Brian Bain Transcript

ROSALIND HINTON: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Brian Bain at his home at 5221 Camp Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is July 5, 2007. I'm conducting the interview for Katrina's Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Brian, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

BRIAN BAIN: I do.

RH: Thank you very much.

BB: Sure.

RH: Let's start with a little background. Just tell me when you were born, a little about your parents, and how they came to be in New Orleans.

BB: Okay. I was born in 1968 here in New Orleans. My father was actually a Confederate Yankee. He came here at the age of three. My grandfather fell in love with New Orleans and decided he wanted to bring his family down here and raise his family as Southerners. So, in 1943, they came down here. Actually, sorry, let me think about that. 1933, I'm sorry. My father moved here and so we have been rooted in New Orleans ever since. So, I was born and raised here, really.

RH: So, where did you grow up in New Orleans?

BB: Actually, well, when you're from New Orleans, you say you grew up in New Orleans, but I grew up in Metairie, actually, which is a suburb.

RH: How did they pick Metairie?

BB: Initially, my parents lived in New Orleans proper, and then at some point, suburbia beckoned them, so in 1968, they moved to suburbia. So, I was actually – I grew up in Metairie.

RH: Okay. What's it like to be Jewish in New Orleans and Metairie?

BB: It's interesting. New Orleans is oftentimes referred to as the northernmost city in the Caribbean. So, I think there's this very open quality. A lot of cultures have come together here, whether it's French and Spanish and African American, Cajun culture from Canada. So, I think it's really a very accepting place in general. I found growing up in New Orleans to be a great experience. I didn't have any problems with antisemitism and things of that nature here.

RH: Where was the center of your Jewish life?

BB: I really began my Jewish life and have stayed at Touro Synagogue here in New Orleans. Everything from consecration to my bar mitzvah to confirmation. Now that we've returned, my wife and I are members at Touro Synagogue currently.

RH: Did you partake of JCC or belong to any clubs or NIFTY [North American Federation for Temple Youth]?

BB: Well, we were in the youth group at Touro Synagogue, and I was the president of the youth group at one point. So, we were involved in SOFTY, it was called at the time, the Southern Federation Temple Youth, and NIFTY. So, we would go to conclaves in Memphis or Little Rock and travel. I also went to Henry S. Jacobs Camp. So that, probably more so than anything else, created a Jewish identity for me and really cemented a lot of those lifelong relationships with Jewish people.

RH: So, when you talk about a Jewish identity, what does that mean to you?

BB: It's interesting. In my film, I reveal – I did a documentary film entitled “Shalom Y'all,” and in the film, I reveal that oftentimes I didn't equate growing up in New Orleans as a very Jewish experience. It wasn't until I made the film, which explores Southern Jewish life, that I really put the mirror up and looked at my own life. I really would say that I embraced my Jewish culture much later, in my thirties. But were it not for the foundation that my parents created through going to religious school and going to Jewish summer camp, I wouldn't have had the base. I would say that it was always there; I just didn't realize that it was there until much later when I looked back.

RH: I think that's an experience of a lot of people from here. Didn't realize it was there, but then when they're ready to embrace it –

BB: Really? Right. It’s true.

RH: – it's there, it's interesting.

BB: Yes, it's interesting. You go to a city like New York, and there are so many cultural Jews; it's just such a part of their culture, and here, it's a different experience. It was for me, anyway. A lot of kids grow up going to the JCC. It's very much inculcated in them. But for me, it was more of a subtext, and I didn't see it until much later.

RH: What do you think the experience of SOFTY gave you?

BB: It's interesting. I think the greatest thing about the Southern Federation Temple Youth was that they introduced us to kids from all over the Southeast. It included Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, parts of Alabama. I think what we learned was that there were kids from other towns. One of my best friends is from Winnsboro, Louisiana, where there were only a couple of Jewish families. So, I think it opened our eyes and created an awareness that there are different kinds of Jews, if you will, living in the South. As I said, some of those bonds are still present today. We've traveled a great deal with the film, and when I've gone to these cities, it's amazing how old cabin mates

will come up to me and give me a hug. We were living in a cabin together at camp and also continued that relationship into our teens through SOFTY. So, it's just been this continuous thread of relationships and understanding Jews from other parts of the region.

RH: Now, this came up in your film a lot, which is assimilated versus integrated versus losing your Jewish identity, versus I talk to people who've had Christmas trees a lot of their life. Can you describe the relationship of the Jewish community to the larger city of New Orleans?

BB: The relationship of the Jewish community –??

RH: Here in New Orleans, to the larger New Orleans community, how would you describe it?

BB: I think in general – as far as acceptance, or how does it differ?

RH: Well, how is it different, I think, and do Jewish people maintain their identity?

BB: I think in New Orleans, people embrace the local culture without sacrificing their Jewish identity. I really do believe that because I think a lot of Jews in New Orleans are very pro-Israel and embrace their Jewish identity and go to services and stuff like that, but they'll still eat a shrimp po' boy on the weekend. I think they've learned how to balance the two without sacrificing their Jewish identity. I think that's true throughout the South in general. I think it's more acculturation than assimilation in the South. There's certainly exceptions to that rule. But for the most part, I think it's true.

RH: So, do you find the Jewish community in New Orleans a pretty distinctive community? You've also been in other places in the south.

BB: Yes, having traveled to other places in the South, it's become more and more evident to me how different the Jewish community is in New Orleans. I think it's just that the

things that we're acculturating to are so different than other places in the South. Because of the Spanish and French influences, and the abundance of seafood, and things of that nature, we have acculturated like other southern Jews but embraced the unique New Orleans experience, and that ranges from music, from the New Orleans Klezmer All-Stars, which are in our film, to Preservation Hall where the Jaffes really became the backbone of this really amazing jazz –

RH: Resurgence.

BB: – resurgence, yes, in New Orleans.

RH: Thanks. I'm interested in your insights into these things, and we'll probably swing back around. Tell me a little about when the storm came on your personal radar screen when you realized “This is bigger than I thought it was going to be,” and what your plans were. Tell me – also, because you're not living in the same place, tell me where you lived.

