

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Mandell Berman
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Susie Citrin
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 12, 2003
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish Community Leadership Oral
6 History Project

7 - - -

8 SUSIE CITRIN: I'm Susie Citrin. I'm conducting an
9 oral history interview with Mandell Berman on December the
10 12th, in 2003, and Mandell -- Bill as everyone calls you -- do
11 we have permission to use your words and thoughts?

12 MANDELL (BILL) BERMAN: Of course you do.

13 SUSIE: Thank you very much. Well, I think
14 everybody wants to start out talking about where they came
15 from, and their family history a little bit. And I know in
16 reading about you your family was already involved in the
17 Jewish community. So if you want to comment a little bit
18 about that.

19 BILL: Sure.

20 SUSIE: And about your mother and dad.

21 BILL: My father came here at the age of 4 in 1883.
22 My mother was born in Toledo in 1883. My father was probably
23 the only Jewish army officer from Detroit in World War I. He
24 was a captain in the army. I was almost born on an army base
25 in Florida.

1 Then I grew up in Detroit. We always lived in the
2 same house on Bilingame between Woodward and Second, the only
3 Jewish family there for all those years. I went to the public
4 schools, including Central High School. During all those
5 years I was attending the United Hebrew Schools. My mother
6 was very active with the Philadelphia Bar and Hebrew School
7 all those years, until I was 16 years old.

8 I graduated from Central in '35, and then I went to
9 a semester of university in Arizona, a year at Michigan, and
10 then three years to Harvard College, and two more years to
11 Harvard Business School. And then I spent 46 months as a
12 naval officer in World War II.

13 **SUSIE:** What was it like to be a Jewish student at
14 Harvard in those days?

15 **BILL:** In those days, and we didn't realize it
16 looking back, but at five o'clock they went their way and we
17 went ours. John F. Kennedy lived next door to me in my senior
18 year, an F entry of Winfercuffs, but I hardly knew him for the
19 reasons I just outlined. There were no Jewish members of any
20 club at Harvard before World War II. Now that's extensively
21 not true. The only Jewish club members, there was a Straus in
22 my class and there was -- you'll remember today the team of
23 Learner and Lowe; they wrote My Fair Lady and others. Alan
24 Lerner was a member of Pudding because he was writing lyrics,
25 not the music. And I worked with him on the Harvard Monthly

1 during my Harvard days. Bernstein was a year ahead of me, and
2 him I did know fairly well. He was president of the Young
3 Communist League. I remember that. Long ago.

4 **SUSIE:** It's interesting that you decided to go to
5 Harvard.

6 **BILL:** It's interesting -- how would I get there?
7 Why would I go at all? The year at Michigan I found
8 unsatisfactory. Intellectually I was Phi Eta Sigma, which was
9 the honorary society, but I didn't like the fraternity system.
10 I didn't want to be one of the boys. And my sister had gone
11 to a school called Emerson outside of Boston, and she was
12 going there anyway, and I had a cousin at Harvard who was two
13 years ahead of me. So I went out there I think probably in
14 February or March when I was at Michigan. Presumably Harvard
15 liked me and I liked them. And they permitted me to transfer
16 as a sophomore into Harvard.

17 I don't think it was a very happy three years
18 because I didn't have a lot of friends. Intellectually of
19 course I did fine. I graduated with something called a Magna
20 Cum Laude, but never Phi Beta Kappa, and I think it was
21 because I transferred three times. I was disappointed with
22 that.

23 And then I crossed the river to Harvard Business
24 School, which was a much different situation because we all
25 started from scratch together. And again, it was a situation

1 where it was a different world. Harvard Business School is as
2 different as Harvard College as you can imagine because memory
3 doesn't do you any good; you have to think. I met a lot of
4 good friends because you work together, have been friends all
5 of my life. There were five or six of us who were Jewish,
6 again still living, and we do still see each other.

7 Then everybody who could walk on December 7, 1941,
8 either became quartermaster corps or navy. I chose to become
9 a naval ordnance officer. So on July 1, 1942, in order to
10 graduate, I went to Dartmouth with most of my class to become
11 a naval officer.

12 **SUSIE:** And you were stationed in the Pacific,
13 weren't you?

14 **BILL:** Not till later. I was stationed the first
15 ten weeks at Dartmouth to become a naval officer, ten weeks at
16 the Boston Navy Yard gun factory to become an ordnance
17 officer. Then I carried secret mail and worked all night in
18 the Navy Department. Somebody needed two more torpedoes in
19 the Solomons or something, I carried such mail, until I was
20 transferred out.

