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THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: HANK FORREST

INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA

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AS: What is your background in Hoboken? How long have you lived here? Where do you live, approximately? Who do you live with, and what is your profession?

HF: My wife and I moved to Hoboken in the summer of '87. We spent our first six years on Madison Street -- Third and Madison -- which was still a pretty dicey area when we first moved in. Six years later, we moved here, on Jefferson Street, only a few blocks away but it's a different ward and a different world, here on Jefferson.

I am an architectural lighting designer. I work in the city. So Hoboken has always been -- we fit the pattern of being a bedroom community. We don't have kids. I think that's it.

AS: When did you first hear the words
"Hurricane Sandy?"

HF: I believe it was weeks before. It was well before the event. I guess at that time of year it seems that weather has started to dominate the news, in a way that it hadn't a few years ago. And I guess maybe with Irene, the year before, it put hurricanes on our collective map. So it seemed like, I guess, there were always hurricanes going on in the news; finally, there was this one, that everyone was talking about, that was going to actually hit us and impact us. So a few weeks.

AS: Based on that, what did you expect
Hurricane Sandy to be?

HF: I automatically went back to Irene. I mean, Irene -- I couldn't help but keep thinking of Irene. Irene was the first hurricane, I think, since -- I remember I had a hurricane my first day of first grade. It was more the way everybody was acting about it -- but that was kind of my context for hurricanes, until Irene came. With Irene, there was a lot of prep, a lot of thought about it, then it kind of blew through. So when Sandy started to come in, I

just automatically started to think of Irene, and like, "Okay. This is something to take seriously," but I didn't take it *that* seriously, because Irene -- we did not lose power in Irene, as opposed to Sandy; the streets got flooded in Sandy, and in Irene they didn't. So my whole context was really driven by us being spared, I think, during Irene, and not having it prove to be as bad as everybody was predicting. Of course, with Sandy -- what Sandy brought with it, which I didn't think about at all, was storm surge. In the aftermath, I had no idea what storm surge was. I really didn't think about that at all. I just thought of the Hudson rising, with all the water coming down from above, and the water levels would rise. But with Irene, Jefferson Street was completely dry. The only places that flooded, in my context, seemed to be the places that often flooded in bad rainstorms, at the south end of town, and the far west part of town. Things like that. But Sandy turned out to be something completely different.

AS: How did you prepare for the storm?

HF: Again, for Irene, I had these large, 10-12"-wide scaffolding planks that are really heavy and long. I stood them on their ends, and created kind of a damn in

front of my garage door. We have a wide, 14'-wide garage door in the front, and a front door. So, essentially, I set up these planks, I covered them in tarps, and I weighed them down with concrete blocks, for Irene, thinking that the garage door did not come tight to the ground, and would keep any water from trickling in. It turns out, I didn't need to do anything. None of that was necessary.

So, in this storm, I just decided not to do that. So, effectively, I think my honest answer is -- other than we did fill up our bathtubs with water; we filled up our sinks with water; we had water on hand -- but that was probably the limit to what we did for Sandy. We didn't buy extra food. We didn't try to create any sort of dams or water protection around the doors of our building. That was it.

AS: What were you doing as the storm hit?
And what did you do after losing power?

HF: What were we doing when the storm hit?
Monday morning -- we had already decided we were going to ride it out and not leave town. We rode out Irene, even though, again, in Irene, there was a terrific amount of outreach by the city -- city volunteers going around town.

Of course, Irene was in August, and on the weekend, and the storm was going to hit that night, just like with Sandy. But in Irene, by that afternoon, it was kind of ominous. There was no real rain, but the city had turned into a ghost town. All the cars had been cleared off the streets. There was no one around. For Sandy, it was already windy, and I believe it was somewhat rainy but not really hard. But it was getting windy. We walked down to the waterfront at 9:00 that morning, to just go for a walk, figuring we were going to be stuck inside that evening, for a while, so we'd just go for a walk. We went down to the waterfront and we saw that there was -- Lackawanna Plaza was already filled up with water, and there were cops standing between Lackawanna Plaza and Pier A. That was roughly where the water was starting to lap up onto the land. They were more or less looking at each other, and wondering, "Well, all right, maybe -- what will we do?" There was that verbal, like, "Should we stop people from walking past a certain point?"

We went up to Pier A. We could see that the water level at Pier A was pretty high. But, basically, we just went for a walk around town, and then just came back. Funny. With Irene, in the hours before the storm, there were fire trucks driving around, making announcements:

"Last chance to get out of town." What started as ground-floor apartments should be evacuated. They started announcing that first-floor apartments should be evacuated. There was a real kind of fear, I thought, instilled -- not inappropriately -- but they were scaring people into leaving town.

Which turned out to be a good thing, but in Sandy there was nothing. There was nobody making these announcements. The streets were filled with cars, and it was clear that it didn't seem like, really, almost anybody had left town. Everybody was still here. So there wasn't so much of that ominous feeling as there was for Irene. So I think all of us -- I sensed -- felt like, "Well, all right. We've been through this before." With Irene, I was always thinking that the worst thing that would happen was that we would lose power, and would be stuck in the house, stuck in some hot house without air-conditioning, without TV or lights. But, again, we just carried on. We just figured, "All right. We're just going to have to wait this out."

So that's it. We really didn't do anything out of the ordinary.

AS: Did you home suffer any damage?

HF: No. Not really. Our back yard was filled with water and it came right up to -- we have a deck, and some steps from the deck up into the house. That was all covered in water. But by the time the water drained out -- realistically, and even this spring -- we lost very few plants in the back yard. That's the level. The back yard was fine, other than it needed to be cleaned. And our garage, we lost -- I didn't really have anything of value stored in the garage, on the ground. We lost some things you store in the garage, but in terms of the house itself, no. It was just really just cleaning things. I think we were really fortunate in terms of actual, structural damage. This house is a concrete block house. We have no basement. The house was built in '84. So we were fortunate in that regard. It was really just a clean-up act, afterwards.

AS: Were you able to get out onto the street and survey the scene?

HF: No. We lost power at 9:30 Monday night. We were watching TV and the power went out, and I said to my wife, "Okay. Let's go to sleep. There's nothing else we can do." But it was pretty loud outside, in terms of the

wind. There wasn't that much rain, but the wind was still making things pretty loud. My wife couldn't sleep, so she just started pacing around the house, until finally I heard her yell, from downstairs, something like, "Oh, no!" So I knew she was seeing water in the garage. The water was coming into the garage.

So at that point, I just stood up on my bed and looked out. There's an alley next to us, so I looked out the alley and I could see Jefferson Street, looking down the alley, and I could see the water covering the sidewalk, and start to come into the alley. I guess between 10:00 and 10:30 it seemed like the water in the garage went from three to six inches, up to a foot and a half or two feet. The water rose very quickly, in maybe a half-hour period. So when we stood at the door of our garage, looking out into the dark garage, with the water out there, we would hear noises outside, and water kind of splashing up against the garage door. We had no idea what was going on outside, but we were too scared to open the doors and see what was going on. I think the next day we realized what it was; it was vehicles driving down the street, throwing waves of water up against the house.

