

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**HOUSTON'S RESPONSE TO THE
VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA**

*AN INTERVIEW WITH
DR PAUL ROBY, M.D.*

Dr. Roby is the Director of Neighbors-2-Neighbors Program, Office of Disaster and Preparedness and Response, a program designed to match up evacuee families with local Houstonian families. This interview looks at the analysis of a disaster and the philosophy of reestablishing the physical and emotional needs of the victims by matching evacuee families with local ones who introduce them to neighborhood stores and facilities.

He was interviewed on December 14, 2005 at his office in the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, 3217 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas 77006. The interview was conducted by Ernesto Valdés, Center for Public History, University of Houston where the tape is deposited in M.D. Anderson Library on the main campus of the university.

Done on Houston, Texas, August 31, 2006.

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Interviewee: Dr. Paul B. Roby

Interview: Dec. 14, 2005

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Interview with: Dr. Paul B. Roby

Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes

Date: Dec. 14, 2005

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

EV: This is Ernesto Valdes and I am interviewing Dr. Paul B. Roby in his office in Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, 3217 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas on Dec. 14, 2005 at approximately 3:00 P.M. I mentioned to you before we began that this interview will be archived in the M. D. Anderson Library, University of Houston for future scholars and researchers. I will need you to sign the release form for these archives for the University of Houston. O.K., if you would just state your full name for me please.

PBR: My name is Paul Benjamin Roby, M.D.

EV: And where were you born?

PBR: I was born in Royal Oak, Michigan, November 29, 1955.

EV: Would you tell us a little bit about your background and your education?

PBR: Sure. I attended the University of Michigan in the integrated premedical/medical program admitted basically to medical school at age 17. I discovered by the time I had graduated from medical school in 1981 that I had a growing interest in business and computer science and technology in general, so midway through my second year of postgraduate medical residency in anesthesiology, I made a decision to leave medical

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practice and move into technology development and industry. Since then, I've had a long career in various aspects of technology and business development, primary medical research and later, software development. I found, after leaving regular industrial employment and just supporting myself with consulting for a few years, my consulting practice dwindling as my clients were tired and made their millions in mergers and acquisitions and decided to do woodworking and such instead. And by the spring of 2005, I was really beginning to look for more meaningful things to do than struggle along with the small consulting projects and watching that dwindling. Having a highly eclectic background made it difficult to go a conventional route to getting a good job so I decided to simply start volunteering. I spent the summer doing volunteer work in Seattle. By the fall, my church, Seattle First Baptist Church, has a program that it supports called *Companis*, that places professionals in nonprofit agencies. Normally, for a one year placement, *Companis* pays housing expenses, medical insurance, and a very small food stipend. When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, a number of people in Seattle wanted to do something other than simply send money to the Red Cross or other agencies, and the executive director of *Companis* began looking around the region for a social service agency that might benefit from the services of the *Companis* professional. His name is Craig Darling, in Seattle. He found Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, which has a long history of social service in the Houston area, and spoke with our director of development, Frank Levy, here at Interfaith Ministries and asked Frank whether Interfaith could use some volunteer assistance with Katrina relief because he had found the news articles at Interfaith was involved. Frank, after looking at my resume, basically asked how soon I could come and then, I think, within one week, I was on an

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airplane to Houston. So, I arrived on September 9, a Friday, in the evening, really not knowing what I would be doing here and just prepared to stuff envelopes or program computers or whatever was necessary, and initially was working with Dr. Jameson Day who is, I believe, a professor or assistant professor at University of Houston in the Business School. Dr. Day was developing a program called Neighbors to Neighbors. The program is a City of Houston initiative, City of Houston, Harris County powered by Houston's faith communities and managed by Interfaith Ministries. Jameson and I worked together for a time. He had other interests and was focusing on some of the technology development for the web site around Neighbors to Neighbors and within one week or so, I found myself directing the program.

Neighbors-2-Neighbors is an effort to provide some connection for Katrina evacuees in Houston. Normally, when somebody moves to a new city, they have a reason for going there. They have a job, a family – one way or another, they have people in the place where they are going. The Katrina evacuees, a lot of them kind of went from dirty water to dark chaos to buses to Houston. Found themselves here with no friends, no family other than the people that may have accompanied them from New Orleans or the other areas in the Gulf Coast. So, what Neighbors-2-Neighbors sought to do was match Houston volunteers, not professional case managers or psychologists but just ordinary people, mainly from faith communities on an individual basis with Katrina evacuees. The original idea I think as we were starting out was that we would spin up a huge computer database and use almost an ecommerce model to go out and register people on the internet and through volunteers and phone centers and other ways of getting their information gathered, we would train the Houston volunteers with a brief power point

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lecture/presentation about how to be what we call a welcoming neighbor for what we call our new neighbors and then match them up based on our original idea was a whole lot of geography and demographics and get people of similar ages. I think initially, we were quite ambitious in our ideas about providing something that would be sort of like a computer dating service where we get a profile on the evacuee and a profile on the volunteer and match them up according to characteristics that we thought would make them compatible.

