Carol Smokler Transcript

JAYNE Guberman (JG): This is Jayne Guberman. I am here in Lenox, Massachusetts with Carol Smokler and we're going to record an interview for Katrina's Jewish Voices. Today is August 13, 2007. Carol, do I have your permission to record this interview with you?

Carol Smokler (CS): Yes.

JG: Great. So, Carol, why don't we just start with a little bit of background about your life. Little bit about your family background, where you grew up and what kind of a family you grew up in, just briefly.

CS: So, I'm the oldest of two children. I was born in New York City, I grew up in Long Island, then in Tenafly, New Jersey -- first in Long Island, later Tenafly, New Jersey. My parents were divorced when I was 14. My mother remarried and moved to Tenafly. My father remarried, so I have two step-families. Went to college in Massachusetts, to Smith. Went to graduate school at the University of Michigan. Got married in Michigan. Lived there for over 30 years. Raised my kids there and when the last kid left, my husband and I changed our lives. We lived part time in Boca Raton, Florida. Part-time here in Lenox and part-time in Jerusalem. Pretty cool.

JG: Pretty cool is right. And I'm getting a buzzing sound here, so I just want to make sure what this is before we go any further.

CS: There's a buzzing outside. Sounds like a lawnmower.

JG: It's not. Hold -- [break in audio] -- Carol, can you tell me a little bit about how you decided to become a psychologist? Just briefly.

CS: OK. I went to undergraduate school in the 60s and my mom thought that I should -- there was enough money for the girls to go to undergraduate school and the boys to go to professional school. And I should get an undergraduate degree, a career and find a husband quickly. And I really wanted to be a doctor, but there was no one to pay for me to go to medical school and I was scared about taking out loans and I wound up being a psychologist because the US government sent me to graduate school for six years.

JG: I see. What about your Jewish background? How did you identify Jewishly when you were growing up?

CS: I grew up in a marginally Jewish family in terms of practice. I grew up with a Christmas tree, with an angel on the top, in a family where I went to Reform Sunday School because my parents thought it was like joining the country club. It was a social obligation. And I was always interested in it and my family was always dissuading me from being interested in it. They wouldn't let me have a bat mitzvah because they thought I could have a Sweet Sixteen instead. They wouldn't let me go to Israel, but they sent me to Mexico for the summer instead. And I would say part of my Jewish identity was my rebellion against my family who was totally uninterested.

JG: Did you have any Jewish education to speak of?

CS: Yeah. I went to Sunday School through the eighth grade, and I had seven Kiddush cups for perfect attendance and I rather loved it, despite my family. And that was my major Jewish education. I couldn't read a word of Hebrew. I didn't know any prayers. I had a real Reform education.

JG: Can you describe your relationship to the local -- to your local Jewish communities and to your national Jewish communities sort of over time just briefly.

CS: I guess. I had a limited relationship -- I had no relationship to the Jewish community in college and when my husband and I got married, we did not belong to a synagogue

initially. We had a limited contact with the Jewish community and we lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan and we joined a synagogue because, in a town with a very small Jewish population, you had to go to some effort to have your kids identify as Jews. You didn't have to do that in the New York that I grew up in and we joined the Conservative synagogue partly because my husband grew up Conservative, and partly because the Reform rabbi was not to our liking. He was very humorous and light and talked less enough for us, and so we joined this conservative synagogue and started going there. And our second child developed a serious chronic illness when he was 13 months old. And we put the whole rest of our life on hold for many years because he's a 20 percent survivor and mostly what we did was go to the hospital and get through the days. And I went from being a person with a career to a person with a job and --

[END OF AUDIO ONE]

CS: -- we had a third kid along the way somewhere in there. And sometime around when he was about 11 or so, he stabilized. And, we got more involved in the Jewish community largely because we had an uncle who was the president of CJF and he said to us, you know, Matt's OK and it's time that you guys do some giving back. And I think that he asked us to do that because his own kids were not interested. And we had shown some interest. And so he actually took us to the former Soviet Union and Israel with the JDC and we also, I think, prior to that, made our own first trip to Israel on our own when our son was better and so we sort of put our toe in the water and then took an enormous plunge and wound up being very involved, first in our local community, where Irv was the president of the synagogue and the president of the Federation. I was the campaign chair, the president of the Federation, the secretary of the synagogue, the treasurer of the JCC -- so we got majorly involved in our community and then we got involved outside of our community in UJC. We got involved on the JDC board probably 18 years ago, 15 or 18 years ago, and I don't know, one thing led to another and I was the national P2K chair and --

JG: Can you say what that is?

CS: Partnership 2000, and then I sat on the Jaffee Board for five years and then we moved to Florida and we got involved in the Federation, in our local community down there. Irv left because of personality issues and he was the treasurer for about three or four years. I was the head of the overseas committee for five different years and kind of minimally involved there now. I'm the head of the task force and I'm on the board of the Women's Foundation and I think -- he put his energy back in JDC and I got real involved with National Hillel and that's what happened when we left the Federation down there or we backed away from the Federation down there. So, religiously, I went from being a Reform Jew with no education to, I guess, a sort of Conservative Jew. I learned how to read Hebrew. I had an adult bat mitzvah.

JG: Hmm. In Ann Arbor?

CS: Yeah, in Ann Arbor. I keep a kosher home. I would say we're sort of -- we're not shomer shabbat but we're shul goers and -- we're not shomer shabbat because we like going to shul and if we were shomer shabbat, there'd be no place for us to go to.

JG: Right.

CS: So we drive on Shabbat, but we don't use computers and we don't do business and we don't spend money. So, I don't know, we're somewhere in the spectrum. I would say we're non-denominational. We don't belong to a Conservative synagogue anymore. We're members of BJ in New York. We go up to Shir Hakaddisha and Kol HaNishama in Y'rushalayim and we go to an Orthodox shul in Boca.

JG: So really --

CS: Yeah, we really --

JG: -- the spectrum.

CS: Right. And we go to the Orthodox shul, not because we like the davening but because we like having a Shabbat community and that's the only place in Boca we can go and know that we'll have Shabbat with people.

JG: So, obviously the Emergency Committee and UJC have been central in what you've been doing for a number of years, and I wonder if you can just give us some background to start with on the history of the Emergency Relief Committee and how it came into existence and --

CS: OK. It came into existence following Hurricane Hugo in the 1980s, when there was a lot of damage to the Jewish community in Charleston. And CJF organized a fund to give them money and loan them money to put themselves back in order. And then the Committee raised funds so that they would be ready for another emergency and Bob Friedman, I think from Canton, Ohio, was the chair of it. I don't know if he was the original chair. He preceded me as the chair. And when -- well, and when the last chair of CJF was Connie Giles and when he was the chair of CJF, he recruited me to be on the executive committee and I told him I wouldn't do it without a real job and I think he made me the Emergency Chair because it was a job and no one really cared about it. And he just wanted a girl at the table and that's how I got there. I think there were five women out of 30 people on the executive committee and I was a woman. And so I've had that job since CJF and UJC came together, which was --

JG: When was that?

CS: I think it's almost 10 years.

JG: So, in the late 90s you're talking about.

CS: In the late 90s I've been doing this and I know I did the floods in the Mississippi River and earthquake --

[END OF AUDIO FILE TWO]

CS: -- in California. Was I doing anything? Yeah.

JG: What is the committee's mandate?

CS: OK. So the committee's mandate is really to, as it started out, to help a Jewish community deal with what we thought then was going to be a natural disaster. Get back on its feet. Loan them money. So we've helped places that have had tornados and floods and earthquakes and hurricanes get back together. Over time, we've also started raising funds and distributing money for the general community. We became the way that Jews could give to the general community through a Jewish voice, so that the general community in the disaster zone would know it came from us. And, the role of what we've done certainly expanded with Katrina and 9/11 and since 9/11 we've dealt with -- well, I guess one was before 9/11 -- we've dealt with several different non-manmade -- non-natural disasters. We helped Denver provide counseling in Columbine. We helped the Hillel at Virginia Tech this summer. We brought a pastoral counseling rabbi to them. We helped them help the general community.

JG: How about with Columbine? What was the role of the committee?

CS: We helped Denver fund counselors for the community.

JG: For the Jewish community or --

CS: The general -- no --

JG: -- the general community.

CS: The general community. And then last summer we helped the Seattle Federation after the shooting there get back on their feet, both in terms of money and support staff from UJC. And, I got to provide the emotional link to the president of the Seattle Federation, so we helped them as much as we could.

JG: Do you think that going forward -- is the committee thinking that natural disasters and terrorism, unfortunately, are going to be sort of going hand-in-hand or it's still more oriented toward natural disasters do you think?

CS: I think it's much more oriented toward natural disasters. And two of those four instances I gave you were not terrorism. They were crazy people. Both in Seattle and in Virginia Tech. They weren't really terrorist incidents. They were loose cannons.

JG: Right.

CS: And also in Columbine. So the only really terrorist incident that we've really dealt with was 9/11.

JG: And what did the committee do? What did you see your role being?

CS: Well, we raised a lot of money that was sent to us in 9/11 and we -- we used the money largely to help the Jewish victims of 9/11. We helped pay Day School tuition, Jewish camp fees, counseling for Jewish victims of 9/11 who were spread from Boston to California, also in Washington, Pennsylvania, New York. And we coordinated the Jewish -- some effort to help in the general community. We particularly helped immigrant workers who worked in the Twin Towers, their families, and we gave to certain funds in New York that were helping immigrants.

JG: Was that the largest disaster by far that the committee had dealt with --

CS: Absolutely.

JG: -- in terms of your response?

CS: Yeah. Absolutely. It was, up until that point, the largest disaster. And we dealt with some small communities in New Jersey that didn't have infrastructure, that weren't part of federations, that were directly impacted because of their location. They were commuting distance to the Twin Towers, and so significant Jewish people lived there, but there wasn't a Federation like Hoboken to help that community, so we hooked them up with Jewish Vocational Services New Jersey and did other things and then we managed the British 9/11 Fund had money for scholarships and so for two or three years, they would call us with an amount of money and we would use it to help keep kids in day schools and to pay for summer camps.

JG: And looking back on it now, if you had to gauge the level of response to 9/11 and to Katrina by the Emergency Relief Fund, what would you say?

CS: Well, I think we did a whole -- we had, I think, 6 million -- under $10 million dollars in 9/11. Certainly the largest we'd ever had. But, with Katrina, the Jewish community plus the Federations, we were dealing with $28 million dollars and much -- the numbers were much greater in terms of impact and I don't want to pooh pooh 9/11 but the disaster situation much more long-lasting to a larger -- a greater number of people than were directly impacted by 9/11.

JG: Right.

CS: There were more people impacted by Katrina.

JG: So -- so let's start talking about --

[END OF AUDIO FILE THREE]

JG: -- Katrina, and one of the things that I wanted to know is whether you, yourself, had a relationship with New Orleans prior to Katrina. Had you been there?

CS: I had been to New Orleans once for the GA, about a gazillion years ago. And -- I think in the late '80s. Maybe there was a GA in New Orleans in the very early '90s and our uncle was the head of CJF and so we went to it. And, that was my one and only trip to New Orleans and I knew Carol Wise and Julie Wise Oreck. And, one other woman --

JG: Through -- through Federation?

