

Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project

Interviewee: Ory, Jon

Place of Interview:

Date of Interview: 2018-06-28

Interviewed by: Astor, Allie

Date of Transcription: 2019-07-02

Transcribed by: Davis, Alexis

Date of Revision(s):

Length of Interview: 00:44:41

Keywords and Subject Headings: Airbnb, America, Australia, Charleston, Folly Beach, New Zealand, West Ashley, community, culture, environment, island(s), kayak, long-term rentals, paddle board(s), real estate, renourishment, short-term rentals, Southern hospitality, teacher, tourism, tourist, travel

Abstract: In this interview, Jon Ory discusses his upbringing as a Charlestonian and his movements upstate. He tells about his desire to go abroad, so for approximately one and a half years, he traveled to various countries along the Pacific Ocean. He discusses how his travels influenced his decision to become an ESL teacher, an international trip leader, and finally a paddle board company owner and instructor. He shares his viewpoint on the changes he's noticed in Folly Beach, from the overall community to the day to day life. He also provides details about the environmental issues that Folly is facing in terms of erosion and the necessity of renourishing the beach every few years. As the owner of an eco-tour company, he desires to educate people about the long-term damage that overdevelopment and natural disasters have on such a fragile yet alluring ecosystem.

Biographical Note: Jon Ory was born in Hawaii but moved to West Ashley as a toddler. He stayed in Charleston for grade school and high school. As a kid, he enjoyed outdoor activities such as bike riding, swimming, and various sports. After attending Presbyterian College in the upstate of South Carolina, he got a job with a textile firm in Anderson. After realizing he wasn't happy with his job, Ory was influenced to quit and travel around the world for a year and a half. As a result of traveling, he got into the occupations of teaching English and leading trips internationally. Currently a stand up paddle board company owner and instructor, he offers tours on the Folly River to locals and tourists alike where he educates patrons about the history as well as the environment.

Project Details:

In the summer of 2018, student researchers from the College of Charleston conducted oral histories for the research project, *Voices of Southern Hospitality*. The project documents diverse opinions and stories about southern hospitality in Charleston, South Carolina, but also offers a deeper and more intimate history of a changing community. Over the past thirty years (early-1990s to 2018), the Charleston peninsula and its surrounding islands have experienced rapid

economic growth and rapid cultural and ecological changes. The *Voices of Southern Hospitality* project chronicles this profound transformation with the personal histories of Charleston residents.

The project was launched in June 2018 with funding from The Committee for Innovative Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the College of Charleston. In addition to documenting important stories, the project was designed to train College of Charleston students in oral history research methods. Five student researchers and 42 interviewees participated in the first phase of this project (June and July, 2018).

Interview Begin

[Interviewer Initials]: A.A.

Interviewee Initials]: J.O.

AA: Let's start here. Alright. So, to start us off first, are you from Charleston originally?

JO: Technically I was born in Hawaii, but my parents moved me back to Charleston. I was, like, three, so all of my memories of my childhood are in Charleston.

AA: And what brought them to Charleston with you back?

JO: So, my dad went to the Citadel, graduated from Citadel. My mom graduated from... I can't remember the name of the nursing school, but it was in Atlanta, Georgia. So, when they got married, he was in the Marines and as soon as he finished his four years in the Marines, he moved back to Charleston because he had an internship, and he got a job and that was the only job he ever had in his life.

AA: Okay.

JO: So, for a job.

AA: Yeah. And so, when they first got here, what job was your father doing and then what did your mother do, as well?

JO: So, my dad worked only one job and the name of the company is still here, it's called SPAWAR. He was an electrical engineer. He worked on nuclear submarines, a civil servant, and my mom worked in the medical field. She was a registered nurse, an RN, her whole career as well.

AA: Very cool. And was she around...?

JO: She was at MUSC.

AA: Okay. Very cool. And when you were growing up in Charleston, what part of Charleston? I guess I should start because there's a bunch of different--

JO: I grew up in West of the Ashley.

AA: Okay.

JO: Down Highway 61, about five miles from Magnolia Plantation.

AA: And you were schooled here as well?

JO: Mhm. Grade school and high school.

AA: Alright. And what did you do for fun when you were growing up in Charleston? What was your favorite pastimes?

JO: Man, see now we're dating myself real good. The phone, the Internet didn't exist, so we would ride our bikes and go swim in the river and swim in the pool and we'd play football and, you know, we had a treehouse that we went and hung out with. So, we were outside all the time. Human interaction.

AA: And so, what were your favorite places to go?

