

Archives 2013.039.0003

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN CAREY
INTERVIEWER: ALAN SKONTRA
LOCATION: HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
DATE: 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Track #1

AS: What is your connection to Hoboken? How long have you lived in the city? Approximately where in the city do you live? Who do you live with, if anyone, and what is your professional background?

JC: I moved to Hoboken in 1987. I came here because it was convenient to work. At the time I was working as a construction superintendent at Ellis Island. For twenty years, I've lived very near the library on Park Avenue, in the middle of town, and for the last six years I've been living on Thirteenth Street. I've only been married the last six years. We got married after spending time as a bachelor. My wife, Sandy O'Conner and I, and my

step-daughter, Rhiannon, live at our home on Thirteenth Street, 209 Thirteenth Street, between Park and Garden.

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

JC: Being a weather geek of sorts, and having taken climatology and meteorology classes, I probably had that on my radar screen at least a week before, maybe farther, before it actually hit here in Hoboken. I was following it regularly on the internet and the weather channel, and in the news.

AS: What did you expect the storm to be?

JC: Well, three or four days out I expected it to be pretty bad. I had, at the time of Hurricane Irene -- we had kind of a precursor to what could potentially happened. That storm didn't pan out the way it might have, the scenarios. I can remember (and these are things I'm interested in, having taken a lot of physical sciences) watching a History Channel or something -- the Discovery Channel -- within the last few years, well before Sandy, I had seen a story about ultimate disasters or something in

the United States. There were things like the giant earthquake off of Puget Sound, or the Columbia River Gorge, that would send tsunami waves out, and fires in different places, and various things and other earthquakes, but one of them was the hurricane that hit New York. The scenario which they portrayed at that point was very much in line with exactly what happened here, at Hurricane Sandy -- an extreme low-pressure storm, even though this was only marginally a Category #1, coming up the East Coast, hitting New Jersey, with its counter-clockwise wind, and a huge wind field. I was well aware that, even without somebody telling me, this was the scenario in which a huge amount of water would get pushed in between Sandy Hook and Long Island, and push into New York Harbor. All that combined -- which became evident when people were talking about you had high-tide cycles; you had a full moon -- these were all scenarios for disaster. Which panned out.

So what did I expect? Two days out, I thought it was going to be really bad. I had prepared, personally, and I had talked to my family and some of our neighbors. I was lucky enough to have a generator at my home, that isn't normally hooked up. A friend who lives across the street is a contractor, and he was leaving town with his three young girls. He asked me if I ran a

generator at my house, whether I would back-feed his sump pump in his basement, if power were to go out. We had a similar arrangement during Hurricane Irene. We had heavy rain during Irene. We didn't have the surge the way we did for this, and I don't think anyone expected to have a scenario where all three PS&G -- the power grid would basically go down.

So I had prepared in that I had a generator, with Mike's help. I drew out \$500 in cash -- because I expected that, if the power went down, the cash machines would be out. I had twenty gallons of gasoline. I had emergency supplies. I had a crank radio. I had taken several cases of bottled water and put them in my freezer. So I had a huge thermal mass to keep things cold, in coolers. I had brought some food in, not particularly -- I made sure we had bread and butter and things like that. But that was reasonably assured. I had some canned goods. There was a question as to whether we would leave town. We were fortunate enough to have a cabin out in the Poconos, which is at 1,700 feet, so I didn't think that would flood. But there was the potential, obviously, for heavy rainfall out there, and losing electricity. So that had its own scenario; that you might get out there and have trees down, and not be able to get back and forth. So my wife and I,

Sandy, made a decision that we would all stay in Hoboken. I thought about where parking cars -- and having been a geography and cartography guy in college, and a construction guy in my present-day life -- I was well aware of what the grades in town were, and what the elevations were. I had moved our cars to, I think it was, the intersection of Thirteenth and Bloomfield, because it's about as high an intersection as you can get at our end of town, without being too far to walk, and try not to park them under a tree, where branches might come down. Things like that.

So I think I was reasonably keyed in, as far as preparation goes.

AS: What did you do on that Monday, before the storm hit?

JC: The weather forecast for the storm indicated that it was going to be severe. I had thought about the surge, but I didn't think it would be quite what they predicted. I expected heavy rain, but understood -- because maybe we were far enough away from [Unclear] that we wouldn't get as much as we might. We're also on a street that, historically, we don't have flooding issues. We had

some people with wet basements, but I wasn't concerned the way someone might be who was back on First and Harrison, or over by Shoprite, or some of the places down on Garden and Second, or other places that we all know flood.

I'm sorry -- what did I -- ?

AS: What did you do on that Monday, before the storm?

JC: I had gotten some supplies together. We had set the generator up. That had been done largely with my buddy, Mike, his people. I think I had gone out and purchased some extension cords. I made sure we had supplies where we needed them -- candles. I had already made sure that I had an extra bottle of propane, in case we were going to barbecue and somehow the stove was out. I was going through, in my mind, what the utility situations might be. I'm an old Boy Scout: I'm prepared for certain things.

So I was trying to look at that. I did make a point of taking my wife and daughter out, at the morning high-tide cycle. As I do even now, I'm often on a website that will indicate some of the meteorologic issues. I'm also on the Stevens Institute website for the buoy that's off of

Castle Point, I was looking at, and I had the weather channel on. We went out in the morning, the three of us, about 9:00 in the morning -- so twelve hours before the storm hit -- and we went behind the Tea building. At that point -- and it was right about the morning high-tide -- the water was right at the lip of the concrete, coming over to the walkway. I knew it was going to go back down, but I also knew, from indications and from conversations, that the evening high-tide was going to be substantially worse. I believe I'd heard that it was going to be at least six feet higher, or some order of magnitude along that, and I just said -- I knew, and I told my wife, "This is going to be bad. This is really going to be bad. Water is going to come into the city horribly," and I wasn't talking about rain water. I suspected (as did happen) that the river was going to come up, and it was going to push over our higher ground, that's adjacent to the river, and into the back of the city.

So I did that, and I talked to Sandy and Rhiannon, my step-daughter, about those things, and I let them know that this could be severe. Also, later in the day, we took a ride around town. One of the -- I don't know if it's amusing, but interesting things -- is my wife's named Sandy. All over town people had boarded up, and there

were big signs saying things like, "Sandy go away," "Don't come here," and I have a few photos someplace (maybe I've lost them, I'm not quite sure) of my wife standing in front of all sorts of establishments with signs. One of them, amusingly -- I think it was the Wilton House -- actually had a sign that said, "Sandy, go away," in spray paint over their windows. Then, in small writing, adjoining it, it said, "And take John with you." I don't know where that came from, but we were both howling.

I also went up to Stevens Point, and was up there sometime mid-morning. This was before Sandy. My wife and I had driven around later in the day. I stood there and was looking at the chop on the river, and how high it was. You could see the water was coming way up over. I guess this was later in the morning, after we'd been out behind the Tea building. But it was coming way up over, into the park -- Maxwell Park -- and the trees were blowing heavy. There were two, huge Army Corps of Engineers ships that were just blowing around in the middle of the river. There was very little other river traffic. I also saw things that I started to suspect (and did come to pass). The docks here at the marina, on Thirteenth Street, the floating docks that are anchored with vertical pilings -- I suspected that they were going to float over the top of that, and later

that did happen. So I was thinking things that were going to happen that pretty much did. [Unclear]

So we prepped, and then I don't know if we had a meal. We made some family phone calls. People were calling us. We listened to the radio and the TV, and we kind of hunkered down.

AS: And as the storm hit, where were you, and what were you doing?

JC: Sandy, Rhiannon, and I were home with our dog. As I said, we decided that we weren't going to leave town. In Irene, Sandy and Rhiannon felt we didn't need to. We had supplies. The worst-case scenario -- I always said, because of where we were -- I said if it really did get bad, we were going to make it to a point where we're going to make it to the Fourteenth Street viaduct. That's the way out of town. You walk up the hill.

