought it was best to just stay in Houston. It was close to home, we had a good base, a lot of other people were staying. So we stayed in Houston.

RH: Were you OK with all these plans?

ZO: I was OK. Yeah, I thought Houston would be OK. I thought it'd be fun to live somewhere new. I had always wanted to go to a big public school and see what it was like, because I have gone to a small private school my entire life. I ended up not going to a big public school, but another small private school, but I -- so I had always had good feelings about Houston. I had been a few times. I liked it when I visited. So I was like, yeah you know, we'll stay in Houston. That's cool.

RH: And were you watching the TV any at all? Or you didn't really kind of do that?

ZO: I don't really remember to be perfectly honest. I just kind of have bits and pieces. I think I really tried to block it out, more than anything else. Every time I went back to the room, I did. Every time we went to the hotel room it was just on. So I'd sit and watch. After awhile it just made me so sad that I, you know, thought of... I didn't really know about the situation with the National Guard. They're coming out with all these stories now, like, with the five days that -- the five days of Katrina. It talks about the two days --

or seven. The two days before, and the five days after. And, just watching that, it was like, some things I've never heard of. I knew the National Guard wasn't there. It was all kind of -- I'm sure I knew about it, but it was just all kind of a blur. I really -- At one point I knew that it was anarchy in the city. I knew that there was no police, and that there was just lootings and killings and things like that. But, I didn't know the nature of the situation. I didn't know the police were -- I knew police were trying, I didn't know where all this was taking place. I didn't know if our house was being looted. I didn't know our house had flooded. I found out, I think, Wednesday after the storm that we were pretty safe, and all of uptown was good. It was more the Lakeview area.

RH: Did you have any friends who lost --

ZO: I do. I have a friend, who -- she got eight feet of water in her house. She actually is living in an apartment down the street from her house. She lived in an apartment across the street from her house, because they were OK after the storm, but her house is kind of a new modern style, and is made out of concrete, and so they've just had trouble trying to get everything going. But she should be in by -- I think in two weeks, which is really great, because she has been -- she actually last year, stayed -- she went to boarding school in Boca Raton, at a school called St. Andrews, and she was there all year, because she thought it would just be easier for her parents and her sister if there were just three of them in the apartment, and she was, you know, she liked it there, so she decided, you know, I'll give them a break and just stay for a year.

RH: So did she spend her senior year in high school --

ZO: She spent -- she came back for senior year. She came back in the summer and yeah.

RH: OK. So where did you end up at school?

ZO: I ended up at a small school called Emery High School, which is a -- it's actually -- it's called Emery/Weiner School. And Emery is the high school, and Weiner is the middle school. And it's brand new. And while it's a small school, and I thought it would be kind of like my school, it's completely different, just because it's so new, and my school is old. Like, really old. But -- and even though it was small, it was still kind of hard to adjust, just because I had it very set in my mind how school is supposed to go. I had been going to the same school for 12 years. This is how school is, and their school was very different. And, having to adjust was kind of difficult for me. And one of my best friends actually came to school with me. She was going to go to Phoenix, but my mom got on the phone with her dad, and she was like, Roger, you don't want to go to Phoenix. Come to Houston. My friend's name is Hadley. Hadley will go to school with Zoe. I have a real estate person who can help you find apartments. Believe me, it's better -- like, it's a good situation. And so, he was like, OK, we'll go to Houston. So Hadley ended up coming to school with me. There was a few other New Orleans kids. I think we kind of threw off their school a bit at the beginning, just because it was so small. There was like 40 -- there was like 39 people in our grade, and then four of us came, and we were completely different, and we didn't have the right uniform. We had to get uniforms, different books, so when it's like -- I think there were 16 total kids, but when a school's that small, I mean, you can really tell. And so I'm very grateful for everything, because it, as frustrating as it was for me, I'm sure it was just as frustrating for all the teachers trying to accommodate us, and you know they were already a month into school or so. A few weeks into -- two weeks into school. And my books hadn't come in yet, my classes weren't finalized, I switched a class, I had picked up this, I dropped that. I was in AP French IV, and they only offered Beginner French I, which I took in 8th grade, so -- I mean, it was a new school, they hadn't really gotten their French program going, they hadn't found a French teacher who could teach up to that level, but -- one of the other kids from New Orleans, because it's more common to take -- it's French and Spanish in New Orleans is pretty fifty-fifty. In Houston it's more common just to take Spanish because there's many more Hispanic

people there. So, my friend Blaire who was in my grade, he also was taking AP French IV, so we got the French teacher at lunch sometimes, and we sat down and talked in French, and she gave us articles to read, and dissect, and so it was kind of a makeshift French class so that I could pick it up when I got back to Newman. And I picked it up pretty quickly when I got back, because everyone was in different places. Some people also didn't take French, but they wanted to keep on taking it. So that was kind of difficult.

RH: Any other kind of courses that were real different?

ZO: Well, I was supposed to take genetics and anatomy for science, and I ended up taking astronomy.