EV: What would be those characteristics?

PBR: Originally, the idea was age, educational, professional background. There were a number of things. This quickly actually fell by the wayside and what we realized was that that sort of a highly sophisticated and detailed matching program would require a long development cycle and we really didn't see ourselves as having that much time. The idea was that when an evacuee has settled in a new neighborhood in Houston, the volunteer would kind of be a friend in town – somebody who knows the neighborhood, can say, 'This is where the post office is.' 'If you have 3 Social Security offices you can go to, that one is across town, this one is closest but this one over here that is not the closest is easier to get to by bus' – the kind of local knowledge that a friend would provide for a friend who lives here.

EV: Let me go back just a second. Do you know how Interfaith initially got involved with the rescue effort?

PBR: Initially, Interfaith was involved with the City of Houston. The mayor called kind of a crisis meeting. Interfaith has had the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response which I know direct here and thus, has been historically interested in disaster relief in

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Houston. So, we are one of the groups that the mayor called together. Interfaith worked closely with Second Baptist Church on what was called Operation Compassion which was a program to provide meals to the people sheltering at the George R. Brown Convention Center. In doing that, we helped mobilize and channel something on the order of 30,000 volunteers from Houston faith communities to get trained in safe food handling at Second Baptist and then provide the actual serving of the meals and preparation and serving at the George R. Brown for about one month. So, that was the first phase of our Katrina relief effort, and that was actually well under way before I personally arrived here on September 9. What was kind of notable about that was that although Second Baptist had a heavy coordinating role and was very instrumental along with Texas Baptist Men, which was one of their disaster relief organizations at providing the food and the preparation, with the help of Interfaith Ministries, we were able to involve people of all faiths. About 10% of the volunteers, for example, were Muslims. We had Jews, Hindus, and Sikhs and a number of faiths which is really what Interfaith Ministries is all about – is bringing people of different faith groups together to do work to make Houston and the world a better place to live as an expression of those different faiths without the effort being sectarian. So, the concern arose for helping people get local connections and the mayor and the county judge, Robert Eckels, asked Interfaith to convene a program to match up Houston volunteers with the individual evacuees. That is the program that I found myself directing.

EV: So, in effect, you merged with other social agencies in the relief? I guess that I am trying to say is when the mayor put out a call to social agencies – did you all set up

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your own enclave or was it a coordinated effort where you merged with other groups and provided . . .

PBR: The other groups convened and were coordinated and assisted by the United Way. I think the meetings, the initial group meetings, were at United Way headquarters and for Operation Compassion, United Way handled the financial accounts for the donations of money for food. United Way serves a very important coordinating role as well. They are also a major supporter of Interfaith Ministries.

EV: On a day-to-day basis, were there just tables run by you all or serving lines or was just everyone kind of mixed in?

PBR: I think there were serving lines. You need to talk with other people . . .

DD: (Speaking to Mr. Dave Dozier in the adjoining cubicle) O.K., it was mixed. In other words, you could have Muslims, Seiks, etc. they all came together on a scheduled day and worked together.

EV: So the call went out from the mayor and you all responded to the mayor's call. And then, that's when you arrived on the scene?

PBR: Probably one week or so into the process.

DD: What date?

PBR: September 9. I had nothing directly to do . . .

DD: About 8 to 10 days into the process.

PBR: Right. I had nothing directly to do with *Operation Compassion*. I am strictly a Neighbors-2-Neighbors guy.

EV: All right, so when you came to Interfaith, what was your first assignment?

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PBR: My first meeting was on a Saturday with Dr. Jameson Day. We got together here at Interfaith Ministries with nobody else here and quietly began to assess what it was we were undertaking to do. One of the things we realized was that a lot of things had been set in motion without as well worked out a sense of what we were seeking to accomplish as we probably needed. Jameson and I spent a lot of time on that Saturday just talking about what we were going to try to do and began sort of setting the scope of the program and in reviewing the efforts to bring up web sites and other technology related to it, it became clear to us by Sunday when we also met and spent some time talking about it, that we probably wanted to take a somewhat simplified approach and just think of ways to get Houston volunteers individually together with Katrina evacuees. We originally thought that the Houston volunteers would be taking people from shelters directly to their apartments. The volunteers were originally . . . the plan was that they would help provide the initial transportation of the evacuees and their belongings.