BB: It's interesting. Katrina has had a really big impact on our lives. We really realized two days, three days before Katrina hit, that this big storm was coming. I always like to say we're chickens. So, we were ready to get out early before we even really realized how bad the storm was going to be. So, on Friday, my wife and I decided that we were going to leave town and go to Houston for a couple of days and relax. We were going to check into the hotel, go swimming, [and] go to the galleria. So it was funny, I actually went to a Saints game the Friday night before Katrina. There was a Saints game in the Dome and went to play poker with some friends after that. It was around midnight. They wanted to keep playing poker, and I said, “You know what? I've got to go home, get the family ready because we're leaving town in the morning,” and they gave me a hard time about it and said, “Oh, come on, stay.” But of course, I left. So, the next morning, we flip on the TV, and of course, the storm's bigger, and it looks like it's coming straight for New Orleans. So, we started packing up, and I called my mother-in-law, who was living with

her cousin at the time. I said, “We're evacuating to Houston. Do you guys want to join us? Do you want to follow us? We're trying to beat the crowd out of town.” My wife's cousin Maxine Goodman said, “Oh, you're crazy.” Those were her exact words. I said, “Well, we're leaving. If you all want to join us you're welcome to.” So, we hang up, and a few minutes later, the phone rings, and she said, “Okay, we'll be ready in twenty minutes.” So, Saturday morning before the storm we loaded up our cars and picked them up, put gas in the cars. We really were very much ahead of those other folks evacuating. So, we made it to Houston in normal time, three and a half, four hours. The funny thing is the year prior, we had evacuated, and it took us twenty-one hours to get to Houston, and my wife was pregnant with our son. That was an awful experience. So that was part of what factored into our wanting to leave early. Truthfully, we left with shorts and bathing suits and things for the baby, a few toys, and we really just thought we were going away for a long weekend. It wasn't until Monday, when we were watching the news that it looked a little more serious. I remember seeing Brian Williams in the Superdome as the roof of the dome was peeling off. There were some indications that the water was pretty bad in some areas. We actually got a call from my sister-in-law Debbie Koppman, my wife's sister, and she was in Dallas working. She said, “Why don't you come up to Dallas? We have a lot of friends and cousins up here. Why don't you come up and spend a couple of days rather than being in the hotel.” So, still, at this point, we didn't realize just how serious it was. We just thought it would be a few days before we could go back. So, I'll never forget. We were getting in the car to head to Dallas for a few days, and my brother and his wife and child were also at the same hotel. They were swimming and playing around. We said, “Okay, things look a little sketchy, but we're going to go to Dallas for a few days.” I'll never forget. Big smile on his face – he's a Pollyanna, proverbial Pollyanna – and he said, “No, it's going to be great. Everything is going to be fine.” We got in the car and left. Of course, then, as the day progressed, the news of the levees breaking kept coming on, and we realized quickly that it was going to be a much bigger situation than we initially anticipated.

RH: So you were watching TV?

BB: Well, we were listening to the radio in the car, and when we arrived in Dallas, we were staying with some friends initially, and yes, we were glued to CNN and the Weather Channel. So, you would see – as they were showing neighborhoods, you would recognize landmarks, and you would see something close to your house. We were going online, and Google has their satellite imagery. So, we were trying to pull up images of our street to see how deep it was because you would hear conflicting reports. One of the scary things was not being able to get in touch with people because you didn't know where they were, and the phone lines were out, all the cell phones were out. Eventually, we realized that text messaging was still working, so we started texting people and things like that. Thank goodness most of our family got out fairly early. There were some relatives that stayed behind, and actually, we were worried about them for over a week.

RH: Really?

BB: Yes, so it was a trying experience.

RH: Tell me, where did you live on the lakefront?

BB: We lived in an area called Lakeview. Our house was on a street called Hidalgo, very close to City Park. So, City Park was one of those landmarks that people started to show on the news. So we saw a lot of water in City Park, so we assumed that we had a lot of water in our house. We had a raised house. So, inside the house, we had about four and a half, five feet of water. So, in the neighborhood, there was about eight feet of water.

RH: Wow. When did that dawn on you?

BB: I'm trying to remember exactly when we realized the house had flooded. I think it was fairly early Monday evening. We realized that Lakeview had been hit pretty hard and

received a lot of the water. When they started saying the 17th Street Canal levee had breached or broken, we realized that that was –

RH: Your house.

BB: – our house, yes.

RH: Was there anything you thought, “God, I wish I would have packed?”

BB: Absolutely. It's funny. When you pack, and you think you're going away for the weekend, you'd never think to pack your family pictures or family heirlooms. So, we really just brought things for going away for a weekend. I had the foresight, and I'm not sure why, to grab our insurance papers and our passports and things like that, birth certificates. I think that was mainly because if water leaked in, I thought at least that stuff wouldn't get ruined, and I'd have it with me. But we grew up seeing flooding periodically, but it would come up a step or two. You never dreamed that it would be five feet inside your house. So, it's interesting. My brother and I – my brother lost his home as well. He was in Lakeview, a little bit closer to [the] lakefront. We both had our family pictures from birth to about six or seven years old, and we each had them divided in our houses. We were in the process of putting them in albums and things like that. But neither one of us had the foresight to bring them with us. So, we lost every image of ourselves from zero to seven.

RH: What does that feel like?

BB: Oh, it's awful. It's awful. Our son is now two and a half years old. He has this big, beautiful head of red hair, and I always say he got it from me. He literally got it from me. It’s funny, people say, “Oh, he looks just like your wife.” I say, “Well, he looks like me,” but I can't prove it because all those childhood pictures are gone. For me, it was somewhat particularly emotional because my mother passed away when I was four of breast cancer. So, all of the images of me with her were a part of that that was lost. So,

I think gradually we'll slowly find relatives that have a picture here or a picture there. But we had boxes full of them.

RH: Wow.

BB: Yes, it's weird. On some level, it's like history is – it's not rewritten certainly, but you realize how fragile things like that can be lost, and how important it is to preserve it as a historian or a folklorist.

RH: Now, what members of your family stayed?

BB: Well, in southern Yiddish, it's mishpuchah, distant relatives. My father-in-law, at the time, his son was living in Saint Bernard Parish, and he stayed and was going to ride it out like a lot of folks thought they could. For a number of days, he was missing, and we were putting up messages on missing persons boards, Nola.com. The Times-Picayune newspaper had a section of their site where you could put missing persons' names in there, and people would – a blog or billboard, and people would respond and say they found this person or that person. I want to say it was almost a week later that he turned up and called, and it was revealed that he had stayed and when the waters came up really quickly, he really started swimming and saving people in the neighborhood. He was one of those guys that really is a silent hero. Eventually, he was evacuated to San Antonio. So, he was in the San Antonio arena with all the other evacuees.

RH: Wow. From Dallas, when you were watching TV, and you saw the images of the African Americans at the Convention Center and the dome, and it's day five, what were you thinking about? Do you remember?

BB: It's interesting. You grow up in a city, and you put on blinders, or you become so used to seeing images that they lose some of their meaning to you. It wasn't until I saw those injustices taking place that it really hit home: the issues of poverty in New Orleans and how these people were left behind. You see people sitting on their porches all the

time in these neighborhoods or riding the bus, and you realize they don't have a vehicle and all these things. There's so many people living at or below the poverty line in New Orleans, but it's just part of the fabric of the city, and I know that sounds weird to say, but it really does. You put on your rose-colored glasses, and you honestly don't see it. I consider myself fairly aware of those sort of things, or I did prior to seeing it on TV. But I think it really brought to light a lot of the social issues here in New Orleans, poverty issues, things of that nature. I think they dropped the ball; the federal government dropped the ball; the city of New Orleans dropped the ball. There should have been a system in place that helped get those people out. At the very least, it's shocking to me that there weren't helicopters. They couldn't get buses in, and they couldn't get trucks in – bring helicopters with pallets of water and MREs [Meal, Ready to Eat] for these people to eat and drink. It just is shocking to me.