JO: I mean, when I was a kid, we were in West Ashley, so the Ashley River was in the back of the neighborhoods, so we could go swim and go fishing in the Ashley River and then, you know, I mean you could go to the movie theater at Citadel Mall or something like that. It was very limited on what we'd do. And are you just asking like when we were kid kids, or are you talking about all--

AA: Yeah, no kind of just in your childhood.

JO: Yeah. Yes, in my childhood, we pretty much were big athletes, so I played football, basketball, baseball and tennis. So, I pretty much was preoccupied all year with some sort of sport.

AA: And then, as you moved through grade school, went into high school, did you stay? Did you go to college?

JO: No, I ended up going to college in the upstate of South Carolina. A college called Presbyterian or PC.

AA: Yeah. And so, you went to Presbyterian. What brought you there as opposed to staying in the region?

JO: So, I went to Bishop England and Bishop England was next door to the College of Charleston back then. It was really Cannon Street that separated the two. So, I... Charleston was very different there then. And I was like, dude, I gotta get out of this town, you know, which is ironic. I went to Presbyterian College, which was a town of 5,000 people, but I went on a football scholarship, so I had an athletic scholarship there.

AA: Right. And after college, did you come immediately back down to Charleston or what was your path from--?

JO: No. So, after college, Mom was like, you know, "You're not moving in here. You're not coming back home." So, I got a job pretty much right out of college with a company called Milliken & Company, it's a textile firm out of Spartanburg, but I was based in Anderson, South Carolina.

AA: Okay.

JO: So, I kind of went... I stayed in the upstate.

AA: Gotcha. And then from there you clearly had something that eventually brought you back to Charleston. So, can you kind of describe... so you had that first job and kind of your trajectory that brought you to where you are today?

JO: Sure. I mean, you probably could appreciate this with your major. I was not happy with my job, and my girlfriend at the time had been to Australia and I had always dreamed of going there, so she pretty much said, "You have to go." And so, she bought me the Lonely Planet, she bought me the camera, she bought me the backpack. She pretty much stuck her foot up my butt and said, "You're going." So, I quit my job, and on my way I ended up in New Zealand, and then from New Zealand I went to Australia and had a six-month working holiday visa, and then I just didn't come home. So, I ended up traveling around the world for a year and a half.

AA: Amazing. And so, where else did you... You went to New Zealand, Australia. What other places did you get through all that travel?

JO: Yeah, so New Zealand, Australia, then I went into Indonesia and then Singapore and Malaysia and Thailand. Then Nepal, then India, then back to Thailand. Then I went to England and then I went to Holland and then I went back to England, and then I came home. So, it was like 11 countries.

AA: How long of time span did that go---?

JO: It was 17 months.

AA: Wow.

JO: So, just about a year and a half.

AA: And what were your favorite places during that travel?

JO: New Zealand and India, definitely. And Amsterdam, Holland.

AA: Is this associated with 83 Center Street or the PO Box?

JO: No, Po Box. 1323. Thanks.

AA: And what struck you about your travels? Was there anything that really just, like, grabbed your attention in that 17 months that you were exploring the world?

JO: Yeah. I mean I grew up in America and if you think about the structure of just the local news, you had to go through like local news and politics and crime and then sports. And then the last 30 seconds of the news was about international news. So, I was under this impression that America was the center of the world. So, when I left, I had my brain exploded to recognize that there's this whole world out there and I just wanted to see all of it.

AA: Yeah. Can you pinpoint any moments in your travels that were extra striking to you or an experience you had?

JO: I think it was pretty much the first day. My first day of traveling, the plane... somehow I missed the plane and then I had to, you know... So, then my first day of travel was like 48 hours to get to New Zealand from Charleston via L.A. And immediately I got off the plane into a bus and I was like... I freaked out because they drive on the other side of the road and my mind immediately was blown and then the whole rest of the time I was there, you know, it was in the Southern Hemisphere, everything was very different. And I remember saying, "Y'all do this wrong." And everybody was like, "No, we do it different." And that's something that stuck with me until today that there's not a right or wrong. There's just that we do a certain way and other people do it another way and it doesn't make it right or wrong. It just means we're different.

AA: Yeah. Absolutely. And so, as kind of a tourist in those locations, how did you feel that you were-- I mean, obviously you were traveling for 17 months so after that point, you kind of build up this traveler-- [overlapping conversation]. How were you received by people in these other places while you were traveling?

JO: Awesome. I mean I really had a wonderful experience. I don't think I would have traveled that long. And I can remember in every country telling them that I came from Charleston, South Carolina and being proud of where I came from because of our culture, and I learned during that trip that culture really has to do with the amount of time that people are in a place and how many people have come and gone and how many families are there and the music and the language and the food and all these things make a culture and telling people about in New Zealand back in 1999--so you put that down: he's old!--telling people I was from Charleston, South Carolina and nobody knew of it. And then somebody did! Somebody was wearing a Clemson, South Carolina tee shirt. I was like, holy cow. And then I can think of now, I can go anywhere in the world and tell people I'm from Charleston, South Carolina and they're like, "Oh yeah, we know all about that place."