CS: Through Federation stuff. Through the National Women's Board. I knew Julie -- we sat on the Overseas Pillar together. I got her on the Jaffee Committee when I was on the nominating committee so I knew Julie and Carol. I knew Julie from the Jewish Women's Archive -- I mean, Carol, through lots of different ways. And that's about it for New Orleans.

JG: And then Hillel.

CS: I didn't really know anything about Tulane Hillel or know any of the people there.

JG: So, when did you first hear about the gathering storm? When did it first come onto your radar screen?

CS: This is going to sound so silly. My husband and I were in Florida trying to get some work done. We went down where -- we were never there in August and we were there --

JG: Where's home?

CS: Boca Raton. And we were -- we live on the ocean and for any storm Category 1 or greater, the beach evacuates and there was an evacuation for Katrina because Katrina first crossed Florida and then went to the Gulf and strengthened. So, as a hurricane -- as a Level 1 hurricane, it came over the Florida peninsula and we went to New York. So, I

was paying attention from the very beginning because I was evacuated. So, we went to New York and watched it that weekend gather strength and then I was at a conference in Brooklyn for something called PLP, the Professional Leader's Program. And it's a young people's conference and there were a few old people like me, there. And one of them was a woman named Barbara Guprin from New Orleans. Ex from New Orleans. Lives in Washington. And she and I made friends. And so we were the only people who were kind of glued to our TV sets. And so we were watching it come to the coast not take a direct hit on New Orleans. On Sunday and then on Monday, we watched the lightning strike.

JG: So, Sunday the 28th of August and then Monday the 29th?

CS: The day the levees broke. Of August, right. So I was watching all of the time. We would go to half a session of the conference and run into her room and watch it on TV and, by that time, UJC was already calling.

JG: By Sunday, Monday. So that was my next question.

CS: Mm-hmm.

JG: When was it really on the radar screen of UJC and what was the first response?

CS: It was on UJC's radar screen before it happened because Howard Fineberg, the lead staff person, and the people who preceded him, too, we always check in with communities before something that we know is going to happen happens. So, he had already been in touch with the community, knew about the plans of some people to go to Houston and let them know they could reach us. So, he was already -- we were monitoring the storm before it came hoping that it would miss New Orleans. And watching it grow, too, because, remember, at the time it hit, it was physically the largest storm that ever was until Rita came and was even larger three weeks later. So these were big, monster storms. And so we had been monitoring it. So, that was Sunday,

Monday. We were already involved in rescuing people by Tuesday.

JG: Can you go back for a minute and just describe the committee?

CS: OK.

JG: Who was the committee comprised of? How big is it? Etcetera.

CS: So, the community -- Howard is the lead staff -- Howard Fineberg. Barry Schwartz oversees Howard. On the community are lay people, many of whom are from communities where there have been disasters. We like to do that, invite someone who has been part of the response to be part of the community. Some of them are hold-overs from CJF. Some of them are professionals. It's a committee that's not just lay people, but it's lay and professionals. For example, Steve Edelstein the executive and national is on the committee. He used to be -- when he worked for CJF and UJC, the staff of the committee. So now he's a member. The California Planning Director, Carol, whose last name I can't think of at this minute, is on the committee because she dealt with the North Ridge earthquakes. A guy from -- Bruce Yudowitz from Miami, who dealt with Hurricane Andrew is on this committee because he had experience and so that -- it's a broad range of people. And not all of them come all of the time. People from the New York Federation are on the committee because of the response to 9/11 and that's who's on the committee. For the immediate response to Katrina, since we had to make decisions --

[END OF AUDIO FILE FIVE]

CS: -- decisions rapidly and make them involving large amounts of money. The three officers of UJC and Howard Riger also joined the committee initially to make some of the early decisions. Actually, it was just Mort Plant. I'm sorry, Bobby Goldberg didn't really participate. It was Mort Plant and Cathy Manning, who was the treasurer of UJC, who --

JG: Cathy Manning?

CS: Cathy Manning and Mort Plant and Howard were involved in some of our early thinking.

JG: So when did the committee first convene? Does it convene in person or by phone?

CS: No. No. By phone.

JG: Phone.

CS: I was talking to Barry and Howard by Tuesday. We were convened by the weekend.

JG: Tuesday the --

CS: The 30th, after. We had talked some before about, you know, what to do. We talked briefly but really we didn't do anything the first several days because we were very much involved in rescue and there was nothing else to do early on and we were actively involved in getting people off of buildings in New Orleans --

JG: How did you go about doing that?

CS: Well, about 40 percent of the New Orleans Jewish community went to Houston and people who could got in touch with the Houston Federation or they got in touch, alternatively, with UJC or people they knew in Baton Rouge or somehow people would tell us they had a relative left behind in New Orleans who chose not to come and this was their address. And we knew where 30-35 people were. And the people in Baton Rouge, there was a guy in Baton Rouge --

JG: Richard Lipsey.

CS: Richard Lipsey. And he took the list of people with Mapquest maps of where they lived to a friend of his who was one of the Baton Rouge sheriffs and they said that would

be great. They wanted to do something helpful and these were people that could actually be saved because we knew where they were. Because Jews are well organized. And, they went and they rescued those people, all of them. And, they went on two boats with a whole bunch of Mapquest maps and GPS devices and they found the people and brought them out and I think we were involved in some other rescues early on, too. There was a baby born in Baton Rouge, in New Orleans, a newborn baby who was taken to Pediatric Intensive Care in Baton Rouge and the mother went to Houston and we got them together. An Angel Flight got them back together.

JG: Are you talking about Lanie Breaux? Lanie and Tad Breaux? Baby Zachary Breaux, who was on CNN? Is that the one?

CS: Maybe. Yeah.

JG: Because I know the Angel Flight was involved with --

CS: Right.

JG: -- bringing them to the baby ultimately in Ft. Worth. I don't know if it's the same one or not.

CS: It may be but there was a baby -- I thought there was a baby in Baton Rouge. It may have been Ft. Worth. At any rate, we were involved in several stories like that in bringing people together. Maybe Howard told you about the gay couple with all of the pets. Do you know about them?

JG: Tell me a little bit.

CS: There was a gay couple, men, who didn't want to leave New Orleans because they had like 20 pets and we couldn't get them to go and we couldn't get them to go. I don't know. I think they were two men in their 40s or 50s and finally some farm or family in

Pennsylvania, a Jewish family, agreed to take them and all of their pets and then they would go and so Richard Lipsey and the Baton Rouge Police got them out with the pets and somehow, someone took them to Pennsylvania. I don't even remember at this point how they got there.

JG: So, pretty dramatic rescues.

CS: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: Hmm.

CS: You're better at the names than I am. I don't remember the names of the people with the baby but that may be it, yeah.

JG: So can you describe the committee's decision-making process?

CS: Yeah.

JG: As it moved from this initial direct rescues to distribution of funds. Was that the main thing that was happening?

CS: Well, I think that there were a couple of things happening. The early process dealt with distribution of funds, but a lot of it dealt with the decision-making about distribution of funds and there were a couple of issues there. Having done this for a long time, Howard and Barry and I knew that you did short-, medium-, and long-term relief and Burt Goldberger. You've talked to Burt? You're going to talk to Burt? OK. Who is the head of National Organization for Jewish Family Services. We all knew that you didn't do this -- dump it all at once, because then the money would be gone and there'd be nothing left for re-building or mental health or longer-term needs. And we got lots of pressure from donors and federations to spend. And, a lot of the initial spending, a lot -- initially they didn't need our money, initially. But, in very short order we discovered that people didn't

have credit. That their credit cards didn't work.

JG: Individuals, you're talking about?

CS: Individuals. And so we made decisions to --

[END OF AUDIO FILE SIX]

CS: -- to give, I think it was $750 to every member of the Jewish community, wherever they were, who needed it. And that helped people get through the first week or two 'til their credit was working, until the ATM machines worked again, until they could put their card in and New Orleans' banks had some way of verifying that they had money in their account.

JG: So they would essentially go to the Federation in the community where they were?

CS: They would go to Baton Rouge or Houston -- basically, Baton Rouge and Houston, but I think other places, and we'd be able to get them this money and the way they learned about it is UJC set up a Web site and communications system through the New Orleans Federation who was then located in Houston and some in Baton Rouge so that people could communicate on the Internet and, a), find out where people were and, b), find out about services that were available to them. And so there was a lot of that early on, the distribution of those kinds of funds. And so the two big decisions early on was what to do short-term. How much Jewish and then the other question is, how much do we do in the Jewish community and how much we do for the general community, because a lot of the funds that came to us came from people who wanted the Jewish community to help the general community.

JG: Can you back up for one minute and talk about how people were contributing. How did they know where to contribute. What kinds of efforts were being made by UJC?

CS: OK. We had a Web site where they could contribute. We were on the New York Times list of places to give money for Katrina relief. We were on the crawl on CNN. So, it wasn't hard to find out that -- and that was given as the Jewish alternative.

JG: Were there other Jewish alternatives?

CS: Not that were listed. And when it's an overseas disaster, it's usually listed as JDC. But it -- I don't know which we -- we had to file certain kinds of paperwork to get listed with them but we did and so very early on the money just kept coming in. And I don't know if you've talked to Jerry Rosen or not.

JG: I've talked to him, not on tape.

CS: OK. He's the guy in finance who was in charge of opening the checks and when we did our mental health debriefing a year ago, he said he couldn't go home at night until every check was opened. He thought that that was his contribution and he would stay there until 9, 10 o'clock at night, opening these checks by himself.

JG: And what size checks were coming in?

CS: You know, I don't know. All different sizes. Small, medium, large. It's just -- and then the other thing that was happening was goods in kind, and that's a very problematic area.

JG: Can you talk about that a little?

CS: Yeah. I think goods-in-kind is a mixed thing. People want to do something to help and so sometimes they don't think clearly about what will help and they don't ask the people in the disaster area what will help, not just from the Jewish community but from all over the country. All kinds of clothes came in. They just molded. And winter blankets weren't needed there in August. And gloves and mittens and, you know, people weren't

thinking. They just -- they were thinking with their hearts, not with their heads. And so a lot of the goods in kind are things that you don't need at all that are pretty useless things, and it's basically not a great way to give -- it's better if you're going to give goods and kinds. Like, I vaguely remember that someone had mattresses --

JG: I also remember, for instance, people collecting backpacks for children with school supplies.

CS: Yeah. Things that can be used right away. Things that have to be warehoused are pretty hard to deal with because -- this is a place filled with water and no electricity and you have to stage them offsite, and we used a lot of the Reform movement camp.

JG: Jacob's Camp.

CS: Camp Jacob became a staging site for stuff. And a lot of it never got used. And I saw -- I know in Florida, they kept having drives to collect stuff to send to the disaster area. They didn't ask anyone what they needed. I thought that there was a lot of -- this is going to sound so tacky -- people cleaning their closets for a tax deduction. And, what really was needed more was money. And a lot of people were afraid money wasn't going to be used right and we would tell people, if you don't want to give money, give us gift cards.

JG: What do you mean by that? What kind of gift cards?

CS: Well, like one of the not-Jewish places we gave to was a great big shelter in Monroe, Louisiana, where there is a small Jewish community. And we gave a $50 gift card in an envelope that said, This is a gift from the Jewish community, to every single person in the shelter. And $50 buys food and personal toiletries and articles and you don't have to worry about it being misused or someone running off with it. It went to what it was supposed to go to. So we urged people who were uncomfortable giving money to --

[END OF AUDIO FILE SEVEN]

CS: -- give gift cards. You know, give them to local churches. Give them to shelters. Give them to where they can give to people who, at the moment, have nothing.