21 Because I went to Harvard Business School, and they
22 wanted Harvard Business School men badly at a new base, a
23 secret underwater ordnance testing base in Maryland on the
24 Patuxent River. I stayed there for 14 or 15 months. I wanted
25 to go overseas badly. By that time Harvard Business School

1 guys would have lead positions in the navy. I went to a
2 friend of mine who was running the bureau of personnel, and I
3 told him I wanted to be a carrier ordnance officer. I went to
4 Jacksonville for another ten weeks, lying on my back, learning
5 how to load airplanes, and being trained to be an ordnance
6 officer on a carrier. I had two stripes by then. I had too
7 much rank to begin anew on an aircraft carrier.

8 So I was sent to the Pacific, to Pearl Harbor, where
9 the Marines reached out for me, and a few months later I
10 landed on the second day of the invasion at Okinawa with the
11 Marines. I remember hiding behind a wall and saying to
12 myself, what's a nice Jewish naval officer -- they were
13 shooting at me incidentally, and you could see the bullets
14 going by from zeros, and I kept saying to myself, this is
15 stupid, how did I get here. You know.

16 I had two months as a naval officer on Okinawa, and
17 then I wrote to the admiral, saying that I'm not being used,
18 my training was not this. So the admiral, surprisingly -- and
19 this was via Saipan and then to Manilla on a four stacker
20 destroyer with live steam leaks in the boiler room, and then
21 met Morris Adler there, our rabbi at Shaarey Zedek who was
22 then a chaplain. Manilla was completely destroyed, at least
23 the part I saw.

24 Then I got on a propeller aircraft and flew to Pearl
25 Harbor to work for the admiral. I took the long way to fly.

1 You couldn't fly much more than 8,000 feet across the Pacific.
2 That's 5,000 miles to Pearl. And I spent the rest of the war
3 and months afterwards working for the admiral as his gunnery
4 officer in a quonset hut at Pearl Harbor. And that's how I
5 ended the war.

6 **SUSIE:** You mentioned you met Morris Adler. And I
7 know you came back to Detroit.

8 **BILL:** I came back to Detroit right after the war.

9 **SUSIE:** I know you were very instrumental in helping
10 to build Shaarey Zedek.

11 **BILL:** Well, that was much later. I joined my
12 brother-in-law in the building business in 1946. And I
13 immediately began to get active in the Jewish community. I
14 had written a letter, which is available by the way, that was
15 published in the Jewish News describing what it was like on
16 one of the holidays to go to religious service in Okinawa. I
17 wrote the letter back to my parents, who gave it to Phil
18 Slomovitz, who published it. That could be an interesting
19 letter describing religious services. But I was always going.
20 Wherever I went, I went to the chaplain for running religious
21 services. At Pearl, on Saipan, On Tinian, and I think one
22 night in the Philippines, but extensively on Saipan. I was
23 stationed there trying to get to Manilla. And then of course
24 when I got back to Pearl, I would go to services as often as I
25 could at the only synagogue in Honolulu, and I've got pictures

1 of myself there.

2 When I got home, I immediately got involved with a
3 fellow named Norman Naimark. We started the Junior Division.

4 **SUSIE:** 1947 I think you started.

5 **BILL:** Really.

6 **SUSIE:** Yes, and you collected for Jews in European
7 camps.

8 **BILL:** Yes, that was a very exciting experience
9 because the DPs [displaced persons] had been let out of the
10 camps but they were displaced, they had no place to go. The
11 British wouldn't let them go to Israel. They were all over
12 Europe. And the Joint Distribution Committee, of which I am
13 now an honorary board member, came to me as a young man
14 through a Mrs. Helen Singer -- I've never forgotten her name
15 -- and suggested that we get cans to send overseas. It was an
16 amazing experience.

17 I became the chairman. We had 1200 volunteers and
18 we had 300 trucks. And remember, this was boys meeting girls.
19 The boys had just come back from the war. And that's where
20 the volunteers came from. We borrowed a large area, shipping
21 area, from people who had the paper product Kleenex. They
22 were Jewish apparently, but I've forgotten their names. And
23 with one weekend -- this is important -- between Euclid and
24 Davison and between Byron and Homer, we left 12,000 bags with
25 directions on the bag, saying we will come next Sunday with

1 trucks, and we came with 300 trucks. We needed them both
2 times, the first Sunday and the next Sunday, to drop the bags
3 off and to pick them up. And then the trucks came into this
4 huge paper warehouse. We'd been promised it for one day, and
5 we had six or seven freight cars backed into the siding.