AA: Yeah.

JO: So, it's crazy to see how much of a change is made in 18 years.

AA: Definitely. And so, once you finished that 17 months of travel, how did you get into this line of work? Or was this a direct jump or was there a gap in between those travels and what you do now?

JO: Yeah, so on my travels, I realized I wanted to be a teacher, so a lot of people would get a degree and I had a degree in business administration, political science, and I was a big time jock, you know, so then all sudden I was like, all right, I'm done with that and I want to be a teacher and I wanted to teach American youth about other cultures. So, I immediately got into being an international leader, trip leader.

AA: Okay.

JO: So, I did that right away.

AA: Very cool.

JO: And then that led into becoming an actual teacher teacher. And I became an English-as-a-second-language teacher, being able to work directly with an international community. And I did that in Charleston.

AA: Cool.

JO: So, that's how I came back to Charleston. Came back to see my family, and then I was able to do what I wanted. So, I would work as an ESL teacher during the year and then I was an international trip leader in New Zealand or Fiji in the summertime.

AA: And what population of people were you working with as you were being an ESL teacher? Like what were the biggest kind of--

JO: The predominant population was Hispanic or Latino.

AA: Okay. Gotcha. And then so after that, what led you to being a stand up paddle board owner and instructor?

JO: For 15 years in the classroom as an ESL teacher, 12 years I worked for a company called Global Works. So, I lived on Folly Beach every season, spent my fall and spring as an ESL teacher and then spent my summers in New Zealand or Fiji as an international director of a program. And then, I decided that I better go now. We can get political. George Bush got reelected as our president and I said, "I'm outta here." And I moved to New Zealand on a working holiday visa, and that was 2008. So, look at your history. You'll see that was the whole economic crash happening. So, I missed all that. I was in New Zealand on a working holiday visa and while I was there I was working as an ESL teacher. I was working as an international trip leader. I was working as a surf instructor, and I was delivering boats, internationally, sailboats. And then, I was working as a kayak instructor and the kayaking company that I worked for got paddle boards. And so, they asked me to be the paddle board instructor and then my grandmother... It was two years later, my grandmother, her health became quite failing, and I

moved home and I knew when I came back to Charleston that I was going to start a paddle board company. And at that time there was no other paddle board company in Charleston.

AA: Yeah. So, kind of along that line of when you first started there wasn't a whole-- can you describe Folly when you started up your business here?

JO: Yeah. So, basically what happened is this company was here, Flipper Finders Boat & Sea Kayak Company was here on the beach.

AA: Okay.

JO: And the owner's name is Richard Brendel, and he and I are friends. And so, when I moved back, everybody was like, "We didn't think you were coming back. You moved to New Zealand. You've been gone for two years." And I was like, yeah, you know, blah blah blah, you know, never say never. And then I told him that I wanted to start a paddle board company and that "your store front would be amazing if you'd be willing to let me partner with you." And he agreed. So, there was a boat-kayak company here, there was Coastal Expeditions has a kayaking company right off the island, and then COA, Charleston Outdoor Adventures, had a kayaking company, boat-kayaking company on Bowens Island.

AA: Okay.

JO: And so, I know for a fact that COA got some paddle boards, but there was no company in Charleston only doing paddle boards.

AA: And in terms of the food and the hotels and that industry at this point, what was it--?

JO: So, the Tides was there. I think it was still called something--it was called the Holiday Inn, still. Or maybe it had just become the Tides, I can't remember. So, I lived on this beach for 17 years, so like I'm going back. Yeah, I mean definitely it hasn't changed too much in the last seven years. I've only been in business for seven years. Definitely the Tides has changed ownership from like the Holiday Inn went to the Tides and the Tides is now owned by Westin or something or Westin took over Avocet, that's where it is. So, it's definitely becoming less of the, I like to call it the "redneck and hippie island", and it's definitely becoming more and more, I don't want to say re-gentrified, but there's a lot more families that come here, which doesn't affect my business negatively at all.

AA: Yeah. And so, you were kind of talking about this, but how has there been changes in the community of Folly in your time being here because you said there's been this change of ownership and whatnot. Have there been other changes you've observed in terms of community?