RH: What did you do to connect with people – text message, but who were you trying to find from Dallas?

BB: It's interesting. After Katrina, we were trying to find friends and family. Because everybody left so quickly, you didn't know where they went, if they'd gotten out, or what their situation was. So, we really were just trying to connect with family and friends. We felt a strong need – I'll never forget that Friday after Katrina, we went to the local synagogue there. It was such an emotional experience. We were hoping to connect with other people from New Orleans. We went to Jewish Family Service as well. Jewish Family Service was amazing. We went there and first of all, we found other people that were in our same situation, some of whom we knew, others we just met, talked to, and connected with. There was a real feeling of relief to connect and have a common experience with other people.

RH: Did you take things from Jewish Family Service?

BB: We did. It's interesting. Growing up in Judaism, as in many religions, you learn about charity, or in Judaism, it's called tzedakah and giving. You're raised to be on the side where you're contributing somehow. So, it was actually very difficult to be on the receiving end. The woman we were staying with in Dallas, a family friend and now a very close personal friend, is Catholic, and she went to JFS, Jewish Family Service, and said, “I've got these friends here, can you help them.” So, I can very distinctly remember saying, “We're fine. We're fortunate. We have the ability financially and network-wise to get out of this situation.” Then, it occurred to me that we really didn't know what was going to happen next. So, it was important to put away those insecurities of opening yourself up to that sort of giving and really accept it at the time. It was difficult, but my wife and I say for the rest of our lives, we'll always contribute and help Jewish Family Service because we knew what they were about, but we now have experienced it firsthand. It's just amazing.

RH: What did you get? How did that work?

BB: It literally went so far as we went to Jewish Family Service, and initially it was about creating that sense of community, and so there were meetings, they had groups with psychologists that came in and other survivors, as they were calling them, of this storm. People were talking about their experiences, and it was very emotional. Some of the people there were Holocaust survivors. So, they had experienced the Holocaust, and then they potentially lost everything again. So, unbelievably emotional stuff. They were connecting. An acquaintance of ours, Tad Breaux and Lainie Waltzer Breaux – you may know the story. Their child was missing because she had delivered a baby, and they didn't know where the baby was. Lainie was there. So, we were there when they got the baby back, and it was very emotional. Jewish Family Service, when they came to the group with the baby, it was like just unbelievable. So, it started off as that, and then it really became a situation where they also offered us counseling if we wanted to continue to go there and see somebody to deal with the repercussions of the storm. We literally

went to a food and clothing bank. Because we just had what we had on our backs basically, and we didn't know what the situation was. So, we walked through the clothing bank and got baby clothes and formula and all kinds of things.

RH: Wow.

BB: It's pretty amazing.

RH: Has it changed how you think of giving, how you would give, even?

BB: It has. I think that I would be far more inclined to give without thinking about it. If I see someone in need, drop everything and do what I can to help them out. There are news events that I see every week from flooding in the Midwest, different places, and I think, “Wow, that's the same situation.” We had it on a much grander scale, but we've contributed much more to the Red Cross and Jewish Family Service and organizations like that.

RH: Did you think about respect and dignity in any of that?

BB: In my own contributions?

RH: Just in your own receiving, did you feel like you were – is that some of the hesitancy?

BB: I think some of the hesitancy in receiving contributions is definitely connected to respect and dignity. We were treated with the utmost respect and dignity by everyone, and never made to feel like “Oh, those poor people.” I do remember initially feeling very funny when people would say – when you would say you were from New Orleans, right after the storm, and people would get that concerned look on their face. It just was very disconcerting to realize that you were that person on the receiving end. But I think you get over that, and you start to realize the beauty of it. Just like you're always taught, it's

better to give than receive; that's inculcated into you at a young age, and it's true. It's hard to receive, but then you realize the beauty of it, and you realize how much people are benefiting from giving you those things. It makes them feel good and helps you out of your situation.

RH: So, you stayed, and what were your decisions about staying in Dallas? How did you and your wife decide?

BB: We ended up staying in Dallas for a year and a half. That was a long time for us to be away from family and friends who had returned to the city. We really made the decision based on our son, who has asthma. So, we weren't in a hurry to get him back to an environment where there was potentially mold or a lot of dust from sheetrock where they were demolishing houses and things like that. So that was the primary reason we stayed. Frankly, as part and parcel of the giving Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, which is one of the largest Reform congregations in America, was amazing. Our son started going to daycare there. As much as we offered, they wouldn't take a penny from us. It was amazing. So, we felt like once – he had a hard time adapting to being there and being a part of Temple Emanu-El's daycare, and so once he had adapted and found a home, we didn't want to take him away from that.

RH: How old was he when you got there?

BB: He was born in November of '04. So, he was about eight months old when the storm hit.

RH: So, do you remember any of the most important services, I guess Rosh Hashanah and the High Holidays, right after the storm, did you go to services?

BB: We did. Interestingly enough, I reconnected with some distant cousins of mine in Dallas. A woman named Sheri Bain Berk. She's a wonderful woman, real character, and she really embraced us. So, when the High Holidays rolled along, we were invited into

their home, and we went to services with them at Temple Emanu-El. It was a very warm experience. I'll never forget, of course, the sermon was based on what happened in New Orleans. It was surreal to have known that I was part of it and sit there listening to the sermon. But the views of the congregation in Dallas and across the country were so overwhelmingly loving and all about hope and help and all these things that it was a very moving experience.

RH: Did you notice when you were making decisions that it divided on gender in any way, the kind of decisions your wife, or the kind of things she was doing, and you? Or even your coping?

BB: Right. It's interesting. We really have a great relationship and communicate very well. So, there was a lot of talking about the experience, my wife and I went back and forth on a lot of things. Generally speaking, I would say I initially was more inclined to come back and that macho thing of pull up by your bootstraps and come in and fix the house and maybe even get involved in bringing the city back. She was initially very hesitant to come back. New Orleans had issues pre-Katrina. So, I think she wasn't ready to deal with those on top of the post-Katrina issues. So, we were divided for a long time. Truthfully, as time progressed, I started to see what she was talking about and so it was funny actually. One day I would come in and say, “You know what, we don't need to go back, what do we need that for,” and then she would be on the other side of the fence, and then the next day it would flip-flop, and I was trying to convince her why it was important to go back. So, I don't think, for us, it divided so much along gender lines. It did probably initially, but ultimately, it was a similar experience for both of us.

RH: You said you stayed with some friends that were Catholic. Is that where you settled, or did you end up getting another apartment?

