

# Madalyn Schenk Transcript

Madalyn Schenk: -- to leave to go to Telluride on Saturday morning. And before we went to that, we heard that there was a storm brewing and so we took the plants inside and took the sculpture from outside and brought that inside as well. My daughter who had moved back to New Orleans from Washington, DC in June was visiting friends in New York. So we didn't want her to have to deal with anything if she were to come home, we were gone and they wanted something to be done about the storm. So everything out there was removed and brought inside and that's a fluke.

Rosalind Hinton: Hmmm. Right.

MS: Our flight to Colorado --

RH: I'm going to interrupt you just a minute because I don't know where Jason is --

Jason: Yeah, yeah.

RH: OK. Because I have to do this little introduction to begin it. So let me do that and so then we can just start right into the Katrina story. So, are you taping now?

J: Yeah, I'm good.

RH: OK. I'm the oral historian, Rosalind Hinton and I'm interviewing Madalyn Schenk at One River Place in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is July 25th, 2006. I'm conducting the interview for the Goldring Waldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life and the Jewish Women's Archive for the "Katrina's Jewish Voices" Project in New Orleans, Louisiana in the Gulf Coast. Madalyn, have you agreed to be interviewed and understand that the interview is video-recorded?

MS: Yes.

RH: Thank you. And now we can begin where we left off which is just explaining what you were doing right, prior to the storm, with the evacuation.

MS: Yeah. Prior to the storm, we had previously scheduled a trip to Telluride, Colorado, where we have a home, so we were heading out Saturday morning to the airport anyway. There was some conversation about a storm brewing. We brought out plants from outside inside, our sculpture from outside inside, and left the apartment, so that if the storm really picked up -- because Cindy was kind of scary -- that my daughter who was in New York visiting friends but recently moved back to New Orleans and staying with us, wouldn't have to deal with anything with the apartment. The cab came at five o'clock in the morning. There were no cars on the street. It took no time to get to the airport. We got on the plane, we flew to Houston which is the first stop, looked up at the TV cameras and saw huge lines of people just hightailing it out of New Orleans. I was kind of like Mrs. Magoo, I was right, you know, ahead of the problem.

RH: The crowd.

MS: Yeah.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: And we were very lucky because we got to Colorado, we were in our own space. I didn't have to worry about my daughter who lives here in New Orleans because she was in New York as many days past as could. I don't remember how many but as soon as she was able to get a flight to Colorado, she came and we were very lucky because we were in our own space with our own things and --

RH: So, your story is not a, you don't feel it's a dramatic story --

MS: Oh, no.

RH: -- as far as the evacuation?

MS: No. And I know that there were a lot of people who felt if they lived on the sliver by the river that they were, they might have had some serious feelings of guilt and the like because you're filming this and there's no secret that we have a very comfortable situation that I always felt like, well, if I was going to feel guilty, that I could feel guilty every day because every day I'm luckier than a lot of other people. So I'm probably not your best person to be interviewing about --

RH: Why do you say that?

MS: -- about the storm. Well, it's just that, there's nothing remarkable here and people have some very remarkable stories to tell just for a matter of history. And one might only be able to use this situation as a contrast to other people's condition.

RH: Well, we'll let history decide that, won't we? (laughter)

MS: (laughter)

RH: We'll move forward and let history -- Tell me, though, how long were you planning to stay in Telluride?

MS: We were going to be gone for two weeks. The, actu-, we were going to be gone for two weeks. We could have come back sooner than we did. We stayed 'til the first week in October but we had to get the OK that the water pressure in the building was adequate, that people could live here because I needed to worry about protection [of] fire. There were four people on staff in the building who never left -- the manager of the building, the head of security, the head engineer and one other person.

So, as I said before, the window blew out in our bedroom. It was boarded up immediately, so there was very little water damage. The apartment next door had like a little tornado come through it and so there was some water, but they just peeled back our carpeting, so that the water that came in wouldn't hurt anything. They stayed, using generators. There was a freezer with a generator that they hooked up and went through the apartments, really, and cleaned out freezers of food, so that -- not knowing how long they would be here, they would be able to grill stuff and that people wouldn't come back to any kind of mess that would have either disturbed them or disturbed the neighbor.

Now some of the apartments on the side of the building, they have a rounded balcony. And those units, some have wind-driven rain and many of them, the ceilings on their balconies were damaged and that repair work is just beginning now. So --

RH: What did you think when you were watching the week, well, really, that horrendous week of, after the storm. I mean, you must have been watching TV.

MS: Glued to the television.

RH: Yeah.

MS: In the robe, the same shots, over and over and over again and just being totally immobile -- not being able to move. But we were able to, in the first couple of days -- This build-- this condominium is connected to the Hilton Hotel, so we were able to call into the Hilton and find out what the situation was. We're only a block from the Convention Center.

RH: Right.

MS: But, so in a lot of ways, we really had a picture of what our neighborhood here looked like. When you saw all the windows blown out at the Hyatt, you could tell that those windows were probably facing Poydras Street and our windows go the other

direction. So I kind of just, knowing that, in general, things just kind of work out, we just assumed the best. Susan and Bill Hess, however, have a house down the street from us; there are quite a few New Orleans families that had homes in Telluride. And Susan and Bill Hess have a house there that is just a half a block away, and they're good family friends. And, of course, we were worried about them. They stayed at their house because of their dogs and it was about four days before they made it -- maybe four days, it could have been a week, you know. I don't know, the time kind of blends -- 'til they made it. And that was a situation where their house on Garden Lane backs up to the houses on Bamboo; that's the 17th Street Canal. Across from the Canal, old Metairie was flooded.

RH: So how long have you, you used to live out, near Garden Lane or on Garden Lane?

MS: Well, what we did is, we lived kitty-corner from Al Copeland in Metairie where we raised our kids for 13 years --

RH: Uh, huh.

MS: -- and when my son graduated high school, my husband said, "Well, what do you think about selling the house?" And I said, "Well, change your life, change your wi-, don't change your wife."

RH: (laughter) OK.

MS: So, OK. So, we sold our house. We lived in a unit here. He bought another apartment here in the building. I didn't like it, and we were about to make some changes in the apartment and the neighbor behind us said she was selling her unit. So we told the real-estate agent if someone wants to buy hers and add it to ours, go ahead and sell it. And so she did.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: And, so we lived for about a year-and-a-half in a wonderful house on Garden Lane that Longview had bought because they wanted to square off their property and knock down the house and put up a parking lot. And the neighbors have objected and --

RH: I remember that.

MS: In the meantime, the situation now is is that it's a beautiful house, we were so comfortable in it; anybody would have loved to have lived in it. The house was torn down. Nothing can be done with the lot and we're here and lucky.

RH: So you were talking about, really, on TV, you could see your neighborhood because the Convention Center is a block away and the press was kind of centered around this area.

