# Julius Levy Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Julius Levy at his home, 4923 Saint Charles Ave. in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is Saturday, October 13th, 2007. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring / Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Julius, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

JULIUS LEVY: Yes.

RH: Let's start with where you were born and the year you were born if you don't mind.

JL: No, I was born in November 1933 in Clarksdale, Mississippi. My mother was a native of Clarksdale, and my father had emigrated there during the Depression from New Orleans.

RH: Is that right? So, what was it like growing up in Clarksdale and being Jewish?

JL: Well, first of all, being Jewish in Clarksdale in the 1940s – with one isolated episode where I was in the fourth grade and was beat up in the schoolyard because I personally crucified Jesus – with the exception of that one incident, I really knew very little antisemitism. Being Jewish was sort of like being Methodist or Episcopal or Catholic or whatever. I often tell people that the rednecks were so busy hating the Blacks that they didn't have a whole lot of time left over for the Jews, and that was pretty much it. So during high school, there was certainly no antisemitism that I was aware of, and I do remember – I came to college at Tulane, and I remember being a little bit astounded that there were eighteen fraternities with only three that I was eligible to join, and there were five country clubs, but there was only one that would allow me to put my body in its

swimming pool, and that kind of thing.

RH: So you really encountered more antisemitism here?

JL: Well, if you want to call it antisemitism – I didn't feel any hatred from people or anything like that, but I certainly knew about the restrictions, that Jews weren't allowed to join certain organizations, certain country clubs, that kind of thing.

RH: So, what did you study in college?

JL: Well, my father was a physician, and had come to Clarksdale because when he went there in 1930, there was only one other doctor, and he saw an opportunity to practice, whereas he had graduated from Tulane, and there were really very few practice opportunities in New Orleans because it was the Depression. So he went there, and the other physician died nine months later, so he became the only physician in town for a long time. So I had always been told I was going to be a doctor by my father, and I was going to go to Tulane, so I did.

RH: Was there a synagogue in Clarksdale?

JL: Yes, there was. We, with a smile on our face, referred to it as a "Reform Conserva-dox" synagogue because it had a little for everybody, and there was a sizable Jewish community in Clarksdale during the time I grew up. In fact, at one period of time, it was the largest Jewish community in the whole state, even larger than Jackson and Meridian. That changed through the years.

RH: Do you remember how many families, or have any idea?

JL: I can tell you that at one time, I know there were 150 children in the Sunday school. As far as the number of families, somehow, the number 150 sticks in my mind, but I'm not sure that's accurate. But it was a vibrant synagogue. We had a full-time rabbi; many

times, we had cantors. I went to Sunday school there. There were nine in my confirmation class. The drawing area for the synagogue was not just Clarksdale itself, but it was the whole surrounding area. We had kids come all the way from little towns like Tutwiler and Schlater and Webb and Sumner, and places like that, so I grew up in a single Jewish community that encompassed a fairly wide area.

RH: Do you have any memories of growing up Jewish, and being with a synagogue, that were important to you, that were kind of formations of your Jewish identity?

JL: Well, just one little incident. First of all, I hated Sunday school, as most kids did, and the teachers were parents of the kids, and they were poorly trained. So it was something that I knew I had to do for two hours every Sunday morning, but to say I looked forward to it, no, I really didn't. I do recall an episode in 1948 – I was an only child. I remember going to the little synagogue for Yom Kippur services, and my father was sitting between my mother and myself. At one point during the service or after the service, the president of the congregation got up and said that he was there to raise money for Israel and that he was going to raise ten thousand dollars at the service and went on to stress the problems that Israel was having, and the war that was going on, and all that. The first thing he did is look at my father and said, "Dr. Levy, I saw that new Oldsmobile you were driving the other day. I want five hundred dollars from you." My father turned red and grabbed my mother and me and dragged us out the aisle and left the synagogue. He wouldn't come back for about ten years. My mother and I continued to go to services there, but that was my initial exposure to Jewish fundraising. [laughter]

RH: [laughter] I hope it's gotten easier.

JL: Oh, it has, it has. Much, much easier, as a matter of fact.

RH: Did your family light candles, have a Friday dinner?

JL: Well, we didn't do Friday nights. We did do all of the holidays. We certainly had a seder every year; we'd go to my aunt's house for that usually. We certainly lit Hanukkah candles, and I say this with a bit of chagrin, but we lit the Hanukkah candles next to the Christmas tree – not something I do anymore, haven't done since I left home, but, yes, my mother had a Christmas tree every year. It was not for the religious aspect, obviously, but she just thought it was pretty. She grew up that way. She had been born in Clarksdale of immigrant parents, and they remained Jewish, but they just didn't stress the religious part of being Jewish.

RH: So, what would you say defined the Judaism that you had when you were growing up?

JL: Pretty much nothing but exposure to it. Certainly, I was not imbued with any deep feelings about being Jewish. I really didn't have a lot of connection, personal connection with Jewish history; that sort of came in college. I know that I did a lot of reading about Jewish history in college, and my connection with feeling Jewish grew through the years. It really culminated probably in 1967 after the Six-Day War when some various things happened that sort of, you might say, gave me a bit of an epiphany and returned me to the religious part of my faith, at any rate.

RH: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

JL: Yeah, sure. I mean, six days, Israel beat six Arab armies, and gentiles were coming up to me and putting their arm around me and saying, "Isn't it wonderful what your people are doing over there?" For the first time in my life, first took a little bit of a shock – "my people" – because I'd really never considered it to be that, and that was really the turning point because after that, I became involved in Jewish things, both at my synagogue here in New Orleans, Temple Sinai, and with the Jewish Federation, and with eventually the national UJA [United Jewish Appeal]. But you asked me has my fundraising perspective changed through the years, and I have to say, it markedly changed.

RH: Markedly, [laughter]. So, tell me what it's like to be Jewish here in New Orleans and a little –

JL: It's very easy. Especially in the last fifty years, or forty years. I can't recall any antisemitic incident that's directly affected me in New Orleans. Jews are now members of most all of the organizations. There are a few of the social clubs that remain closed to Jews, but not many. Even those are not any that I would care to join were I even invited, but the country clubs are now open, and the biggest country club, the New Orleans Country Club, doesn't have a lot of Jews, but they certainly have Jews. I've been to Jewish weddings at the New Orleans Country Club, that kind of thing. I've even been to a bar mitzvah there. So, antisemitism in New Orleans – not much, if any.

RH: The Mardi Gras societies –

JL: Well, the tradition – and this is not me, because I'll get back to it later, but I work as a policeman at the Mardi Gras parades. The tradition I heard about for many years was that Jews leave town at Mardi Gras; they take their ski vacations, or they go wherever they go, so that they're not putting themselves in a position of discrimination. Well, there are two that I can think of – Mardi Gras organizations, which are still controlled by the New Orleans WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants] community, that don't allow Jews, or that Jews are not in, but the biggest organization, Rex, takes Jews. The two organizations that I can think of that don't take Jews, they also don't take Catholics, Italians, Blacks, a lot of other people, so it's not – it's not just the Jews.

RH: Well, one has to be Comus. I'm trying to remember what –

JL: Comus is one. Proteus is probably the other. And then there are some that don't parade, some of the carnival clubs that are also discriminatory, but I was mentioning the two that put on parades. Comus doesn't parade anymore, but they used to.

RH: So, tell me about your education here at Tulane.

JL: Well, I came to Tulane as a pre-med and ended up – when I started Tulane, it was during the Korean War, so Tulane had an accelerated summer program where you could take the equivalent of a full semester during summer school. So I graduated from high school on a Saturday and started Tulane on a Monday. Went straight through twenty-four calendar months, did the equivalent of three years of college, and in those days, you could get into medical school after three years of college. You can't do that anymore, you need a degree now. And I started Tulane – so I started Tulane as one of the youngest people in my class and went through medical school, graduating in 1957. I just had my fiftieth-year reunion about six months ago.

RH: Oh my gosh. And so you've been on the faculty at Tulane also?

JL: Yeah, well what happened – I took my internship and residency [at] the Tulane Service of Charity Hospital, and when I finished my residency, I had two years of required military service. I spent two years in the Navy. And then, I came back to New Orleans and was in private practice for about thirty-five years. During that time, I was on what's called the clinical faculty at Tulane. I taught at the medical school, but as a volunteer – unpaid. And slowly there, also moved up through the ranks and eventually attained the rank of clinical professor. Then after I retired in 1998, I went back to work full-time at Tulane – I say full-time, not really – I teach gross anatomy to the freshmen, and that's only a one-semester course, so I'm involved in teaching from August through December, and then basically I'm off the rest of the year, so I'm really full-time for five months, and no-time for seven months. And I'm doing that right now – as a matter of fact, this year, I'm the interim course director in gross anatomy because the previous course director left, and the new one won't be here until next year, so they needed somebody to do it for a year, and I volunteered.

RH: And this other part of your life is being a policeman, and so talk about that a little bit.

JL: Well, I'm somebody who, when I was five years old, the greatest thing in my life, I wanted to be a policeman. And of course, I soon learned that policemen couldn't support families in the way that I had become accustomed to, so obviously, that was not going to be a career for me. But in 1977, I was watching television one day, and they had an advertisement that the New Orleans Police Department was putting on a night school police academy, which was very unusual because usually, it was a full-time day job, and that one could keep his day job while going to the police academy, so that's exactly what I did. Instead of four-and-a-half months, which it would have been in day school, it took almost a year. Nine-and-a-half months, I believe it was. I'd go every Tuesday and Thursday night from 6:30 to 10:30 and then all-day Saturday, and got my commission in the police department, went to work as a patrolman, and gradually worked my way up through the ranks. I was in what they called the police reserve – the requirement was twenty-four hours minimum per month, and I generally worked more than that, but I'd work generally either Friday or Saturday night or both if my wife had no social plans.

RH: So, are you a captain now?

JL: I'm a captain, yes.

RH: That's so interesting that you've remained involved and engaged with that.

JL: I have. I'm probably one of the five oldest people on the police force at this time. It's interesting. There's a compulsory retirement at age sixty-five, however, you can continue on a year-by-year basis if you get a letter from your doctor stating that you're in good health.

RH: Oh, okay. [laughter]

JL: So, every year, I turned in my letter and, [laughter] continue for the next year. There's an eighty-four-year-old policeman who's still fully commissioned who's in good health. So, I'll stay on until they tell me I can't anymore.

RH: Wow, that's wonderful. Are there any places – and I'm thinking, both Jewish and non-Jewish, that serve as a social center for you and your wife? First of all, we probably ought to have – who your wife is and your children?