JO: Yeah. So, before Airbnb really took off, there was a lot more long-term rentals, so you had a lot of artists and musicians and kind of transient post-college trying-to-figure-life-out, take the summer... And that brought a whole other creative side to the island, and you could see that. You could see that with murals and art and music and people just hanging out in the park or on the beach. Now that Airbnb has become part of a very normal lifestyle, there is a very limited

amount of long-term rentals for people that can afford it. And, therefore, this island is definitely driven by real estate. And so, there is still a tight-knit community in Folly Beach, but we've all gotten a bit older. So, like, there are a handful of families that have their kids that are born here and they're anywhere between four and 17 years old. And that's a great core community of Folly Beach. But the level of long-term rentals and having that more Bohemian style feel is definitely gone away on a certain level.

AA: And so, the image of Folly from when you first got here... 'cause obviously now it's "the Edge of America." It's this big tourist attraction. When you first started your business and even back to when you just were living on Folly, do you see a change kind of how Folly is viewed or does it maintain its tourist attraction, I guess?

JO: Yeah. I mean "the Edge of America", that little element is still here, and Folly is still considered to be the alternative island. There still is that component to it, you know, and then of course if we look at the number of long-term people that live here long-term, residents, I think that they've gone up by like 700, so there hasn't been a large influx. However, the dynamic of tourism changed greatly. I think it was five years ago, they banned alcohol on the beach, so that definitely changed the day trippers and how the beach from day to day is. So, that was a part I said Airbnb, the truth is when they stopped alcohol on the 5th of July, that really affected the beach immediately. It affected Bert's Local Market, it affected restaurants and businesses, and then in turn the beaches recovered, and it's more family friendly now. Yeah, definitely.

AA: Yeah, definitely. So, in comparison to the other beaches that you hinted at, this Folly being its own kind of unique--

JO: I'd say Folly's funky.

AA: Yeah, exactly. So, what is, in your opinion, what's the comparison between Folly, Sullivan's Island, IOP? Like, what sets Folly apart?

JO: Well, I have a tour guide who works for me. Eric is his name. He's a firefighter. He lives in Mount Pleasant, but he's a firefighter on Sullivan's island. The mean price for real estate on Sullivan's Island is \$2.2 million. So, that alone says that Sullivan's Island is in another demographic altogether. Isle of Palms, I don't know what the mean price of real estate is there, however Isle of Palms does have Wild Dunes there. And so, in general, I would say the affluency level and short-term rental is probably more dominant than even on Folly Beach. But at the same time, we'll throw a little more history, 'cause I grew up here. My best friend's parents lived in a teepee on Sullivan's Island Beach for one year before they bought their house. It is now worth \$1.5 million. It's the same house.

AA: It's crazy.

JO: So, Folly Beach right now is similar. It's not the same because you can't live in a teepee. But what I'm getting at is that evolution of the islands is happening.

AA: Yeah. And so, in terms of this evolution of the islands, can you think of like a specific turning point when tourism really took off in Folly and was the start to this growth and the appeal of Folly as a tourist destination?

JO: I mean, everything in Charleston changed in 1989. September 22nd or whatever it was. I wish I could remember the day, but Hurricane Hugo changed the entire dynamic of Charleston, and that's factual. You can break it down by all parts. Real estate, people left, the Navy Base shut down, all these different things occurred. So then as far as Folly changing, what was your question again?

AA: Just kind of a turning point when tourism really kind of took off, and it was like the quintessential...not tipping point, like turning point, of this idea of--

JO: Yeah, I mean tourism has always been a major component of Folly Beach, you know. I think what's really amped everything up is the Charleston Visitor Bureau working directly with other visitor bureaus in the United States. We have now been named the best city in the world by *Condé Nast* and *Travel + Leisure* magazine. So, this has been over the last seven years. You know what I'm saying? So, that's really what's put us on this path to explosion.

AA: Yeah. And so, how do you think that-- so what is Southern hospitality for you in this line of tourism, because that's obviously a pretty important part of Charleston, South Carolina is this Southern hospitality. Can you describe what that means for you?

JO: Yeah, I mean, I always think... Was it Hank Williams Jr.? I think is the song, he said, "We say grace, and we say ma'am. If you ain't into that, we don't give a damn." So really that line, minus the "don't give a damn" part, that line right there really defines what hospitality is. Like, you naturally are going to say, yes ma'am and no sir. And you're naturally going to ask somebody how they're doing and mean it authentically. And if somebody has a question and you have the answer, you're going to take a minute out of your busy day to answer them and potentially just be genuine to somebody instead of being suspicious. And I think that really separates New York City from Charleston, South Carolina.

AA: Absolutely. And when you interact with tourists through your business, do you get this feeling that that's something they're really looking for when they travel to Charleston?