RH: Wow, that's a big difference.

ZO: I took French at lunch, but I took Beginner's Spanish. English was the same, AP US History was the same. Let me think. Actually, English was a little bit different, because they had a specialized English. They were doing American English. Like, doing --

RH: American Lit?

ZO: Kind of -- yeah. It was like taking literature from America, starting in Colonial -- we dissected -- what is it -- Rip Van Winkle, and a few of the speeches made by people on the Mayflower, and things like that.

RH: Still doing that, huh?

ZO: Yeah. I mean, you do it for History, but it was kind of like, that was their English course. I think we're supposed to do Hamlet at Newman, and then your second semester junior year, you take an elective, and you do specialized things. The English department offers all different classes. And so what they just did was they took all the juniors and instead of second semester, giving them an elective, they just gave them the first

semester's curriculum. It's cause we all kind of had something different. Let me think. I took art, which was fun.

RH: You wouldn't have done that at Newman?

ZO: No. I'm in chorus at Newman.

RH: Oh, so you have to kind of choose there.

ZO: Yeah. And I don't think they had chorus. It was kind of an after school thing, and I just kind of took chorus as a class. And so I thought art would be fun. What they didn't tell us at Newman is that they label math -- they label Algebra II -- our math -- but really it's pre-Cal. So some of us, like at Emery, we went into Algebra II, when we should really have been in pre-Cal. Which didn't help me very much when I got back to school, and a lot of people did more advanced math. And I've never been a math person. I'm a big history person. History and English. And so that was a little bit tricky, but I got like a B+ in math at Emery, because it was stuff that we had done in Algebra, because it was actually Algebra II instead of pre-Cal. So, luckily they changed that, because it was a misconception for a bunch of people.

RH: Was it a religious school?

ZO: Yes. It was a Jewish day school, which was a lot different from anything that -- I'm not used to --

RH: What is that like?

ZO: It was -- I mean, in some ways it was kind of like camp. It was just like, they had some of the Jew -- the Hebrew words.

RH: Did you take Hebrew? Does it --

ZO: No, and you have to take a year of -- not a year -- yeah, you have to take a year of Hebrew there, which I didn't do, because I wanted to take Spanish, because I thought that'd be cool. And they do kind of -- they do some of the Hebrew words on the bathrooms. Like, the girls and the boys, and the assembly was called Ma`amad. I don't know what that means, but that's what it was called, and it's a Hebrew word. Let me think what else. We had things on Friday for Shabbat. Like we had challah. The kitchen was kosher. Like, some days there'd be milk, and some days there'd be meat. I haven't thought about this in a while. I'm trying to think what else. Most of the kids were Jewish. Not all of them. There were some Israeli kids. Do we have --

RH: You were probably with more Orthodox kids than you're used to, cause you probably -- are you around a lot of Orthodox kids here in New Orleans?

ZO: No, no.

RH: Or even Conservative?

ZO: I think there were more Conservative than Orthodox. But, I'm not -- it's just -- it's a different -- it's a much different culture. Houston and New Orleans. In the Jewish sense. I find that New Orleans is a lot different with the Jewish culture than most places. As I found in Houston, and from some of my friends from other places, a lot of people who are Jewish, their social life also tends to be Jewish. Through like BBYO or NFTY, it's just kind of like, that's part of their social life, whereas here, it's just a little bit different. Like, my social life has nothing to do with Judaism. It's just kind of like, I have my Jewish stuff, and I have my New Orleans stuff. It mixes well, it's just like, we just blend in a lot. I find that some places, Jews kind of like, stick together and do, you know -- but here, most of my friends aren't Jewish, but they know all about it, because I am, a few of my other friends are. I've grown up around -- it's just been very integrated. I think the Jewish community is very integrated in New Orleans. I've never felt antisemitism ever.

RH: No prejudice or anything.

ZO: Yeah. In my life. Maybe one or instances, but nothing notable. Nothing that screams out in my mind, oh that was a terrible thing for me. It's more just people being curious than prejudice. I recently had a friend who I was talking to about some things, and he just had some misconceptions, and he was like, oh I never knew that that was, you know -- I can't remember what it was, but I just remember that I cleared up some of his misconceptions about Judaism and things like that. But, I've always felt very accepted in everything here.

RH: In Houston, how --

ZO: In Houston, I did only because I feel like I was in a smaller sheltered community too, because I went to such a small school, that everything was just kind of like -- everyone was Jewish, so I mean -- the only real prejudice -- well not really prejudice -- but the only real outsider-ness that I felt was the fact that I was from New Orleans.

RH: Did that -- I mean, did you feel that? Did you feel like an outsider?

ZO: A lot.

RH: Yeah?