JL: Well, my wife is the former Donna Ruth Berke. She was born in New Orleans. Her parents were Milton and Pearl Berke. Her father has had several professions. He retired as an agent for Metropolitan Life Insurance company. Donna was born in 1938. We met at the time that – interesting story. I'm a ham radio operator; that's one of my hobbies, and Donna's father is a ham radio operator, and he and I were talking across town on our radios. I had a radio set up at Charity Hospital in those days, I was a resident, and he and I would talk across town. And of course, on ham radio, you only went by first names, so I had no idea that he was Jewish until one day we were talking, and he made some comment that let me know that he was Jewish, and of course, I responded with a like comment, so he knew I was, and I happened to be mentioning to another ham who was Jewish that I had been talking to him. His first name was Milt, and we called him Milt on the air, and the person I was talking to said, "He's got a very nice daughter." So the next time I'm talking to him on the air, I said, "I understand you have a very pretty daughter," to which he said, "Yes, and here she is right now, she happened to be walking by," so we first met over the airwaves on ham radio. Actually, we were engaged six weeks after our first date and married five months after our first date, so it was sort of a whirlwind thing. We have three children: Laurie Ann, who lives in Atlanta, married to Jonathan Goldman. He's an investment banker, and she's the CEO of a company called SPANX that makes women's undergarments. My oldest boy, my second child, is Richard, who lives in Dallas. He's an orthopedic surgeon, more correctly, I suppose, a shoulder surgeon. He's in the sports medicine group in Dallas, Texas Sports Medicine Center, and he does shoulder surgery. Then I have a younger son, Andrew, who also lives in Dallas, and he's into commercial real estate, and I have nine grandchildren and another one on the way.

RH: What a beautiful family. So, was their Jewish education different than yours?

JL: Well, [laughter], I will say they went to Sunday school at Temple Sinai, and they hated it. [laughter] So, it probably wasn't a whole lot different. Two of my three children married spouses who were Jewish by birth, and the third one converted before the wedding – and she's probably more Jewish than our other, natural-Jewish spouses, their in-laws. All of the grandchildren are being raised Jewish, and again, they're being sent to Sunday school, and I'm sure they hate it as well. [laughter] It's sort of hard to tell – we've never been religious. I mean, we've never kept kosher or lit candles every Friday night or done anything that would even smack of being Jewish in terms of our religious practices. We do go to synagogue for *yahrzeits*. We do go for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and occasionally we'll join in the community seder or something like that. But we certainly are not, if you'll excuse the expression, church-going Jews, for the most part. Even though I served as president at Temple Sinai, again, it was not a religious thing – probably the worst part about being president of Temple Sinai was that I had to go to a hundred and two straight Shabbat services. [laughter]

RH: [laughter] And sit up on –

JL: Or one hundred and four, I guess it is. Fifty-two weeks, yeah.

RH: But you've been very involved in the Jewish community. And so, could you tell me your understanding of the Jewish community, from the kind of work you've been doing, and talk a little about that work?

JL: Let me sort of, if I could – it's going to be a long narrative, but basically, while I was in college, and as a resident, and then after getting married, I became very intellectually Jewish. I did a lot of reading. I became imbued with Jewish history. And I told you the incident in 1967, and finally, what happened is – and what turned my whole perspective of being Jewish around- was a trip to Israel, and I'm sure you heard this from other people; it's a very common thing. But basically, what happened is that I began every year being asked to donate to the Jewish Welfare Fund here in New Orleans, which

supported the local community as well as overseas. And I gradually went from $100 to $500 as my annual gift, which in those days was not a bad gift. I remember getting a phone call one day from a very close friend, a Jewish doctor who had treated my mother. She had a thyroid problem, and he took care of it. He's an endocrinologist. He called me and said, "I'm the chairman of the doctors' division of the Jewish Welfare Fund this year, and I'd like you to be one of my three vice-chairmen." And so I said, "Well, what does that entail?" He says, "Well, you have to supervise five or six workers, who then each have five cards to go out, and you have to solicit your workers," that kind of thing. "And" he says, "You have to go to Israel with me." And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He says, "Well, all of the vice-chairmen and I, as well as all of the vice-chairmen of the whole campaign are going to go on this trip to Israel." And I couldn't really say no. Donna did not go with me. I remember showing up at the New Orleans airport to leave for New York, and there were three people. I said, "Well, where's everybody else?" He said, "Oh, we're the only three." At any rate, we went to Israel, and it sort of turned everything around. I can even give you the single incident that was the major factor in the turnaround, and that is, it was a typical first trip to Israel. Three days in Tel Aviv, a day or two in the north, and then four days in Jerusalem. I remember coming down on our bus, and we were put together with others who were also on a UJA mission but who weren't from New Orleans, so it wasn't just the three of us traveling alone; we had a bus full of people. We were coming down on a Friday from the north down to Jerusalem to arrive at the Wall for Kabbalat Shabbat, and we're going down the highway. There are three Israeli soldiers who are standing on the highway, hitching a ride to Jerusalem. So the bus driver pulled over, and the three soldiers got on the bus to get a ride to Jerusalem. Two of them were men, who sat in an empty seat in the back of the bus, and the third one was a girl, eighteen or nineteen years old, blonde hair and blue eyes, who sat in the empty seat next to me. So, for three or four hours, we talked, and she's telling me the story about her father – or her grandfather, rather, who was one of the settlers of Kibbutz Kinneret, which is on the shore of the Galilee, and where we had just left, and

she was – and trees, and flowers and things were beautiful there – and she told us the story of when he got there, there was malaria-infested land with rocks and swamps and how they carried the rocks off the land by hand and drained the swamps. She said that when he died, the last time she saw him before he died, he reached down and he grabbed a handful of dirt and he said, "Never forget, this is the most important thing we Jews have." She told me the story of her father, who was one of the Haganah soldiers who, in the 1948 war, lived in Tel Aviv, and one of his jobs, or one of his garrison's jobs, was to escort the convoys that took food and water up the mountain to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. You know the story of how the Arabs came down from the hills and assaulted the convoys and killed people and all of that. She was too young to remember it, but her mother used to tell her the story of every time her father left the house. Well, actually, she probably hadn't even been born yet, but the mother said that every time the father left the house, she never knew whether she'd see him again or not. I became very close to [her]. I remember there were tears in both our eyes as she got off the bus in Jerusalem, and one of the things I remember her telling me is that she made some comment. I wish I had written it down at the time because I don't know the exact quote, but it was something like, "There's one thing you and I have in common, even though I wear a uniform and you don't, we both live in a world that would rather there be no Jews." And I think she's right, I really do. At any rate, I see her every time I go to Israel. She's now married with three children, two of whom have already served in the army, and one of whom I think is either in the army now or his service is almost over. And two of them are in college, so that's been a close relationship. But that was really the turnaround because I remember [break in audio] plane in [break in audio] Israel. We left from Kennedy airport, and it was a snowy night; it was in January. The UJA had a name badge that I put on, and the name badge said, "We are one." I said to myself, "They'll never get me." [laughter] "They'll never get me with that propaganda." I remember going and saying to myself – I had a number in my mind what I was going to contribute to the campaign because I knew they were going to solicit me, and then when the actual

solicitation came, I think I gave something like eight times as much as I thought I was originally going to give, so that was really the start of things. I came back. The Federation asked me to speak to a group of doctors about my trip. Then I became the chairman of the doctors' division and went on to become chairman of the fund for two years – or actually, two different times, and eventually served as president of the Federation. Got involved in National UJA, and whenever you're ready for that, I'll go on to – [laughter]

RH: Well, I tell you what, I think we should move on to the Katrina, and I know UJA – a lot of these are going to come back in. We're going to be talking about that. Unless you want to talk about UJA right now –

JL: Whatever you want, you're the interviewer.

RH: I do want to come back. So, I was thinking we would just begin with when you realized it was a serious hurricane and what you and your family did.

JL: Sure, I'll be happy to talk about that. Let me just give you a little background before we even get into that. Hurricanes in New Orleans are a way of life. I've lived in New Orleans since Donna, and I moved back here for me to start practice in 1965, and there've been hurricanes, if not every year, certainly on a regular basis. The mindset in New Orleans, up until five to eight years ago, was never to leave town during a hurricane; nobody evacuated. People went to whatever concrete and steel structure they could find during the hurricane, and if they were too poor, they went to public buildings during the hurricane. The Hurricane blew through, next day, everybody went home, [and] took care of the wind damage. Sometimes, we were without electricity for a period of time, but life went on. So, the mindset, like I say, was to stay in town; it was never to leave. I think it was because of a lot of – I say eight years; it could have been more or less. Because of a lot of political pressure on the legislators, they started recommending evacuation. And in my opinion, the evacuation orders were being ordered so that the politicians could

protect themselves, no other reason. There certainly was no real reason for evacuation – the Superdome was open, the Convention center was open. Poor people could easily go there. Rich people went to hotels or office buildings, or whatever. So everybody had shelter from the hurricane, and the next day you went home. What happened in Katrina was that there was a "mandatory," in quotations, evacuation. You can't make a mandatory evacuation. You can't make people leave their homes. But the same thing happened. Many people did leave. I don't know the exact statistic, but I think over half the people left. But those that stayed went to office buildings, hotels, or the Superdome. And Donna and I, as was our custom, we went to my medical office building about eight blocks from here, which has a bridge across the street that connects it with Touro Infirmary. We went to my office and took air mattresses and bedding with us, and food, and we just hunkered down during the hurricane, looking out the office building window at the wind blowing, trees breaking, and things of that sort. [We] walked across the bridge to the hospital to eat and socialize with others who had evacuated, and the office building was full of people who had done exactly what we did. And came home. The hurricane, the maximum winds – the hurricane really sort of abated and blew through around 7:00 or 8:00 on a Monday morning, and we waited until the rain stopped, and then around 2:00 Monday afternoon, we walked home. I'd taken both of our cars and put them up in high spots in parking garages, so there was no worry just in case there was water. We walked home, and my house is eight blocks from Touro, it's on probably the highest ground in the city. Prior to the hurricane, Donna had moved a lot of the furniture and valuables and things like that away from the windows, just in case something would come through a window and break it, so the furniture was sort of askew; it had been sort of moved centrally in the house, both upstairs and downstairs. Came home at 2:00 [and] passed friends walking along Saint Charles Avenue at the same time, some of whom had passed our house and said, "Your house looks fine." Came home. Trees down everywhere, front yard, back yard. One of the neighbors' pecan trees fell down in our back yard and destroyed a wrought iron and brick fence that we had back there, but