JO: Yeah, I mean, you know, everybody has a reason to come to Charleston. We have multiple five to seven James Beard award winners, so food. Then, obviously, the beach is another thing they come for. Even before that, I think history, the history of Charleston, all the churches and the horse and carriages and the Hunley. So, you know, the Hunley and the weather, you know, all these things bring people to Charleston. But definitely people say when they come down here, "I like it here. Everybody's nice." That would be the catch phrase that I hear from 90% of the people that make a remark about Charleston. "Everybody here is so nice and friendly."

AA: Yeah. So, in your day to day work, what's your engagement with tourism? How many of your clients are tourists from elsewhere that have come down to Charleston?

JO: Yeah, I mean if I would've known this was a question, I could have pulled it up. I've got a booking software that has the demographics, and I could look at my Facebook and see where they're coming from. But in general, I would say 60% to 70% of my clients are tourists.

AA: Okay. And do you, again, it doesn't need to be exact demographic stuff, but do you have regions of the country or even world that you find that a lot of your tourists are coming from?

JO: Yeah, I mean there's a joke out there that, you know, "Please go back to Ohio", but there is a large percentage of tourists that come from Ohio. So that would be, I guess that's kind of Midwest. But then, you know, it comes in waves, you know. I would say Ohio; we have a lot of people that come up from the Northeast trying to escape the cold weather. But just close by, like we have a large number of people that just come as close to the way as North Carolina and Tennessee.

AA: And what are your interactions with tourists? Are you out on the water with them?

JO: Yeah, I mean when I started this business, it was me. So, I answered the phone, I ran the tour. I would actually paddle away from the clients ever so politely, answer the phone, and then come back and book the next tour. And so yeah, from every element, I worked directly with the client.

AA: Gotcha. And how was your interactions with tourists that are down in Charleston? Just any interactions specifically stick out in your mind of, like, favorite tourist.

JO: So, the nice thing about working in the tourist industry is people are on vacation. People want to have a good time. I am not your dentist. Very different. So, everybody tends to have a good time. And then being directly involved with the paddle boarding, it's the number one fastest growing sport in the entire world now. So as far as the bucket list or "I want to try this", I'm basically in the forefront of something that's hot, you know? And the fact that I grew up here, everybody is very receptive to the fact that they get to go on an activity with a local, and that seems to mean a lot to them.

AA: Definitely. And do you think, like, what features of paddle boarding in the Charleston area do you think are most appealing to a person that is coming to Charleston and wants to get out in the environment? Like, what is it about paddle boarding?

JO: So, paddle boarding in general, like, it's just a buzzword and it's the fastest growing water sport in the entire world. It's not just in America anymore, it's not just in the Southeast. So, I mean, everywhere they're doing it, so everybody has heard of it. However, it's very unique here because the name of my business is SUP Safaris, and I call it a safari intentionally because on all of our tours, we're definitely going to see some sort of shore birds. We're definitely gonna talk the oysters; low tide, we'll see them. And the major highlight are dolphins. So, with the fact that we say that you have a high percentage chance to see dolphins, everybody wants to see dolphins. So, it's driven by the wildlife.

AA: And where do your tours go?

JO: Folly River.

AA: Up Folly River. All right. And how do you think that tourism... Obviously you're directly engaged in the environment. How do you view the impact of tourism on the environment? And have you seen a change in this over the time that you've been running this business?

JO: Yeah, so first of all I was a teacher, so I work directly with the schools. I work directly with Charleston Waterkeepers. I work directly with Surfrider Foundation. We've done water quality testing with James Island Middle School for two years. I know for a fact that the water quality on the Folly River is the best when it comes to measurements 99% of the time. So as far as impact on the Folly River goes, there hasn't been a major impact on the environment from the Folly River. However, if you were to look at Shem Creek and you talk to some of the outfitters over there, it was, you know, the story was in the *Charleston Magazine*, what last year? Last summer? It's a no-swim zone. Like, you're not supposed to put your head under the water. There is a major issue with-- the only thing they're measuring, and I know this because we use to do that, the Charleston Waterkeepers are just measuring fecal coliform or whatever it is. Poop. So, they don't measure all what's going on in there, but I would say that tourism has definitely made an impact on the environment in certain places where there's just maybe too much. But I find that the impact to our environment being a coastal town is more directly affected by development. And not by tourism.

AA: Okay.

JO: Especially not ecotourism. We don't even have a motor.

AA: Yeah. And can you talk about that, as you just said development seems to be playing a bigger impact on the local environment. Can you talk a little further on that?

