Louis Trachtman Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: This is Rosalind Hinton interviewing Dr. Louis Trachtman at his temporary office at 1010 Common Street. It's the office of the State Public Health Department. Today is Friday, July 20th, 2007. I am conducting the interview for the Katrina's Jewish Voices project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Dr. Trachtman, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Louis Trachtman: Yes, I do.

RH: So why don't we begin with the year you were born and your family history? And your family now? Tell me who they are.

LT: Well, I was born July 7th, 1939. And the second son in the family of two boys. And my family now consists of my wife, Betty, and my son William.

RH: And how did you come to be in New Orleans?

LT: I was born in Buffalo, New York. I went to medical school in Buffalo, New York, and I came down to New Orleans in the spring of 1965 to spend one year as an intern at Charity Hospital, which, of course, was known nationally for its good medical training. But they still offered a rotating internship where you could have two or three months in each type of specialty. At that time in medical training, it was the age of specialization, and they were trying to get people more and more to start specialized training right after medical school. But I wanted a more general internship first, and Charity was one of the few in the country that still offered that. So I applied, and I was accepted at Charity in the LSU division of Charity Hospital. And I was planning to spend one year doing that and then go back to Buffalo probably to train in pediatrics. And I wound up staying here for

pediatric training and met my wife-to-be, who also worked at Charity Hospital and have been here ever since, except for two years when I went into the US Army, 1968 to 1970.

RH: Vietnam War.

LT: Vietnam War, but I was stationed in Seoul, Korea. So when I say Korea, they say, “Oh, the Korean War,” and no, I'm not that old. But it was the Vietnam War, but I was in Korea.

RH: Thank God – maybe?

LT: Well, I really liked it. It was considered a war zone, but there was no war. The Korean War has never officially ended, but I had a great experience. I went there as a pediatrician, and I liked it.

RH: So why did you end up settling in New Orleans?

LT: Because my wife didn't want to leave. I guess that's the short answer. My wife is from New Orleans. And you know, they say, “You can't get New Orleans girls out of the city,” and it's pretty much true. And of course, I liked it here. I wouldn't have stayed if I didn't like it. But we got married when I got out of the service – right after I got out of the service.

RH: What's her maiden name?

LT: Breland. B-R-E-L-A-N-D.

RH: Where did you marry?

LT: Here.

RH: And I mean, at a synagogue?

LT: Temple Sinai. Rabbi Blackman if you remember him. You want the date.

RH: No, no. No, I don't need the date. No, I was just curious. Now you have – that you're at Shir Chadash –

LT: Yes.

RH: – so did you move from Reform to more Conservative?

LT: Yes. Well you know, I was brought up in an Orthodox home.

RH: Okay, that was another question I had, so I'm glad you started that.

LT: I don't know, I guess in the years through medical school and training and then young married life, there wasn't a whole lot of religion in my life – in our life. Then when it came time to get married, Rabbi Blackman was very – so we had no synagogue affiliation. Put it that way. But Rabbi Blackman was very accommodating, and even though we weren't members or anything like that, he was thrilled to marry us, and it was a number of years later that I don't know – I just felt the need for more religion. And we lived uptown near Chevra Tillim if you remember Chevra Tillim, which at that time was Orthodox. We became members at Chevra Tillim. But still just went to the synagogue a few times a year and not regularly. Of course, I was working in both private practice and public health a lot. My wife was working until our baby was born, then she stopped working. And when Chevra Tillim – I forgot which rabbi it was – I think it was Rabbi Scott Hoffman – since so much of the congregation followed Conservative type Judaism more than Orthodox, even though it was Orthodox in name, it decided to affiliate formally with the Conservative Jewish – Judaism movement. And I saw no problem with that. So we became Conservative. And then, of course, the Jewish community moved from uptown more to Metairie and the suburbs. And then there was the merger – although they don't want to call it a merger – but the coming together of the two congregations. Tikvat Shalom and Chevra Tillim at the what's now – under the new name Shir Chadash out in

Metairie. And gradually, through the years, religion became more important in our lives. But also maybe yet a tiny bit more difficult because Chevra Tillim was about a two-minute ride and a fifteen-minute walk from my house. And now Shir Chadash is not within walking distance, but more like a fifteen-minute drive from our house.

RH: So you never made the move out to the suburbs in the ’60s and ’70s.

LT: No.

RH: Is there a reason?

LT: We're just not suburban people. We're used to city life. All our associations are in the city. My work has always been in this area. Except for when practice privately on the West Bank for a couple years. But other than that, we've just been city people.

RH: You said your wife retired. What was her work?

LT: She didn't retire. She quit.

RH: She quit. Well, I mean, to have her son.

LT: Right. She was a social worker at Charity Hospital.

RH: Okay. So she was a social worker. All right. What's it like for you to be Jewish in New Orleans?

LT: Forgive me for laughing. You know there was a rabbi whose name I can't remember right now. But he said the worst thing a parent can tell his children or their children – parents can tell their children – is that it's hard to be Jewish. Because he always said it's not hard to be Jewish at all. So it's not hard to be Jewish in New Orleans. It's easy to be Jewish in New Orleans, just the way it's easy to be Jewish anywhere else. It's no different. And I've been Jewish in Buffalo, I've been Jewish in Israel, and I've been

Jewish here. Nowhere else. But what's it like? I mean, it's just – you know, it's just your life.

RH: What are your primary communities here in New Orleans?

LT: I'm not sure I know what you mean.

RH: I mean social communities. Networks. Is it primarily your work community?

LT: We have a lot of old friends that go way back to when both my wife and I were both at Charity Hospital. We've remained friends with people that we worked with then. I think socially, that remains our main community, which is not a large group. I'm talking about ten or twelve people – married couples. Maybe six married couples. And I mean other than that, we have a lot of – we belong to organizations, but we do go – and when they give parties and things like that. So socially, it's not strictly Jewish or non-Jewish. It's a big mixture of the two.

RH: So the kind of the religion, it's kind of a – your networks are a mixture of Jewish and other religious affiliations. Do people in New Orleans –?

LT: Well, I'd say secular.

RH: Secular.

LT: Not necessarily religious at all.

RH: Okay. All right. And do people mix by race and such as that here? Do you?

LT: Not much.

RH: Not much?

LT: No. Work-related things. Medical Society type of things, which I consider work-related. Yeah, there is a mixture of Black and white and some, of course, Asian and Hispanic. And that can be social as well. But on the close friend type relationships, no. For better or for worse, no.

RH: Now I'm curious because I see here that you belong to Shir Chadash, but there's another organization you talked about.

LT: Chevra Kadisha.

RH: Yeah. What is that? I know I'm not familiar with that.

LT: Okay. Chevra Kadisha is a Hebrew title, and just about every city in the country has a Chevra Kadisha. And it means “holy society.” And it has the task of preparing the Jewish dead for burial in the traditional Orthodox manner. And there is in New Orleans, Chevra Kadisha. A number of years ago, one of the rabbis in town asked me if I would be a member of the Chevra Kadisha, and I said, “What are the requirements to be a member?” He said, “The only requirement is that you don't have to be afraid of dead bodies.” I said, “Okay. If I'm not afraid of dead bodies, I'll be a member.” And there is a women's part and a men's part because, according to Orthodox Jewish law, only men can prepare a man's body; only women can prepare a woman's body. So there's a fairly large number of people that participate, and we get called once in a while to prepare a body.

RH: Do people request it with – at Shir Chadash?

LT: No, they usually request it through their funeral home.

RH: Through their funeral home.

LT: Right. And the funeral home knows who to call. The Chevra Kadisha does have a president.

RH: Are there any other events that you kind of – or even memories that kind of capture your life here in New Orleans? Like a story or a memory?

LT: I'm sixty-eight years old. I have lots of memories. I guess what sticks out in my mind is, of course, getting married and the birth of my son. When my wife went into labor it was Touro Infirmary, and it was the middle of summer. It was July. His birthday is July 6th, mine's the 7th. But my wife went into labor like the 5th of July. And we went to Touro, and the doctor met her there and admitted her. And she was in labor – and twelve, fourteen hours later, the baby was born. Nice big boy. And my wife was the only woman in labor at that time. So when my son was born, he was the only baby in the nursery. And, of course, I had been on the staff at Touro when I was in private practice – one of the hospitals I was on the staff. And the nurses said, “Oh, Dr. Trachtman, of course, you want to examine your son, don't you?” Well, I did not want to examine my son. The fact that he looked nice and big and crying and healthy was good for me. I wanted his own pediatrician to examine him. But I couldn't tell the nurses no. So they handed me a stethoscope, and I listened to his little heart beating and stuff like that. And did a little examination of him. I said, “As far as I know, he's fine, but his own pediatrician is going to be here in a little while to examine him again.” And that'll always stick out in my mind.

RH: So, what kind of education did your son have here? Were there any –

LT: He went to nursery school.

RH: Was it like JCC?

LT: No, he went to Children's House which is not in existence now. And it was run by – oh, I can't remember. The name is on the tip of my tongue. Anyway, it was a very good

nursery school. And he didn't go until he was three because my wife wasn't working, so she was a stay-at-home mom as they would say now – until he was three, and then she enrolled him at nursery school. And then, at five, he went to Country Day – stayed at Country Day through high school – from kindergarten through high school. Then went to LSU in Baton Rouge, majored in geology, and then decided he wanted a master's degree in geology and went to UNO. So that was his education.

RH: Is he here in town?

LT: No, he was until Katrina. And then, of course, we relocated after Katrina to Baton Rouge. And his job, which was here, relocated to Baton Rouge permanently. So he is now a resident at Baton Rouge. Fortunately, it's not real far away.

RH: And what was his Jewish education like?

LT: Almost none. I guess he inherited it from me that he did not want to have much to do with religion. And we didn't force it on him. And I'll be very honest about it. Religion – being brought up in a Jewish home – Orthodox home – as a child, a lot of things were forced on me, and I said, “I don't want to do that to my son.” I've not regretted it. But no, he's not religious.

RH: Let's get into the Katrina story. You have quite a story to tell, I think. So when did you start to realize this is serious? And what is the drill for you, as being a member – or a person in the state department – the State Health Department?

