

Jake Kupperman Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON: This is Rosalind Hinton, interviewing Jake Kupperman at 5924 Coliseum -- it's his home -- in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Wednesday, July 18th, 2007. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish life. Jake, do you agree to be interviewed, and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

JAKE KUPPERMAN: Yes.

RH: OK. Let's start with your age and -- well, when you were born. Then also, tell me a little about your Jewish and your general education.

JK: All right, I'm 18 years old, and I just graduated from Newman High School. And I'm going to attending Georgia -- University of Georgia. My Jewish education: I attended Sunday School at Touro Synagogue. I was bar mitzvahed and confirmed.

RH: OK. So what happens at a bar mitzvah? Can you tell me a little about your bar mitzvah and what it was like?

JK: It was interesting. It was fun. I just -- I had lessons with the cantor to teach me my chants and stuff. And that's about it.

RH: Do you feel like you can read Hebrew a little better since you went through it?

JK: I can read it better. I don't feel confident reading it well, though. I definitely need the vowels, too.

RH: What?

JK: I definitely need the vowels.

RH: Oh, I gotcha. I gotcha. So how big was your party?

JK: It was a good size.

RH: And where'd you have it?

JK: It was at Generations Hall.

RH: Generations Hall. Where's that?

JK: I'm not sure. Where is it? I think it's in the -- I don't know where it is.

RH: All right. I'm just going to put that down. Generations Hall, and I'll get it later. Tell me about what it's like to be Jewish in New Orleans for you. What do you and your friends do?

JK: It's pretty normal, I think, because the school I -- the high school I went to had a lot of other Jewish people. So it was fine. I don't know. Everything was fine.

RH: What do ya'll do for fun and activities?

JK: Go to movies -- I don't know, just hang out with friends.

RH: Are there any other Jewish organizations you belong to?

JK: No.

RH: No, not really?

JK: Not really.

RH: Do you have friends who aren't Jewish?

JK: Yes. A lot. I think probably most of my friends are not Jewish. But we're about even Jewish and non-Jewish.

RH: And so, do you have any places where you hang out where there's black people, African Americans, or anything like that? Or is most of your group white?

JK: Not. Mostly just white.

RH: What activities are you involved in? Have you been in school or extracurricular -- that kind of thing?

JK: I played basketball for the basketball team. And that's what I did.

RH: That's about it? Just played basketball. OK. Let's get into the Katrina story. OK. When did you first realize this was a serious storm?

JK: I first realized that it was a serious storm probably that Saturday night, when I was hanging out with a few of my friends. But there was only about four of us, total, because the rest had already evacuated. But even then, we were kind of just joking around saying that we couldn't believe that everyone had evacuated, because we didn't think anything was going to happen. And then the next -- the next Sunday morning -- this is probably when I really realized it was serious -- I called those three friends and they had all already evacuated, too.

RH: Oh dear. Tell me how your family was -- where were they?

JK: My mom was in Atlanta, and I was with my dad and my grandparents. And my two brothers were in college -- in Indiana and Texas.

RH: So, what do you guys do to prepare for a hurricane around the house?

JK: We had to board up all the windows, and that's about it that we had to do around the house. Just take in any objects that are outside and put them indoors, so the wind won't pick them up or anything.

RH: Were you nervous at all?

JK: Not really. We ended up going to Touro Hospital, so we didn't stay in our house. So I felt pretty safe since that's a pretty solid structure. And we were in a room with no windows.

RH: OK. Tell me about this. Tell me when you guys decided to go to Touro Hospital and who made the decision.

JK: My father made the decision, and I guess he decided -- I guess when he decided that we were staying, he decided right away that we'd be staying there. So probably Saturday or Sunday. I think he told me about it Sunday.

RH: What time did you guys go down there?

JK: Probably early afternoon. Maybe late afternoon on Sunday.

RH: What do you take with you when you go to Touro?

JK: Just some clothes, toothbrush, toothpaste, nothing much. Because we didn't think we would be -- we didn't really stay there that long, so we didn't need too much.

RH: OK. So the storm starts, and you said -- where were you? In the building?

JK: I was in a room inside the building that -- it didn't have any windows, so I could look at the storm, but I had to leave my room and go out to the staircase, where there were some people that would be watching the storm there.

RH: Did you do that?

JK: For a little while. But it just looked like -- from where I was it just looked like any other hurricane or anything. It was really windy and it was raining, but I couldn't really see it.

RH: So you've stayed for hurricanes before?

JK: Yes. But they don't usually -- I guess none of them really came that close. But it just looked like a really big thunderstorm, basically. But the wind was definitely a little stronger.

RH: Who'd you stay in the room with?

JK: It was my father, my grandparents, two of my cousins, and a family friend, and then another man, and then another family, that was a family of one of the nurses that worked there. And my dog.

RH: Your dog was with you.

JK: Yes.

RH: Oh, OK. What's your dog's name?

JK: Duke.

RH: Duke.

JK: He's around here, somewhere.

RH: Sounds like a giant dog, but --

JK: No, he's tiny.

RH: -- but (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) a little dog. OK. Tell me a little about what Monday was like for you? Did you go to sleep Sunday night there? Did you sleep much?