ZO: Yeah. And I mean it wasn't the fault of anyone at the school. It was, I mean, just as hard as them to accept us as it was for us to, you know, come in and be, you know, kind of force our -- it was just kind of an accidental -- kind of forced mixing of two very separate cultures, lifestyles. You don't -- the way that we've been raised in New Orleans, and -- I mean, we grow up around alcohol, Mardi Gras, craziness, and I mean it doesn't -- I have never felt -- you know, like it's a big problem. But where in Houston it's like, I mean, there used to be a joke here that you'd get served if you can see over the bar. We were the last state to raise our drinking age to 21. Just, it's the, you know -- I went to

Bourbon St. as a child, just walking around. I've been around all of it. I've like grown up around it, and it's not -- I don't think it's hindered me in any way. I don't think that it's disrupted my childhood, if you will. But in Houston it's just much different. It's a much newer city. Like, we've grown up around -- like, in Houston it's very -- you don't walk anywhere. Everyone just drives. Everywhere, you just drive, drive, drive, drive, drive. And here, I mean, you walk, you take the streetcar. You drive like maybe five minutes, and then you get to your friend's house, whereas in Houston, it's like you drive 15 minutes, and then you know, you have to get on the highway, get off the highway. I probably used the highway three times before -- from the time 16 to 17.

RH: You mean in New Orleans.

ZO: In New Orleans, you just -- I don't go on Causeway, I don't need to go on I-10, and then you get to Houston, and you know, to get to school I need to get on the highway. It took me a few months before my mom even let me start driving, but I got used to it quickly, which was good. And now I can pretty much drive anything anywhere after living there. It's a little nerve-racking at first, but I got the hang of it.

RH: Did you hang out with the New Orleans crowd mainly, or did you make some friends there?

ZO: At first it was kind of hard. Hadley and I -- well, Hadley and I had each other, so at first we didn't really want to make friends, just because it was kind of like, we have our friends. I don't need new friends. They're just all -- you know, I have my friends, they just live in Virginia and Massachusetts and Charleston and Florida right now. So, but eventually we started -- even the kids from New Orleans that went to our school, we weren't really great friends with, but eventually it kind of like -- we started making friends with the kids from New Orleans, and then you know, we were all a really tight group. And then, you know, we started making friends with some of the kids from Houston, and then it just kind of became more of a little group. And there were -- some of the kids hung out

with us a good bit, and I actually just got back from Aspen, and I saw one of my friends from Houston. So I made friends there. Some of them I still talk to, some better than others, but I was really grateful to have Hadley, because just the adjustment was kind of hard, and just having someone there that I could, you know, a shoulder to lean on, because one of my friends went to a huge, big public school called Langley in Virginia, and she made friends the first day, but their schedule -- and you know, she sat with them at lunch -- but their schedules are off, and so some lunches are at different times, and so the next day, she looked around the cafeteria, and knew no one. And so she had to go -- I think she sat in the bathroom and ate her lunch, which is really sad. I mean, it's not that they weren't nice to her. And she, I mean she could have -- it was just, you know -- a week after the storm, and she was in a huge public school and didn't know what else to do. So, just things like that.

RH: How did you keep in touch with your friends?

ZO: Cell phone, Facebook.

RH: Did you go visit anybody?

ZO: I did. I visited a good number of my friends. I visited my friend in Charleston. When Rita, the other storm hit Houston, we went to Florida to stay with our friends. And so I saw my friend Mia, who was in Florida.

RH: Where in Florida were you?

ZO: Boca. We went to Boca. Like Tallahassee/Miami area. We kind of bounced around there for a few days. I went to DC for a leadership conference, and my friend lived 45 minutes outside of DC, so I went to see her. And then I went to Dallas for one of my friend's birthdays. It's about an hour flight from Houston.

RH: What was it like to see your friends who you hadn't seen in a while?

ZO: It's a great, great feeling. You just kind of pickup right where you left off. Some of them had other friends that I saw. Other ones, it was just very natural. It was like we spent no time apart at all. We were just all right back together. And then after the storm when we all came back, most of us came back -- I have a group of 11 friends. We're very, very close, all of us. We do pretty much everything together, and it's pretty fun, because you kind mix it up. If you hung out a lot with one of them, you just go hang out with the other two. Besides that, we're always together. Just a big pack. And three people didn't come back. They stayed at their Katrina school for the rest of the year, but then everyone came back for senior year. So one stayed in Virginia at boarding school, one stayed in Florida at boarding school, and one of them stayed in Baton Rouge just to finish up. School in Baton Rouge. And then the rest of us, we just all came home, and it was just -- it was like no time had past. We were just all together again.

RH: Did you do anything the first time you saw each other? Was it at school the first day, or was it --

ZO: No. Well, what did we do? We just kind of all met up at different places. It was just like it was before. There wasn't like a formal meeting of let's all get together. It was just kind of, as people gradually got back, they just kind of like, jump in with the group that was already there. I got back on December 20th, and I hung out with my friend Camille, who was in town. And Hadley was coming the next day on the 21st, and then my other friend was grounded. And then another of my friends got back, and so then we, four of us watched a movie the next night. Then another one got back, and then you know, we went and did something else. So, it's just kind of like, kind of adding on. People kept on coming back, and we just kept on, you know, going about life as it was.