But we were there. At 6:00 -- we weren't to be out after 6:00. I was. A friend of mine who lives on Fourteenth Street -- he and his wife are near Baja, on up the third or fourth floor, and the power has gone off. He is a chef in Manhattan, and he needed to be at work. His wife, Susan [unclear] Sandy -- my friend the chief, Sandy,

was in working at the hotel and his wife was here in Hoboken. They had only moved back here from Hawaii, actually, a few months before. So we were concerned about Susan. The power went off over there. I talked to my buddy. I knew that between some friends that we'd make sure Susan was okay. So I went over to her place -- well, first, actually, at about 6:00 -- about 5:30-quarter of 6:00 I was behind the T-building. It was at 5:30 I was behind the T-building. The water was as high at 5:30, against the wall behind the T-building, and was starting to come over the top of the wall -- as it was at the high-tide in the morning. And we were three and a half full hours before the high-tide. With that, it seemed like this was going to be really severe, because, basically, the water hadn't receded from New York harbor and the Hudson River.

So from there, there was a 6:00 moratorium, and I ended up going over -- having had a phone call from Susan -- over no Fourteenth Street, and went and helped her out of her building, in the dark. Their power went off a few hours before a lot of other people. Then I walked over here to the shipyard, and dropped her off with a couple I know here, where Susan could stay through the storm. It was just easier for her to be over here, than to come over to our house.

So I did that. I stayed here -- I stayed in the shipyard. I think we had to drink Irish whiskey, and I called another friend who was upstairs, on the fourteenth floor, and I was looking out at the marina, and wondering when the water was going to breach the sea wall here. It was over the dock, I think, at that point, at the Thirteenth Street pier. It was about to crest over it. The waves were pretty heavy. The boats were bouncing around in the marina, and the wind was howling from the northeast, and it was really coming around the edge of the building, bad. I had seen a couple other heavy-wind situations, but this was all funnels. I probably left here, in the shipyard, about 7:15 or so -- I'm not sure exactly -- and then headed home. My wife and daughter were there and the lights were on. They were watching TV.

What happened then? I went back out. My wife was on the phone with a family relative here in town -- my stepdaughter's grandma -- and also, we went over to -- I can't remember the sequence exactly. Rhiannon was playing some electronic games. About 8:00 or so -- maybe it was later, 8:30 -- I went out, not having been out for quite a while, and walked around the corner, on Garden Street, and went up by Gino & Harry's. I could see at that point that the water had come southbound on Garden, by the new parking

garage. At that point, the old parking garage was still there. We were still an hour or so before high-tide, and the wind was blowing to push the water up on our side of the river. I walked back on the cobbled area, where the Farmer's Market now is, and then went around the corner by CVS. There were some other neighbors who were out. I was there by CBS, looking over toward the diner, and the water was already pushing up on the front of the Malibu diner. I was concerned that the water would come higher. I knew, at that point, that this was really severe, because I knew that that was relatively high ground. I could see the water flowing over toward Willow. I suspected it was probably flowing from the south end of town, where, earlier in the day, I had been down at the rail yard. The television cameras had been there, and there had been live broadcasts and things, showing it come up by the train yard. But I suspected, at 8:30 at night, that not only was the back of town going to get severely, severely, severely flooded, but it might hit our house.

So I ran back to the house, got over there, and very abruptly -- in my way -- went in and told my wife to get the hell off the phone (not in the nicest manner), and Rhiannon, I told her, "Come downstairs, put your shoes on. This is serious. Something big's going on." I realized,

in a bit -- I went back out -- I kept saying that high-tide was at 9:06. I guess that's something I knew from the Stevens website. The water, in my mind, could come up -- that was the peak -- or it would be slightly thereafter, because of the way the wind was blowing, and things pushing into the harbor. But basically, that was going to be the peak of the surge. So I kind of had in my head that within an hour the worst of the water that was getting in was going to get in, then it was going hit us -- my house -- it was going to be sometime before that. Then, in going back and looking, the water line that was intruding was kind of stable. It wasn't coming southbound on Park beyond the Malibu. I walked over by the Sunoco station -- Dean Marchetto's office -- and it was flowing past there. It wasn't coming farther, it wasn't coming closer to our home. But I knew -- that was fine for us, but it had to be absolutely horrible elsewhere, and I was going through these scenarios in my brain: "If the water is in front of the Malibu, it must be all the way to the bridges by Weehawken, and the south end of town has got to be absolutely inundated. That appears to be what happened.

So that was kind of up to the peak. Then the power went out.

AS: Did your generator work when the power went out?

JC: It was a 5,000-watt generator. It had to be manually started. I could have turned it on right away, but, frankly, I didn't want to. I didn't need to.

Track #2

JC: I was saying about the power going out. So the power went out. I had a generator. Now probably -- I don't know exactly what time -- because time was a bit of a blur, and it wasn't pre-eminent; it was just what was going on. So I could have turned the generator on; I didn't need to. I ended up -- I had set up extension cords. The generator was directly in front of our house. We've got a piece of property that is twenty feet wide. I had four foot to the gate. I had a generator underneath a little shed there. I had my gasoline and what not. I didn't need to turn the lights on. I had flashlights, I had flashlight batteries. The refrigerator wasn't going cold. I also, frankly, didn't want everybody -- for me to be sitting there with lights on, going, "I'm okay." There was no need to. I kind of got to a point where, after it appeared that the worst of it was over, it wasn't going to get any worse,

and the power was out, it was kind of time to go to bed. We were tired. I don't remember exactly. I may have been up the whole night before, in my hyper state or something, but we were tired. I suspected it was going to be a long day the next day. I didn't know how long the power was going to be out. I didn't know that the power was out through the city, totally. We didn't have internet. We had cellphones. I think some people were calling in. I don't know. It was just kind of like, "Get up in the morning and see what's going on."

I did have a conversation, I guess, with my buddy, Mike, who was out -- I know I did. I had a conversation with him. He was out in Warren County, where they were staying with his family, and I said, "Hey, the power's gone out. Do you want me to turn --" I asked him if he wanted me to turn the generator on. I was going to back-feed -- take his sump pumps off his house power and use the extension cord that we'd draped across the street, in the trees and into his basement, and change that cord around so his sump-pump would run automatically when the power was on. We decided, no, we didn't need to do it that night; that I'd get up and I'd get over there by 7:00 in the morning, or something, to check it out when the sun was up. So that's where that was left

The next morning --

AS: Yes. What did you do the next morning?

JC: The next morning I did get up, and I was all wired up. I can't remember if I had the radio on or whatever, and I didn't turn the generator on right away. There was enough light to get around the house. It was going to be light. I'd read the riot act to my daughter -- "Don't open the refrigerator." We had water. We had gas in the stove. We even had hot water. I wasn't quite sure if that was going to work. I should know this, as a construction guy, but I knew there were certain things that weren't going to work. The heat wasn't going to work, even though it was gas, because the fan wouldn't push the air around. There were various things that I knew wouldn't work. I also had a lot of firewood. I think I got that a couple days before.

Oh, yeah. We'd been away all the weekend before. I'd forgotten about that. So we were coming back from Connecticut, at a family event, so basically I rolled -- to go back -- we had been away, and had just come back from a few days away. We didn't get back until late on Sunday, and I knew that there were things to do, but some

of them I've already done already. So let me get back to -- what were we saying, Alan?

AS: The next morning. Tuesday morning.

JC: Okay. So Tuesday morning. So I got up, had my flashlight, had all my spare batteries and stuff. I went across the street into my buddies house; went down to the sub-basement, and it was like, "Oh, shit!" Excuse my expletives. There was water in his basement. There had not been any water on our street. There hadn't been any water within, oh, 200 feet, probably, and there was only a slight grade. But the ground water had come up into his basement. Mike had installed a really great under-drainage system and had a couple of sub-pumps, but the water had come up. He had, I think it is, a Pergola-like wood floor, and the floor was floating above the concrete slab. Basically, I knew it was ruined, and I was kicking myself. We had made a decision not to turn the sump-pump on the night before -- waste gasoline; you'd need it for lights; save all of that. So it just was a lesson. It was the first time I was going to go turn his sump on. I didn't know what the normal cycle of it was. I understand these things, but -- so, immediately, I went up from his sub-basement, into his

basement and up to -- and ran across the street, with everything quiet in the neighborhood. I didn't care if I disturbed anything; I started the generator up. It was all ready to go. I hooked up the electric, and just started pumping.