JK: I slept a lot, actually. I slept more than most people, I think. When I woke up, the storm was over, and we -- well we ate breakfast that the hospital provided. There was us and a lot of other families of staff members. Then we piled into a car and we decided that we would go check out our houses, just to make sure everything was OK. So we started driving to -- I think it was my house, first. But there was a lot of -- it was just a lot of trees. So we had to kind of dodge the trees drive up a little bit on the sidewalks and stuff. And every now and then we'd all have to get out and try and move a big branch to create the path to get to our houses. And then once we were there -- we got to all the houses -- but there was just minimal damage, like broken windows and stuff. But a lot of trees were down.

RH: So everybody lived, kind of on that sliver that didn't --

JK: Right.

RH: OK.

JK: Everyone lived pretty close to the hospital that I was with.

RH: And so whose house did you go by?

JK: We went by my house, my grandparents' house, and my cousin's house, and our family friend's house. And they were all in the area that didn't flood.

RH: So what happened next?

JK: After that, we went back to the hospital -- or we walked around for a little while just to survey the area. And then we went back to the hospital.

RH: What'd you decide to go back to the hospital? Do you know?

JK: Because, I guess we just went back -- I don't know why. I guess there was -- Yeah, I don't know why we went back. I guess no electricity in the houses. And I guess my dad just wanted to go back to the hospital to help out there. So when we went back to the hospital, it was us and a lot of the other people had to help move things in the hospital from lower ground, in case something happened -- or just out of -- into safer areas. We formed lines -- we passed trays all across the hospital. We had to help move a lot of the equipment to other floors, and just do a lot of stuff like that.

RH: So you ended up on work detail, huh?

JK: Yup.

RH: Did you mind?

JK: No, it was fine. It was kind of interesting, because everyone was strangers, but it didn't really matter at that time, because everyone knew that their city had been hurt, so they all kind of came together to help the situation the best that they could.

RH: So, keep going. What happens next? Tell me the story.

JK: Monday, we slept again at the hospital. And we just -- we ate dinner with everyone that was in the hospital, which was all strangers. And then on Tuesday morning, I remember we woke up because -- I woke up to my dad and my grandparents talking. They were going to have to leave the city -- or debating whether we should, because the levees had broken, or the canal walls had broken. So apparently my dad knew a way that we could get out that would be dry. So we -- first what we did was -- my grandparents and I, we got into the car, and we were going to go get something from a store, but when we got there, it was being looted, and there was just --

RH: Where did you go?

JK: We went to the A&P on Magazine St. And when we got there, just there was about 100 people, or maybe less. Just throwing things all over the place. Not even taking stuff to keep. Just trying to destroy it. And just -- there was some people just stealing stuff, and others were just throwing stuff all over the grounds, and just throwing in the air and screaming. So that was pretty disappointing.

RH: Disappointing?

JK: It was the complete opposite of what I experienced inside of the hospital. Because it was more like everyone was destroying everything instead of coming together to save everything.

RH: So what did you guys do?

JK: Well we decided that it wouldn't be a good idea to try to go to the store, so we went back to the hospital, and then we got into the car and drove down Tchoupitoulas, where we saw some more looting. And we drove --

RH: Who got in the car the next time?

JK: Well it was -- by this point, my cousins and family friend had already gone out of the city, on that same route that we are now on. It was my father and my grandparents and I. And so we just drove down Tchoupitoulas, out of the city.

RH: On Tuesday.

JK: On Tuesday.

RH: About what time was that?

JK: Tuesday --

RH: Afternoon.

JK: Afternoon. Tuesday afternoon.

RH: And what did you see when you drove out? Did you notice anything? Or did anybody in the family point anything out?

JK: I noticed there was a lot of looting, but also it was kind of eerie, because when we were on the bridge, we looked around and we were the only car. And we couldn't see anyone. It was kind of like a ghost town. It was a very weird feeling.

RH: So there was looting all the way down Tchoupitoulas? Is that where you guys were?

JK: Yes.

RH: Can you kind of describe how many people there were?

JK: There weren't as many that I saw down on the end, but the most I saw was by Magazine. But there were a few people still looting. Or trying to. We saw some people trying to break into the Wal-Mart -- the Super Wal-Mart on Tchoupitoulas. But I don't know if they were successful. They were attempting to break in as we drove by.

RH: OK. And then what? Where'd you head from there?

JK: After that, we went to Lafayette to stay for a night at another cousin's house. And there was us, and it was my grandparents, I and my father, and my dog. And we stayed with us and a lot of other family members that had gone to that house also. And I actually stayed in -- that night I slept in my cousin's office.

RH: Oh really?

JK: Mm-hmm. All the kids had to go sleep in the office.

RH: Was it attached to the house, or was it --

JK: Oh no, it was about ten minutes away. It was a ten minute drive. So I went there late, and slept, and then we just woke up early.

RH: How many cousins were you with?

JK: Over probably about -- total about ten or 15 people.

RH: Ten or 15? Wow.

JK: Probably. And then we drove to Texas. Yeah, we drove to Texas after that. To Austin, which is where my brother was living at the time. And when we got there, we met up with my mom. She flew -- she flew to Houston, I think. And we picked her up on the way.