LT: Well, it has changed since Katrina, but prior to Katrina, my assignment, which had come about many times before, was to go to Baton Rouge, to what's known as the Emergency Operating Center of what's now called the State Department of Homeland Security. It used to be under the State Department of the Military they called it, popularly known as the National Guard. They ran the State Emergency Operating Center in Baton Rouge, where all the departments sent a representative 24/7. Could even sleep there,

eat there, shower there, live there for as long as necessary if there was either a natural or manmade disaster of statewide proportions. So I had gone there several times in the past. I should say many times in the past and handled those things. Of course, from there, there was communication with all the state – various departments of state government and parish governments, which also had emergency operating centers in each parish. So that's where I was supposed to go prior to – or as Katrina was approaching. And that's where I planned on going. My time to be there was Sunday night and stay for as long as necessary. Well, all the times before, it was never more than a couple days. And we went to bed Saturday night, as you may recall, which I guess was like two days before Katrina actually hit. And the news was that the hurricane was going to head towards the east and not directly hit the city. So I just planned to leave sometime early Sunday and get to Baton Rouge in time to start manning – doing my duties in the evening. My wife and son were – well, my son was still living at home. There was no plan to evacuate. Well, we woke up Sunday morning, and the first thing we heard was that Katrina is headed directly for the city. There's mandatory evacuation. Well, this meant hurriedly packing things up. We took my wife's car to high ground. I should say into a parking garage here in the CBD because we don't live far away. So it was just a matter of a few minutes getting the car – her car into a parking garage on a high floor. And my son was going to use his car to take my wife and our dog and cat and whatever they could pack together and head out. And I would head out separately in my car for Baton Rouge, where I was supposed to go that night anyway.

RH: Well, where were they going to head? Not to Baton Rouge?

LT: They had made reservations at a hotel in Dallas, Texas, that took animals – took pets. Because we had a cat and dog that we dearly loved and couldn't just leave them home with the storm approaching. I mean with a bad storm approaching. So they had made reservations in Dallas, Texas. And so they were headed north and then towards Dallas. North and then west. And I headed to Baton Rouge. We left the house around –

say, shortly before 10 AM, Sunday. At around five o'clock, I looked at my speedometer, I had gotten eleven miles from home. I listened to the radio, and the radio said, “I-10 is jam-packed towards Baton Rouge. Take alternate routes.” So I went Airline Highway. And I then found out that that was just as bad, moving forward like an inch every five to ten minutes, if that. Well, around 5 PM, the weather was acting up, and I was alone. And I started getting scared because the rain was coming in sheets; the wind was acting up. And I said I'm just – oh, and then I heard somehow, maybe just talking to others while waiting around in line, that it was all – the same all the way to Baton Rouge. So I said, “Well, there's no way I'm going to get to Baton Rouge in the next couple hours at this pace. I'm going to go back home.” And I knew that the Superdome had set up a special – what they called a special need shelter. In other words, a healthcare facility for people with special healthcare needs or chronic illness. And the state plan, which had been in effect for several years, and which I had actually gone to before to help when I didn't have to go to Baton Rouge – the people came with their medicines, with their oxygen tanks, with their wheelchairs, and a caretaker or a sitter or someone to help them until the storm was over and they could return home. We had done that before. So I said, “I am going to go back and do that because there's no way I can get to Baton Rouge.” And, of course, no one expected Katrina to be as bad as it was. So I just turned around on Airline Highway, and I was the only person going back. It was you know, bumper to bumper, crawling along all the way back to the city. But I got back to my house in ten minutes. I called Baton Rouge from my phone at home and said, “I can’t get there – I can't get out of town now. I'm going to go to the Superdome.” They said, “Fine, don't worry about it. Just come tomorrow after the storm has passed.” I said, “Okay.” And I went to the Superdome. I probably got there about before 6 PM. And that was it. A week later, I got out.

RH: Well, maybe you can tell us a little what it was like to be in the Dome. What was Sunday night like?

LT: Sunday night was not bad because they had set aside a special area of the part of the Dome where they had a lounge and meeting rooms, not in the big stadium itself, but more of a separate area. They set that aside as the special needs shelter, which they had done in the past. The air conditioning was working. There were communications by cell phone. I talked to my wife by cell phone, and I knew that they had gotten to Jonesboro, Arkansas, where almost by chance, my wife found out that her sister and our brother-in-law – my wife's sister's husband had gone – kind of a long story. But anyway, that was her – not her first husband, but his granddaughter had relocated there because her boyfriend lived there. So they went to Jonesboro, Arkansas, which is a good-sized city. They got a room at a hotel – and I think it was a Holiday Inn – I can't remember. But they were in communication by phone, and her sister told her this hotel accepts pets. So they stopped in – I guess they got to North Louisiana – Memphis, Tennessee. And then were in communication with her sister, and they went to Jonesboro, Arkansas, canceled the reservations in Dallas, checked in in Jonesboro, Arkansas. I knew they were safe. So, of course, I felt better. And that first night, of course, people were checking in – the special needs patients were checking in. So things were going relatively smoothly. Of course, others were – who were not ill were going into the Dome because it was also opened as a shelter for the general population. And everything was considered safe. And we just had cots if we wanted to sleep. And, of course, the need for a doctor, the need for nursing staff was minimal – because, like I said, people came with their own medicines, their own supplies, their own caretaker. They were setting up with a cot and finding their space and things like that. And things were just going along. We were called when needed. Someone might have some medical questions, things like that. Around 2 AM, the storm really hit. And we could hear the – we had no windows in that part of the Dome. We could hear the wind outside. We could hear the rain. We were busy, so we didn't go looking around much in the rest of the areas. I did go out and look at the general shelter, and I knew it was filling up with people. And they were sitting in the seats, or it was getting crowded, or on the floor of the Dome. But it wasn't much

different than in years past. But like I say, around 2 AM, the storm hit, and we could hear the wind. We could also hear that parts of the sheeting – I guess you would call it that – the metal rim of the Dome were coming – those things were coming off and banging against the side of the building. And that was a little scary. But we felt secure. In fact, the air conditioning was kind of too cold. But we were just waiting for the storm to pass. And then I remember all of a sudden it was – it must have been about three or four in the morning. All the power went out. We still had lights and air conditioning, like I say, until then. Then the power went out. And the first thought in our minds was, “Whew, at least it's not as cold as it was before.” Little did we know that it was just the beginning of a horrible experience. But the storm continued, and we could hear the banging. The next morning – and if I'm going on too long, please stop me – but when light came – there was no sleeping. I mean, we were going 24/7 just being awake. And once in a while, someone would ask a question or something or needed something medically. But nothing serious. The next morning when light came, I guess there was still some rain, but not heavy. But the weather was still not good, so we just stayed in the Dome. And there were some technical – I'm calling them “technical people.” But we had no power. And, of course, there were people who needed power because they had medicine that needed refrigeration, they had respirators or small machines that you might take a treatment with for asthma. You put medicine in it. You're probably familiar with some of these things. You put medicine in. Those are run electrically. They're not really battery-operated. So those things needed power. So then there were some men around. I don't know if they worked for the Dome or if they volunteered, but they did manage to hook up some power to one – there were like columns that help hold up the ceiling, and they had power outlets. From a generator somewhere, they did manage to hook up power to that one area so that they could get a refrigerator from somewhere in the Dome – because they have restaurants and things like that there. They did get a refrigerator so they could keep things like insulin and other things refrigerator. And they could hook up the breathing respirator, little machines. Of course, people had to take turns. They got that

going. That took several hours. We just waited, and waited, and waited, and the air started getting bad. And, of course, we lost track of time. The cell phones were, of course, out by then. There was no TV. They tried to hook up a TV because we had electricity, but there was no TV. Couldn't get any station. We really didn't have battery-powered radios. And we really had no communications with anything outside our little area. I think things started deteriorating because there was no air – like I say, there were no windows you could just open. Even if the weather wasn't good outside. And it got very close. The asthmatics were having a hard time. Non-asthmatics – just us – the air was getting pretty foul. The bathrooms, of course, weren't working properly. We did not have trouble with food and water at that time, but by that time, everyone had lost their appetite anyway and really wasn't hungry or thirsty. Although they did have bottled water available. But the bathrooms did become a problem, so there was some odor emanating from the bathrooms. And, of course, it was dark. Flashlights were hard to come by. And I think we stayed at the Dome about three days. And really, it was becoming intolerable for the patients. We knew there was – let me go back. No, it was somewhere between two and three days. We knew that there was flooding because I saw Dr. Lupin. Did you interview Dr. Lupin? Ralph Lupin. Ralph Lupin is an OBGYN doctor in town, and he may be retired now. He may not be. But he's about my age, maybe a year or two older. And I've known him for years. He also goes to Shir Chadash – but he is a general in the National Guard. And I saw Dr. Lupin, and by then, the weather had cleared, and people were going outside to be able to get some fresh air, so to speak, although it was extremely hot and humid. But at least it wasn't as bad as indoors. And I said, “Well, I guess the worst is over.” And he looked at me, and he said, “I'm afraid it's not.” And I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “The levee broke.” Well, without him even saying what levee, any levee breaking, there's trouble. I knew he meant flooding. And I said, “Oh no.” I said I hope they can get it fixed soon. Well, it wasn't more than a couple hours later that the water came in. And, of course, in that interval, some people left. Now I can tell you the medical people – and we had about forty staff people. And at one time, we

even had up to one thousand patients in the special needs shelter, but they had managed to transfer a bunch out when the weather did clear – when the storm had passed a little. But we were down to about five hundred patients.

RH: How did they get the – where did the other five hundred go?

LT: They could get out by – oh, where did they go? They may have gone to area hospitals. They may have gone home. If they had transportation –

RH: So it's pretty much if they wanted to go, they left.

LT: Right.

RH: So, these are the people who could get out on their own and had a place to go.

LT: Right.

RH: Is this Tuesday or Monday sometime?

LT: We lost track of time. It had to be Tuesday. And see, like I say, things ran together, and there was no communication. So, of course, some people didn't know if their home – we knew the storm had hit. People didn't know, and there was no communication, so they couldn't call home or call a neighbor. There was a mandatory evacuation, so many people didn't know if they had a home to go home to. So people were kind of waiting to see what was happening. There was no – there was really no one in charge.