BB: It's funny. Well, when we first arrived, my sister-in-law, as I said, was in Dallas. So, these were very close friends of hers that we went to stay with. They opened their home

to us. We stayed with them for about a week and a half. We had family meetings with them, and they really were beautiful and helped us through the entire process. The following week my sister-in-law talked to another – I direct television commercials as well. So, she produces television commercials. So, she talked to another director that she works with out of L.A., who she knew had a home in Dallas. He said, “Look, if there's anything I can do for you or your family, let me know.” So, Debbie said, “Well, actually, I think my sister and her husband are sticking around for a while, and my mother. Can they stay in your house for a little while?” He, without missing a beat, rolled out the red carpet. So, we literally lived in John Adams's house from the second week in September through December through the end of the year. He would have gladly had us stay longer but we felt like we needed to get a place of our own and start to accumulate stuff again, buy some furniture. So, we then rented an apartment elsewhere. But yes, it was amazing. Just basically total strangers opening their homes to us. His house was actually beautiful too, with a swimming pool. So, we felt like, “Okay, this is nicer than our house in New Orleans. Stick around for a little while.”

RH: So, I was going to ask you, were there any moments of kindness that you experienced that were particularly memorable. That sounds like one of them. I don't know if there were any other –

BB: That definitely was one of them. What's interesting is the bonds that are created through these acts of kindness. It's a bond that I'll never forget. John and Julie and I are very close now. I think we'll always stay in touch and see if there's anything I can do to help them – actually, it's funny because he lives in L.A., fairly close to the observatory, and they had fires there. I'm trying to recall the name of it. But they had fires there recently. They were actually evacuated from their house in L.A., so I quickly sent him an email that said, “Come and hang out with us in New Orleans; you're more than welcome.” So, I think just seeing people literally bring – actually, I will say this. Because of the baby, we were on the receiving end of a lot of things, from formula to diapers to a crib

and things like that, that really took an emotional toll on us. Because to have lost that stuff was big, but to be on the receiving end of that sort of stuff was really very moving. So, people going into their house and taking their crib out of the attic or family heirlooms like that, that was really special.

RH: Interesting. Because you said an emotional toll, and there gratitude has that also.

BB: It does, yes. It's interesting.

RH: When did you first come back?

BB: I think my first trip back into the city was in December, and I came back. Julie wasn't interested in going to the house at all, but I realized that we had to go in and recover what we could from the house. So again, another act of kindness that was amazing, we had – I believe it was Jewish Federation set this up, where kids were volunteering during their Christmas/Hanukkah break to come to New Orleans and help people with going through their houses and gutting their houses and things like that. So, I went to the house, and fifteen people from all over the country showed up. They helped us go through the house, and they helped me salvage different things from the house. It was just remarkable, just an unbelievable experience. They packed up. It was funny. I remember my initial instinct when I grabbed things, because I did go by the house before they went over there with me. My first instinct was to grab the Shabbos candles and the menorah and those parts of our religious, cultural life that I wanted to hold close. They had never held that sort of importance to me. They had on some level, but I didn't realize the importance they held for me. It really occurred to me that when you go to a Holocaust museum, and you see what people left Germany with, oftentimes it was their family's Shabbat candles and things like that. I certainly understood it on some level from an intellectual standpoint, but until I went into my house and was compelled to grab those things first, I didn't truly understand what that was about.

RH: So what were you able to –?

BB: So actually, the Shabbat candles up there, on either side, and our menorah. Things like that. The silver we were able to clean and it's a little worse for the wear, but it'll always remind us of the experience.

RH: Did you grab them that first day? Were you able to grab them?

BB: I did. I was able to grab them that first day.

RH: Then you went back and had these fifteen people. Did they gut it too?

BB: Yes, amazingly, everybody that came in was literally, they were either students or there was a rabbi and his family from Columbus, Ohio, who I've stayed in touch with. None of them had construction experience whatsoever. Amazingly, they all came in and initially started helping us grab things, and they were washing bowls and tchotchkes that I was ready to throw on the street and throw in the dumpster. But particularly I will say this across gender lines. The women that came in realized the importance, if not to me, things that Julie, my wife, would value later on. So, they said, “Let us wash it, you might feel differently later on.” I was like, “No, really, just throw it away.” They said, “Well, we really want to do this for you." So, I remember they set up a little assembly line, and they had all of our nice family silver, bowls, and things like that. They were washing them and putting them in boxes with newspaper, and said, “If you don't want it later, make that decision later. But you're not in a position to think about that right now, so let's do this for you.” Of course, most of that stuff later on, when we opened the boxes, we were thrilled to see it. It was somehow a connection to our pre-Katrina life. But the guys came in, and the women, and they really started hauling everything out. Of course, the baby's room was one of the toughest things because we had just had a baby eight months earlier, and so there was a lot of bonding that took place for us there centered around his room. So that was tough to see, his crib getting thrown out on the street and things like that. But

once they removed all that they started gutting it and pulling down sheetrock and things like that. So literally, when they left, for the most part, the house was empty and gutted, and just the frame of the house was standing. It was amazing. It was amazing.

RH: Wow. Wow. Where did you stay when you came in?

BB: My parents' house in Metairie was fine. So, we stayed with my parents when we came in. It was actually interesting. They're in the middle of a block and obviously the high point of their street. So, everyone around them had flooded, but their house was just fine. So, theirs was the only house in the family that didn't get destroyed. I'm actually thankful because I think if it had happened to my parents, it would have been a much tougher scenario. For us, we just said, “You know what, it's a phase of our life, we're young enough that we can rebuild and start over.” My parents are youngish. My dad's early seventies, my mom's in her mid-sixties. But I think it just really would have taken a dramatic toll on them. So, I was thankful they didn't have to go through it personally.

RH: Their home probably became a way station, too, if it was the only place.

BB: Yes, it was funny. Yes, we would come to town, and whether it was us or my wife's mother coming to town or different family members, all congregated there. So, it certainly took its toll on them in other emotional ways. I'm sure it was difficult to see their kids go through that. But from my perspective I think I was thankful it didn't directly happen to them.

RH: Was anybody upset with you that you stayed away so long that you got the vibe from?

BB: It's interesting. There are many camps that developed based on the situation in New Orleans. My sister-in-law, actually, her apartment was fine, and she was actually about to close on a condo and that condo was fine. She was about to close when the hurricane

struck. So, she closed on the condo in December of '05 after the storm and moved all her stuff in there. She loves New Orleans. She loves everything about it [and] doesn't want to live anywhere else. So, she could not understand why we didn't want to come back. It was difficult. We had that experience with some friends too, like, “I don't understand, why are you staying away. Everything's fine.” Life feels like it's normal if you go to the areas that were unaffected. Honestly, the longer we stayed away, I think, the easier it was to stay away. My brother was significant; he and his wife came to visit us the fall before we came back and had a great visit. He is a low-pressure kind of guy, and he conveyed that to me. He's like, “Come back and check it out. I think the longer you stay away, the easier it is to stay away. But I think if you come back, you'll see that life can be pretty good back there, and your family and friends are there, so it is a good place to be.”

RH: So, what was the thinking process to really come back for you guys?

