

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Penny Blumenstein  
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Charlotte Dubin  
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Monday, May 23, 2005  
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation  
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish community life in  
6 metropolitan Detroit

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8 MS. DUBIN: I'm Charlotte Dubin. I'm conducting an  
9 oral history interview with Penny Blumenstein for the Leonard  
10 M. Simons Jewish Community Archives at the Max M. Fisher  
11 Federation Building on May 23rd, 2005.

12 Mrs. Blumenstein, do we have your permission to use  
13 your words and thoughts in the future for educational and  
14 historical research and documentation?

15 MS. BLUMENSTEIN: Yes, you do.

16 MS. DUBIN: Let's start at the very beginning.  
17 Where and when were you born?

18 MS. BLUMENSTEIN: I was born in Detroit, Michigan,  
19 December 10th, 1939, at what was then Women's Hospital. It's  
20 probably had three names since then. My father's family was  
21 from Detroit. I even have a grandmother who was born in  
22 Detroit. My mother's family was from Cleveland, and she  
23 married my father and moved here.

24 They lived here for all of my life, up until the  
25 time -- can we go back for a second? Assuming not all of my

1 life because I intend to be living a lot longer yet.

2 My parents are both 90 this year. My father was 90  
3 in February and my mother will be 90 in July, and we're having  
4 a 180th birthday party for them in June. They've had a long  
5 and very active life here in Detroit. They permanently moved  
6 to Florida when my father was 65. But then they didn't stay  
7 permanently in Florida, but that's where they reside now.  
8 They moved to Texas for a while. My father opened a new  
9 business. And they now live in Florida again.

10 But they have had a very active life and one that I  
11 would have to say really gave me a grounding for everything  
12 that I did later. They were both active in the community, and  
13 it was a tradition that I would have to say came even from my  
14 grandparents. Both of my grandmothers in their own  
15 communities were very active, and my grandfathers were really  
16 participating on a very high level in their communities. And  
17 it just was kind of traditionally the things that you did when  
18 you could. It was what gave me the impetus to move into the  
19 world of tzedakah because everything that they did was related  
20 to that.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** Who are you named for?

22 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** I'm named for a great grandmother.  
23 My Hebrew name is Basha Esther. My original name was not  
24 Penny. My original name was Brooke. Very romantic and  
25 English or something that my mother was probably very romantic

1 while she was pregnant with me. And she was looking for a B.  
2 But somehow I wasn't quite a Brooke when I came out. I was  
3 kind of more round, bald, and not fair as my brother had been.  
4 So the picture of the baby she was going to have did not fit  
5 the name she chose. So she nicknamed me Penny, which was the  
6 name from a movie I think that they had seen while she was  
7 pregnant with me, and it just seemed to fit.

8           When I went to school, in those days you didn't have  
9 to have 17 pieces of identification to affirm your name and  
10 birth date, and so they enrolled me as Penny, and I just went  
11 all the way through school that way. I didn't change my name  
12 legally until after I had had three children and listed them  
13 as having mother Penny on their birth certificates and decided  
14 that some day they might have a problem because legally there  
15 was no Penny. I have subsequently become legally Penny  
16 Brooke.

17           Now Brooke is a much more popular name. Probably  
18 fits a variety of people in their appearance. So today  
19 perhaps it would have been more fitting, and you would have  
20 known me as Brooke.

21           **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me what life was like in your home  
22 growing up.

23           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, I come from actually a  
24 pretty big family. I have two brothers and a sister. We had  
25 a very close family. We still do. It's a wonderful family.

1           My father was a CPA, and after many years of being  
2 one of the top small Jewish firms -- well, it was the largest  
3 of the small firms in this community -- he decided that he  
4 wanted to go into business and did a variety of things that  
5 took him far further than being a CPA.

6           We had a family that did a lot of things together,  
7 even though there was a very large spread in our ages because  
8 there's 11 years difference between my oldest brother and my  
9 youngest sister. Yet we did take family vacations and we went  
10 to the same camps and we did all kinds of things as a family.  
11 We were very close to my grandparents, who lived here, to my  
12 aunts and uncles, and to my mother's family in Cleveland. We  
13 traveled to Cleveland quite often. My mother had a sister and  
14 her parents, and it was that kind of family.

15           And then we had our extended families, since there  
16 weren't as many aunts and uncles who lived here, of a whole  
17 group of my parents friends who became part of our family.  
18 They had their children, and we all did things together.

19           It was a nice time to grow up. It was a time of  
20 feeling comfortable and safe. I don't think I was at all  
21 aware of the Jewish side of life in a public sense where there  
22 would have been problems with being Jewish. My parents had  
23 certainly experienced it very often. I mean I could tell you  
24 long stories about how they experienced it, both when they  
25 were first married and looking for apartments here, and when

1 my mother went to University of Michigan and was looking for  
2 housing. Many, many things that they never made us aware of.  
3 We were very comfortably Jewish. You know, in those years you  
4 grew up fairly much in a Jewish neighborhood, even if it  
5 wasn't completely Jewish. So from our first home in the  
6 Dexter Davison area to when we moved to the Seven Mile  
7 Livernois area, everybody practically in school seemed to me  
8 to be Jewish. At least the majority. And we were a  
9 comfortable majority at that time. It was a different world  
10 than what my children grew up in.