RH: Who was in charge of your area? Anybody?

LT: No. Like I say, the medical staff was in charge, but that was forty of us. There was no one person in charge. But we had faced problems before and knew that things eventually would be okay. We were optimistic. But we knew we couldn't leave until the patients were gone. In other words, the place – the special needs shelter would be open

until the last patient was gone. That's how it always operated in the past. Now I can tell you in the past we never had more than fifty people. Here we had five hundred people, but okay, it's just a matter of numbers.

RH: Because there had been, I remember under Marc Morial, they strongly suggested if not mandatory evacuation, there were a lot of people –

LT: This was mandatory.

RH: – went to the Dome. But still only – so this was the first time you had that many people.

LT: In the special needs shelter. Yeah.

RH: In special needs. Yes.

LT: Now, in the Dome itself, we heard there were twenty-five thousand people. And they had a first-aid station. And I did walk over to the first-aid station, which was manned only by a few – and bless their hearts – a few emergency medical technicians and, I think, one nurse. It was coincidence because there was a convention of emergency medical technicians in New Orleans when Katrina hit. That was the last day of their convention. So there were hundreds of EMTs here in town. And a lot of them couldn't get out because their flights were canceled. They came to the Dome, and they were trying to help as best they could. So they were manning that first-aid station, and I went over – I did go over to the Dome at that time, and it was shocking because it was wall-to-wall people. I remember there was a woman who came up to me. She knew I was a doctor. I think I had a white coat. She said, you know, “My little girl has a fever. I don't think it's anything serious, but we have run out of – or we don't have any medicine.” So I said, let's go to the first aid – and of course, we did not have any medicine. The people who had come, they were told, of course, to bring medicine for three days. But we, as a staff, didn't have medicine to hand out. I said, “Let's go look in the first-aid station [and] see

what they have." So we walked the little girl and the mother, and I walked through the crowds of people, got to the first-aid station, and thank God, they did have something for fever for a child. I gave it to the woman, and she was very thankful. And then they went back to where they were staying, but it was wall-to-wall people. And the air was terrible. You could barely breathe. And I thought –

RH: Well, you had been in the lounge at the Superdome. At some point, did you move to the other building?

LT: Yes. Okay, right after that, the air had gotten so bad that really it was the National Guard, somehow, that got with the Dome management people and said, "We've got to get these people out." And, of course, at the same time, there was the fear of snipers. And there was the fear of flooding. I mean, the flooding was there; the water had come in. They really told people not to leave at ground level because there were at least three or four feet of water.

RH: In the Dome structure, there were three –

LT: The Dome itself – the roof had blown off, and the rain had come down. That added to the misery in the Dome itself. Now our area was dry. We were high up. It was dry. But the air, like I say, was terrible. So the management said, "We can get across over the little bridges that are high up to the arena. The arena has a lot more light. The air is better." Because it was not used as a shelter. So we moved, like I say, five hundred – a lot could move themselves. They were ambulatory. But we divided the people up between those who had to be taken on rollers who were not ambulatory, those who could walk, and those who were in wheelchairs and got them across the bridge to the arena. That must have been like Wednesday.

RH: Why were they afraid of snipers? I mean, were there, in fact, snipers?

LT: There were, in fact, snipers. Now, of course, you probably – we didn't know the truth. But they said that there had been a lot of looting. That every gun store in the city and the suburban areas had been robbed. Every gun was stolen. We knew – they told us one National Guardsman had been shot in the leg at the Superdome, that one man had committed suicide at the Superdome. Forgive me, this is the part that I still have horrible memories. People were scared to death. And I felt so bad because here we had five hundred people chronically ill, elderly, some young. They had come to a place of shelter, and all I could think was, “They've come to a place where we may all die.” If it's because of maybe the snipers – we're not just going to die a natural death. I don't know. And the people were scared to death. We were told that the evacuation had ceased because the bus drivers that were coming in by the hundreds with buses said, “We are not going into the city,” because there's snipers shooting at not only the bus drivers but the helicopters. They had buses, of course, which could go through the floodwaters in some areas. They had helicopters which could land at the heliport, which you could reach by foot from the Superdome. There is a heliport there if you're not familiar with the area. And it's high. And it was mainly made for – as a public heliport. They said they're not coming because [of] their fear of violence. Well, that fear spread to us – but at least we got to the arena. The air was better. Like I say, there was no shortage of food or water, even though people were not hungry. The only good thing that happened that whole week was I lost thirteen pounds.

RH: That's quite a diet.

LT: It was. Right.

RH: You're not going to recommend the Katrina diet, are you?

LT: I'm not going to recommend it either, but I was just not hungry. And if you give up eating, you lose weight. I've since gained it back, unfortunately.

RH: Were you afraid?

LT: I was afraid at that point. But we did get to the arena, and I can tell you – my brother is dead; my mother and father are both dead. I prayed that – I don't know if you all believe in this or not, but that your dead relatives can intervene for you and help you. And I prayed that they would intervene and help us somehow. But anyway, back to reality. We were at the arena for a couple more days. And by then, the weather had cleared. It was still terribly hot and humid. It was terribly dark at night. We had lots of windows – window light during the day. No electricity. But you may have read in that book, The Path to Destruction, about the alarms that kept going off in the arena because someone had opened an emergency exit, and that set the alarms off. Also, by then, the FEMA-sponsored emergency medical teams had come in. And we were taking care, like I said, of the chronically ill and elderly with special needs who were being evacuated by then, slowly. Like I say, the situation security-wise had maybe gotten a little better. They were starting to take people out. But by then, they call it the National Medical Disaster Teams. They started coming in. Now they only stayed twenty-four to forty-eight hours. But they were taking care of the acutely ill. And this was the sad part because they had started bringing in people from the Dome who were having chest pains. They had started bringing people in who had walked for three or four days through the water from St. Bernard Parish. People who had clung to trees for twenty-four hours. It was pitiful. They were hypothermic, which means that their body temperatures were low – subnormal. These medical teams were taking care of them. They had supplies. They had lighting. They had emergency generators. They even delivered a baby of a woman that went into labor from the Dome. Brought her over to the arena. They set up in the arena. And they, of course – there was one team I remember from Wisconsin – there was one team that came in from south – Southern California. Those are the two I remember. But then, like Thursday, they left. They said, “We hear there's a lot of – again – sniping going on, there's a lot of looting. We know that there's a lot of violence. And we're not going to work here with bullets flying over our head,” although that was an

expression. Literally, there were no bullets flying at us. But the National Guard told us we can't guarantee your security, which also did not –

RH: It means they couldn't guarantee yours, either.

LT: That's right. Which also, I was going to say, lent even more fear to people who were already terrified. We can't guarantee your security. But the evacuations went on.

RH: How many people were getting out an hour? You know, in a day?

LT: From our area?

RH: Yeah. I mean, what were you down to?

LT: We were down to, I'd say, about a couple hundred by Thursday. And Thursday, everyone got out. All the patients got out. Either by bus or by helicopter. And we had no idea where they were going, except we were told that they would be taken someplace safe. And they were told that they'd be taken someplace safe.

RH: So these two teams that were there for twenty-four hours left. Is that right?

LT: One team was there for twenty-four hours. They left, and they were replaced by another team. That's how they worked the National Disaster Medical System.

RH: But I thought you said they were going to leave because there was sniping.

LT: Yes, the second team left – they probably had planned to stay longer, but they – yeah, they packed up and left. They had eighteen-wheelers that, with all their supplies, could enter through the floodwater to the ground floor of the arena.

RH: Did they take anybody with them?

LT: No. Just their own staff. They were staffs of, oh, I'd say, twenty-five to fifty people. Yeah, no, they didn't evacuate anyone. And when he told me that, of course, one of them I had borrowed this – I forgot the name of the tool. It was such a handy tool. I swore to buy one afterward, but I never did. It was one of these things like – not a Swiss Army Knife, but almost like a Swiss Army Knife which had every gadget in the world on it. And that's how we disconnected the siren, which was driving everyone crazy – by just going on and on, with a voice that kept saying something was wrong. You know how they have these automatic voices that tell you, “Something’s wrong. Use the nearest exit,” or something like that? Over and over and over. But anyway, I gave it back to him. But don't get me wrong, those people did a fabulous job. They took care of so many acutely ill people, I'm sure they saved people's lives. But they left. They said they wouldn't stay under those conditions. Well, I think it was probably Thursday night – Thursday evening. The last of the patients were gone. The staff just waited, and then someone from the National Guard – if anyone was really in charge, I guess it was the National Guard. They came and told us that they were going to get us out of the arena. We would be evacuated. They were going to take us to the ground floor of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, where they could guarantee our security. Again the security issue was foremost in peoples' minds. And there was no news, no – you know, no communications. We knew there was anarchy out there. It was lawlessness. Out there, I mean, outside the Dome. Outside the arena. That area. But they said if we go to the first floor of the Hyatt, there is no flooding – it's on a little higher ground – and we can guarantee your security because there's only two doors that have to be secured. So we went out a back way by truck with, I'd say, four-foot-high wheels – they took us out by truck. Took us to the Hyatt, which indeed, was dry. They said just find a place away from these doors on the first floor of the Hyatt and don't go upstairs. Don't do anything else. Just stay here. And, of course, there were no bathrooms there. But after no eating and hardly any drinking, the need for bathrooms wasn't terrible. But there were none if you needed one anyway. For the men, could just – with the National Guard – I know you won't mind me

telling you this – but they could just, with the National Guard saying “Okay, go back there by that wall of the building outside, and you can relieve yourself.” With the women, they set-up a curtained area with black garbage bags. And we stayed there until Saturday.

RH: Thursday to Saturday. Thursday night to Saturday.

LT: Yeah. Friday night. And, of course, they kept telling us we're going to be evacuated, we're going to be evacuated. Well, the buses never came. Friday night, someone told me they found a telephone that worked – that accepted credit cards. I said, “My God, that's what we need.” So I had a credit card. I went to the telephone, which was on the first floor of the Hyatt somewhere, and I called the Emergency Operating Center in Baton Rouge – Homeland Security – and I got the State Health Officer on the phone, Dr. Jimmy Guidry. I knew their number at his station because I said all the state departments were there. He answered the phone. I said, “You have got to get us out of here.” He said, “I thought you all had been evacuated two days ago.” I said, “No, the patients were all evacuated, but we're still here waiting. And there's about forty of us.” He found – you know, he was shocked to hear the news. I don't know if my call meant anything or not, but the next day, Saturday – and it was already light but I don't remember what time. It was in the morning.