RH: Tell me this. Did you notice in your family, did some people -- did some of you guys cope better than others with being away?

ZO: Personally, I'd say I coped pretty well. Just because I'm a firm believer in a good cry. So whenever I'd feel like crying, I'd just cry. I decided that I'm not going to hold it in and try to be brave and strong. Well, I mean, I was. But if I wanted to cry, then I would cry. Instead of, you know, holding it up and just, you know -- so, sometimes Sophie would be like, you're crying again? I'm like, I feel like crying, I'm going to cry. And so, I really think that that helped me a lot. Because just the release of emotion, it's just that you just feel so much better. I cried a lot.

RH: You did?

ZO: I cried the night before I went to sleep on Sunday was a good one. At my first day at school at Emery, and the first time I saw my dad after the storm. And those were the -- I just couldn't really help it. You know, I wasn't going to hold it in, put on a happy face, because I was hurting. And so I felt like if I should, you know, just let it go. And I really think that helped a lot. I was just able to accept the situation. Just think about it in a better perspective, as opposed to having just like all these feelings kind of bottled and warring around inside of me, like with who to point a finger of blame on, and who did this wrong. I just let it all go, right at the beginning. I mean, it got -- sometimes I would cry later on, but it was really that beginning step to recognizing that something terrible had happened, and I was allowed to -- I let myself accept it. I think it took mom and Sophie a bit more, just because I think they were trying to put on those strong, like, it's OK we'll get through this. You know, I don't need to cry. This and that. It might have taken them a little bit longer. Everyone's experience is just so personal to themselves. I couldn't tell you when they really started to get it. But, personally --

RH: Are there any things that you just enjoyed -- I didn't mean to interrupt you -- that you let yourself enjoy in Houston?

ZO: I loved California Pizza Kitchen. I went there frequently, and I actually gained ten pounds in Houston, which is understandable. I really loved driving around with Hadley,

and just -- you know, like, we always do here. We just drive around with each other and just play loud music, and dance in the car and be silly. We were in traffic one day, and we were playing -- I forgot what -- but we were dancing like morons, and people were just staring at us, and we had the windows down, and it was just a great -- just times like that just really were fun. I liked being able to drive a lot, because it kind of like gave me that feeling of independence again. And, like I could kind of rely on myself, because for the past few months I really didn't have -- you know, I just felt kind of out of place. And like I wasn't in control of anything. And everything was out of touch and so when I was able to actually get -- regain that independence, and -- you know, like, I'm taking the car to go here. I can take the car to go play tennis. I can, you know, this and that. I think that really helped me a lot. Just little things like that. Simple pleasures that going down -- after a while, I started, you know, really using the facilities in our apartment building. I went down to use the gym. You know, I figured out my way around. Things like that. When I started, you know, kind of that home feeling. That kind of like, in touch with your reality. I think that's probably what I enjoyed most towards the end. I actually had a better time towards the end than I did at the beginning, or in the middle.

RH: Yeah, that makes sense, because you were kind of commanded at --

ZO: Yeah, I had adjusted.

RH: What do you think were the -- some of the greater tensions?

ZO: Tension. A big tension in my life was making new friends. Feeling accepted. Wanting people to want us to be around. Wanting people to want to be our friends. Trying to get, you know, kind of that feeling of a group. I just, you know, I've had my friends all throughout high school, and it was just very easy, and I've never ever had problems making friends, but I just feel like the experience really detached me from that ability to do so. Whether I didn't want to make friends subconsciously, or whether it was just harder to come in junior year and do something with that, I don't know, but that was

probably one of the biggest tensions.

RH: Do you think of the people who are from New Orleans, did you notice that the boys coped better than girls? Or did you notice that -- was there any difference in gender about who made friends, or anything like that that you noticed?

ZO: Not really. I mean, boys are very much more, like -- like they don't really let their feelings out as much as girls do. So I don't whether they were coping better, or whether they were pretending to cope better, or if it, you know -- I mean, the boys did make friends. I think it was easier for boys. Just because some of them played a sport. Some of them played soccer, some of them were just outgoing, and you know, boys are boys. But with girls it's much of a -- like making friends at more of an emotional level. And so if you really have that strong hold in one person, you don't really feel the need to go out and extend, I guess.

RH: Were there any times where you felt kind of privileged being from New Orleans? Or did people treat you any differently?

ZO: I got a free ice cream. I got free ice cream at Cold Stone for a while. There was one day where I went to the mall after finding out that one of my -- I had three friends in Virginia. Two were at boarding school, and the other one went to the big public school. And when I found out that my friend was going to a big public school, I got very, very, very upset. And so I'm walking around the mall, crying, because you know, let the feelings out. And I see a thing at Cold Stone that says free ice cream if you present a Louisiana ID. So I presented my Louisiana ID, and I had a nice free ice cream, and it made me feel a lot better.