11 That's why I'm so happy now that my grandchildren  
12 are having a more Jewish experience here at Hillel than they  
13 would if they were in public school.

14 **MS. DUBIN:** Who were your friends?

15 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Who were my friends. Oh, you will  
16 know so many of my friends. You know, I have friends that we  
17 started practically -- well, some of them were from  
18 kindergarten. When you talk about some of my friends that you  
19 would know, Doreen Hermelin and Margie Krasnick and Bluma  
20 Schechter, we all knew each other since we were about eight or  
21 nine years old. We have remained friends.

22 You know, it's always a reflection to me of who I am  
23 and who I was when I realize that some many of my friends have  
24 the same kind of caring and interest for community. It's  
25 always astounding. I mean people are astounded by the fact

1 that we have a group of friends that we have celebrated our  
2 major birthdays with -- there are about 18 of us -- that were  
3 all friends at least from high school, and many of them, as I  
4 say, from even before. I have friends from kindergarten.

5           Most of my other friends today are very often people  
6 who I've met through Federation. Nancy Grosfeld I would have  
7 to say is one of my very best friends. We met through  
8 Federation, through the Women's Department, because she was  
9 the person who followed me as the chair of the Lion of Judah  
10 Division, and it began just an incredible friendship, and our  
11 husbands became friends, and we have very interwoven lives  
12 today.

13           I have to say also I have some very wonderful strong  
14 relationships with men. Not everybody has men friends, but I  
15 have some friends who are men. Maybe it started with David  
16 Hermelin at Adat Shalom. He wasn't just Harold's friend, and  
17 we weren't just friends as couples. He was my friend and I  
18 was his friend. And there are other people who are like that  
19 that I have a very close relationship with, which it's  
20 wonderful to have perspective from the whole as opposed to the  
21 part, because men have different ways of looking at things.  
22 It's helped me a lot in many of the things that I've done  
23 because you can't think in a narrow box when you take a  
24 leadership position. You have to look at the whole, not the  
25 part. And that's helped me a lot.

1           **MS. DUBIN:** Was there someone who particularly  
2 influenced you growing up, someone you looked up to?

3           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** I would have to say it's just the  
4 subtle influence of my parents. I have really extraordinary  
5 parents. They're very different in nature. My father was the  
6 quiet, calm leader person. People depended upon my father a  
7 great deal. He's extraordinarily trustworthy.

8           My mother was a personality who was fun-loving,  
9 definitely committed, a great mother. I mean mothering was  
10 her job. And even though we battled a great deal as teenagers  
11 are wont to do with their mothers, when I was growing up,  
12 intuitively I knew, you know, that my mother is just an  
13 absolute lady. She's one of these people who's a classic  
14 lady, but not without a sense of humor, not without a reality  
15 check. She's not a forbidding person. Just ask Harold about  
16 her sometime. He absolutely adores her. I think that's why  
17 he married me.

18           So I think my parents were probably my largest  
19 influence.

20           I had a grandfather, my mother's father, who I just  
21 absolutely adored. You know how there's just certain people  
22 in your life. On both sides I had one grandparent that were  
23 more models for me than the other just because they were these  
24 very calm, reasonable people, who were -- I was not such a  
25 calm and reasonable person, and they gave me a real sense of

1 being able to cope with situations in life, of having a  
2 reasonable outlook about things.

3 My grandmother, who unfortunately died when she was  
4 67, she just had the gentlest soul. Talk about a lady, she  
5 was such a lady. In those years when I was growing up, I  
6 spent a lot of time with her. Not because she ever lived with  
7 us, because she didn't. Just that she was the kind of person  
8 you liked to go to her house and be with her. That extended  
9 beyond my childhood into my young adulthood. She was a great  
10 example for anybody to follow.

11 **MS. DUBIN:** How about Jewish content in your life?  
12 Did you go to a Jewish school?

13 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** We were members of Shaarey Zedek  
14 from the early times. My grandfather was a member, my father  
15 was a member. It was a typical '50s Jewish education. I  
16 don't know how much I learned, but I went the required amount  
17 of time. I went through confirmation. There were no bat  
18 mitzvahs at that time, so you really didn't have the ability  
19 to take a real role in the synagogue or the synagogue life. I  
20 would have to say consecration, which at that time you had to  
21 be 16, that was the extent of it. Very few of us continued on  
22 to graduate.

23 I can't say that I had a great Jewish education. I  
24 would say that I learned the required amount to get through  
25 from one year to the other. It was one of those things; you



1 had to do, you did it. It didn't make me particularly  
2 knowledgeable nor did it make me feel particularly connected.

3 I happened to have loved Rabbi Adler and Goldie  
4 because they were just dear people. They were friends of my  
5 grandparents also, so I saw them on a more intimate level than  
6 maybe everyone would have.

7 My father was very active in Shaarey Zedek, and had  
8 they stayed in Detroit, he would have been president of  
9 Shaarey Zedek, but they had decided to move, which I would say  
10 my mother wasn't that unhappy about at the time because  
11 Shaarey Zedek wasn't her life. She was much more involved in  
12 Jewish women's organizations and also in the March of Dimes  
13 because my sister had polio, so she really got involved in the  
14 March of Dimes at the very earliest. I marched at the March  
15 of Dimes from the time I was about 15 or 16, every year until  
16 I got married, and even after that, somebody would call me and  
17 I would make the calls or do the walk, whatever.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** Is that your earliest volunteer  
19 experience?