[END OF AUDIO FILE 1]

RH: Okay, this is tape two of Katrina's Jewish Voices, and I'm speaking with Dr. Louis Trachtman. So you've made a phone call to the state.

LT: To Dr. Guidry, the State Health Officer.

RH: And he thought you had left two days before.

LT: Yes.

RH: And so you said you weren't sure if your phone call made any difference, or if it did, but it felt like it.

LT: It felt like it did, but not to me. It did to people that I told the story to afterward. And Saturday – well, I'm sure it was morning, but I'm not sure what time – the bus came for us. It was a nice tour bus with air conditioning which was so nice. Like I said, there were forty of us. We got on that bus, and it was heaven. And we did have to leave by an exit on Poydras St. Now Poydras St. did have some water, and I had managed to keep my feet dry that whole time until we went to the bus. I forgot to take my shoes off. And, of course, they were saying watch out for cut glass – I mean for cut glassware, bottles, and so on. Or downed electric wires. So, it's probably best to keep your shoes and socks on. So my feet got wet, but we got on the bus, and it was heaven because it was air-conditioned. We had run out of water for at least the last twelve hours at the Hyatt. There was plenty of bottled water. They did have food. The famous Meals, Ready-to-Eat, if we wanted it.

RH: Did you have one of those?

LT: In the whole week, I had one full one. And I have to tell you it was a vegetarian one because – maybe this is another thing of interest to Jewish people – I have always tried to keep kosher. And what went through my mind was, even though I – like I say, wasn't really hungry, but during that whole week, what went through my mind was my father telling me – and he was one of six children. They left Russia when he was about – I'd say eleven or twelve years old. And their father was in the United States. Their mother had died, so there were six children traveling with some companion. And they left Russia, of course, right after World War I and the Russian Revolution under the hardest times possible. The time of pogroms in the Ukraine. They were in the Ukraine. Their town had a pogrom. And he said, along with telling me it's hard to be Jewish, he said that in all their travels in Europe to get to a boat to eventually to the United States, he they never –

he never ate tref. He never ate non-kosher food. And I said, “If my father could do that under those hard times, I will do it under these hard times.” So I didn't eat tref, but I did eat a vegetarian MRE, which one of the nurses, God bless her heart, found because you know all the MREs had the contents listed. She found one that was vegetarian. So I had that. And it was 3,500 calories, and that's what I ate that week. So that's a good way to lose thirteen pounds. But anyway, back to the bus. The bus driver was from Texas, and he said he's taking us to Dallas. I said, “Okay, any place out of here is fine.” I knew my wife and son were in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Well, just as a little aside, the bus driver, like I said, was from Texas, and he took us on I-10. And I knew the short way to Dallas was you go I-10 at Lafayette, you go I-49 to Shreveport, Shreveport over to Dallas. It's about an eight-hour trip at the most. And of course, there wasn't much traffic. While we're passing Lafayette, Louisiana, I quickly ran to the bus driver, and I said, “Aren't you going to take I-49 to Shreveport and then to Dallas?” He said, “Oh, is that the way you go?” I said, “Yeah, that's the short way.” I said, “What way were you planning to go?” And he said, “I'm going to Houston. I'm from Houston. I was going to go to Houston and then North Dallas.” I said, “Okay.” By this time, we were past Lafayette anyway, and he didn't want to turn around. But we got stuck, of course, in the Houston traffic, which has traffic all the time. Terrible traffic. But we finally made it to Dallas.

RH: Now, had you talked to your family at all during this week?

LT: Not until I got to Dallas.

RH: They must have been beside themselves.

LT: Yes. I found out afterward. Because they saw what was going on in New Orleans and knew what was going on more than we did. It was on the news. And I do have to tell you one other thing. At the Hyatt, even though they told us don't go upstairs, I wanted to see what was going on in the rest of the hotel. And, of course, we had no patients to worry about. I was alone. I mean, of course, with the other people. But I

mean, I didn't have my family to worry about. I did go upstairs, and it was not air-conditioned, but it was hot. But I see a group of four people – a man, a woman, and two younger children. Two teenage – a boy and a girl – group, sitting there, and they're speaking Hebrew. And I thought what a wonderful sound in the middle of all this. Because I kind of speak Hebrew. And I walked over to them and I asked them if they were Israelis because I didn't recognize them as being from here. And they said yes, they're Israelis. But it turned out the man worked at the Hyatt and had brought his family to the Hyatt because the Hyatt told their employees they could bring their people – or their families – in there for shelter, for refuge. Their home was in Terrytown, on the West Bank. So we talked for a few minutes, and then he said, “Come, I want to show you my workshop.” He was a – now, I can't remember either – a carpenter or an electrician at the Hyatt. And he took me to his work area where the air conditioner was working. So we sat there, and he told me he had worked there for several years. But that the Hyatt – they were planning to move to Orlando, Florida, because the Hyatt was going to close anyway, even before the storm wrecked everything; they were planning a major renovation that was going to take a year or two, which means that he thought he may not have a job for a year or two. So they were planning a move to Orlando, Florida, before the storm. And they're – this just hastened – they knew they were going to move anyway. So if their home was damaged, it would have just hastened their move. Their kids, of course, had mixed feelings because the kids – one was born in Israel, one was born here. They had mixed feelings about moving, but if their family was moving, they were moving. So we talked for, I'd say, about an hour. And I told them about how I had been in Israel a number of times. I had volunteered with the Israeli army, stuff like that. And then I said, “It’s time for me to get back because they'll think I have disappeared.” The air conditioner went off about twenty minutes later. They lost electricity. That wasn't the reason I left, but it wasn't as comfortable as it had been before for them, either. It was just nice seeing them. I'm sure they got out okay. They did see me before they left the hotel to go back to the West Bank to their home. And they were allowed to leave.

And they waved goodbye and said maybe we'll see each other again someday. That was before we were evacuated. But anyway, we got to Dallas, and one of the nurses called the Hampton Inn because they had a cell phone that worked once we were away from New Orleans, closer to Dallas. Got the phone number of the Hampton Inn [and] made a reservation. We got rooms at the Hampton Inn. The bus let us off there. They told everyone on the bus, “We'll either take you to a shelter or to the Adam's Mark Hotel.” Well, no one wanted to go to the shelter. They said, “We've had enough of shelters.” The Adam's Mark Hotel, of course, you'd had to pay. And I said we had reservations already at the Hampton Inn, which was only a block away anyway. Because all this was downtown Dallas. So he dropped us off at the Hampton Inn. The rest went – I guess some went to the Hampton Inn; the others went to the Adam's Mark Hotel. And we checked in – and by then, had telephone communications, had showers. I wore the same shirt and pants for that whole week. I hadn't even brought a change of clothes because I thought I'd be going home the next day. I then called – I got the phone number of the Holiday Inn in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and they said, “Oh, your wife and son checked out yesterday.” I said, “Did they leave a forwarding address?” “No, oh no.” I said, “Oh, well, now I will try to find them. I'm back in civilization. I will somehow find them. I know they're okay. The guy at the hotel said they left yesterday. Where would they have gone?” Well, I knew my son and my wife – I don't know if it was by mental telepathy or what, that they would head back towards this way. They couldn't go to New Orleans, but maybe Baton Rouge. Because a lot of people that my son worked with and that I worked with, of course, were in Baton Rouge. And I knew by then that Baton Rouge hadn't suffered from the hurricane. At least not much. So I called someone I worked with – I knew in Baton Rouge. And they called someone else – oh and said, “Yes, your wife and son are here.” But they didn't know exactly where. But my son had gone to work. And then the woman I called, called someone she knew. He called, found out that I was okay, and got my – made sure he had the right number at the hotel and all that. Ten minutes later, my son called, and that was the first they had heard from me.

And that was Sunday. So it was exactly a week later. Actually, it was early Sunday – it was Sunday. And because it took – our trip to Dallas had taken fourteen hours because of all the traffic going through Houston. Well, of course, being at a hotel, I could shower and all that. I found out they were okay. We talked by phone. Sunday night, my son drove to Dallas because I said, “I'm in no condition to try to get to Baton Rouge by plane or bus. Whatever. Come and get me. Take your time. I'm in a hotel. Everything's OK.” But the next day, and I'll never forget, it was Labor Day. So it was Monday, September 5th. My son drove to Dallas, got me, turned – I said, “Stay overnight.” Because from Baton Rouge to Dallas isn't a quick trip. He said, “No, I want to go back.” So we headed back to Baton Rouge. It turns out that they had left a forwarding address at the hotel in Jonesboro, which the guy who answered the phone didn't know – he didn't see the note stuck on the wall there. And my wife and son – my wife – my son had a laptop computer with him. He got the eight hundred number of an apartment complex in Baton Rouge and could reach them by cellphone because their telephone system was down to. But he reached the eight hundred number. And sight unseen, they rented the last apartment in this complex in Baton Rouge – which, as you know, had thousands and thousands of people who had evacuated there. But they got the last apartment, which was their demonstration apartment – their model apartment–fully furnished. And when they brought me there – or when my son brought me there, there was home. I mean, I truly felt saved. Not just seeing my son but seeing my wife again and having a home to go to. And, of course, the dog and cat were there. It was just like being at home again.

RH: Was it nice?

LT: End of story. End of that story. Beginning of the recovery.

RH: What were some of the things you were treating in the Dome medically?

LT: It was not so much a question of treating as making sure that the people could take care of themselves – that they had their inhalers, that they weren't overdosing, that they

were getting their proper – that they were – like the diabetics were eating and taking their insulin properly. It was things like – well, those were the big things were the asthmatics. And they'll tell you that that's true in every shelter. Asthmatics and diabetics are the most predominant illnesses you have to deal with. That if they were – had something relatively common and ran out of medicine, to maybe find someone else – because we had no stock of medicines – to maybe find some other person that had some medicine that could share it. And that it was the right medicine. So it's more like a medical caretaker chronic illness role than, say, opposed to those medical teams that came in and they were taking care of delivering babies and taking care of acute illness. This was more like taking care of chronically ill people.