RH: Now what was the meeting like? Do you remember?

JK: I think it was a very welcoming meeting, but I think she had been a lot more worried, so she was a lot -- she was very relieved that we were safe. Because when we were in the hospital, we didn't really know what was going on around us, as well, because we didn't have the news or anything to look at. So she had heard stories -- had been hearing stories about all of the chaos that was going on, which we were unaware of. So I think she was really relieved to see us, and we were too. And then we drove to Austin and stayed, I think a few nights there. Just at a place. And then after that, we went to Baton Rouge to live.

RH: Now in any of this time, were you looking at the TV? I mean, did you see what was going on in New Orleans?

JK: The first time I got to really look at the TV was in Austin. And that was interesting. My mom had already told me things, and I had already -- once I got to Lafayette, I could

talk to people on the phone.

RH: Who did you call? Did you have --

JK: Well I talked to my -- or I tried to call my brothers. I talked to a few friends. I could text message people, and just tried to locate where everyone was, and what their plans were.

RH: Where did your friends end up?

JK: A lot of them were in Houston, Baton Rouge, a few were in Atlanta, some were in Dallas, and that's about it. There's a lot of other places, also, but those were probably the biggest, most common areas.

RH: So mainly just trying to find out -- kind of see where your group was.

JK: Exactly.

RH: When did you realize not going back to New Orleans too soon?

JK: When I was in Austin, and we started to try and contact a school in Baton Rouge -- Baton Rouge Episcopal, to try and see if I could enroll there. And then we drove to Baton Rouge, and they didn't have any room in the day school, so I had to enroll in -- there was a special night school that they had set up, just for people from New Orleans, or like St. Bernard's Parish, with all New Orleans teachers that didn't have a job at the time. So, I had a few friends at the night school.

RH: So there was a few Newman people there? Did you -- what was the first day of school like there?

JK: It was interesting. I guess everyone was just kind of meeting. Everyone kind of told their stories of where they were and what had happened with them. And I don't know. I

kind of like night school.

RH: Did you have one of the more interesting stories?

JK: I definitely did because I stayed, which most people hadn't. But there were a few people -- like I think one or two people that had actually gone back in the city on rescue missions.

RH: Really.

JK: So that was kind of cool.

RH: Tell me -- you said you kind of liked night school. So give me what you did there? What time did you go to school?

JK: School was from four to nine every day. So I would wake up really late -- so that was fine -- then I'd eat lunch and go to school. And then I'd get all my classes. Everyone was from New Orleans. So it was still cool. It was like we had transplanted somewhere else. And then I would go home and do homework and kind of just stay up. I was on a different time schedule. I was awake from about two in the afternoon to about four in the morning everyday. So it was kind of new. It was weird.

RH: You liked it?

JK: I mean I liked it because I get to sleep late. So that was fine. But yeah, I liked it. It was a very relaxed atmosphere at school. So I enjoyed that.

RH: Pretty different from Newman?

JK: Well, because Newman is pretty relaxed, but it wasn't this relaxed. And then I went back -- well when I went back to Newman, in the fall, I went to the Newman interim program.

RH: Oh, you did. So you actually came back early.

JK: Yes. In November.

RH: Well, let me ask you a few more questions about Baton Rouge. Did you make some new friends there?

JK: Yes. I met a few new friends. One who was living in St. Bernard's Parish. And the others that were just in New Orleans. And there was actually one or two people from Newman there that I didn't previously -- weren't previously friends with, that I got to be a lot closer with.

RH: And so, what did you guys talk about when you got together?

JK: We'd talk about -- I guess the city. Just where everyone was. Talk about our friends that we aren't with the time. If one person had talked to them, just to see how they were doing. School. Just other normal stuff. Sports, other regular stuff.

RH: Since you're a basketball player, I mean you weren't -- I mean, I guess it was football season, but I don't know. Did you miss practices or anything?

JK: When I came back to Newman -- we didn't start our basketball season until the second semester that year. So we missed about half the season. But all the New Orleans schools that were still participating in basketball just started up the second semester. So we still had a season, but it was cut short.

RH: Were there any places in Baton Rouge you liked to go?

JK: Not really. Not like -- it wasn't the best most fun city around. There's a lot of traffic.

RH: What did you miss from New Orleans?

JK: Pretty much everything.

RH: So, tell me what everything is.

JK: My friends. Just my school. Just that there was not nearly as much traffic there in New Orleans. Just, I don't know, everything. Just the city in general. Everything. Just my normal routine I kind of missed. Just everything.

RH: Were people nicer to you in Baton Rouge because you were from New Orleans?

JK: Not really because I think there was just so many people from New Orleans, that it was kind of just normal there. Because I think New Orleans had kind of taken over Baton Rouge. So they weren't necessarily extra nice because they were so used to it -- people in Baton Rouge. So it wasn't similar to places with only had about one Katrina person. Baton Rouge had a lot, so they weren't -- they were used to it.

RH: Did you have any bad incidents?

JK: No. They weren't -- they were just normal. No bad incidents.

RH: Did you go to the High Holiday services or anything in Baton Rouge?