20 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Actually probably was, yes. It  
21 was particularly important if my mother didn't happen to be in  
22 town when they were doing the walk, she knew somebody was out  
23 there doing it. And it really taught you to care because when  
24 you have situations within your own family that you can  
25 relate, you understand that raising money for people who don't

1 have it is really important, because when my sister had polio,  
2 they came right to the hospital and talked to my parents and  
3 offered all kinds of assistance, which my parents didn't  
4 happen to need much of it, but that was a wonderful experience  
5 for them because they knew that there were people who really  
6 did need it. So, yes, I think that was a great lesson.

7           **MS. DUBIN:** Let me come back to that a little bit  
8 because I think your role as a volunteer is going to be  
9 important to us. But for a moment I'd like you to tell us  
10 about your education. Where did you go to high school and  
11 afterward?

12           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, I went to Mumford, the high  
13 school to go to in the '50s. Then I went to the University of  
14 Illinois. But Harold and I were going together already and  
15 our phone bills were far exceeding our capacity to cover them.  
16 I remember getting a very lovely check from my grandmother for  
17 my 18th birthday and having to pay my phone bill with it.  
18 That was not such a good thing. And I subsequently decided  
19 that I would come back to Detroit. It was really kind of  
20 silly. I wanted the experience of being away. I knew it was  
21 a once-in-a-lifetime experience. If I didn't take advantage  
22 of it then, I never would, and I was glad that I did it. But  
23 I was happy to come back.

24           Then I went to Wayne for about another year and a  
25 half. It was a very fast track. I got married ten days after

1 my 19th birthday. Harold was 20. We were very young, but we  
2 had been going together already for a couple of years.  
3 Marriage was the option then. And in order to keep him out of  
4 the Army we hurried to have our first child, which we did. I  
5 got pregnant, and somewhere in the very first few months of  
6 that next semester I decided, you know, I think I'm not  
7 feeling that great. I think when I have this baby, I'm going  
8 to stay home. So I never finished.

9           What I did was I continued taking classes of all  
10 sorts for a long, long time. I was never focused about what I  
11 took, so I never made an attempt to put it together to add to  
12 my college credits. You know, at that time, it wasn't that  
13 important. I didn't need a college degree to do what I was  
14 doing, which was parenting, and I didn't need a college degree  
15 to learn things because I was learning things in all these  
16 classes that I was taking and enjoying, and I didn't worry  
17 about final exams. I just learned. I actually had a much  
18 better time then than I had earlier on. And I was a pretty  
19 good student, but it's great when you learn and there's no  
20 pressure on. You're just there because you enjoy it.

21           So I would have to say the rest of my life has been  
22 an education. I did go back and take -- I was doing some  
23 accounting work for one of Harold's father's little businesses  
24 and I went back and took some accounting courses. I think I  
25 took some of Harold's accounting courses. I did the homework

1 when he was too busy.

2           There are times when I go to fill out forms where I  
3 say to myself, oh, I wish I could say yes, I got a degree from  
4 the university. I could go back and finish if I wanted. I've  
5 read all those marvelous stories about people who are 89 years  
6 old and getting their college degree. It's not important to  
7 me anymore. There was this little window of time when it was.

8           **MS. DUBIN:** Somewhere along the line in your early  
9 married life you were starting to get interested in  
10 volunteering apparently. How did that all happen?

11           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, actually I think probably it  
12 happens to a lot of women. You're looking for something to do  
13 outside your home where instead of talking about babies and  
14 what you're cooking for dinner, you want something that's a  
15 little bigger than yourself, something that takes you outside  
16 of your little narrow home environment.

17           In those years there were a lot of things that you  
18 could join as a chapter. I didn't plunge right into  
19 Federation. I didn't really know very much about Federation.  
20 And I was actually part of an ORT chapter, which was being  
21 organized by neighbors and friends of mine, and they asked me  
22 if I would join and I said sure. It would be a good way to  
23 get part of myself outside of my home environment and to be  
24 with people and to talk about things that were important.

25           **MS. DUBIN:** Tell us what ORT is.

1                   **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:**   ORT is the Organization for  
2   Rehabilitation Training.   Now that was what it was then.  
3   Today it's much broader.   Today it's much broader because ORT  
4   does a lot of teaching, setting up schools in environments  
5   where schools aren't available.   At that time what they were  
6   doing was to take people and give them new training outside of  
7   a field perhaps that they had been in that was no longer in  
8   existence.   Where they had moved, they had become an immigrant  
9   to Israel, or they had had their life changed considerably in  
10  an environment wherever they were, which could have been in  
11  any country in the former Soviet Union.   Now they have a much  
12  broader scope.

13                   What chapters did was raise money and raise  
14  consciences for people about what ORT was doing to encourage  
15  more people to support it.   But it was also a social  
16  environment, and it was a way of people getting together.  
17  They were learning about ORT, they were sending out the  
18  message about ORT, and they were learning about other things  
19  because along with what we did as far as the raising of funds,  
20  which I don't think in the concept of what I know about  
21  raising funds today, was not very much, but it was an effort.