EV: Is this under the Neighbors-2-Neighbors . . .

PBR: Under Neighbors-2-Neighbors, and then help them get set up in their new apartments, which we thought would happen very quickly. Now, the reality turned out to be very different. We registered in the program a number, several hundred evacuees but the only address information we had for them was George R. Brown shelter or the Astrodome or wherever they were. They were there longer than we had initially thought they might be and a great many of them didn't go directly into their more permanent housing. Instead, they went to hotels, and were moving around a great deal. And so, when they were in the shelters, we knew where they were but we didn't know where they were going to live, so we couldn't match them with people in their future neighborhoods

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at that time. When they had moved out into their neighborhoods finally from the hotels into the apartments as the city frantically worked to create low income or affordable housing for them, at that point, we lost track of where they were because we couldn't take a name of someone we had registered in a shelter and find out what apartment they had ended up in.

EV: So, there was no real follow-up, it was just moving people?

PBR: There was no path to follow then. The city didn't know specifically where they went. Rumor has it that FEMA knew but FEMA wouldn't tell the city or us because of privacy concerns for the individuals whom they were helping to find housing.

EV: I want to make sure I understand this. I assume that all these programs were dovetailed to work together just like the eating lines where everyone was all kind of dovetailed together?

PBR: I don't know what you mean by dovetailed together.

EV: Were there people from other agencies working together helping people register together for housing at the Center?

PBR: There were a number of them and there were people scattered around . . . they were in the large shelters like GRB (George R Brown Convention Center) and the Astrodome. There was a second tier, which was the Red Cross who operated shelters around the city. Then there was a third tier and a lot of informal shelters, church basements, things like that.

EV: Well, I was thinking more in terms of your particular . . . well, you said you had a group of names that you wanted to assist, how did you get those names?

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PBR: We got those names by volunteers at tables at the GRB and people handing out flyers, folks who telephoned in to an inbound call center and registered through that process.

EV: Were those Interfaith Ministry volunteers or from anybody?

PBR: They were, I believe, mostly Interfaith Ministry. Interfaith Ministry volunteers come from a wide variety of faith communities in Houston.

EV: Right, so then they took in the names, they sent them over to you. In the meantime, there are other people trying to house them, I guess. And so, in that process, you were not able to keep the _____?

PBR: Well, there was an effort to empty out those large shelters and those people then sort of disappeared into the city for us. We knew that they were in hotels. So, what we found was that we were able to reach the ones who had given us mostly New Orleans cell phone numbers. A lot of those phone numbers still worked. So, weeks later, they had had time to go out and get into apartment housing . . . we were able to reach a number of them but we found ourselves launching a second wave of outreach because the city of Houston knew where the apartment complexes were that had been certified for use with these vouchers. So, we found ourselves going out to those apartment complexes and registering people all over again. Later, we had people in our telephone center here in the building and earlier, a smaller one at Houston Crisis Intervention Center, contacting the people who had registered while they were in GRB for whom we had cell phone numbers and verifying that they were still interested in being matched with a welcoming neighbor, and we proceeded to establish where they were. And what we ended up doing was matching people on a strictly geographical basis. Basically looking for welcoming

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neighbors in the same zip code as the new neighbor. And when we couldn't find a match within the zip code, looking in adjacent zip codes. This was a very labor-intensive process.

EV: It sounds like it. Could one say that every time you all turned around to go onto the next step or to ask another agency to help you, it just seemed that everybody was overwhelmed?

PBR: Yes, there was a lot of overwhelmed-ness among many people trying to serve the housing needs, the furniture needs, the health care needs, the child care needs, the transportation needs. In general, I think the city of Houston and Harris County have mounted a massive effort but this is something for which nobody was quite prepared, nobody had anticipated that hundreds of thousands of people would suddenly appear in Houston with routine needs for shelter, jobs, faith communities, everything else, along with a lot of special needs.

EV: The needs of all the parables – thirsty, hungry, and naked.

PBR: Yes, all those things. So, the one thing we knew was going to be the case was that it wouldn't be the way we imagined it would unfold and that proved to be exactly right. So, a few weeks in, after we realized that our initial computer database efforts had produced pretty good information about Houston volunteers, we knew where those people were but very little good information about where the Katrina evacuees were after they had moved around as much as they did. We launched, and David Dozier who you will interview later, was instrumental in helping lead an effort to go out to the apartment complexes where we knew Katrina evacuees were being lodged and do outreach for the

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program all over again. And then, we were able to register several hundred through that process.

EV: When you all were out there with your clients in these different housing areas like you just mentioned, did you pick up other people that needed help?