6 I forgot to say how did we get 1200 volunteers. We
7 advertised in the Jewish Chronicle in those days, and there
8 was a movie called The Juggler with Kirk Douglas, and it was a
9 movie about DPs in Europe, and we showed that movie in the old
10 RKO Theater downtown, which has since been destroyed, and we
11 filled it. I spoke as chairman, and others spoke. I think
12 Harriet Cooper Halpern was one. They were the PR. We filled
13 the theater. And we got them as volunteers.

14 And then came the problems, because 300 trucks came
15 in with canned goods, and for the first few hours it was easy
16 to put them into boxes and load them. What happened when boy
17 met girl? And that's what did happen. A lot of marriages
18 resulted from that evening. I think we were left with 10 or
19 12 of us to load the rest of the freight cars, but we did. I
20 think we filled three or four freight cars and shipped them
21 east.

22 The following year was a disaster because they
23 wanted clothes, clean clothes. How do you pack clothes? It's
24 one thing to put canned goods into boxes. Quite another to
25 put clothes. And we only had two paper presses that were used

1 for clothes presses. The machine wraps wire around it. And
2 we borrowed Paul Zuckerman's, to his sorrow and mine, peanut
3 butter making floor, which had to be sanitary, white uniforms.
4 Why Paul loaned it to me I'll never know.

5 We had fewer clothes, but way too many. And at four
6 in the morning, as usual, boy had met girl, and this was the
7 second year, and they were getting bored. And Paul had to
8 bring his whole shift in early that morning to get ready to
9 make peanut butter to pack all those clothes into the freight
10 cars. It took years for Paul to say hello to me.

11 **SUSIE:** So you were very innovative in a lot of
12 different way. You fulfilled a lot of different needs in the
13 local community.

14 **BILL:** Well, those were early on. We're talking
15 about '47 and '48.

16 You mentioned Shaarey Zedek. I started I think at
17 Federation in the education division. We used to have
18 divisions. I think it was probably '55 or '56 when I was
19 chairman of the education division, the builders division for
20 Federation. But by that time -- I'd begun I think in '54 -- I
21 was the youngest officer in the history of Shaarey Zedek. I
22 was 36 or 37 years old. I remember Rabbi Adler introducing me
23 at the time.

24 **SUSIE:** I have here that you served 14 years at
25 Shaarey Zedek.

1 **BILL:** I was an officer for 14 years, and the reason
2 was that in '57 we met at Rubiner's home on Chicago Boulevard,
3 Louis, myself, Hy Safran, and others, and the president and
4 Leonard Sidlow, and the president was Rubiner, and we decided
5 that we had to move from Chicago Boulevard and Lawton. I had
6 been going to Sunday school there every Sunday. I graduated
7 from high school there. And of course during the week I'd
8 been going to United Hebrew Schools.

9 So we began to look for real estate. We found on
10 Northwestern Highway 15 acres that we thought would be fine.
11 It's south of where we are now. And when Louie and I hired
12 the architect, Percival Goodman, at the Wonder Bar on
13 Washington Boulevard for lunch, with Saul King, who was then
14 the president of Albert Kahn and a member of our synagogue.

15 Why Percy? Percy had designed 41 synagogues before
16 he did Shaarey Zedek, and Louie and I, who made these
17 decisions together, reasoned that he'd made 41 mistakes, and
18 he'll make 41 less for us in the 42nd building. Of course I
19 traveled the country, I visited his buildings. In Springfield
20 I remember, in California, in Denver, where Percy's previous
21 buildings were. Percy and I became good friends.

22 And we made a deal. They had never worked together,
23 Percy and Albert Kahn -- this is Shaarey Zedek now -- Albert
24 Kahn to make sure the roof didn't leak and the air
25 conditioning worked, and as it turned out, to design the now

1 famous truss system that spans this largest Jewish religious
2 institutional space in the world at Shaarey Zedek. Shaarey
3 Zedek has turned out to be the largest Jewish synagogue in the
4 world, matched only in size by the Dohany Street synagogue in
5 Budapest. They're designed very differently. We're different
6 because we didn't open at the back. We're a diamond. Percy
7 designed that. It was a stroke of genius to have the diamond
8 shape because you could have 1200 for Shabat, and you open the
9 north doors, which are 22 feet high, and 125 long, and they
10 stack, and then you have an open space.

11 This tape isn't long enough for the history of
12 building that building, so I won't go into it.

13 **SUSIE:** But I think throughout your career, just
14 reading all about you, that you've taken on very innovative,
15 creative projects. You have a foresight that many people
16 don't have into what the community needs.