22                   We also had speakers come for different programming  
23  so we could learn about a lot of different things that were  
24  going on in our own state or in the world, to broaden our  
25  perspective, and I think that that was, you know, for us our

1 rehabilitation training I suppose you could say.

2 I had a role. I would do anything. You could give  
3 me any job. I would do anything that they wanted me to do, as  
4 long as I wasn't president. I didn't want to be in charge of  
5 any whole thing. That was my rule. So I did about everything  
6 in the ORT chapter that I could think of to do.

7 Margie was a good friend of mine. That's how I knew  
8 Dulcie. Margie Krasnick is Dulcie's sister-in-law. They had  
9 a leadership training program within the Women's Department.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** Women's Department of what?

11 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Of Federation. I will tell you  
12 that this is what I knew about Federation. One day my  
13 doorbell rang and some lady was at the door who asked if she  
14 could come in and talk to me about giving a gift to  
15 Federation. I can picture in my mind that moment. How  
16 horrifying. I didn't even a clue. I didn't have a clue how  
17 much I could give and I didn't even really understand what I  
18 would even be giving to. And it was just one of my more  
19 uncomfortable moments.

20 But of course, you know, I said yes, you can come  
21 in. In those days you could answer your door and let somebody  
22 come into your house. We sat in my little family room. I  
23 swear to you I can't remember who she was, but I remember the  
24 moment because I was so frightened I didn't know what to say.  
25 I mean this was not a decision I was making on my own. We

1 didn't have a great deal of money. We were strung pretty  
2 tight. I had no idea if Harold was even giving money to the  
3 Federation himself. I -- I don't remember how old I was, I  
4 was pretty young, but I had been married maybe a couple years  
5 by then. I must have been because by that time I was in my  
6 house, so I must have been married three or four years. I  
7 probably had two kids.

8 I gave her something. I don't remember whether it  
9 was \$10 or what, but it could have been a million in my mind.  
10 It was not one of my best experiences, not because she wasn't  
11 nice, but because I felt uncomfortable.

12 And it didn't take long, just a year or so later,  
13 Dulcie -- maybe it was a few years later when Dulcie asked me  
14 to become part of this leadership training group, and by that  
15 time I had already been active in ORT, so I was out there a  
16 little bit more.

17 It was an incredible experience because you didn't  
18 just learn about leadership and how to do things. You learned  
19 about what the Jewish Federation was about, and at that time  
20 it was the Jewish Welfare Federation, but it was about welfare  
21 and it was something directly related to how I felt about what  
22 I should -- you know, if I were going to be giving my time and  
23 energy, it was for people with less who needed support. It  
24 was my road to leadership.

25 Of course, when I finished that course, you know,

1 they found immediately some opportunity for me to serve and be  
2 on a committee and I don't even remember where I began, but it  
3 was whatever it was, you just went from one thing to another.  
4 You learned about different things.

5           Of course, you know, the end result of that was  
6 eventually this person who never wanted to be president of  
7 anything, I became the president of the Women's Department,  
8 but I had already been the campaign chair for the Women's  
9 Department. I had had many campaign roles. And really and  
10 truly, what I really got into was the campaign part. By  
11 somebody who was so intimidated by somebody asking them for  
12 money, I don't know how I became so involved in asking other  
13 people for money, but it became my life to ask people for  
14 money.

15           **MS. DUBIN:** How do you?

16           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** How do I ask people for money.  
17 Nicely, I hope. I ask people for money for things that I  
18 believe in, because I think that if you believe in something  
19 and you know how much that money could help, it's not that  
20 difficult to ask for money. I've had so many people say to  
21 me, I don't know how you do that, that's so horrible. I said  
22 no, it isn't. It isn't. Because if you know why you're doing  
23 it and you know what it's going to do, it's not that  
24 difficult.

25           You also have to take your own ego out of it,



1 because if people refuse you, then you have to say thank you  
2 for listening to me. You can't do this if it's for you. I  
3 could never ask for money for myself. But when I ask for  
4 money for a cause, for a real reason, then that's a whole  
5 different thing. So it isn't about me and I can't make it  
6 about me.

7 I unfortunately know many solicitors who do make it  
8 about themselves. I don't ever have a goal in the respect  
9 that I have to do so many solicitations, or I have to raise X  
10 amount of dollars. What I have to do is try to speak to as  
11 many people as I'm either assigned to or find I can reach, and  
12 I have to do the best job explaining the need to them.

13 Nobody makes people give money. There was a time in  
14 the not so distant past but distant enough where people put  
15 pressure on other people through their businesses. Now, that  
16 was really more the level of men's campaigning. It was the  
17 way it was done, it was accepted. Accountants called  
18 accountants. People in the tool business called other people  
19 in the tool business. And they all pressured each other to  
20 give a larger gift, do more, whatever.

21 Women can't do that, number one. Women's attitudes  
22 about giving money are different. They give it for different  
23 reasons, and they have different ways of accessing their  
24 resources. Most women are not nearly as independent about  
25 their giving, even though they are the greatest influence in

1 that family. You have to learn a great deal about how people  
2 give, why they give and what do they have to do in order to be  
3 able to give, and there's so many components to that.

4           So for me, I kind of look at all that when I'm  
5 asking for the money. I believe in quality giving. Everybody  
6 I know can't give the same amount I can or the same amount  
7 that their friend can, but if they're giving a quality gift, I  
8 think they can do it.