PBR: That has been kind of an interesting thing. It is difficult . . . and Hurricane Rita actually provided some examples of this as well . . . what we realized were a lot of these folks had special needs. There were elderly people. You know, the folks who were educated or had a lot of job skills, resilient, mobile, well connected with telephones and internet and such folks, a lot of these people picked up and made lives for themselves on their own. We found ourselves especially trying to serve folks who were elderly or had disabilities or were simply in poverty probably before they came here and their special needs didn't go away as they arrived in Houston. And increasingly, we sort of found that the basic thing that happened to them in Katrina was that something they couldn't control came and wrecked their home. But there are a lot of things in America where things that people don't basically control come and wreck their home. And we found ourselves asking, well, is a Hurricane Rita survivor all that different from a Hurricane Katrina survivor? Is that kind of person all that different from somebody whose job in a textile factor went to China or who was suffering with an abusive spouse or where an alcohol or a drug addiction had had an impact on their family and similarly, their home. And we, in our program, are constantly struggling with the issue of do we expand into what is sometimes referred to as case management? Or do we try to stick strictly to the objective of matching Houston volunteers with Katrina evacuees to provide sort of nonprofessional, friend-in-town type of connection. And generally, as a policy, we went

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with the latter approach, although we did find ourselves doing seminars with other groups on mental health and occasionally helping with furniture, clothing or other special needs where we could. But as a matter of policy, it sort of became necessary to focus down on accomplishing the one simple thing that we were trying to do which was . . . we talk a lot in disaster relief about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs where, as humans, we fundamentally need air and water and food and once those things are taken care of, we then turn to our need for shelter, security, freedom from being subject to predators, crime and stuff. And then, a higher level of need are things like connection, meaningful work to do, other people to have some sort of relationships with. Then in Maslow's hierarchy, you go all the way on up to self-actualization and being Albert Schweitzer and all of those things. We were really, with Neighbors to Neighbors, operating at the level of connection but what we found was that that's not a very meaningful thing to offer somebody who was still struggling at the level of shelter, and by insecurity and food, having a bed to sleep on and a chair to sit on. So, we weren't ending up serving the tens of thousands we had originally thought we might. We weren't providing tens of thousands of people a ride from the shelter to a lovely apartment -- lovely, by any standard, meaning secure and warm and dry and with electricity and a telephone -- but we were, much later than we had thought in the process, able to start reaching Katrina evacuees who had managed to get settled in apartments and were still interested in getting some additional human contact, and we found ourselves matching those people with welcoming neighbors on an individual basis but also we found that a very important aspect of our matching work was when we found an apartment complex at a given location, we would look for faith communities in the same area. And these were

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congregations, usually Christian churches but not always who, as a ministry of hospitality to their new neighbors, were not completely comfortable with the paternalistic overtones of the word but in a sense would adopt an apartment complex and where the congregation would supply members who had been trained with the Neighbors-2- Neighbors program, to go and form these relationships with people in the complex near their congregation.

EV: I take it that the recipient's religion had no bearing on receiving help?

PBR: Generally. We are working with volunteers and couldn't fully control every aspect of every interaction but it was understood by the congregations and I believe they did a very good job that this was not just an intake mechanism for potential new members, although that undoubtedly resulted in a lot of cases but it was a ministry to the evacuees and if an evacuee were atheist or of a different religious faith, they would be just as welcome to take part in the program as somebody of the same faith as the congregation.

EV: You mentioned something earlier that kind of intrigued me because when you said that you initially began your planning you went through various web sites to see what kind of help you might be able to find - out of curiosity, what kind of web site did you look for in that type of trauma?

PBR: I am not sure I understand the question.

EV: Do you remember saying that you and . . .

PBR: We started developing our own web site.

EV: O.K., but you said you looked through some other web sites when you first started?

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PBR: We actually went through several design iterations of our own site. I think that is what I was referring to.

EV: O.K., I thought you just went looking in general through other web sites.

PBR: Yes. We initially had a very ambitious idea that we would have a site that people would log in to and register in detail and be able to post information about resources available to evacuees and where to get furniture and things like that. That quickly became unwieldy especially because we were trying to sort of spit it up and put it into production at the same time and normally, a very sophisticated site like that takes weeks of development just to settle the requirements, then more weeks to actually code everything, and then more weeks to test everything.

EV: Did your whole staff here involved in this endeavor?