When we got up the next day, the water level in the garage had gone down to about six inches, something

like that. So that's the garage, and like the front vestibule down our stairs. At that point, we opened up our front door, just to look out, and we could see that there was just water from our bottom step, right across the street, to the house across the street. So we put on the tallest boots we had -- and we could walk in front of the house, but as soon as we got down toward the sidewalk and out into the street, clearly the water was still up over our knees, and our boots weren't going to be tall enough, so we were basically trapped in the house.

So we went up to the second floor. The front of our house has a tenant's apartment in the front. He had left, and stayed in the city that night, so we just kind of went into his apartment to look out his window, from the second floor. From there, we could look up and down Jefferson Street, and see that the whole thing was a lake. Cars were all still parked. It looked like nobody had left, and we would see other people looking out their windows. We were all more or less trapped. There were a few people that you'd see their legs and pants wrapped in garbage bags, and they were kind of wandering around. But at that point, also, we would see, occasionally there would be fire trucks that would come down the street, city pickup trucks. There was the occasional car -- SUV -- that would come storming

down the street and throwing water, but for the most part it seemed like it was city vehicles. A couple of times I yelled out to them, saying "What's going on?" One city worker yells back to me, "We don't know. Nobody tells us anything." A fire truck came storming down. They were just driving down. They weren't making any announcements or anything. The fire truck -- I yelled out at them, "What's going on? What's happening?" And they just said, "Talk to your mayor. Nobody tells us anything." Three times, I yelled out to the firemen and twice to the city workers. All of them had what seemed to be an almost kind of political response about what seemed to be about the city and the mayor not communicating, and they were given no direction. All of a sudden, I started to get really antsy; that here we were, trapped in the house, and there had been no warnings or anything leading up to this. I just felt the city had really collapsed badly; that the city government had collapsed badly, and just abandoned the citizens. Obviously, they couldn't have prevented the storm. They couldn't have done anything about the water that was coming into my house. But at least in terms of communication, and giving us some sense of not being -- because here we were, isolated in our house; not knowing what was going on with the power; when were we going to get power back? Was the

whole town like this? Was this something that was just in our part of town? We were given nothing, because we had no access to news or anything. We were completely abandoned. So it was disheartening.

If I ramble on and don't answer your question, you're going to come back and ask me again, right?

AS: Do you feel as though your neighbors were prepared? And how do you think they handled the storm?

HF: I did not think -- there were a number of positive things about the storm. Among those positives were the fact that we got to know, or got familiar with many more of our neighbors than we normally are, even though we've been on this block for almost twenty years. There's been a fair amount of turnover on the block in the last five or ten years, so we don't actually know a lot of the people on the block. But I think for all the people that we do know, and all the people we met and got acquainted with, I got a sense that we were all in the same boat (no pun intended), all kind of blindsided. Most of them had basements there were completely flooded.

But they were great. I'll tell you, as freaked out as we all were in our various ways, I thought that all the people we met, and all the people we met through those people on the block, were very community minded and were very willing to help out and share. I think, like us, they felt like any support or communication from the city completely collapsed, and we were on our own. Any help we were going to get was only from each other, and that seemed to be something that kind of brought us together, in that regard.

So we didn't have any negative experiences whatsoever, with any of the people we came across in our block. And even as we finally start to wander around town on Wednesday, everybody was kind of pulled-together at that point.

AS: How would you rate the city's preparation for Hurricane Sandy, versus it's preparation for Hurricane Irene?

HF: Well, Sandy, as I've already stated -- I would be pretty comfortable giving them a zero on a one to ten scale, ten being the best, and one being nothing. I don't think we got -- if this were a third-world country, I

don't think we would have gotten any better or worse support than we got, since we got no support whatsoever. Irene, I would actually give the city good marks. As I said, Irene -- the fire department -- there was more of a sense that the various municipal departments -- not just the city hall department, but the fire department, the police department -- you had a sense that there was actually some coordination, and that they were talking to each other, and that they collectively had some sort of plan -- the main plan being to just get people out of town as much as possible, and get all the cars off the streets. After Irene proved to be not as bad as we were told it could be, some people felt like, "Well, there they were. It was overblown," and this and that. I'll tell you, the day or two after Irene, with having to move trees, and having to deal with downed wires, and the cleanup, etc., it was great that the city had done what it did, and got all those cars off the street and the people out of town. Granted it was a weekend in the summer, so I think people were in a better place to get out of town than they were for a Monday in the fall, right in the middle of the work -- Monday night, etc.

Irene -- I don't know -- maybe a seven or eight in terms of a one-to-ten basis. I thought they did

good. I was glad that they went a little overboard, and they were a little more cautious, and they did what they did. It still confuses me, to this day, why there was none of that for Sandy. The question I have is, what did the city actually know before Sandy? Were they aware? Did they understand storm surge better than I did? Recently there was an article -- they were talking about Stevens -- and there was a guy at Stevens who was quoted as saying something like, "Yep, we knew there was going to be eleven feet of water, and there was eleven feet of water." Now I don't know what eleven feet of water means, but it sounds like we have this maritime -- we have a highly-regarded and accomplished maritime program at Stevens, people who know about this stuff, with equipment, wave pools, and things like that, that they know about water movement, and oceans, and tidal movements, and things like that. So it's hard for me to imagine that the city really didn't know more than I did, just listening to press reports, etc.

That was one of the interesting things about Irene. I realized, since we had power the whole time -- we could watch the news, etc. -- with Irene it became clear that you were not going to get any useful information on the TV, because the TV seemed to be aimed toward a regional audience. So they had to kind of report the worst-case

scenario, thinking that whoever's in that area is going to be watching TV, and they're going to want to know about that. So for us, who were not getting hit with the center part of the storm, it was kind of useless information. I wasn't experiencing what, maybe, the towns along the Passaic River were experiencing, etc. The best information, then, was just going online. Because at least online, if it started to target Hoboken, if it started to target smaller areas, much, much better than you could on the news on TV.

Of course, with Sandy, I had no access to any of that, but I would have thought that the city did.

AS: How do you think the city handled the aftermath of the storm, in the days after the storm?

HF: Poorly. My zero on the one-to-ten rating for how they prepared for the storm -- it doesn't get much better for the days after the storm. On Tuesday, as I said, we were trapped in the house. We didn't go anywhere on Tuesday. I guess by Tuesday night the water had gone down on the sidewalks on Jefferson Street. The street was still flooded; the intersections were still very flooded. But it was dark out, so we didn't go anywhere. Wednesday, when we got up -- the first thing I did Wednesday morning was to go

down to City Hall, figuring out that City Hall must know what's going on, and I could get some information.