MS: Mm-hmm. I could see my neighborhood on TV. In the beginning -- not in the end -- but in the beginning, I was able to make contact through the Hilton Hotel. So we were able to know that the people who were in the building were safe, the neighbors who had stayed were getting out and that there was going to be staff here the whole time. So even if you were to look over the balcony and straight down, that's the river walk. And so even though the river walk was totally looted and the people on the, in front of the Convention Center were miserable, they kept showing the shot that turns right towards our building where that one body was left on the Convention, was left on Julia Street, on the side of the Convention Center. And you could see that no one was coming in this direction. And there was nothing I could do. I was safe. My kids were safe. We were in our own space, so I relaxed for ourselves. But I worried for other people.

RH: So, the sense of helplessness must have been hard, huh?

MS: Um, it was like -- how should I say this? I'm born in Chicago, we moved, we've lived here 24 years. With the exception of my daughter, my family's not here. We were very quickly able through the Internet to connect to all of our close friends because I had the

computer, I had a computer in Colorado. I had a list of everybody's e-mail addresses and -- So we were able to account for the people who would be my New Orleans family and worried a lot about Susan and Bill. But as soon as I got to Colorado, they were the only people that we had that we didn't know where they were.

People here, the neighborhood has a little different sense because people who are from New Orleans, the neighborhood is just not their neighborhood, their friends. But, in many instances, there are large Catholic families who have -- Four or five family members have houses within three or four blocks of each other. And so, that's an entirely different situation because it's not like one person is strong and can take care of all those other neighbors, all those other family members.

And I think on the first day I heard right away is that -- Senator Landrieu had said on the news that they had taken a helicopter ride over the city, not uptown. Areas that ordinarily flood, ordinarily flood are not flooded and areas that never flood are flooded. And I knew right away that if she had said that that they didn't fly over uptown, it must have been this area right here was OK because, otherwise, they would have been all over it. Otherwise, the news stories would have been a whole lot different because they would have been filming St. Charles Avenue. So --

RH: So, can you describe how you felt when you watched the news and --

MS: I mean, it was just --

RH: -- and you saw the Convention Center?

MS: -- just, just stuck. I do political work, and I, and I recon- -- Some of it is disbelief. Some of what I saw, I couldn't believe. I couldn't -- in two ways -- I couldn't believe that there was no help coming. But I also couldn't believe all those stories about rapes and stabbings and stealing and all of that because I know that when people are crying for help, they need to make a story. And so, for the people who saw no help coming, I didn't

know whether or not the stories were just getting bigger and bigger and bigger in an effort to get someone to come. I know we shook our heads and couldn't believe that there was not one elected official in any of those shots. Were they scared? Were they helpless? It just seemed to me that if there was leadership in the city, it was very strange that there wasn't somebody there just trying to be a soothing voice. You know, even if they couldn't get stuff in, couldn't there just be somebody there to soothe the people?

I know that -- Last weekend, I went to hear Senator Barack Obama speak. He said he went to Houston to shake hands. I was invited to go to Washington, D.C. with the "Women of the Storm," and I met with a congressman from Washington State, in the Seattle area. He had gone to Houston, to the Astrodome, to kind of be with people who were evacuated there, and it just, there was nobody here.

RH: So none of the elected officials here went to the Astrodome to be with the people --

MS: Well, I don't know that that's true or not true. I just know that I didn't see them coming to the Con- -- They never showed up on television at the Convention Center.

RH: Right. Mm-hmm.

MS: And I don't know. I just felt like it was a horrible crisis. We were very lucky. The best thing I could contribute is to stay out of the way.

RH: So, tell me, you've been in New Orleans, you've been involved in politics for a long time. What, what does New Orleans mean to you? How do you connect to the larger city? How has it kind of made you as a person?

MS: Well, I think that there's a benefit always to a person moving to another place, that initially it's scary but you have to kind of jump in with two feet to, to be a part of where you live. And I've just been very fortunate along the way. There have been women mentors or opportunities to do things that are really quite interesting. And I think that there --



RH: When did you come here?

MS: For the World's Fair. We came in 1982 -- my husband is a subcontractor.

RH: Oh, OK.

MS: So we came in 1982 in preparation for the World's Fair. He was doing quite a bit of work in Louisiana for a customer and having a difficult time because the work ethic in Chicago is different, that the feeling towards unions -- he's a union shop -- is very different in Illinois than it is in Louisiana.

And so, he was having a hard time getting people who wanted to commit to stay here to be superintendent or whatever. And he was traveling back and forth a lot and I said, "All right. I have a daughter going in the third grade, that's a good time to make a change, a son going into kindergarten. Let's just go on an adventure and stay put because you can always go home." And, very quickly, New Orleans became home.

The first piece of mail I received was an invitation to a membership party to the National Council for Jewish Women. I wrote a check for a life membership because I figured you had to do something to get noticed and I got a call right away and invited to work alongside a couple of other women on a project. And one thing and another thing and I had gone -- My sister, at the time, was the third president of JACPAC and she was being installed in Washington, D.C. and I had gone and they had done this whole big deal about improving United States' relations with Israel that probably the best approach is to build trading partners.

They used Hightower in Texas as an example. He was Secretary of Agriculture in this whole irrigation thing and -- whatever -- and I came back. Little me, what could I do about improving U.S.-Israel relationships and trade? And that kind of thing.

And it just so happened that I was Vice President of, oh, yeah, Public Affairs for the National Council of Jewish Women -- nothing changes -- and the Community Needs Committee was really very contentious at the time. People were like, "If you're not for my project, I'm not going to be for your project." And it just so happened that I made a phone call and found out that HIPPY, which is a home-instruction program for pre-school youngsters, which is an NCJW program in Israel, had just been translated from Hebrew to English.

So, at that time, you couldn't be for a project that wasn't your organization's. We were able to get Everett Williams to pilot it.

RH: That's the School Board President at the time?

MS: He was Superintendent of Schools --

RH: Superintendent of the Schools --

MS: -- at the time.

RH: Yeah.

MS: To agree to do that. And so we started one little pilot in New Orleans at the same time as Hillary Clinton did 17 in Arkansas.

RH: (laughter)

MS: And --

RH: And what was -- The pilot program, where, where did you have it?

MS: At, it was at [LaFanne's] School. [LaFanne] and then Hoffman School. HIPPY's a home-instruction program where there is a coordinator who recruits women from the community who, then, teach their peers how to work with their children, and they bring

them materials every day -- not every day, once a week. And, so, it was pretty splashy and, then, Renee Pratt was newly elected to the City Council, no, to the state legislature. We talked to her, she passed a bill in her first few days of being in the legislature. And, then, HIPPY was in seven locations around the state.

RH: Oh, my god.

MS: So --

RH: So, was -- HIPPY wasn't an NCJW project. So pretty much, you were working with other women in the Jewish community?

MS: Mm-hmm. And through that -- Well, actually, we had, at the same time, had nominated another committee in that Public Affairs Group, had nominated Elizabeth [Rack] to be the Hannah Solomon Award winner, recipient. And so, I didn't know Elizabeth but, quickly, she became my mentor. And I would say, "More wonderful things have happened to me because of her than any other single woman." She actually is a woman in her 80s now who was the National Secretary of the League of Women Voters and was a school board president here -- maybe two or three decades ago already.

And just involved me, was the reason that I became involved with Planned Parenthood and with the NOCA Institute, which I just completed my term as President of the Board. So --

RH: So, because a lot of people think New Orleans is a closed community and very hard to get into. But you seem to have been embraced in some ways.