So the water was drained off of his floor. Consequently, then, I back-fed things. I went over to my house, which wasn't critical, and I said, "Okay, let me plug their refrigerator in for a little while." I think we were trying things, to see if the TV worked. I didn't have any rabbit ears with the new-style TV sets. Anyhow, I couldn't get any information, and I don't have a Smart Phone so I was kind of scraping by on what info I could get.

With that, basically, the days all blend in. That first day, I think it was everybody getting out, seeing the neighbors. People knew I had a generator. It was making noise. I had it on for a couple hours in the morning, when the pump had to go down. I wasn't quite sure how often you have to turn it back on. I wasn't particularly looking out, or doing anything outside of our immediate home. I don't believe we were supposed to be riding around town at that point, and I wasn't. I did, shortly after I turned the generator on -- I met some other

neighbors, including some firemen who live on our block. I'm sure he was on the job. But his wife was coming out, and we ran down, up to the end of Garden Street, by the waterfront, to see what was going on, and lo and behold, there was that sailboat there, so I saw that for the first time. That kind of, in my head, gave an order of magnitude how bad it was. Because if that boat, that probably draws four or five feet with its keel -- even if it was pushed up and forced up under the water, the water had to be pretty heavy and thick, deep over the walkway.

Then I didn't want to stay out long. We weren't supposed to be -- the cops had their job to do. I understand that. But in some ways I guess we all had a need to understand what was going on, or wasn't going to be going on. I guess they were concerned, later on, about anybody looting and things like this. But it was basically neighbors trying to figure out what was going on.

Later in the day I know there were some issues that I was helping some neighbors out. In fact, this same friend who's a fireman -- he was off on duty -- he checked her pump in the basement, and it wasn't working. I had some roofing material that I patched a pipe in his basement, so they could at least make sure water didn't

collect. There were a couple of things that I was going around, doing.

AS: When did you leave your immediate neighborhood and start venturing out into the city? Was it the next day?

JC: Here again, a bit of a blur. I could probably go back and look at some things, but I think most of Tuesday -- I believe I pretty much stayed nearby. We heard conversations from different people, and understood that power was out all over. I'm not sure if, on that day, I went down to City Hall. I don't believe we were supposed to be using our cars. I had my bicycle. I knew that was a great way to get around. I used it extensively later on. Later on, when we could use our cars, it was a different thing. But it was just a good way to go around and see what was going on. I think I might have gone down as far as Eleventh Street. People were out on their stoops. Different people were talking: "Did you get water? How's this? What did you see?" I started to understand that some places, some of the high-rises might have had emergency generators. Also, with my construction background -- and I was Facilities Manager, Assistant Facilities Manager to

Guggenheim Museum for nine years; I've worked with emergency power systems; I've worked with fire alarms; I've built elevators; I've built sea walls; I've put up steel; I've poured concrete; I've done marine construction; all sorts of other things -- so many of the issues, emergency issues and things I was familiar with -- understanding that if you don't have a generator, the potential is the fire alarm didn't work, or that the water pumps weren't pumping water up to the upper floors, or to a tank that might help; that there were going to start to be sanitary problems. It was also just, with flushing -- it was also obvious -- I didn't know for a fact that -- I assumed that the sewer plant wasn't functioning, and I was well familiar with the inherent drainage problems here in Hoboken, with the combined storm and sanitary, and that basically everything that was in and stuck -- the water that was in the city, that hadn't gone, that was stuck, had to go out -- it wasn't going flow out to the river on its own; it had to be pumped out, or it had to go out through the sewers, and this was going to be the big issue.

My stepdaughter's grandmother lives over on Thirteenth and Grand, and she has a corner apartment, a corner condo, that had quite a view. We had been talking to her on the phone. I knew, initially, she couldn't get out

of her building. I think we also knew, shortly thereafter, that her car was flooded. She was concerned about her dog being there in the house. I believe it was later that day that the water got to a point where, from the south end of that building, the southeast corner, that she could walk across Twelfth Street -- because it's a little higher -- and she was able to get over to our house. With that, we knew that she'd be staying with us, and it would be our dog and her dog. I also knew we had a generator, that kind of sat back. Okay. We've got so much gasoline. I didn't know how fast it would be used. The primary reason for running the generator was so that Mike's sump-pump could de-water his basement, because the groundwater would probably continue to get up, and we benefited from that because we could charge things. I could power the refrigerator, and just make sure it would get colder. And a couple other things that we used.

I guess within a day many -- being who I am, and many people knowing me, a lot of my friends knew that if they needed something they could come over, or we were having people over, at least probably the second evening, and I had the generator running for a while. We started to cook food, and just people's freezers were -- they couldn't keep the food, and they brought it over to our house, and

we made big meals. So that was kind of the first day. I guess I had a feeling that a huge part of the city was flooded, and there were a lot of people who were really in a bad way, and that we were really, really lucky. I mean, I was prepared, but we were very lucky, and it was a matter of only being a foot or two higher than some people who were a block or two away. I also suspected that people who were traditionally -- that apocrypha is low; that they were hit really bad. Horribly. I thought -- I mean, there would be five feet of water in big parts of town, and I guess there was. Well, I know there was, now.

I guess the next night some people came over, and people were asking questions and stuff. Then, I guess, Wednesday I kind of set it up where, "Okay, now's my day to go out and explore, and see what's really going on."

AS: And when you went out to explore, where did you go, what did you see, and what was your response?

JC: On Wednesday, at that point -- immediately after the storm, at the Fourteenth Street viaduct, the water had receded, and you could go up that viaduct. It was -- oh, I remember what happened. I'm confusing the days. My buddy who lives over here in the

Constitution [unclear] -- it might have been the next day. He had parked his car where he assumed it was safe. It was "away from the river," quote/unquote. He had parked his car on Fifteenth -- no, Sixteenth -- north of the Burlington Coat Factory, just adjacent the kidney dialysis place. In retrospect, that seemed to be the sluiceway, where a big chunk of water was going cross-town. That might have been on that Wednesday. But the bottom line is, Rick and I hopped on a couple of bikes, and we were riding around. His car was over there. He had known it was flooded, but he didn't know how bad. We cycled up Willow Avenue in about a foot of water, beyond the north of the Hess gas station. He wasn't too sure how deep it was going to get. By where the Macy's studio was, nearby Burlington, there were police officers preventing April from going -- the water was much deeper at the base there, to go up and over to Weehawken.

But we got to the bridge, and there was some gas leak or something going on over by the Shades so we weren't going over there. But he could see his car, that was there on Fifteenth, right immediately east, or west of Willow. He could see how the water had gotten in; it was almost up to the interior ceiling. So I think that was his confirmation, not the assumption that he had to write his car off. So there was a bit of that.

On Wednesday -- it was Wednesday -- when the water did recede, for whatever reason, going back in the [Unclear] with the sump-pump online -- of course, nobody had power. I had sump-pumps. I had one installed in my house. I had another one that I bought. I think for Irene I'd gone out to an industrial supply house and gotten some things. So I kind of knew that I was okay, and I was thinking, "Okay, who can I help?" But on that Wednesday morning, I took my car, and I could see, Tuesday night, that there were lights up in Union City, up by the Yardley plant. With that, I said, "Okay. They've got electricity. Maybe they have gas, maybe they have food. Not that I necessarily need this stuff, but let me find out what's going on." So I drove out of town. I think I did it by way of the viaduct, the Fourteenth Street viaduct. I got up there, and I went around to a variety of places. I found a Walgreen's that was open, over by Schuetzen Park. It was kind of spotty, where the power was on and where it was off. I was asking people about gasoline -- not that I desperately needed it, but everybody was in a tizzy about that. Somebody said there was one at JFK Boulevard, down a couple of blocks. They went down there, and that had been pumped out and was gone. Somebody said there was someplace

else, and I could see that there were major lines, and everybody was running around.