17 **BILL:** I'm not going to admit that. Maybe it's
18 true. But the truth of the matter is the person who built
19 Shaarey Zedek, although I was the building chairman and gave
20 it four years of my life, it was Lou Berry and Hy Safran, whom
21 I adored. The three of us really were doing that. I just
22 happened to be chairman of the building committee and made
23 most of those decisions.

24 I'll tell you only one story about the design of
25 Shaarey Zedek. When I saw the plans, and Charlie Avery was my

1 co-chairman because he was an architect and I wasn't. I'd
2 never been involved with a building. Nobody else had either
3 incidently of this size and this character. So when I saw the
4 plans, I said to Saul King -- remember Percy had designed it
5 and Saul King was doing the drawings and making it work -- up
6 at the New Center Building I said to Saul I've got to have a
7 three-dimensional drawing of this because I don't understand
8 it. So they did a three-dimensional design, miniature. And I
9 said it scares me. This was 1959. I said in 1990 will this
10 architecture be considered part of the mainstream of American
11 architecture? Using concrete, using that roofline, will this
12 be a fad or will this be part of mainstream architecture? And
13 Morris Adler was concerned as well. So they brought in the
14 chairman of the architectural department of the University of
15 Michigan, and he reassured us, so we built it. I just mention
16 that as part of the story.

17 The building opened in 1962, and it is unique. I
18 mentioned only one detail. It is so big when you open the
19 doors, we have to reproduce the sound an eighth of a second
20 later or we'd have an echo in the corner. So when you go into
21 that synagogue, you don't realize it that you're reproducing
22 sound in the far corners by an eighth of a second. The whole
23 system is built in for that.

24 **SUSIE:** Throughout your career, the fact that Jewish
25 education has been so much a part of who you are, and

1 especially in this community when you talk about Jewish
2 education, and if you had to point to the one person who had
3 it on his or her agenda, it would be Bill Berman.

4 **BILL:** Well, I've told you about my background. In
5 1954 we dedicated a Hebrew school building in my mother's
6 name, the Esther Berman Building, at Seven Mile and Schaefer.
7 So I was always involved in Hebrew Schools. Abe Kasle was the
8 president until 1959, for 16 years, and he built the system.
9 When I came out of the Navy, I became kind of his spear
10 carrier or his briefcase carrier.

11 **SUSIE:** But not everyone has that deep loss.

12 **BILL:** So I became the first president of the Hebrew
13 Schools after Abe Kasle, when we were building the system in
14 1961. '59, '60 or '61. I think that would be the case.

15 I was president for three years. Why? I was
16 different because even though I'd gone to the Hebrew Schools.

17 **SUSIE:** It says here '62 to '65 you were the chair.

18 **BILL:** Well, probably the chair afterwards, but I
19 think I was president from '59 to '62 and then the executive
20 chair. Mike Zeltzer and Hy Safran's brother became involved.

21 So with the educational background and the Hebrew
22 School background, I was a rare bird in Detroit. So by 1965
23 I'd been given an award nationally as a young Jewish Leader of
24 the Year by the old Association of American Jewish Education,
25 of which I became its chair for 16 years. And in 1965 as

1 well, nationally the Council of Jewish Federations organized
2 its first committee on Jewish education. I became its chair.
3 So there is a history of my being involved in Jewish education
4 nationally.

5 **SUSIE:** I've got some quotes from that say parents'
6 involvement in Jewish education is so important, and this
7 helps to preserve the Jewish community.

8 **BILL:** The quality of our Jewish life. My first
9 involvement with CJF, the Council of Jewish Federations was as
10 chair of its education committee in '64 until '70. I was with
11 Max Fisher and Hy Safran in that famous Boston year of 1969
12 when the young people revolted and said start supporting
13 Jewish education. I was one of the three people, Hy, myself
14 and Max, who agreed to open the doors, let them in. That was
15 in 1969 when people like Hillel Levine and Michael Brooks, our
16 own Hillel director, were young rebels, pounding on the door,
17 and we said the door is wide open, come on in.

18 **SUSIE:** I know that you've done so much, but if you
19 could choose one particular thing that you would say was the
20 most significant development in your career as a Jewish
21 leader, what would you say that might be?

22 **BILL:** It would probably be bringing the Russians
23 from Russia, working out a way to get them here, when I was
24 president of the Council of Jewish Federations.

25 **SUSIE:** You had sort of a twofold agenda: the

1 education on the one hand and this enormous exodus from the
2 former Soviet Union.