RH: Did you lose anyone?

LT: You know, I'm glad you asked that question because, like I say, we had a thousand people at one time. The numbers kept going down. We lost one person and she was a ninety-two-year-old woman. Bless her heart. She sat in her wheelchair for three days and then just put her head down. And her caretaker – like I said, all these people had caretakers with them. Some of the caretakers were just as old. Some were kids. My best helper was a nine-year-old kid, who was someone's caretaker, yeah. He was my right-hand man. But anyway, the caretaker of this ninety-two-year-old woman – I later found out she was ninety-two – said, “Come check, I think she's dead.” And you know, listened. No heartbeat, no breathing. She was dead. We didn't want to alarm everyone. Like I say, she just put her head down and died. That was the story I got. So it must have been a cardiac-connected death. That's what we usually attribute those things to without an autopsy or any other history. But we didn't want to alarm everyone because we had all these people waiting to be evacuated and terrified to boot. So we just wheeled her aside – it was like she was sleeping because her head was just down. We didn't cover her up – and took her to an area where there was no one else, and then found out that from the Dome, they had established a temporary – what they called a

morgue. Because by then, like I say, one person had committed suicide. They had another body there. And they took her in the wheelchair down to this area from the arena. This happened in the arena to the Dome, and I remembered her name. And months later, I saw her name on the list of those deceased and that funeral arrangements had been made. Her family had been contacted. And that's when I found out – well, the chaperone or the caretaker had told me she was a ninety-two-year-old woman. But just one death among those we had.

RH: But you did have some sharing of medicines and such as that –

LT: Right.

RH: To keep people going.

LT: To keep people going. It's almost a joke because FEMA – and bless their hearts – FEMA does a wonderful job of handing out money. And, of course, they paid for the medical teams to come in. But those medical teams were organized. FEMA didn't have to organize them, they just paid for them to come in. FEMA paid for a pharmacy to be setup, and it was almost a joke – because they had two volunteer pharmacists who came in from Texas. I should say one pharmacist and one pharmacy assistant. They setup a pharmacy in the arena, which by no stretch of the imagination was a pharmacy. They had some bottles of insulin, they had a few bottles of aspirin. They had one type of high blood pressure medicine, and that was it. I mean you could put their total stock of medicine in one little box. And that was the pharmacy. And then they were gone in two days, too.

RH: You mean they got out way before your patients?

LT: Yeah, yeah. So you know, and in years past, the shelter had operated – like I say, we didn't face this horrible storm, we just faced people who had evacuated who were special needs people. And I'm talking about people who relied on, say, an elevator to go

up and down to their apartment, and they had no legs. People like that. They came to the special needs shelter. But if medicine was needed, we could just get it from Charity Hospital or a nearby hospital. Tulane University Hospital. There was ambulance service back and forth if someone needed to be taken to an emergency room. Well, none of that existed under these conditions. In fact, we didn't even know that the hospitals were probably even having a worse time than we were, which all came out afterward. So we couldn't get medicines from the hospitals.

RH: How did you manage peoples' fears because you and your staff, or the staff you were with – I won't call it your staff –

LT: Just by talking. I don't know if that managed it or not. But when people are –

RH: Because you were all afraid.

LT: We were all afraid, and just by talking and sharing feelings and saying be optimistic. Everything will be okay. We'll get out of here, which, like I said before, I had my own doubts about. I mean, I don't mind telling you, it was the first time in my life. And I've been in the Army – and I've been in, I won't say terrible circumstances, but I've been in somewhat dangerous circumstances. And I never felt like I was going to – there was a threat to my own life until this. But we just talked, and that helped. It helped me anyway. I hope it helped them.

RH: Were there National Guard around a lot or no?

LT: No. I later found out they only had twenty National Guardsmen for the whole area. Had we known that, then we would have been even more afraid.

RH: When you say the whole area, you mean the arena?

LT: The arena and the Dome. Because remember, there were still twenty-five thousand people in the Dome. And they were slowly being evacuated. When we went from the arena to the Hyatt, I told you we went out by an entrance by Poydras Street. We had to go upstairs and then over because we couldn't go through the water – through the high water. I could see the people outside the Dome – masses of humanity. I mean, you've seen the pictures. I had no camera, I mean, or anything. It was like – you know the word surreal. So many people say the whole thing was surreal. It was like a different world. It was not our world. It was a different world. There were thousands and thousands of people outside the Dome on the high area, waiting to be evacuated. Getting out into the air where you could breathe. And I mean, it was heart-wrenching, because you knew they were suffering. We had abnormal heat and humidity at that time. But they could be out, and there was no rain.

RH: Were there more people lost in the Dome? Did you find that out later? No?

LT: When we left, I heard they had a total of three. And I knew about the two. There was one suicide and one from the special needs shelter. I don't know about the third. So I don't know if any others died in the Dome or not. We later found out that there was this massive shelter with no medical facility at all at the convention center with an equal number of people.

RH: So you ended up back in Baton Rouge. How long were you in Baton Rouge?

LT: Seven months.

RH: Seven months? So what happened to your house?

LT: Well, first of all, let me tell you that God bless her, one of the doctors I work with named (Erin Brewer ?) – as soon as I got in touch with the people that – see, we, as a state agency, have lots of people in our agency in Baton Rouge. As soon as I told them I was back, they were glad to hear that I had survived because they hadn’t heard from me

either.

RH: You had no communication with your State Department of Health the whole time you were in the Dome.

LT: Right.

RH: You were really isolated, huh?

LT: Oh, yeah. We were all isolated. But Dr. Brewer insisted that I talk to some therapists. I said, “After what I've been through, yes.” I'd call it post-traumatic shock – call it anything. I am a basket case because I think I told you – and I broke down a few minutes ago. I could not talk about it. Thank God my wife made me talk about it. But just talking about it – she was my best therapist. She made me tell her everything, what happened the whole week. And, of course, she told me what they went through. Dr. Brewer insisted that I talk to some therapist, and she sent a clinical social worker and a clinical psychologist to the apartment, and we talked for three hours, and it really helped. Anyway, I went back to work about – I think about a week later. It took me really a week to get situated and to feel normal – to feel human again. And they set up an office for me there and welcomed me back and all that and said, “Take as much time as you need.” But then – I'd say about three weeks – no, maybe two weeks after that. Like three weeks after Katrina, as state employees, we were given permission – because you needed permission to get back into the city. We had a convoy setup with police escort – state police escort – to come back into the city to our headquarters building at 325 Loyola to try and retrieve some documents that we needed – some paperwork – maybe some office computers, things like that from our offices. And they said, “Now we are not telling you can't – we're telling you, you can't stay in New Orleans. But if the route you take takes you past your house, we will look the other way. Because the convoy is going in, but you come out on your own. But you do have to come out,” and we had passes. Well, I'm trying to think. My son is a geologist, and they had mapped – they had mapping of

the flooded areas, and he knew that our house was underwater – or was in a flooded area.

RH: You lived on Versailles?

LT: Yes.

RH: And Broadmoor area. Is that Broadmoor?

LT: Technically, it's not Broadmoor, but it's right next to Broadmoor.

RH: Right. Fontainebleau.

LT: Yeah.

RH: Do they call it that?

LT: We call it Fontainebleau, yeah. We're at the corner of Versailles Boulevard and Walmsley – right at the corner and one block off Fontainebleau. He knew that it was flooded. We didn't know how bad it was flooded. But three weeks later, we did go by on the way out – we did go by the house. And by then, the floodwaters were gone. And we looked, opened the door, and ours is a raised house – so thank goodness the main living area was not flooded. Downstairs, my wife's mother had lived with us for eight years, but she died in 1992. In other words, her apartment – the mother-in-law apartment was all downstairs and all that. Finished. But we knew that by looking at where the line was on the wall, we knew we had had four feet of water, and the whole thing was a shambles. It was a shock, another shock. Everything thrown around. You probably saw some flooded – I don't know if your place was flooded or not. But they say the worst happened when the water left. Because it came in slowly. But when it left, it formed like whirlpools going out, so it threw all the furniture around and the refrigerator and everything. So I knew it would be a while before we could go home. And, of course, there was no power,

utilities, or anything. But the water was gone. And we had the apartment in Baton Rouge – the office was set up in Baton Rouge. My son's job had been relocated there.

RH: Was there anything on the first floor that you were particularly – or your wife was sorry you had on the first floor?

LT: You mean at ground level?

RH: On the ground level.

LT: We had a few things that were not broken. It was amazing. You probably heard this before. Some very fragile items didn't break. Furniture fell apart because of the glue or stuff like that just gave way. But glass objects just kind of floated to the floor and didn't break. So, we had some kind of fragile items that didn't break, and we took those upstairs just in case something happened again. We lost a lot of pictures that were down there. My mother-in-law, of course, had a lot of pictures from her side of the family. They were all – ninety-nine percent were lost. Some of the old-time pictures – I don't know if you saw them, but – I had a picture of my mother and father from when they got engaged in 1934. It was a hand-colored picture – photograph that was about – oh, I'd say ten by twelve. I knew it was hand colored. It was a black and white photograph that had been hand-colored. But the whole thing washed down to the bottom. So the picture itself was just a piece of white paper. But the ink they used – the dyes, the photographic material just washed right down to the bottom. It couldn't be restored. So a lot of pictures were lost. Lot of furniture was lost, but that – a lot of antique stuff that. We talked to a man afterward, and he said, “Well, if you spend enough money, you can restore anything.” But for even less money, you can probably replace it. After that, we started the cleanup process once they allowed people back into the city.

RH: So when you were talking with the psychologist, was there anything that kind of surprised you that you thought about when you were –

LT: That I had been so afraid of – not afraid – I guess afraid, but also facing my own mortality. That this could be the end. And they told me that these thoughts would recur, that I would remember things, and I would probably cry. And it was all true. And it did keep coming back. And here it is two years – well, not quite two years later, but still talking about some things get me worked up. I work for the state. They also arranged some group therapy sessions. I remember from Baton Rouge, they rented a church hall in Prairieville. If you're familiar with Baton Rouge, Prairieville is right outside Baton Rouge. But they rented a church hall, and they brought in some therapists from – this was aside from the therapists that I saw who were volunteering just from the Baton Rouge community. They arranged some group sessions. These therapists came in actually from Washington DC, and we had a two-day session in Prairieville where they had all sorts of group activities designed to bring out your feelings and share it with – we were – that was like a group of fifty people. But that was fun.