JK: Yes. We actually -- no, we actually drove back to New Orleans to attend the services there, just for a little while.

RH: At Touro?

JK: No, it wasn't at Touro. I don't remember where it was. Gates of Prayer. It was at Gates of Prayer.

RH: And did you see some extra people? What was that like? Do you remember?

JK: That was -- Yeah. I saw some extra people that I hadn't seen before. So that was just more seeing people that I hadn't seen in a while. So that was refreshing. But after that, I just got back in the car and went back to Baton Rouge.

RH: When you were watching TV when you got to Austin, did it bother you when you saw the TV and people left behind? Did you think about that much or anything?

JK: It bothered me.

RH: Because you had also seen looters. So you were seeing...

JK: That's the part that bothered me the most, I think, because it seemed like they were making the situation a lot worse, instead of trying to better the situation. So that was definitely the most bothering -- bothersome aspect of it all. Then the other part was how people had been trapped or left behind in the Superdome. That was -- it was bothering, but in a different way. It wasn't like I --it didn't evoke anger at the people. It was more like I felt -- I don't know how to describe it. It was more like -- I was mad more at the government, as opposed to the people in that situation.

RH: Did you and your friends talk about -- did you share with them that you saw these looters and stuff?

JK: Yes.

RH: And what did ya'll talk? You said you were angry, huh?

JK: Yes. They all -- everyone agreed about that. Everyone was pretty mad about the looting, because it was just hurting their own city.

RH: So did anybody ever say, you know, "Hey, I think it was OK"? Have any of your group said anything like that, or have a different opinion about it?

JK: The only time anyone ever said it was OK would be if the people needed food or something like that. But not when they were taking unnecessary goods and just destroying places. That was never OK.

RH: So you said you came back early. When did you first come back after --?

JK: When we came back to live it was early November.

RH: So tell me about that. You came -- I mean, when you first... When did you first tour the city?

JK: When did I first tour the city?

RH: Yeah, when you -- did some of you and your friends get in a car and drive around?

JK: No. I think it was -- I don't remember the date. It was probably only a few weeks after it had all happened. I came back with my family, and just to empty out the refrigerator and stuff like that.

RH: Did you get that task?

JK: I helped out. That wasn't --

RH: That was a brave thing.

JK: That was pretty bad.

RH: So you were mainly in the uptown area?

JK: Yes, but we also drove -- we drove up on the interstate and surveyed the city, and I remember seeing like mid-city was still underwater at that time. I remember, I think it was -- I think it was Rock 'n Bowl maybe, the water was up to like the second story. So I got to see a lot of the flooded areas. And we couldn't actually go through all the way around the Interstate, because it was -- the water was up to the underpass on I-10, near West End. So it was still a lot of flooding.

RH: So you were really back early. But you guys didn't stay?

JK: No. Then we went back to Baton Rouge, and that's when I had my night school. And then when we came back to stay was November.

RH: So was school harder, easier in Baton Rouge?

JK: It was easier in Baton Rouge, I think. They didn't put us -- it wasn't as demanding I guess, just because everyone was -- I guess just because of the situation, because everyone was just tired and didn't want to put any extra stress on anyone. So it wasn't as hard.

RH: Did you have some of your Newman teachers?

JK: Yes. There were a few. I didn't... There was one Newman teacher there, but I didn't actually have him. But there was another Newman teacher that had actually given the course design to one of my teachers to follow.

RH: What class?

JK: It was for math class.

RH: So you were talking about when you came back and Newman had an interim. What was the first day of school like there?

JK: That was really cool because I got to see a lot of people that I hadn't seen. There weren't too many of us that had come back. Probably about 15 or 20 people in my grade. But I hadn't seen any of them, so that was really interesting. I got to see a lot of the teachers that I hadn't seen. That was definitely -- I enjoyed that a lot. That was really -- I felt like I was back in the city. So that was definitely, really good.

RH: Did it feel like maybe, things were going to -- now things might get back to normal?

JK: Things still weren't normal, but they were getting that way. It wasn't there yet, but it was definitely on the way, now that I was back living in my house, going to my school. The routine was almost back to normal, except that obviously there was still a lot of people missing, and it was still -- the city was still really hurt, as it still is.

RH: Tell me how do you manage classes with just 20 people? Was it split between boys and girls or was it...

JK: No there was -- I think everyone -- almost everyone had all of the same classes, except there was just a few classes that we split up for, just that some people were taking that others weren't. They tried to continue what you had been taking that year at away school, and tried to continue that curriculum. So when we first got back, everyone had to take tests just to see if everyone was on the same level or not, and then we had to -- sometimes we had to re-cover certain things if someone hadn't learned it, just so they could catch up.

RH: So Newman did actually send around a curriculum to all the students. Or to the teachers. So while you were away, you'd follow it.

JK: I don't know if they did that at other places. I know just one of my teachers happened to be in Baton Rouge, and they were going to stay, and they were going to actually teach the course, but they ended up -- she ended up having to leave, so then she gave the curriculum to another teacher to teach it.

RH: So, what did you and your friends do once you got back?

JK: Once I got back?

RH: Yeah.