3 **BILL:** To be as fair as I can, I was continually
4 involved in Jewish education nationally, first through AAJE,
5 and then in 1981, when we organized JESNA, Jewish Education
6 Service of North America. I became its honorary chair. I
7 helped organize it with a fellow in New Jersey, my good friend
8 Arthur Brody. We went up to Brandeis and brought John Woocher
9 down, and that's now a famous story and Woocher has JESNA into
10 something that's very important nationally, and I'm very proud
11 of that. And I'm proud, too, of the fact that I have been
12 funding, and have now increased funding, for the Berman Center
13 for Evaluation and Research at JESNA and the publication of
14 the results at JESNA. So I've been involved with them.

15 But simultaneously, in '87, I became the president
16 of the Council of Jewish Federations. I'd been working my way
17 up in that sense.

18 **SUSIE:** For over twenty years.

19 **BILL:** From '65 to '87.

20 **SUSIE:** It's amazing, when I look at your career in
21 Jewish communal life, how long you served in organizations and
22 you worked to change them and bring out innovative ideas that
23 no one has ever thought of.

24 **BILL:** Well, you know, it sounds good. I don't know
25 that. I'd have to think about it. But nobody does anything

1 by themselves. Every place I worked I had people who were
2 smarter than I was, I hope, just as caring, just as willing to
3 make a difference, and I think that in all of these areas
4 where I have worked -- we're talking of course about JEF here
5 in Detroit, where it became apparent to me -- we had Bill
6 Davidson involved. We each put in \$15,000, and we would start
7 something at Shaarey Zedek that would bring the families in.

8 I was worried that there are tree rings in every
9 synagogue. Let's call it five tree rings; it doesn't matter.
10 There is certainly a core group that we see on Shabat in any
11 synagogue, plus the guests that come bar mitzvah. Then you've
12 got another group who would want to be involved if they knew
13 how. So we started at Shaarey Zedek this Jewish family
14 program, brought Aileen Appleman in from Ann Arbor, and then I
15 funded myself for quite awhile until it became evident that
16 the city needed it city-wide. So this Jewish Experiences
17 Family, of which I'm very proud, is now reaching the families
18 because that's the only way we're going to make a difference
19 in our synagogue life, by getting families involved. So I'm
20 proud of JEF, I'm proud that it's continuing, supported by the
21 millennium. And that's one of the things in my life I'm very
22 proud that I was able to continue to start, and to continue.

23 **SUSIE:** Do you want to talk about the population
24 study that was done? Just a few minutes perhaps.

25 **BILL:** Whatever you ask.

1 **SUSIE:** Because you were trying to preserve
2 tradition and Jewish education and the love of the Jewish
3 literature, and yet you're also looking ahead. You're a
4 forward thinker that tries to look at population studies.

5 **BILL:** Well, let's get to that if you want. Sure.
6 Starting with JESNA and the evaluation center, because I think
7 in American Jewish life we're trying to reproduce the wheel
8 across the country much too often, and when I was the
9 president of the Council of Jewish Federations, I had preceded
10 that by being chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee of
11 the Council of Jewish Federations. It had occurred to me and
12 others on the staff at CJF that we, the Federated system, did
13 not really know who we were. Are we really the center of
14 Jewish life in Des Moines or in St. Louis or in Berkeley,
15 California? And do we know how many kids (a) should be
16 Jewishly educated in that community? How many are ready for
17 bar mitzvah or aren't they?

18 So in the early '80s when Mort Mandell was president
19 of Cleveland, I convinced him to let me chair a committee on
20 strategic planning. So I toured the country. I went to four
21 or five Federations, at assemblies and so forth, always made
22 speeches about let's do strategic planning. The first thing
23 you do in strategic planning is something called an
24 environmental scan. Who are you? What world do you live in?

25 The American Jewry did not know. We didn't have to

1 know because we were doing fine until the middle '70s. So
2 beginning in the early '80s Federations began to do studies,
3 community studies. You call them demographic studies, but
4 they're really sociologic studies. Then by 1989, when I
5 became president of CJF for a year or two after, it became
6 apparent that these would be lost. Cleveland, pick your city,
7 Boston, Baltimore, Chicago of course, New York continually,
8 Detroit not until '91. What's going to happen?

9 So I started at CUNY, the City University of New
10 York graduate center, the Berman Data Bank for the storage of
11 those studies. And now we come to 1989, when I was president
12 of the Council still. It occurred to a lot of us, others
13 around me -- I was always guided -- that if we didn't do a
14 national study, we wouldn't really know what was going on
15 nationally. We thought we could take nine Federations, match
16 them up. But the questions were all different from the data
17 bank.