So I went down there. The building was essentially empty. There was the community room on the first floor, off of Newark. I walked in there, and that seemed to be -- had the notion of mission control. I went in there and I found Joel Mestre, who, I believe, was the head of emergency management. Maybe I'm wrong. I went to the website today, and I see he's now the deputy coordinator of emergency management, so I don't know if that was his role then. But I knew he was pretty high up, and he would be somebody who, at least job-title-wise, should know more than me, and know what's going on.

Basically, he was just running around with his head cut off, in there. And when I started to ask him, "What's going on? How come we haven't heard anything from the city?" he just responded, "Well, you know, I'm really tired, too. My house was flooded. I haven't slept." It was all about him. I didn't get any information from him that wasn't about him. There was no, "You might want to try so and so," or something. There was nothing.

So I left there, realizing that City Hall -- I went through the building, and there was nobody around. So at that point, we proceeded to just walk the city. I

started with going to the three PSE&G substations. I figured, "Okay, that's my main thing right now, as I've got no power." So I went up to the Second Street substation, up near the projects, and the substation itself was dry, but it was an island in the middle of a lake. As soon as you got to the fence around it, it was all water. And it was quiet. There was nobody there. There was no activity whatsoever. Then we walked up to Tenth Street, up to the Shop Rite. The substation was there. There, the streets around it were dry, the substation was all dry, and there was a pickup truck parked outside the fence, and there was a guy in there, walking around. So I yelled in to him. He was PSE&G guy, so I asked him, "What do you think? What kind of state is this in?" And he said, "Well, I'm the first one to have been in here to look at any of these. Actually, it's much better than I thought. He reported that there were some transformers blown, etc. I said, "Do you have any idea when we might get power?" He said he thought it might be in two or three days. This was Wednesday -- meaning that Friday or Saturday -- that that substation was up. So I said, "I live on Fifth and Jefferson. Am I powered off this substation?" He said, "It's hard to say. It's not as easy --" He didn't know. So I asked him about the other substations, and he says, "Well, the Second Street and

Tenth Street only feed Hoboken." He hadn't been up to Second Street. He was going up there next. He asked, "So what's it like up there?" so I told him what I saw, in terms of how to access it, and the water around it. He said there was another substation up on Fifteenth Street, on the north end of town, where the Second and Tenth Street substations were fed off Jersey City from another station that was completely blown and not operable; but one uptown was either solely or jointly fed by a station up in Bergen County, that was still working. So that's why some people in town had power -- because they were being fed off that substation.

At that point we had also heard that there were places uptown that had power. We seldom went up to City Hall, to City Hall/Washington Street. Washington Street was dry. It looked like a bunch of the streets uptown were dry. But it was kind of hard to say where the water stopped as we walked east.

Then we walked up to the Fifteenth-Street substation. That looked dry. Then we did a big loop, up Fifteenth Street, and then came back down, I believe maybe Washington/Bloomfield garden, and that's when we began to see that people had put power strips outside. You were starting to see some people -- there weren't that many out

at that point, but you started to see some people sitting there, powering their phones, etc. It seemed like maybe two or three blocks where there were maybe two or three people. It hadn't yet mushroomed into what it became on Thursday and Friday where it seemed like, not every house, but maybe one out of three houses had power cords running outside, and people started to put benches out. People started to put food and drinks out. It almost looked like a competition from house to house, of who could be the better host. I didn't get a sense, talking to any of those people, that they really had any idea of what was going on, on the west side of town. It almost felt like they were guilty for not having been flooded or lost power; their biggest conveniences seemed to be that they couldn't get to work, and that other people they were communicating with were out of communication. And so forth.

But people were very nice, and it was almost, not quite a party, but it was a very positive, fun atmosphere up there. But then coming back -- that was Wednesday. So Thursday, I got up first thing in the morning, again, and I went back down to City Hall. This time I knew -- I stuck my head in the ground-floor office. The ground-floor office, at that point, now, seemed to have become, on Thursday morning, kind of a volunteer

headquarters, where it seemed to be they were signing up -- people whom I didn't recognize as being city workers or anything like that, who seemed to be organizing the kind of volunteer situation there.

So at that point, I went upstairs to the mayor's office. First, I started to go upstairs just to see who was there. The City Clerk's office was closed. I went upstairs. The Environmental Services, Human Services -- those doors were all shut. I saw the mayor's door was open, so I just walked in. I walked through the mayor's reception room, into the mayor's kind of meeting room there, and I saw that there were, I think, maybe three people. One of them, a guy there, eventually asked, "What can I do for you?" I introduced myself, and said, "I'm just looking for information. Who are you?" He introduced himself as Juan Melli, the mayor's communications person. He looked like he hadn't slept in a long time. I could see there was a power strip by the window, with power cords going out the window, I guess to generators down below. He's sitting there, and Michael Russo -- my councilman -- is sitting around the table with his hands folded behind his head, and he's like slouched in the chair, looking very relaxed, with his legs folded. I'm just looking at the two of them, saying, "So when is the city going to communicate outside? When are we

going to learn what's going on?" I wasn't so angry yet, with him. I was just asking those things. He said, "Well, the city's website has information." I said, "How am I supposed to access --? Can you access the city website?" And I'm pointing to the power strip on the window. He said, "I know a lot of people don't have power." Meanwhile, I'm saying to him, "Well, when is the city finally going to outreach and do something?" I see Michael Russo is motioning to Juan Melli, and pointing at me, in a manner of, "You see! This is what I've been telling you. Here. Listen to him. He's telling you the same thing." That was the implication of Russo's thing.

So I just said, "Well, there's been absolutely no presence. The city has had zero presence on the streets -- at least where I am -- other than a fire truck would go by, the pickup trucks would go by." There was even a city worker in a backhoe, driving down the street with what looked like their cousin or somebody -- clearly not a city worker -- in the scoop of the backhoe, with a video camera, shooting videos. The only people I saw were out shooting videos; they didn't seem to be working, or doing anything. I said, "Where is everybody?" And Russo is saying to Juan Melli, "Yeah. You see?"

So I turned to Russo, and I said, "Well, Michael, in all fairness, where are you? How come I don't see you back in our ward? How come I'm seeing you sitting here, with your arms crossed? Where are you? Where's the City Council? Where's anybody? Where are the directors? I see volunteers being organized downstairs, but where are the people we're paying, whose job it is kind of do something? They're nowhere."

He said, "Well, it's been tough. We've been trying to organize this." I said, "Well, what's going on with the power?" He says, "Well, PSE&G is working on that. They said it could be a week to ten days." This is eight hours, or twelve hours, after I saw a PSE&G guy, and he's telling me two to three days. And he's up at the substation. So I said, "Who's telling you that? Is that from guys who are here, working on the substations? Or is that some PSE&G default response from their office in Newark, or whatever." He said, "Well, this is what PSE&G is telling me."