missed the house, or just took a little tiny chip of wood off one part of the house – missed the carport, missed – we have a fountain in the back yard; it missed that. There had been some wind-driven rain that had come in under some of the doors, which we took care of very easily, but that was it. And the electricity, of course, was out. Prior to the hurricane, I had bought a generator, and I had about enough gasoline to run the generator for about three days. Plus our cars were full of gasoline, which we could have siphoned to use in the generator. Previous hurricane, the most we ever had electric outage was six days, so I had enough gasoline to carry my generator for six days. The generator was not strong enough to run the air conditioning. It was really hot. But it ran everything else in the house. So, our plan was we'll stay in New Orleans, we'll run the generator, we'll bring the cars home from the garage, and siphon the gas off that to run the generator. Then when the electricity comes on in five or six days, we'll be back to normal again. That was our plan. So, we slept in the house Monday night. It was very hot, but we managed. We had the generator running the refrigerator and the freezer, and we could use the washing machine if we wanted to, so we were pretty comfortable. And then Tuesday morning, we turned on the radio, and the radio news was that parts of the city were flooding. Well, parts of the city always flooded, the lower parts of the city. I mean, I recall during Betsy, which was probably the worst hurricane until Katrina, there was an area out in New Orleans East that flooded, in the Chalmette [area]. So that didn't bother us too much. And then they said that the electrical grid was so badly damaged that the first estimates were it would be a month before we got electricity – well, that was sort of scary. And then, by Tuesday afternoon, we heard Lakeview being flooded – well, that was brand new. And Lakewood south, which is a very nice area, being flooded. Those were new areas that never flooded before. So, we had a conversation about what to do. We were afraid if we siphoned the gas from the cars to run the generator, then we wouldn't be able to leave town, so we decided, just for safety's sake, what I would do would be to drive Donna to Dallas, where our two boys lived. We loaded up our SUV with anything that was thought to be valuable, including pictures, the CPU of my

computer, some of Donna's silver jewelry, that kind of thing. We loaded up the SUV, and there was from the uptown area an easy way to get out of town. I-10 was blocked at an underpass out in Metairie, but there was a way to get there by going across the river to the west bank, and then taking highway 90 and getting back on the expressway further down. I remember we were driving down Tchoupitoulas Street past Wal-Mart, and I looked over – we looked over, and there were people leaving Wal-Mart with shopping carts full of things, and I said to Donna, "Isn't it wonderful, they're open already?" [laughter] Well, they were being looted, and even as a policeman, [laughter] I wasn't smart enough to realize that at the time because we had never seen looting in New Orleans before. But we drove to Dallas, spent the night in Shreveport on the way, and then arrived in Dallas Wednesday around noon-time. My children convinced me I shouldn't return to New Orleans, even though I really wanted to, and finally, about five days later, watching television and what was going on in New Orleans, we just – I couldn't stay. I had to get back, so I drove back. I remember watching television in Dallas and hearing all of the hype from the news media: eight murders in the Superdome, children, nine-year-olds being raped in the Superdome. One commentator said, "All the houses on Saint Charles Avenue are being looted." These are his words. I mean, horrible – "Oh, shootings all over town, and murders." So, I got back to town – I drove back. Got there on Wednesday. I drove back on Sunday, having bought five-gallon gas cans, filling them up in Dallas, and putting them in the back of my SUV because I didn't even have any idea whether we could get gasoline in New Orleans or not – thought we wouldn't. Arrived in New Orleans on a Sunday night and went to work for the police on Monday morning – worked twelve-hour shifts without a day off for six weeks. Turned out there was plenty of gasoline, so that was never a shortage. The police brought it all in. When I arrived back in New Orleans, most of the looting was over. There was still some minor looting going on. The water was still at its height; it hadn't started being pumped out yet, but most of the rescue operations of the people who were stranded on rooftops and porches and things like that – that was over with. As the waters receded, I was

involved on many instances with finding bodies in houses, particularly in attics, people who had sought refuge in the attic and then couldn't get out of their attic. That was over and over. I tell everybody, "If you're going to go up to your attic, make sure you have an ax that you can chop through the roof because – and you have the strength to do it because that's not the place you go during a hurricane, or during a flood." Saw the misery of the people in the Superdome and the Convention Center, saw a lot of displaced people aimlessly walking around the city with no place to go. There were no missions open. There was no place for a homeless person to go other than to the Superdome. They had started evacuating the people at the Superdome, probably, maybe Saturday before, but there were still plenty of them there by the time I got there. But I was very pleased to learn – I'll have to digress a moment. As I arrived at my house, I put the key in the back door, wondering what I was going to find when I walked in, whether my house was going to have been looted or whatever, and of course, it had not been, and it turned out that only one house that I'm aware of on all of St. Charles Avenue had been looted, and it was actually some people who had stayed there for five days, and then when they left they took a few things with them. But there were no break-ins for the purpose just of looting, and there were no murders in the Superdome – there was one suicide of somebody who jumped off an upper deck. There were no rapes in the Superdome, particularly no rapes of nine-year-old children. The media just, I mean, hyped this up something terrible, and without any effort to make truthful the things that they were seeing. They interviewed people, rumors got passed around, the rumors got magnified as they were passed, and we ended up having those rumors broadcast over the air as fact. Not one time when I was in Dallas did I hear anyone say, "Boy, is New Orleans lucky the historic part of the city was not flooded," which it wasn't. The French Quarter was not flooded. Uptown was not flooded Faubourg Marigny had some minor floods in the older area. Not once did a commentator say that. The helicopters are flying over, showing all the flooded areas, showing people on rooftops. Did a helicopter fly over Saint Charles Avenue to show that it was fine? Not once. Did it fly over the French

Quarter to show it was fine? Not once. And I just really took so much effrontery at what the media did in this that I'm still mad about it. And the media's still doing it to New Orleans, I mean, they're still telling people, "Oh, look at the horrible crime in New Orleans," and they don't tell the truth behind that crime. Anyhow, I can get into that as another thing. This is not a bad place to live. We have more restaurants open than we did – we can now go back on the record – we have more restaurants open now than we ever had before. We have tourism and the port, which are two of our major industries, are coming back better than they did before. Tourists still come to this city, we just completed a five-day meeting of the American College of Surgeons. It had 100,000 people in the city, including the drug people – people dealing legitimate drugs – including those and the various vendors that came to set up the exhibits, [and] not one untoward incident occurred. I'm not aware of any crime involving any of these people and not aware of – certainly, no murders, or I would have heard of that. Oh, I take that back, I do recall a pickpocket got somebody's wallet. I do remember that. But pickpockets are our bane at Mardi Gras. I mean, crowds of people together, and I've almost adopted the feeling that if some man is stupid enough to put his wallet in his back pocket, he deserves to have it picked.

RH: [laughter] At Mardi Gras?

JL: At Mardi Gras. It's just not the place to put it. [laughter] And we tell people that.

RH: So, how did you find the police department when you came back?

JL: Pretty much in shambles for two reasons. First of all, logistically, we were in shambles; most of the district stations had been flooded, so the police working in those stations were having to work in various other places. My district, they set it up in tents in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart on Tchoupitoulas that had been looted. The supplies the police department had were almost none. Many of the police cars had been flooded and lost. Many of the policemen had lost their uniforms, their guns, their radios. The radio

system in the police department was down. So, logistically it was a nightmare; it was really bad. And then the second bad thing was that many of the police had abdicated their post during the hurricane. Some, who I cannot forgive at all, left town in their police cars. There's just absolutely no excuse for that. Those people were all terminated. We found New Orleans police cars in Houston, Dallas, abandoned – and of course, those people never came back. Then there was a number of policemen – probably somewhere around two hundred – who left in their civilian vehicles to take their families to safety. The vast majority – 180 out of the roughly 200 – the vast majority who returned two or three days later, some stayed as long as a week. Some of them were told they couldn't come back to work, depending on who the district commander was. Some told them they could work, but basically, they all got reprimanded, there was [break in audio; inaudible] dismissed from the police force, then subsequently, they each had separate hearings. Many of them were allowed to return to work. Some of them were docked a month's pay. Some of them were put on a three-month suspension. Some of them lost a rank in grade, but they were allowed to return. So that was a bad time. If you ask me what my feeling is about those people, their duty is to stay at their post in the police department. However, they have families just like I did. I didn't go to work the next day for the police department; I took care of my family. So, it's hard for me to be too critical about what they did. The police department today, of course, is down in numbers. We were about 1,650 people pre-Katrina, and now – I hear varying statistics, but my guess is we're around 1,300 or 1,400. And the police recently, just starting October the first, the police department went on twelve-hour shifts in order to make up for the decreased numbers, so that's –

RH: What do you think of the police department? I mean, is it rife with corruption?

JL: No, it's not. It's not rife – the police department was rife with corruption up until about fifteen years ago, and we had a police chief who came in, Richard Pennington, and his sole goal – he was the second in charge in the Washington, D.C. police department.

He was brought in as somebody to clean out the corruption, and he did. And he fired lots of people that were – there were some horrible situations, police murdering to protect drug people – I won't even get into it. It was terrible, but, in about a five or a six-year period, he cleaned it out. You had to be squeaky clean in order to remain a policeman and in order to get accepted into the police academy. He arbitrarily dismissed a whole bunch of people. To my knowledge today – now I can't say there's no corruption; there's always going to be a bad cop, but the police department is certainly not, if you'll excuse the expression you used, "rife with corruption." It's not that at all.

RH: It's not systemic in any way.

JL: No, not at all. It's not at all. Unfortunately, we can't get a lot of recruits wanting to go to the police academy because of the fact that we are on demand and underpaid and things of that sort. They recently did give a raise to the police, so that helped recruit rookies in the police academy. They also had a situation, back during a previous administration, where they came out with a city council ruling that you had to live in Orleans Parish in order to be a New Orleans policeman, and if you were already a New Orleans policeman, and you lived outside the parish, you couldn't be promoted. That restrained terribly the number of recruits that we were able to get for the academy. That was done away with post-Katrina, so now you can live anywhere you want. I think that helped. We were losing a lot of police officers who quit and went to other jurisdictions because they couldn't get promoted. That's no longer the case.

RH: Do you have one memory that could speak to that time – or one or two memories?