18 So we did the first -- and I raised the money for it
19 -- the famous 1990 study where we got the 52 percent
20 (indiscernible). Nobody remembers anything else. That was a
21 study of a small universe, 2150 family were interviewed, and
22 conclusions were drawn, I think unfairly looking back. So it
23 was natural, continuing now to the most recent study. By this
24 time Conrad Giles was president of CJF. So Conrad and Marty
25 Carr, whom I had hired at CJF, came to me and asked me to

1 chair the year 2000 study and to raise the money for it.

2 So I did with another fellow, a friend of mine from
3 Washington, Eddie Caplan, who's now the head of the Jewish
4 Centers Association nationally. We raised \$4 million. For
5 five years I led a team at UJC as chairman with Eddie, but I
6 was really the research guy, to get this study done. But not
7 a 2100 person study, a 4500 universe. That was the cost and
8 the challenge. We did the study under very awkward
9 circumstances because Bush and Gore were running for
10 president. We're making phone calls, and somebody else was
11 calling at the same time. But we finished it. Lots of
12 problems, we've been severely criticized, but people are now
13 recognizing nationwide, people who need the use of the study,
14 and we've moved the data bank to Brandeis. I'm up to date
15 monthly on the calls we're getting, thousands of people who
16 want access to that study, and who are using it. And I think
17 I can say I'm pretty proud of the fact that I was in the
18 middle of it. I guess you could say I made it happen. I
19 guess I could say that's one of the things I'm very proud of.

20 **SUSIE:** Yes. I think some of the interesting
21 results are just incredible to think about. Young women for
22 example are not having children as they are in the general
23 population.

24 **BILL:** You need 2.1 reproduction to reproduce the
25 family; we're 1.9. And those are real numbers. There are a

1 lot of other things. I don't know how interesting this is.

2 **SUSIE:** Absolutely. I was reading some of your
3 curriculum vitae.

4 **BILL:** I'm talking now about the study.

5 **SUSIE:** Yes. And there was an article about it in
6 there, which was fascinating.

7 **BILL:** There were lots of articles. You learned the
8 day schools were growing in number, which was good news. The
9 Conservative movement is losing, which surprised me, but for
10 lots of reasons, I think. I've just written a long letter on
11 that, that may be an article may be an article soon.

12 **SUSIE:** I think what was surprising, too, was that
13 there were many more Jews than there actually are.

14 **BILL:** Nationally?

15 **SUSIE:** Yes.

16 **BILL:** Oh, that's controversial. But let me finish
17 this point. Conservative Judaism had less orthodoxy -- and
18 maybe we miscounted in '90 -- and that day schools, afternoon
19 schools are losing. Those trends -- and that's what this
20 study does -- and the intermarriage rate, which could say was
21 52, maybe because we didn't have enough interviews, was not
22 properly calculated, but we know what the trend is now,
23 because if you were married -- now we're using five-year
24 pieces -- if you were married I think from '85 to '90, there
25 was a 37 percent of intermarriage; '90 to '95, 42 percent; if

1 you were married between '95 and 2000, 47 percent. So we have
2 the trend. So we know we've got this challenge. And this
3 study I think proved it.

4 On the number of people who are Jewish, the
5 question becomes who's Jewish? How do you count Jews? And
6 all of these sociologists, all of whom I know very well and
7 personally, I know their names and we've had dinner together,
8 and we've talked, and I have funded some of their research, we
9 know that it's easy to count a Jew if you say he was born
10 Jewish, mother or father, if you say he was raised Jewish.
11 But if you ask somebody what are you now, and they say they're
12 not Jewish, then you count them or don't you? And we were
13 severely criticized because we did not necessarily count them,
14 people who said they were no longer Jewish.

15 My best story I think that illustrates the problem.
16 I told you I kept in touch with some of my Harvard Business
17 School friends, who are now as old as I am, 86 years old in my
18 case, maybe 85 in theirs. I called a fellow the other day to
19 stay in touch with him. He asked me what I was doing. I
20 described this study. He said, "Well, of course if you asked
21 me if I was Jewish, I'd say I'm certainly not Jewish." I
22 said, "Jack, I know you were born Jewish, God knows you were
23 raised as a Jew. What are you now?" "I'm not Jewish.
24 Judaism is the opiate of the people," the usual stuff.

25 So I said, "Jack, let me ask you a question. What

1 do you do on Passover?" Which as you know 80 some odd percent
2 of Jews celebrate Passover, not Yom Kippur anymore, but
3 Passover. He said, "Of course. I run the family Seder."
4 Now, is Jack Jewish or isn't he?

5 There is the guts of the question, and I leave it to
6 whoever listens to this tape to understand the dilemma we had
7 in counting Jews.

8 **SUSIE:** Well, the next question is, now you have all
9 these facts. What can you personally envision the community
10 will look like in the near future?