JO: I took environmental economics when I was in college and basically during that class-- I just did a business major. I was like, this seems more interesting than just business. But you know, I don't want to misquote, I've read a lot in my life, but if you take a natural environment, a marsh or a sandbar, and you just look at how much rain falls, the rain falls and it naturally goes where it needs to go. Now you put a piece of concrete all over that, and you have the same amount of rainfall. Now the rain doesn't naturally go where it needs to go, and you immediately see such issues of erosion and you see foundation problems, trees. So, basically the more that we are taking away what is naturally here and replacing it with concrete and infrastructure, the more that we're going to have major issues with flooding downtown Charleston. Right? The more we're going to have issues with erosion. You look, we have to renourish our beach every 10 years. And just the impact on the environment itself. I mean, you think about how many hurricanes have we had coming through here? Like, this is not hocus pocus, you know, we're not just making this up. This isn't hippies versus businessmen. And I talk about that on my tour. You know, it doesn't matter if you're a hippie and you just want to make sure this is here so that you can come out and look at it and smile every day. If you're a businessperson, if our ecosystem goes away, there goes tourism and more importantly there goes our seafood industry and you start to lose clean water and then you lose just population in general. So, we casually talk about it on our tour, like we are an eco-company and we do actually focus on giving our clients an aha moment, you know, we don't cram

it down their throat or anything, but we definitely have talked about the environment and impacts of knowing where your food comes from, specifically your seafood. That's the one thing we can talk about on every tour.

AA: Yeah, definitely. And do you find that there's a difference between how tourists and locals are receptive of this information?

JO: Yeah. I mean, I don't think I would get into this conversation with a local on a tour. I would be more receptive to asking a question, you know, locals that have been living here for a while, like, "Oh, what is that? I've always been curious about that bird." Whereas tourism, I think that we have a responsibility as being an eco-tour company to offer some sort of education while we're out there or else we wouldn't be called an eco-tour company. I would identify myself as something different.

AA: Definitely. And in terms of your business, I don't really know how this works, but do you have regulation and limitations on what you can do as a business engaging with your environment or are you pretty much free to run business as you want it?

JO: Right. I mean, I have my business license of City of Folly Beach. As far as regulations go, I'm on a paddle board, it's a vessel and therefore required to have a whistle and a life jacket and lights on it if I'm out after dusk. But I mean as far as limitations to the environment, really not. The only law that I know is that you're not allowed to feed dolphins, and you're not allowed to jump on them and swim with them. So, beyond that, there's not really any other limitation within the environment.

AA: Okay. And then in the town as a whole, you had mentioned that the ban of alcohol on beaches was a pretty big turning point. Are there any other regulations and stuff that have come forward as the town has continued to develop that stick out in your mind or is that kind of the big...?

JO: I mean, that definitely changed the day to day people that came on and off the beach.

AA: Can you describe that change a little bit for me 'cause wasn't here when that--

JO: Yeah. I mean, like, basically it was just... There was a lot more trash. There was a lot more...anything that you can think of that would have to do with lots of alcohol consumption in 100-degree temperatures. So, you had a lot more...whatever, you name it. Scuffles, people falling down. Definitely trash. Major issue with the traffic. Sirens going off all the time. And now without that, we still have the same amount of traffic on the weekends, but you don't hear the sirens as much. You don't see the same amount of trash. And as far as the brawling or whatever, it's things people do 2:00 in the morning. That just doesn't happen as much anymore.

AA: Gotcha. And so, in terms of... Going back to, you were talking about like the flooding and the erosion and things that are definitely problems that could significantly impact Folly, were you in the Charleston area when Hugo happened?

JO: We had to evacuate. It was a mandatory evacuation. My mom was like, "Uh uh. You're not staying," 'cause I was 16 at the time and I was like, "No, mom, let me just stay." So yes, I was here, and we were talking about this the other day, there were no trees. All the trees were gone. The pine trees were done. McClellanville, anywhere outside Charleston all the way through Charleston. That's how powerful that storm was.

AA: Yeah. And how did Folly rebuild after that? Were you in the area?

JO: I wasn't on Folly Beach itself, but I do know that the island was separated at Washout.

AA: Wow.

JO: Literally, the Washout came through. So, if you had a house beyond Washout, you were stranded. But it was a mandatory evacuation. Nobody was there. And then just in general, you know, everybody came together. Like that sense of community definitely happened, like neighbors. I just remember my neighborhood, like we literally had no power and whoever had the chainsaw and who had the barbecue grill and who had whatever, we just helped each other out, and it was like six weeks I want to say. Solid six weeks there was no power. Nobody went to work, and nobody went to school, yeah.

AA: Crazy. So, in comparison to that, if you look at Folly Beach today, and there's obviously been some stronger storms in the past couple of years that we've been kind of lucky in that they've avoided us. But what do you think the difference between that storm and a storm of that caliber coming through Folly today? What would kind of be the impacts of such an event happening?