9           I would have to say in that respect David Hermelin  
10 was probably the greatest influence that I ever had in  
11 listening to him ask for money. Even if you can't do it  
12 exactly the way he does, you could listen to him and pick up  
13 some nuances that made you feel differently about how you  
14 would ask and how you should feel while you are asking,  
15 because for him it was a joy, and not everybody has that.

16           There are two David Hermelins in the world, but we  
17 were lucky to have one here, and I was lucky to have him as a  
18 friend, as a mentor. He always made people feel good about  
19 giving their gift, and that's what I try to do. If you can  
20 make people feel good about it, not only will they give you  
21 that gift, they'll continue to give. And if they're not  
22 giving it to you because you ask, it may be somebody else, but  
23 they begin to know how good it feels to give, and that's a  
24 real lesson for anybody who, let's say, is in this business.  
25 Anybody who does this, listen, it's not the pay is so good.

1 So you have to have some psychic pleasure out of this, and  
2 that's the psychic pleasure. You made somebody else feel  
3 good.

4 **MS. DUBIN:** When you chaired the campaign, that was  
5 1996 I think.

6 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, gosh, I know. It seems so  
7 funny, it's so far removed now.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you have any special challenges?

9 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** We have many more challenges  
10 today. There are always challenges because you're always  
11 trying to increase your campaign. I can't say there were  
12 specific challenges. I did the major gifts portion. It was  
13 an experience, doing the major gifts portion, not because it  
14 was more difficult; I think it's easier. I think people who  
15 are used to giving money, who have been giving more  
16 substantial amounts of money, are easier to speak to.

17 I believe it's much easier to solicit men than it is  
18 to solicit women because men have a very specific idea about  
19 their parameters. So when you're talking to them, they  
20 already know a great deal about how much they plan to give,  
21 and you can move them from that amount, but they understand.  
22 They don't consult with anybody. They're making a decision  
23 based on their knowledge of their own means and what you can  
24 do is encourage them to increase their perspective. So I  
25 found it to be in that sense an easier campaign than when I

1 did my campaign work in the Women's Department. There are  
2 certain variables that you can take off the table.

3 Women who don't feel comfortable about giving large  
4 amounts of money. Did you know there are many women in the  
5 Women's Department who are capable of giving much larger  
6 amounts of money but they don't feel comfortable being a woman  
7 doing that. It's one of the reasons why Harold and I long ago  
8 have discussed the fact that, partly because of my activities,  
9 but that it was important for me to take as much as our gift,  
10 because let's face it, I don't care whether it's a women's  
11 campaign or a men's campaign or a woman's gift, which we know  
12 is very important because we're counted, and it's important,  
13 it's still going to be a decision a family makes by and large.  
14 But it's important for women to say, I can step to the plate  
15 and I'm not only capable of giving a large gift, I have the  
16 right to give that large gift. But it's a harder concept and  
17 not everybody has a husband like mine.

18 I understand that, but I do make that larger gift in  
19 my name so that women can say, oh, well, my gift is really  
20 good, but if I raise it a little bit, I'm not going to be over  
21 the top. It's a balance.

22 Campaigning is hard every year only in the respect  
23 that you're always trying to achieve more. You know that more  
24 is going to be needed. So it's difficult, but it's  
25 everybody's challenge.

1           **MS. DUBIN:** You were president of the Women's  
2 Department in 1993 to 1995. Did you have some role models?

3           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, did I have role models. My  
4 best role models -- just turn and look at the past presidents  
5 that we've had in the Women's Department. And not only were  
6 they excellent and kept the Women's Department in the  
7 forefront of what we do at the Federation, they are still  
8 active. Women's Department leadership does not leave when  
9 they're finished. They stay there. They're there for advice.  
10 They support activities. It's an incredible scenario.

11           I think maybe I realized that when I was the Women's  
12 Department campaign chair because those women were so actively  
13 soliciting for the Women's Department. Who better could tell  
14 the story of what we do and why we do it and why it's  
15 important to do it as women as past campaign presidents from  
16 the Women's Department? So I had a number of role models.

17           Certainly people like Dulcie was a role model.  
18 Edythe Jackier was a role model, Tillie Brandwine. I mean I  
19 remember when Tillie won the Butzel. It was like oh, my  
20 goodness, there's like my idol. She is a woman who has such  
21 -- it wasn't that I was even looking to go beyond the Women's  
22 Department. It was that she had such a broad following  
23 because she had done in her very quiet, firm way so much that  
24 she could be honored by the whole of Federation. Who else  
25 would I want to be like besides Tillie. And quiet. Quietly

1 effective. I think that she was a great role model for me.

2           You know, if I had a list, I could probably go back  
3 and name so many of the women that went back a little farther  
4 than I did. Certainly my immediate past presidents because  
5 they were so helpful. Everybody stays and they really pull  
6 together as a team. But I would have to say that those three  
7 women were women that I could look to for examples of how it  
8 is to be a really good leader.

9           **MS. DUBIN:** Do you feel a responsibility to help  
10 women become leaders in the community?

11           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** I do. You know, first of all, I  
12 think women are really more effective in many leadership roles  
13 than men. I love our guys, but women, first of all, will take  
14 more time and put in more energy, just simply because they  
15 have more time and energy. They don't have as many dual roles  
16 to play.