I ended up coming back. Oh. I went and got a gasoline siphon at an auto-parts store, that I thought would be helpful, independent of whether I needed it or not. Then I ended up coming back, and I stopped at a little bodega that was at the northbound leg of the Fourteenth Street viaduct, and I bought some potatoes and rice, and I bought just some other, basic staples -- again, not because I needed it, but I thought somebody, someplace could use this, and if I can grab it, I'm not going to hoard it or waste it, but maybe I can help somebody.

I proceeded from there to drive back down into Hoboken, at which time there was a van across the street, at the top of the hill, still in Union City. I went around it, and I started to go down the hill. I wasn't driving aggressively, and the police officer told me I couldn't go down -- a county police officer (it's a county road). I ended up turning around and saying that I live in Hoboken, and I'm just trying to get back home. I have some food and things, and I'm trying to get back home. "You can't come down here, sir. I'm sorry." It appeared to me that this guy was very, very tired, and he'd been working extremely long hours. I don't doubt that he'd been on for

the better part of a day and a half, two days, at that point. I was trying to get home. I'm saying, "Hey, listen. See, right down there by the Rite Aid? I just have to go -- my house is right around the corner from the Sunoco station." He wouldn't let me down.

So I pushed him a little farther. He proceeded to tell me he was going to arrest me. I thought this wasn't a route I wanted to take. He was on foot; I could have driven by him. I didn't think I wanted to do that. Maybe I'm a little crazy, but I figured if I got down -- even if I got by him, I'd get to the bottom of the hill, and obviously he had a radio. Again, undoubtedly, yes, he was incorrect in handling it the way he was. He kept telling me I had to go back around, and go down through Weehawken, by the Lincoln Tunnel. I'm looking down, and realizing it's all grid-locked down there, and I don't see any cars -- and there were also cars that were passing me, going down the hill, that he didn't appear to be stopping. And there were people coming up the hill. And I was like, "Why is this guy doing -- ? Why can't I go [unclear]." "Sir, you have to leave right now," very forcefully, and almost hit my chest.

So I finally left, and I went around by Gregory Common, and came down the hill there. That was all at a

standstill. I turned around and went up by the Lincoln Tunnel, and came down another way. I finally ended up weaseling my way around by the Lincoln Tunnel. Police officers went around the dock, by Lincoln Harbor. I was trying to get in. We were sitting, standing still, over by Lincoln Harbor. I got out of the car. It was obvious nobody was going anyplace. It looked like there were a lot of flashing lights over by Dykes Lumber. I finally said, "Fine. I'm not going anyplace," and decided, even with -- I guess I had some milk or something. I was trying to get home, and I had things I wanted to drive home. I ended up driving -- parking my car in Lincoln Harbor and walking home, along the new walkway to Weehawken.

So I was home. Of course, I'd disappeared -- I was only going to be gone for an hour, and this was several hours later, when I got back. There were some discussions about that, at home. Later on, I knew I needed to go back to get to my car; that the parking lot attendant was nice enough -- at Lincoln -- to let me leave it at Lincoln Harbor, on the second floor. I hopped on my bike. This was late in the afternoon, on Wednesday. I hopped on my bike, and I was going over to Weehawken to get my car back. It seemed at that point the traffic was going in and out of town, but it was heavily, heavily regulated. There

were county police officers, being county roads, at Fourteenth Street, and Willow, and Park, at the bottom of the viaduct, and it was getting a bit gridlocked. It seemed that everybody was trying to go out and see what was going on. The gasoline stations -- the Hess gasoline station, the BP stations, the Sunoco station -- were all weren't functioning. There was no electricity. There wasn't any fuel. People were driving up -- two days after the event, they were trying to figure out what was going on. People were trying to hold it together. There weren't a lot of answers. Communication was poor.

But, in any case, I hopped on my bicycle, and I got all of about a hundred yards, next to the Malibu Diner, and I see a big van, like a UPS-sized van, with a trailer behind it. There's a guy there with big construction lights, and he's got things that I know from the construction business; he'd got four-inch "mud suckers"; big, six-inch pumps; he's got a "quad," like a little four-wheel drive thing; he's got carts; he's got all sorts of things -- generators, blah, blah, blah. I'm looking at this guy; this guy's loaded for bear. Then I turned around -- I didn't turn around -- I got off my bike and yelled over to him, "Hey, what you got there?" There were all these boxes, and I realized -- I'm certainly

nearsighted but -- that these were generators. He said, "I've got generators." I said, "Well, what are you doing with them?" He said, "Well, there was a guy down at the shore that was looking to [unclear] bring these two, but he backed out." I said, "Where you from?" and he said, "Pennsylvania." "What the hell are you doing here?"

They'd come in from someplace out in some town near the Susquehanna River that had been hit by a hurricane before. This guy had a business where he sold "quads." He knew there probably would be a need. Obviously, he was trying to make some money, but I think he was honestly trying to do some good things. He had four or five guys with him, that had left out there. They'd loaded up, and they'd come this way to get some work and help out. So I get off, and I ask him, "So what are these generators?" He had ten 5,000-watt Briggs & Stratton generators, in boxes. They didn't look like they fell off a truck; he looked like he was honest. Having worked in the South Bronx and in Harlem, I know how these things go, if some things suddenly appear to be purchased. I said, "How much do you want for them?" He said, "Fifteen-hundred dollars." I didn't know how much a generator cost. I assumed it was several hundred. I wasn't quite sure. Briggs & Stratton is a good name. I turned to him and said, "That sounds a

little high." "Well, I'll give you a deal, if you get more than one." I said, "Really." To which he turned around and -- I asked him if he'd sell all of them, and he looked at me like, "Who are you?" I said I knew the mayor, and that I thought I could get the city to buy them. I knew there was a need. I'd been around town, and I'd seen that there was very little electricity anyplace other than that weird thing with Eleventh Street, and cross-town, and going down River Street had some power. I guess I knew at this point that City Hall was without power, and everybody was trying to figure things out. So I told him to wait there.

Oh. I guess to backtrack -- I had been over to the Sunoco Station. We'd been trying to get, through this friend, get the power to the Sunoco station, to get gasoline pumped. But there was somebody else that I'd met through that situation, and he happened to be walking down the street by the Malibu. I can't remember his name now. But I said, "Listen, wait here with this guy. Don't let him sell these pumps. Don't let him sell these generators." It ended up that I got on my bicycle. I didn't go to Weehawken, as I'd told my family I was going to. I proceeded to try to find the mayor. I had been told by somebody that she was over at Tea building. I went over there and talked to the desk. She wasn't there. I turned

around from there and went down to the Eleventh Street Fire House, the Thirteenth Street Firehouse, and they told me that they thought she'd gone down to City Hall. I went down to City Hall, and she was there. The National Guard was already there. I really wasn't aware of all the city's operations at that point. I went up to her. (She knows me for a variety of reasons, including being a trustee here in the museum, and my wife knew her because my stepdaughter and her son had been at school together, at one point -- and for other reasons that I'll leave.) I went up and I go, "Mayor, Mayor," and she looked at me and said, "Yes, John?" And I go, "I've got something to tell you." She broke off her conversation from the Army Reserve guys, and I said to her, "There's a guy at the Malibu Diner who's selling generators." To which she said, "Oh, that's good." To which I said (I think I'm quoting this right) -- the question was, "Well, what will we do?" and I'm like, "Get 'em. Do whatever you have to. You have the money to do this, Mayor -- Dawn." And she ended up grabbing somebody I came to know a little better -- Jon, who's the head of public safety here in town, and I think we talked to one of the city business managers at that point. I left my bike at City Hall, we got in a squad car, with no traffic lights, with the party-hat lights on. We drove up to Fourteenth Street,

and then went around the corner to the Malibu. Jon was trying to get onto his Blackberry and find out how much things are worth, but basically we got there and we cut a deal. We bought the all -- which was great -- for \$1,100 each. So the city had ten generators.