BB: When we decided to come back to New Orleans, we chose to do so as a six-month trial period. We really said that after six months, we were going to sit down and talk about it and decide, “Is this the right thing for us?” Truthfully, after about a month and a half, two months of running into people at the grocery store or if you go to a coffee shop and you see your old teacher from the third grade, it's just amazing. New Orleans is like a little village. It always was, and now certainly more so than ever. That feeling of being surrounded by family and friends, for us, made all the difference in the world.

RH: So, your wife's from New Orleans, too?

BB: Yes, my wife was born and raised here.

RH: Did we say her name?

BB: Julie Koppman. Yes, I may not have said – yes.

RH: Okay, so how long has her family been in New Orleans? Do you know?

BB: That's a good question. My wife's family certainly has been here since the early 1900s, and I'm not sure when they actually came to New Orleans. Her family is very entrenched in the city. Her grandfather was a quintessential New Orleans gentleman. He always wore the seersucker pants, and you never saw him without a tie on and button-down shirt – the quintessential dapper gentleman. So, for her to not be certain about coming back was big. For her mother, who was with us in Dallas – (Fionne?) Perloff – it was a big deal to be away. Shockingly, she said, “I have no desire to go back.” That was her philosophy initially. I think she was just so taken aback by the whole thing. Then, by December of '05, when we had all decided to give it a six-month trial, she really said, “I miss it. I've got to go back.” I think a lot of people feel that way about New Orleans, whether it has to do with Katrina or not. People leave, move to Chicago, and their hearts are always in New Orleans; they end up coming back twenty years later or whenever they can sneak back.

RH: Compared to Dallas, what did you miss? How is it different, I guess?

BB: I like Dallas more than I would have ever imagined I would. It's interesting. I think a lot of people left New Orleans and had, for the most part, not spent a great deal of time elsewhere, so they got to other places, and they realized that a lot of other places like Dallas function.

RH: Better.

BB: They function better. There's better education [and] better roads across the board – less corruption, less crime. So that's very alluring and progressive communities where there's money, and the arts are supported. As a filmmaker, that was very appealing. So, I liked a lot of those aspects of Dallas that I never would have imagined I would have been drawn to. Ultimately, despite the friends that we made and things like that, it was a

big city, and I was unfamiliar with anonymity because, for better or for worse, wherever you go in New Orleans, you're going to see somebody you know. There were times in my life where that wasn't such a cool thing. But I think I came to realize that at this point in my life, it's a pretty special thing, and it was something I really missed in Dallas.

RH: Right. Tell me about your work. Because there's been changes in your work life also, pretty dramatic.

BB: Well, I direct television commercials for a living. So, the storm affected me in some ways, but in other ways, it was fairly easy for me to get back up and running rather quickly. The company that I was with in New Orleans was called Morrison Productions. They were contemplating closing their doors and moving on pre-Katrina, and so we were in that mode where things were being shut down there. So, I was already of the mindset that I was going to look for affiliation with another company anyway. Interestingly enough, shortly after the storm, Morrison Productions, which was housed in a beautiful old art deco movie theater, the Coliseum Theatre here in New Orleans, had a five- or six-alarm fire. So, I'm sitting in our apartment in Dallas, and all of a sudden, I'm seeing pictures on CNN.com – because it was big news at the time – the Coliseum Theatre, the place where I had worked, going up in flames. They're dumping helicopter buckets of water on it. So, I realized the writing was on the wall, that it was definitely time to move on there. Interestingly enough, basically, my life's work had been in that building, and when I came back to empty the house, I went over there and filled some tubs, some plastic tubs, with all my old films and my life's work. So, thank God that stuff was preserved because –

RH: It was preserved?

BB: Yes, because it was in tubs, and I had come in and taken it out before the fire.

RH: Oh, I got you now.

BB: Yes, I'm sorry.

RH: Now I understand. Oh, when you came in in December. So, you beat the fire.

BB: Exactly.

RH: Oh my God.

BB: Exactly, yes. Then I actually signed with a company out of Dallas called Sugar Films, and they're just some amazing guys that saw the situation and invited me to sign on as a director, and so I've been with them ever since.

RH: So, you can be here and not in Dallas?

BB: Yes, so we shoot some here. Sometimes, I commute back to Dallas or wherever the job chooses to shoot. So that's worked out fine.

RH: You left a little part of yourself there then.

BB: I did, I did. We still have some roots in Dallas, which is nice. Of course, our family connection there is nice, too.

RH: What do you see as different now that you're back in New Orleans?

BB: With respect to the Jewish community?

RH: Well, we can start with the Jewish community.

BB: It's interesting. I just had a call yesterday from a reporter at the Los Angeles Times. He was calling about a story that he was working on where he heard that New Orleans was trying to attract Jews back to the city. They were offering money for Jews to move into the city. I think our population is down by a third, our Jewish population. So, it's somewhere hovering around 6,500 Jews now. So, he called to ask me what has

changed about the culture. I have to say, while the culture was always welcoming and that laissez-faire-Caribbean-come-join-us sort of feel, coming back after Katrina, it's even more so that way. I've watched as congregations have really come together. There's always been unspoken divisions between this congregation or that congregation or the Orthodox and the Reform. I would say prior to the storm, everybody got along, but after the storm, it's become a very cohesive unit. People are much closer, and Beth Israel now holds their services in Gates of Prayer, and Temple Sinai and Touro have always been the two big congregations on the avenue; that unspoken rivalry on some level, I don't think it's there anymore. Part of that has to do with the storm certainly. People realized the fragility of the situation and community, and you can't divide along simple differences, that they can be overwhelmed.

[END OF TRACK 1]

RH: Okay, we were talking about the Jewish community and if you were connecting in different ways than you had connected before the storm.

BB: My wife and I have really tried to become very involved since the storm. We really had a conversation about it and decided to make a concerted effort to be involved. So, since coming back, [we've] been attending services more frequently. We have become a part of – there's a group called Lemann-Stern here, which is supposed to bring young adults along and introduce them to Jewish involvement in the community, and we had actually been invited. You're selected and invited. We had been invited, I think, twice before and turned them down for various reasons. It was not a great time in our life to do that sort of thing. But coming back, we were invited yet again, and we decided that it was an important thing to do. So, we're a part of that. I'm actually going to be a little more involved in that. I'm going on the trip to Israel with them, and Julie's going to be involved in going to some of the events. But we decided not to both go to Israel at the same time because of the baby. But Lemann-Stern is one way that we're trying to get involved.

Then, we actually were just chosen as the chairs of the welcoming committee for the new cantor at Touro Synagogue. So, we've been very involved in introducing the new cantor and his wife to the city.

RH: What's involved with that?

BB: What's involved with introducing them to the city?

RH: Well, first of all, you've got a new cantor. So, tell me about that. Who's the cantor?