JL: Well, my memories – I can tell you some police events that happened, but my greatest memory was sleeping in my un-air-conditioned bedroom with – and our bedroom is in the front of our house on Saint Charles Avenue – with my windows open because there was no ventilation. There was no air conditioning, no electricity, and sleeping all night with the windows wide open and not seeing a single light or hearing a single sound

because there was no traffic on Saint Charles Avenue because there were no cars and there was no electricity, and there were no lights. I could lay in my bed and look up at the stars, which I could never do before. And driving home at midnight when I got off duty and driving home and seeing a totally black city – that memory will stick with me forever, and also the memory of when the electricity finally started coming back on and seeing the downtown and the French Quarter area lit again after a month. That was big. What the police did is they – about two weeks after I came back, they brought in a cruise ship for all of the city workers, so the police moved onto the cruise ship, that was nice – air-conditioned. But they brought in food, and so we had hot meals. The other thing I remember – how wonderful the volunteers were who came into the city. The Baltimore police department sent us a dozen police cars. The Boston police department sent in uniforms. They had New Orleans police uniforms made by whoever our vendor was, and they came in with trucks full of police uniforms. There was a sheriff's office in Burnet County, Texas, who came in with enough barbecue to feed us for a week. We had steaks and ribs that were delicious. You know, people doing things like that, and then there were all sorts of people sending in supplies – underwear, and clothes, and toiletries, and things of that sort. The manager of the Wal-Mart, whose parking lot we were in, came to us and said, "Tell your men they're welcome to go in and take anything that hadn't been looted." I got the key to the pharmacy. Interestingly, the pharmacy – nobody had broken down the door to the pharmacy in the looting process.

RH: Really?

JL: So the manager gave me the key to the pharmacy, and I was dispensing drugs to people who needed them and couldn't – no drug stores were open –that kind of thing. So those were my memories of just being in New Orleans at the time. I mean, I can tell you some horrible stories of seeing decaying bodies floating in the water and people trapped in their attics dead with the smell that comes with that after about forty-eight hours, and some pretty bad things, and people crying because they couldn't find their

loved ones. Seeing the water gradually receding because they got the pumps working about two weeks after the flood, and it took about three more weeks to pump the city dry. But to see the water receding, to see the absolute devastation of the homes and the flooded areas and driving out to the lower Ninth Ward and seeing the barge that had come through the levee on dry land and blocks and blocks of houses in the middle of the street, and houses on top of cars. And still seeing dead bodies, laying there. They just couldn't pick them up fast enough. They had no refrigeration in New Orleans to take care of the dead bodies, and they were having to drive seventy or eighty miles to find a place where they could store those bodies in a place that had refrigeration, and seeing the trucks loaded up with the bodies, it brought to mind the pictures I had seen of after the Holocaust in Europe, of bodies on the trucks and things. I certainly saw it. So that was the unpleasant part of it.

RH: How did you hold yourself together, during that time?

JL: We had a psychiatrist, Howard Osofsky, who was chairman of the Psychiatry department at LSU, who set up an office on the cruise ship that they brought in, and there were signs all over the cruise ship he was available, he and a group of others, to talk to any of the police or firemen who had problems and wanted to come. We had even social workers asking us to fill out questionnaires about our feelings and did we have nightmares and anything like that. And I can truthfully say I really never had that, nor to this day – I've never had a nightmare about it. I've thought about it a lot, but it hasn't changed my life, and I sort of feel like I was one of the lucky ones because I can see a lot of people who weren't like that. We had two policemen who committed suicide – one was in the middle of a divorce, and his wife and children had left town pre-Katrina, and he just killed himself, a fellow I knew fairly well. There was another policeman who also committed suicide; I'm not sure what the details of that were. But it happened. Many people were affected. I don't think that Donna and I were – well, Donna stayed in Dallas until the electricity came back on, so she stayed about five weeks, so she missed all the

things I've been talking about.

RH: So you stayed here the entire time?

JL: I stayed in New Orleans. I walked in my house. The water was working. The gas was working. I went out in the backyard and found the telephone wires that had been cut down by a tree, spliced them together, my telephone was working.

RH: [laughter] You're resourceful.

JL: [laughter] The only thing I didn't have is electricity, and I had a generator for that. There was plenty of gasoline that the police had. I had my car, I kept it filled with gas, [and] there was no problem.

RH: Do you recall any of the other recovery people?

JL: Oh, sure. The recovery people showed up even before I got back, but then en masse later. I mean, we had more doctors and nurses than we could possibly ever need. I mean, there were just – there were more doctors and nurses than there were patients, I think. If anything, we were overburdened with help because eighteen-wheelers would show up full of clothes, blankets, and all of that. Well, most of the people in New Orleans had left by then. Those in the Superdome had been bussed out to Houston, Dallas, and wherever. So, we had all these supplies, then had nobody to use them. The FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] people came in and set up what we call Federal City, they took two parking lots down – there are three parking lots, I guess – down in the French Quarter, and set up tents, and served three hot meals a day that any public worker could go get. They weren't for the public; they were for the first responders. So I never lacked for lack of food or hot food. Maybe the first few days we were eating these meals ready to eat, the MREs, but I certainly didn't suffer from the lack of food. Once the cruise ship came in, we had all the personal comforts as well. So, I mean, it was not a – and that was a relief effort. FEMA actually rented this cruise ship,

actually, two cruise ships from Carnival – the Fantasy and I think it was the Celebration. I'm not sure, but they actually leased two cruise ships from Carnival to put them in the pier. The Navy sent in the USS *Iwo Jima*, which was a communications carrier, and in fact, President Bush came in frequently and would land on the ship in his helicopter, and then would tour the city and that kind of thing.

RH: Oh, okay. I was wondering where he was landing. [laughter]

JL: The Air Force One would land at the airport, and then they'd helicopter him onto this Navy ship. I had an incident where I had a car, a police car that had overheated, and stupidly got some radiator water splashed in my eyes. I went to the *Iwo Jima*, and they took care of me in the doctor's infirmary there – sickbay. So, I mean, we had everything we could use. I mean, there were no shortages.

RH: Do you have any thoughts about the first response?

JL: Well, I do. Our Mayor, Ray Nagin, announced before last year's hurricane season, not this year's because this is our second hurricane season since Katrina – we're in the middle of it right now. He announced last year before the hurricane season that the Superdome and the Convention Center would be closed, that there would be mandatory evacuation if there were a hurricane threat, and when quizzed and asked, "Well, where are the buses going to come from to evacuate these people?" There were approximately – and I could be a little bit wrong in what I'm saying here. There were approximately 100,000 people – no, that's too many – there were approximately 60,000 people who sought refuge in the Superdome. Now, 60,000 people. Let's say you can get sixty people on a bus, which you really can't, you can only get about fifty – that would be a thousand buses. So to not have those people in the Superdome and to get them evacuated, pre-hurricane, you would need a thousand buses and a thousand bus drivers. Well, the bus drivers have families; they're not going to stay behind to evacuate other people. They're going to take care of their families. Where are you going to get a

thousand buses? Certainly not that many in the public domain for street work or school buses or what have you. Nagin was even asked, "Well, where are those people going to go, that you're going to mandatorily evacuate?" His response was a wonderful response: "Well, I don't know. But once they leave the city limits, they're not my problem." Houston is not going to open its arena anymore. It was literally destroyed by evacuees. Nor will Memphis, who did the same thing, nor will Jackson, Mississippi, or Baton Rouge, who did the same thing. Houston was hit with a crime wave because of the evacuees, of our evacuees. They're not going to welcome us with open arms anymore. So even if logistically you could evacuate people, where are they going to be evacuated to? I don't know, and neither does our mayor, and neither does our governor. So now we have this situation in New Orleans – and the hotels then announced – when they said they weren't opening the Superdome, the hotels then announced, "We're going to close and evacuate our employees." So now the people who can afford it can't even go to hotels. So, I dread to think of what's going to happen the next time there's a quote-unquote "mandatory evacuation." I don't know where people are going to get mandatorily evacuated to and how, but that's the government, you know? They would have been, in my opinion – and plus the fact, flooding, which is the only thing that differentiated this hurricane from any ones we've ever had in the past, was flooding. Were it not for flooding, it would have been just like it was in Betsy. Everybody would have gone home, cleaned up their yards, got rid of the debris, and waited a week for electricity to come back in. It was the flooding that did that in. According to the Army Corps of Engineers – [break in audio]

[END OF FILE]

RH: I guess one thing I think we probably ought to talk about too, is Tulane.

JL: Sure, I taught anatomy in Houston.

RH: [laughter] Okay, let me mark the tape. This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Julius Levy for Katrina's Jewish Voices, and this is tape two. So, I was thinking we should move on and talk a little bit – because you have this incredible relationship to Tulane also, as a professor, so, what happened with Tulane?

JL: Well, the uptown campus and the downtown campus were both flooded. The uptown campus, the area on the lake side of Freret Street was badly flooded, and then parts of the campus on the uptown side of Freret, but not all the way to Louisiana Avenue – I didn't mean that – not all the way to Saint Charles Avenue. According to Scott Cowen, who's the president of the university, the university sustained, and these are his figures, somewhere around $300 million worth of damage. The downtown university, which is the medical school, the Health Sciences Center, as well the hospital, was badly flooded. Charity Hospital, which is next to Tulane, was flooded. The Baptist Hospital, Mercy Hospital – they were all flooded. So the city was left – Methodist Hospital at New Orleans East was flooded – things were bad in the city. So Tulane Medical School was virtually put out of business. The classes had started the first week in August, and the hurricane was the end of August, so the students had had one month, and the campus was unusable. Thanks to the great, great generosity of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Tulane Medical School was able to reopen in Houston the third week in October – I'm sorry, no, no, the third week in – let me get my dates straight now. They were out for approximately – so the first week in October. Peter Traber, who is the president of Baylor College of Medicine, could not have been nicer – gave us classrooms, lab space, office space – put the Tulane logo up on the office. The ID badges that we wore had both Baylor and Tulane logos on them – could not have been nicer to us. And I then, starting about the – oh, I guess the third week, maybe the fourth week in October, started commuting to Houston to teach anatomy to the freshmen, who by that time, the school had started, and they had apartments and things of that sort. So Tulane operated its medical school out of Houston for the whole year. The upperclassmen were put on the wards at Methodist Hospital, Texas Children's Hospital,

Saint Luke's. We heard over and over from the practicing physicians at those hospitals that our junior and senior medical students were better prepared than the Baylor students, and that made us feel very good. But I was flying over to Houston every Sunday, and flying back every Wednesday night for, about two months, I suppose. And then, of course, by the time that year was over with, the downtown properties had been completely cleaned out and fixed up, and school started regularly last year, and it's continuing into this year. Tulane Medical School is still very strong. We have no worse students from the standpoint of their pre-medical criteria – the MCAT and the GPAs – than we ever had before. In fact, we have the largest class now that ever enrolled at Tulane Medical School – 175. One little statistic that's become skewed since the hurricane was the percentage of females in the class. We were almost at fifty percent. There was one year we were forty-eight percent; that was the highest. Post-Katrina last year was thirty-nine percent. This year it's back up to forty-five percent again. We didn't really know the reason for that – you could surmise maybe that the women or their parents were reluctant to let them come to New Orleans at that time, perhaps. That's just a guess. But it's going back up again. We've had more applications to Tulane Medical School this year for this same time interval than any previous year. So, it's not a lack of people wanting to come here. And our faculty was a bit decimated. We were required – the medical school – to terminate about two hundred people, non-tenured people. Many of those have come back already. But the faculty is gradually growing again. One of the reasons those people had to be terminated is because they were practicing clinicians, and there was no hospital for them to practice at. They were terminated with a year's advance pay, but it was sad to see some of those people go. But we're doing well, no problem, and I think the university did sustain some financial losses. A lot of it was covered by insurance. It was just announced in the last month that Tulane's endowment for the first time just reached a billion dollars. And that was good news.