RH: That's a New Orleans thing to do too. Did you connect to the Jewish community in any other ways than just through the school?

ZO: Not really.

RH: Did you guys do any Rosh Hashana --

ZO: We went to their Rosh Hashana. I actually didn't go to Yom Kippur because I got strep throat, which was another problem. Hadley and I were spending a lot of time together and sharing drinks and food, and she got strep throat which turned into mono, and I just got strep throat. So I didn't go to Yom Kippur. But we did go to Rosh Hashana. Their synagogue is so big there. Like 500 people, 600, 700 people in a room. It was beyond anything I had ever seen before. Just the enormity of -- and there's three temples like that. It's insane. I have like, you know, we kind of have our temple, and 200 people show up for Rosh Hashana, and it's a 300, 400, and it's a lot of people. But when you get up to 700 people in one room, it's just kind of like the enormity of it is just beyond -- but my mom does have friends that are Jewish, so we went to someone's Rosh Hashana lunch thing after lunch services. We went to a dinner before Yom Kippur at one of our other friend's houses. Once we went to an Orthodox rabbi's house -- an Orthodox rabbi's house -- for dinner -- for Friday night dinner. And so that was really cool. I liked that a lot. And then he tried to pour my sister and I wine. My mom said, no, they can't have wine. And he was like, but it's Shabbat, and she was like, no, absolutely not.

RH: For all this looseness in New Orleans -- well, how is it different than Shabbat dinners you've been to?

ZO: It was the -- it was very homey. And our Shabbat dinners are homey, of course, but it was just very -- I liked it a lot. There's just a feeling about it. It was great. It just kind of made me feel accepted, and warm, and nice.

RH: Is there anything that you learned from your time in Houston that you kind of -- you think about and you took away? Or how you want to be from that whole experience? Like maybe I'll do something different.

ZO: It just kind of taught me to -- that's a good question. You just kind of have to take it one day at a time. You can't predict tomorrow. I mean, what's happened in the past has happened, and all you can really do is put your best foot forward and just keep on trucking pretty much. It's definitely taught me how to hope with any situation, pretty much, that comes my way. I'm pretty confident with going to college. New place, meeting new people. It's prepared me pretty well for that.

RH: OK, we're going to take a break because that's an hour --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 1]

RH: -- voices. Well, I also -- I wanted to ask you, did you and your friends, when you got back, did you guys get in the car and go around the city, and drive around?

ZO: I did do that with Hadley and my friend Catherine. And one day, we just drove to the part that was West End out between where the 17th Street canal flooded with the other one. The name escapes me right now.

RH: London. On the other side.

ZO: Yeah. And it was exactly what I had seen on TV. Just devastating. It was an area that, I mean, that I didn't feel particularly connected to, just because, I mean, I'd lived uptown, and it's down in a different area of town, but it was absolutely devastating. Kind of like feelings of anger more than anything. Anger and sadness. Angry that it was a preventable, it was completely preventable, and just sad that people actually did have to go through that. It was kind of awakening, and it made me appreciate everything that I had, because these people really did lose everything. Like there was a house in the middle of the street. There's still water coming out of the canal break. It was -- everything was dead, destroyed, defeated. It was really hard to look around at that. And for -- I play tennis, and during tennis season, we couldn't practice at our courts right down the street from here, because it hadn't opened yet, because the Audubon Institute didn't have

enough money to open them yet, so we had to drive out to UNO -- the University of New Orleans -- to play tennis. And so, as we would drive out there for - - well this was for matches -- just the water lines. We would drive past one of the areas that was hit hard. Really hard. As you kept on driving, you could see the waterlines go up, up, up, up, up on the houses. And what was also great about it, was driving out there for about, you know, the four months that tennis season is, the progress that you could see when, you know, a store was -- wasn't open one week, and then the next we went out, it was open. And it continued on to this year, too. Every time we'd drive out, you know, we'd see a McDonald's that wasn't open and now it's open. And the CVS that was, you know like, had a window out is now completely brand new. Again, it was really great to see that. But it was also, you know, really again, awake -- just shakes you, just looking at all of that devastation.

RH: So, when you got back, did any of your classes or are any of your teachers, did you guys talk about the storm?

ZO: We actually had during English, one week, for English class we had one of the guidance counselors come in and we just talked. Everyone in the class just kind of talked about things.

RH: And was that good?

ZO: It was good. Yeah. Actually, this year we had this class. A seniorseminar, and we talked about different issues of today, and one of our units was Katrina. And so a lot of it, we read "One Dead in the Attic," or "One Dead in Attic." And we just talked a lot about our experiences. We wrote papers about our experiences, so that was also a good release at the end of the year. Kind of something that I haven't thought about in a while that just kind of resurfaced.

RH: Wow. Who was the seminar teacher that you had?

ZO: There was a bunch, because the class was too big to have us all in one class, so we split up and different teachers took different sections.

RH: So, have you through school or any other ways, have you been involved in the recovery in any way?