JO: I think the impact would be very much the same. I think if you have a Category 5 hurricane with sustained winds, 200+ miles an hour for eight hours on this island, it would be decimated. Every house that is not brand new that does not have all the codes and all the hurricane stuff probably won't be here anymore.

AA: And in terms of recent developments here, do you know if there's regulations and stuff that, what are those kinds of measures that being taken to, like you said, codes for houses and stuff and can you describe those?

JO: Sure. So, it's called BFE, which is not the joke that you may think it is. It's Base Flood Elevation. So, your base flood elevation is a minimum of, I want to say, 12 feet. And every foot that you go above the minimum, your insurance taxes go down. Your tax, your annual amount that you pay, your premium goes down. I know that there's a requirement for storm windows. That's definitely a requirement. I know that if you were to be building underneath the building, you have to have breakaway walls. And that means that if a storm comes they actually will break away, and then beyond that... Those are the ones that I know specifically, but I don't know every bit of the code, but those are the major ones.

AA: Okay. And are there any, in terms of, as we had been talking about like pumping stuff in for the beach, like pumping in sand and whatnot. Have you seen changes on the actual beach in the past, like in your seven years here?

JO: Yeah. It's happening right now. They are trucking in, I don't know, billions of pounds of boulders in these open 18-wheelers, all day, every day. And so, they're redoing or rebuilding the groins. And then beyond that they've actually gone so far as to pour concrete over the groins. And I don't know if it's meant to be permanent, but it's definitely to help these big earth movers to be able to drive over the rocks. It used to be small and so, yeah. So, they are literally redoing the groins from 8th to 12th, and they plan on renourishing it once they finish the groins.

AA: Okay. And so, in your opinion, do you think that this is something that needs to happen or what's your view on the just almost creation of the beach as it is simultaneously eroding away?

JO: So, I mean, it's two things. This is a barrier island and when you speak scientifically, barrier islands are just that. They are islands that are meant to buffer against the mainland. Barrier islands will disappear every 200 to 500 years, and then they will come back. So, not in our lifetime can we comprehend this. Not in our Facebook age where it's like 30 seconds from now I need another like, but in the normal ebb and flow of the environment, Folly Beach can be here for 500 years, could be gone for 1000, can come back for another 500 to 1000 years. But in the fact that we have put so much infrastructure and real estate here, nobody wants to lose their house. Beyond that, Folly Beach is in a unique situation where it has been proven and we have collected enough data and it's been taken to Army Corps of Engineers. They are responsible for paying for 85% of our renourishment until 2020 because when they built the jetties back in the 1900s or I don't know, 18... I think it was like...I can't remember when they actually built the jetties. Too many history facts. But they left a hole and it's known as Dynamite Hole. So, there's a hole in the jetties to where smaller boats can get out. I don't know if that was the original intention, but that creates a funnel that when the tide is ripping in and out, that has actually been proven by DNR or data and taking it to the Army Corps of Engineers, that we have erosion four times faster than we would naturally. And so, that is why we are having to get the renourishment every 10 to 12 years. And that's why 85% of it is being sponsored or paid for by the Army Corps of Engineers.

AA: That's crazy. I had no idea that that was the reasoning behind that.

JO: Come on a SUP tour, girl. We'll teach you some things.

AA: (laughing) So in terms of, obviously as you were traveling around for 17 months while you were abroad, you were engaging a lot in their tourism, essentially. What is your kind of comparative, like if you were to compare tourism in Charleston versus the tourism you experienced while you were abroad, is there any big differences that kind of stand out in your mind?

JO: I think America's level of safety may be higher than in other countries. Definitely we're a very litigious society here. But yeah, I mean really that's what I see. It's more mom and pop. It was way more mom and pop in other countries whereas here, you know, you look at the outfitters and whatnot and you know, you're looking at multimillion-dollar operations here and so, you know, it's going to a hierarchy, like more of a, I don't want to say a corporation, but it's definitely more organized. So yeah, mom and pop.

AA: Definitely. And so obviously there's a bunch of other like ecotourism companies that kind of function similar, like the same waterways and such. What is your relation between the different tourism groups on Folly Beach?

JO: So, I got into paddle boarding specifically because I wanted to do something that was a niche and nobody else is doing so I didn't have to worry about, you know, cat fights or whatever., You know, I would say that in general everybody gets along in this community, but we also recognize that it's such a small community that we try our best to do our business the best we can. And we're not intentionally going and kicking sand on somebody else's surfboard or something, but there is a simple level of competition. And they say that good competition is healthy. So, as long as people aren't slashing each other's tires or anything like that, which doesn't happen, there is that element of healthy competition on Folly Beach.