RH: How do you feel the medical infrastructure is now, here in New Orleans?

JL: Broken.

RH: Broken?

JL: When you say in New Orleans, we can talk about New Orleans proper, not greater New Orleans. There's only two general hospitals open in greater New Orleans – private hospitals – and that's the Tulane Hospital and Tulane Infirmary. Those are the only two that are open. Children's Hospital is also open. On a non-private basis, there are about 150 or so beds in what used to be Charity Hospital – not the main building that was Charity Hospital, but the old building that used to be University Hospital, so they're open. Many, many doctors left New Orleans. Some of those doctors left New Orleans to go to neighboring parishes, so it's not like the area lost them. Many of them moved north of the lake to the Covington area, and many moved to Jefferson Parish. The two major Jefferson Parish hospitals, East Jefferson and West Jefferson, were not flooded, and are open and doing well. Many of the doctors that used to practice in New Orleans are now at those hospitals. The hospitals in Chalmette were all flooded and closed. So, there's been a shift – the Orleans Parish Medical Society, which at one time used to boast over 1,800 members, I think the statistics now down to under a thousand. So, from that standpoint, it's regrettable, it really is. But it's just a matter of time before it comes back. Ochsner's been open the whole time; that's another Jefferson Parish hospital. Ochsner just recently bought Baptist Hospital – recently, I'd say, a year and a half ago, and I understand the plans are to gradually reopen parts of that. Some of the old building will not be reopened as a hospital, but there are other parts that will be, so there will be –

RH: How about LSU [Louisiana State University]?

JL: LSU sustained a lot worse. LSU Medical School sustained a lot worse losses than we did. Their main building was flooded, and they haven't even fixed it up yet; it's still empty. Their prime hospital now that their students and residents use is Earl Long Charity Hospital in Baton Rouge.

RH:  Do you think that will stay that way?

JL:  Well, they also have a Charity Hospital in Lafayette that they use.  I've heard rumors – and this I can't substantiate at all.  I've heard rumors that LSU Medical School could be moving to Baton Rouge.  That would be a loss for the city.  I mean, Tulane – it would be a double-edged sword for Tulane.  We would gain some teaching slots, because of the fact that they were vacated by LSU, but I think we would lose a lot more in terms of financial support from the legislature and all of that, and we've had a lot of joint efforts with LSU – a cancer consortium, a gene therapy center, things of that sort.  I'm afraid we might lose that because the legislature has always been more partial to LSU because it's a state school than to a private school, Tulane.  So, we'll just have to wait and see.

RH:  What do you think about the Charity system ?  Bring it back, don't bring it back?

JL:  My opinion, they should have – the statistic I heard was sixty-two million dollars. They should have spent the sixty-two million dollars to fix up Charity Hospital to reopen it.  That's my opinion, and it remains that today.  I think that, even though this is politically incorrect, you can use it if you want – I think that what's happened is that the state and the people who run the Department of Health and Hospitals have felt that this is a great opportunity to get money from the federal government, FEMA as well as other parts, and they've come out with: "Charity Hospital's a total loss.  It can't be opened.  University's a loss.  It's no good in the long term, and therefore we need three-quarters of a billion or a billion dollars to build us a new hospital."  And that's been their line from day one.  I mean, [laughter] it was funny, but the first edition of the *Times-Picayune* after the hurricane, they were about three weeks before they came out and got back – they were printed in Baton Rouge, I think, for a while, but the first one that I saw in New Orleans, the lead article was "New Charity Hospital to Be Built by FEMA."  Well, that was, of course, a rumor; it wasn't the truth [laughter], and that's where we stay with that.  We need a public hospital in this area.  We definitely need it.  We need it to take care of the

sick people, but we also need it for training physicians, X-ray technicians, lab technicians, OR [operating room] technicians, nurses, you name it. I mean, we need it for all of those reasons. And there's a lot of lip service being given to building one. Rumors are rife. The first rumor was that the VA [Veterans Affairs] would build a hospital, and Charity would build a hospital next to each other, and they'd use a common area for laboratories, and this kind of thing. That turned out to be a rumor. They're still talking about where they're going to build a VA hospital. Ochsner wanted them to build it out near them, but I think they've pretty well determined, although I'm not positive, that it will be built downtown. The new Charity Hospital – don't ask me where that is on the drawing board, or if it even exists. I really can't tell you. I can tell you we need it. One of the problems in medical care in New Orleans is that the indigent patients are going to private hospitals for their medical care, and the state's not paying for it. So the private hospitals are having to take it on the chin to take care of these people who unquestionably need medical care and can't afford it. But with no funds available to treat them, the original concept of funding in Louisiana was that the funding went to Charity Hospital – the state funding went to the Charity Hospital system, and it wasn't that the money followed the patients, it was that the money followed the hospitals. Now, unless they come up with something where the money follows the patients, the private hospitals are going to go broke. The legislature has not come up with anything to help with that, and the doctors are providing free medical care, they're not getting paid at all. The hospitals are getting a dribble now – from the state, not much. The doctors are getting nothing, so the doctors are getting up at 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning to take care of trauma patients who would have originally gone to Charity Hospital, and they're not seeing any remuneration for it. Now, I will say things have improved a bit because about three months ago, four months ago, they did reopen the Charity emergency room at University Hospital, and it's a nice emergency room. It's now seeing most of those patients again. But that's where we stand. We have a broken medical system. It will be fixed eventually, but it's going to be a while.

RH: While people jockey, it sounds like, for –

JL: Yep. Yep. This state has never been known for its great political system, and we have not only our share of dishonest politicians, but we also have, if you'll excuse me for saying this, our share of stupid politicians.

RH: How do you think the Jewish community's doing?

JL: It's surviving, yeah. Maybe not like it was pre-Katrina, certainly not in numbers. I get varying statistics told to me. At one time, our Jewish community – and people deny it was ever this big, but I know the word going around was that we had 12,500 Jews in this community, and I'm going back about ten years. I see the statistic ten thousand pre-Katrina. And now I see the statistic somewhere around eight thousand. But I don't know that that's a fact, and I don't know how anybody can accurately count them. We sustain a loss of a lot of Jews who left town. Sad, but it happened. I don't think we lost any more Jews on a per-capita basis than any other group in town lost. We have always had, in my opinion, in this town, sort of a Cadillac appetite on a Ford economy in terms of our Jewish services. For our ten thousand Jews pre-Katrina, I mean, we had two Jewish community centers. We had a Hebrew day school. We had children's services. We had Jewish family services. I mean, we had tons of Jewish services for a very small Jewish community. And on a per-capita basis, we were spending a lot more money than most cities. Now, we have fewer Jews, and to be honest with you, I'm not sure our appetite has decreased at all. We still have everything I just mentioned. We have a Jewish day school that caters to a very small number of children. We did limit the grades. It used to go through the, I think, eighth grade, and now it's back down through the fifth grade or third grade. I shouldn't say that because I'm not really sure. Most of the Jews who are here are here because their businesses are here, or their professions. And they seem to be living pretty much pre-Katrina lives. I don't see any lack of people going to the restaurants or the various sporting events or what have you. Saints have twenty

thousand people on a waitlist for season tickets. We never had that pre-Katrina. [laughter] So I think life for those people here is okay. Now, that's the people that I know. I'm sure if you ask how the impoverished part of the community is doing, you'd hear a different story, but you asked about the Jewish community, and I don't know of a lot of needy Jews in New Orleans. In fact, I don't know of any. And Jewish life seems to be normal. We had a lot of aid from Jewish organizations. The UJC, the United Jewish Communities, gave us a lot of money to keep things going. I'm very pleased to say that our Jewish Welfare Fund campaign, which is our annual fundraising campaign, exceeded expectations tremendously last year. I mean, we were thinking at one point we'd be lucky to raise $1.8 million, and I don't know the exact ending figure, but it was over $2.2 million. I said $1.8 million, and we raised over $2.2 million, so things were really doing well – are doing well.

RH: Tell me about your national affiliation in the Jewish community.

JL: Well, when I was chairman of the drive here in town, on both occasions, and then eventually president of the Federation. I got involved nationally, and I worked my way up from being a regional UJA chairman all the way to being a national vice-chairman of UJA. Through the years, I had various jobs with the national UJA. I was, at one time, the national chairman for missions. I was the national campaign chairman for many years. So I had a lot of jobs that I did with national. I was the chairman of an organization called Kadima, part of the UJA that sixteen handpicked people went to distressed Jewish communities overseas every year, came back, wrote the campaign plan, and took movies, and stills, and made videos, and this kind of thing. I was the chairman of that for, I think, six years.

RH: What was the name of that program?

JL: *Kadima*. Forward. You know the story of the second lieutenant leading the brigade over the hill – "*Kadima, kadima*, follow me." Actually, *acharei* is "follow me." *Kadima* just

means “forward.” But it was a wonderful time in my life. I was going to New York two or three days a week every month – two or three days every month. Really rubbed shoulders with some of the nicest people in the world who are involved in this organization.

RH: Is that right?

JL: Yeah. I miss that. I really do. But it’s for the young people; it’s not for the old people, and it’s gone to the right people now.

RH: Do you think that this Jewish community has done well in training its youth, its leadership?

JL: Well, of course, I used to travel around the U. for UJA, and I probably made two or three hundred trips to various cities around the UJA, and the two things that I heard most of all when they would ask me – because I was now the person from out of town who was the consultant. The first is, “What do you do with your doctors?” I heard that over, and over, and over [laughter] in terms of fundraising. But the second thing I heard is, “How do you get the young people involved?” New Orleans has had a Lemann-Stern Young Leadership program through the years, where it started out as a men’s group and a women’s group, and then it subsequently merged, where we take twenty-five every year of the most promising young up-and-coming people, and we give them a two-year course in Jewish leadership. Bring in speakers – I’ve talked to the group on a number of occasions. We teach them the Jewish alphabet national system. All of our organizations have letters, and we teach them all of that. At the beginning of this trip, they go to Israel; that’s a requirement of being in the group. It’s paid for by the community, the whole program. Some of the money is donated specifically for that program, but most just comes out of the Federation budget. So we do what we can. I don’t know how you involve young people who don’t want to be involved. It’s just like in fundraising when I go up to somebody to ask for a donation, and somebody tells me first off, “I don’t give a

damn about the Jewish community or Israel," I just turn around a walk away. There's nothing I'm going to be able to do. If people don't want to get involved, then they don't want to get involved, and that's the end of it.