JK: It was just -- it was me. It was about three good friends of mine and I, and one of them was going to Newman, and then two of them were going to St. Martin's, because that had opened up earlier. I don't know, just hang out. Not really much to do, but just -- I don't know.

RH: Do you go to friends' houses a lot?

JK: Yes.

RH: Kind of sit around and talk and --

JK: Watch TV, yup.

RH: Watch TV. So did you guys talk about what was going on?

JK: Mm-hmm. We did. We just -- we talked about what was going on, and we were really waiting for the second semester to come, for everyone to come back. Everyone -- because pretty much everyone came back that semester, so we were just waiting for that to happen, because we thought that would be really cool.

RH: Can you remember anything really interesting about before January, that you saw or you did that kind of struck you?

JK: Anything really interesting?

RH: Mm-hmm. That you and your friends were doing.

JK: I remember -- I mean, not -- nothing too interesting. Just, I remember we didn't really have much to do, or we would say we want to go eat somewhere, but then we would have to go through the trouble of what's open, and just things like that. But nothing -- no shocking...

RH: So you guys were kind of the old hands, weren't you, when everybody else got back?

JK: Mm-hmm. That was pretty cool.

RH: Yeah?

JK: But everyone was -- they were all just really happy to be back, everyone when they came back. But yeah, it was nice that I had already been in the city, and it was definitely great to see everyone. It was like a reunion of all my friends and just everyone. So that was definitely a lot of fun, and a really good time.

RH: And who had the most interesting away story? Do you remember?

JK: The most interesting away story?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: I do not remember. I don't know. Everyone's story was so -- there's nothing... Probably the most interesting story was one of my friends that had gone back in to do rescue missions. But no one had --

RH: What did he --

JK: What did he do?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: He was out -- he was in night school with me, but he had also attended Newman with me, so I've known him for a long time. So I remember he had come back to New Orleans to help rescue people right after the storm.

RH: He'd get in boats and things?

JK: I think so. Yes.

RH: Wow. So tell me, in this experience, what was something while you were away that you really missed?

JK: I mean, probably the thing I miss the most was just the people.

RH: Really?

JK: Mm-hmm. Just my friends, or just seeing everyone. That was probably the thing I miss the most.

RH: Mm-hmm. And what had you kind of taken for granted that you don't think you'll ever take for granted again?

JK: Probably -- the thing I took for granted was a bed, because I slept on a half-deflated air mattress -- blow-up air mattress while I was in Baton Rouge. So it definitely -- that felt good to get in a bed again.

RH: So your -- your bed when you -- was one of the first things you kind of missed when you came into the house?

JK: Yes, exactly.

RH: Said, "Greetings", huh? That's something. So you were kind of camping a little bit. Did you have other furniture in this house?

JK: In the house? There were some couches in the house, but my room just had a blow up mattress which about halfway through I guess somehow got a hole in it, and it was just half deflated.

RH: I've done it before.

JK: So I would sit on one side, and the other side would pop up, and then I would go on the other side, and then that side would pop up because it was half deflated.

RH: Do you think boys handle being away in this whole incident better than girls, or do you think one group seemed to manage better than another group?

JK: I don't know.

RH: The other way would be say, who coped best?

JK: I don't think -- I think it differed. I don't think there was one group. Like I couldn't say that boys particularly did better than girls. But there was just certain individuals. Probably, like I guess, overall, probably the boys did cope a lot better, but there were still some exceptions on both sides.

RH: So why do you think that is?

JK: I guess, I don't know. I guess, I don't really know why.

RH: Amongst your guy friends, like who was having trouble?

JK: Who was having trouble?

RH: Yeah.

JK: The people that had the most trouble were the people that were by themselves. They didn't have other friends that they were... They weren't in a place where they knew other people. Or they were at a school by themselves, probably. It was probably -- they probably had the worst time handling it, because they didn't have any -- it was like they were starting up at a new school again. But they didn't really want to -- they wanted to go to the new school, but they didn't really want to -- they didn't really care about fitting in or attaching themselves to the school, because all they wanted to do was come home. So I

guess for that few month period, they were just kind of there, by themselves.

RH: And did you keep in touch with any of those folks while they were gone to kind of lift their spirits?

JK: Yes, I kept in touch with most of my friends. And I tried to convince a few of them to come back to the Newman interim program with me, which one of them did. So I think that was awesome. That was good.

RH: So how did you guys keep in touch?

JK: Phone. I would text them, maybe. And they would give me -- I talked to a lot of them early, and they would give me their new -- because a lot of people had new cell phone numbers or just new house numbers to call them on. So I had a big list of all that, which everyone's numbers on it.

RH: Mm-hmm. And so did some of your friends not come back at all?

JK: A few of them didn't come back until this year. So some of them didn't come back in January. They waited. And then a few of my friends didn't come back at all.

RH: Were you mad at them for not coming back?

JK: No. I don't think it was their choice, exactly. Well I'm not mad at them. None of my really good friends, but just some of my friends. But no, not mad at them. That's just how it worked out for them.

RH: Who do you think in your family coped the best?

JK: Who in my family coped the best?

RH: Could have been you.