11 **BILL:** I don't know the answer. It will be what we
12 make it. It's an enormous challenge to American Jewry, to its
13 leadership, and certainly to the Conservative movement, of
14 which I'm a very proud part. To decide what its future is by
15 how they reach out to the inter-married, how they reach out to
16 young people who, for reasons of the open society and all the
17 other reasons that many of us are familiar with, many of the
18 reasons that this study opened up and showed us, how we deal
19 with that information will decide what the future of Judaism
20 is.

21 Orthodoxy is growing, and that generation will
22 continue to grow because of their birth rate. But whether or
23 not they're an integral part of American Jewry will depend
24 upon whether they will go mainstream and what they feel like.
25 I've just written a letter on that. Whether they feel that

1 traditional Judaism is merged with the ideas of Western
2 Civilization and the culture of Western Civilization. Unless
3 they can merge them, they will not be an integral part of what
4 we all want American Judaism to be.

5 **SUSIE:** I know that in your personal life you have
6 even gone back to studying Hebrew again.

7 **BILL:** Yes. Not enough. When I became chairman of
8 the board of AAJE, probably back in the '60s, maybe '70s, I've
9 lost track, I decided that my Hebrew was insufficient. I had
10 an obligation. So I began to study in my office. I got a
11 teacher to come, and I learned quite a bit. I brushed up on
12 my Hebrew. Although I've traveled, I have a good friend I
13 went to Harvard with, whom I've traveled all over the world
14 with, and he used to joke with me. When we went to Israel,
15 and I would ask directions in Hebrew, he would say, Bill,
16 let's take the directions, and then we'll go in the opposite
17 direction. He did not trust my Hebrew. But I did study, and
18 I do know yetzagafate freet (ph. sp.). [Speaking Hebrew.] So
19 yes, I studied Hebrew.

20 Now I've decided that I don't understand the
21 sources. My Hebrew education -- and it's one of the reasons
22 that this generation was turned off -- was pretty darn bad.
23 And I never knew what the Mishneh was, I didn't understand the
24 transition of the Torah to all law to the Mishneh to the comor
25 (ph. sp.) to the responsa (ph. sp.). And I've been studying

1 that with a young rabbi friend of mine. I study on Monday
2 nights with him. My children gave me rgamora (ph. sp.), you
3 know, in English/Hebrew, so it's ten times as long. But I
4 have most of the books. And we pick on choose on Mondays.
5 But mostly I'm asking questions. I'm trying to understand.
6 I've read Maimonades Mishneh Torah in the original Hebrew,
7 which explains what I'm looking for.

8 Maimonades intellectually had to explain to his
9 generation what our history was, what the rabbis' role were,
10 how our law worked. Did anybody really know? How did we get
11 to yohoda nasian (ph. sp.), in 200 A.D. to collect the
12 Mishneh, like a huge dictionary. That's what the Mishneh was.

13 And then of course how did we get to Svat (ph. sp.),
14 where the ashodah rook (ph. sp.) was written so we had the
15 rules to live by.

16 **SUSIE:** Maybe you can write a book yourself.

17 **BILL:** Yeah. I'm not qualified to write any books.
18 I'm just learning for myself. But I am curious and I wish I
19 had more time.

20 **SUSIE:** Well, it's an admirable thing to be
21 constantly learning. It's part of who you are and I got that
22 from some of the things I read about you.

23 I wanted to know if you wanted to comment at all
24 about Israel and your trips there in the past and how do you
25 feel about the future of Israel?

1 **BILL:** That's a very difficult question because
2 Israel is not dealing with a people who want to make peace
3 with them because probably the majority of the Palestinians
4 have been taught that Israel shouldn't be there at all. So if
5 you could deal with somebody who's willing to say to you,
6 let's decide and negotiate on borders, let's decide how we'll
7 live together, that's politically doable. But when you're
8 dealing with leadership who in the end say you don't even
9 belong here, then you make an amazingly difficult problem for
10 Israel.

11 But Israel is an amazing place. And you have to do
12 with Bob Briesman (ph. sp.) and I did. I mentioned I talked
13 about the direction of things. Coming into Israel from
14 Jordan, spend a week in Jordan and then drive to Israel, and
15 see what Israel has done in the Middle East that nobody else
16 has done. It's an amazing, creative, exciting place. It is
17 inconceivable to me that the Western world doesn't see them
18 not only as the only democracy in the Middle East, but as the
19 hope of the Middle East, because with Technion, with Feitzman,
20 with Hebrew University, Ben Gurion with Bar Alon, an educated
21 world of technically educated, brilliant, aggressively
22 technologically civilization, what it can do to the whole
23 Middle East if it had the chance. I wish I knew what was
24 going to happen.