ZO: Yeah, there's a club at my school called ACTIONS, which is an acronym for something. And they joined -- last year they joined up with Katrina Crew, and they adopted the street from Jefferson -- on Jefferson, from where Newman starts down to Clayborne/Claiborne (sp?). And so a few Saturdays I would go out and pick up, you know, trash and things like that. One of my friends at school founded an organization called Teens for Green New Orleans, and him and bunch of my other guy friends went out every day last summer and picked up things in Lakeview, and did hedges, gardening, every things like that.

RH: Wow, did you guys get in touch with people to help them, or are you just --

ZO: Yeah, the news actually came and interviewed them, and I think they kind of -- it's been -- it hasn't been on for a while, but they did it all of last summer and they made a big difference. Most of the green space in one part of Lakeview is because of their efforts. And then at the end of this year, with the same class, Senior Seminar, we did had Habitat For -- this whole senior class -- did Habitat For Humanity for two weeks.

RH: Wow. That's some hard work.

ZO: Yeah, it's good stuff.

RH: But now you know how to build your own home.

ZO: I could build my own house.

RH: So, are there any things you take away from these that you'd want to tell other teens who haven't been through, you know, your senior year the way your senior was? You know, or tell people about New Orleans?

ZO: Come visit. Help the economy. Help it come back. Everyone in the country could do something, whether you give to an organization, come down here and volunteer for something, come here just to visit, and put money back in the economy. Anything -- like anyone, you know, can just supporting the -- adopting an animal from the LSPCA that they found in Katrina, or his parent -- not parents -- whose owners died or, you know, are misplaced. There's just so much that anyone can do just to really help the economy. I mean, and the recovery. And I just get frustrated trying to get people to recognize that it's kind of like we are part of this country. You know, this is our home. Some people just kind of want to, you know, it's not my problem, I don't live there, but it really is like everyone's problem. Helping with the wetlands restoration.

RH: Why do you say that it's everyone's problem? That's the tricky question.

ZO: Well, a lot of the oil from -- and resources -- come from, actually, this area. I think it's 1?4. I don't have the numbers in front of me.

RH: Yeah, I think it's about.

ZO: It's about a 1?4.

RH: 30%. 25, 30%.

ZO: We're one of the top five ports in the country. And it's just -- it's people. You got to help other people, whether it be, you know, someone you've never met before, or your aunt or uncle or cousin. We're all kind of in this together. And when people kind of distance themselves and say it's not my problem, you know, it's just another city. I don't live there. I have nothing to do with it. It just hinders our coming back a little bit more. It

just makes it more of a struggle.

RH: Tell me about what it feels like to have been Jewish through this crisis? Can you say that that's been --

ZO: In some kind of -- in some ways, well I went to Jewish school, so that's I mean, pretty much most obvious. Just a sense of community, that I think I have a -- like a leg up on, because I was Jewish. Wherever you go, there's always someone who, you know, Jewish people always kind of bond together, 'cause we have, you know, so much in common. And so I think having that just helps a sense of stability and community, with me at least.

RH: Has your relationship to the Jewish community here changed any?

ZO: Not really. It just kind of like -- with it what -- how it was with my friends, I just kind of came back and jumped back in. It was like no time was spent away from it. So I still went to services on high holidays here, everything like that.

RH: To go that Hanukkah party, the first one.

ZO: Which one was that?

RH: The one down at -- on the riverfront. I was just curious. I think they had a big one.

ZO: I don't think I went to that. I think my parents did, maybe.

RH: Have you ever thought about your understanding of God or anything in this? Did that ever come up for you?

ZO: It's tricky. I kind of see it more as God is kind of like. How do I phrase this? When people want good things for you. Like when people pray for people in New Orleans, or things like that, there's just something about it that is really felt. It's like a vibe. And my

understanding of God is pretty much that it is -- God is a carrier for that. For that healing. I didn't lose God when, you know, something terrible happened, because terrible things happen. Because if they didn't, nothing good would happen. But, just that feeling of good vibes from someone I've never met, or someone who, you know, says, you know, I'm praying for everyone in New Orleans. You know, get better. That helps. And that's kind of my understanding of God through the whole Katrina thing mess.

RH: Is anything different, like at the JCC that you noticed?

ZO: We're smaller.

RH: You noticed that?

ZO: But then again, everything's smaller, so -- that's probably the only really thing I've noticed. Just that we're physically smaller.

RH: Do you guys have much to do? Is it a different crowd out at the Metairie JCC?

ZO: Oh, I don't -- I honestly really don't go out to Metairie.

RH: Okay. [laughter]

ZO: I'm an uptown girl. I stay uptown.

RH: Is it hard being -- or, the upside and the downside of being the granddaughter and the daughter of such prominent Jewish activists.

ZO: I do a lot of interviews. I do a lot of talking.

RH: Thank you.