RH: Were those kinds of volunteers, or were they – did they say, “No, we really want you to show up for these?”

LT: Oh no, it was volunteer. But they strongly suggested it. But no, no one was forced to do it. We did find a synagogue in Baton Rouge. There's two synagogues in Baton Rouge. Fortunately, one was not that far from our house. And I don't know if you know the Gomel prayer. But when you come – of course, it's another one of these things not all Jews believe in – but when you come out of a life-threatening situation, you say the Gomel prayer, which means that you thank God – it's not a very long prayer. It's like one sentence.

RH: Could you say it for me? Do you mind?

LT: Right off the top of my head? No, I don't have it with me. But it's – you bless God, of course, and you thank God for – Gomel– for having brought you out of this – like saved you from this situation. I went to the synagogue – my wife and I went to the

synagogue to find out when they had services and things like that. And they said they also had a therapist coming in from San Francisco whom I never did get to talk to. But I did go to the synagogue regularly. The first Saturday, I was there, and I said the Gomel prayer. They were Reformed, and Rabbi Zamek – Stanton Zamek couldn't have been nicer. Are you familiar with him?

RH: Yes, actually, I met him and his wife.

LT: Him and his wife. Yeah, Rabbi Bergadine. Rabbi Martha and Rabbi Stan go by. And they were wonderful. And of course, the Reform don't have the Gomel prayer in their prayer book, but they had a Conservative prayer book there, and yeah – that first Saturday, I said that which helped me up here too.

RH: Did you go to High Holiday services in –

LT: Yes, and you probably heard the synagogue there in Rita had the roof blown off. Which isn't funny, but they got through Katrina with no problem at all, but then when Rita came through, the roof of the synagogue was damaged a lot. So the High Holiday services were held at this beautiful Baptist church next door. And yeah, we went to the High Holiday services there.

RH: Did you see people you knew?

LT: Yes, lots of people from New Orleans.

RH: How was that? Was it comforting?

LT: Oh yes. I mean, no one likes to – it's the old saying, “no one likes to see other people miserable, but misery loves company.” And people shared their stories and were happy to be out and safe.

RH: So, did your job change any once you were...

LT: No.

RH: Just relocated to Baton Rouge?

LT: Just relocated.

RH: So kind of explain to me what your work is.

LT: Well, I've been in public health for thirty-seven years, so I've done it all. But right now, and even a couple years ago, I'm the medical director of several different public health programs. And, of course, we're all over the state, but this is our central headquarters. Well, I say here, we're spread out between here and Baton Rouge. But I'm a pediatrician by training and also preventive medicine. Two specialties. So the programs which I'm in charge of, medically, are – and I will list them for you – tuberculosis control, HIV/AIDS program, sexually transmitted disease control program, the genetics program, which is mainly newborn screening, which is very much related to pediatrics. You know, newborns are screened for now thirty different diseases with a drop of blood when they're born. Or shortly after they're born. And a couple small programs that we have. One's called the Yellow Fever Vaccination Certification Program, and the other is the Refugee Health Program. So obviously, I'm stretched too thin. I don't do a good job at anything, but at least I try. My relatives tell me, like my Hebrew. At least I try. Same with this.

RH: What do I need to know about that? Because you've had to re-setup, at least in the New Orleans area. I assume that you just continue the programs in other areas.

LT: All of the other areas of the state except the Lake Charles and surrounding area, which was so hit by Rita.

RH: Rita. Right.

LT: Yeah. We have health units there that are called public health centers in every parish. So in the parishes like where Lake Charles is and surrounding area, those had to be – programs had to be restarted from scratch. And this area even more so. And it's still in progress. Rest of the state, the staffs had the double job of manning special needs shelters, which were manned by public health physicians and nurses and clerical people and social workers. In all of the major cities, evacuated people from New Orleans and from the Lake Charles area, and probably some from Texas – because Rita, you know, hit that area. So probably some people –

RH: In east Texas.

LT: Right. Probably some people from Louisiana who had evacuated to Texas may have gone to shelters in Louisiana when they had to evacuate from Houston. But anyway, they had the dual job of not only staffing the shelters but keeping the parish health units going with everyday work.

RH: Has the resources – are you satisfied with the kind of resources you have in the devastated areas from Lake Charles to New Orleans?

LT: You mean post-Katrina?

RH: Yeah.

LT: No, it's been too slow. It's been way too slow. I don't know how to make it better except just by each day trying to advance things just a little bit.

RH: And do you attribute that to anything? The slowness?

LT: I don't know. It's just that the progress of everything is slow. And building up the public health infrastructure is no different. It's not a question of money; it's a question of getting that money spent. The wheels turn slowly. I guess I have no good analogy

except post-Katrina, even if you had money, there were things you could not buy. You may have gone to the grocery store, and the shelves were empty. You couldn't go to a restaurant even if you could afford to eat out because the restaurants were closed. Things like that face us every day.

RH: So do you feel people are underserved in the devastated areas like the New Orleans, or –?

LT: Oh definitely – right now – definitely. Yeah. I know that there's certain things that in public health have had to be cut back. And just to give you one for instance, not that I'm going to get on my soapbox about public health but it's pretty much a standard of care. It's pretty much practiced all over the US, if not worldwide, that if you have tuberculosis, even though you're on treatment and you are not necessarily spreading this disease to others, you have to complete at least six months of treatment for ordinary – if there is such a thing as ordinary tuberculosis–in your lungs. But the way to make sure that that person is taking his or her medicine is another person – either a public health staff person or a trustworthy relative or a trustworthy volunteer makes sure that that person actually takes the medicine, swallows it, visually, you see it get into that person. We call it directly observed therapy. Because of some staff shortages, we have not been able to do directly observed therapy on everyone that should have it. So we're relying on the old-fashioned method of they know that they need medicine and they'll take it themselves. But we also know that after a few months, people get sick of taking medicine, and they say, “Well, I'm just going to stop.” I'm feeling better. You know they don't know all there is to know about the disease. Maybe that's our fault. We don't educate them enough. But they may stop taking their medicine, they may have a relapse. I wish that we could prevent stuff like that. Have more staff. But that's just one example.

RH: Well, since I'm sitting here in kind of the – kind of a public health, government kind of thing, what are your thoughts about the Charity system? Did you work with the Charity system when it was here?

LT: Well, I was trained – I'm a product of the Charity system. I did my training, as I told you, through Charity Hospital. LSU. I also got my master's degree in public health at Tulane, which now has its own medical center. But the state very much needs that system as a dual role for the care of indigent people – also as a medical center in its own right for, say, rare diseases that need specialty care from the medical centers. From, I should say, the medical schools – specialties – specialists at the medical schools and also as training ground for all the medical specialties as well as the allied health professionals. Nursing, physical therapy, occupation therapy, medical technology, all those related fields that are part of the universities – Tulane and LSU but need to have practical training in a medical center – which Charity Hospital – which University Hospital now serves in a smaller capacity.

RH: When you say University Hospital, is that LSU?

LT: That's LSU hospital. It used to be Hotel Dieu, and it was renamed University Hospital when the state –

RH: Is it back up?

LT: It's open again. Yes. It opened again – oh, a number of months ago. Not at full capacity.

RH: What would you like to see, ideally? What would be your vision as a public health professional for care in the city and the state? If I could get my checkbook out today and –

LT: Oh, they've got lots of money, but the thing that they're – I shouldn't say arguing about – that they're debating about is what kind of system to set up. Whether it should be the system like it was or a completely – maybe not completely, but a more decentralized, more privatized system.

RH: Do you come down on one side or the other?

LT: No, I really don't, but I, fortunately, have not been asked my opinion. But I know we need a system that honors both, like I said before, the treatment of the indigent as well as those with rare diseases that need the super medical specialists in a big medical center. And the training of physicians and medical specialists and the allied health professionals – and I don't know that that – I mean that so traditionally has been done under what we call Charity Hospital or the state-run hospitals. Mainly in New Orleans, but also in Shreveport and all the major cities of this state. I don't know if that can be done strictly through a private hospital system. That's what all the debate is about.

RH: It’s still not settled.

LT: I don't believe it's settled. No one told me. No one may care to tell me, but – see, our public health system mainly is outpatient. If people need inpatient care, we refer them to state-run hospitals all over the state or to private physicians. And referring to the private sector, it's mainly people who have insurance or Medicaid or Medicare, which is form – are forms of insurance. They can utilize the private sector. The private sector is not set-up to take care of – to offer free care, which falls on the state to pay for. And rightly so, in my opinion. But wrongly so in some peoples' opinion.

RH: Are there more sick people in Louisiana than in other states per capita?

LT: I don't think so. In all of the ratings, you see Louisiana is never in the group of the best. But if you really look at the situation, we're only in the group of the worst in a few things. For many measurements of health, we're in the middle. And then many things, if

you take the time to really analyze it, which most people don't – the difference between the best and the worst may not be very big at all.

RH: Statistically.

LT: Statistically, right. So we have many things to be proud of. We have many things not to be proud of. But that's why we have public health programs which – I can look back over – since 1965 anyway in Louisiana and say that we have improved greatly in many things. Things like infant mortality, things like maternal mortality – women dying in childbirth. Our rates of tuberculosis and syphilis – even though they're high – they're better than they were many years ago. So it's all relative. We'd love to eliminate some diseases, and we have. Like things through immunizations for children. Measles, polio, chickenpox. Those things we used to take for granted that all children have to get sick, and some very sick. They don't have to anymore. Shots prevent it.

RH: Do you think that kind of reflecting back, that the situation in the Dome with people being left behind, do you see racism playing a part in it?