From there, Jon drove back in the squad car, and I actually hopped in the truck with the guy who was selling these things. He hadn't been to town. I said, "Come on, I'll direct you down. We're going to take them down to City Hall." We did that, and the National Guard took them off. They proceeded to be given out that night to a variety of places, including, I'm told -- I know one of them went to the Elks, which was needed for the soup kitchen. There were generators that went to some of the schools that were in need, some of the senior centers, but they were needed desperately. We weren't prepared, and the generators were important. I was glad I could help with that. They could have gone to private owners and other people, but it was more important that the community have them.

That night I think I went home -- came home -- and I get the look again, "Where have you been?" and rightly so. And it was, "Well, I did this and this." "So you never got your car." "No, I didn't." I'm not sure if I got it that night. I think I did. Parking wasn't

particularly a problem at that point. Some people had left town, and obviously there were a lot of cars. I wasn't going to go park in a flood-prone area. I assume -- and it gets to be a blur -- but we started to have friends over. I let people know in the neighborhood that if they needed to charge their cellphone -- because people's cellphones were dying -- that they could use power strips at our house. I had my daughter taking people in, and I said, "If people come in with their phone and they're going to leave it, that's fine. But they need to mark their phone with their name, as well as their charger; otherwise, they'll never get them back. Because there were too many things going on. So she kind of helped orchestrate that.

There were a lot of people in and out of our house that we only casually knew, or never met before. There was a great sense of community in that. They brought food, and we cooked it and ate it.

AS: In what other ways did you get involved with the relief and recovery effort?

JC: Well, after I got home that night -- and I had more of a perspective on what was going on in the city -- and I'm a guy who gets involved, maybe overly

involved, in things, at times -- I ended up talking to my wife and just saying -- and I was between jobs -- not that anybody was going to work at different places -- but I've got a set of skills, from my construction and facilities management; from my knowledge of engineering and other things -- I just turned and said, "I can do something. I can help." I wasn't part of the CERT team. I knew there were things that I could do. We were okay at our house. I wasn't worried about water. I wasn't worried about food. We had electricity for a couple hours a day. I had to mind, making sure -- as I'd promised my neighbor -- that I would keep the sump-pump going, so he didn't get water backed up in his house. I was specifically involved.

The next morning I ended up down at City Hall, and I talked to somebody I came to know pretty well (he's a great guy), Steve Marks, who's the assistant business manager. I didn't know Steve's background. I'd never met him before. I think I met him briefly the night before. I proceeded to go up -- I guess they had known I'd help with the generators. I went and introduced myself, and basically gave them the line, "Hi. I'm John Carey. I've got a construction background. I've lived in town for twenty-seven years. I'm a trustee of the museum. I know a lot of people. I've done sea walls; I've put up steel; I can put

up a crane. I understand emergency generators. I've built elevators. I understand concrete -- boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. I was the Assistant Facilities Manager at the Guggenheim Museum. This and that, blah, blah, blah. What do you want me to do?" And Steve, as I recall, kind of looked at me, he sized me up, and he said, "Go find out how much gasoline is in town." I said, "Fine."

So I left City Hall. I said I'd be back in an hour or two, and I proceeded to drive around. The flooding had by and large receded. I guess this was Thursday. At least, where I was. I knew there was still water entrapped in the back part of town. I hadn't really ventured back there. I knew it was difficult to get out of town at the southern border, going across Jersey Avenue -- the way we go to the Holland Tunnel and Jersey City -- and I knew you couldn't get over to Paterson Plank Road, and I knew we could get out at the north end of town, but there were bottlenecks all over.

So I proceeded to go -- I went down to the [Unclear] Station at Observer Highway. It looked like the pumps were destroyed. It wasn't worth it even to ask. Nobody was there. I went up to the Sunoco Station and talked to Meer -- whom I've known because he's in our neighborhood, and he's also done work on our cars. We've

bought gasoline there. I went in and said hi. I told him that the city had asked me to find out how much gasoline he had, and what did he need? He said he had 12,000 gallons of gasoline; he had 20,000 gallons capacity, but he didn't have electricity. I think I'm confusing the sequence. The other individual I talked to about the night before, the generator actually was -- that happened I got to know -- when we were trying to get electricity, he said, "I'll go."

So I knew that's where he was at. He basically had gasoline in the ground. He told me it would be good. Although I've built some of these things, I wasn't quite sure whether water would get into the tank. (Salt water would be a problem.) But he said it would be fine. But it's just that his electronics, his pump and his controls were out. I went over to the Hess gas station, where I occasionally buy gasoline. I went in and introduced myself. The guys knew me from my face, just having been in the neighborhood, buying gasoline. I went in and introduced myself. I said, "I'm John Carey. I've been asked by the city to find out how much gasoline you have. What's the story?" They were completely pump-dry. They had been pumped dry before the storm. They have 30,000 gallons capacity, and they expected a delivery, he told me, within an hour or two. And they were also getting a generator. It sounded

great. I found out later that the gasoline didn't come for a couple days, and when they got a generator, they turned all their lights on and everybody swarmed there, but there was no gas. I went over to the BP station and did the same thing. They had 20,000 gallons capacity. I think he had about 10,000 or 12,000 in the ground. He couldn't get it out. And he was asking me when I was going to get him electricity. I couldn't do that. With that information, I went back to City Hall. I told Steve. I think he was happy to know that. This was all part of them figuring out what was going on in town.

Subsequent to that, I know Mike Griesbauer and some other people were trying -- Mike, who's my neighbor, who helped me with the generator -- he got back into town after a few days. It was difficult for him to get in -- but he had some connections, and he was trying to see if we could get electricity to the Sunoco station. But there were some voltage problems, with the amperage and stuff.

Bottom line is, I showed up at City Hall, and I had some skills that I could help out. I kind of was in a position where, because I wasn't attached to anybody, and was kind of a flying-bunko squad, and I'd go ask Steve what he wanted, or I'd be down at the command center, and

the first floor that I started to walk in and people knew me -- I got to know the people who were manning the desks. I started to have conversations with a variety of people. People were asking me what I'd seen, and I was trying to feed that stuff back. Also, a day or two after being down there -- because I started to go down every day -- talking to Juan Melli, who was in charge of communications for the city -- I pointed out to him -- they had stuff up on a website -- which is great, but most of us, especially -- I didn't have a Smart Phone at that point. Most of us couldn't get the internet, so that wasn't particularly helping a lot of people, as far as communication goes. I had a conversation, I remember, with Juan (and maybe it was in his head before I said it), "Throw out the fact that you're in 2012. You've got to go back to the time when I was a kid, and everything's got to be in print. They had put the white board up with information, in front of City Hall -- which was certainly helpful -- but the fact was, if you were sitting up in my neighborhood (which wasn't in a bad way, compared to a lot of other people), most people, a lot of people, weren't going to walk ten, twelve, fifteen blocks, to the far end of town -- because that's where City Hall is -- to get information. You needed to get information out.

I suggested that you needed print. And because of the fact that City Hall (and this threw me a bit, and I know they've worked on it subsequently), the emergency power situation at City Hall was not great. They were running extension cords. They had very poor lights, much worse than I was used to on a construction site. I'd worked on emergency plans and things, for there and, as I said, at the Guggenheim. I was taken that we weren't operating at a level that I had hoped my city would, and I believe they will in the future. I'm getting sidetracked here, Alan. Redirect me.

So the printing. They had one low-capacity, relatively low-capacity, printer that they were working out of the emergency command system, and there was no volume you could get out of it. At one point I was standing in front of City Hall, a couple days into it, and I pointed to Juan, I said, "What you've got to do is you've got to get that building --" and I was pointing to the Office Depot across the street -- "functioning, and get electricity to it. Because they can print there. Because that's what you need. You need a high-speed printer. You've got to be able to put out a newspaper, essentially." We didn't have that capacity at City Hall -- not that we necessarily have to -- but that was our fallback. It was amazing to see all the

volunteers, a couple days into it, helping bring food and clothes and things.