MS: I had this conversation with a friend of mine whose house is in Lake Vista. She's on the side of the line that they have to demolish their house. A neighbor across the, a neighbor to the river side of her house -- of course, it has a green grass -- and [] happy and living just fine. And we talked about that.

I think it's, if you are here and trying to be a part of a community that's made up of families who have so many family members to take care of or to think of or to socialize with, it's difficult. But if you take the route of being part of a community of people who are activists, they're mostly from other places, and they need a family. And, very quickly, it's just my community, really, has come out of, I believe, meeting some incredibly interesting people. And I think that, yeah, if you go a road trying to, to find a comfort space among people who have very busy lives surrounding family, then it's difficult. If what you're shooting for is to be some queen of the debutantes who, you know, it's difficult.

But if you, I think anybody who comes to New Orleans who wanted to be a part of the arts community, a part of an activist network, oh, my god, you'd be embraced in a second.

RH: Mmm. That's been my experience, too. (laughter) Let's go back a little bit to the Katrina story and just talk about, a little bit about when you decided to try to come in and see New Orleans and what went into your decision-making.

MS: OK. As I mentioned, I was the President of the Board of the NOCA Institute -- and you can see NOCA down the river from here. Sally Perry is the Executive Director. Sally evacuated to Baton Rouge. She lives in the warehouse district and because of the school, she was here immediately. She was able to get in and see how her apartment was doing.

The National Guard was at NOCA. So, the initial reaction is, "They commandeered the building," and we thought, "Ooooh." Then, the looting started and we said, "Aaaah."

RH: (laughter)

MS: Then, they were going to take the Guard away to send them to the Middle East, to -- I don't think they were going to Iraq. I think it was to Afghanistan, and we went, "Oooh." And so that was a rocky road. But I always had a picture through somebody else's eyes

about what I was coming back to.

We initially had airplane tickets to come back on September 22nd and -- because we didn't have a car; we had a rented car in Colorado. So we were going to fly back on September 22nd. September 22nd is Rita. My husband had a meeting here. He couldn't get the people to change the location. There were some people from Washington who were coming in town.

We were able to bump him up to a flight that was a little bit earlier. My daughter and I stayed put because there was no reason to come here with another storm barreling in. He flew in. The people that he came to meet were, literally, on the corner, in front of the Hilton Hotel, across from the airport. He said, "You're not going anywhere until we have this meeting." They sat down, they talked for an hour, they got on the plane. My daughter who I had told you had gone to New York, had left her car at the airport. So my husband got into her car, couldn't drive into the city because it was closed, tried, but couldn't do it, turned the car around and drove back to Colorado. He was going to stop in Shreveport, wasn't tired. We cancelled the hotel reservation they had in Boger, made it to Dallas, and I said, "Uh, uh, you have to go beyond Dallas because there's going to be traffic there in the morning. Whether there's a storm or no storm, it's going to be a problem.

He pushed forward a little bit, we had him right outside of Dallas. In the morning, he got up in his car, he pulled out, no traffic at all in spite of the evacuation from Houston. And the reason is because that bus that had the people that were being evacuated from the nursing home, where everyone died, that [wreck] was one stop, one expressway exit towards Dallas from where he stayed. And so he just [shooshed] all the way through.

So all the way along the line, we've been just, our stars lined up all right and it gave me a sense of -- I had very little to worry about and it gave me a greater sense of optimism. And I recall that when they started talking about all the lay-offs, particularly Tulane

University, non-profit organizations and a couple of the -- we were having regular conference call meetings with the Executive Committee from NOCA.

RH: I just want to say, it's the New Orleans --

MS: Center for Creative --

RH: -- Center for the Creative Arts and it's, it's a, it's a high school. Is it a high school?

MS: It's a high school, it's a half-a-day program, right now it's a half-a-day program. Some famous alums are the people we'll know are Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick, Jr., Branford Marsalis, Wendell Pierce who is an actor. The talent is amazing -- Trombone Shortie -- just because they're New Orleans families where music is steeped in the culture and, and the families passed that on, and it is a world-class facility. It really is a part of the history, I think, of the rebuild of the city.

But, in any case, I was like "doggit" because people were laying off staff and, not knowing when the fundraising would ever come back, whether the money would be there -- and whatever. And [I just] put my blinders on and said, "We're going to keep our staff. We're going to do whatever we can to keep them. If you're not going to fundraise now when all eyes are on you, you're not going to fundraise ever."

And the staff cut back their, the staff worked from whatever place they were. They cut back their hours and were going to have reduced salaries. We were able to pay them in full though by the end of the year.

We found that the, the faculty found alternative locations. NOCA doesn't just ser-- even though it says, "New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts," it's not just New Orleans. It's the state agency that serves about 12 parishes around here. So, they were able to find locations in other places and to -- In cases where kids were in schools, in Jefferson Parish or St. Tammany Parish, St. Charles Parish, those kids who had a place to go to

school to take their academics were able to take their arts training in alternative locations.

RH: So, you scattered out your, your faculty?

MS: They scattered out the faculty. So that what happened is is that arts center, arts schools, art centers like fine arts schools of the same caliber as NOCA took some of our students in and their, their people who donate to them gave the resources for room and board, tuition. So there were kids here, there and everywhere. So, the very top kids were placed very high-quality institutions.

The rest of the kids who were able to, whose families were able to get them back and wanted -- These kids were so committed to this program. Families worked hard to get back to this area, whether, if it's not in their own home into a rented place, into another school, those kids were able to go because the faculty kind of spread out to different locations.

And, then, in May, the school had a intense five-week session and so the fundraising we did enabled about 60 kids whose families are not back but the kids wanted the certificate from NOCA to be able to go to Loyola and stay in the dorms. So those 60 kids were back here studying.

And we had done, shortly before the storm, had done a survey because the, NOCA is -- On one side of our property is Bywater and one side is the marina and both areas downtown were, are getting very hot and the property was going up and there were a number of, oh, projects looking at development of the river. You know, they were going to put the Poland Street Wharf was going to be open to cruise terminals and, then, all that area between Poland Street and the French Quarter was going to be developed.

And we had to look at what potential land needs we would have. So we had Allan [Escue] do a planning process with the faculty and the community.

RH: This was before the storm?

MS: This is before the storm.

RH: Oh, OK.

MS: So, again, I'm sitting in a good comfortable place. Sally Perry's is pretty comfortable, we put our blinders on and we're not cutting the fundraising staff. If you had a vision before the storm -- and this is just one instance, and I can tell you some other places that it also happened -- if you had a plan, a vision before the storm and you were, you could move forward, it's the people who are stuck because they were happy with their situation. They had no plan for making a change or doing something different, and they've gotten no information to enable them to plan to correct their situation. Those are the people who are stuck.

I have a house. Can I fix the house? If I fix that, you know, it's the people whose insurance companies are not coming through with the money. My daughter had a plan, she was coming here. She was going to stay with us a short time, she was going to buy a house.

Well, OK, there's that whole issue about what's happened to housing values. An immediate spike in the cost of housing, then it's going to level off and maybe come down.