ZO: Not a problem. I guess just the down -- there's not really a downside, other than maybe, you know, I get inconvenienced because my mom one night is like, oh by the

way, you're coming to speak at a trip I organized for these people from New York. Or my grandmother is saying, oh by the way, are you free this night, because there are some teenagers from Atlanta who are down here in New Orleans on their class trip. Will you please tell them about your experience being a teenager? And so it's just things like that. Just little minor inconveniences. Besides that, there's not really. I'm proud of what they do. I think they do a lot of good stuff. Whether I decide to take that path or not is going to be seen. But, I appreciate everything that they've done for the city, community, everyone as a whole.

RH: Do you think your sense of activism might come from seeing parents so active?

ZO: I'd say so. I'd say my mom definitely influences -- kind of, or is trying to nourish a spark in me to go off, and you know, be as big as I can, and do everything that I can. But I'm also very set on finding my own path with what I want to do.

RH: Do you have a sense of the direction you're heading? You don't have to have a sense. I was just -- you love history, I know that.

ZO: Yeah, I do like history. I just like helping people. Whether they be Jewish people or just, you know, Christian people or Muslim people. I just like helping. Doing something that leaves -- makes -- when I finish a task, just makes me think, wow, that was a good thing. I'm glad I did that for that person. Or people. One thing I didn't do last year that the storm hindered was I volunteer at Children's Hospital, which I love to do. I just love being there with kids, knowing that I made somewhat of a difference. Habitat was great. You know, when I was building a wall. I'm building a wall for someone who lost all their walls. You know, if I was painting a house. You know, if I was building a shelf, it was always a shelf for someone who has nothing. They've got nothing, except for their hopes and dreams and good intentions.

RH: They do have that. It's a good thing to recognize. Tell me, has the -- couple of years now -- experience, and you being on the other end of needing help, and relocating, has it changed how you view helping at all?

ZO: It does. It has a lot. In just the sense of kind of what I said earlier. Like, people. You know, when you hear things like, the tsunami or a tornado. Or a forest fire with people who lose their homes. I mean, kind of before the storm, I was like everyone else. You know, like, oh, it's you know, it's not me. But now it's very much like when I hear about natural disasters, people who lose everything, just by chance, you know, because it's just how it's going, I really sit and think about it, because I know exactly how they feel. Well, not exactly. I still have a home and everything, but I know that feeling of, you know, loss and want. Like, just the want for people to care. It's really powerful. Recently with the -- especially now -- there's like a terrible forest fire in California, and there was a -- and I was watching the news, and it was like, several people lost their homes, and a boy died or something like that, and when I see things like that now, I just sit down and I watch them, because I feel like someone should be watching, and someone should care. And so if I, you know, think about -- if I try to do what I can, or become aware of the situation as much as I can, that it -- even then that little bit helps. Because I know after going through the storm, just thinking about people who actually -- when someone would say something like, well New Orleans doesn't need to be rebuilt. Like, anyone who would be like, yes it does. Just the hope that someone would do that, or someone would think, wow, I really hope that they recover. Just really instilled a feeling of. It was a great feeling. When I knew that there was someone who was defending or thinking about us. And so I always try to -- now that I've come out of this experience to turn it around, and do that for someone else.

RH: Tell me, what do you think. Is your relationship to government changed? Your understanding of government? State, local, federal.

ZO: I mean, to this day, there's all sorts of accusations about who to blame. Whether to blame the president, blame the mayor, blame the FEMA, blame the governor. I just really see a disconnect. I just saw the disconnect. I saw a government that I believe very strongly in break down. Completely break down. From what I understand now, it's just all. No one was -- it was like five different mechanics working on five different machines, and then trying to throw them all together and be like, OK, it's fixed, instead of like five different mechanics working on one machine at the same time, passing around tools, creating an assembly line. And so that really -- it doesn't make me mistrust the government, as much as I feel the need -- I see the need for them to fix it. I'm really more -- the thing that I'm most agitated with is the Army Corps of Engineers. Somewhat the president, but I think that the engineers should have built the levees how they -- I mean, like -- or, like they just should have built them right. They had the resources to do so. They had the money at the time to do so. They just built for a Category 3 when they were advised to build for a Category 5. There's levee systems in Holland that can work to protect the entire country from a storm, but we don't have levee systems enough to protect a city from flooding. And that just kind of -- and then the fact that we can't even sue them, because you can't sue the government without the government's consent, which is again, a little bit agitating. But that's probably where I'm most upset about. I also -- if you watch the documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, Condoleezza Rice went to see *Spamalot* three days after the storm. President Bush was talking about Iraq two days after the storm, in California. If there's a natural disaster of that magnitude, drop what you're doing for a few days -- Monty Python is not going anywhere for a while -- and I mean, like, it's your job. That's your people. Like you're a politician. Politicians are supposed to work for the state. The fact that people stayed here with no food and water for five days, and people died and suffered and went through horrific experiences that no one should ever have to go through -- not only in America, but anywhere. It looked like a third world country. We're supposed to be one of the most powerful, smartest, richest, countries in the world, but you can't take care of people for five days after one of the

greatest natural disasters of all time? I mean, come on. Water. You load up a plane, fly down, distribute water. I mean, it just -- things that should have happened that didn't happen because of the breakdowns just make me insane. It's -- if you're a politician, that's -- I mean that's your job. Beyond all of the political PC stuff that you have to do. Like the appearances and whatnot, you know, take care of the people. That's why you have a job. You're supposed to take care of your people. And no one was taking care of the people.