LT: Oh no, not at all. I think there was a lot of focus in the media, and maybe rightly so, on the poor. African American and poor. I can tell you by being there that there were lots of African American and not poor, and there were lots of Caucasians, poor and not poor. But of course, I wasn't the newsperson taking the pictures. And again, I think of – I'm not going to burst into tears again – but there were old people. There were old New Orleans people who had no way of getting out, who were looking for shelter and looking to be evacuated. They came dressed up because they knew – white and Black – they did not want to be out in [public] – you know, it's an old New Orleans thing. You don't go out in public unless you're properly dressed. Well, they went out in public, and they had to be properly dressed. They wore a suit and tie. The woman wore a dress and nice shoes and maybe pearls. And there they were, sitting in horror but trying to – at least they were properly dressed. I mean, they didn't make the news – and to answer your

question, no, I think the poor were more affected because we know that parts of the city that were poor were totally devastated. But then maybe I'm wrong in saying that because parts of the city that were middle class and up and high – the silk-stocking district, so to speak – were totally wrecked and devastated. So no, in fact, right after Katrina, they were calling it the great equalizer. So any hints of racism, no.

RH: Do you think that there's been an inadequate or an unfair distribution of resources after in the recovery period at all?

LT: Not to my knowledge.

[END OF AUDIO FILE 2]

RH: – tape three for Katrina's Jewish Voices with Dr. Louis Trachtman. I wanted to shift gears and ask you – you said even in your notes that being Jewish meant a great deal to you through this situation.

LT: And I'm the only one in my family. That means a great deal, I think.

RH: Well, then I'm glad I'm interviewing you.

LT: Pardon me?

RH: Then I'm glad I'm interviewing you. Can you kind of tell me what you meant by that?

LT: I think just what I've been telling you about the things that I thought about during the time in the Dome and the arena and the Hyatt and in Baton Rouge and since then. I don't know. I think just – like I say, I was raised in a religious home, but I really got away from it for a long – got away from religious practice for a long time. I don't know. Post-Katrina, I've just had this feeling of how important it is. Like Friday night, we light candles now in our house, which we didn't do before. And of course, I belonged to the Chevra Kadisha before, and I've become very active with the men's club at Shir Chadash.

RH: What is the men's club up to these days?

LT: Not much. Well, we have services every Sunday morning. We sponsor the services, and we have a breakfast. Once a year, there's a dinner with entertainment.

RH: You mean regularly? On the Sunday morning service?

LT: That's the regular meeting time. And there's a baseball team, which – there's kind of a synagogue league in New Orleans. There's five or six – what did I say? Did I say baseball?

RH: Yes.

LT: Okay, yeah. Baseball. That they play against each other. They sponsor a golf tournament. They have a golf tournament once a year. Things like that.

RH: Well, what kind of – well, the practices you've just said is the lighting the candles on Friday, obviously. It's given you great comfort.

LT: Yeah. I lead services most Sunday mornings.

RH: Oh, you do.

LT: Yeah, sometimes on Saturday if they ask me.

RH: Are there any other ways that you've kind of reconnected more powerfully than before?

LT: We have mezuzah – a mezuzah on the door now.

RH: Didn't have it before?

LT: Didn't. No. We had one years ago. We've been in that house thirty-five years, but one year we had the house painted and never put the mezuzah back. I have to tell you – I can't get it out, but I have – I know I'm being recorded, but this is kind of silly – I have a little red string and a mezuzah that I wear. This was my brother's mezuzah. He died in 2003, but his wife gave me his mezuzah that I wear. But one time when I was in Israel, I went to – and let's see, this was – this must have been about five years ago – five or six years ago. Elijah's Cave in Haifa – I worked at a hospital in Haifa. I looked on the map, and I knew I could walk to this cave where they said, Elijah his – the prophet hid because I think it was Jezebel. One of the queens wanted to – wanted him killed, and he hid there. It's a holy place for both Muslims and Jews. And I went there, and I just sat. I felt so relaxed; I just sat. They had people coming and going. It's a cave. A man outside the cave had little red pieces of string. And you know there's a legend that a piece of red string is good luck. It's probably a totally worthless Jewish legend. I don't know how it got started. But he had the pieces of string, and he was a religious man. And obviously, he was looking to get some donations. And he asked me my wife's name and my son's name, and my other relatives names. And he said blessings for all of them, and he blessed the string, and he gave me the string. I gave him a donation, and I have worn that string all these years. I was thinking it would get worn off and torn and fall off, but it hasn't.

RH: So you had it on at the Dome, also.

LT: Oh, yes. Yeah.

RH: Interesting. With your brother's mezuzah.

LT: I don't know if you heard this story about Sammy Davis Jr., who was a convert to Judaism. He wore a mezuzah – I forgot who told this story. But he wore a mezuzah all the time after his conversion and – except one night, he forgot to wear it, and he was out driving, and he was in a bad car accident. He said it was because he stopped wearing

his mezuzah. So I don't know where the line ends. Here I am a man of science, I firmly believe in science. And I also have these superstitions. My wife calls them superstitions.

RH: You call them beliefs.

LT: No, I call them superstitions, but I guess they're beliefs in some way. They're beliefs you can have without doing any harm to anybody.

RH: Has your experience or your feelings about God changed any through this period? This two-year period now.

LT: Oh, I believe in God more than I did before.

RH: Really? Can you kind of [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

LT: Well, I'm maybe saying I always believed in God. I mean, I believe God got me through this. I didn't get through it myself. I think I had the willpower. My wife says I always have a very strong willpower. And maybe it's just another form of stubbornness, but I see things through, and maybe this was part of it, but I couldn't have done it without belief in God and thinking God was going to see me through this. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

RH: I think it does. Has the crisis that you went through and the events that you went through, has it changed any of your priorities? I mean, you were away from the city for seven months.

LT: No, I don't think it has changed any of my priorities. When mentioned [being] away from the city, they did offer me the job to stay in Baton Rouge. Of course, we had the apartment rented there, and I liked Baton Rouge a lot. My wife liked it a lot. Of course, she wanted to come to New Orleans a lot. I wanted to come back, but I knew it was not the same. I mean, I had been back to New Orleans a lot more than my wife was. She

didn't get back here until months later and saw how bad things were. But when our house was ready to move back into, she did say if living in New Orleans is too difficult, we'll move back to Baton Rouge. But so far, so good. But as you know, things here were not easy, and you probably know too, things were not easy. But get easier as days go by. But my priorities, no, I don't think, have changed. I want to work a couple more years and then retire.

RH: Is that earlier than you thought you would?

LT: No. It's later than I thought I would.

RH: Really?

LT: Really.

RH: And so why are you extending it?

LT: Well, for two reasons. I'm glad you asked. One is I really love my work. And the second is that I really can't afford to retire right now. But in two years, it'll be okay.

RH: Did you take a financial hit with the storm?

LT: We took a big financial hit, but fortunately, we had savings to cover it. Now, thank you, Governor Blanco. Thank you, federal government. Between our insurance and Road Home, I think we broke even, which is what Road Home was supposed to do – make up the difference between what you lost or what you had to restore and what was paid for by insurance. Thank God we had the savings we could use. Our house is pretty much back to normal. We settled with Road Home just about a month ago.

RH: So you have a fairly nice story to tell.

LT: Oh, definitely. I can't fault them at all. They lost our first application, but other than that, everything was fine.

RH: Okay. Did you take help from the Jewish community?

LT: Oh, yes.

RH: Was that hard?

LT: No. I didn't feel like I was being a beggar. We were in Baton Rouge and – now, I can't remember how I found out whether it was on television or whether it was just through the synagogue, but I found out that the Jewish Federation was giving help. And I called them up and did it on the phone, and I forgot – two or three days later, I went and picked up the checks. They had a check for me. They had a check for my wife. They had a check for my son. And came in very handy. I knew that I had contributed to the Jewish Federation for as long as I can remember, every year and their appeals, and I didn't feel bad asking for a little help. And since then, I've been able to contribute back in their annual appeals. And given a little while, someday I'll be able to give them back everything – the same amount they gave us. But no, they helped a lot. They were great.

RH: So, did you think, in general, the Jewish community kind of rose to the occasion?

LT: Oh, very much so, yes.

RH: Is there anything that particularly stands out to you about the Jewish community?

LT: Well, their outreach, like making us know that there was help available. They also told us if there was any other help we needed to ask for, thank God we didn't need any other help. I know now they're offering help to businesses, financial help to businesses that need to get started or get off the ground again. And thank God I don't need that. I'm not sure it was through the Jewish community or through the synagogue itself. I told you

they said that they had a therapist coming from San Francisco – a rabbi who was a trained clinical – either psychologist or social worker. Somehow we couldn't get our connections together, so unfortunately. We did talk on the phone, but we were supposed to meet and just couldn't get our schedules together. But by then, I was not a basket case anymore. So just talking on the phone for a few minutes was fine. I told him I didn't think I really needed his help as much as maybe in the first few days that they first told me he was coming.

RH: Well, tzedakah and tikkun olam are two theories or concepts – Jewish concepts – and I was wondering if you think differently of either of those after the storm. About how you would help another person if they were in need because of the vulnerability that you were in.

LT: I guess the basic answer is no, except I keep thinking, could I have done more? I know we're going to get out of New Orleans faster the next time. And we have plans to go to Baton Rouge – and my son has a townhouse in Baton Rouge which he's – he has a bed there which he says is our bed – really a sofa bed if we need it. But I will, I think, stock up on some medicines, stock up on supplies and take them with me and not have nothing to offer in the way of being a doctor. Because next time what I'm supposed to do is I'm not going to the Homeland Security Emergency Operating Center, although they do say, with all my years of experience, that's where I could help the most. I said, “No. I really want to be where those people are who had to evacuate.” So they will set up a special needs shelter in Baton Rouge. I will go there and be a doctor again like I have been – or I have been in the past here. But I will try to take more with me and not be totally reliant on what is supplied. Although the plans are that, of course, Baton Rouge maybe being better stocked next time. They won't have to rely on people bringing their own stuff – especially for prolonged periods. But I would try to do more. I guess that's part of tikkun olam, I don't know.

RH: I don't have too many more questions to ask you, you'll be glad to know. But I was curious [about] your own family. Of course, I mean, your first week after were very hard on you. Overall in the two years, do you think there's been a difference between how your wife or you have coped with all the change that the two years has brought?

LT: Definitely. Nothing surprises us anymore.