JG: And was that a significant part of the funds that were collected do you think?

CS: No. No.

JG: No.

CS: But it was a way that we distributed funds in the general community. We did it through gift cards.

JG: I've heard a lot of people talk about getting Wal-Mart cards.

CS: Yeah.

JG: That kind of thing.

CS: Right. Remember, Wal-Mart is all over the South and it was easily accessible and it was easy to get the cards. It was easy for people to find a Wal-Mart and the price point was right.

JG: So, you were starting to talk about several issues --

CS: Yeah.

JG: -- that we really need to get into. One was short-term, medium-term --

CS: Right.

JG: -- long-term decision making.

CS: Right. I think I really pushed them to think strategically and not just spend the money, even in the categories.

JG: How much money are we talking about?

CS: Well, in the end, $28 million dollars of --

JG: That came in over what period of time would you say?

CS: Oh, gosh. You're going to have to ask Howard for the details. That was all total. So my guess is in the first couple of months, with the bulk of it coming in initially --

JG: So, quickly.

CS: -- and quickly and some of it belonging to Federations to make their distributions from and some of it with them asking us what to do. For example, I'm going to get off on another tangent. There was a donor in Palm Beach County, Florida, who had $100,000 and they wanted to do something in the general community and we didn't feel like our funds could do everything we were asked to do, and this little community in Northwest Louisiana wanted us to give money to college students whose families had lost everything, so that these kids could have blankets and sheets and the supplies they needed so they could go back to school. The university was taking care of their tuition and room and board, but they didn't have anything and we just didn't feel like we could do that. It was a bottomless pit. If we did it for that college, it would be the next college and the next college. But, we called Palm Beach Federation and we said, this man could help 200 kids go back to school by giving them a gift card for $200 dollars each to Wal-Mart and we gave all those kids from New Orleans who went to this college in northwest Louisiana the gift cards in the name of the Jewish community so that they'd have the supplies to go to school.

JG: That's terrific.

CS: So, that was a kind of thing that we sort of directed donors to, where we didn't feel like our funds could necessarily do that.

JG: And he wanted to do it that way rather than through the Federation, through UJC?

CS: Yes, because he wanted to know where his dollars went and so that was how it was done.

JG: OK. So back to your short-term, long-term thinking.

CS: Right. So I really pushed, maybe because I've done this a long time and also because I am involved with JDC and their international development program, I really -- and it's -- the way that UJC's Emergency Committee has operated, I wanted to make sure that we leveraged our dollars. That we had local partners. That we did things that other people weren't going to do. That we could account in a financially responsible way for how money was spent and that we didn't just give it to big national organizations where we know that the overhead was not right. Or where we felt like they had made mistakes. Like, we wouldn't want to give to the Red Cross. They did some things right. They did some things wrong. Or United Way -- we didn't give to those things in 9/11 either. And so we really were looking for smaller organizations where our dollars mattered. We also early on tried to give cash, I told you, to Jewish people who were in need and one of the ways we did it was people calling in Baton Rouge and Houston. The other way we did it was we sent out a team from Birmingham, Alabama. Do you know about this?

JG: No.

CS: OK. We sent out the head of -- Esther, the head of Jewish Family Services in Birmingham and Richard, the Federation exec, from Birmingham and the same -- and Steve Edelstein and the head of the Federation of Nashville and his head of Jewish Family Services, we sent them to the south. He said -- Steve jokes, he said, he had

$20,000 cash in his pockets, a Jewish boy driving through the South. And we sent them -- one team went to Mississippi. One team went through Louisiana. And then we repeated after Hurricane Rita. We went to Western Louisiana and Beaumont and Beaufort and that area of Texas. And we sent them from community to community to find the isolated Jews and give them money when they needed it.

JG: Wow. How would they find the isolated Jews in a small community like that?

CS: Well, you know, UJC knew some of them through the network of Jewish communities and they'd go to churches and ask. And we went to Hattiesburg, Mississippi and St. Charles, Louisiana and Lafayette, Louisiana.

JG: And they found people?

CS: And they found people. And we helped them. And then --

[END OF AUDIO FILE EIGHT]

CS: -- we helped the general community in those places, too. For example, when we went to Hattiesburg -- there was a Chabad rabbi in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I think it's Hattiesburg.

JG: How big is Hattiesburg?

CS: Oh, I have no idea.

JG: Tiny, though. It's small.

CS: Tiny. Never heard of it except from the Civil Rights movement. So -- I think it's Hattiesburg. Maybe it's Jackson. I think it's Hattiesburg. They met -- they saw -- they met the Chabad rabbi there and he said, you know, there's this people and that people, and Steve said, what can I do? What can we do to help here? And he said, go to the

Catholic church. The priest there is the main community -- is the main helper for the whole community and so we gave money to the priest to distribute in the general community in our name. And, at the suggestion of the Chabad rabbi.

JG: Very nice.

CS: Yeah. And they were terrific. They went all over the place. And they were our first people, I believe, I may be wrong, to get to Gulfport and Biloxi and those places.

JG: Hmm. I wanted to ask you when was the first time you actually went to New Orleans.

CS: The first time I went to Louisiana --

JG: I mean after Katrina. OK.

CS: So I went about September 19 -- 18th and 19th -- to Baton Rouge because, by that time, Howard and Burt and Barry had already been to Baton Rouge.

JG: So, Howard Fineberg --

CS: Burt Goldberger and Barry Schwartz had been to Baton Rouge. None of us had been to New Orleans because you couldn't go in and the -- the community in Baton Rouge asked us not to because it was hard to get passes and if you didn't have a reason they really didn't want to do tourism. There was too much work to do. I remember, there were 1,500 Jewish evacuees in Baton Rouge and about 200,000, I think, in the whole city. So, there was a lot for everyone to do so my first time down there was in September and I went to a meeting at LSU that the New Orleans people had organized in conjunction with Baton Rouge for all of the New Orleans people who were in Baton Rouge and for some of them it was the first time they had seen each other and knew that each other was there. And I brought a check for $1 million dollars from UJC, which was

the money that we initially gave to this organization we had formed in Baton Rouge, which was the New Orleans Federation, the Baton Rouge Federation and the Jewish Foundation -- Community Foundation of New Orleans. We formed a partnership that would come together to take care of this expanded Jewish community. It would pay Martha to be a full-time person.

JG: Martha Bergadine.

CS: Bergadine. It would help grow the pre-school. It would take care of the elderly seniors who had come from New Orleans to be in Baton Rouge. And so we had given the partnership $1.5 million dollars. We had set aside and I brought a check for $1 million to this meeting and that's why I came, was to bring the money and wave the flag and be there to support them.

JG: What was -- what was the meeting?

CS: The meeting was a meeting of the New Orleans community to just -- to receive this money. To see each other. To thank the people from the Baton Rouge Sheriff's Department and Richard Lipsey who had rescued the people, to thank the Baton Rouge community and to sort of pull everyone together for the first time.

JG: What was it like?

CS: Well, it was -- the whole thing was very bizarre. There was no place to stay because there were no hotel rooms or anything in Baton Rouge, so I stayed with one of the families and there were three TV sets in the house, one of which was one of these giant ones, and they were on all of the time. And the crawls along the bottom of the TV sets were saying, Have you seen so-and-so? This was three weeks later. Can't find my aunt. Does anyone know where so-and-so is? And the TV sets were all on local stations and there were hurricane stories 24/7. Just battering this house. And I was staying at this house --

JG: Was this someone in the Jewish community --

CS: In the Jewish community --

JG: -- in Baton Rouge?

CS: -- and they had a family staying with them from New Orleans also with their dogs. Actually, the families that lived in Algiers and the second day I was there they tried to go back to Algiers and it was -- I was like vibrating. It was constant crisis mode. And I asked to go to the shelters and to see what there was to see and the husband of the house said to me, don't make us take time off the job. And so I didn't see anything except this meeting and then I left the next morning.

JG: How big was the meeting? How many people were there would you say?

CS: A couple of hundred. It was very nice.

JG: I bet it was very emotional.

CS: It was very emotional. It was really nice. And the president of the Federation, Alan Bissinger was there and Sandy Levy was there, and was Dina there then? I'm not sure if Dina was there or someone else. There were a lot of people there. Some people had come from Memphis just to be there to see who else was there. And --

[END OF AUDIO FILE NINE]

CS: -- and Eric Stillman had come in from Houston and the day before --

JG: Eric Stillman was the --

CS: -- the exec in Baton Rouge, in New Orleans.

JG: The president. President of --

CS: He was the executive of the --

JG: Oh, Eric Stillman. Eric Stillman.

CS: Eric Stillman.

JG: That's right.

CS: At the Federation at the time and then his -- Adam --

JG: Brownstone.

CS: -- Brownstone was there also. And they had rescued the Torahs the day before and Eric was --

JG: From New Orleans?

CS: Oh, he was staying in this house with me, too. And Eric drove them back to Houston the next day in his car.

JG: The Torahs.

CS: He drove the Torahs that belonged to one of the two big Reform uptown synagogues. I can't remember which one it was. There were two big --

JG: Touro?

CS: It may have been Touro. It may have been Sinai.

JG: Sinai.

CS: The other one is Sinai? It was one of them wanted their own Torahs for their services for the high holidays.

JG: Which were coming up.

CS: Which were coming up. And they were going to have High Holiday services with their rabbi at some place in Houston and they wanted their own Torahs. And so he was going to schlep them, and he did, to Houston.

JG: Wow. Some story.

CS: So I was there after Katrina and then about 10 days later it was Rita. And the synagogue -- the main synagogue in Baton Rouge was -- you know this?

JG: Beth Israel.

CS: -- Beth Israel was damaged by the next storm.

JG: Right. The hole in the ceiling with water pouring in.

CS: Right.

JG: Yeah.

CS: But prior to going to Baton Rouge, I had gone to the White House. Do you know about that?

JG: The Compassionate Cabinet.

CS: Yeah.

JG: Was that right?

CS: Did I tell you that?

JG: No.

CS: Someone else tell you?

JG: It's -- I saw it in articles that were on the Internet.

CS: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: So can you tell us about that. What was that and how did it -- how was it brought together?

CS: I think we went on a Monday. They called me up on Friday and said, what are you doing Monday and I said, I don't know what I'm doing Monday.

JG: Who's the "they"?

CS: UJC called me up. The Washington Action office of UJC called me up and said can you go to the White House on Monday. And I think I was probably planning on doing something else but -- I'm sorry. Is the noise bothering you? Because I can tell her to stop emptying the dishwasher, if it's making clatter.

JG: It probably is.

[break in audio]

JG: Record. Now we're recording. Don't tell me that you lost all of that, Jane. I cannot believe that you just lost all of that. OK. So you were starting to tell me about the Compassionate Cabinet.