PBR: I think everybody on the staff at some point got involved in some way but it was primarily the Office of Disaster, Preparedness and Response staff and some of the development and outreach staff and then volunteers. And we had volunteers . . . I came from Seattle as a volunteer, in essence. I was supported by my agency in Seattle that didn't cost Interfaith anything directly. And we had volunteers from the Disciples of Christ in Indianapolis and, at various times, other volunteers from around the country coming to help, especially with things like Apartment Outreach and Congregation outreach. And various places in the community helped. I think some of the restaurant chains would provide food for our informational events, Talisman Motors – a used car dealership in Houston – provided me with an automobile that I am still using while my Honda Civic is on a truck coming from Seattle.

EV: (Laughing) That's what they say!

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PBR: I know it is coming. I watched it go on the truck. I hope it is coming. But there were a lot of generous contributions from the community. What Talisman provided us, for instance, would have cost \$2,000 to \$3,000 if we had had to rent a car. So, there is amazing generosity from all throughout Houston and around the country.

EV: For the most part during this rescue operation, I suspect, you probably stayed on the administrative level?

PBR: Yes.

EV: But did that ever require you to move into the “front line troops?” Did you ever go interview and mingle with the evacuees?”.

PBR: We only used military analogies during times of crisis. But I didn’t do very much of the actual frontline except for the individual matching and the database manipulation, the computer manipulation to the match by zip codes and generate materials for the call centers, I have done a lot of that work directly. But mostly, we have relied on volunteers to staff the call center, ODPR – Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response staff like Dave Dozier and his team, to do the outreach to apartments.

EV: Were you in direct contact with the government agencies of say, the city, county, FEDS?

PBR: Yes, our main contact was through the office of the mayor. And the mayor convened a meeting, it was daily for quite sometime, and then with slightly less frequency – there is the 8 a.m. meeting at George R. Brown Convention Center – to kind of review progress with all of the various agencies involved in Katrina relief.

EV: How did view the mayor’s performance?

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PBR: I have been impressed, I think along with everyone else. And this was not the disaster that anyone planned for. You didn't have the notion . . . I mean, we were prepared for rain and floods and wind damage to Houston. Nobody was quite prepared for 200 some odd thousand people to arrive in an otherwise intact city of Houston with special needs and even when they arrived, these people came and thought they would be going home after a short few days and then found that their home was utterly destroyed. And there were a number of people also who came here, sort of middle class, the ones who didn't come on buses, the ones who came in their own vehicles and evacuated early, came and stayed in a hotel in Houston, that found that their job and their home were destroyed in New Orleans and after a few weeks of living in hotels and eating in restaurants, their savings were wiped out and they had become poverty stricken - folks who otherwise had good working lives and regular jobs and homes and mortgages and everything else. So, the cycle of need for which Neighbors-2-Neighbors would originally work extended far longer than we thought and even now in mid December, people are still moving from motels into what apartments are left and while we are going to phase out the individual matching process, we anticipate helping congregations do their own outreach to apartments and Katrina evacuees probably for months if not years to come.

EV: Well, I think there was a motel or apartment house that burned down last night.

PBR: Yes, I heard about that this morning.

EV: Did you have any particular story or contact with any of these folks that would be your typical moment or your one memorable experience?

PBR: I have had several. We did a presentation - I think I ended up with something like maybe a full 2-1/2 minutes on Fox News nationally where we met an evacuee from New

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Orleans, an elderly lady and her adult son, who had come from a fairly horrendous story of survival in flood waters through to the shelter and then an apartment complex in Houston, and they had been helped with the Neighbors-2-Neighbors program. And I got to meet her personally and her son and have been quite touched with that story. One of the things that we are anticipating doing over the next few weeks and months is going out now to the people that we had matched earlier and gathering stories. In fact, if you like, we may invite you to gather oral history from those that might want to participate.

EV: Yes, that might be something we might consider.

PBR: But we are not just phasing out the intensive efforts to make matches. We are not phasing it out as much as we are shifting it under a more sustainable basis because we can't sustain the labor to do it in the way we have been doing it, support congregations in continuing this work on their own longer term and I think mounting sort of a followup effort to find out how it went. We have a number of anecdotes, some very touching stories where a welcoming neighbor assisted a new neighbor in finding health care or was just a friend at a time when somebody more than anything needed a friend. And I hope that we will be able to get a lot more of those kinds of stories over the next few weeks. We are going to be getting the assistance of some people with not quite professional social worker skills but enough education and background to help gather the information as sort of documentations and they will be available through a work force program. Interfaith Ministries has expended a fair amount of internal funds on things like installing telephones for the call center and software server rental and such and as a non-profit, we really don't have large cash reserves as which to do this so we have to take advantage of volunteers and workers provided by other programs and we have been given a great

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opportunity to get a number of these people who are sort of called assistant case managers. I think we are expecting to have 6 such people join us next week. And we are looking forward to putting them to work on finishing up the individual match work that we are doing and following up with the people who have been matched and finding out how the program actually was for them.