BB: It's interesting. The new cantor is a young guy named Billy Tiep. He's a recent graduate from cantorial school. If I'm not mistaken, Billy's twenty-seven, twenty-eight years old. So, he's a really wonderful young guy and [has] great energy. We were thrilled that he chose New Orleans because it's cool to see a young couple choosing to come to New Orleans right now. He loves kids. So, I think he sees this as an opportunity to get involved in the community and work with a lot of the kids and really be a part of the rebuilding in the Jewish community. So, we've just been involved, and it's really been more about making them feel at home and introducing them to as many people as we can in the community, and we made a little book of good restaurants, which is easy to do in New Orleans, and drycleaners and things like that. Our mission is to just keep them meeting new people and involved and things like that.

RH: Connected.

BB: Connected, yes.

RH: Now I'm just going to go back to the Lemann-Stern for a minute because that's like a two-year program, isn't it?

BB: Right.

RH: So, the first part, when is the trip to Israel?

BB: The trip to Israel for Lemann-Stern is in October. It's a seven [or] ten-day trip, I think. Then, beyond that, you're involved for two years, sitting on boards of different Jewish groups in New Orleans, whether it's the JCC, Jewish Family Service, or different community organizations. The idea is to get you involved so that you'll sit on those boards later on. Because it's so important to bring along that next generation of leaders.

RH: Have you been to Israel before?

BB: I've never been to Israel. This will be my first time.

RH: This'll be a good way to do it, it sounds like.

BB: I think so.

RH: Any other rituals or observances that are more meaningful to you post-Katrina?

BB: I think there are rituals that have taken on more meaning for us. I think every night before we put my son to bed, we say the Shema with him, and we say a little prayer that begins with Baruch atah Adonai, thank you, God. We talk about what he needs to be thankful for from that day and what we did that was special in our time together. I think the need and the desire to raise our son with those sort of things has become more important to us since Katrina. The other neat thing is, as part of that, living in a village in New Orleans, we actually have a childhood friend of mine who's Jewish that lives down the block here, and literally a couple times on a Friday evening around 5:30 we'll get a call from them, and they'll say, “Hey we're lighting the Sabbath candles or Shabbat candles. Y'all want to come over?” They have a two-and-a-half-year-old as well. So, it's neat. We'll go down there and light the candles with them, or they've come down here; we've invited them over. So, I think those rituals, particularly with respect to doing them with others in the community, have become more important.

RH: Have you been involved with or connected with the Jewish community because you've – Baton Rouge, north shore, or the Gulf Coast or – because you've been traveling around and know a lot of Jewish communities too? So, I was wondering –

BB: Actually, I have to say our focus has mainly been at home and so we haven't particularly connected with the Jewish families in the Gulf Coast or Baton Rouge.

RH: Okay. Can you describe what being Jewish has meant to you through this experience?

BB: For me, the experience has changed my perspective on being Jewish by teaching me about the importance of community. As I said before, I understood that I was a part of this Jewish community and was raised in the Jewish community, but I never understood the important social implications of that: the network of people [who] are there to help and embrace you at any time for any reason. I think that that sense of community has really become more evident to me since Katrina.

RH: Have you been involved in –? I guess I'm trying to think of the future of the Jewish community and your ideas of what it'll look like [and] some of its challenges.

BB: Yes, it's hard to say what the Jewish community's going to look like, say, ten years down the road. But I think, and I hope –

[TELEPHONE RINGS]

RH: Turn this off there.

BB: Do you need to get it?

RH: No, but if somebody leaves a message we'll hear the message in a minute, so I guess I didn't realize I had this on still.

BB: So no, it's hard to say what the Jewish community will look like in the future.

RH: One thing you said was ten years, not two.

BB: Right. I think it's going to take a long time for the Jewish community to evolve. I think it's going to take a long time for the community in general in New Orleans to pull out of this situation. But I think, particularly for the Jewish community, I would look five and ten years down the road to really see significant changes. Hopefully, that means the numbers will start to grow. Hopefully, it means connections within the community, like I was talking about before. Hopefully, that will really blossom and flourish and continue. These congregations will continue to be supportive of each other and connected and more communitywide events, I suppose, rather than individual sections of the community.

RH: How do you think the Jewish community interacts with the larger community in the recovery?

BB: That's a good question. I don't know that I have a good answer for that. I think the Jewish community has been involved to as much of a degree as anyone else. I don't think that the recovery has necessarily crossed religious lines. I think it's affected everyone equally. So I don't know.

RH: Okay. What's your understanding of God, and has that changed since the storm?

BB: My understanding of God has always been that like Rabbi Kushner's book, [When] Bad Things Happen to Good People. There are so many mysteries to God and why things happen. On some level, it's not for us to question in a way. I'm a firm believer, personally, in taking what you can from good and bad situations, and so I would like to think that personally, I've grown from the experience as a person, and maybe that's part of the plan. I don't know. It's hard for me to say.

RH: So, when you say you've grown, what kind of learnings do you feel you've gained from this experience?

BB: For me, I've grown in the sense that I've learned more about community, family and their importance to me, and the importance to stand up and try and make a difference when and if you can. Those are probably the big lessons that I've taken away from the experience.

RH: Anything that you took for granted before you'll never take for granted again?

BB: Wow. I think there's a lot of things that you take for granted, particularly the notion that your history will always be there. It's important. I made a film about my family on some level. So, I preserved a portion of it. I've always told people in my lectures traveling with the film all over the country, tried to preach to people to sit down with your grandparents, your parents, your ancestors, and just do like we're doing now, ask them questions because that history [is] so important and you have to preserve it. What's funny is while I was doing that and saying that and preserving it on some level, I don't think I truly realized the importance of it until a piece of my history was lost through those photographs that were lost in the storm.

RH: I was thinking that's where the picture of the little redhead is in the film.

BB: Right, right, yes. There are a few little moments like that that we preserved. Yes, I need to show that to some people for sure.

RH: Yes. Tell me about New Orleans in the recovery and how you feel that's going.

BB: That's a tricky question. I think the recovery in New Orleans is going to take a long time, and I think, unfortunately, there's always going to be politics as usual and people skimming money off the top and fiefdoms within the city where people want one thing to happen, and some people want to see something else happen. So, I think all those

things are going to mean that the progress is going to be slower than we would like, and that's discouraging. But for us at the moment, the benefits of being here outweigh those issues. I think the school systems and seeing the things that are happening with trying to improve education here are very positive. So, I think there are going to be positive changes that come out of the storm ultimately, whereas maybe somewhere else, they might have happened a little quicker; it's going to take a while for those things to really manifest themselves here.

RH: I guess with a son coming up, the school systems are a major –

BB: Yes, and I think any community is built upon … I think any community is only as good as their educational system, and for here, unfortunately, it goes pretty far back that we have not had a good education system. I think that's why our economy is largely based on tourism, and a lot of people are making minimum wage or less, and it's because they haven't been properly educated, and I think, ultimately, a lot of the crime stems from educational issues, people not having the tools to make a good living. So, I think the fact that Katrina has made us reflect on that, and the schools are now being taken over by parent associations or smaller groups, and really getting the attention they deserve will ultimately help the community. That's why I say five, ten, maybe even twenty years, maybe it'll take a full generation to come around, where once these kids are educated and given the tools to have a career and things like that, things have to get better.