AA: Yeah, definitely. What do you find is the most effective route for your business to kind of promote yourself to the tourist community and even just the Folly community in general?

JO: I mean, like, growing up in Charleston being a-- so I volunteer a lot in this community, so people know me, not as a paddle board dude who just has some company in the corner. I am an active member in my community, and I like that. And that's probably part of who I am. And that's the number one way on Folly Beach. But in general, you know, the Internet is going to be where everybody goes to, you want an answer and you just hit the box, right? To Google. So that's a no-brainer I would think. I'm not giving away any trade secrets on that.

AA: Yeah, fair enough. And so, in terms of your business, how has it grown since you started with it seven years ago versus today? What's your kind of clientele in terms of numbers?

JO: Yeah. I mean basically, my first year in business I started small, you know, "keep it small, keep it all" is the expression, and yeah, a sole proprietor. And then I realized that we did well, so I just increased the capacity, meaning the number of paddle boards that I have. And then I increased the number of guys, the number of office people. So, everything's just grown. And I think in the fact that Charleston is the number one tourist destination in the world for so many years now that you know, we just keep getting more people coming here. So, we haven't really changed the formula very much. It's nice. There's definitely job security in a tourist industry in Charleston.

AA: Yeah. And what's kind of your ambition for this company? Do you foresee, do you have goals to, not improve, but goals to expand? Do you have goals to eventually move elsewhere? Because obviously you've traveled a lot before. What's your ambition with this company or just in general,, kind of where--?

JO: Yeah, so I think it comes back to personal choice and a lifestyle choice. So, I've had this conversation with lots of people, lots of times. My business is right here. The river is adjacent to my business. My home is 500 yards away from here. I'm a seasonal business. I work six months, seven months, eight months out of the year. I work eight months out of the year. I have four months off. For me to expand and to follow a corporate model or something like that, that would only mean

that I would be happy. My personal life choices would have to change for me to want to be on Kiawah and to have another hub in Shem Creek and it'd be over there at Wild Dunes. So, for me, it's a personal lifestyle choice. So, I want to do the best that I can, but I don't want to grow any bigger and have another flagship operation. I just want to be where I am knowing that I'm completely connected with the community that I work with.

AA: Definitely. That's a good way to do it. So, to close out, I guess, what is your vision for the future of Folly Beach in terms of this development that's occurring, about the renourishment, where do you see this future of Folly leading?

JO: I mean, as we like to say, it's an island and there are only so many plots that can be developed, and I think we're literally at the point of right now. So, if you want to check Folly Beach politics right now, we have a moratorium on the island, a moratorium against dividing lots and building on a single-home lot and dividing it. So, they're recognizing that we need to quote unquote pump the brakes. But I'm very confident that what will happen is that every lot that is for sale that is available to be developed on will be developed in the next 10 years.

AA: And do you think that that's a good or bad prospect to have?

JO: It depends on where you are. So, we'll take it all the way back to being a kid. If I were into real estate as a kid, if my parents were in real estate and not an electrical engineer and a nurse, you know, you wouldn't be talking to me. I would've bought a hundred acres in Hollywood. I would have bought a hundred acres in [inaudible]. I would have bought a hundred acres in Wadmalaw. I would've bought a hundred acres here. I would have bought thousands of acres of land. And I just would have waited for this to happen. So yet again, you know, it's all about, it's all about where your principles are and what you think is good or bad. So, from that perspective, Folly Beach can only develop so much. So, at some point it'll be done. And I don't think that it can change too much of the way Folly is 'cause we're pretty close to all the lots being developed. But yeah, so the old expression is, you know, "All the nice places, when they find them, everybody goes there." So, Charleston has been found now, it's never going to go back.

AA: And kind of expanding beyond Folly Beach too, what is kind of your vision of like the Greater Charleston area in terms of what this impact of this "top tourist destination in the world" image. How do you think that's going to play out in the Greater Charleston area?

JO: You know, yet again, it depends on where you are. If you're a real estate developer, you're stoked. Like, how many cranes do you have in downtown Charleston right now? There's seven cranes, there's 10 cranes all the time. There's new high-rise apartments going in, there's more hotels. It's not going to stop, you know, it's going to keep growing. And then the true question is, what does that really mean for our culture and what does that really mean for what Charleston will remain to be? And I hope it remains the same because when the Charleston Nine massacre happened and that was a boy from Columbia, I think, I was on the Arthur Ravenel Bridge with 17,000 other people. We held hands and sang "Amazing Grace." And that is Charleston. And I hope that that never changes.

AA: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate you coming out and letting me come out and kind of busy you to do this. I appreciate it a lot.