RH: Does that happen much in this community?

JL: No, no. No, no, not at all. I'm just sort of, making up a story to tell.

RH: Is the Lemann-Stern a special program in New Orleans?/

JL: Yes. Lemann and Stern. There was a Lemann family and a Stern family, who this program was named after, and it is a New Orleans program. Many cities have young leadership development programs, but Lemann-Stern is specifically a New Orleans program.

RH: Is there anything unique about the Jewish community here that –?

JL: Yeah, I think we're unique in that we're eighty percent Reform. And that's a pre-Katrina statistic. I don't know what it is today. Most communities are much less Reform. New Orleans is a community that – I mean, there are people in this city that trace their Jewish heritage back to the 1830s, and most of them are Reform. We went through a – I don't know whether previous people you've interviewed have covered the Jewish history of New Orleans that well, but New Orleans had a situation where we had two big waves of immigration, and it really divided the community for years. The first group of immigration [was] 1830 to the end of the 1840s immigration. There was a Franco-Prussian war going on in Europe. Things were bad for the Jews in those days, and so we had a wave of immigration. Most of those were from the Alsace-Lorraine area of France/Germany, who came to New Orleans because it was a French-speaking area, and it was always better to go where you could speak the language, so that brought in a lot of immigrants, and there are a lot of very prominent Jewish families in New Orleans whose ancestors came in those days. And they had built up financial empires – maybe

not the term empires really, but very strong financial representation – by the 1880s, 1890s, had become very assimilated into the community from the standpoint of, their children were now first-generation Americans who were speaking English like everybody else spoke English. The first thing the first wave of immigration did was adopt Reform Judaism; they never denied their Jewishness, but they gave up the Orthodox traditions. So, now we're in 1885 or so, and these people start arriving from Eastern Europe, with their *peyes*and their *tzitzits* and their long black coats and hats, and beards, and all of the sudden, they became an embarrassment to the Jewish community that was here, who were well-assimilated into the community. And of course, those, the second group, set up their Orthodox traditions. There were never any Orthodox synagogues in New Orleans. Well, I shouldn't really say that. The original congregation that came over you could call Orthodox because Reform really didn't start until the 1870s in any meaningful way, but they quickly became Reform. So the new ones are now really traditional Orthodox, and there was a tremendous schism between the established Jews and those that came in the 1890s, 1910, '15, '20 period. Even a lot of the Jewish history books from New Orleans refer to the Saint Charles Avenue Jews, and the Carondelet Street Jews because that was where they lived. Temple Sinai, my temple, that I was president, at one time, was always Reform, it was built as a Reform synagogue, moved from its location down on lower Carondelet Street up to its present location in 1927, and I remember for years you couldn't get in Temple Sinai unless you were of French or German descent.

RH: Is that right?

JL: I mean, I don't think that was in the bylaws or anything, but it was certainly true. In fact, Temple Sinai was the hotbed for an organization called the American Council for Judaism, which was an anti-Zionist Jewish group. I remember having – I was teaching Sunday school at Temple Sinai when I was in college, for no other reason than four dollars a Sunday – it had nothing to do with altruism. There was a big split in the

congregation because the American Council for Judaism textbooks were adopted and had lines in there such as, “We are not American Jews, we are Jewish Americans.” A whole group of the congregation left and went to other synagogues because, they were still Reform, but they couldn’t take anti-Zionism. The rabbi at the time would give anti-Zionist sermons from the pulpit. I remember, when I first became president of Temple Sinai, I was just out of all of my UJA and Federation work. I got a phone call from a man who had been president of the congregation in 1948, and he takes me to lunch, and the first thing he says to me [was], “Are you a Zionist?” And I said to him, “If you’re asking me do I want to go live in Israel the rest of my life, the answer is no. If you ask me – am I supporting Israel in every possible way, the answer is absolutely yes.” And he hands me this [inaugural] speech he gave when he was president of Temple Sinai, on yellow – you remember the old Thermofax paper that was yellow, like cellophane – ?

RH: Yeah.

JL: He hands this to me. He says, “I’m going to sit here while you read this.” I read this speech that he gave, in which he said things like, “We have no connection with the Jewish state in Palestine, we are loyal Americans.” Yeah, I guess after World War II, you couldn’t be in favor of Israel and a loyal American at the same time! I don’t know. Anyhow, we ended up lunch – on a pleasant note, but nevertheless, he was not happy with me. I remember what went on at Temple Sinai when somebody wanted to put an Israeli flag on the *bimah*. And they had a board meeting in which all the past presidents showed up. And the vote – it wasn’t a question of money because there were plenty of people who were willing to pay for it. But the vote was against putting an Israeli flag on the *bimah*. It changed about five years later, they had another vote, and they put it up there. And now, it’s up there, and anybody who has a life-cycle event that wants it removed during their event, they can request it be removed, and it will be, you know? But those are the kind of things that I remember about Temple Sinai. I remember being in college, and God, would I never go to an AZA – I would never go to anything AZA, that

was too Orthodox. [laughter]

RH: So that was a fraternity?

JL: Well, that was me personally – no, AZA was the American Zionist – it was the boys' high school fraternity, but it wasn't really a fraternity. It was like – well, it's like today, the BBYO, and these kinds of things. The youth organization.

RH: Right. Too Orthodox, though.

JL: Too Orthodox. And the JCC was too Orthodox.

RH: Really?

JL: Yeah. I mean, we went there, but it was still –

RH: And what years are you talking about?

JL: I didn't go to Hillel when I was in college. That was way too Orthodox.

RH: When did it start –?

JL: That was a mindset thing. I mean, that was just – it wasn't really too Orthodox. Word sort of got out that it was too Orthodox.

RH: When do you think things started to change?

JL: Israel. Big change after the Six-Day War, but change is starting in 1948 and on. Israel's the best thing that ever happened to the Jewish Diaspora. I mean, it really is. If it weren't for Israel, we would still be doing things like we were doing them in the 1940s, and there would still be lots of restrictions against the Jews joining organizations and things of that sort. It's Israel, and it's the fact that it survived with everything against it, and it shouldn't have survived on paper. All of that made Jews very proud to be Jews.

Jews weren't proud to be Jews before that. I say that as a blanket statement. That's not true, but there was no real pride for me in being a Jew before Israel, at all. I think, if I could've avoided it, I would – if you had given me my options, said, "Look, you can be Protestant, or you can be a Methodist, and nobody will ever know you were a Jew," I would have taken them up on it at one time in my life. I know my mother in Clarksdale, Mississippi felt very strange being socially ostracized from a lot of the women that she was with. I know she would have very easily become a Protestant if she could have done it with nothing bad attached to it.

RH: What is your hope for the Jewish community now?

JL: Obviously, that it does well. I have nothing but fond hopes for things being very well, very good with the Jewish community. I think we're on the right track right now. I like Michael Weil, who's our Executive Director. I think he's done a good job since he's been here. We had a reconstruction-type thing going on, of various committees and such, of which I was the chairman of one.

RH: What was your committee?

JL: The public relations committee. We put together – our committee put together sort of a welcome package for anybody who wants to move to New Orleans with a lot of financial benefits to it – free membership in synagogues, JCC, this kind of thing for a while, for a year. But also, the publications that are going out – we put a video together. We got articles put in a lot of newspapers all over the country, so I mean, it's done. I think it's the way to go. I don't know that we're going to be able to get Jewish immigration to New Orleans just on the basis of those kinds of things, because people come to New Orleans for financial reasons. They come here to get jobs. They come here for reasons other than the fact that this is a city to be nice to live in. I hope one day we'll be there, where we'll get these people, that we will repopulate the city.

RH:  A large part of it would be the medical community, I would assume.

JL:  A large part, sure.  We lost some Jewish doctors, good friends of mine, who are no longer practicing in New Orleans.

RH:  Are you resentful of any people who've left, of the people who've left?

JL:  No, no.  People should live where their lives are the best.  I went through this when I was dealing in committees with immigration out of the Soviet Union before they opened the gates, and some of the people opted to come to the United States, and others to Israel.  I would have liked to have seen them all go to Israel, but on the other hand, they go where they think their individual opportunities are the best.  I have a very good friend who's a urologist, one of my closest friends, who moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, because he had an opportunity to practice up there, and his practice here in New Orleans – he did all of his work at Baptist Hospital, and it was destroyed.  He was shut out of his office building.  For three or four months, he couldn't even go to his office.  So what was he to do?  He took a job in a VA hospital in Florida, did that for six months, then moved to Chattanooga.  I don't blame him.  I miss him, but I don't blame him.

RH:  Do you feel the medical community has been mistreated in any way, through this crisis?

JL:  I'm not sure what you mean by mistreated.  The Jewish medical community?

RH:  No, not the Jewish, just –

JL:  The medical community as a whole?  Only in having to do all this Charity Hospital work for no remuneration.  That's certainly a mistreatment.  I don't think there's been any specific legislation or anything that the politicians had control of that you could call mistreatment.  I'm not exactly sure what you're driving at.

RH: Well, I guess that's the wrong word. I feel the medical community has taken a big hit in Katrina itself, the medical community has – the doctors' stories are very important stories to tell.

JL: Yeah, and I think if you talk about – first of all, there's been an economic hit. Certainly, their income is not what it was pre-Katrina. Although many are just as busy because they're taking care of these non-remunerative patients. Those who practice at Touro Infirmary have not taken much of a hit because the hospital's every bit as good, if not better than it was before. It may be tougher to get your patients admitted because the bed situation is a little tighter than it used to be, but we dealt with that sometimes during the good years, pre-Katrina. So I really can't say that other than economic, where there's been, of those who stayed, that there's been that much change. Certainly, those teaching at Tulane who lost their positions took a hit. And LSU, I guess, was the same thing. Certainly, people's practices who practiced at the flooded hospitals have taken a big hit, some of whom went into forced retirement, some left town, and some went into the competitiveness at other hospitals, so they certainly took a hit. I don't know how else to answer your question.

RH: Okay. I think you've answered it. I've just noted with some poignancy that some doctors, say, who were at Tulane, their practices dwindled, and they've had to move to other hospitals, and here they were at the peak of their career in one place, and suddenly you're starting over.