RH: Nothing surprises you – either of you.

LT: While we were away in Baton Rouge, we were fortunate because we could get a workman from Baton Rouge who could come to our house – and our back door disappeared. So they could get in and out of the house without us having to be there. And, of course, the upstairs was locked off – not that we didn't trust them. But we didn't know all of the workmen that they might bring along with them. And downstairs, there was nothing to loot or steal. So while we were away and they were fixing things, they said that the water main in the street on our corner broke, and we had Old Faithful in front of our house for a couple days. I said, “Oh my God, you think the house flooded again?” They said, “No. The flow of the water was that it went the other way. It didn't go towards your house; it went the other way.” But there was Old Faithful spouting in front of our house for two days. I'm glad I didn't see it. Just stuff like that. Well, we took it all in stride.

RH: So, did you guys divide up decisions along – any particular kind of lines, or did you work together for most decisions? Like did she take over the house building, did you take over the house repair?

LT: No, I paid for it. My wife made the decisions.

RH: She made the decisions.

LT: Oh, yes. Right. We didn't do things much differently, though, then it was before. I'm trying to think. She did change some things in the bathroom down there. I'm trying to think what else. The layout of the rooms is a little different because some of the walls were not weight-bearing walls, so it could be configured a little differently. She changed some of that. We had to get new flooring, so she chose the tile and the color and all that kind of stuff. No, that was up to her. I just paid for it. But our money is half and half, right?

RH: Yeah, right. It's a community property state.

LT: It's a community property state.

RH: And now that you're back in your home and you so poignantly told me that you know when you saw your wife, your son, your dogs, you had a place to stay – that was home. What does home mean to you now?

LT: Good question. Home means safe haven. I even felt that way in our apartment in Baton Rouge, where were there really just for a relatively short time. You walk in the door, or you just pull in the driveway, and even though things keep going wrong, you can't live in a place without things going wrong. You feel that's your place, your spot on earth. That's what home means to me. Of course, your loved ones are there. I miss my son. I mean, he hasn't lived at home – well, he lived at home for a while when Katrina came – just before Katrina. But of course, he didn't live at home when he was at college. He didn't live at home when he was at graduate school. He did go to Houston for about three months from Baton Rouge, where he was offered another job, and he tried it for three months. It didn't work out to his satisfaction. He came back to Baton Rouge [and] got his old job back. But I miss him not being around. But I'm sure he feels he's old enough to be on his own. He really wants to be independent. So we talk, and we see each other once in a while, but I miss him not being home.

RH: Well, that must have been kind of special too. You lived with him for seven months, is that right?

LT: Yes. Yeah. In the same apartment, right?

RH: Yeah, right. But you miss him being around in New Orleans.

LT: Right.

RH: Yeah. If there was something – one thing you could be grateful for, what is it that you're grateful for?

LT: Well, that we're alive and healthy. My family.

RH: Is there anything that you kind of took for granted before that you'll never take for granted again?

LT: Yeah, life. My own life. I mean, being a doctor, I've seen plenty of people suffer and die of all ages. I guess part of the medical training is that you are kind of immunized against that. You don't personalize it. You have to be faced with it yourself to know. And that's probably – I'm thinking it's true of most doctors. I've never had a public discussion about it. But I think it was brought home to me. So I don't want to take that for granted. It's precious.

RH: Are there any communities that you've turned to resettle that have been most helpful to you? There could be more than one.

LT: I don't know what you mean by communities.

RH: Well, networks, friends, institutions.

LT: The same as before Katrina. And they're not all back up and running. Some are up and not running. And some better than others. But the things I mentioned before –

certainly, the synagogue life, the medical community, getting together with friends.

RH: Did some of your friends leave the city permanently?

LT: No.

RH: That's something.

LT: Right. It is something. Of course, everyone had to get out temporarily. But all of our close friends are here – are back.

RH: Shir Chadash has gotten smaller.

LT: Yes. A lot of the membership left.

RH: Well, what is that like?

LT: Disappointing.

RH: Disappointing.

LT: But of course, everyone has their own circumstances. I don't know what they lost or what made them leave.

RH: Does it feel different there now?

LT: You miss the people that are gone that were very active. And, of course, there's a – the rabbi had only come a month before Katrina. And he is very enthusiastic about – and optimistic about–the future of the synagogue. So that's kind of contagious to the people.

RH: Is it contagious to you?

LT: In a way, yes.

RH: You sound a little more cautious.

LT: I'm a little more cautious because when we were at Chevra Tillim, one of the reasons it felt it had to get together with another congregation was because most of the members and active people were old. There were no children, no little children, no young couples. I've just noticed that at Shir Chadash that a lot of the young people are gone. A lot of young couples are gone and are leaving. It's become an older congregation, and it's going to be faced with the same kind of thing. Of course, being old myself, I think that's not so bad. The catering to the old people. They need to be thought about too. But maybe it's a Jewish thing. You think about, well, what's going to be twenty-five, fifty years from now? I don't know. But that's just one thing that's of concern. And it may be of concern to all the congregations because so many young – the whole city – so many young people have been leaving.

RH: How many kids are back? Do you know since you do those immunizations?

LT: In the city? No, I don't know. I don't know the head count.

RH: I don't know if there's too much left to ask you. I feel like I've covered a lot of things. Now at the recovery, what's something that makes you the happiest?

LT: The happiest? Or just happy.

RH: Just happy.

LT: Having a great office.

RH: With a great view, huh?

LT: With a great view, yeah. We have great communications. Like I say, I'm in headquarters, and we have our fingers all over the state, and obviously, I can't travel a whole lot and be everywhere at once, but the communications are up and great.

Telephone, fax, e-mails, so I'm thankful that my work is very satisfying and that, at least in this area, it is progressing well. In the rest of the state it's progressing well. I'm thrilled that our home is livable and pretty much back to normal. I mean, we have problems like the grass grows fast, and is it going to get cut this week? Things like that that are important sometimes but trivial compared to other matters in life.

RH: A normalcy.

LT: A more normalcy. Right. My wife loves going out to eat. And there's lots of restaurants open. That makes me happy because it makes her happy. Just having a kind of normal life again. I'm taking guitar lessons which I've always wanted to do.

RH: Well, you see, this was what I end with, is what are your – are you heading in new directions?

LT: Yes.

RH: Who are you taking guitar lessons from?

LT: Well, the man's name is Steve Kennedy. He's started with the lessons offered at the Jewish Community Center. But now he's going privately at his house rather than at the JCC. In fact, we just finished the lessons at the JCC. I've been getting lessons once a week. But now – my last lesson was Tuesday at the JCC, and now he's going to do it privately at his house.

RH: How fun.

LT: So, yeah, classical guitar. I started that in November.

RH: Why did you decide to do that?

LT: Guitar?

RH: Yes.

LT: Like I told him, the ’60s passed me by. I said I was too busy studying and going to medical school, and then medical training and all that, and then into the Army. I said the ’60s passed me by, and I always loved hearing guitar music, and we started out on just a regular acoustic, what you'd call a popular guitar with metal strings, which is very hard on your fingers. But also easy to learn to play if you're only going to play things like folk songs or –

RH: You got to strum.

LT: Strum, right.

RH: Then you get to those nylon strings.

LT: Oh, you know all about that, yeah. So then, after a few months, he suggested I switch to classical, so I did. And he loves my classical guitar, which I bought just a few blocks from here at the Old Vintage Guitar Place I think it's called. But it's a new guitar. Made in Spain. And he loves it, and I love it. And it's fun to learn how to play.

RH: Well, that's marvelous.

LT: He's a good teacher. And I don't have a lot of time to practice, but he puts up with that.

RH: Is there anything you'd like to say upon closing here?

LT: No, but thank – except thank you for thinking that I was worthy enough to interview. I'm sure there's thousands of others like me – I know there are – that are even better deserving than I am, who may not get a chance to tell their story.

RH: I'm sure you stand in for a lot of people, though.

LT: Well, I hope so. We have great hopes for New Orleans that it's not a total loss. We want it to come back. It's much smaller than it used to be, but we're optimistic. My son misses New Orleans, but I will never – you will never be able to guess the reason why.

RH: Okay. Why?

LT: My son loves tropical fish tanks. He loves to raise tropical fish and plants. And he says he does not like Baton Rouge because it does not have a decent pet shop. New Orleans has decent pet shops. So he does his trading here with different pet shops because they trade back and forth. He'll raise some fish and trade them, and he'll raise some plants and trade them with the various pet shops. None of this makes him money, of course. It's strictly a hobby. But he really likes it. He's got a 225-gallon fish tank which he drove all the way to Tennessee to get and haul back.

RH: Well, we'll have to let the tourist and convention business know that there's another draw –

LT: The pet shops. Oh, yes.

RH: – for New Orleans. Maybe we'll let the younger JCC people know, too, who are trying to recruit.

LT: So that's his reason for missing New Orleans. Other than that, he likes Baton Rouge. He's happy there and his work, and he's made friends. And of course his co-workers.

RH: Is there something you'd like to tell the country about New Orleans that you think they ought to know about us? Especially when people say, why are they building that back [inaudible]?

LT: I have a T-shirt at home that says it all. I went to a concert at the Trinity Episcopal Church, and they have their concerts every Sunday, which are free if people didn't know that. And a group from – now I can't remember where – I think it was Minnesota. A choir of about fifty people came, and they were wonderful. They gave a concert as one of these Sunday afternoon concerts. And they sold T-shirts. And the back of the T-shirt says – and it was for New Orleans. And the money that went to buying t-shirts, CDs, whatever they had to sell went to charities here in New Orleans. And the back of the T-shirt said, “Because it's here, we must come back.” New Orleans is here, we must come back, and we must make it bigger and better than it is now and like it used to be. If anyone from outside New Orleans ever sees this, please come visit – come here to live. There's lots of opportunity. You make your own opportunities many times.

RH: That's always been the case, hasn't it here in New Orleans?

LT: God helps those who help themselves. That's part of tikkun olam too.

RH: Okay. Thank you very much.

LT: Oh my God. Thank you.

RH: This has been delightful.

LT: I hope I didn't bore you to death.

RH: What an incredible way to get to know people. I feel like I'm the luckiest person on earth.

[END OF INTERVIEW]