So it seemed clear to me that while he might have been doing his best, the only information he had was that he hadn't left this room, and he was just being told this by whomever, from some other office, who hadn't left their room, who was being told -- it was all like fourth-

hand. So I had no confidence whatsoever that he had any better sources for information than I did, by simply walking around town and just talking to people.

So at that point, I think I ended up realizing that I wasn't going to learn anything from these guys. They didn't know anything. So I said, "All right. Well, thanks for that." I walk out, and Russo kind of walks out with me, and Russo kind of walks me out of the building and down the stairs -- basically, like, "If there's anything I can do --" Thanks, but what are you going to do.

So then, at that point, as we're heading down the stairs at City Hall, I realize, "Well, I'm probably going to learn more up in the mayor's office than I am walking around with Michael Russo, so I just excused myself from him. He leaves, and I go back up to the mayor's office. I go back up to the mayor's office, and I see, as I'm standing there, they're in the middle of talking about something -- and I'm just standing there -- a woman walks in and introduces herself to Juan and some other people. She says, "Hi. I'm from Reuters. Would you give me an interview on what's going on?" He said, "Sure," so she sits down. And I'm standing there. I'm like invisible at this point.

So she starts to ask him, "Well, how does the city think they're doing?" She starts asking very broad, very roundabout questions that don't really seem to relate to what's going on outside. And Juan is answering the questions, and doing what he can. Finally, at the end of her little thing, she says, "Well, all right. Is there anything else I should know, or you want to tell me?" No. So she leaves. At this point I see -- another one of the council people now is there. I forget her name. I see they're talking about something. They're now talking about how they can get "flip charts," or how they can put information out. I'm listening. "Where where are we going to get Magic Markers?" "Well, maybe So-and-So has Magic Markers." What their ideas was, they were going to get some sort of markers, and they were going to write information on storefront windows. But they were like, "Well, we have to make sure -- are they washable? We can't damage the storefront windows." And one says, "Well, what if we used flip-chart paper?" "Well, we don't know where to get that," and so forth.

So finally I interrupt. I said, "Are you for real? Is that your idea of how to get information out? To write on storefronts? They said, "Well, we're trying to come up with some way." I said, "Why don't you just

photocopy off a lot of a whole lot of paper. They said, "Because we're out of power. The photocopiers don't work." I said, "Well, what about Weehawken? They have power. Or what about The Office, or places on Washington Street. You can't put a generator into The Office, and use somebody else's copy machine?" And I'm thinking, what's with these guys? This is like a school project or something, that they're talking about. "You should be banging out 1-2,000 copies of something, and just distribute them around town. There are a few stores that are open. They're in the dark, but they're selling food or something. I would start with those places. But also, just around town. Start getting information out. Where's the City Council? Has anybody talked to the City Council?" They said no. They said, "Well, assume they're busy in their wards, and so forth." I said, "Well, why isn't there a meeting? Why isn't the mayor -- ? Where are the directors?" "Well, they're out doing stuff out there. I said, "There's no presence of any of these people. How come they're not making some sort of communication?"

So finally -- I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This was the state of response. I said, with PSE&G -- they said, "Well, we were told a week to ten days." I said, "Well, I just saw a guy --" They said, "They're

working on it." I said, "Well, I just went to the substations yesterday, and I went again this morning. There's nobody out there. I saw a guy there yesterday. He told me he thought it was going to be two to three days. And he said he was the first one to visit the Tenth Street, and no one, yet, had been to the Second Street. Why are these guys with the backhoe joyriding around town with their guy with the video camera? How come they're not using the backhoe to get some PSE&G guy into the substation, so he can start -- I mean, if PSE&G isn't going up there because they can't get through the water, how come you guys aren't helping them get access to the substation. Like, come on! There's got to be some more to this.

So it wasn't until Friday -- this was Thursday that I'm witnessing this in City Hall. Finally, Friday -- I don't remember if it was 11:00 or if it was 2:00 on Friday, the mayor had her first press conference outside City Hall. I went to that, thinking, "Okay, maybe we'll finally heat that." The mayor was there. At least I recognized two council people -- David Mello and Ravi were there. Maybe they were there and I missed them -- I had photos. I was looking at the photos. I don't see any of the council people; I don't recognize any of the department heads there. The mayor was the only one who spoke through

the press conference. At one point, she took questions. The mayor spoke, thanking the volunteers. And I'm thinking, "This isn't a community citizen-activist situation here. Why is it only the mayor and some citizen-volunteers who are doing the work here? How come, when she has a press conference, she doesn't have the chief of police, and the fire chief, and the department heads with her, like you'd see for Bloomberg." In Bloomberg's press conferences he would hand off to Kelly; Kelly would talk about something. He would hand off to people, who would all give their little spiel on what's going on in what they are. If you're going to tell me that the Department of Environmental Services is off, busy, somewhere -- which I'm sure he might have been -- he wasn't available to come to a citywide press conference, with the press there and everybody, to talk about, I would think -- he wouldn't be closer to than the mayor? It was almost like the mayor had no team. I didn't know if that was just because the mayor felt like she was the head of the team and she needed to do it. Either she wasn't allowing anybody else to come forward and say what she knew, or that she had to somehow be the one in charge -- the mayor is the main manager. She has these department heads that should be the specialists in their respective fields.

So I just thought the whole thing was silly. I had people, friends and relatives from out of town, talking about the mayor -- that they'd be seeing the mayor all over the news. There would be these shots of Hoboken all over the news. How come we weren't hearing a quarter as much as the rest of the country was hearing. It just felt like a political opportunity, for the mayor to go on the national press -- that everybody learned from Giuliani, in 2001, with 9/11, that the mayor, or the governor, or whatever -- they're role in a calamity is to make sure you get lots of press coverage, and that you put out the right message to the media, and then the press will show that that person did their job, and held the people together, etc.

Even when I wrote a letter to the reporter, complaining about the job the city did, there was a lot of backlash of people saying, "Oh, this is politically driven. Why are you downplaying the mayor? You just have it out for --" It became a political thing. Yes, my political feelings toward politicians notwithstanding, I was responding to what I saw and what I actually heard. This was not -- I didn't feel I was fabricating any of this. And as soon as I mentioned anybody on the block, or anybody else that I would see in town, I wouldn't even -- I'd volunteer to

them, I'd say, "So, tell me, how do you think the city is doing? What do you think of what's going on?" And each one of them, every single one, would say, "Well, we haven't seen anything." It was all very polite but negative. And then when I said to them, "Well, I agree. I haven't seen the city do anything." And then I would hear people say, "Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that. I've been really disappointed, not knowing what happened."