JL: Yeah, and I suppose I'm looking at this from the perspective of somebody who's seventy-three years old, rather than somebody maybe who has been out of residency for five years, and they're still in the process of building a practice. I'm sure you would hear a totally different story from somebody like that. But I'm sort of looking at things overall from my perspective, and I don't see what a younger person might see.

RH: What has the Jewish community –? Have you thought about it –? Has it meant a lot to you during this experience?

JL: Has it done anything for me personally, you mean?

RH: Well, not really done anything, but just being Jewish.

JL: Well, I see the community as a whole taking a hit in that the Jews didn't suffer more or less than anybody else. [inaudible] I've given the best years of my life to this Jewish community, and I want to see it thrive, and I want to see it do as well as it can. I don't want to see things go badly in any way. And looking at it from that standpoint overall, I can't really say it has. I think we certainly took a financial hit for a while. We certainly had our problems, but I think we're on a fairly firm financial footing right now. I think our Jewish community is doing well overall, and I think that we're on a rebuilding or growing path right now. I don't see any people leaving town who haven't already.

RH: Well, that's nice to know, from October, that they're –

JL: I see, and this is not Jewish, but I see, for example, in the uptown area, I see people moving uptown who used to live in Metairie and who were flooded out in Lakeview, and that kind of – I see a lot of them moving uptown. I see areas that used to be white, that had become mixed, are now becoming white again. I see that. And that pleases me.

RH: I guess one of the questions I'm trying to get at is more like your Jewish identity – has that changed any? Is it firmer, is it –?

JL: Okay. All right, if you're asking me, am I any more religious than I ever was before, the answer is absolutely not. If you're asking me, do I still feel as strongly about supporting the Jewish infrastructure in New Orleans, I absolutely do. Maybe even a little more than pre-Katrina, because they probably need help now more than they did before. But I'm at the age now where I'm not going to be on the Federation board other than as a

past president. I'm not going to be involved in Jewish activities that much. I was pleased to be asked to be chairman of one of the rebuilding committees, and I did that. I was not an expert in public relations, so hence I was a chairman in name only in that I was running the meetings. But the expertise didn't come from me. And I don't see myself doing many of those type [of] jobs anymore. I still take cards in the annual campaign or chairmanship of division as I have done forever, and I still feel the need to participate in Jewish fundraising in New Orleans as much as I ever did. So my bonds with the community pretty much reached a point, and it stayed there. I'm still very much committed to this Jewish community. But in a different way than I used to be committed, from the standpoint of still having the feelings, but just not being one of the workers that I once was. I think our Jewish community has wonderful professional and lay leaders right now. We probably need a few more professional people – our Federation is undermanned, and I think that our lay leaders in the Jewish community are as good if not better than they have ever been before.

RH: Is there anything that you'd like to preserve in the Jewish community, as it moves forward, and are there some things you'd like to see slip by the wayside?

JL: What do we want to preserve? We want to preserve our heritage, that's what we want to preserve, and we're certainly doing that. From the standpoint of the Jewish organizations, if you were to come to me and say, "Look, I want you to start at budget zero, square one, and build a Jewish community," what I would build personally would look nothing like what we have here. But we're not given the opportunity to start at square one and build up – or zero budget and build up. We have traditions of supporting organizations, and we're keeping them up right now. It seems sort of funny in my mind to think of the fact that we had ten thousand Jews; now we have eight thousand or seventy-five hundred or whatever the number is, and yet we've got the same infrastructure. We haven't changed it. With the exception of cutting back on the grades of the day school, we've really done nothing.

RH: That's been the big cut so far, huh? [laughter]

JL: Yeah, yeah. And that was not that big a cut, because there weren't that many kids. Maybe the organizations aren't serving as many people as they used to, but the organizations are still there. We haven't, for example, closed up one of our JCCs. We haven't done that. We haven't amalgamated or consolidated any of our synagogues. I mean, there's every reason in the world I could sit here and give you why Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai should have merged fifty years ago, thirty years ago. But they're no closer to a merger now [laughter] than they ever were.

RH: It's not going to happen, huh?

JL: Yeah, it's not going to happen. But I'm not building this Jewish community starting from scratch.

RH: Is it not going to happen? Is it theology?

JL: No. [laughter]

RH: Is it ideology? Is it heritage?

JL: It's heritage, purely. It's certainly not ideology or theology. There are so many people in the Jewish community who quit this congregation and joined this one because they don't like this rabbi. Then they quit this one and joined this one because they don't like this rabbi. And rabbis come and go; congregations stay. The ideology between Touro and Temple Sinai is no different. They really aren't. We should have consolidated years ago. We should today consolidate our Sunday schools. We should for financial reasons. We should say, "Okay, Touro, this year you've got grades one through four," and "Sinai, you've got five through nine." I'm just making up the numbers. "And next year, we'll switch, and everybody keeps their own confirmation class." Yeah, that should have been done years ago. It's not going to be done.

RH: It isn't?

JL: No.

RH: That sounds like a great idea.

JL: [laughter] It's not going to be done. I remember when I was president of the temple, Donald Mintz, who, may he rest in peace, was the president of Touro. We had everything all arranged, and we were going to merge, except that they wanted to take their mahogany ark and tear out our marble ark, and that split the merger. Wasn't going to happen, you know? [laughter]

RH: The arks. [laughter] Okay.

JL: The ark story. [laughter]

RH: How about the city of New Orleans, how do you feel about the city of New Orleans? At one point, you told me you were hopeful, do you want to talk about that?

JL: I'm bullish. I think that one of the things that happened to New Orleans was that we lost a large portion of the lowest level of the community. They went to places like Houston and Dallas and had better lives than they had in New Orleans, and they're not going to come back, and I don't blame them. People should look for their better lives. But these were not people in New Orleans who were supporting the city through their taxes or their efforts or anything like that, so we've gotten rid of a lot of those – anywhere between 100,000 and 150,000. This is not politically correct either, but it's left us with a better city. I think we're doing a lot to improve the school situation. We certainly have better schools now than we did pre-Katrina. The state's taken over most of the public schools, and that's a very positive sign. I'm not in the position where I can say whether or not the economy is going to continue to grow, but it is growing – not back to pre-Katrina levels, but it's growing. We still have a ways to go before the port does as much

business as it did before. We still have a ways to go before tourism is back to its pre-Katrina levels. But it's coming. I think the eventual outcome of the city is – I see rosy days ahead. I really do. We'll get our crime problem taken care of – the murder problem. I shouldn't really call it the crime problem. Once the drug turf lines are redrawn again, and the gangs get their own acts together, then they'll stop killing each other, and things will be better. It has nothing to do, as I said before, with police presence. Can't stop these murders.

RH: Are there any things that you would like to see in this city that you don't see now?

JL: Oh, I'd like to see wonderful public schools. I'd like to see a hundred Forbes 500 businesses operating out of New Orleans. [laughter] I'd love to see the cruise terminal with eight ships a week coming in and out. I'd like to see – sure, I can name things I'd love to see. I'd like to see a nice, honest, well-informed government at work. I'd like to see the federal government return the oil royalties to the state of Louisiana. There's lots of things I'd like to see. But I'm not going to see all of those things. [laughter]

RH: [laughter] No, I think not.

JL: I'd like to see fifteen thousand Jews living in this city.

RH: We've gotten this far, and we haven't really talked too much about race. And it can be a difficult topic. But I'm curious if you think that there was a racial element to why people were left behind.

JL: Yeah. Poor people were mostly Black, and those were the ones left behind. Very simple. It wasn't because they were Black; it was because they were poor. But they also happened to be Black. So, racial tensions in New Orleans are something that has only existed in the post-segregation era. New Orleans was always a checkerboard city. The history of New Orleans was such that back in the days of slavery and shortly after, the whites lived on the avenues, and their supporting staff, the people that worked in their

homes, lived behind them. So, you could look at New Orleans at any time, and right now, we're on Saint Charles Avenue, near the corner of Robert – you go four blocks down Robert Street, and you're in a Black area. New Orleans has never been a city that had a railroad track down the middle with the Blacks on one side and the whites on the other side as Clarksdale, Mississippi was and other places. It just never was like that. So we really had no racial tension in this city up until integration. Now I'm not saying that the Blacks were given everything they needed. I'm not saying that at all. They certainly were underserved. Their schools weren't as good. They were not allowed in colleges. This was a bad situation from that standpoint, but there were no white-Black racial relations from the standpoint of bad feelings between the two, or riots, or murders, or anything, for racial reasons. That reached its peak during the integration era, and now it's gotten to the point where the Blacks took over the government, the –

RH: I want to change the tape and finish this.

**[END OF FILE 2]**

RH: This is tape three of Katrina's Jewish Voices, and I'm Rosalind Hinton interviewing Julius Levy. You were just saying that the racial tension – you found it became more intense. Now, the government is African American, and after segregation, tensions between the races became, I guess, more strained.

JL: You may get a better understanding of me if I just say one thing, and that is, I hate the term African American.

RH: Oh, okay.

JL: Because I'm not a European American. I'm an American. There are a lot of Africans who live in South Africa and Egypt who are not Black. And therefore, the term African Americans – I don't like it. We can talk about them as Blacks if you like, whatever. Moon Landrieu was the last white mayor of this city. Dutch Morial was the first Black mayor.

And the Black government has continued up until the present time. Almost every election – in fact, I will say every mayor's election, the run-off has pitted a Black against a white. I think I may be wrong on one election when I say that. And the white has always lost, for mayor. City council, the whole government, of course, pre-integration, was white, and now it's mostly Black.

RH: So, is this part of the "Big Easy" mentality, do you think?

JL: Some of it is. I don't like the term "Big Easy" either. This used to be called "The city that care forgot," and somebody made a movie called *The Big Easy*, and that sort of became our tag. It distressed me after the hurricane, the first meeting of the City Council, Mayor Nagin is standing there on the news with Jesse Jackson standing behind him – and he's a violent racist, as is Al Sharpton. They all come down, and they're big buddies with our mayor. Well, our mayor shouldn't be the big buddy of these people, he really shouldn't. I'm sure of all of the speeches that our mayor gave about "the chocolate city," and those people there – meaning, those people uptown that he spoke about disparagingly – we don't have good leadership. And it's not the Black or whiteness of it. It's the fact that we just don't have quality leaders running our government, and that's sad because if we had had a decent governor and a decent mayor during Katrina, things I think would have been a much better situation. Look, Mississippi, I'm told, has received more FEMA money than Louisiana has. Why? Because they have decent leadership over there, and we don't. We had much more destruction than Mississippi.

RH: Right. I guess, now that you've seen your home as in the larger city, not your personal home, but compromised the way you've seen it, and you said that sometimes these – you think about the things you saw two years ago when you were back here. How would you construct, I guess, or recreate, or talk about, a sense of home? What is home to you?