17           We have had many wonderful presidents in our  
18 Federation, but they all have full-time jobs. I remember when  
19 I became president, Harold said to David Page, I'm seeing  
20 Penny spending so much time doing this. How did you do this?  
21 He said, who said I had time to do my real job? Because  
22 that's what would happen. You have to give up something. But  
23 I didn't have to give up anything. I just managed to be here  
24 on a regular daily basis. And I think that women could really  
25 do this job in a very effective way.

1           It's more difficult to get them to stand up to it,  
2 to say I want to do this or I would do this. And that's  
3 something that I keep encouraging many women who have  
4 leadership positions here, because they're very effective in  
5 the leadership positions that they have, both within Women's  
6 Department, obviously, but also in the general Federation.  
7 You'll notice we always have a strong number of women vice-  
8 presidents, and they are truly effective.

9           ~~Men~~<sup>WOMEN</sup> are a little more reticent to take on the rest  
10 of the Federation world, and they don't realize that just by  
11 being a good leader, you don't have to be -- this is not a  
12 war. This is a matter of just asserting yourself in the  
13 positions and at the moments where you need to. And I always  
14 encourage them in their roles to speak up.

15           I generally encourage people anyway to speak up.  
16 You know, within any organization, there are people who see  
17 things with a different perspective or they see things in a  
18 new light. I always encourage those people who speak to me to  
19 please make sure that they speak to the appropriate people  
20 about that, because good organizations come from having a  
21 number of people who are willing to invest not only their  
22 energy but also their intellect, and you can't do that unless  
23 you also use your mouth. Because if you don't tell people  
24 what you're thinking and you don't bring it into the mix of  
25 decision making, then a good organization can become very weak

1 very quickly. So I encourage women to do this because they  
2 are, as I say, more reticent to speak their mind.

3           You know, I never thought about it. Nobody said to  
4 me I couldn't do this. I figured if I had the position, then  
5 I had the voice. And this was long before I became the  
6 president. But if I was going to have the position, I was  
7 going to have the voice, because what was the point? I wasn't  
8 some figurehead, you know. I don't need to be that. I  
9 wouldn't want to be that. So you take me, you take the whole  
10 of me. And I encourage other women to do the same thing.

11           If you do it in the right way, no one is going to  
12 try to get rid of you because you're a woman. Doing it in the  
13 right way, I would have to say, for anybody, is the most  
14 effective way of getting your voice heard. So being strident  
15 isn't necessarily effective. You can't always be negative.  
16 You have to look at things in a positive way. But you have to  
17 be able to say what's on your mind in a way that's not  
18 necessarily confrontational. I am not a confrontational  
19 person. But I do believe in fairness and I believe in  
20 firmness.

21           When I became president, I don't know if it was Bob  
22 Aronson or Mark Davidoff who said I'm the one with the velvet  
23 hammer. Well, okay, but it's a hammer, because it's important  
24 to be able to be firm. If you have a true viewpoint, you  
25 can't back off just because somebody disagreed with you.



1 That's an important thing. But my mother-in-law of blessed  
2 memory said, you can catch more flies with honey than you can  
3 with vinegar, and that has been one of my watch-words.  
4 There's always a nice way to say no. There's a nice way to  
5 say we need to change this. There's a nice way to say this is  
6 my viewpoint. Whatever it is, you can say it very nicely, but  
7 you need to say it and you need to be assured that saying it  
8 is more important and more effective than not.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** One position where you had an important  
10 voice was as chair of the Strategic Plan Action Committee.  
11 That was in 1996. Tell us a little bit about that.

12 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** You know, that was probably one of  
13 the greatest learning experiences of my whole Federation life  
14 because there was no aspect of Federation that we didn't cover  
15 in the Strategic Plan. So I learned about everything that was  
16 going on here and how we operated. We were making a lot of  
17 changes which I think were really effective. We actually need  
18 to do that every ten years or so. It was a huge process. I'm  
19 not recommending it for this moment. But it was a very  
20 important part of bringing us into the 20th Century. Now  
21 we're in the 21st Century, which seems unbelievable to me.

22 But bringing us into the 20th Century was really  
23 important because we had been operating as the Jewish Welfare  
24 Federation, and we changed our name, but we needed to change  
25 the way we looked at how we did things and then we needed to

1 change the way that we did things, because you have to be,  
2 first of all, a meaner and leaner organization. People's  
3 lives change, opportunities change. We're so much bigger  
4 today in what we do, so many different directions that we move  
5 in, than we were in the initial aspects of this organization,  
6 that if we didn't make change, eventually we would have become  
7 obsolete.

8           It's difficult enough as it is in this modern Jewish  
9 world because there's so many opportunities for people to  
10 participate and to donate money in things that are so totally  
11 outside the Jewish environment, or there are Jewish  
12 organizations that have become bigger and more active that  
13 could draw some of our really not only top leadership people  
14 away, but also some of our largest donors away.

15           In fact you see it a great deal now. Campaign  
16 suffers from the loss of many of our dedicated donors who  
17 have, unfortunately, aged and died and their families are not  
18 necessarily continuing in the tradition, and bringing in young  
19 people today who understand the scope and the depth and the  
20 meaning of what we do.