RH: Do you think race relations are worse or better since the storm? Or have you experienced any –?

BB: Yes, interestingly enough, I've always thought that New Orleans had a different take on race relations than a lot of the rest of the South. Because I always felt like in New Orleans, you'll have million-dollar homes, and then the very next block, you'll have people living below the poverty line. So, we've always been very connected because we had to

be. There's only so much land in the city where people could live. So, oftentimes, you find the African American community is very close in physical proximity to the white affluent community. So, therefore, personally, and maybe it's a utopian view, but I've always felt like while there are tensions, there's also an understanding here, and people got along and got over those issues a little bit more. I think since the storm, when a lot of the poverty issues came to light, that shifted the landscape a little bit. While I personally haven't experienced any racism going back and forth either way, I think it's probably there a little bit more. I think a lot of the African American community is very angry that they were left to deal with the storm and weren't properly helped, and their community wasn't supported, and it revealed all the poverty in the city. So, I think there's a lot of anger from that.

RH: I guess there are two phases here. There's the immediate rescue if that was racist, and then there's the recovery if that's got some racism involved in it. Do you have any thoughts on that?

BB: I think there's probably some degree of racism involved in both. I'm not sure that that's – I think, to a certain degree, that's local, and it's also a national issue. That's my belief. I think it's funny because there is that cordialness that I talked about, about living in close proximity and having relationships that cross racial lines. But I think behind closed doors, there's probably a portion of the affluent community that doesn't necessarily want to see the African American community back at fifty-eight percent or fifty-six percent where it was before. That's an unspoken truth, I think, about some of the city. I do think in the recovery, there is some veiled racism where certain communities, whether it's New Orleans East, which was primarily African American – the recovery czar is pushing for a lot of money to go out to New Orleans East. I think a lot of people are saying, “Why are you putting money out there? That's crazy.” I think part of that has to do with the fact that it is an area that's prone to flooding, but part of it is an undercurrent of racism. That's just a personal opinion.

RH: Yes. Did you have any thoughts on the closing of the projects and not reopening them?

BB: Yes, I think a lot of people view the closing of the projects as a racist issue, and I think there certainly is some racism involved, but a lot of it probably also has to do with the fact that those buildings were not in great condition beforehand, and they probably needed to have better places to live before that. I understand people's connection to home and place and wanting to be in the same place. So, I definitely understand people saying, “Look, I don't care, I want to go in there, I'll clean it up myself, I want to be back in my home.” But I think, hopefully, this will open up an opportunity for new housing for people so that they don't go away; they just have a better living situation. But the undercurrent of it, there's probably some racism there too.

RH: You talked about on a federal level.

BB: Well, I read Douglas Brinkley's book, The Great Deluge, and just to read about how the ball was really dropped by [the] federal government and FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] across the board, and how somehow or another we had information by watching CNN that they didn't have, that people were in trouble. So, honestly, I think if it were white, affluent people standing outside the Convention Center, there would have been helicopters and food and people getting flown out of there much quicker. It's a sad truth about America, but I think it is a reality. A lot of that has to do with socioeconomic lines. So, I think if it was a poor white community in Middle America, the same thing could have happened. But I don't think they responded in the way they should have. I think if it was a bunch of oilmen standing out there, they would have been out of there pretty quickly.

RH: Well, you just gave me another thought here because you're a filmmaker, and the first movie that came out pretty quickly was When the Levees Broke with Spike Lee. I'm ready for a movie review here.

BB: I saw When the Levees Broke, of course. I thought he did a pretty good job, truthfully. It's a huge task to tell the story of what transpired. But I have to say he did a pretty good job of doing it and showing, I thought, a fairly balanced point of view. A lot of friends of mine were angry that they didn't show more Lakeview and other areas with middle-class white people or upper-middle-class white people. Frankly, I keep going back to the class and social issues, but we had the ability to get out. We had a car. We had money in the bank account. We had credit cards. We could go stay at a hotel. We had a social structure outside of the city that was very supportive of us. So, it's not as interesting or compelling of a story, frankly, as a storyteller. Everybody's going to get their insurance in Lakeview or for the most part. But those other people that didn't have those things for economic reasons or whatever, I think that was an important story to tell. I didn't think he took – Spike Lee is prone to – he often takes a heavy-handed approach and says look, “The levees were blown up.” I heard rumors that that was going to be the theme, that the levees were blown up. I think he touched on those issues because it's an interesting theory that some people have, but I think he was very fair in his approach personally.

RH: So, just as a storyteller, you think he went to the right stories?

BB: There are so many stories to be told. But I have to tell you, overall, I think he did a pretty good job.

RH: So, tell me about your living now, because you lost your home. We left at you were gutted. You had had fifteen great people from out-of-town gut it. You're in an apartment now on Camp Street uptown. So, what are your plans? How does this work? How have you been dealing with the recovery, the bureaucracy of the recovery?

BB: The bureaucracy of the recovery has been trying, to say the least. We actually sold our house for about a third of its actual value to a friend of ours that renovates and flips houses. So, between that and what we were able to collect in insurance money, we were

able to pay off the mortgage and then have a little bit for a down payment, which is about as good as you could hope to come out. It's almost as though you sold your house before. That's where we came out. But we fought tooth and nail with the insurance companies and mortgage companies, and that first year and a half I would say I spent easily ten to twenty hours a week dealing with that stuff. So, it was rough. We applied for Road Home money to help us a little bit, and we haven't heard anything about that. We were fortunate in we have potential SBA [Small Business Administration] money available to us. So, at a better interest rate from when we applied.

RH: Is that through your business?

BB: Actually SBA, it's a misnomer, the name SBA, Small Business Administration, because they help individuals to secure low-interest loans after a catastrophe as well. So, ultimately, everybody's been very helpful. But it's been a bureaucratic nightmare getting there, and I think we're fortunate. Because a lot of people lived in areas where they didn't have to have insurance, flood insurance, because their mortgage company never said they needed it. We wouldn't have had flood insurance if our mortgage company hadn't made it mandatory. So, we know a lot of people that didn't have flood insurance, and they've had a much tougher road ahead of them.

RH: What are the challenges now, of buying in New Orleans?