JK: Probably -- I mean, I guess I had it the easiest, I think, because I didn't have to deal with really any of the -- not nearly as much of the responsibility as my parents. So I guess I didn't have as much -- not nearly as much stress or anything, or as much going on. So I guess I had it the easiest, so I didn't really have much trouble at all.

RH: And did you guys when you got back, did any of you do -- in school, did you talk about the storm in class or anything?

JK: Not really. Newman, the teachers tried to keep it focused on the studies.

RH: Focused on studies.

JK: So not really during class. Not that much. I guess probably the first day that we got back, everyone kind of just went around the room, and told where they had been. But after that, it was kind of more focused on the work.

RH: And did you and your friends -- did you guys do anything with the recovery in any way?

JK: Not really. Not much, no.

RH: It's OK. So you guys just tried to get back to your life as it was.

JK: Yes.

RH: OK. So kind of describe your routine during the school year.

JK: During which? Where am I right now?

RH: I guess the first six months you were back.

JK: The first six months I was back?

RH: Yeah.

JK: So, I guess --

RH: January through --

JK: Oh, my routine was pretty much back to normal. Everyone had come back -- or not everyone, but most everyone had come back. So school was pretty much back to normal. It was just a regular routine, I guess, that I had been doing before the storm.

RH: Which is -- kind of describe it.

JK: My routine?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: I don't know, just go to school. I had basketball at that point, so I had to have basketball practice. Come home, do work, eat dinner, go to sleep.

RH: Mm-hmm. Get up and do it again?

JK: Yup.

RH: OK. When you got back, did you connect with the Jewish community at all?

JK: Not much more than previously.

RH: So what's that mean? Just services?

JK: Just -- yeah, services.

RH: So does -- like Sunday School kind of ends after confirmation, huh?

JK: Right.

RH: That's kind of graduation from Sunday School.

JK: Mm-hmm.

RH: So then there's not too much more to do after that as far as courses or class work.

JK: Right, right. Just services for holidays and stuff.

RH: Is there any kind of long term impact that has happened on you or your friends since the storm that you see?

JK: Long term impact. Let me see.

RH: Are there any ways you think differently now? Any priorities that are differently? That are different?

JK: I don't know. That's a good question.

RH: You want to think about it?

JK: I don't know. I don't know. I'm not sure.

RH: OK. Is there anything you've learned about yourself from the storm?

JK: I've definitely learned that I -- that I -- that I definitely need people. I definitely need my friends, or friends and just people to communicate with, because I enjoy it much better than being by myself. I like being around people a lot more.

RH: Did being Jewish mean anything special to you going through this?

JK: Being Jewish as it pertains to this. I don't know. Not in particular.

RH: OK. And did you notice -- I mean like -- did you notice any way how the Jewish community responded to the storm?

JK: No.

RH: Not really? These are good answers. Don't worry about it. This is exactly what I want. Have you noticed any of your friendships changing since the storm? Or maybe it's just in general, because you're getting ready to go to college.

JK: My friendships changing?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: I guess probably everyone -- all of my friendships got a lot stronger because of the storm, just because everyone had gone through the same experience. There's something that we all shared, because we had been separated for a while, but then we got to come back together. So that was -- I think it definitely made our friendships a lot stronger. But besides that, not really.

RH: Do you think this whole experience with the storm and the way New Orleans is, is something that you're going to remember most of your life?

JK: Definitely.

RH: Is there any one or two things in particular that you'll remember?

JK: About?

RH: The storm. The recovery.

JK: Everything. One or two things? I'll just remember -- just everything. I don't think I'll forget any of it, really. Any of the -- I'll definitely remember the looting, I'll definitely remember just the very slow recovery. I guess that's two things.

RH: You guys have any theories on why the recovery is so slow?

JK: Theories?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: Nothing -- no theories. I don't know, just I guess -- it was just handled poorly.

RH: Do you have a different view of the government now that --

JK: Yes, I probably have less faith than I did before, just because of the -- the situation. Just how it was very badly handled.

RH: What do you think is the worst thing when you say badly handled? What was the worst thing to you?

JK: The worst thing? Probably the slow response that took a few days to get there, for the government to really respond. I think that was probably the worst.

RH: Do you have -- do you see some of the people that you made friends with -- you know, Baton Rouge?

JK: The ones that don't live here anymore. Or the ones that didn't live in New Orleans and Newman, not really that much, no. Just the ones that I had previously known, maybe, that weren't -- that I wasn't such as good friends with. I'm still better friends with them. But knowing that, I really -- didn't really -- hadn't never met before, probably not.

RH: Do you ever think about God?

JK: Do I ever think about God?

RH: Uh-huh. Like whose fault is this for the storm? Or ask God for help for people.

JK: I don't think about it in fault terms. I don't blame it on anything like that. Maybe like in services or something, I would ask for help for other people or something like that, but

not in any blaming or anger terms.

RH: Can you kind of explain to me how you think of God?

JK: I don't know. How I think of God. I don't know.

RH: Did you get help? Did you have to ask for help through this storm, you know and through the crisis? Like maybe not being used to asking for help, and realizing you needed some help?

JK: For myself?

RH: Yeah.

JK: Not really that much. I don't think I'd ever really needed like that. Just probably more for other people that had a lot tougher situations, and were a lot worse off.