21           So the Strategic Plan was an effort to change our  
22 perspective here. We changed departments, we had goals which  
23 I would have to say by and large we have met almost all of the  
24 goals of the Strategic Plan. There were some that were minor  
25 that have kind of folded. And some of them didn't work,

1 believe me. I could see, we went through the Strategic Plan,  
2 we went through the implementation, which took far longer than  
3 we anticipated, and then we did an evaluation, and some of the  
4 things did not work the way we wanted. But from that came  
5 something new. So even if it didn't work in its first  
6 iteration, it was still changed enough we could move it  
7 someplace else and -- and still have an effective way of  
8 dealing with the issues of today, and that's what a strategic  
9 plan is all about. How do you go from what you were, maintain  
10 your strength, and move into the future? I think we did a  
11 pretty good job of that. It took a lot of people and a lot of  
12 effort, but I really believe that we have an organization  
13 today that functions in the real world.

14 **MS. DUBIN:** And then you made history.

15 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, yes.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** How did it feel becoming the first woman  
17 to be president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan  
18 Detroit?

19 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, initially, it was kind of  
20 frightening. You know, you lay in your dark room and you open  
21 your eyes, and you say, oh, my goodness, what have I gotten  
22 myself into. And you think this is too overwhelming, I'm not  
23 prepared, I don't have the background, I never ran a business.  
24 How am I going to do this? And then you start to do it.

25 First of all, I had a great support team. We have

1 wonderful professionals, we have wonderful past presidents who  
2 were there for advice and effort and didn't leave me hanging  
3 in the wind. And then you begin to realize you know a whole  
4 lot more than you thought you did. I had great training.

5           When you look at my bio and you see what positions I  
6 was placed in -- obviously, I had no idea that I was on a  
7 track. Again, this was not my goal. I didn't have a goal to  
8 be president of the Federation. It never occurred to me in  
9 the years, and especially even when I started in the Strategic  
10 Plan, I had no idea that they had already kind of identified  
11 me -- when I say "they," the powers that be, the president and  
12 the past president at the time and the professionals, that  
13 they were kind of putting me on a track, and they were giving  
14 me an education that would prepare me to be a president. So  
15 it was only in reflecting upon where I had been that I  
16 realized how -- I wouldn't say devious; devious is too strong  
17 a word -- but the ulterior motives were in place when they put  
18 me in a position of chairing certain areas. That was training  
19 that was invaluable to me because of my understanding of how  
20 we operated.

21           I think, too, this is a very staff/lay combination  
22 organization. Nobody stands alone, nobody makes a decision  
23 alone. There are areas of course that professionals like Bob  
24 Aronson as a CEO will make decisions on the business side of  
25 things that he will always ask you about, but it's really his

1 decision to make. You can't operate a business with people  
2 who come and go as presidents do. However, we had a very  
3 wonderful working relationship, and you work as a team.

4 By working as a team, things that you thought were  
5 impossible happened. You don't ever feel as if you're making  
6 a decision without a lot of information. And it was difficult  
7 only in the respect that there's so much responsibility and  
8 you feel like you are truly the representative of the  
9 community and you want everything -- you want everything to be  
10 as good as it can be. Perfect is a word I don't think exists  
11 in any real world. But you really want it to be as good as it  
12 can be. You want to help as many people as you can, and you  
13 want the people who depend on you to be their representative,  
14 to feel that everything that's going on is on the highest  
15 level. I think Jewish standards are always extraordinarily  
16 high anyway, but I think that we feel like we have to hold  
17 ourselves to the highest level here.

18 So it wasn't as overwhelming as I thought it was  
19 going to be after the first, you know, maybe six months, only  
20 that it was a huge job. I was the first president to have an  
21 office that was a real office, and I used it and I was here  
22 every day. That gave me a unique position among most  
23 presidents because, first of all, I could do most of my work  
24 in the daytime. I had access to all the staff; they had  
25 access to me. So we developed great relationships which I to

1 this day value. It was a wonderful experience for me. And I  
2 had a very organized life. I focused my life on Federation.  
3 I put everything else that I was doing in the background and  
4 on hold. I explained to everybody this was where my life was  
5 going to be for three years. You could wait for me or not,  
6 but I wasn't going to divide myself in little pieces. And it  
7 was a great thing.

8 It was actually easier than being past president,  
9 because now I don't know which meeting to do go. Nobody's  
10 organizing my schedule. If I need to be there, then this  
11 meeting will be arranged to so that I will be there. And that  
12 isn't happening to me now. That is much more difficult.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** You mentioned that past presidents were  
14 helpful to you. Were there any in particular?

15 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, certainly my immediate past  
16 president, who was Bob Naftaly. Bob was always there for  
17 advice. It was funny, we used to laugh because we had very  
18 different styles, I knew that he knew how everything worked.  
19 I knew I could call him. He conferred with me on a regular  
20 basis. It was just wonderful.

21 And David Page who had been the president before  
22 that was amazing, because David is among the most organized  
23 people I have ever seen in my life. He had spent a great deal  
24 of his time during his three years of the presidency not only  
25 overseeing the Strategic Plan implementation and making sure

1 that was all done, and he had been in charge of the original  
2 Strategic Plan. But he had reorganized a lot of the things  
3 that were going on in the building to make it a more high  
4 functioning business than it had been before, and that was a  
5 great help to me. So I knew that he was a terrific resource  
6 on every level that I needed.