But it just seemed like things weren't as directed as they might be -- and I'm kind of a logistics guy, and I've worked on huge construction sites, where the budgets are tens of millions of dollars -- \$100 million plus -- and I was taken by the fact (and I commented to some people) that we were bringing in -- food and clothing was coming from all over, wonderfully, but it was in black, plastic bags, and this stuff would get dragged up the steps of City Hall and put in the City Council room -- which, I'm like, this is the last place you want it. You've got to carry it up and down stairs. You need to mass handle this stuff; where are you going to do this? I knew there were people working on this, obviously, and it worked out well, over at the high school, when they got it. There were some great people working over there. But initially, to see plastic bags of clothing that was unmarked and you didn't know what it was, just dumped in between seats, in the City Council office -- it was like the act of handling it was next to impossible, and you couldn't get to what you needed.

So we were talking about that with some people. This printing thing -- I suggested to "Warren" that

-- well, they didn't have electricity in that part of town, and I remember sitting there going -- at that point PSE&G had set up a tent in the parking lot, immediately adjoining Office Depot, and my comment was something to the effect that if you can't get damned PSE&G to get power through a wall that's six inches thick, into Office Depot, what the hell are we doing? Because all you needed to get was 40 amps inside the building and get it to the printer. I proceeded with, maybe it was Steve, or other people at City Hall, and maybe Juan gave me a number, and I was trying to chase down the manager -- Larry Schwalb -- and corporately, some people were trying to help out, going up to get Office Depot open -- and somehow I just said, "You've got to get electricity in there, even if it's not on the grid. Just get electricity there." And there was electricity, from a huge generator that PSE&G had, in a tent, right next door, so there's no -- in my construction background, there's no problem. Get the damn store open, start printing stuff, and hand it out.

I'm not saying I did that, but it did -- I think Juan and other people did an admirable job. They had a lot of volunteers, and they handed out all sorts of information in the next couple days. And I know, having talked to people -- the first couple days, just driving

around town -- the first day was talking to your neighbors; the next day, "What's going on?"; the third day I heard people on Thirteenth Street saying they might be out of food, is the A&P open? This and that. I'm like, "Whoa, hold on a second. It's bad, but we've got it pretty good up here. Calm down. The city's doing what they can. There are people in the back of town who are in a bad way." But the communication wasn't there. It eventually got to a point where -- I think on the first day they might have gotten like 8,000 or 10,000 8.5" X 11"s out, handed them out, and they didn't need so many subsequently. They were going out daily, and the mayor was having a daily briefing, and some of that was going on the TV. So people far away knew what was going on, but we didn't all know it here. Then you'd get phone calls if your phone was charged, so the information was eventually getting around. I'm sure all sorts of people are looking at those things now to make it better, so we don't have this situation in the future.

AS: When did you think the worst had ended?

JC: What do you mean by "the worst?"

AS: In terms of -- in the aftermath.

JC: Well, the damage that was done was done. I knew, having cleaned up contaminated buildings, there was mold contaminated, and asbestos, and other things; that it was going to be a long process. The construction here in Hoboken, in buildings -- I didn't have a perspective on what it was like regionally. I suspected certain things. We could come down here to the river, look across, and you'd see all of lower Manhattan, south of 34th Street, or 38th Street, or whatever it was -- there was no power on, with the exception of a few places. What media we did here -- there was some big fire out in the Rockaways that we heard about. There were towns that were wiped away down at the shore. But that was all in passing, and those would be huge news issues, normally, but it was just kind of like a total peripheral, just getting by here, and trying to help out.

The worst of it -- the longer it went on, it made it worse. There were things -- I'd be down at City Hall on some days. I know the fire chief (Blohm, is it?) had asked me at one point -- and we'd had some conversations -- they had an emergency generator at City Hall, but it was being run off extension cords. There was one extension cord that was running up to the conference room on the third floor, and most of the other power was

just being used on the first floor, but it wasn't being distributed well. Every late afternoon and evening, it was like you were going into the dark; you couldn't even get around, where we were, across from the emergency command room there, the small conference room on the ground floor, over to the bathroom, over by the Parking Authority, because it was in the dark. So I thought, "Okay, we've got to get more lights here," and I had this conversation. Of course, if you could do anything, you'd go do it. I think I talked to the chief about this, and he said, "Can you get me some lights?" I said, "I'll do what I can do." I realized again, sitting, I think it was over by Office Depot, or PSE&G, that you could see lights -- I could see the light at Target, across the rail yards, and the water had receded. Because I could see that, I assumed there was power (which there was) over in that part of Jersey City, and I assumed Home Depot and Target were open (which they were). So, with that -- I don't know what we -- "There are types of things that we need. Let me go see what I can get."

So, with my Amex card (and the chief assured me I would get reimbursed), I drove over to Target, and I bought extension cords. And I went to Home Depot. I went in and I bought squiggies, and I bought what they call

temporary construction lights -- we call them birdcages, on a construction site -- and I started to buy things that I thought were important. I bought some mops and some other things -- several hundred dollars worth of things -- some construction lights. I spent a few hundred dollars. I didn't want to spend too much. I could have bought more. I didn't want to wipe things out, because there was somebody else who had some needs, But I knew that even City Hall alone, or up at the Elks, or someplace else -- the Elks, I knew, were starting to crank food out -- that there was a need.

So I ended up grabbing what I could, and I brought them back. The chief was very helpful -- thankful, I should say -- in that. I put the receipts aside and tried to make sure I didn't lose them, which I gladly didn't. I started actually stringing some lights myself around, with some extension cords, around the lower floor of City Hall, and I felt there was a need, at least, to run some temporary lights up through the central stairway, so people could walk up to the upper floors -- which they couldn't. I took a construction light, a halogen light, and bounced it up into the stairway.

While I was doing this -- it was strange -- because I was taken by the fact that it was so poorly lit.

I was trying to figure this out. I guess we got some basic stuff out. I don't know if it was that day or the next day (and the days are a bit of a blur, and I was in a bit of a whirlwind, and [unclear], to make sure my neighbor was pumped out, checking in with my family. We had friends in, and there was a lot of congestion in the house). But a few days into it, I'm at City Hall, I worked around the corner, and the main electric panel that I came to know, was at the base of the stairway at the first floor, between the Parking Authority and the place you pay your tickets, your traffic tickets. The electric panel was wide open. This is something you don't normally see, because if it's "hot," somebody can get electrocuted. There are busbars.

[Phonetic] How many amperage of electricity going through there is probably thousands -- I don't know what the voltage is and all this kind of stuff. I'm not an electrician. But I see in the floor -- there are big rolls of wire, and there's copper that's maybe three quarters of an inch across, and somebody clipped this stuff. And I'm looking like, "Who's doing this?" I'm riding around, putting little extension cords, and there's somebody really doing something here. I was thrown by the fact that this hadn't happened before. We weren't prepared for it, but

that aside, there was somebody working on this, and I was thinking it was great.

The next thing I know, this shorter guy than me, this little ball of energy -- he's coming through with a miner's hat and a little spotlight, and he's inside the panel, and he's throwing it around, and he's cutting wires, and I'm like, "Who are you?" And he's looking at me like, "Who are you?" And I tell him, "You're exactly the guy who needs to be here." And within a couple of hours, he had back-fed the generator that had a lot of capacity, that was being run by really light-gauge extension cords, and he back-fed the power into critical lighting systems. Certain things we decided you didn't need to power up, but just get lights in the building, and so the copiers could work again, and the communications system, and some other things. So I got involved in that.

Another thing I got involved with was April Harris, over at In Jesus' Name, which is the food bank, the food kitchen here in town. I guess I had started to drive around and find out where water was a problem. It was evident that there was a lot -- because we didn't have power -- it was only starting to come on slowly in different parts of town. There was standing water in the streets, but because there was no power, even when the

water receded, everybody's basements were flooded. That caused problems with the electrical circuits and panels, your utilities being ruined. We've seen this before, but not on this scale.

So I went over to Our Lady of Grace, the old school building, which is the Mustard Seed School now, where my daughter was in school, and found out that the basement had flooded. When we started to look around -- yes, of course it flooded; it was on the west side of Church Square Park. I knew shortly thereafter that the library got some stuff [unclear] next door, where the food kitchen is. Oh, wow. The food kitchen. That's really going to be needed now. You started to find out a few days into this, that this was an amazing group of volunteers who were around. There were people who were pulling all sorts of garbage and stuff out of the basement. April -- whom I had only met in passing, my wife knew, because the school had done some things with the food pantry before -- I ended up going in there. I could see they were cleaning stuff out in the basement, and she was very much in a bad way. Her operation had shut down and wasn't functioning. It was critical that it needed to. You would assume that there was food coming in and stuff, but she wasn't aware of clothing

and things, and she could obviously be a key distribution point, using her network and her knowledge and stuff.