So it's almost like everybody was very much caught up in what was going on. We were, I guess, lucky, in a sense, that we didn't have water flooding into our apartment; that we didn't have hardcore issues to deal with. It seemed very much, on this whole part of town, etc., that nobody felt they had any support from the city: warnings beforehand, or communications afterwards. It wasn't until like Friday or Saturday -- it all seemed to begin on Friday. And Friday -- at that point the water had gone down. Even in the projects, the water had gone down at that point. The water had gone down, and everybody was full-scale -- I work in Lower Manhattan, and there was no power there, so I didn't have to go back to work. I couldn't go back to work until Monday. It was just full-scale cleanup at that point. Finally, on Friday, more so Saturday and Sunday, you start to see the PSE&G tent, the

power with all the laptops and the power setup near the parking lot on *Observer*. You saw the big gas truck on *Observer*, giving cans of gas out. There was free food being given out in Church Square Park. There was all of this, very, kind of generous, like all these freebies.

A friend of mine came down from Jersey City on Saturday, and we walked around with him. He was completely blown away by the level of just free water being given out, and power bars, and sandwiches, all the food being -- free stuff being given out all around town. He's up in Union City now. He said, "In Union City you're not seeing anything like that." They weren't flooded, but they lost power. He said, "You weren't seeing any of this kind of largess happening up there." So Hoboken kind of became the poster child for everybody to do this.

And it was nice for a while, but, realistically, by Saturday and Sunday, I think we had all kind of gotten into a routine, and at that point it wasn't until the weekend that even the weather started to turn colder, and the food in our freezer -- our freezer started to defrost, and food was going to be better off outside than in the freezer. More and more stores were starting to open up, and you could buy stuff.

AS: So let's recap. In terms of where you think the city failed, in some respect, it seems with communications; with a lack of organization; a lack of contingency plan; and a sense of presence, a sense of the right people being out, publicly. Were there any other areas that you think the city failed in?

HF: Yes. I think after everything got normalized, and once we were all -- I realized that for people who really had damaged homes and such, it was months and, maybe, to this day they're not truly back to some normal level. But months later I thought -- so what have we learned from all this? Where is the look, the hard look -- what actually happened? What did we do? What might we do? What have we learned, and so forth? And perhaps that stuff has gone on behind closed doors. I like to think that it just hasn't leaked out to the public. But I haven't seen any -- I think there were some city-hall meetings having to do with, maybe, insurance funding, where people would come to City Hall and complain. But I'm not aware of there having been any - just like this interview now -- any interviews that the museum is doing. I feel like the museum, with this whole oral-history project, is filling a void that the city, on some level, should have done.

Granted, what you're doing with the interviews here -- it's from a historical perspective, in a lot of regards, and the museum, being what they are, are limited to what can they do with this, other than collate all this information and make it available. It's not like the museum can put anything into action out of this. But I'm curious as to what involvement, if any, does the city have in this project? The city has done virtually no outreach to gather people's experiences; to gather this feedback from the population.

That week after the storm, for the most part, the only information that could really be had was by people just talking to other people, and walking around, and learning things with their own eyes, and hopefully there are some sort of documents that might be gathered, whether they be photos or whatever, to figure out what happened. There is a community group in town that did, when the flood maps had come out -- they had a couple of community meetings to talk about the flood maps, and to talk about Sandy. But, on the one hand, those meetings were nothing more than some shopkeepers talking about their experiences, etc. There was no real information that was being given out; it was really just disseminating some information that they had collected.

But, at that meeting, I met a Stevens guy. At that meeting, I was walking around, talking to people, and saying, "Why -- I'd like to know what actually happened that night. How did the city flood like that? Where did the water come from? How much of the flooding -- and I assume it varies in parts of town -- how much of that flooding happened because the sewers backed up? How much of that flooding came in because water maybe flooded in over the railroad tracks, and came in from the south, across, maybe, west of Clinton, that part? How much of it was flooded because of water that flooded up from Weehawken Cove, from that? How much of the city flooded because the water just came barreling in, over the walls along the riverfront, straight in from the Hudson?"

A day or two afterwards, we were at Biggie's, on Newark Street. We lived next door to Biggie, for a long time, on Madison Street, so we know them. So I spoke to Mike, Biggie's son-in-law, and he was telling me that there was a guy in his restaurant there on Newark Street, who was in the restaurant that night when the water came in, and he described that it was like this kind of mini-tsunami, that kind of rode right past his storefront. None of it came into the restaurant, but just this wave of water that washed right up Newark Street, toward the city;

then eventually just went down and disappeared, and was dry.

Other people have told me that, coming up First or Second Street, there was this wave of water that rode its way in, that maybe was what -- the big water rise that we experienced from 10:00 to 10:30, when the water jumped up over a foot, was maybe part of that.

But what actually happened. I know that Stevens' wave tanks, that I mentioned before -- I was told that they have a tank there that can recreate any ocean-water -- they can create any wave action, etc. So, clearly, they must have some ability to at least understand what happened during the storm, from the Hudson; and how did that hit the land, and then once it hit the land, then come into Hoboken?

So this Stevens guy I met at this community meeting -- I asked him those questions. I said, "Do we know what happened?" And he said, "Well, honestly, no. Because the initial studies and reports that were done I think were for the broader region, by others." But he said Stevens was in the process of doing a model for Hoboken, to understand how the river waters came into Hoboken. But when I asked him how much water came up from the sewers, he said, "That's a very good question. We can't answer that. We

don't have the -- I'm not sure how anyone would -- I don't know how we can gauge that at this point."

Then, months later -- I don't know if it was in June or May -- there was a meeting -- there were a couple of meetings organized in City Hall by -- I forget who organized it. It wasn't the city. But there was a group, there were a couple former FEMA engineers who gave a presentation, and John -- I forget his last name. I knew him for a long time from the museum. I saw him a couple days after the storm. He was, I think, working with the emergency management group or something. He did a lot of volunteer work in the aftermath of the storm. He seemed to be the organizer of this event, and there was an event that evening and that afternoon. They had a different event for the city, itself. The headline of the event was something along the lines of "How to Protect Yourself the Next Time," or something like that.

The gist of the presentation and the event was more or less for like all those basement apartment owners -- what can you actually do yourself, to kind of manage this? For people like me, and all the people I saw that day -- and this is like seven months later -- and if I hadn't pulled out all that -- if I hadn't thrown out what I did, and cleaned what I did, and pulled out all the wet

installation that I had under my floor slab here, I'm sure -- I assume I would have had mold weeks later, at that point. There is no way I was going to be waiting seven months for some guys to tell me [unclear]. But I kind of feel like, in the aftermath of the storm, I did what I could do to just clear out anything, and get rid of all the muck that had covered everything.

So for me it wasn't that informative a session. These two guys were smart, and they were very well-intended. One of them was from -- I don't know -- the Southeast, and one was from the Midwest. They were nice guys, who were clearly just doing this out of a sense of trying to help people. So I appreciate what they were doing. But they admitted they had never been to Hoboken before like that day, and they didn't really have any specific information that was specific to Hoboken.