CS: So they called me on a Friday and said, we've been asked to go to the White House and I was ambivalent about going because I didn't like the president. I was furious at how he was dealing with Katrina, and I guess I realized in short order it was important to go as I was to be the only Jewish person there and there were about 20 people and they called me a couple of times from the White House to check my security clearance and tell

me what entrance to come into and, probably in typical fashion, and change the time. So, every five hours, I was changing my plane reservation because they kept making it earlier and earlier. Anyway, so I went. And there were about 20 people and we spent the first 45 minutes in the Roosevelt Room just talking amongst ourselves. And I think there were three or four women and about 16 men. And it was the head of Lutheran World Service. Someone from the Red Cross. Someone from Laraza and myself were the only women. And I sat next to the head of Catholic Social Services and across the table from the head of Second Harvest. And, they were -- I have a Jewish story about both of them so I'm going to tell you. They were really remarkable, remarkable people and there were a couple of black Southern ministers there of the evangelical variety.

JG: They're mostly lay leaders?

CS: They were all professionals except me, I think. Which was really nice. They could have sent Barry or Howard but they sent me, which was really very nice for me. And the head of Catholic Social Services said to me, it's so nice to meet you. This was September 12. The hurricane came on the 29th of August. He said, the largest single gift we got came from the Weinberg Foundation. He said, I think it's incredible that you guys take care of your own and you help the rest of us take care of ours. So, since I know Shel Silverstein -- Shel -- I'm sorry --

[END OF AUDIO FILE TEN]

CS: -- Shel, who is the head of the Weinberg Foundation, I called him the next day to tell him and they had indeed given the Jewish community half a million dollars. They were our largest single gift, too, and they had given Catholic Social Services, right away, right off the top for direct relief, immediate relief. And so that was really nice. And the guy who was the head of Second Harvest had been the head of the Chicago Stock Exchange and he decided he needed more meaning in his life. And so he took on Second Harvest, to make it the largest food bank in the world. It's his second job in the world. And he told

me that he had been contracted by people in Israel, Laurie Heller's organization in Israel, and that he was helping Israel set up food banks. And he said it was such a great thing for him to do because he loved Israel and he said, unlike the United States, I know that I can make sure that there isn't a single hungry person in the state of Israel. Oh yeah, and the third person across the table from me was the head of the YMCAs. And we were talking about the YMCA in Jerusalem, YMCA, and how they were building this tower next door to it. And I was telling them I thought the tower was really ugly and he said yes, but it would fund the Y in perpetuity, the money from selling the apartments in the tower would endow the Y forever. And he said there are people in America who don't understand why we need to have a presence in Israel. And he said, YMCA is cheap and it's open to everyone and we want to keep it going. And this was the only way I could do it. So, that was pretty nice in 45 minutes.

JG: Very nice. And what was the purpose of this meeting.

CS: Well, I'm getting to it.

JG: OK.

CS: So we just sat and talked waiting for the president. And then he came in and the purpose of the meeting was for him to hear from the largest relief groups what they were doing and what they thought the needs were. The real purpose was for, I thought, was for him to look good because at the end, CNN and MSNBC and all of those TV stations came in and took pictures of him talking to all of us and we were on TV and stuff. And he -- he -- he came in and he did -- he talked about 40 minutes non-stop in what I, as a psychologist, thought was a very defensive way, justifying what he had done and banging the table and saying we're done with rescue and relief. Let's get on with rebuilding. And, to most of us, that didn't really ring true as they were still taking bodies out of the water --

JG: Right.

CS: -- and other things. And so that was hard to swallow. And then he went around the room and people asked -- got to make a statement and ask questions and stuff and everyone got a turn to speak and UJC had cued me with what I was supposed to talk about and I learned from one of these guys -- I can't remember which organization he was the head of -- he was way smart. I think he was the head of The United Way. I think he was head of United Way. He said President Bush, you're doing such a great job. If you could do A, B, and C, things would be even better. And he was the first person to speak and the cue from him was don't be critical. If you want your -- this man does not -- and he knew the president. They had met many times before. And the message was don't be critical. Give him praise and build on it and that's the way he can hear you. And most people took it from him and it was sort of disgusting to have to do this, but that's what we wound up doing. And I talked about what the Jewish community had done and that we were in a coalition to take care of the people in Houston. Then I actually talked -- I strayed by script and talked about mental health and I said I was a psychologist and I was very concerned that we were going to have long-term mental health problems here and there were no funds being allocated for that because, in the FEMA guidelines, if you want to be reimbursed for mental health needs, it has to be done in the first 14 days. And I said, that doesn't take account of post-traumatic stress and some other guy from National Children and Family Services had said, we're going to have long-term problems here. Where are we going to find the funds to help with post-traumatic stress and putting kids' lives back together. So, someone had laid the groundwork for me and I just built on that. And he turned to Scott McClellan who was his press secretary, and he said, Scott, she's right. Write that right down. And I thought, that was cool. And when we were done going around the room, he thanked us and then he had Reverend Jacques, who has that big evangelical church in Dallas who had been to New Orleans with him, lead us in prayer. And we all stood up and joined hands and prayed a lot and I thought the president paid his most attention to the prayer part and I was very --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 11]

CS: -- very struck as the only non-Christian in the room. There were no Muslims, Buddhists or anyone but me. That they never said Jesus and I thought that that was very respectful to me.

JG: Why do you think they didn't have any --

CS: It didn't occur to them.

JG: -- Muslims, Buddhists --

CS: They weren't doing the work.

JG: Oh.

CS: Their communities weren't involved, first of all, in terms of who lived there and I don't think they do as we do which is relief outside of their own communities.

JG: Hmm. Which brings us to the topic that we definitely want to touch on, which has to do with the decisions -- the decision-making process around relief or Jewish organizations and long-term support and non-Jewish general community support.

CS: OK. It occurred to me, I don't know if I told you when I was in Baton Rouge about the Israeli search-and-rescue team?

JG: No. Go ahead.

CS: Did anyone talk about them?

JG: They have from different points of view.

CS: OK.

JG: But go ahead.

CS: So, to go backwards, when we were in Baton Rouge at that meeting, they brought the 14 Israelis to the meeting and Israel sent a search-and-rescue team and AIPAC helped get them the visas to get here because, at first, the U.S. didn't want any foreigners to come and help and we could have used all of the help we could have gotten. And, this Israeli team came. It was Mark Solomon from Philadelphia's idea. He funded it. He raised the money to fund it and they were on the ground wearing white T-shirts with great big Magen Davids on them and they were psychologists and divers and physicians and nurses. There were 14 of them. And, they came to rescue people and they wound up digging bodies out of the water in St. Bernard's Parish. Sleeping on the floor of the high school there and, mostly, they did -- you know, they just --

JG: Recovery.

CS: -- recovery. Not rescue. And it was very -- they were very good sports about it, but it was very disheartening. They thought there would be people to save. They thought there were -- and they had been --

JG: Were they just late? I mean, when did they actually --

CS: No. No.

JG: -- arrive?

CS: They arrived in time. That's just where they got assigned. And, P.S., there weren't that many people to rescue. There were lots of bodies to get, especially in St. Bernard's, which was badly damaged. And they were from the Israeli Army and they go all over the world and do this. They had done -- they had done it in Turkey at the earthquake site. They had been in the tsunami. And they were -- I thought they were terrific. And the people at the meeting were very proud and grateful to have them there. It was really nice. So that was the Jewish community helping the general community, one of the first efforts. Not our effort. Someone else's effort.

JG: So how about UJC decision-making process on this?

CS: OK. So, I just wanted to add that one of the people I met at the White House was a young man who was involved with the Afro-American community and he told me he was going to try to get students to come -- he was a minister -- winter and spring break to New Orleans to work on the rebuilding and I, after I left the White House, I went to stop in and visited Hillel and I brought the idea to them right away. I don't know if the African American college students ever did it, but we got organized and did it.

JG: Did other faith-based communities do it as well?

CS: Tons of them. Half a million people have been volunteers there in the last two years. Yes, other faith-based communities did that. So, back -- let me go back to the decision-making process.

JG: Yes.

CS: So, one of the big discussions we had was how much Jewish and how much not Jewish and we had some communities that were really wanting to be 50-50. Some people in Washington. Steve Nassiter was very concerned that we give enough to the general community. And we decided on a formula that was someplace between a third and a quarter to the general community, because Jewish needs kept changing. And one of the things that became clear was if there was ever going to be a Jewish community in New Orleans, that we were going to have to keep it afloat. Bad pun. Until it could get itself back on its feet. And so, you know, you've probably heard about the two-year reconstruction plan and that we paid people's salaries, rents, insurance and everything --

JG: Talk about that for a minute.

CS: I was ambivalent about it in the beginning. I think it's a good thing now. We kept the Jewish community workers afloat by paying six months' worth of salary.

JG: For whom, for instance?

CS: All of the people at the Federation, Jewish Family Service. I think a good portion of the JCC staff. Not the rabbis and the people who had their movements behind them. And mortgages -- mortgages on buildings that -- you have to pay mortgages even if the building doesn't --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 12]

CS: -- function, and we did it because many of them were working from distant locations, but also because it was the only way to give the community an infrastructure to come back to. And so we did that.

JG: One of the things that Myrna Matsa mentioned, Rabbi Matsa, who is doing pastoral counseling --

CS: Yeah.

JG: -- on the Gulf Coast was that those allocations allowed the rabbis, the professional workers, not to be focusing so much on their own survival and therefore able to be reaching out --

CS: Right.

JG: -- into the community.

CS: I don't think we paid rabbi's salaries. I think they were paid by their movements. As I recall, we paid communal workers. But I think --

JG: Same principle.

CS: Same principle. But, the communal workers were severely impacted, some of them. Some of them less so. In the rabbi community, at least two and maybe three of

the rabbis had barely been in town for months when this happened.

JG: Andy Bush at Touro --

CS: Right.

JG: -- and was it --

CS: The guy at Shir Shalom. The conservative synagogue. And I think those were the two.

JG: Yeah.

CS: Who were just brand new. And the Orthodox rabbi hadn't been around long and they sent him packing --

JG: At Beth Israel --

CS: At Beth Israel, because there was nothing for him to do, since there was no synagogue and there was no community for him. I think it did help them to deal with other people but one of our shortcomings was hard to -- we weren't always processing that they were in a crisis, too, unless it was an obvious one. Like when Eric Stillman's wife's mother, father -- I can't remember who died -- or when Adam's father died. I mean, these were crises on top of crises. But, Eric was in a crisis the whole time and his wife refused to come back and there he was with his wife and his kids in Houston and a job in New Orleans and having to think about maybe a different job. You know, these people were in a personal crisis.

JG: And under a tremendous amount of stress.

CS: You know, Dina Gerber, living in a trailer, trying to manage Jewish Family Services in two different locations.

JG: When was this? Wasn't she in Atlanta for some time?

CS: Yeah, but when she came back, she came back to a trailer in her front yard and the -- the -- the mold house that every tour -- every Jewish tour -- would go through, was her sister's house.

JG: Hmm.

CS: Because she lived in Lakeview, which was a total mess. And, you know, we asked a lot of Alan Bissenger. His wife was in Pensacola. He was in Baton Rouge. His kids were at college. His house was unlivable. His mother was out of her house and his business was turned upside down.

JG: Right.

CS: And he was running the community on the side, you know. But we asked a lot of a lot of people and they really -- they came through. Eric Sternberg was the president of the Baton Rouge Federation, took the job to please his mother. He thought it was an hour a week.

JG: A month, he told me.

CS: Yeah. And, you know, he wound up doing nothing else --

JG: For months.

CS: -- for months, and doing it with great grace and a pregnant wife besides.

JG: Hmm.

CS: And a baby.