The whole problem of today's newspaper, about whether or not you'll even be able to get an insurance policy written, if you are a first-time homeowner in Louisiana. For some people, if you'll even be able to get insurance if you have insurance because there's a lawsuit now --

RH: Right, mm-hmm.



MS: -- or there will be a lawsuit. Jim Donelin is got to hold the ground because people, the law says if you, according to the newspaper today, if you've had insurance with a company for three years, they can't just --

RH: Drop you.

MS: -- drop you.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: And Allstate, which is one of the largest insurers in the state, wants to drop 18 parishes that are coastal, so there's a fight brewing about that. So for people who have property and don't know whether they are going to be required to raze the property or not, they're stuck. People who have made the decision to demolish that can't get the permits quickly are stuck.

Their neighbors are mad because they haven't gutted their houses but there's no sense to gut your house if you made the decision to demolish. Some attorneys are invol-, you know, I mean -- Your heart has to go out to people because, just because if you did it right, you got caught. If you did it wrong, you got caught, and some people just are lucky.

RH: Mm-hmm. Right.

MS: So, yeah. NOCA has great plans. It's --

RH: Tell us a little about it because you're just telling me that, that you see it, those plans as integral to the, to the survival of the city.

MS: Well, first of all, it's an arts, um -- Well, see, you know, we did some stuff and, then, we forget about it. You know, it's a state agency, so the State wanted to cut the budget. So that was, ha -- A little group of us had just raised up some money. This is also a funny thing.

Kathleen Blanco was having a fundraiser -- I forget when -- but Cynthia Dupree had asked if --

RH: Cynthia Dupree is --

MS: Is her fundraiser.

RH: OK.

MS: -- had asked if, if, ah -- And I had had a conversation because we were trying to get Kathleen to come speak at something and we were trying to figure out a fundraising tactic -- or whatever. I had nine \$1000 checks made out to the Governor for her re-election campaign in my drawer which, since I was going out of town, I mailed.

RH: (laughter) How fortuitous. (laughter)

MS: (laughter) So she got lucky because I don't know what her, what her future is but the money went in, and NOCA is a state agency and it was like, we got to worry about this huge budget cut because one of the legislators from Ascension Parish has it in for NOCA and always is messing with our budget which is -- and he wanted to cut it, I've forgotten how much, maybe -- He wanted to eliminate all the positions and cut the budget, I think -- I know, I don't remember if they did cut it by \$800,000 and he wanted to cut it by \$2.2 million? I, the figures are gone because I haven't looked at it in a while.

So what we did is, we came back here. The faculty did their deal, our fundraising staff stayed fundraising and, then, some of our board members worked on organizing some advocacy to make sure that we didn't get cut in the state budget.

The school, itself, I believe, is part of the rebuild because everyone wants the musicians back, everyone wants the artists back. Theater, creative writing, that's really the heartbeat of the city and what makes New Orleans unique. And so families whose kids

are able to get an education unlike they can get anywhere else in the country, they're finding their way home. And if the kids have the talent, it's most likely their parents are talented, too.

The other thing that I was doing at the same time is that I was on the Board of the New Orleans Center for Science and Math Education. New Orleans Science and Math Education was similar to NOCA in that it's a half-a-day program, it was open to any New Orleans parish school student who wanted to take their electives in science and math at this particular school. So, say, you went to Warren Easton, you got your degree from Warren Easton but you left a half a day to go get your science and math classes at Delgado's campus where the school was.

Here's a situation where the principal had a long vision, alerted us all to the fact that she might or that she would be retiring in a year from now, so several years down from the time that we had done this planning that we were concerned about whether or not the situation at the Orleans Parish school system would allow us to continue this program which is 90% African American, therefore the culture makes it 66% women and one of only two science and math high schools in the nation that are majority African-American schools.

And the idea of having no test to get in also makes it different. And what happened is that you had to make this special effort to go there, so there was some decision-making involved. But in a lot of ways science inquiry and math [manipulatives] is a new way, a different way of teaching, so the kids from failing schools who hadn't gotten their reading and their communication skills together were learning in a way that they started technical writing and things like that -- and they were getting that extra help in all their subject matter and testing very, very well compared to the students in the district.

So, maybe two, three weeks before the storm, the faculty had voted to become a charter school.

RH: Oh, my gosh. (laughter)

MS: And we weren't sure whether the city was going to weigh, the Orleans Parish School Board -- There are five ways to become a charter school, and we had done all the research on that. Again, so there was a plan in place. The teachers had voted that they wanted to be a charter school.

We hadn't approached the parents yet. We had been dealing with this question of: "Right now, we're a half-a-day school, we're importing kids from around the district or exporting students which really had a positive ripple effect through the district, we felt. Could we be a half-a-day and a charter or not?" And so, those of us who were able to come back were back and in planning meetings right away.

And at the beginning of October, the New Orleans Parish School system granted four schools charter status and that was: Ben Franklin, which you have to test to get into; [Luscher], which requires testing to get into; the Priestley School, which is just going to open up now this fall in architecture and construction; and the Science and Math High School is now a full-day school. It's temporarily housed at Allen School and where we thought we'd have 70 kids, because we were trying to get our kids and our teachers back, we had 170 kids, 80% of whom are kids that never were part of our program before.

RH: My [word].

MS: So, again --

RH: What's the demographic? Is it primarily --

MS: Still primarily African American. She, the scores were not what we used to have but we've been walking funders through. And I had the opportunity to be in an English class and the instructor is reading out of the New Yorker and reading really fast. And, then,

she's having a conversation with these kids about style of writing and who's the speaker and what's going on, and the amount of insight that these kids have, I guess, because their life experience has been so different, well, they're not great readers. They certainly have a sharp ear and a good eye for insight. And so, I think they're getting an excellent education and that, in a little bit of time, they'll be right back up there, you know, if they're exposed to a real school with high expectations for them.

RH: So, you've been implementing a vision for these two schools, really --

MS: And I think school --

RH: -- since you've been back. (laughter)

MS: Exactly. Exactly. So since I've been back -- I mean, in the beginning, it was a focus on these schools. I get a little distracted when the politics starts. So I worked in Mitch Landrieu's campaign and did that. I was invited to "Women of the Storm," so I've been very busy.

RH: And "Women of the Storm" is...

MS: "Women of the Storm" was a group -- Anne Milling with America's wetlands and Nancy Marciglio was very involved in that as well -- pulled together a group to go to Washington, D.C. to extend personal invitations to Congress to come view the devastation because you really have to see it to believe it. You can't watch it on television and get it because -- They still show the same pictures of the city flooded. The city's dry but there are just, you can drive twenty minutes and it's a ghost town -- doors flapping in the wind, nothing, nobody there, no sound; the cars still there, pretty unbelievable.

RH: So --

MS: So everybody has his place. Now this is what Senator Obama said, so I'm not going to take total credit for it. But I believe there's two kinds of rebuilding. There is the rebuilding which is, "What am I going to do about my home?" It's all the houses that have to be rebuilt, all the debris that has to be hauled off, all the businesses that need to be re-opened, all the physical things -- the street lights that still a year later, there are still streets without street lights. All the physical things that have to be done, and that's a huge job.