EV: Are you experiencing . . . there have been several stories on NPR and other news agencies and media that there might be a hangover . . . I guess hangover is not the right word but people are just overwhelmed by the donations of time and money that now they just can't go anymore, they just can't give anymore. Did you have any of that so far?

PBR: Yes, sometimes that is called donor fatigue.

EV: That's the phrase, "donor fatigue," yes.

PBR: Yes and no. There were a number of people who were exhausted by actually . . . churches, for example, that sheltered people. There are congregations we know about who have been financially . . . their financial existence is now threatened because they threw open their doors and provided shelter and may not have kept the kind of records that would allow them to get reimbursement through FEMA or the Red Cross, had enormous utility bills as a result and now are having trouble paying their mortgages.

EV: Is there some help going out to them in any way?

PBR: There are a number of agencies working with them. We are not working directly on that. What we are doing is putting together a conference on disaster preparedness which we anticipate having probably in late spring of the coming year where one of the things that we'll provide is education so that congregations and faith communities of all kinds . . . I wouldn't want to say churches even though the majority will be Christian

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churches because that is the majority of faith communities, but we are very interested in all faiths . . . but will provide faith communities with education on things like how do you register as a Red Cross shelter, how do you keep records that might help you get reimbursed for some of your costs, what are the best practices for becoming a small shelter should this kind of thing happen again.

EV: Yes, absolutely. That is awful to be like that.

PBR: So, we will have a disaster preparedness conference that we hope will be very well-attended and we are going to continue working to organize the faith communities in particular so that the response to the next hurricane can be that much better and we have full-time Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response working on precisely that -- helping faith communities not only learn how to protect themselves and their members during a disaster here -- how to move their records off-site and back things up, simple, mundane things like how to cover things in plastic and how to keep track of your members, how to look for the most vulnerable members of your community and see to it that they are helped at the time when they may need to evacuate or be assisted, and we are working to help with organization of long-term recovery efforts. We are working through the Gulf Coast . . .

Tape #1, Side 2

EV: This is side 2 of tape 1. We are continuing our conversation with Mr. Roby. This is Ernesto Valdes. Go ahead, Dr. Roby.

PBR: So, we are working with a number of other organizations - the Gulf Coast VOAD - Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster is a national program, and especially along

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with the United Way which is instrumental and very helpful in planning, in being organized, in setting up a structure for channeling the wave of interest and energy in volunteering that occurs after a disaster so that we can make the best use of that energy and community involvement when the next disaster occurs.

EV: Other agencies that I had read about said some of their people had problems with the effect that this entire trauma was having on their volunteers. Did you experience any of that? Did you hear about any of that?

PBR: Our volunteers here in the office I don't think have been subjected to a whole lot of the direct exhausting work out on site or things like that. And so, I found myself after a few weeks of working very long days and not having any real human contact outside of work and church, needing to sort of pay attention to my own needs, and I am sure that was the case for a number of our folks. But I think really it is a job and we are all kind of energized by it. I personally am very happy that I am able to do meaningful work here, especially now into a staff position. I am director of Interfaith Relations which includes the ODPR and a number of other functions.

EV: So, I take it you weren't working necessarily 8 to 5, 7 days a week?

PBR: No, it was more like _____ 7 days a week.

EV: Oh, really?

PBR: A lot of late night emailing and things like that. It has now settled down and it is a regular job. I am beginning to build a life for myself here in Houston. In a way, I mean, a little like some of the Katrina folks in that I came to Houston thinking that I'd be going home again and found I am not – not for at least a couple of years probably.

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EV: So, if you just look at the totality of trauma, there must be all kinds of needs, but did you ever dream it would call for such an extended “volunteer” time and unexpected problems that you would face. In particular, you spoke about the people coming in who, their special needs were just beyond anything you might have imagined.

PBR: The special needs are enormous. If you talk to people like Jeff Stys at United Way, or any of the other coordinating agencies, they can tell you about . . . or people in the office of the mayor, John Walsh or Michael Moore, chief of staff, can tell you about a whole array of special needs. There are people who came here with preexisting special needs, medical needs, substance abuse related needs, poverty-related needs. There are cultural differences between South Louisiana and Gulf Coast Texas that are generating needs and problems. There is a great deal of posttraumatic stress disorder. There are cultural barriers to getting mental health assistance in a lot of the Katrina communities.

EV: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

PBR: Folks who historically distrust health care systems because, going back to the _____ experiment and other things, or that just were cultures where getting assistance from a mental health professional is viewed as a stigma.