So I, along with running around and doing other things, started to stop in there. It ended up that the Convent building, which was historically the convent -- she'd been in the basement. She had permission to move up to the first floor -- which didn't get any water. They started out in a room or two. It was all in a jumble. She had some older women who were trying to organize things. Things were in plastic bags again, and they weren't stacked well, and there was no shelving and what not. I ended up in there with some other people, in helping to organize her, and get it so it's functional. I felt good about that. I felt good. She runs an amazing organization, and I realized that she had this network of people, many of them minority, Hispanic; some of them speak poor English, live back in the projects, and these aren't people that maybe a lot of people in town know do such wonderful things. But the way that April could make sure she had supplies, that people who were in real need in the projects -- I started to hear from these women -- sometimes in poor English or translated -- just how bad things were in the projects. I believe there are about fifteen buildings there. Having worked in construction in the South Bronx and in Harlem, I wasn't

thrown going back and seeing -- maybe I have more insight than some other people have. I also, from a construction point of view, and an operations point of view, understood that if you've got -- I think the tallest building is a twelve-story -- if you didn't have water in upper floors, if you didn't have emergency power in the hallways, seniors, and people who didn't have the means -- that some people in my neighborhood might have -- there were going to be real problems. I shouldn't say "problems," but they were going to have some hardships that were going to be challenges for them as individuals, and also our community.

I think I had a sheet. I knew what every address was, in the Housing Authority -- and I'm doing this in an official capacity -- knowing what the building numbers were; knowing how tall they were; knowing whether they or not they had electricity. I was getting this information from some of these women who were going and taking food from April directly to individuals they knew -- pregnant women, mothers who were in need -- but there was always the issue: You had to walk up and down stairs, sometimes in the dark. Of course, we know there are some issues with crime and things back there. It was a tough thing. But some of these wonderful women were making sure, taking things where they were really in need.

So I tried to help April out in that. There were times I'd make sure that she knew how to get food from what was a central distribution point, up at the high school, and that they were feeding her food and blankets, and she would say things that she needed: She needed diapers, she needed baby food, things like that. I'd go tell people, and I can't remember the woman's name, who was doing a great job at the high school, making sure that some of that got down to April, so she could distribute it. I also, on my own -- another thing -- I ended up -- I was over at the projects a couple times, a few days, and the Red Cross was there and the Salvation Army. I came to know some of the people who were working for them, and there were some amazing people who came in from faraway places -- Tennessee, Kentucky, and had been at Katrina and things like this. I know a couple times I found that there were Red Cross trucks distributing food up here near the museum. I was a bit thrown, because whatever flooding we had basically receded back into the river. Not that there was a lot of economic activity in town, but I assumed that, by and large, most people up this way were okay. We had some of the bodegas have flooding issues and things, and lack of heat a couple days into it, when that storm came and stuff. There was a need for blankets; there was a need for

clothing; people had lost some stuff. Maybe some of it wasn't distributed as well as it might have been. But this was, again -- people at City Hall asked if I could help out on that. I made some calls to the Red Cross and to the Salvation Army, and told them that they could probably do the best work they could do and get to the most people if they were back in places like Sixth and Jackson, or Second and Harrison, and some places that maybe some people in town weren't venturing back to. Then there was a lot of good -- there was an amazing amount of good work being done.

But I remember, in the dark, being back by the Jubilee Center, handing out, with a Red Cross truck -- I wasn't handing out sandwiches, but there with my Ford Explorer, with the headlights on, and with some signal flares, and they handed out, in a matter of a couple hours, I think, 1,000-2,000 hot meals, that were really needed. These people didn't know anything about Hoboken. They just showed up. That was good. I was happy I could see that done.

And I tried to get a hold of the police, because -- not that we were necessarily going to get jumped or something, but it would have been good to have a police officer -- and eventually there were some police officers

who came along, and they were very helpful. We went down and we parked at, I think, Third and Harrison, in the middle of the projects. A few of the officers knew people down that way, and they called people down. I think a lot of people got food that might not have otherwise. So anything I could do to help that was good. People were scared to come out. There weren't any lights. They eventually got some generators in the projects, where they had some construction lights -- you see highway construction at night -- and a few things like that, but that was few and far between.

I babble here. Another thing -- and this was six days into it, I think. Sunday morning -- I know I'd make a point -- there were different things and different people I was catching. In some ways, if April was doing okay at In Jesus Cares [sic], I didn't feel I needed to go back there. She had my phone, she could call or something, and I had a cellphone that I could -- things at home -- people were coming by. They were cooking, and there were people staying with us that we didn't know, or people stopping in or staying late. So there was kind of a home base for a variety of people.

I'd make a point of, early in the day, like before dawn, I'd get up (and I was getting by on very

little sleep, as sometimes I do), I'd drive around town, and I'd see where there were lights on. I'd understand where power was, and some of that information I was feeding back to City Hall. And other people -- it wasn't just that they didn't know, but it was helpful for people to understand what was going on. I'm sure the police and the fire departments knew a lot of this stuff; and, certainly, PSE&G. I'd go by the sub-stations and I'd see the guys working. I had in my head that the Thirteenth Street substation was in better shape than the one by Shoprite, and the worst of them all was the one down at First Street, Second Street and Harrison, because it was under much more water. There were crews in from all over.

But I was driving around this one morning, and I guess the water had receded back by the Jubilee Center. I was familiar with the Jubilee Center from some things my wife had done, and involvement I had had, on a variety of things. It's a great organization, and they do an amazing job of reaching out and connecting people within the community, with people who have some resources, with people who have some needs. I went back and the door was locked. It was very early in the morning, but I realized that they didn't have any water damage, particularly, except for the entry, because the first-floor slab is

elevated. So, with that, I decided I'm going to go over to the Episcopal church -- the All Saints -- that is instrumental in organizing what. It was All Saints Day, so I'm over at the church, at about 8:00 in the morning or something, and Reverend Curtiss and his wife, Linda, were there. They knew me, for various reasons. I went in and I asked -- I said, "Can you open the Jubilee Center?" They said, "We don't have any electricity." I said, "Well, the water's gone down. I have a generator." I had a generator, not the ones they got for the city, but a friend of mine from Syracuse had actually driven one down and left it off at our house the night before, because he wanted to help out. He said, "If anybody needs this, give it out. Let them use it." So somebody upstate New York was thinking of us down here.

So I ended up telling them that if you open it up, I can get you electricity. With that, Linda and I went over to the Jubilee Center. She opened it up. They've got gas stoves. The gas was working. I said, "Just start boiling water, so we've got water." And they have a fully-equipped kitchen, which is great. And I've worked a lot in the food business and the restaurants, so it was just like -- start boiling water. I knew at that time that the Elks were doing stuff. They were feeding a lot of people, and

there were some other places in town to get food. But it would seem that, because of the proximity of the Jubilee Center to the Housing Authority buildings, that it would be really helpful to get that going. So some of the parishioners who were getting set up for All Saints Day -- with no electricity, I think. Or maybe there was electricity. Our power in our house came back on, on Saturday night at a quarter to 11:00, and it was starting to come on in bits and pieces in town, initially around the hospital and some other places. So I had power at home. I'm not sure if they had power at All Saints Church. I think they had candles out. They didn't have power at the Jubilee Center, but I could get them a generator. I asked them to start boiling water, and I went over to the A&P -- that I don't believe had electricity at that point -- and went in and bought as much oatmeal as I could, and just started, with the assumption that we're just going to start cooking oatmeal. (The old Boy Scout in me.)