RH: Are there any friends that you can think of that you wanted to help, or did help?

JK: Well, there's a few people that I knew that definitely had a lot worse situation. Not friends, like, not that I went to school with, but I definitely wanted to help them a lot, and I think we did help them.

RH: Yeah? You want to talk --

JK: Just -- we just helped them out financially, just helped give them money, and -- just so they could use it.

RH: Do you have a housekeeper or someone here that you were worried about?

JK: Yes, that's probably the main person I was worried about, because she had been here since I was probably about four. And I know her home had flooded. But I tried to talk -- I talked to her on the phone a few times. I called her once I had got into Austin,

and tried to locate her just to see if she had made it out. And she had -- she had made it out, but she was in Pensacola, in a sleeping shelter.

RH: In a shelter?

JK: In, I guess a shelter for all the New Orleans people. But I think she's back now, and I think she's rebuilding her home, so that's good.

RH: And is she back here, at the house, working?

JK: She's back in -- No, she's not. She's still has to deal with her home first, and getting her life back to normal before she can do anything else.

RH: Right, right. Any of your friends kind of call on you for help, or ask you for help?

JK: Friends? Not in particular. I don't know. I think most of my good friends had it pretty good compared to most people, as well. Similar to what I did, so I don't think there was -- not really.

RH: So most of your friends are kind of in this uptown area.

JK: Right, exactly.

RH: That's a good thing. Do you think when you go to college, what are you going to -- do you have an idea what you're going to study in college?

JK: I think I'm going to try and do business. I'm not sure what type though.

RH: Do you want to come back here?

JK: Definitely.

RH: You do?

JK: Mm-hmm.

RH: Why do you want to come back?

JK: Just because I love the city. It's my home. I definitely want to come back.

RH: What are some of the things you love about the city?

JK: Just everything, I think. I love the people, I love the -- it's just the uniqueness, the spirit, just like -- just everything about the city. It's just -- it's one of a kind.

RH: When did you realize it was one of a kind?

JK: I mean, I've always loved the city, so I don't remember exactly when I realized that. Probably the storm emphasized my feelings about the city. But I had always loved the city, even before.

RH: Mm-hmm. Are there any issues in the recovery that bother you? I mean, do you think everybody's being treated the same?

JK: What do you mean?

RH: You know, different parts of the city. How they're coming back.

JK: Any things that bother me?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: I mean, I guess just that overall, the slow recovery and how it's just -- it's just a very -- it's like a very complicated process that, in some ways, I feel has been overcomplicated, and unnecessarily so, cause I feel like it's just caught up in maybe the politics, or just things like that, that are very unnecessary. So that's definitely bothersome -- bothering.

RH: Yeah. Do you ride around the different parts of the city, or have you been in different parts of the city?

JK: Mm-hmm. I don't anymore, but I have been -- I've toured -- I walked -- I drove around the city. Lakeview and also the 9th Ward, for a school project. We did Habitat for Humanity in Musician's Village. So I've been around the city.

RH: What was that like? Did you work at the Habitat?

JK: We worked there for two weeks, just building homes. And I enjoyed it, but I don't know. It was a long process. And I don't know -- I enjoyed it. I enjoyed trying -- I enjoyed helping out, but it was also -- I don't know. Habitat was interesting.

RH: Tell me about that.

JK: It was -- some of the things -- well the thing I didn't like about it, it seemed very inefficient. I think a lot of the time, just I guess, I guess it's because they don't have enough staff or whatnot, so it's a lot of the time there's just volunteers just doing something that they were told to do. But since they're not particularly, I guess, skilled at that, they would mess up a lot. So then they'd have to take it down and redo it and stuff like that. But I thought it was -- like if you go to Musician's Village, definitely a really cool thing is there's a lot of houses that have been built there, and it's definitely a really good thing.

RH: So somebody did go after you and inspect and see if your workmanship was...

JK: Yeah.

RH: I'm somehow comforted by that. And so sometimes you'd have to redo it and stuff like that.

JK: Mm-hmm.

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

RH: This is tape two with Jake Kupperman, for Katrina Jewish Voices, and I wanted to just ask you if you can kind of create the perfect New Orleans, what would it look like?

JK: If I could create the perfect New Orleans?

RH: Mm-hmm. If you were the czar of the recovery.

JK: I guess just, the recovery process would definitely be sped up a lot. I don't know. I guess more people would be back in the city. A lot more of the homes would be rebuilt. I guess the levees would be a lot stronger. And the storm, regardless. That's probably about it. I guess the crime, education. That's about it.

RH: So you'd like less crime, I assume, huh?

JK: Yes.

RH: More education.

JK: Exactly.

RH: OK. For you, have you seen any -- do you have any new ways you think about things, or new opportunities that kind of came out of the storm?

JK: I don't know, I can't think of any right now.

[off-mic, speaking to Jake - Inaudible]

RH: No? You don't want to talk about it?

JK: Oh that doesn't -- that's not right.

RH: Oh, OK. Have you ever traveled to Israel?

JK: Yes. A long time ago when I was -- I think I was five.

RH: Do you remember it?

JK: I remember a little bit, but not that much.

RH: Mm-hmm. Have you ever gone to Camp Jacob?