25 It's a political problem of course. I don't live in

1 Israel. My kids did serve in its army. I can only support
2 them with my money and my dreams and my hopes.

3 **SUSIE:** How many times have you been to Israel?

4 **BILL:** I don't know. Three times a year. I flew
5 with Max 13 times to Israel. I counted them once. I suppose
6 I've been there 20 or 25 times. At 86 my family is a little
7 critical of my traveling to Israel, you know, 10 hours, 11
8 hours flight. But I'm going to go. I hope to go with a
9 mission, if I can get permission.

10 **SUSIE:** How old were you when you first went there?

11 **BILL:** 1961, and I was born in 1917. So whatever
12 the math is.

13 **SUSIE:** Do you want to talk a little bit about your
14 family, Madge.

15 **BILL:** Sure. I have a wonderful family. My wife,
16 Madge, I've been married 53 years. A golden retriever, who's
17 wonderful, who's three. We have three houses. We live in
18 Detroit, we live in a New York apartment -- I needed that, and
19 I still do, for all of my -- because I'm still connected of
20 course to the study. I chair the Investment Committee of
21 United Jewish Communities. I'm there a lot. I go to the JDC
22 meetings, I'm involved. The Berman Data Bank meets in New
23 York, the Advisory Committee.

24 I have two children, a son and a daughter. My son
25 is a doctor, and recently married and given us our first

1 Berman grandchild. My son has worked all over the world
2 helping people. He's worked in Mexico, he's worked speaking
3 Spanish on the Guatemalan border. He's worked in Zulu
4 hospital with Kevlar vest in South Africa as a doctor. Most
5 recently in British Guiana, where he ran a hospital on the
6 equator without any power or air conditioning and no
7 telephone, only radio, and his wife flew the patients in.
8 They're both pilots. John's a commercial pilot, owns a
9 helicopter. He's right now collecting people who help in
10 Appalachia with his helicopter.

11 My daughter, who's a writer, has given me two
12 grandchildren: Lawrence, who's graduating from University of
13 Michigan, and Sarah, who's 12. I'm very proud of them.

14 **SUSIE:** That's terrific. I know that in your long
15 list of accomplishments you can include serving with Skillman.

16 **BILL:** Oh, yes. I forgot. I was the first chairman
17 of the Skillman Foundation, which we built up. I'm no longer
18 there, I'm emeritus. I was chairman of the Michigan State
19 Housing Development authority. I rebuilt it. We did about
20 two billion in bonds during my time there.

21 **SUSIE:** How about New Detroit?

22 **BILL:** I was on the Board of New Detroit,
23 representing the building association.

24 **SUSIE:** What do you see for the local community,
25 especially the Detroit community, as a developer?

1 **BILL:** Well, I'm not much of a developer anymore.
2 It's been a long time. I'm still involved in real estate of
3 course as an investor, but not actively in anything.

4 I always felt that Detroit would have a great future
5 over the longer run, even though we all fled from Detroit
6 because the freeways permitted that, and the Jewish outflow.
7 I've just described where 12,000 Jews lived, and there
8 probably isn't one in that square today.

9 **SUSIE:** Well, 1967 was like the watershed year.

10 **BILL:** It was. That's how we built the Hebrew
11 School system, because they were building synagogues that way.

12 But back to Detroit, the infrastructure is there.
13 You know, the water, the sewer. And I built a lot in Detroit.
14 I chaired the Elmwood development downtown. How many units
15 were there? Probably a thousand units there, east of St.
16 Aubin.

17 But politically Detroit will have to struggle, and
18 unless we get people downtown who want to live there, and
19 there are schools they can send their kids to, Detroit, which
20 used its best land to build two stadiums for football and
21 baseball, its future will depend upon its governance, and what
22 kind of outreach its governance can bring to the city.
23 Residential of course.

24 **SUSIE:** Well, thank you so much.

25 **BILL:** You're welcome.

1 **SUSIE:** It was a thrill for me to be able to speak
2 with you. I was just amazed at your accomplishments. You're
3 looking at me very strangely.

4 **BILL:** Well, because I've got to think about them.
5 They were all moving from one thing to another.

6 **SUSIE:** I can tell that you just have this great
7 love for education and the Jewish people and the future of our
8 local community, and what's going to happen to us nationally
9 as Jews, your great concern.

10 **BILL:** And that concern now is happily shared by
11 thousands of others, and our future will depend upon the steps
12 that we all take together. That's the only way it's going to
13 work. Thank you very much.

14 **SUSIE:** Thank you.