At the beginning of the session, they went around the room. There were, if I remember right, maybe fifteen or twenty people in the room. They went around saying, "Okay, could you introduce yourselves? Why are you here? What are you hoping to learn?" So I asked these same questions. I said, "Well, (a) I'm trying to understand what actually happened with that." So John, the fellow who organized this, shared what he knew. He said what he had

heard was that in at least the southern part, the water basically all came in through the New Jersey transit property, on the south, of Weehawken Cove on the north, for the most part. But then I also said to him, "Another thing I was hoping to find out --" there have been these two flood maps, and I just don't understand them at all. I don't know what is being -- I was always told that there was a line -- I was on the planning board for twelve years, and we would see -- there would be flood maps that would show a line that ran down the middle of the town. That was the flood zone. Either you're west of that line, in the flood zone, which we are, and which are most things, west of Willow, etc., or west of Park -- and then there was the other part, and we were in this 100-year flood plan. Even my house -- I was told that this floor that we're sitting on now -- when we built it we were told it had to be ten feet above sea level; so, according to the survey maps, in Hoboken, our part, the sidewalk in front of the house is 7.4' feet above sea level. We had to raise this floor 2.8' above the sidewalk, in order to be above that -- which proved to be correct for this storm. We were probably six inches above the water line, for the storm.

But I don't know how that 10' above sea level -- I'm told that a water line above sea level, at

high tide, the amount -- so that's ten feet above the water line, when the water is at some mean, high-tide level, whatever that is. So for the Stevens engineer -- the guy [unclear] to say that we had eleven feet of water -- I don't know what that means. My understanding is that the Hudson River, at high tide, is normally at six feet or above. During the tide levels, the water goes somewhere from, I don't know, four feet to six feet high. I don't know above what.

So these flood maps now seem to have a lot more lines to them. It appears to me that, as opposed to there being just one measure of a flood zone, there are now several measures, but I don't really understand them, and I don't see anybody explaining those things. We keep hearing about new flood maps. Can't the city put it in plain language what these flood maps mean?

So it's things like that. Obviously, the city is at the whim of -- what did they know before the storm? Did they know about these storm surges? Did they know that there was going to be a lot more flooding in town than there was for Irene? Maybe not. But why do we still have these questions now? How come those things aren't -- and now we're starting to hear speeches and words from the mayor, as far as preparations -- a better prepared city for

the next one -- how can we prepare ourselves better for the next one if we don't actually know what happened in the last one? If we're going to set up barriers to prevent the water from flooding the town, don't we need to know where the water came in? Are these barriers that need to be at the New Jersey Transit property? Or the Weehawken -- ? What kind of barrier would we have needed to prevent the flooding that we had for Sandy? And are those kind of barriers silly? Because it seems that Sandy kind of broke all the rules of all the preconceived ideas that people had before.

I work, in a loose sense, in the construction business. I'm a lighting designer. I work with architects and developers and owners, and provide lighting for buildings. And I'm a lead AP, I'm very involved in sustainable buildings that work, etc. So I'm often in meetings -- much more so since Sandy, because we do -- I've got projects in the city. I've got projects in Manhattan, in areas that flooded along the Hudson, and there's a lot more dialogue now about -- everybody gets rid of the word "flood prevention." That used to be -- prevention is now replaced by mitigation. Because no engineer in their right mind, nowadays, seems to be along the lines of saying that whatever we do is going to prevent a flood. Because with

Sandy, we know it's going to happen again. And with climate change, etc., we know these things are -- just like Sandy was a high-water mark (no pun intended), there are going to continue to be higher and higher water marks. So at what point in time are we attempting to design for, in terms of preventing something from happening?

Hoboken -- all right, we had between a foot and a half and two feet of water here on Jefferson Street. If we had another foot of water, then all of a sudden where we're sitting now -- this would have been flooded, and, presumably, almost everybody on this block, the first four would have been flooded. It seemed like the water went down roughly an inch an hour. So with that, whereas the water had pretty much gone down in twenty-four hours -- if we get another storm, where the water is a foot higher, that means that instead of twelve to eighteen hours we have this flooded condition, that means it's going to be that much longer. So who knows if that means that power will be lost that much more. The cleanup effort will have to be that much more. Will my wife and I want to continue to live here? Are we going to be like those farmers in Iowa who, every year or two their houses get flooded by the Mississippi? All right, they rebuild, etc., but every so often they just take the towns and maybe move the towns to

some high-water mark, or they just move to some other place, or they move their house on the farm. Or, do they give up the farm? At what point, way down the road (hopefully way down the road) will Hoboken start to return to its prehistoric levels of Stevens being an island surrounded by -- will this go back to the swampland that it was 150 years ago, or whatever?

But until then -- the city's hands are tied to a certain extent, certainly in terms of mitigating floods and building more pumps, building water walls -- whatever they can do -- is far beyond the city's ability to do. They're going to be fighting it out with all the other towns and counties that have similar problems, to the state and to the feds to do this. At what point can the city do? They can come up with plans, but at what point does the reality of what can be done meet something that's -- all right. Is it worth it for us to spend billions of dollars to take certain measures that we can only guess are going to help us, until a certain point? All the time spent on dialogue -- since our governments have more or less lost the will or ability to spend money, or do what I think is their role in terms of looking after the populace -- their role is to tax and spend. Spend money and provide services. That seems to be a debatable point. As our governments

become less responsive and more torn by political infighting, etc., people lose more and more trust in the government, and are less enthusiastic to have the government do their job and do these big projects and spend these things. So it's almost like a Catch-22. In some ways, for us who were lucky in not losing our home this time, that becomes the disheartening aspect of this. It showed how much -- not on every level but at least in this time, the municipal government in this case -- they've shown that they're not any better equipped to do anything than the person in the street. They might have access to better information, but we didn't even see that. So the one advantage they have seem to have kind of been lost. It's very disconcerting.

AS: Did the city government get anything right?

HF: As much as I resented the fact that it seemed like the outreach was all handled by citizen volunteers -- that it was simply people -- maybe not necessarily me, because I didn't actually volunteer, even though I did. On Thursday morning, when I went down to the mayor's office, and I saw that, basically, nobody knew what

was going on, and I saw that Juan, the communications guy, was overwhelmed with what was going on -- I went down Friday morning. Actually, I went down early Friday morning and I met Juan and the mayor walking down First Street, and I intercepted them, I guess around Clinton. They were walking down First Street and City Hall. I was on my way to City Hall to see Juan, so I went down there. My purpose was to volunteer to Juan. I said to Juan, "I'm not interested in joining the volunteers, knocking on doors and giving out water or whatever it is. You seem to need help, and I'm interested in helping you on this." But, of course, I'd seen him with his boss, so it was probably not good timing on my part.