EV: Really?

PBR: Sure.

EV: What would they have gotten there?

PBR: Well, you are talking about South Louisiana, people, especially poor people who, within their own culture, were able to adjust and have good lives but had been completely turned upside down, taken out of their region, their culture, to a different region and culture. Houstonians, I think, have been marvelously hospitable and worked very hard

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but there are misunderstandings. There is probably some backlash -- there are problems in schools. Children manifest posttraumatic stress disorder in different ways than adults. There are a lot of mental health groups working very hard to try to get people to recognize symptoms of problems and even in the Neighbors-to-Neighbors level with individuals, we had reports from welcoming neighbors of sweet, elderly ladies who are hearing noises at night -- complaining about noise complaints, the noises that no one else can hear. Getting unexpectedly into altercations on buses. Things that sweet, elderly ladies don't normally do and they are probably manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder. But these things come out as behavioral issues or simply _____ maybe indicating kind of a psychotic condition and, in fact, to somebody who understands PTSD, are fairly predictable, fairly understandable, and fairly treatable. But connecting the folks up with the right kind of treatment and support is a challenge. People go into an apartment and don't have furniture is a challenge. If you talk to people at the Houston Furniture Bank, they will tell you that they never were prepared for this many people suddenly in need of furniture.

EV: As a physician, you must know what this is like -- people showing up without medically records and they would just verbally have to tell you, "This is what is wrong, this is what they've done for me." How was that handled?

PBR: Probably in a number of different ways. When you interview David Dozier, he will be able to tell the story of one evacuee -- a woman who came, had a fractured bone in her leg. The fracture was treated in New Orleans. She had pins and casts and things, surgical pins and a cast. Arrived here with no medical records, no cards, nothing, and needed some kind of medical help. And there is a story I can help you link to on a public

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television production of the woman telling the story of getting medical care with the assistance of a welcoming neighbor. Somebody who just knows where the hospitals are and can make telephone calls and help sort things out. There is a group of Islamic physicians in Houston that provided mobile clinics to shelters. There are undoubtedly a number of groups of which I am not aware but different communities and people have responded in many, many different ways. There is no unified, organized, well-worked-out system but a lot of those systems are even now still starting to come on line as people struggle to do the best they can to help their fellow human beings and fellow citizens.

EV: On this Neighbors-2-Neighbors, now that you have a lot of people who are not going to want to go back to New Orleans. Is this going to be an ongoing thing with these evacuees that don't want to go back or can't go back?

PBR: More likely can't go back. I know of a lot of people who don't want to. I think, myself included, I would be very happy if I could go home and have the same kind of life I have here. Yes, there is going to be ongoing need for quite some time and we are going to continue working with congregations, especially faith communities, to help meet those needs as best we are able. But ours is really just one part of the many, many kinds of services and ministries that the people impacted by Katrina are going to need.

EV: When you came here first, you knew what you were facing, right? I mean, you came here specifically for the tragedy. And, as you said, they decided to go ahead and keep you.

PBR: Yes, they ended up keeping me.

EV: Are you continuing then on the Neighbors-2-Neighbors?

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PBR: Yes, Neighbors-2-Neighbors will become just one of the programs offered through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response.

EV: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think might be interesting?

PBR: Well, a couple of the things that I have found personally is our work has led us to take an interest in working with, especially the Pakistani-American community in Houston, on trying to help support efforts at relief from the earthquake in Kashmir which is a far bigger disaster than Katrina in terms of lives lost.

EV: Oh, really?

PBR: Oh, yes. That is a huge, huge problem that is very under-recognized. It is under-reported in the U.S. There are tens of thousands of deaths there and as winter sets in, in the mountains that is going to get worse and worse. And we try to be helpful in whatever ways we could.

EV: What would be your avenues of help on something like that?

PBR: One of them was a benefit concert that some New Orleans jazz musicians had through connections through the Disciples of Christ denomination to Patricia Case, one of the volunteers from Indiana who came here and said, "We'd like to perform a benefit concert in Houston and we thought about trying to give back some of the hospitality and support we had received," and with Patty, they worked out that they would raise money for earthquake relief in Pakistan, in the Kashmir region - some of it is disputed between Pakistan and India. They did a concert, I think they called it "Play It Forward" and raised a certain amount of money. I am not sure how much. I attended a meeting at City Hall and we are ready to . . . we have helped use our email database to publicize a vigil to try

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to call attention to the Pakistan disaster, to the earthquake disaster that was held a couple of weeks ago in Houston. We are doing what we can to spread the word that there is enormous help needed there.