JG: So --

CS: So, have I circumvented the decision-making? So, part of the decision-making was we decided to do that recovery plan. We decided the Jewish community needed more than we thought it might have. We --

JG: And so the decision was to support the Jewish communities --

CS: It always is that we support the Jewish community and we support others, but there is no one else who was going to pay those salaries or take care of those people, so we did the things that no one else could do, and I considered that medium- to long-term in the Jewish community. And then we thought --

JG: Just a two-year commitment to all of those institutions?

CS: Yes, but not to the salaries for two years. That was the initial six months. We made a long-term commitment, which allowed them to raise other funds to really sustain themselves and there's no Federation campaign in 2005. But there was in 2006, remarkably. They sent money to Israel last year during the war. I mean, they are truly a remarkable community. So the decision-making was how much should go here and there. What kinds of projects we should be involved in outside the general community. Outside the Jewish community. And I told you we made the decision about indigenous and locally based and no one else was going to do. And then we let our partners in those communities do a lot of the vetting for us.

JG: So --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 13]

JG: -- whom, what did you look for in your partners?

CS: Did you talk to Barbara in Houston?

JG: No.

CS: OK. Well, she did all of the vetting in Houston and they were unbelievable. They got the biggest chunk of money. We gave them one million-and-a-half dollars. Originally, all of the faith-based communities in Houston were going to feed the people in the Astrodome for 30 days. And, so, they called -- Lee Winch called from Houston and said, Would we be part of the feeding coalition? And we said, For sure. And it was going to be a million dollars. And we said, Take it. Because we wanted the Jewish community to have standing in what was the primary relief process there. But they got the people out of the Astrodome lickety-split and they didn't need it for that. So they held the money in escrow, and they looked for places where we could make a difference. And, secondarily, where it would make a difference for the Houston Jewish community. That's, by the way -- we've done this all along -- and this is what the Weinberg Foundation does, too. You make friends in the general community when you show that you, too, care about them. So we wanted Houston to think in terms of what was most effective and what would have long-lasting effect. And so they found a whole bunch of organizations to give the money to, and we went and visited after the money had been given to several of these organizations. One was neighborhood services, which did a job unemployment program for people who were staying on in Houston. We visited some evangelical churches, which were doing more direct relief. Day care and all kinds of other things. We gave money to an organization that was taking care of people with AIDS because they were falling through the cracks. We did an organization for abused and neglected women who were evacuees from the Gulf area. And has anyone told you about the Vietnamese? My favorite story. We gave money to -- I haven't told you this? -- to the Houston Vietnamese community; and the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans is in the Gulf Coast, because the majority of them are shrimp farmers, shrimp fishermen, because it's what they know how to do from Vietnam. And 20,000 of them evacuated the Gulf and they live in Mississippi -- well, they live in Biloxi and New Orleans and all down and along the Gulf. And they came to Houston, which is the largest community. And the Houston community took all of these people in and tried to take care

of them and it's Asian custom to take care of your own and not ask for help. Not to necessarily help others, but to be self-sufficient. And they -- Barbara found -- she's the planning director of the Houston Federation -- Barbara Bracker --

JG: Bracker?

CS: Bracker or Bracken. They couldn't do it. And so we gave them $100,000 and when we were there, they came to us and they said we were the first and only people who'd even offered to help them in any way, and that as such they would always be friends with us and on our sides and, if the tables were turned, we should know that their community was there for us. So it was a perfect example of helping people and about six months later, when the bombing happened in the Seattle Federation, Lee got a letter from the head of the Vietnamese community saying, We feel terrible. We know there's a war in Israel and we think this shooting in Seattle must have been a direct reaction to that war. And just know that we say prayers for you and, if you can think of anything we can do to ease your burden, we're here for you. We're your friends for life.

JG: That's pretty wonderful.

CS: It was -- yeah, it's in the Katrina Report, the letter. It was -- and it really was pretty wonderful and we did it for the right reason. We did it because they needed the help and it's what goes around comes along. I think there's a newly elected congressman last year, a Vietnamese congressman, the first one ever from Houston.

JG: What about the race issue in the Katrina relief and how did that play into decision-making in the Jewish community?

CS: Well, you know, in the early relief, we gave to whoever was there, you know. When they called us from Monroe and Northwest Louisiana, we gave money to whoever was in that shelter, those Wal-Mart cards. We did what we needed to do to the people who were there. We gave $50 -- or $100,000 -- $50,000 -- some amount of money. I can't

remember -- to the mayor of Dallas who had a housing coalition, a Jewish mayor of Dallas, a woman. And those were all short and intermediate term things. I don't think anyone ever thought about who was what color. You just did what needed doing. I don't know what else you mean beside the race --

JG: There's been a lot of --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 14]

JG: -- talk and the portrayal in the media of the racial tensions underlying decision-making with Katrina --

CS: I don't think -- I don't think we had those issues.

JG: Mm-hmm.

CS: I don't think we had them at all. I can't think of any case when we did. One of the things that we did decide, and I don't think it was a racial issue -- decision -- I think it was a numbers decision was, when we went -- when we took our first group in February of that year, and that's the first time any of us went to New Orleans except a few staff people.

JG: February, 2006?

CS: Right. When we went on that trip, we decided -- and that was lay and professional people -- we decided that we really could not do much in New Orleans. That the numbers and the needs were more than our dollars could have any effect on and that we would do our best to help in the Jewish community. And we subsequently did some things. We helped with the coalition of organizations to provide housing and help for seniors and we did some things in coalition later on.

JG: In New Orleans?

CS: In New Orleans because the Jewish community wanted us to and we thought it was the right thing to do. But both our dollars and the $4 or $5 million dollars that the New York Federation raised, we decided -- for the general community -- we all decided would be best spent somewhere else and we earmarked a lot of it as mental health and we did a lot of mental health work largely in Mississippi where we felt, because of good government and population numbers that were manageable and partners who were more able to work with us, that we would have more impact.

JG: Do you think your background as a psychologist played a role in that?

CS: Influenced that?

JG: Yeah.

CS: Well, it's interesting because the New York Emergency Chair, Cheryl Fishbein, is also a psychologist. So, and Burt was there. So I don't think it hurt that a lot of the people looking at the decision-making were psychologists. But, when we went on that trip, the very first person we met was a woman named Susan Cochran, or Susan Collins. I don't remember. Susan. Who worked for Trent Lott or Thad Cochran. She worked for one of the two senators. And we met her in a restaurant in Biloxi and she was living in a trailer working 18-hour days, trying to get people their benefits, and she was one of the most depressed people I have ever seen. And we were all overwhelmed by someone so put together in such incredible distress and going on day after day, and so right from our very first person, we were talking post traumatic stress disorder, because she was so clearly in such terrible shape herself.

JG: What can you say about that as you looked at the scene in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast --

CS: Yeah.

JG: -- sort of over the course of this past almost two years, now.

CS: Yeah. I think everyone breaks down at different times and I thought Steve Richler did a great job, both in his job as president of the synagogue and his real job as trying to rebuild tourism in the Gulf and, you know, he was just going and going and going and last May we went out with him one afternoon in New York and he just broke down and he told us -- have you talked to him yet? Has he told you about the family records? So, maybe he doesn't want me to say this. So, he talked about how he was the oldest in his generation of his family and he had all of the family photo albums and all of the memories and all of the letters and everything that belonged to his whole extended family of cousins and it was all gone. And, he felt so guilty that he couldn't hold the memories together.

JG: Hmm.

CS: And it was -- you know, he's a very upbeat person.

JG: Yes, he is.

CS: And it was the first time he really -- he just sat there and cried, and you just felt so sad for him. It was really, really awful.

JG: So you had people losing both their family memorabilia and communities losing all of their memorabilia. Destroyed synagogues and destroyed institutions of all kinds.

CS: Right. And Steve was from New York. He wasn't from Mississippi. But he had generations at his house, and so that was, you know, painfully awful for him. And --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 15]

CS: -- I'm surprised he didn't talk about it. Well, I guess I'm not. I mean, he knew us all pretty well, you know, to have --

JG: He showed us his new house.

CS: Well, things have improved. And he stayed, which I wasn't sure he would stay, but he was really a zealot about making it better. And --

JG: So, while we're on the subject of mental health, tell us about the decision to hire Rabbi Myrna Matsa.

CS: Well, I want to talk about the other decisions, first. So, we were in coalition with the New York Federation, these mental health decisions, and one of the things that was so attractive was bringing together the trauma coalition that the New York Federation had brought together of Israelis and New Yorkers who dealt with 9/11 and dealt with the intifada and had a lot of experience in post-traumatic stress disorder. And they felt comfortable targeting first responders and kids. And so we brought that coalition together and wound up in the bizarre and wonderful situation -- I wish someone had photographed it -- of St. Theresa's pre-school in Biloxi, Mississippi having Israelis coming to teach resilience to pre-school teachers.

JG: In Biloxi.

CS: In Biloxi. And we worked with some schools in Mississippi -- the strongest school was half-black and half-Vietnamese. And the principal made the kids do all of the school they missed.

JG: Do all of the school they missed?

CS: Yeah. She made them make it up and make up all of the work, and she was quite remarkable. She had standards and she pushed those kids to live up to the standards and her message was, you didn't miss six months of your life. We're just going to compress it and move on and it really was inspiring for the families, that, you know, they didn't have to lose -- they didn't have to be a year behind -- they didn't have to be a

semester behind -- this was a school with a lot of kids who were not on grade level. I mean, I think the Vietnamese families are very upwardly mobile but it was a half Afro-American, half Vietnamese school. And they scored in the top three in the state in their exams that -- in 2006. So she really pushed and I think the resiliency training was very helpful to her.

JG: What kinds of things would they do in the resiliency training?

CS: They teach the teachers how to identify the kids with real post-traumatic stress disorder and get them out of -- get them higher level help. They'd teach them how to talk about the events, how to talk with kids who were having trouble sleeping, who were separated from their home, all kinds of things to cover in school, what kinds of activities to do to lessen the trauma. I think it was pretty helpful. I want to add one other thing about mental health in Mississippi. The head of the county there, Colonel or General or whatever his name was -- Joe -- he's no longer in that job. Someone else can tell you his name -- he was into mental health. He was the emergency response team for, is it Hendrix County or Harrison -- whatever county Biloxi Gulfport is in -- and he was into mental health. So, in addition to our own mental health concerns and thinking it was an issue, he told us and, in fact, this year he said to us -- he said last year I'm worried about the responders and the teachers and the parents. He says, this year, I'm worried about teenagers. What's going to happen to teenagers this year. There's nothing for them to do. They don't see a future. So he was -- he was a terrific guy. Yeah.

JG: Sounds like a terrific guy.

CS: Yeah. He was a terrific, terrific guy and so he also instigated our mental health concerns. He verified it for us.

JG: Right. So did that lead to decisions about hiring --

CS: Yeah. When we came home -- no. That was later on. And so Steve kept saying we need a rabbi, we need a rabbi.

JG: Steve Richer?

CS: Richer. And so first we made some other decisions and then the New York Board of Rabbis' people went down there, and then we came back with the idea of hiring Myrna. And -- or hiring, if we could find it, we'd go into coalition, New York City Board of Rabbis would supervise and they had experience in this and we thought that we could have a body on the ground, and that that would have impact. And she seemed the ideal person because she had the pastoral counseling, she'd lived in the South, she was experienced and motherly and she seemed -- I think it was the right thing to do. So that's how we got around to hiring her.