And then there's the rebuilding which is of community, and, so I liked when he said that because I don't have to spend any energy on the physical rebuild and I'm not a great one for going out and doing physical work and cleaning up houses or that kind of stuff. You know, there's this -- I'm sure someone else will talk about it. Katrina [Crew], this wonderful woman who put together a volunteer team and they cleaned up streets and litter for months.

I have a very good friend, Julie Schwam Harris whose son was here, is part of an a cappella group. Julie has always been a dumpster diver anyway --

RH: (laughter) That's right.

MS: -- and has always been one to clean up after the Tulane students go away for the summer and take all that stuff and send it to a thrift shop or whatever that they throw away. So she's a great one for cleaning up messes and -- So her son, Jonathan, was here with this a cappella group. She and Seth and Jonathan and some of these other kids went out to clean up some houses that were put on a list. And she's sorting away and cleaning up and doing whatever.

We have another friend, a mutual friend. Her name is Clarisse Kirkland. Clarisse is one of seven sisters. The seven sisters couldn't gut their father's house and the stuff needed to be taken care of. And it just so happened that Clarisse works in City Hall with Julie, is

taking the day off, she's with a sister, they go to the, her father's house.

And who do you think happens to be cleaning up the place? Julie.

RH: (laughter)

MS: So that's, it's a wonderful story, she says --

RH: Right.

MS: -- 'cause it wasn't a stranger who was touching her house --

RH: Right.

MS: -- or her father's things and all of her -- Her mother had died that, long before that. So I'm not one to do that kind of clean up. But as far as focusing on the schools and doing that piece, that's my piece.

RH: OK. We're going to take a short break while we check --

[END OF AUDIO FILE PART 1]

MS: ... first place before. (laughter)

RH: With science and math and with NOCA, have you been fundraising -- You have to go out of state to fundraise.

MS: Well, that's an interesting point.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: So let's look at the three things. Ruth Kullman did the fundraising for Mitch Landrieu's campaign which I worked in. There was no problem raising money for Mitch or Ron Forman. So, that was kind of telling. We did a, there's been quite a bit of national

support for both the Science and Math School and NOCA but -- We had our NOCA Gala this year and it raised \$200,000.

RH: How is that compared to other years?

MS: Well, actually, we raised \$206,000. We kept dumbing down the amount of money. I think we've only had one other gala that raised more, and that was when Ralph Lubin was Chair, and so that explains that.

RH: Mm-hmm. So what you're saying is that there's people who have some deep pockets within the city and they give to the causes they want to give.

MS: Mm-hmm.

RH: So --

MS: So, it's possible to raise money --

RH: Money within the --

MS: -- within the community.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: We are extremely dependent, however, on national foundations to come in. And, generally, those national foundations want to give to something systemic and that's rough because they don't know where to land their money because there's no plan.

RH: Right.

MS: So --



RH: So, if Orleans Parish were to have a plan, if we, if there was a direction, if people knew what they could give to that would make systemic change, that's what national foundations really, really want to do. Anybody that we've had a relationship with before at NOCA and the [Sergna] Foundation, some of these other places, they were here immediately.

Wynton Marsalis, of course, raised money on television. There was a donation there. Mexico has made a donation.

RH: The country?

MS: I don't know if it's the country; it's something from Mexico -- I don't know --

RH: (laughter)

MS: -- is making a contribution of \$300,000 to NOCA.

RH: Who is?

MS: Some -- I don't know. Sally would know, but it's --

RH: OK.

MS: -- it originates from Mexico.

RH: OK. Huh.

MS: So, all around the world, there are people who want to help and the difficulty that they have in connecting is, like you said: Is New Orleans easy or hard to break into? Well, if they're looking to give to something systemic, they're having a problem because there's no plan. If you're looking to just do something, there are places because of maybe a previous relationship or a reputation or whatever.

I saw Tamara, actually, at the ALA Convention. I'm on the Library Board Foundation, which has been doing a lot of fundraising as well. And --

RH: I didn't realize you were on that foundation, too. (laughter)

MS: (laughter) It all goes back to education. All right. So, it was really exciting. It was exciting to see people coming here and, more importantly, to see how good people are because there were two branch libraries that were fixed and opened while the Convention was here. One is the Children's Resource Center which is an old Carnegie building that sustained water damage, but -- It's on Napoleon near Magazine. And some of the, a publishing company gave some money, some repair was done to the building. A number of librarians came in, volunteered and painted the whole inside. A company gave the furniture and another group of librarians came and shelved all the brand new books. It was really cool.

They have a little Reading Tree because it's a children's resource center and the bark is definitely an oak tree but when you look at the leaves, they're kind of a Northern leaf and not a live oak tree leaf.

RH: (laughter)

MS: (laughter) But it, but it, really, the kindness of strangers. And it's just so cheery in there, much better than from before the storm. And, then, I haven't been out in Bywater but they also redid the --

RH: The [Alhar] Branch. I went to that opening. It's lovely. A WPA building.

MS: Yeah.

RH: It's so wonderful that the architects decided to keep it.

MS: Mm-hmm.

RH: So, with the library, for instance, this is another organization that, in some ways, feels like it's been declining over the years.

MS: But there's hope!

RH: OK. You feel there's hope --

MS: I think there is hope.

RH: -- in some ways, perhaps, even because things have been swept away?

MS: Well --

RH: Or --

MS: -- I can't remember. Where was that? I don't know. At some point, I was some place where they were saying, "Portability is the first thing that's important, that what we learned from the storm is communication is everything." And so you need to be able to take everything with you and be able to share information like that. And libraries, that's it, that's the place for sharing information.

So we have great hope for technology and -- Even though people look at me and say, "there's so much to be done that the library shouldn't be a big thing on the mayor's plate," but it's just another one of those city services. And one of those things that neighborhoods that are going to drive to the planning are going to, they're going to demand a library. I think, I think it's very hopeful.

RH: Mm-hmm. So --

MS: And nationally people are getting, you know -- I think they've raised \$1.8 million in, to the Library Foundation. I think that's in cash and in kind. That's pretty good. What they don't want are for people to send them their books.

RH: (laughter)

MS: People want to send lots and lots of books.

RH: (laughter) I've heard, I've heard that's Ron. (laughter)

MS: (laughter)

RH: -- go on (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MS: They want to send books. Don't send your books! Don't send your books! Send your books to the bookseller and the bookseller will send us a check.

RH: Right, right. Well, tell me, let's talk about New Orleans a little more and, then, move into the Jewish community a bit. You're, obviously, very engaged in trying to rebuild the city. Is there something that drives that for you?

MS: [pause] It's a responsibility. I mean, New Orleans is my home. Is it because I have a huge love for this city? Is it because, or any of that? I don't know. I just know that I was in a position of re-- a position to make a difference with NOCA. I was in a position to make a difference with the Science and Math School. And I was in a position to participate, although I haven't been equally as active with the libraries. And it's just all stuff from before and I can't abdicate that responsibility because I don't have to do physical rebuilding.

RH: Are you con- --

MS: So I wish, so I -- I'm sorry if I can't --

RH: Go ahead.