So we went back, and some of the parishioners came over. They just started cooking, and they made cheap oatmeal with cinnamon and some sugar. We had Styrofoam bowls, and within two hours some parishioners and some other people in the neighborhood were there, handing out, going around -- nobody came -- they put out a sign,

initially, "Everybody's probably wondering who are the crazy people at the Jubilee Center and that guy running around?" -- being me -- and I was calling up and saying, "Hey, there's hot food down here." People started to come down, walk across the street, walk a block or two. It was a slow process. I think initially it was tough to give the stuff away, but I think within a day or two -- within a day -- staff was back there, we could run electricity, and I plugged in a refrigerator. I also made my first run for them up to the high school. I went in and grabbed some juice and things, then went back sometime later that day, with one of the staff member (I can't remember his name, again), went up to the high school and introduced the person from the Jubilee Center to the people giving out food [at the] distribution point, and just said, "This is legit; make sure he's got everything he needs." I think the first delivery was we had a laundry basket full of chicken soup. I can remember some young kids who had come over after church were opening up regular-sized cans and just dumping them into a five-gallon pot, and heating up soup that was very appreciated by people who were walking in -- just to come in and say they were happy to sit down and have -- it wasn't cold in there. We didn't have heat but it was dry -- a place to socialize and sit at a table. I think

we had a radio on, with some music. It was nice. It was nice. It was helpful. Again, over there, I knew that was going, and there were a couple of people who were keeping it going. I didn't feel a need, after that, to get back to the Jubilee Center, necessarily. I'd stop in occasionally. I'd go back a day or two later, and they had the internet going. That, for all sorts of people -- somebody who was some IT guy figured out how to get that going, and that was very helpful. They were already starting to do FEMA forms, and I was getting some information from City Hall, and being able to bring it over to the Jubilee Center, and maybe some of those newsletters and things. Just doing whatever I could to kind of facilitate whatever help I might. So. What other babble do I have?

AS: Well, my last question -- which I've been asking everybody -- do you feel as if Hoboken has recovered, and if so, was there a moment that made you think, "Hoboken is back?"

JC: I think Hoboken is an amazingly vibrant city. There is so much economic vitality here. There is so much street life. It was a gradual process. It's not completed. It's not as obvious what the damages are now.

There are other communities where there was -- I'm told we lost 4,000 cars. I'm told 1,750 apartments -- low-level basements, ground-floor units were damaged. Subsequent to the storm, I got back involved and I've steered myself toward learning more about flood-plan management, which is a certification program that I've gotten. I've been to some FEMA conferences. I've been to things with the Army Corps of Engineers. I've been involved in a lot of great conversations, that are really needed.

We all need to understand what happened. It appears we are historically on an island. The peak of the island is where the Stevens family house was; but, basically, we all know now that Washington Street is high, and there's a topographic line that runs around at about ten feet, and below that, in a storm such as this, you're liable to get flooded. We have to fix that. We have to figure out what the smart thing to do is. There are 53,000 people in town. We have too much exposure. We have old buildings. Have we recovered? The fact is, it's not like we're down at the shore and your house got picked out and floated into the bay. We're not in a bad way, the way some other places are. But there are all sorts of people -- there are businesses that were really horribly hurt. We're a community that is transient, somewhat. There are people

who move in and out, particularly young people, as we've gentrified. Some of what we need to do -- big things we need to do -- kind of macro-engineering -- to keep the water out, so the surge doesn't come in. We've got to fix our combined storm and sanitariums, and we need to build better. We need to think about what we can put on ground-level floors. Should we have a furnace down there? We lost 4,000 cars. That was -- I won't use the word "stupid," but in some cases we should have been smarter. It seemed that there were a lot of other cars -- during Irene, people moved their cars, more so than they did for this one, because they saw Irene, and they decided it wasn't going to flood, and they left it. But where do you put 4,000 cars? You can't drive them all up to Stevens and put them on the football field.

So we've got to figure this stuff out. Have we recovered? I'm sure there are some places -- I've had a lot of conversations with people -- I look down at the -- what's the coffee place that's down at Second and Garden? He took six feet of water. He's, amazingly, rebuilt. How many times can a business do that? What's the value of a building that's been in the family for years, that has a rental apartment on the first floor, that now isn't as economically viable to rent? Can an elderly, senior citizen

who owns the building -- that's reportedly worth a lot of money -- afford to live there anymore, because they don't have a rental income, because they can't rent out the first floor? There are things we've got to do. We've got to have emergency systems. We have to be smart about generators. The initiatives that the city is taking, as far as micro-grids on our electrical system is smart. We need to upgrade our storm and sanitary. People need to understand what the exposure is; to understand the basic -- we live in this great city. Many of the buildings are 100 years old, and we're not smart about understanding what damages we can have. You ask somebody, "Did you protect your house?" "Oh, I did something up two feet." "Well, what's the elevation?" People don't know what the elevation is -- the elevation being off of sea level. People don't know that stuff. We need to understand that stuff. It's really important. I know that, because of who I am, that I'm in much better shape, because my front stoop, I believe, is at about twelve-foot. Somebody who lives back on Monroe Street, it's a five. People need to understand that information. So.

AS: Is there anything you'd like to add, that I didn't already ask about?

JC: We live in a wonderful city. I'd hate to think we'd have to retreat from the water. We live on the edge of the Hudson River. But it's not just the edge of the Hudson River, or upper New York harbor; we live on the edge of the Atlantic. It appears, you know, that sea level is rising. That can be documented. Whether you believe in global warming or not, the fact is, the expectation is, that water levels are going to be higher. A city like ours -- the chances of something like this happening again are much greater than they probably were in the past. We have to be smart about it, and we haven't been. We've really been kind of naïve. We have a natural topography that can work for us in protecting ourselves, with our old island, with our palisades behind us. What serves to trap the water in Hoboken is the water basically -- we only have to keep the water out for a couple hours during the high-tide cycle. If the Atlantic Ocean comes up ten feet because all the glaciers melt, we've got a much bigger problem. But if we're only talking about if we have a Sandy-type storm, and a storm surge every couple of years, we have to be able to build walls, have edges that we can protect ourselves. We have to have a pumping system. We have to have sanitary systems. We can only build the sewer plant so big. We have to have places to hold water until it can get pumped out

into the river, because the sanitary plant is lower in elevation than the high-tide line.

We can do these things, but we have to focus ourselves. We have to be smart about it. It isn't a political fight, it's a practical fight.

And I'm amazed at our community. I was really taken by all the volunteers, across the board, and some of our public servants. There have been good discussions since the storm; there has to be more. We can't forget what happens. We've got to focus ourselves, now that it's in our collective memories, what happened, and we shouldn't be waiting. We can't wait five years to figure this out. We need to focus ourselves now, and do some more things. We're very lucky to have people -- the governor, the mayor, other people -- people in the federal government, in HUD, have pointed out that Hoboken has some unique issues, and work with FEMA out of the box; work with the Army Corps of Engineers, figuring out what we have to do. We have Stevens here, which has amazing resources. We're very lucky to have that. They've looked at some of the flood control issues, with their oceanography people, with their marine systems. We should be taking advantage of that; have a public/private collaboration. We should be using any resource we have, to figure this out. People have

done it in the past, people have done it in Holland. A lot of our issues, if we can figure them out here, in our square-mile city of 50,000 people -- I've told people that I know from FEMA and other people that if you can figure it out in Hoboken, this will transpose to being able to work problems out to their potential in New York, in Boston, in Philly, and the low-lying areas of Washington, Savannah, and Charleston. All these things. I want us to see us move forward. I want to see us smart about it. We shouldn't leave a few hundred rail cars in our train yard. We need to be smart about understanding that water is going to go down (and I trust they're doing this), that water is going to go down to the entry level of the PATH train. All these things.

Recovery -- you said when did the city feel like it got back? I think the real milestone for many of us was when the PATH train got back. I don't use it extensively, because I'm up at the north end of town, and I don't go into Manhattan regularly. But that ended up -- having that kind of connectivity with Manhattan again was critical to us being where we are, and the fact that we're such a heavily mass-transit city. It didn't mean that we had to rely on the buses so much. We were lucky we had the ferries.

There's a lot of be done.

AS: Thank you.

JC: You're welcome, Alan.