JG: And how long has she been down there and what's her mandate?

CS: I think she's been down there since November, 2006. I think, you know, I get my information from Halle Misley, that she's done really well. She's brought together different groups. Her office is in the Mississippi Mental Health Association, so while she's a Jewish --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 16]

CS: -- pastoral counselor, she works with the larger community. She also was to sort of ride the circuit and visit all of the -- both the five rabbis in New Orleans and the three rabbis in Baton Rouge. I don't know how successful or how much impact she's had with them. I think it was a good investment, and I think it was probably good for the small Biloxi Jewish community to have her there, too. Biloxi/Gulfport/Diamondhead.

JG: Yeah. What about the role of the staff? You told me that you had wanted to talk about the role of the staff and the community's work?

CS: Yeah. I think Howie day-to-day was remarkable. He really worked his tail off and to the point where I was concerned that he was too involved. I mean, I was really worried about him and I talked to him about it. It's easy to get consumed by this. And, I was surprised when we did the staff de-briefing to hear Jerry Rosen talk about opening the checks and actually it was the first time I realized that I, too, was consumed by this. When I said it to my husband he said, You didn't know? This is the only thing you ever talk about. You know, you watch the news three hours a day. You only read this stuff. I hadn't realized that I hadn't read a book in a year. I couldn't concentrate long enough to go from beginning to end of anything. And I had stopped painting. I just -- I didn't have the attention span for it. And I said something to one of my kids and they said, “You didn't know?” And, actually, I took one of my kids last year down there.

JG: What did you do?

CS: This year? When did I take them? I took them in 2007. I took them on one of our trips. My oldest son came with us and that was really good for him to see. And, I'm trying to think -- Barry functioned on a different level. He was sort of over Howie and had the bigger, global, big picture in mind.

JG: What's his position?

CS: He's Howie's supervisor. He was the vice president at UJC of consulting at the time and he helped make some of the connections with the foundations and other funding sources and they really were remarkable, both in the short-term and, I think Lee Winch was truly fabulous with what he did in Houston. Did you talk to him?

JG: I've talked to him.

CS: Yeah.

JG: But it's been a while.

CS: He was just a prince the way he opened his doors and let them be part of him, and even when it was hard and I think -- I think they were more than generous with their time and their money and their ability to give -- and they took care of the general community, too. I mean, they had teams of people at the Astrodome from Houston.

JG: Right.

CS: So I thought the staff did really great. There aren't that many lay people who were involved in this. I think Cheryl and I were the most involved.

JG: Who's Cheryl?

CS: Cheryl Fishbein from New York. And there were some other lay people in the community who participated. And I think that Mort, who died, you know that Mort Plant died -- he was the -- he and Kathy were the two UJC executive officers who helped us. He died in an accident last September.

JG: Wow.

CS: Not related to Katrina. Were really helpful in helping us think things through, as was Howard Regar. I thought we made a good team and I actually thought I did a pretty good job and was a big support to the staff. I think I talked to Howie every single day for months and months and months.

JG: What would you say is your role as the chair?

CS: Well, I don't know. I think it's probably different for different people. I thought my role was to think about policy, to think about the strategy of where to spend and how to spend, to think about the global questions, short, medium and long. Place, location, Jewish versus non-Jewish and to move those issues along. I thought my role was to take care of the lay people in the field who needed taking care of. The people who'd call

me and cry. I thought my role was to be supportive to the staff who was working 24-7 and then to go wherever they needed me to go to be the voice of what we were doing and to try and make sure that the Jewish community had heard about what we had done.

JG: What do you mean when you say people would call you? What would they call you about or with?

CS: The money's not coming fast enough. I heard you raised $28 million dollars. Why don't we have more of it in New Orleans. Why can't you make the day school tuition --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 17]

CS: -- free, then more people would come. I'm living in a trailer, can't you get me into a hotel. Or, you know, or I'd call like Julie or Carol and they'd just unload, which was fine.

JG: How did you respond when people would call you?

CS: I'm a psychologist. I'd listen. And, you know, some version of I know it's terrible and we're doing the best we can do and if there was something to be done, I'd do it.

JG: Sounds like it was probably a very emotional experience for you.

CS: Yeah. I think it really was.

JG: And consuming.

CS: Yeah. And I think it was really hard to, you know, people like Sandy and Dena and Eric -- I mean, the victims were also the helpers and that was really, really hard and I think the rabbi helper victims had it easier than maybe the rest of the staff.

JG: Why do you think?

CS: Maybe because I've had less contact with them, and I don't know differently.

JG: Mm-hmm.

CS: I think that they had movements behind them, their movements behind them, and the four Reform rabbis had each other. The guy at Shir Shalom, he was really isolated and we had to push the Reform rabbis to include him.

JG: Right.

CS: Which was sort of incredible. And, you know, the Chabad rabbis had God and the Chabad infrastructure to help them.

JG: What about the movements like the JCCA and --

CS: I think they were helpful to some degree. I thought it was really interesting -- the Reform movement in the beginning was busy helping in the general community and not helping the Reform community. You know, it was a lot sexier helping the people floating down the river than it was -- and I'm not sure they knew how badly people needed help. They all came around eventually, and Barry did a whole lot of that building bridges, so this was really a coalition where JCPA, you know, Andy Milan's group --

JG: Yeah.

CS: And Burt and the streams -- everyone got on the same page together and that was Barry bringing everyone together and the Schusterman Foundation paid David Altshuler to try to figure out what the needs were going forward in the Jewish community.

JG: So how did this -- one of the questions I have, Carol, is how --

CS: I'm sorry. I'm sort of all over the place.

JG: No, we're doing fine.

CS: It's bigger than I thought.

JG: How did the UJC emergency relief committee's efforts coordinate, if at all, with other organizations? With the Reform movement? With --

CS: Well, I think we eventually all got on the same page and knew what each other was and were doing. For example, the American Jewish Committee had money that they wanted to spend in New Orleans and we helped them figure out where in the Jewish community it should go. So, we kind of served as a coordinating function, kind of took charge. The streams had limited resources, which they gave to their own community.

JG: Streams meaning the denominations?

CS: The denominations, yeah.

JG: Mm-hmm.

CS: And, you know, the streams also sent volunteers. Came from different synagogues.

JG: For instance, through the Mitzvah -- the adult Mitzvah Corps of the Reform movement? That kind of thing?

CS: I think more congregational groups came. Groups came from congregations, more than came -- and they came from day schools. I mean, a day school in Miami helped build the playground in Bay St. Louis. And so different groups came, not so much through the Mitzvah Corps. And Nechama was on the scene providing housing and different opportunities for them. But, remember, in the first few months, the community wasn't in New Orleans hardly. And so it didn't really function there. So this was subsequently.

JG: What do you think the impact of Katrina fatigue has been on efforts moving forward and the community's sense of the larger Jewish community and its support.

CS: Well, I think that Americans have very short attention spans and I think the Jewish community got distracted last summer by the war with Lebanon. And, I think on the other hand, there is some longer-term interest, but it's very selective.

JG: What do you mean?

CS: Well, I think Alan Franco -- you talked to him? You're going to?

[END OF AUDIO FILE 18]

CS: OK. Alan Franco and I and David Altshuler went to the Jewish Funders Network last year and I was just on a conference call with the Jewish Funders Network and those people just can't seem to get interested. It's just not sexy. It's not, you know, didn't spring from their heads. It's not their issue. It's not what they want to be involved in. I would say there is minimal interest in the foundation world for helping with this, and yet the Avi Chai Foundation was remarkable. Do you know what they do?

JG: No.

CS: They paid the day school tuition of any kid from New Orleans who went to any day school in America. So all of the kids who went to Atlanta or Houston who went to day school there, their tuition was paid for in the first year.

JG: What's your take on why foundations and Jewish family foundations aren't more interested? Here, New Orleans was the hub of regional Jewish life in many ways, was -- this has been described as the largest natural --

CS: This is going on the Internet? Because a lot of the people are interested in what they're interested in personally and their own issues, and my Uncle Bill calls them the Lucky Sperm Club. You know, there's a great sense of personal entitlement about what I should fund. 'I only do this, and my feeling is, you only do that, but in a crisis, you also

do this.' And there wasn't a whole lot of that coming forward. Although individual foundations, some of them -- there were some people who were very helpful. But the foundation community was not. I think you talked to Sandy Garden?

JG: Haven't.

CS: Shocking or not, he was interested.

JG: Hmm. Do you think there were Jewish frameworks, Jewish values that were sort of the key motivating values and principles behind the efforts within the Jewish community? What did people hang their hats on in terms of Jewish teachings? I'm thinking of -- we've heard so much about tikkun olam and one of the things, for instance, that we hear about all of the time from the people who have been narrators, as you are --

CS: Yeah.

JG: -- is what it has felt like to be on the other side of giving.

CS: You mean in receiving --

JG: Being receivers --

CS: Right. Right.

JG: -- as opposed to givers in the Jewish -- and what a sort of shocking and difficult experience that has been for so many people.

CS: I think it is a shocking and difficult experience and I think, you know, we've all tried to do this in -- with as much grace as possible to preserve people's dignity and self respect and not make them feel like recipients.

JG: Yeah.

CS: And to constantly remember the temporariness of the situation. That's why I think of the times we've spent in New Orleans, we've spent endless amounts of time listening to people's multi-generational stories because they're interesting but they are really a way of preserving people's dignities.

JG: What do you mean?

CS: Well, when you go into someone -- when you see some of these places that are not in the best repair and someone says to you, or like Sandy, like Levy, when we went to see the orthodox synagogue, which you've been to?

JG: Beth Israel.

CS: Beth Israel was just awful and she said, you know, this is where I sat when I was a child and my grandparents were here and this is where their plaque went. And she said, I got to Reform synagogue now, but this is where I grew up. This was my home. You just listen to those stories because the telling of the stories and the recognition that these people have history is so important. And I know that in the last two years I've had to speak at their annual meeting and the first year, last year was sort of by the way, but the first year I was really good. And I talked about being overwhelmed by the sense of history and what it meant to have a community that had multi generations and I think those are the things people there value that you can't take away from them, even if you lose your papers and your Yahrtzeit list and your home and so it's very important to honor those things to make people have their dignity. And to be respectful and in awe of what they have that's unique to them. And so I at least tried really hard to do that and to give kavod to them for what no one can take away.

JG: Are there any stories in particular that you remember about individual families or communities and their generational stories?

[END OF AUDIO FILE 19]

CS: Well, I just told you a little bit about Sandy. And when -- the first time we went to Beth Israel and Jackie took us.

JG: Jackie Gothard --

CS: Yeah. And Jackie took us -- she was holding a plastic Yahrtzeit plaque that she had found that morning from a great uncle of hers and she hadn't thought about coming to the shul that day and she felt so lucky that she came and she was clutching that piece of --

JG: Plastic.

CS: -- five cent plastic like it was her uncle. And it was so incredibly touching and -- it was -- the more you think about it, the more overwhelming it feels and seems. It was a long time. Anyway, so I think that's what you kind of do -- that's what you do for people. And I know when I gave that speech, a gazillion people thanked me, because I think I must have hit the right note and it was the first gathering of the community at home.

JG: It was in the spring, is that when it was?