BB: When we came back to New Orleans, we decided we wanted to live uptown. They call it “the sliver by the river.” Some people call it “the isle of denial” because you can go outside, you'd never know anything had happened here. We made a very conscious effort that if we were coming back for six months, we wanted to make it a very positive experience. We felt like that would lend itself to our positive experience. We're paying much more in rent than we ever would have dreamed we would pay in New Orleans for the privilege of living in the sliver by the river. But that's just part of the process, I think. We're looking to buy some property in New Orleans, and we would like to be in an area

that didn't flood, somewhere uptown. Everything's very expensive right now. But we're starting to see the bubble burst a little bit. A lot of that has to do with the fact that, for example, there was a house down the street that we were looking at, and by the time we ran our numbers for insurance, flood insurance, and homeowners insurance, we would be spending almost a thousand dollars more a month just on insurance and taxes, actually. So, I think people are realizing that they can't ask astronomical prices for these homes because people then, on top of their mortgage, have to pay an additional thousand dollars. So, it's interesting. I think the tide is turning somewhat. In the last couple of weeks, we've seen people that are offering two years in which the seller will cover your insurance cost. So, that's basically almost, in some situations, a twenty-four-thousand-dollar credit, if you will. Other people are offering things like if it was in an area that flooded and they have Road Home money, they'll sign over their Road Home money to you. So, if it's a, for example, two hundred-thousand-dollar house, and they have eighty thousand dollars in Road Home money, then [it] brings it to one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. So, anyway, it's evolving. It's evolving. It's taking a while. I might need a second .. just on the tail end of a cold. A lot of talking. I may be losing my voice, too. You don't have any more questions, do you?

RH: Not too many more. Actually, we're wrapping up. I'm just going to circle back and ask you about your relationship to city, federal, [and] state government, and have your ideas changed any?

BB: Are you rolling? Okay, I think I've watched the process of a post-Katrina world and seen issues with the federal, state, and local government and their ability to communicate, and certainly issues between the mayor and the governor and then maybe some partisan stuff going on where Mississippi, who has a Republican governor, seems to be on a faster track of recovery than Louisiana, with a Democratic governor. So, I think some of those issues have been brought to light. But as some people say, the system – it sure beats a lot of other systems in other parts of the world. So, despite

those issues, I think, hopefully, it all ultimately will balance out and work itself out. But I have seen fractures in the way the process works between federal, state, and local government.

RH: Is there anything that would tip it for you to leave New Orleans?

BB: I think if we really got slammed once again, we might leave and not come back because, on some level, what kind of life are you living if you're constantly having to evacuate, parts of the community are constantly struggling and flooding? I have to say, if it happened again, not just the evacuation, but if we were really hit hard again, we would seriously consider moving on. It'd be a tough decision, though.

RH: What do you like best about being back now?

BB: About being back? I think it all comes back to the sense of community. Family and friends, and of course, I love the culture and the food and the music, and that's such a part of our world. But it's really about people. I think you can find other communities where you connect, but there's something really special about the way people connect in New Orleans and in the South in general. It's funny when we were in Dallas. I went to the Walgreens pharmacy to pick up a prescription one night, and the pharmacist was getting it for me, and he was talking to me; he’s got a little bit of an accent. I was like, “That's Cajun.” I'm thinking to myself, “That's a Cajun accent.” So, I said, “Where are you from, man?” He said, “Oh, I'm from Lafayette.” No, I'm sorry, he's from Houma. His name was [inaudible]. I said, “I'm from Louisiana, man, I'm from New Orleans.” He was like, “Oh man, let me tell you, oh, it's so good to see you,” blah blah blah. Started talking about the Saints and everything like that. That's another reason I'm glad to be back, is the Saints. But we started talking about people being nice in Dallas, and I truly feel like they were very welcoming and warm, as I said. But he said, “You know, man, people in Texas and Dallas are business nice, they're business friendly. Very sweet, very nice, but you know, in Louisiana and New Orleans, they really ask you how your mama is and how

your daddy is, and they care. It's real genuine caring loving niceness, and here it's just business nice." I said, "You're right, man. You're right." There's something different about people from New Orleans, and it's that genuine love and appreciation of culture and each other, and it's special.

RH: Okay. Anything else you want to add?

BB: Not that I can think of. I know Julie's in the other room. You can hear me?

JULIE KOPPMAN: Yeah.

BB: Anything I forgot to say?

JK: About anything?

BB: About our lives?

JK: Well –

RH: Come on in and get in.

JK: No, no, I'm not – [RECORDING PAUSED] more like a sibling with Lindsay than cousins, and then because that was so important. That was one thing.

BB: My brother and his wife have a child that's about the same age as our son. At this point, we may or may not have another child, or we may adopt at some point. But at this point, she's the closest thing to a sibling that our son has. So, it was really important to us as part of that sense of community; it's important for us to have him grow up with her and to almost have a brother-sister relationship. They were here, so that was a big pull for us to come back. Is that all you can think of?

JK: One other thing.

RH: One other thing.

JK: This is back regarding another thing. In Dallas, between like Jewish Family Service and John Adams and Temple Emanu-El –

BB: I said that.

JK: You did?

BB: Yes.

JK: When we literally went in with JK [Joseph Koppman], and they were like, “Bring him in.” They would not take a penny from us. He went to that preschool for a year, and we paid nothing because they would not let us. They were amazing.

RH: That's a pretty amazing thing.

BB: Yeah, we kind of talked about that. It was amazing. I think that's it. It's funny because I said to you in our emails that, obviously, I'm glad to be interviewed and be a part of it. These things are such a family experience that I was like, “Maybe Julie can be in it.” You don't make any of these decisions on your own, especially when you have a partner, and it's very much a personal decision, but it affects you and the next generation. So, I don't know what I'm saying.

RH: I got you. It's almost awkward to be speaking on your own.

BB: Yes, exactly.

RH: Right, because that's now how you functioned at any point.

BB: Exactly, and we did the struggle together, exactly.

RH: Right, right.

BB: Anyway.

RH: Okay, thank you very much.

BB: Thank you.

RH: It was a great interview.

BB: Thanks.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RH: Well, a very few comparatively.

BB: Interesting.

RH: I think it's mainly because their lines are so busy. It's still so disrupted. But they would love to have some of that.

BB: Cool. I'll have to dig it up.

RH: Lainie actually sent a lot.

BB: Oh, she did?

RH: Because I interviewed her.

BB: She had news stories probably and all kinds of stuff, I'm sure.

RH: Well, and Miriam, of course, was a great interview – her mother. At one point, her mother says, "Dallas. Leave it to the Jewish community; we got a personal shopper."

BB: That's really funny.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RH: She came in for a weekend.

BB: My dad actually dated Miriam years ago when I was a little boy.

RH: Oh really?

BB: So, I had a childhood relationship with Lainie and Joel, but it's kind of funny.

RH: Lainie's not here anymore, is she? [inaudible]

BB: She is actually. Kids are at the – yes, they talked about going elsewhere.

RH: I'm going to have to call her up then. Because she was going to –

BB: Yes, [it] might be an interesting follow-up.

RH: She actually spent all last summer visiting – did she tell you this?

BB: I knew she was researching.

RH: They went to every community they thought about living in to see how the Jewish community was, and they decided on Utah.

BB: Oh, really?

RH: They were going out to buy a house. So, I've been surprised. I've heard that she was still here. So, maybe Tad finally – he felt like the kind of renovation he did wasn't going to be easy.

BB: Right, but if you're a contractor, now's the time to be here.

RH: They all bellyache, though, because they say you can't get good employees.

[END OF INTERVIEW]