Another thing that I have sort of personally come to realize is that disaster relief is a great way to bring people of different faiths together to work. If you want to get Jews and Muslims and Hindus to do something together, disaster relief work is a really good thing because all of the world's major faiths and probably all the world's minor faiths stress humanitarian help and serving those in need as a way of serving whoever they worship. And the thing that I've come to realize is there is no shortage of disaster in the world. There are little disasters going on, on Montrose Boulevard right now on a human individual level. There are earthquakes and floods and tsunamis and tornadoes and hurricanes and more earthquakes, but there are also disasters around addiction, around family violence.

There are children subject to disaster. We have a health clinic that occurs twice a week here in our parking lot specifically for youth who had had no other source of health care. And as I work to help build our interfaith relations activities to higher and higher levels, I am finding that working on human need that arises unexpectedly often, albeit predictably; I mean, we know there will be hurricanes, we know there will be earthquakes, but unexpectedly for the individual people who are subject to them – the survivors, the victims – is a really good way to bring different faiths together and a way that we can work together as expressions of our faith, not pretending it is a secular thing and not ignoring our differences. I mean, different faiths have different sets of beliefs and interpretations about how you achieve salvation but we all pretty much agree on what

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to do if we see a fellow human in dire need. So, that has been kind of a neat thing for me and I have also come to realize that there is just no shortage of need and disaster out there.

EV: You could almost say that the divine powers that be kind of keep things popping in order to keep the different faiths working together.

PBR: Well, things pop all by themselves. As I said, there is just no shortage of that out there. We don't have to create . . . we might argue about whether through war and things like that we create a lot of these – there is a lot of human suffering out of that.

EV: Who is the head of that Pakistani campaign out here, do you know?

PBR: I don't think there is a single head of that campaign but a very good person to talk about the Pakistani earthquake relief with is City Councilman M.J. Khan. He is a Houston City Council member. Easy to reach. You can look on the City of Houston's web site and you can find anything.

EV: Yes, I have heard a lot of Jewish spell it Khan. That is the way you tell the difference. It is like I didn't know the way the Slavics whose last name ends in "ski" – the Polish spell it with an "i", the Russians spell it with a "y" so there is a little trivia for you!

PBR: My Polish great-grandparents' name was Bilitza. Didn't end in ski or sky.

EV: My wife's maiden name was . . . I keep thinking I can pronounce it correctly but it is "Jarzeckia".

PBR: There are a lot of Polish-American people in the Detroit area where I grew up.

EV: Yes, well, she is from Chicago. _____. Anyway, is there anything else you might want us to . . . keeping in mind this is going to go down . . .

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PBR: For history.

EV: Your standpoint, your part in the history of this.

PBR: Well, it has been a great journey for me. My role has really been, you know, somewhat sort of being Dilbert's _____ and in the future, you will have to go look at Scott Adams and the Dilbert cartoon to figure out what I am referring to but the folks . . . you know, I have been deeply impressed by the amount of energy and work that volunteers in Houston have put out, the hospitality that Houstonians have shown has impressed me. If you asked me six months ago what city would I be living in, in December 2005, Houston, Texas would have been the last place I would have imagined and when I think of things now like the Mayor's _____ Dinner and seeing the outreach efforts in the mosques, the temples and communities here, I have come to realize that a lot of Houston is kind of . . . my West Coast liberal stereotype of Texas . . . there are people and institutions here that are nothing like what I imagined. This is a very enlightened and very humane place.

EV: Yes, and I think some of what you are saying, some of Houston's concern, I think is just kind of a natural affection we have had for that city because it is so close, because we went there to play a lot, because as quirky as New Orleans was, we had a little more stiff-collar thing but we had no trouble zooming over to New Orleans to have our fun.

PBR: Yes, I guess I have a lot to learn yet about Houston and the Gulf Coast in general.

EV: But I think it is a correct assumption. I come from an area where they think they are pretty friendly but El Paso does not have the money Houston has. Houston has always responded very well in these kinds of things and I am impressed with it.

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PBR: Yes, Houston, the city government and the people in general in Houston are deeply impressive to me personally.

EV: Did you have one of your staff taking photographs of your participation?

PBR: Not a whole lot. I will show you some things online right now and then we have to finish up.

EV: Sure, or you can tell me where I can look online.

PBR: Sure, I'll get you the links. I have to find myself a blank CD-R and I can bring you a copy or if you have a G mail account or something, I can email you a large file. Something also that talks about Companis, the program that sent me.

EV: We might have it at the university. I mean, I just have a simple little PC. I am not as sophisticated as you are.

PBR: O.K., why don't we finish up the interview and I will show you the links.

EV: Wonderful. Thank you very much. This concludes our interview.

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