MS: I'm sorry if I can't give some flowery answer.

RH: No, I, I'm very pleased with the -- (laughter)

MS: (laughter)

RH: -- with your answers, Madalyn. What do you think about the changing demographics of the city? Is that --]

MS: I, I can't make a prediction. I can't make a prediction because I don't know whether they are, I don't know what the ultimate outcome will be of who will come and who will not come. As many people as we see are going, many of my friends have their children coming back. I'm not a good judge of this or a demographer. I'm definitely 56 ½ today, so a baby boomer. And I think you tell me the age of somebody and I'll tell you what they're doing, that just like when I was five, we all had a hula hoop and when I was, you know, a certain age, everybody has always been at the same little space, you know. If you kind of tell me a person's age, I could probably tell you their situation.

RH: OK. Like what are 20-year olds doing in this city right now?

MS: Well, 20-year olds, you know, they go to college. But people my age, for the most part, we were raising our kids to go some place else before the storm. My son lives in New York. He is part of a group of 12 kids -- they're inseparable since kindergarten, I mean, these boys are as close as they can be. Of the 12, two are here. He is 29, so this is a 29-30 crowd, and they're just getting married now. If you look at people a little bit older than me who raise their kids to go away and their kids are married and they have grandchildren, they're probably leaving -- probably because if they're a little older than me, they would be likely to have lived on the Lake Front or on Lakewood South, and their kids would be married living somewhere else and their grandchildren.

RH: How about the 40-year olds?

MS: Forty-year olds? They're going to go, they're likely to go. Why? Because their kids are young enough that they may want to raise them in a different environment because the school situation here is difficult. A lot of people have gone away to find out that you can get a quality education someplace else and if you're unsure about your business and your earning capacity and you've got three kids, you can't very well bet that you can put your first \$36,000 after taxes down to go to a private school, you know, there's economics there.

RH: That's been, that's been the cost of the private --

MS: A private school's about \$10-12,000, and if you've got three kids, there you go.

RH: Right, right. How do you feel about the response to Katrina that's been on the national, state, local level? Do you have any thoughts on that?

MS: I love my Times Picayune. (laughter). We used to hate the newspaper but I love my Times Picayune. I think the local reporting has been remarkable. I think that not just Chris Rose who has written our, who was a second-rate entertainment writer before the storm, who has written our collective psyche, a diary for all of us. There isn't a person who doesn't understand exactly what he wrote or the collection of stories that are in his book that you don't remember where you are reading it on on the computer [to the] hard news. I mean, it's been, I think it's been, they've done an exceptional job. I don't watch that much television, so I don't know about Anderson Cooper and all of that.

I think that the women who have been working so hard to get Congress to come visit the devastation have --

RH: The Women of the Storm.

MS: Women of -- Well, I think it's really just the leadership from the Women of the Storm. I think, and I think Mary Landrieu has done a terrific job of trying to call the

attention of Congress to our situation. So I think that the reporting on a local level has been terrific, and it wouldn't be fair to report on a national level. I thought Chris Rose's, not Chris Rose's, Chris Matthews' interview, the debate between the two mayoral candidates was awful, that the questions were awful and showed a real lack of understanding about the situation here. But --

RH: Do you want to say anything about the campaign? Your candidate didn't win; it was a close race.

MS: Um...

RH: You must feel, there's a bit of a road-not-traveled that you...

MS: I think that -- When I watched television when the storm first came and watching and watching and watching, the whole time, I thought, why don't we have a politician? Whereas Mark Morial who would control the media, who wouldn't have peo-- who would have the ability to keep people from being hysterical, and there's problems with Morial's administration. Let's set that aside and let's just talk about charisma and I felt that we needed someone who had the kind of charisma that would bring people back to New Orleans, particularly young people who could, who might be able to see this rebuild as an opportunity to not have to start at the bottom but to come right in at the middle and get to the top pretty quick.

So, I worked in Mitch's campaign which was a beautifully-run team. Everybody stayed in their lane, everybody did really well. Ruth did an amazing job with fundraising. The people whose staff, Mitch did a terrific job. There was none of this backbiting kind of stuff you see in campaigns a lot of times, about people worried about face time or worried about getting credit.

I generally do crowd building, so, or people, if you would. So, in the first primary, we did an event for neighborhoods. That was really cool. And, then, the second primary we did

an event and we served 1488 lunches to women, and it was very upbeat. However, Mayor Nagin came to the event and didn't just come to the Hilton Hotel and stand at the front of the building, but absolutely came in, plunked himself right in front of the cash bar.

RH: Was this at a Landrieu event?

MS: At a Landrieu event.

RH: (laughter) An interesting approach.

MS: And he called out the names of people. "Caught you." I mean, he was, with a smile on his face, joking around, intimidating African-American women who were there. So, it is the sorriest part of what is left of our city is -- We have a long way to go to rebuild better race relations.

RH: Do you have any ideas about how to do that?

MS: I think it's person by person. If you roll up yourselves. If you work with somebody. It doesn't matter. You build a -- It's very hard to strike up a friendship with a person but it's very easy to build that friendship when you work on a common cause. And so there are a lot of common causes that we have in the city. And so I think that one by one by one, we could do it.

The thing that I always believe is a challenge are the pollsters because there always is a question of race and ethnicity in those polls, and what gets reported to the newspaper always is a statement which really creates a solidarity among blacks against whites, or whites against blacks. So --

RH: You mean a polling question?

MS: There's always a polling question that's always reported in the paper in a way that creates a solidarity.



RH: Kind of an identity politics that is "us versus them".

MS: Yeah, as opposed to what the truth of the matter is is that we're all in this together and that the storm didn't -- I don't think that Katrina had a race bias --

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: -- that there are people in areas of the Lake Front who are white that got hit and people who are in New Orleans East who tend to be African American who got hit, and the 9th Ward and places that are missed because there's always been lots of checkerboard neighborhoods [involved]. It's part of what we like, huh?

RH: Yeah, yeah. Tell me, so you don't think "politician" is a dirty word? That's kind of what you just said when you talk about Morial and Mitch who's kind of a career politician.

MS: Well, they certainly painted him to be that.

RH: I mean, what do you think politicians have to offer, say, that a businessman like Ray Nagin seems to be lacking?

MS: It's one thing when you are -- Well, one thing I felt that Mitch had were relationships and that relationships matter, that understanding the political process and how do you get people all moving in a direction together and how do you know how to slap -- because sometimes you've got to slap a group of people -- how do you do it in a nice way? When you say Morial, I mean, I would have people very hard-pressed to argue this with me. You may think that Mark abused power or you may think that Mark used power; it depends on how you feel about him.

But one thing that you can't deny is that he understood power, and here is a mayor who I, that we have now who, for whatever good traits he has, really doesn't understand what kind of power he has. And one might venture to say is that someone who understood

that would probably see that they have more power now than they had before the storm as opposed to being totally overwhelmed.

Now, on the other hand, he could be exhausted. Wouldn't anybody be? And I just was ready for a change. I was ready for a change and ready to hire somebody, if you would, for the job that had experience. So --

RH: But you're still ready to roll up your sleeves?