RH: So did you like the movie, *When the Levees Broke*?

ZO: I liked it a lot. I heard a lot of speculation. Not speculation. I heard a lot of reviews that it was more inclined towards the -- towards the black people of New Orleans, than what happened to the white people, but I didn't find that to be that true. Except with the conspiracy that the government blew up the levees, but I think that every argument had a counter-argument. They showed people from all walks of life. There was a lawyer, some politicians of every race, you know, people from every class, and I felt like everyone was pretty equally represented. I highly recommend it to anyone who hasn't seen it. I just think it did a really good job of encompassing that feeling. That's really hard to explain by anyone except for someone who's been through the storm. And I would sit there and be nodding, like, yeah, yeah. And so I really actually did like it a lot.

RH: Do you think there's been racism in the recovery or even in the immediate aftermath?

ZO: I think that there is a lot of speculation of racism. I don't know if I'm a good resource for saying if there was or wasn't, just because my experience is so far from that issue. I feel like a lot of people felt it. It's kind of a tough issue. I'm kind of trying to tap dance around it without stepping on anyone's feet. There was a lot of accusations. There was a lot of accusations of the president not caring because people were black, and --

RH: Kanye West.

ZO: Yeah. The Kanye West comment. Just things like that. I didn't -- personally -- I didn't think of -- I didn't think there was that much racism, but maybe that's just because I'm ignorant to it. Not in a bad way, ignorant, but that it's just not a part of my world. I wish it -- I'm just not educated on someone else's experience. Being Jewish, I felt no racism, but I mean, I know some people definitely felt a lot of not great feelings, because -- and they thought it was because they were black. And I mean, maybe it was. I just -- I don't know, personally.

RH: Do you think that you'll come back after college?

ZO: Yes. Absolutely.

RH: Really?

ZO: Yeah. I can't imagine myself living anywhere else. RH: Really?

ZO: Mmm-hmm.

RH: So tell me why.

ZO: I love it here. I want to help it forever if I need to. It's just given me so much. It's made me who I am today. This place. And I feel like if -- I feel like people shouldn't desert it just because they can. I just can't see myself anywhere else. Raising my kids.

RH: Are you mad at people who've left?

ZO: I'm not mad at them. Everyone has a different reason for leaving. Everyone has a different story. You can't blame people for leaving. Just like you can't, you know, chastise people for staying. Like, oh it's so silly, why are you staying? We have a better life in Houston. Like, you should come back to Houston and not be in New Orleans. But, I

mean, I can't be like -- it's their decision to leave, and it's my decision to stay, so I guess I'm just living for that -- those people who left, and I have to pick up their work. But that's OK.

RH: Now that you've lived in a hotel, I understand for a while, and then a small apartment, tell me what does home mean to you now?

ZO: Home is a place where everything in your life fits. Just everything works. It's where the people you love are. You recognize everything. You can -- somewhere you feel comfortable. It's somewhere you feel safe. It's somewhere that you love. It's just -- New Orleans, pretty much, is what home means to me.

RH: OK. Do you have any different priorities now than you used to have?

ZO: I guess I have more of an inclination to come home and just do something that works for the city, more than that works for myself, if that makes sense. I would rather do something that benefits the city than that benefits myself. But then again, I see anything that benefits the city makes me feel great.

RH: And, are there any things -- anyway your worldview has changed?

ZO: I just want to do more. Do as much as I can. It's just a big world. And, I mean, there's a lot of stuff to get to, and see. I feel like there's a lot -- as of right now -- there's a lot that I can do. And, I mean, just as me. Like, whether it be here, whether it be, you know, somewhere in Africa or -- I just see that there's -- like you can always do something, I guess is what I'm trying to say. There's always something to do, no matter where you are, or who you are, or where you're from.

RH: So, no excuses for apathy, huh?

ZO: No.

RH: OK. And tell me this. We're almost done now, but I'm curious. After being away for so long, what is the thing you're most grateful for now?

ZO: Just being able to come back to someplace and call it home. Being able to have this house that's 200 years old, and have this city that's such a big part of my life, and just know that I have a home. And so many people don't have homes. And, I'm just so grateful that I do. Not in like a snooty way, because I want to help people who don't. But, it's just made me really appreciate not take any of this -- anything I have -- for granted. The clothes on my back, my dad still having a job, having a place to sleep at night, having all my family members feeling safe when I go to sleep, and I never take that for granted again.

RH: Wow. Anything else you want to add?

ZO: No. I think that pretty much sums it up.

RH: Thanks a lot.

[END OF INTERVIEW]