CS: It was in February and I followed Carl Bernstein. He was the speaker -- he was the speaker who had been signed up before the hurricane and, you know, he said a whole lot of anti-Bush things and things that were OK and he thanked me afterwards. It was really pretty nice. But I think that that's what it's about there.

JG: A lot of people from the community really are from multi -- from families that go back for generations.

CS: Unlike most of us. Yeah.

JG: Mm-hmm.

CS: And, that's a very special thing, to be part of a multi-generational history. Did you talk to Scott Cowen?

JG: Not yet. We've tried. Several times.

CS: Do you know the Jewish story about his house?

JG: No.

CS: So, Scott Cowen was in this mansion.

JG: Scott Cowen. You should say who he is.

CS: President of Tulane. Jewish. Lives in this mansion that was given to Tulane by the head of United Fruit Company. And the man who started United Fruit was a Jewish fruit peddler and he sold bananas on the street, and he grew it into the biggest fruit importing company in the world. And he lived in this mansion. And, on the -- when the United Nations was voting to make Israel a state, he called all of the Central American countries that he imported fruit from and he said, if you want to do business with me, you vote for Israel. And the votes that made Israel a state were the votes from the Central American countries.

JG: That's quite a story.

CS: And there's a section in Israel, in Kiryat Menachem where the streets are all named Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica -- from these votes.

JG: That's a wonderful story.

CS: Yeah.

JG: Yeah.

CS: Yeah. But I think -- you know, everything there has generations.

JG: Hmm. Yeah, I've heard a number of wonderful stories about -- or wonderful -- they're actually heartrending stories about things that carry memories, of course, that were lost or some that were saved. That range from, you know, someone's wedding pictures from that summer, like Irwin Lackoff's --

CS: Mm-hmm.

JG: -- to the shank bone that had been passed down from several generations in a family that was in somebody's freezer and, of course, was lost. As all of the refrigerators were destroyed. And it was probably the most poignant thing for that family. It was worth nothing, other than everything emotionally.

CS: I remember someone called Howie from Mississippi right before the storm -- oh, it wasn't Steve. It was someone else who called Howie from Mississippi right before the storm came, and he said, I'm putting all of my pictures up on the Internet. He scanned all of his family photos onto the Internet, he said, and then I'm leaving. And then he lost everything that was there.

JG: But he saved everything.

CS: Yeah, I don't remember who it was.

JG: I had never heard of anyone who did that. It's wonderful.

CS: Yeah. I know after Katrina we took all of our family photos and put them on CDs and put a set in a safety deposit box.

JG: Very smart. Now just remember to go back and check the CDs because the CDs are not a stable medium.

CS: Kind of frightening.

JG: Five years. Tops.

CS: So what do I do? Do I do it again?

JG: Mm-hmm. Transfer it to another medium. So what do you think the committee's role is going to be on the ongoing efforts.

CS: Maybe they're on DVDs. Is that more --

JG: Same. No.

CS: Too bad.

JG: Looking -- looking --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 20]

JG: -- forward to the efforts to rebuild and revitalize the Jewish communities in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, do you -- will the committee have an actual role, do you think, or once the immediate disaster and -- have all of the allocations been made or where do things stand?

CS: Well, we didn't talk about the students.

JG: Right.

CS: And the allocations of monies that we directly had have almost all been made. The -- we have the ability -- we just kind of asked the Los Angeles Federation to allocate $150,000 of their dollars to send college students again this winter, so we have the ability to take the $400,000 that's out there and make a difference in terms of where it goes. And I didn't talk about one of the strategic decisions we made was we would work in the

general community in partnership with other Jewish organizations and we did that in three primary different ways. We worked with MAZON to find, because MAZON has been on the ground a long time -- it's a Jewish hunger relief organization -- to find small food banks in Mississippi and Louisiana, also in Alabama, that needed supplies and re-stocking and we did that in conjunction with MAZON. We gave the money to MAZON and they found the food banks so they were our intermediary partners and we felt very comfortable working with them. And the two other things we did which were Jewish for the general community is we worked with Hillel and over the last two years, we have sent 1,600 kids to the Gulf --

JG: Wow. Winter and spring break trips.

CS: Winter and spring break trips for two years and we're going back for a third year. The first year we did rebuilding in Mississippi and last year we did taking down in New Orleans. It was much harder, the taking down work than the rebuilding.

JG: Emotionally or physically or both?

CS: Emotionally much, much harder. I think physically maybe in some ways, too, but emotionally much harder to take apart people's stuff. I mean, I did it. It was awful to take apart someone's house and make piles of what's toxic, like things from the bathroom, or cleaning fluids, what's electrical and has to be gotten rid of separately. What's no good and what maybe you can save. And those are hard decisions and I spent a day making them with college students as we took apart someone's house and his bedrooms and his drawers and it was really hard, hard, horrible work to do.

JG: How would they know what to save or what not to save?

CS: Well, you save something that has no mold on it and that maybe someone can find a value -- a use for them. There may be a sentimental -- someone had, I can't think of the name -- you know those things they have in the Southwest that mean good luck.

They look like ribs and they have sticks in them?

JG: Are they Native American?

CS: Yeah.

JG: I can't think of what they were called but --

CS: OK. So we found one in someone's bathroom in East New Orleans and it was OK. It didn't have mold on it. Now, it probably had no monetary value but we saved it.

JG: Right.

CS: So we were making decisions like that. Am I allowed to say something obscene and funny? I was with a Hillel kid and we were taking apart this guy's bedroom and we pulled out a drawer of dildos and I turned bright red and I, you know, I -- this was after we had seen pornographic pictures and we had taken guns out of this house and ammunition and -- there was everything in the world in this house and lots of pornography. And there was this drawer of dildos which sort of didn't add up. At any rate, there I was with a 19-year-old college student with red hair and I don't know whose face was redder, mine or his. And he looked at me and said, [strained voice] “Is it in the save pile or the throw-away pile?”

JG: That's great.

CS: No one else will tell you that story unless you interview him. And so anyway, we put it in the throw-away pile. We decided that even though they weren't moldy, neither of us --

JG: Now were these Jewish family homes or just homes?

CS: No. These were general community homes. And this was one that shouldn't have been cleaned. It was a home that belonged to his elderly parents but they didn't live there and he got himself on the list because of the priorities for taking apart houses was the age, the handicapped and the poor, and he was neither of those but his parents were. And we met him and it was -- I was ashamed of it. I don't think the college students even knew. I wanted to say one other thing about students down there. I think students came because they wanted to do good in the world and they didn't always come as Jews because they were Jewish, and sometimes we let them bring their non-Jewish roommates or whoever wanted to come could come.

[END OF AUDIO FILE 21]

CS: -- but we did --

JG: On the Hillel trips?

CS: Absolutely. And we taught -- we did text study twice a day with them and so we tried to put a Jewish framework around the work they did. When we initially said that we were going to send Hillel kids down to the Gulf, we met resistance on the committee because they thought it was to benefit the kids and not to benefit the people in the Gulf. And finally someone in the committee said, if we gave the money to Catholic Social Services and they sent Catholic volunteers, you wouldn't think twice about it. And the guy sort of backed off and said, OK, let's try. And it turned out to be a wonderful success because just the way the Vietnamese people built bridges, in the first year, the kids stayed in the Presbyterian Church in East Biloxi and they did text study at night and the elders and the ministers in the church did chevruta with them and stayed and studied and had never done anything like that before. And I think it was a wonderful experience for everyone, and I know the Presbyterian Church had divested in Israel and I know they changed their mind and there were people who were angry that we were staying at the Presbyterian Church because it was during the -- end of the divestiture period, but I really

think things like the kids coming down and doing that changes hearts and minds about who Jews are.

JG: I heard a number of stories from -- mainly in the online collection of people writing about working on homes, particularly of African American families, who had never met a Jew, never seen a Jew, who thought Jews never reached out and did things for people outside the Jewish community.

CS: Right.

JG: Did you see that kind of thing, hear those kinds of stories?

CS: Well, I heard it from the Israeli team. They said people would come up to them all of the time and say, you came all the way from Israel to help us and were kind of overwhelmed that they mattered that much in the world, that people would come to help them. And, yeah. There were a lot of people in Houston, in the evangelical church, they -- when we went to this big evangelical church, the woman who was the -- the minister and his wife, the woman was showing us around, and she kept saying, “I can't believe you people helped us.” She said, “I guess we all do believe the same.” We believe we are all God's children and we should do good in the world. And so there was an enormous amount of goodwill and especially at the neighborhood community center that was doing the jobs thing.

JG: What do you mean?

CS: They were -- the staff there was blown away that we had chosen them, that, you know, that Jews were wanting to help other people and that they and their efforts would matter to us. So it was - yeah. There was lots of that. For me, there was -- I usually see the glass as half-full, so I thought, if you paid your taxes and your insurance and you did good in the world, in your hour of need, the world would be good to you. And now I know that you can't count on the government. Sometimes you can't even count on your friends

and you can't count on the insurance company, even if you pay every premium on time, or the bank, to stay open or the phone company. But really, you know, people of faith are some of the few people you can count on and people of faith are blind to who you are and maybe some of them what you to become them, but most of them are just doing this work because it's God's work and it doesn't matter what stripe their religion is. They're doing it because they know it's the right thing to do and that's very unlike the government and lots of other people out there. They're just doing it because it's right.

JG: Right.

CS: And with all of the things I think are crappy about this country and the terrible things I learned post-Katrina, I really learned a whole lot about how good people are and why they do things, and I know that Lutheran World Relief is the primary feeding organization. They do feeding for the Red Cross, too. And if there is a crisis, those guys just drop everything and go. And it's part of what they do for God and they do it for anyone who's in their path, and it's irrelevant who you are. They do it because it's right. And there's not enough people who do that. And the government makes decisions for the wrong reasons and they don't get their hands dirty enough to see the right reasons. And in the FEMA parks, for example, there are no playgrounds. Did you know this? Because the bureaucrats at FEMA were too worried that someone might break an arm and sue them, so you had people in trailers where there's alcohol and substance abuse and child abuse because they're more worried about the legal issues than about giving kids a place to play. And so Rosie O'Donnell has built playgrounds outside the FEMA parks because she cared about kids --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 22]

CS: -- having a good time.

JG: Didn't the committee fund at least one --

CS: We built a playground. That was in Mississippi. And now we're building one in New Orleans, but they're not affiliated with the parks. The parks are -- in Nowheresville, so they're hard to get to. They're awful.

JG: The parks?

CS: The FEMA parks.

JG: The FEMA parks. So what about these playgrounds that the UJC committee has funded?

CS: So, we went to coalition -- oh, that's our other Jewish partner. With AEPi fraternity. They called us and Jerry Rosen is an alum, so he helped do this, with an organization, a wonderful organization, not-for-profit, called Kaboom, and they built playgrounds in poor areas all over the country and I think they built them in the tsunami area, too, and in other countries and places. I'm not sure. But, we went to coalition with AEPi. They raised money and we gave them money to build a playground, first in Bay St. Louis and then, now, we've done I think two in New Orleans and the communities are planned -- the parks, the playgrounds are planned by the community. So if they have a lot of senior citizens, the community will say, let's build benches all around. Or if they need a certain kind of play equipment. And the idea is it helps build community locally and a community that's in a bad shape and they work in coalition with Kaboom and the AEPi people and then together everyone builds it in one day. And it's called Building Day. And Jerry went to one of them and we got there the week before Building Day. And --

JG: So have you seen them?