MS: Oh, yeah. Everybody lines up to get behind the winner. That's the way it works.

RH: Mm-hmm. Right.

MS: I mean, you don't walk away. I was afraid at one point because, you know, I thought, "Oooh, is this -- You know, people after every election say, "I'm moving. I can't," you know, "I can't live here anymore." And I was afraid that with the storm and having a dozen other reasons to move that a lot of people might move because of the disappointment with the outcome of the election. Then, I remind myself that everybody was running to Canada to avoid Vietnam but not too many people did.

RH: (laughter) Right. So, let's go on then to the Jewish community and --

MS: They did a wonderful job.

RH: (laughter)

MS: Really, the people who, the people who were in place did a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful job.

RH: Do you want to name a few that you --

MS: Well, I think that the Federation was up online and found people quickly and, you know, that they were able to, that, nationally, the Jewish community responded to the

disaster, that our local Federation moved itself to Houston and was able to find people very quickly. I never felt the need for the Federation services inasmuch as, that I wasn't in a city like Houston or Atlanta where there was a big exodus of Jewish people. I was all by myself in Colorado and then I was here, and, here, pretty much with my friends. Ruth Kullman is president of the synagogue. I mean, I think that they've been able to --

RH: You mean, Touro.

MS: -- Touro -- able to hold that together. The Union for Reformed Judaism -- All right. Well, the connecting factor here is kind of strange. Ann Anderson is a school board member. She is also the Executive Director of an organization called, "New Orleans Neighborhood Development Collaborative." And NONDC supports CDCs that do housing, community development corporations. So before the storm, I had written some grants for her organization and so when I came back to town and I stopped by to see how everything was going with them, they asked me if I would write a proposal to the Union for Reformed Judaism, which gave \$62,500 to pay for a manufactured house, which was placed and built on a lot which they owned in Central City. And the house has been sold and so a portion of that money has gone into another manufactured house on the same square across the street from where the [Guslo] rise was demolished before the storm, and they're rebuilding that.

RH: It's over, near Aretha Casa Higher (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MS: It's actually a Martin Luther King near Freret.

RH: OK.

MS: And so the Jewish community came through and helped there. And I read in the Jewish newspaper online, the Jewish Newsletter online, that the Union for Reformed Judaism also gave a good deal of money to [UJAMA], which is a community development corporation, [INTRAMAY], so that volunteers coming to the city to help

[INTRAMAY], which is getting quite a bit of attention because of the musician's village, and Habitat and that kind of thing, that there be a place for those volunteers. So, nationally, I think that the Jewish community came through for its own. People were able to access \$700 per person for help through the Federation. The synagogues have gotten considerable help to keep their doors open with a declining membership and people in bad situations, the communication has been linked and, then, nationally, the Jewish community has done what it always does is work for the welfare of the community in which we live. I think that's some kind of quote from Jeremiah.

RH: So what has being Jewish meant? Has it meant anything more during this experience?

MS: I don't know. At first when people reported about the damage in their homes, it sounded to me like, nobody's dishes got ruined. It was kind of strange. The china cabinet floated all the way across the room but it set itself down and the dishes weren't broken. Or somebody came home and they had some kind of story about their house: The water was six feet high and the crystal glasses in the cabinet were just filled with water but they weren't knocked over. I'd think of the table as "family"; so family survived.

And then when I'd talk to my Catholic friends, routinely you hear that the Blessed Mother was in the same place as they left here. So, I guess faith survives. And, in a community like New Orleans where family and faith really supersede everything, it's kind of spiritual. And I'm proud of what the Jewish community has done. How did being Jewish impact me and what I've been doing? It must be respect for education.

RH: Have any other thoughts on God or spirituality? How God works in the world?

MS: Just very appreciative 'cause I got lucky. I'm lucky all the way down the line and always have been. And then the question I guess remains is, "Is a person lucky or is it the way you look at life?" And I can't, I, I'm lucky, you know. I'd be pretty stupid if I

complained about anything.

RH: Do you think there's anything distinctive about the Jewish community here in New Orleans that draws you in to connect with?

MS: Gosh. I was so deeply involved in the Jewish community several years ago -- I mean very intensely -- because you could -- It was one year I chaired the Federation Campaign and the next year, I was President of the Jewish Family Service and you could just click things off every single year, some kind of thing. I've never been a, really observant religious person, although, you know, services are very comforting to some of my friends, but not to [me] particularly anytime that we've been temple-goers. I'm well aware that anything that I'm doing now has its roots back to the Jewish community and the opportunities that the community gave me to go outside of the Jewish community. And because everybody's doing such a great job, I haven't retreated to my roots.

I wonder if we had sustained more damage, if I would have gone back to a safe place. But I feel like I'm in a safe place because I feel very grounded in the Jewish community, and I think that that's how I got to the places that I am. I don't know if that makes any sense. I could kind of trace the roadmap.

RH: So there's a kind of way the Jewish community's home?

MS: Oh, yeah. I mean --

RH: And a safe place.

MS: OK. Maybe this is it. I haven't thought, this is like spitting it out right now without ever thinking about it before. I grew up in a very insulated Jewish environment, surrounded by extended family. I was 32 years old and I came to New Orleans as a kind of foreign land. To even say "St. Charles," saying the word "saint" was like pretty tough and now here I am, 56, and maybe what I'm thinking is I grew up as an adult -- I grew up

with three children -- so I grew up in the bosom of this Jewish community, and now I'm off -- not out of it, certainly grounded in it, but free to go outside of the community and secure enough to know that at any moment I could come right back home 'cause you can always go home.

RH: Mm-hmm.

MS: And it is home. The Jewish community is home but it's not -- But my energy isn't there right now, but they're doing a great job.

RH: That seems to be the consensus. Are there any types of Jewish rituals, even family, home rituals --

MS: Mm-hmm.

RH: -- that have more meaning to you or that you've begun now?

MS: We're still sloppy on Friday night.

RH: (laughter)

MS: (laughter)

RH: That could be a ritual? (laughter)(laughter)

MS: (laughter) Yeah. The ritual is, we're still sloppy about, about recognizing Friday night. So --

RH: Any teachings or concepts? I mean, you just quoted Jeremiah?

MS: Well, I quoted Jeremiah because I read it the other day, you know. But --

RH: Oh, so are you reading your Bible?

MS: No, no, no. I was out there, and we turned back to this, it was really just the other day. It's like, "OK, I'm going to take this piece of paper with me because I have to do this interview from the Act. "Act" is all congregations together in Jeremiah and Acorn which is a community group that helps low-income people. That's where Senator Barack Obama was speaking. So, and I went. It was so, it was, it was -- Right after the storm? Ervin Mayfield played at Christ Episcopal Church and it was like, it was the most healing thing.

And, then, Friday night, even though I was feeling kind of guilty about being there because my friend's daughter was getting blessed at Temple because she's getting married, I went to hear the Senator anyhow. So that's where that quote was. It was on a piece of paper there. So I thought, "I'm going to remember this because I have to do an interview."

RH: (laughter)

MS: But I don't think that --

RH: You're getting into something that's kind of, it sounds like it's special about New Orleans and that's that you have musicians like Ervin Mayfield.