But, of course, he couldn't take me up on that. It ended up -- the walk down First Street ended up becoming a dialogue with the mayor at that point, just to see what she knew. Because this was the first time I had seen her since this whole thing began. I was sympathetic to her, because, obviously, nobody would really have wanted the job she had there -- to be the mayor of this town. But then that's when I asked her, "Where's the city council? How much has there been -- when was the last time you met with the city council?" She said, "Well, I've been in touch with them, but we haven't actually had a meeting. They've

been a little busy." I said, "Well, shouldn't there be a meeting, an emergency meeting with you and the city council, to talk about this?" Because it seems to me, again, the only outreach that is going to happen in the city is by actually walking and talking to people face-to-face. I said, "Why wouldn't you have each of the city council members set up a mini-satellite city hall in their ward, so that you could take the volunteers, or whatever volunteers you needed, or, hopefully, the City Hall workers, who I'm assuming have nothing else to do, and have them be shuttling information back and forth between City Hall and these satellite City Halls? And the city council people would set up in the satellite offices, and they, in turn, would have their own ward volunteers, and they could go block to block. Is there a map anywhere, showing the state of what houses don't have power? Who's flooded? What basements have been flooded? Has that information been collected? Do you actually know who's flooded out and who's not? What cars are dead? What cars are working, etc.?"

So she just said, "Well, the City Council, I don't think they would listen to me. And I think they would resent having someone tell them what to do." I said, "Well, you don't think, given this situation, that you, as mayor, there wouldn't be some banding together, some rally-'round-

the-flag kind of thing?" And she just said, "No." So that was disheartening -- (a) that she felt that way; (b) she just didn't do anything, because she just assumed she'd know the outcome of that. I said, "Well, look, even if you did it -- why wouldn't you do it, and if they refused, then you could put the onus back on them. At least you could let people know in that ward, 'Hey. The five council people who were willing to listen may have set up satellite offices, and that's going on. And those who said no, in those other wards, those council people didn't want to listen to me. I have no control over what they want to do within their wards, etc.'" I realized that, politically, what I was suggesting was far-fetched, I guess, etc. But it just feeds into this -- it just felt like there was no leadership at that point.

But anyway, in terms of what the city got right -- I can appreciate -- there were people I know who work in City Hall, and they were the ones who told me they went in on Monday, and when they walked in -- on Monday, before the storm, the mayor and a couple of directors just looked at them and said, "What are you doing here?" They said, "Well, we're here to work." And they said, "Well, don't you know there's a hurricane coming? You shouldn't be here." So I said to the mayor, "Why were the City Hall

workers just sent home? Was there nothing for them to do?" Here you're gathering volunteers to have them do -- I assume there's no end of things to do. And she goes, "Well, you know, some of the people had elderly parents, or kids they needed to look after." I said, "Sure. So those people shouldn't be obliged to come in. But people who can come in should come in. To just send everybody home -- I don't understand that."

So I think even if the City Hall workers were allowed to come in, and were allowed to take part in this, and were utilized to do *something*, they would have needed more help anyway -- because the phones are out, the internet's out. So I think that, certainly, gathering volunteers -- there was a place to have citizen volunteers. So as much as I resented the fact that it seemed like they seemed to take the place of the people whose salaries we pay to deliver services to the city, I do appreciate the fact that there was this outreach, and that those individuals were compelled to help, and that the city did organize them to do stuff.

Just like Irene. Before that, among the outreach beforehand was a group of volunteers that came and knocked on our door, and said, "Okay, you know there's this hurricane coming. Are you staying?" We said yes. They said,

"Okay. Then do you have water? Do you have food?" They were providing a good service, I thought. But, of course, that was Irene. But I'm sure there were people who were helped either getting evacuated out or whatever, so I do appreciate the fact that the city did have the wherewithal to get some help. Clearly, they needed it. But that might be the only thing I could look at as what the city got right.

AS: How else did you pass the time? Did you feel like you had enough supplies to carry you through the days?

HF: Yes. Luckily, we had a lot of food in our freezer, etc., and, literally, we had more food than we needed. So literally every night we invited -- we had neighbors come in. We never ate alone. We always invited neighbors in from the block, and we sat here -- in candle light, basically -- and had dinner. We had gas, so while we had no power, we got a little bit of power back on the Friday after the storm. Even though PSE&G said we had full power back, we didn't. We only had one phase -- even though they kept maintaining that wasn't the case -- which meant that we had certain outlets that would work, but none of

our appliances worked -- with the exception that, since we had gas, we had hot water so we could take hot showers, which was really great. As the house temperature started to go down into the fifties, it was nice to be able take a hot shower in the morning. And we could light the stove, and we had the stove working so we could cook, and we had hot food. That was kind of fun. Neighbors would bring whatever they had that was defrosting, or candles, or whatever. So that was a nice thing.

Otherwise, we just started to get up when the sun got up, to take advantage of whatever daylight we could, to clean. Basically, we were cleaning, hauling stuff out of the garage. There were days spent going down to Garden Street to charge our phones. My wife's phone service continued to work, so we were communicating with the insurance companies. We had flood insurance for the house as well as for our contents; but, since our apartment did not flood, the contents -- it only covered the contents in our apartment, it didn't cover the contents in the garage, because the garage is deemed not a storage space.

So we had insurance -- we got insurance coverage for food lost in our fridge. Our car, which was in the garage -- which worked when we turned it on, on Wednesday, but then on Friday, when we finally -- I kept

cleaning and doing work. My wife was starting to go up the wall, so I told her to just take the car, drive to Jersey City and get herself some coffee and do something. The car, of course, didn't work. So it was dead at that point, so we had another project of calling the insurance company, who essentially said that they would send somebody to boost the battery, but since the car was sitting in a foot and a half of water, they advised us that we might just think about totaling the car. We had a car with 100,000 miles on it, and even if the car were, the next day -- who knows what toll the salt water and everything would take on the car, a month later, three months, later, etc.? So we decided we had to total the car, which meant we had to get the car towed -- which was no small feat. We could see, during the day, the amount of tow trucks in town, hauling cars out of town, was unbelievable. And you could see, as the days went on, that all the cars parked on the street were all starting to fill up with water vapor inside the car -- so you could tell which cars were dead with that. At first it was going to be a week before we could get the car towed. My wife had to go back to work, and we had to start thinking about buying a new car. Where were we going to put the new car, if the old car was in the garage? So it just seemed like every day was spent -- there was at least an

hour or two spent on the phone with the insurance company. We felt like we had a very good insurance company. But, still, between dealing with the homeowners insurance, the auto insurance, and the flood insurance -- and on the car insurance, we had to get adjustors to come here and inspect the car before we could get it towed. Then the house -- we had to get flood people to come in and inspect the house. They came back a couple of times.

So it seemed like between cleaning, dealing with insurance, and then we would have dinner with everybody at 5:00-5:30, and we would basically go to sleep at like 8:30-9:00. It just felt like every day was exhausting. After the first couple days went by, and we started to deal with the reality of having to get our lives back in order, and how was I going to get to work on Monday, since the PATH was gone -- where were the buses, how were the buses running, and that stuff -- it just seemed like all this work to get us back to zero was exhausting.