CS: I have not seen it done. But we went to groundbreaking and the mayor came and the mayor of Bay St. Louis and all of these people came and it was filmed for TV. It was a big deal.

JG: Is the one in New Orleans done yet? Or are they working on it?

CS: I think it got done this week. Or next week. It's coming. It's very soon. It's Henderson Elementary School. It's coming up. And I think Jerry -- and we sent a guy from the emergency committee went to the first -- David Shifron went to one of the playground buildings. He was the other active member of the committee. He actually went to the playground building, and then he went with his synagogue the second time.

JG: Yeah.

CS: So he did some of that. But anyway, that was one of the main lessons that I learned. To see the world a little bit differently.

JG: So I want to just talk a little teeny bit about New Orleans as you see it now and what you think it will take to bring back the Jewish community of New Orleans and how you think it might be different.

CS: Well, it's going to be two-thirds of the size it was and everyone has pretty much agreed 6,500 is about what it's going to be. 6,600. It's not going to be 10,000 or 11,000 people.

JG: Isn't it at 6,600 -- 6,500, 6,600 right now?

CS: Yeah. That's it. And that's what we're thinking the community is and if they get 100 more families to come, that's neat, but if they don't, that that's what they are. I think the strategic plan is really good. It hits the right notes. The one thing --

JG: In what way?

CS: -- well, I think they have to think about bringing new people into the community. I think they have to think about their alliances with the general community. I think they have to think about themselves as a smaller community. What I don't see happening

rapidly enough is the consolidation of institutions, which is painfully hard, since everyone's grandmother went somewhere else.

JG: Right.

CS: And it's harder in a community with many generations and the contracting that goes with being one-third less of your size is very difficult to do and a community that size, I don't think, can sustain two JCC's and four reform synagogues. And, it's very hard to shut anyone's doors. And it has to come from them and not from us. And --

JG: So there are some -- still a lot of tough decision-making--

CS: There's a lot of hard decision-making --

JG: -- on the horizon.

CS: -- and I think there's a lot of unknowns. You know, there was a report recently that Lakeview was not safe to rebuild in.

JG: Because of the levee situation?

CS: Because of problems with the levees in Lakeview and that's home to a lot of people. And I think there is the fatigue factor, not from the outsiders, but from the insiders. I listen to Debbie Pine, who is very dedicated to Hillel and Andy, her husband, who's dedicated, thinking about, is this really where they want to educate their children through the 12th grade. How long -- you know, they had a mission here, but is it good for their families, and I think --

JG: They were a new family --

CS: A new family.

JG: -- who had been there just for a month or so before Katrina.

CS: But I think even some families who have been there for a long time will have to start wondering how --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 23]

CS: -- how long they want to live in a place that is that hard to live in. And the other thing that concerns me is the real vulnerability to any storm, even a smaller storm. And so I think that that's a serious issue. In Mississippi, they think they've solved some of that by moving north of I-10 and I know in New Orleans there has been some of that too. The corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans has all kinds of new housing in it. A lot of apartments for people who want to commute to work in New Orleans or -- so I don't know how viable New Orleans is as a city and, you know, besides just the sliver by the river and, you know, Metairie and I don't know who wants to make the hard decisions and when there is going to be rental housing so that the tourism industry can really be vital and so some of New Orleans had a wonderful working class population that -- a lot of them lived in rental housing that they can't come back to. And it was a place of neighborhoods and almost of those neighborhoods have signs saying, you know, Gentilly is coming back and this one is coming back, and I don't know how long people will want to be the only house on the street.

JG: Right.

CS: And, in East New Orleans is in a flood plain, still, because the levee is not -- the -- I'm sorry, Mister Go is not functioning right and I don't -- I -- it's a hard one. And it's not so unlike people who had to decide -- Jewish people who had to decide whether to stay or leave other places.

JG: Right.

CS: And, you know, a lot of our ancestors had trouble packing up and leaving, too. And I do think if there is another storm, it will be the end of the city and the end of the

community, too. And I don't think the federal government really gives a damn, and I don't think the state government can get uncorrupt enough to make a decision, and the mayor is always watching his back and no one is willing to say what is uninhabitable or shouldn't be rehabitated. And, it's a mess. And it was more depressing this last year than the year before.

JG: Because?

CS: Nothing has happened. In the places where nothing has happened, nothing has happened. And --

JG: Yeah.

CS: -- it's hard to think that we were cleaning houses in East New Orleans and there were streets and streets of houses and they weren't the shacks from the Lower Ninth. You know, the shotgun places that were torn down. They were brick houses that needed gutting.

JG: Hmm. Anything that you think is better, stronger, more resilient --

CS: I think.

JG: -- in the aftermath?

CS: I think there is a really strong sense of community amongst the people there and I think people have been strengthened by their ability to stay. They are survivors and they know it, and so they are strengthened. I think the national Jewish community's ability to deal with a terrible disaster has increased, and we know we have to be proactive and we've fixed up our communication system and I think we've proven to a lot of skeptics a reason for having a national Jewish community. You know, as someone who was about to cut their pledge in half when this happened, I think that the national infrastructure is

necessary and this is a good example of why you have a national community and why you have case management all over the country and why all of the Jewish Family Services talk to each other, because we could do what no one else could do in short order. So I think that that was strengthened.

JG: Yeah. So what is your overall assessment of how the national Jewish community conducted itself during this crisis?

CS: I thought we did terrific and I'm not saying that to pat myself on the back. I thought the staff did great. I thought people in federations -- you know, Lee Winch, Steve Nassiter, put 12 social workers on staff in agencies in Chicago to deal with the non-Jewish people who came to Chicago.

JG: Martha Bergadine.

CS: Martha Bergadine. Even where I'm from in Ann Arbor, Michigan, we had 87 evacuees that were cared for by Jewish Family Services, because there was no other agency who knew how to do evacuees/refugees. So I thought from big to small, we did a terrific job. We took good care of our own and we took good care of all of the people that we could who came our way.

JG: Right.

CS: And we used our agencies to help anyone who crossed our doors. So we helped the general community one by one in addition and I thought we did just fine. And we worked together. I thought the religious streams --

[END OF AUDIO FILE 24]

CS: -- and the UJC and JCPA and Jewish Family Services, I thought we all wore the same hats and our job is, you know, there is a big advocacy job left to do and we're still

involved with legislation to change some FEMA laws and rules and there's a whole political thing that needs to be done to make this work better if it ever happens again and I think it's important that our voices are heard and they're being heard commenting on what some of those things are. I mean, FEMA is restructuring the whole way it coordinates with the not-for-profit world.

JG: Do you think that the experience of Hurricane Katrina has changed the priorities of the National Jewish Community in terms of anything?

CS: Well, I think for the people who were really involved, and on the national level, we know we have to improve disaster preparedness.

JG: How so?

CS: We need to have a full-time staff person in place and we did great borrowing the other part of Howie's time and other people's time and we need to have more infrastructure, better communications, satellite phones, other structural things to make things work better. So I think we have more awareness of how we have to improve. So I think that's mostly how. And I think, also, we're pretty pleased with how well we did. And --

JG: How do you think it compares to other faith-based organizations, non-faith based organizations -- do you have any idea?

CS: All I can tell you is we did better than the government did.

JG: That's for sure.

CS: If we were running the government, people would be living in something better.

JG: By the way, many, many, many people told us that. Exactly that.

CS: That what?

JG: They -- they could rely on the Jewish community. It was better organized. They feel proud. It made them proud. The response of the National Jewish Community and the local Jewish communities.

CS: Right. I think it's true.

JG: -- to this crisis --

CS: Yeah.

JG: -- compared to -- certainly compared to how they felt about everything else.

CS: I feel -- the only thing I feel sad about is that we couldn't make the large Jewish foundations, most of them, see that this was important or a priority. And even Weinberg, that gave us a half a million dollars early on, is reluctant to sink more money into a place where the levees won't keep people there larger than a category three. So I don't blame them.

JG: Right.

CS: Not really. I mean, it's hard to think about investing in something that's waiting to happen again.

JG: So, I thought we could just end with just an opportunity for you to reflect on how working on the UJC's response has impacted you. So, would you say that it's changed your world view? Changed you?

CS: Well, I think I told you, that it certainly made me less naïve and less of an optimist about what you can expect from the government and how self reliant you have to be.

JG: Mm-hmm.

CS: And I think after Katrina, Gavin Newsom, the Mayor of San Francisco, said everyone should have three days food, water, money, a full tank of gas and all that, and we try and do that.

JG: You've tried to do that?

CS: Oh yeah. We made copies of our documents. We put things into a safety deposit box. We've done all of the personal kinds of things. I think I have good faith in the community but, as I told you, I have faith in faith-based communities.

JG: Yeah. Is there anything that surprised you, would you say, as a psychologist, as a Jew, as a human being, as a woman?

CS: The government really surprised me, and I'm a fairly thoughtful person. The lack of planning has blown me away. The inability to come up with a plan that works to decide the hard decisions. What to rebuild. What not to rebuild. What to turn back to wetlands. No one is talking about that. It reminds me of the gas crisis of the 70s. You know, we were all panicked about it and 10 years later we were driving Humvees. So it reminds me of the same head in the sand, special interest, non-thinking, unplanfulness. So, for me, that's been a shock.

JG: Is there anything -- do you see -- is there a gendered story here? People ask me that all of the time. Was there a difference in the way women reacted to their experience compared to men in their personal lives, in their work lives, in their community lives? The leadership of the Jewish community?

CS: This was not a gendered story. I mean, maybe someone else thinks it was --

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CS: -- I can't think of one example. There are a lot of women in places where decisions were made. There were a lot of women doing the heavy lifting.

JG: Did that change anything. do you think?

CS: No. I think that was true in the community anyway. I didn't see any men shrink from the responsibility. I saw a guy like Eric being caught --

JG: Eric Stillman.

CS: -- Eric Stillman, but not being caught. I mean, he was torn by his family. He did what he had to do, and that's OK, too.

JG: Right.

CS: And he wasn't a native. Different from Allen Bissinger or Sandy or Dena.

JG: Right.

CS: This was not -- for me, this was not a gendered story. I don't know. Did anyone think it was?

JG: Oh, people had observations more about the ways in which people reacted based on gender. Responsibilities that they had. Women often, for instance, having responsibilities for taking care of children.

CS: Yeah.

JG: That kind of thing.

CS: That wasn't the level I was dealing with.

JG: Right.

CS: So it really -- it really -- those weren't my issues. No. I think in a lot of ways women did more of what they were doing anyway. You know, Donna Sturberg was always running the Baton Rouge community. She just, you know --

JG: Right.

CS: -- stood behind Eric and did it. No, I don't think so. I just don't think it was a gendered story.

JG: Yeah.

CS: Not for me, at least, it wasn't.

JG: What do you think sustained you during this period?

CS: I've got a great husband and I didn't have to live there every day and I took a lot of Benadryl to sleep at night and I had a lot of people who wanted to listen to me and the other thing was, I thought I was making a difference, and I think you'll do a lot of things because you think what you're doing matters.

JG: Right.

CS: So I thought what I was doing made a difference. And I said I'd stick it out until the end, so I did.

JG: Anything else you'd like to add?

CS: No, that's enough. Don't you think that was enough?

JG: Carol, it's been great. Thank you so much.

CS: You're welcome. That was OK?

JG: That was --

[END OF INTERVIEW]