JK: No.

RH: Oh you aren't a Camp Jacob kid.

JK: No.

RH: Are you planning on going to Israel at any time?

JK: I would like to go, but not as of right now, I don't have any plans. But I definitely want to go back in the future.

RH: Mm-hmm. OK. Does -- can you kind of explain to me what Israel means to you?

JK: I guess it's just -- it's like the... It's definitely -- it's somewhere I feel like -- it still feels like home to me, even though I don't live there. I've only been there one time. But I definitely feel like -- I feel connected, just because of Judaism. And I feel like it's definitely it's something I feel is very important.

RH: Have you ever participated in some of the Mardi Gras stuff?

JK: Mardi Gras?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: Mm-hmm.

RH: What kind of Mardi Gras things?

JK: Mardi Gras.

RH: More parades? Have you ever been to any of the balls or anything like that?

JK: I've been to one ball, but mostly just parades.

RH: Mm-hmm. Do you think your senior year was different because of the storm?

JK: It was different, but definitely my junior year, which is the year that I was in -- was definitely a lot more impacted by the storm than my senior year.

RH: Now that you've lived on a mattress that was leaking on the floor, can you tell me what home means to you?

JK: It's just -- it's where you just feel -- it's just comfortable, and just safe, and just like -- I used to not like my daily routine before the storm. I used to hate it. Just having to wake up and go to school and come home. But then when I was away from it, you kind of missed it a lot. So then I was happy to be back.

RH: You mean no more complaining about your daily routine?

JK: I do, but definitely a lot less, because I know what it means to miss it.

RH: Do you -- can you think of -- I may have asked this already... If you could pick one memory of your experiences since Katrina -- or from Katrina to tell me about, what would it be?

JK: One memory. I don't know. Probably just the -- from when I stayed in the city at the hospital. That's probably --

RH: Do you remember anybody being particularly kind or nice throughout this whole thing that kind of touched you?

JK: Well, I definitely -- I remember the -- all of the support and the donations from the country. And just some of a lot of people were volunteering and coming down to work along, just recently after the storm. So I definitely remember all that, so that was definitely -- it was reassuring for that time that people did care about the city. But most of that has passed.

RH: If somebody in New York or Miami had a hurricane, what kind of advice would you want to give them? I mean, if they had a hurricane and they can't go back home. Any advice for them?

JK: Yes, just -- I don't really know. Any advice to give them? I guess just to make the best of what's happening, and it's going to -- it'll go back soon enough.

RH: Do you feel like you made the best of the situation? Is there something you'd like to change, and how you approached exile?

JK: I don't know. I thought we made the best of what we could do. I think we did fine. I don't know if there's anything I would change. I don't think so.

RH: How about in a year? I mean, that period -- January when you got back. The end of your junior year. Anything else you had kind of wished you would have done in that whole junior year?

JK: I guess probably I wish I helped out the city more with volunteer work. That's probably about it.

RH: Tell me what your most grateful for.

JK: What am I most grateful for?

RH: Mm-hmm.

JK: I guess my family, probably. Definitely.

RH: Why?

JK: Because, I don't know. It's my family. I don't know. Just because...

RH: Do you talk to members -- your family that's not in town anymore? Do you have kind of a different relationship with them, than before the storm?

JK: Most of my family that -- my family that was in town before the storm is all back, so not really.

RH: Do you keep up with your brother, Zach, or anybody --

JK: Mm-hmm. Well Zach -- my brother, Zach is back in the city.

RH: Oh he is?

JK: He's at -- he's at Tulane Law School. But my other brother, Shane, is at Indiana, going to college there. But he was already there before the storm. But I keep up with him. I talk to him a few times a week, probably.

RH: More so than before the storm or not really?

JK: No, not really.

RH: OK. Tell me one thing you've learned about yourself.

JK: One thing I've learned about myself? Just that I -- I think one thing I learned was just really how much the city needs, and I definitely do want to come back later on.

RH: If you had -- if you wanted to tell people who weren't in New Orleans something, what would you want to tell them?

JK: Oh, I'd tell them that -- that there is still a situation here, and that -- and that it's definitely not all solved, or better. And that we still need a lot of help.

RH: Do you think people have forgotten?

JK: I think so, definitely.

RH: And do you travel much out around other places, out of the city?

JK: I don't know, I don't really get to travel that much. I like to stay here. If I travel, in I guess Florida. Into Florida. But not -- or not really anywhere that I interact with the other places that much, with other people.

RH: Why do you think people have forgotten this? I mean, what do you -- what do you think is going on?

JK: I think that they've just moved on to the next, I guess, big situation. They're kind of -- I guess they're kind of bored with it now. And they're just sick of it, I guess.

RH: So, I think we can wrap up here. And I'm wondering if there's anything else that you want to say, that you haven't had a chance to say.

JK: Not really. No. I don't think so.

RH: No? So, you're definitely going to go into business? Is there some kind of business that you'd like to start if you came back here?

JK: I'm not sure what type of business I want to do, but I think that's where I'm headed at the moment.

RH: Mm-hmm. Sounds like a good idea. You're going to enjoy Athens. It's a very cool city.

JK: Thank you.

RH: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]