AS: What did Hoboken learn about itself as a city -- less in terms of the city government but more in terms of its people? What did they learn?

HF: Oh, boy. I don't know that I can answer that. I guess, on my block -- maybe I can only go as far as that -- at least on my block, my impression, from the people I came across with, is that everybody was surprisingly positive about how well -- all the positive and generosity they met with the other people they came in contact with, and how much people went out of their way. So I think in this very small world here, people felt, among all the things to get depressed, and discouraged, and things lost that week -- that much, I think, went beyond just our own, me and my wife -- it seemed like there was that kind of community -- which was very much a part of Hoboken when we moved here. When we moved to Hoboken, it was still very much a neighborly small town. As the town got more gentrified in the last ten years, and real estate prices skyrocketed, and the neighborhoods really started to break down, in terms of what they had traditionally been -- I think a lot of that, for those of us who had been here for a while and had some sense of what that was like -- that was already starting to fade, or had already faded when we moved in, in '87. But there were still pockets of it left, and there was still enough people around who remembered that, that we felt like we could get a firsthand sense of that. But I think that had already kind of been

lost in the last ten years. Enough new people had moved in who were oblivious to what the neighborhoods were, or what things used to be, and they were more -- I think their concept of Hoboken was more of what it appeared to them today, and what they were going to make of it. So I think that neighborliness, which was kind of an old Hoboken thing -- and this block was always very much and old Hoboken block -- which, I think, why I'm characteristic of the resentment of City Hall, because I think a lot of that is rooted in the fact that City Hall has completely lost that sense of what Old Hoboken was. There were a lot of negative things about old Hoboken, but in terms of the positive things of old Hoboken, that stuff had been lost and dismissed on some level. But I think at least people got back in touch with that, for the storm. Whether anyone in Hoboken has changed -- I don't know. Or whether that experience, that positive experience that we had will come up again the next time there is a storm -- I suspect that it will, in some different way.

But just like after Irene -- from the aftermath of Irene to the aftermath of Sandy -- it was a whole different thing. Because I think with Irene, everyone was truly scared going into the storm, and truly relieved after the storm. And, generally, there was no -- we could

move on. There was no baggage left over. Whereas with Sandy, I think there was a certain complacency we had going into the storm, and -- I don't know. Depending on your experience, there was just a depression, or resignation, or something that came after the storm. So I'm not sure what was learned from Irene to Sandy, in terms of people's attitudes or whatever. So I'm not sure what was learned from this thing of Sandy, that would leave its mark on the town.

Once I started to talk to contractors, etc., they would tell me stories about the number of people -- landlords -- who just cleaned out those flooded basement apartments, completely renovated them, and rented them out again. People who would move into those renovated, basement apartments -- do they have any idea what that apartment looked like on October 30th? Do they think about that? It's not my business, I guess, not my problem. If I were that landlord, would I do something different? Would I write off that basement apartment now, knowing that either I'm going to have to keep renovating it every few years. Is it their responsibility to inform tenants that they're moving into something that's going to flood? This is America. There's personal responsibility. Should people just know what they're getting themselves into? Should they do their

homework, and not get themselves into that? I always thought it would be interesting in town if there were little bronze plaques set up around town, showing what the height above sea level is. So at least if, on a given block, I would have some way of knowing, "Oh. This is 7.4' above sea level. Oh. So this probably flooded, blah, blah, blah." Is that a smart thing or a stupid thing? Or a plaque showing those lines -- like you'd see in little towns somewhere, maybe in west Jersey, where they'd have lines showing that on such-and-such a date, water went up to this point. I don't know if that would serve any purpose.

AS: Do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered? And if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

HF: Has Hoboken recovered? I would say so. It certainly looks like it's recovered, from walking around town. I still notice a lot of the apartment lobbies that have bare studs, where sheetrock was ripped out and they had to put back things. I notice storefronts, down on Washington and First Street, or elsewhere in town, where, whoever was in there, it's still vacant; they're waiting to be rented out. The retail climate in town was already

tenuous from the recession, beforehand. After this happened, it seems to me a lot of those business that were on the edge, were gone. I wonder, like, what kind of business owner would move in along First Street? We know the woman at Choc au Pain, on First Street between Bloomfield and Garden -- she was saying how the water stopped virtually right outside her shop. So she was lucky -- nothing came in -- but it was like in the middle of that block, the water kind of came up that far. First Street was starting to become a little bit of a vibrant retail -- given where we live, First Street -- I walk down First Street at least two times every day. But I wonder, now, what kind of place would open up on First Street.

So, in terms of Hoboken, being back -- yeah. Generally speaking, it is. And I guess, for me -- a point for me was springtime. It was back in April, I guess, or May. Spring, this year, I remember, even though it was wet, was a really good spring. Temperatures were moderate. There was rain and there was sun, and it was really when the leaves, all of a sudden, came back and everything started to get green. That was the point where we started to see our back yard -- we didn't lose all our -- we've put a lot of effort in plants, etc., in our back yard, and it was nice to see -- after it was all covered with that horrible

water, and all our mulch was washed away -- it was nice to see that 90% of our plants came back, and all the big ones survived. We didn't lose any big trees, etc.

So that, six months later, was a nice sigh of relief, thinking, "Okay. Life has returned." And I got that same feeling, just walking around town, seeing the trees, and talking to people. It seemed like we weren't the only ones who looked at spring a little differently this year, since Sandy was what blew away the last of the leaves on the trees, and that was clearly the end of the fall. Everything was just stark after that. But I still walk around town, noticing things that were damaged. I wonder, are they going to grow back. And even with the warm weather now -- I, myself, I cleaned out everything I needed to, and threw away everything I needed to here, but I didn't do anything in the house as far as pro-active things, to better prepare the house for the next storm. I was waiting until it got warm out, to do that stuff. So it's really only been in the spring and summer that I finally started to get rid of the old shelving I have, and get better, taller shelving, and to make places in my garage for things for be higher. We had kind of a secondary fridge in the garage, before it got flooded out and damaged, that we threw out. Now we bought a new one, and moved it into our

apartment. We had an exercise machine in the garage that got covered in mud. We had had it for a while, so we got rid of it.

So it was a chance for us to kind of clear out and start over again, but it wasn't really until, I think more honestly, the summer that I really started to feel like I was able to put the garage back to a normal state. I'm still not completely finished, because I'm pulling out the wood steps we had in the entrance to the apartment. I pulled out the wood-stud walls we had, so that stuff is still -- I hope to have it done in a month, but I feel like I'm still kind of working to come back and get to a point where, at least, "All right. I'm sure it's going to happen again. But at least I can have some peace of mind that I did everything I could do, and so be it."

AS: Is there anything you would like to address, that I haven't asked about?

HF: No, your questions were good. As you can see, I've thought about this. I've been thinking about Sandy ever since Sandy. But no. Thanks.

AS: All right.