MS: And the gospel groups that were singing at this, that's what I meant to say before, yeah. It's what's special about it.

RH: Mm-hmm. About New Orleans is that --

MS: About New Orleans.

RH: -- is perhaps even the way it expresses its spiritual life in music? I don't want to put words in your mouth but --

MS: No, but you're getting there. You're doing good, you're doing good.

RH: (laughter)

MS: Yeah, there is, it's a, there's a very -- I think that the culture is kind of spiritual, but in terms of -- I think that the question that you were asking me, if I've been more devout. Do I think more that there's God's will? Do I think that there's a lesson from all of this?

RH: What, for you, perhaps? It doesn't have to be --

MS: Yeah. I think that you just have to appreciate every, every day, you know. You have to appreciate every day and you have to have a purpose for putting your feet on the ground, but I don't know that that is uniquely Jewish or that this sense of responsibility is uniquely Jewish. But I know who I am. It goes back always to, to, to the safety of being Jewish which probably sounds pretty strange that you would call being Jewish "safe". But --

When I was little, my grandfather -- we used to eat dinner Friday nights at my grandfather's and grandmother's house and they were Orthodox Jews and Shomer Shabbos, and whatever and I think, you know, as I recall, my grandfather used to say that what's nice about being Jewish is that you're part of a small enough group that you have an identity. So --

RH: Are there any concepts in Judaism, any intellectual frameworks that you kind of think through when you approach the world?

MS: You mean, when I look at something?

RH: -- or act or that come to mind?

MS: I don't know, I think that if you say that Judaism is a three-legged stool and it's prayer and it's Torah and its acts of loving kindness, for me, it's the doing more than the knowing. So, I'm a little off balance. (laughter)



RH: I like that. It's a nice (laughter) image.

MS: (laughter) (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) ...topple over.

RH: You get your (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) work done off balance. Do you have a vision for the future, either of the Jewish community or either of New Orleans? We've been talking more about New Orleans. Or even for yourself, your family?

MS: I don't, I don't know the answer. It's not going to be the Anastasie Indians and just disappear. There's a reason that there was a city built here before. The reason still remains. People will come back. It'll be the same, it'll be different. It's Gumbo with a different flavor. And we're here and we're here because we have a role to play, and my husband is in the construction business and I'm in the business of helping get these, getting the fundraising done, helping these schools get on their, their feet because I'm a field-of-dreams person, you know. You build it, they'll come.

RH: Any frustrations, any things of the Old New Orleans you'd like to put aside?

MS: I really would hope that there could be, I really would hope that there could be better, a more, a better, more equitable economy. All the things that we know to be, all the poverty issues are problematic. We have an economy that was built on tourism because we had uneducated people and the jobs that they could have really were related to service industry, maintaining hotel rooms, the food, food service and that kind of thing. But when you think about the opportunity to really -- If somebody just had the vision to build some other kind of industry.

You know, you see Jews in entertainment because they weren't locked out. You see Jews in the film business because when film first started, nobody was there, so you couldn't be locked out. You kind of -- All those areas that are on the cutting edge, that are new, where old established ways, that people would go to. That's where you always found Jews who were persecuted some place and afraid of antisemitism could go to

those new things. They were something cutting-edge that we could just start building, building on without losing what is the taste, the smell and the feel, the feel of the city because it truly does it have its own taste and it has its own feel and, lately, the smell is not so good.

RH: (laughter)

MS: But the food, the taste, the smell, the sound from the music, it's just -- the gingerbread on the architecture, it's vis- -- You know, it's a very sensual place and it would be nice to be able to keep that but to be able to bring in, to bring people in because we have a viable economy. But I don't know that we can, but I can work on improving these schools, so that people feel like they can come back.

RH: I feel like we've --

MS: Are we done?

RH: -- answered most all the questions and so I think -- I'm just curious. Do you have an evacuation [plan]?

MS: (laughter) Why? Because we didn't before? And we still don't? Well, no --

RH: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) a lot of people are developing them.

MS: We should.

RH: (laughter) OK.

MS: We don't even have -- like, this is really terrible -- we don't even have -- I'm going to do it today. I know we have maps in the house. I have to make sure -- We don't have a state, southwest Louisiana, not southwest Louisiana, we don't have a southeast/southwest map of the United States in the glove compartments of the cars. So

maybe I'll make it my business to do that.

And I promised myself I would get a camera, so that the day before a storm comes brewing, I could take pictures of everything, so that we would have that. But our plan is to get [Rene Zack] and if it looks like, if we can't get a flight out because, you know -- Rosh Hashanah two years ago, we flew out to Houston. Last year, we were in Colorado. So if we can't get a flight out, we're going to drive to Memphis to Micky and Ed Lazarus' house. They're our friends that moved out of New Orleans and they have to do their part since they moved away.

RH: The people you miss who have left --

MS: Most of my people are here, most of my people are here. The, I don't think anyone will understand this on the tape, but the people I miss are my 40,000 new neighbors every day because I live here in the heart of the tourist area of the city and when the tourists aren't coming and the noise level is down, I kind of get lonely for the strangers, for the, just the energy level.

RH: Mm-hmm. It's great. I totally get that. You've got your neighborhood here, right here at the foot of Canal Street, as [the song goes].

MS: Yeah. And so I kind of miss, I kind of miss having all those people. It's very easy to take a walk into the French Quarter but it's very sad. Those businesses are, a lot of the shops are closed for the first half of the week now, they're not there Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and people are just hanging on. And that's really sad because that's the heartbeat of the city, it's on the higher ground, it's where, it's a place that was saved but the tourists that feed that area are miss- -- I miss [Commander's] Palace. I probably stay home and stay in much more than I did before -- in part to stay away from, well, not so much now but, in the beginning, I wanted to stay out of the way of progress. Now there's not so much progress, and I want to stay out of the way of looking at no progress.

RH: Mm-hmm. You came back finally -- I should have gotten this earlier -- about when did you come back --

MS: The first week in October.

RH: OK. So you were here when no one was here, really. There weren't a lot of people --

MS: And I don't feel like there are a lot of people that are back in the building here, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure if that's accurate or you just don't see them, bumping into them up and down the elevator or anything like that. But --

RH: Do you feel safe in the city?

MS: Absolutely! Absolutely, because I've always gone to the strangest places, and, you know -- For a while there, I, you know, I was working in Central City, so right where all that horrible stuff is? Oh, yeah, I'm, I've been on those streets. It's not a question of do-I-feel-safe/not-safe and that's answering from crime. Obviously, being up here and having the experience that I had, I feel very safe from the weather, from the levees. I'm a very blessed person and everything is always so smooth in my life. So why would I suspect I would not be safe? And if I'm not safe, then it'll be my turn not to be safe because so far everybody's taken a turn here.

RH: OK. I think we can wrap it up.

MS: OK. Thank you so much.

RH: If you'd like to add anything.

MS: Thank you. You made it easy. I hated it.

RH: (laughter)

MS: I hated it.

RH: You're wonderfully articulate. I'm going to (inaudible) [fadeout]. (laughter)

[END OF INTERVIEW]