JL: Well, first of all, let me just get back to the question, and start off by saying there's no way that I will ever leave New Orleans. I mean, I will die in this city, no matter how good or how bad it gets. Unless there's riots in the street, I'm going to stay here. New Orleans has been my life. I moved to New Orleans when I was seventeen years old, and except for two years away in the Navy, I've never left. I see so many people who moved to Atlanta because that's where their children are – after they retire. Or they move to Dallas because that's where their children are after they retire. I mean, I regret terribly that my children didn't stay in New Orleans because there were no economic opportunities for them at the time. They needed jobs. But I'll never move to Dallas or Atlanta to be with them. They have their lives, and that's fine, and I want to see my grandchildren as often as I can. The whole family gets together every Christmas, excuse the expression, and every summer we rent a big house in Seaside for a week. And then we visit with our grandchildren and our children as often as we possibly can. But I'm always happy to come back home. I mean, this is my home, and it will stay this way. I love the heritage here. I go to Dallas and Atlanta, and [they're] the most sterile places I've ever seen. I mean, there's nothing fun happening there. I mean, when I say fun, I mean, I like trees, flowers and old areas and preservation things. You don't have any of that in those cities. They're all too busy with their businesses and the horrible traffic snarls that you get into. I go to Atlanta, and my daughter asks me to pick up her children from school, and it takes me – and the school is only, at the most, two miles away from the house, and it takes me a half hour to forty-five minutes to get to the school and back. It makes no sense at all. And her life, I mean, she's so busy – she's the CEO of a big organization. She's flying off to here and there all the time, and I mean, they can have that. I'm just not interested in it. I love New Orleans. I think it's a wonderful place to be. It was a wonderful place to bring up my children. I did have to pay to send them to private schools, but that was anticipated. You knew you were going to do that. But it's a great place.

RH: If you have one memory post-Katrina or one experience that you would want to talk about, what would that be?

JL: You mean just an event?

RH: Just an event.

JL: I remember, the electricity came on in this house, four weeks and two days after the hurricane. And I remember calling Donna, and saying, “The electricity is on. Come home.” And she flew into the airport, which was accepting three to four flights a day when she came back – three or four flights a day, civilian flights. There were lots of military and other kinds of flights. So she managed. It took her two or three days to get a seat on an airplane, and I went to pick her up, and we came home, and she arrived here about on a Thursday, I think it was. I’d just heard that Clancy’s Restaurant was opening the next day. So I said to her, let’s go to – because we like Clancy’s. It’s one of the restaurants we go to. We go to Clancy’s – New Year’s Eve could not have been any different. I mean, everybody there was hugging each other and kissing. People we didn’t even know were putting their arms around us and kissing us and hugging us, and it was like, “We’re back.” It was like, “Here’s New Orleans. We’re up and running again.” I remember the menu had two appetizers and three entrees. There was a sign on the door saying, “If you expect prompt service, come back another day.” And we were there for two or three hours; it took that long to eat the meal. But I mean, it was like a party the whole time. People were just so wonderful with each other, and that was my recollection for the next month. I mean, everybody you saw was so happy to see you here, and you were so happy to see them, and the word going around of “Well, do you know any restaurants that are opening up?” And you’d go find them. I’d stand behind somebody in a terribly long line at the cashier at the drugstore because they didn’t have help, and you had to wait in line, and somebody needed another dollar and a half, and the person behind them would say, “Here, take it,” you know, that kind of thing. I remember people carrying out ice because the drugstore was selling ice, and that was a big deal, because before the electricity was on – and people carrying out ice for other people to their cars – “Oh here, let me carry that for you.” It was always – it was like everybody was – and for

a brief period of time, I didn't lock my front door, didn't have to lock my front door. I left it open all the time to get the breeze through the house, and I was never worried about crime because the people that were here were not the criminals.

RH: It's like a bygone era, almost, huh?

JL: Yeah, it really was. It was a different thing for a short period of time, and I loved that. And that's my best memory, it really was. That, and the lights coming on again.

RH: [laughter] Have any priorities changed for you since Katrina?

JL: No, not really at all. I can't say that. I mean, we still do – our life is pretty much the same as it was pre-Katrina. We're still traveling a lot. We love to take two major vacations a year, and we still do that. Our day-to-day life – we've lost some friends who've left town, but we're still not without friends, and we still do pretty much – we still go to the same fundraisers that we used to go to. We still go to the same speeches, or annual meetings, or whatever we used to go to. We're still supporting the same organizations we used to support. So, no, things – I can't say that our life is any different.

RH: Did you learn anything about yourself, coming back?

JL: Not about myself. I think I learned a lot about other people. I think I learned – I was very dismayed with the looting. I mean, hell, anybody could do that, you know? I just haven't thought that people were really that base that they could do something like that. I sort of learned to be very leery of people who are supposed to be leading this community from the standpoint of their capability of doing that. We supported Ray Nagin when he ran for mayor, and we supported him both by action and monetarily. He's been the worst disaster this city's ever had. He's a racist.

RH: That's the second time you said the word, and so many people have different definitions. What's your definition?

JL: A racist is somebody who favors one race over another, simply because of the fact that they're that color. Nagin is a racist. He favors the Black race over the White race, so that's racist.

RH: Has that happened a lot in recovery policies that he's involved in, that you've seen?

JL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Whenever he could possibly denigrate the whites, he's done so. Whenever he could possibly shift any monies to the Black community, he's done so. He was the leader of the organization in the last mayor's election to set up polls in Dallas and Atlanta so the so-called – they didn't want to call them refugees – our evacuees could vote. He's been a leader of the "bring people back" movement. He's not talking about bringing white people back. He wants to bring the Blacks back so that they can vote for him. And not just him, but – Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have been involved in that as well, and they're the worst kind of racist.

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

JL: Oh, other than the fact that I've been very fortunate to have a privileged life? I mean, I guess that's what I'm most grateful for. To have three healthy children, and nine and four-ninths healthy grandchildren. We've never had anything befall us that was the least bit bad. My children are all happily married. They're all doing very well themselves. So, I feel very fortunate – and I have a wife that I've lived with now for almost forty-seven years. That's something else to be grateful for. I've seen so many of my friends who can't say that.

RH: Is there anything that you took for granted before that you would never take for granted again?

JL: I think I took my personal safety a little bit more for granted than I do now. I almost always now carry my weapon with me when I go out at night. I didn't do that pre-Katrina. I did it sometimes, but I almost always do it now. Yeah, it's still discouraging to me to

drive through parts of New Orleans and see that there's been no recovery, that the houses are still gutted, and that kind of thing. So I had a different feeling toward my city looking as pretty as it once looked. I mean, even the slum areas were still old construction, and they still had a little charm – the duplexes and the camelback shotguns. We've lost a lot of that. We still maintained a lot of it in the un-flooded part of the city, but it used to be much more widespread. And besides that, I feel like it's something I'd like to see different.

RH: See back again, huh?

JL: Yeah.

RH: I don't have too many more questions.

JL: I don't have too many more things to say. [laughter]

RH: [laughter] So, if you have anything you'd like to add, at this point –

JL: No, other than the fact that I think it's a wonderful thing, what you're doing. I really think that this project is a remarkable thing that you're doing. I regret somewhat that I don't have a tape of my great-grandfather, who came from France, whose voice I've never heard. It would be nice to hear his reflections on why he left France and his experiences in New Orleans, and in Slidell, and Mandeville, and that kind of thing, you know?

RH: And what the world was like day-to-day. Wouldn't it be nice to have that?

JL: Sure.

RH: [laughter]

JL: My ninety-eight-year-old aunt who died about – she died at age ninety-eight about five years ago, fortunately, Stuart was able to get to her before she died and got her story.

RH: What would you like your grandchildren to know about your life in New Orleans?

JL: I think my grandchildren – or certainly my children know everything about my life in New Orleans, and I think my grandchildren, they've been here enough so that they know – they come to New Orleans, and they go to Mardi Gras World, and they ride the ferry across the river, and they go to the IMAX, and they do the Children's Museum, and the zoo and the aquarium, and that's their picture of life in New Orleans. They ride the streetcars. I'm glad to have that because they see the best things. I don't think they need to know much more about my life in New Orleans, other than the fun things that they're able to do when they come here. Just to give you an example, my great-grandfather, who emigrated from Alsace, emigrated to San Francisco, crossing the isthmus on a mule, and then eventually came to New Orleans, never would tell anybody – his children or anybody – what his life in California was. The only thing we could figure is that he must have done something dishonest. But he never, ever would discuss it. Anytime anybody brought up California, "I don't want to talk about that." And that was the end of it.

RH: Probably just hard. And trying to put that hard part behind him.

JL: Maybe. The Jewish immigrants back in those days didn't talk about life in the old country. Nor did they speak their native languages, except in small groups. They otherwise wanted to be Americans and learn English. I wish that our Hispanic immigrants today felt the same way. I wish they wanted to become Americans and learn English. I know I'm going off now on another platform, but it distresses me to see public school being taught in Spanish in Miami. It distresses me. It shouldn't be.

RH: Well, if your grandchildren were going to sit around and try to figure out, "Why did he love New Orleans so much?" – what do you think? If you wanted to cut to the chase and help them with the answer?

JL: It's just like an old pair of shoes; it's so comfortable. I can't really answer your question. I hope that one day my children in front of my grandchildren, or even if I live long enough, my grandchildren will ask me that question. I can sit and talk to them about it. I don't know why I like New Orleans. I love everything about it. I love what I do from day to day. For a seventy-three-year-old retired person, I hardly have a moment that I'm not doing something. I enjoy sports. We have it here. I enjoy my teaching, the ability that I can teach at Tulane – I have that. I love to travel; I can do that.

RH: A lot of good restaurants.

JL: A lot of good restaurants. Should lose a little weight. It's just a very comfortable existence here. It's a small-town-ish atmosphere. I mean, I probably, out of the eight thousand Jews in town, I probably can call by name two thousand of them. It's just a very nice place to be. I'm not saying it would be that nice for somebody who would move here today. But going through college, internship, residency, and marrying a New Orleans girl, just sort of fell into the picture, and was fortunate enough to have a good practice and an income that could support us in the way that we wanted to live. And we don't live extravagantly – at least, I don't think we do. But we bought a nice house when prices were cheap, and you know that kind of thing. It's a nice life. I'm very happy with my life. If you ask me, would I have been happier living anywhere else, my answer would be no.

RH: Well, thank you very much.

JL: You're welcome.

RH: That's just wonderful. This is a beautiful interview.

JL:  Oh, thank you.  I hope that some of things I said, particularly regards to race never appear –

[END OF INTERVIEW]