7 David was a person I could get a second perspective  
8 from because David and Bob were different. So very often  
9 issues would come up and I would just call them and I would  
10 say, okay, how would you handle this? What is your experience  
11 with this? Do you have any other background? And I would  
12 call actually many times both of them because you also have to  
13 make your own imprint as a president. This isn't something --  
14 you can't just fill somebody's shoes and walk in them. You  
15 have to make your own path. By getting perspectives from both  
16 of them of how they handled it, eventually I developed my own  
17 style.

18 I would have to say by the third year I didn't have  
19 to call them very often. Certainly even by the second. But  
20 that first year, when you're really just trying to get your  
21 arms around it, trying to develop not only your own sense of  
22 style of handling things, you know, which come in with but you  
23 have to be a little bit more presidential than you were  
24 before. But you also have to develop ideas about how you get  
25 from the problem to the solution to the future.

1           You know, they tell you don't worry about what  
2 you're going to be doing and leaving us your mark. The first  
3 year just get oriented, which I did. And by the second year  
4 you'll begin to see areas that you feel you really want to  
5 change, you want to have more impact in, you want to focus on,  
6 and by the third year you will hopefully either have  
7 established it or actually achieved your goals.

8           It was just really great advice from both of them,  
9 and it really works. So you take from your predecessors those  
10 tools and knowledge that you can use and then you eventually  
11 develop your own tools and create something new and different  
12 for the future. I would have to say that my working  
13 relationship with Larry Jackier, as he became president,  
14 worked the same way. We would meet regularly, we would have  
15 discussions, we would just talk about how I did things, and  
16 it's the pattern. So it's a wonderful system that we have  
17 here, that people do use history to create future.

18           **MS. DUBIN:** One of your predecessors as president  
19 was Max Fisher.

20           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, Max. I was so lucky with Max.  
21 Max didn't have a clue who I was when I became the campaign  
22 chair. In fact I often laugh. He just didn't know. He kind  
23 of, after we played a little Jewish geography, knew some of my  
24 family because of my grandfather. But it was one of these  
25 strange things. He didn't know Harold, he didn't know me. He



1 had no idea how we came to leadership positions or were able  
2 to give campaign gifts of import. But he was, as he always is  
3 with every new campaign chair, he sits down and he talks to  
4 you. And it's like this big thing, an audience with Max. You  
5 know, it's like an audience with God. It was scary in the  
6 first part.

7           But you know, I never really was afraid of people.  
8 I always feel that people are just people. I know that there  
9 are a lot of people who are intimidated, but it just doesn't  
10 bother me. To me it can be a one-time experience or multiple  
11 experiences. But it's not my way.

12           I think the way that we really developed a  
13 relationship was that we traveled together to Chicago when we  
14 were having a meeting for the reorganization for the two  
15 organizations to become UJC, United Jewish Communities, which  
16 is our present national organization, and it was a combination  
17 of United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations.  
18 It was a very long process. I was involved in it for a really  
19 long time, trying to establish a new plan and a new paradigm  
20 for how we could have a national organization.

21           Max, of course, being Max, and having been the chair  
22 or the president of both of them at one time or another and  
23 the guru of the Jewish world, he came to this meeting in  
24 Chicago, and we traveled together. I remember we were having  
25 breakfast on the final morning and we were sitting, listening

1 to a compilation of reports, and he turned to me and he said,  
2 "Penny, what do you think?" And I said, "Well, to tell you  
3 the truth, Max, I think that in the end there's going to be  
4 five men who are going to sit in a room and make the decision,  
5 and the rest of this is for show." Of course he laughed, but  
6 it probably was really true. And you notice that I said "men"  
7 because I really felt that really was what was going to  
8 happen. It was a very out-of-body experience that I had been  
9 spending all this time trying to have this new democratic  
10 approach to our Jewish world, and knowing that in the end it  
11 was going to be very much the same. But he really appreciated  
12 it.

13           And from that point on it was like we had this  
14 relationship. So he would say to Bob Aronson, so how's my  
15 girl friend? How come you haven't brought her to see me  
16 lately? And it just became a thing where we just developed a  
17 really warm relationship. It was such a great thing.

18           When I became president, there were many times I  
19 would do the right thing, and that would be to go and consult  
20 with Max and tell him things that we were planning or things  
21 that we wanted to do that would give him not only an update  
22 but kind of get his take on things that we felt we needed it.

23           You know, in any organization of our stature and  
24 nature and history there is usually one person who really made  
25 it happen, who has more influence and you respect as the

1 elder, and even though you consider yourself to be the one in  
2 charge and you have all of these really wonderful people who  
3 are working with you, and you are making decisions as a  
4 democratic organization, it's not a bad idea to get your  
5 elder's nod on many issues. Frankly it's sometimes a very  
6 good thing. So I would do that.

7 I have had experiences where there was something I  
8 really felt was important and Max had been kind of fighting  
9 against it. I actually can say, if you want to call it  
10 winning, I won on an issue that I thought was extraordinarily  
11 important. So that was because I think I had his ear, I had  
12 his respect. I was able to influence him in the way of giving  
13 him the information that would help him to give the nod of  
14 approval, because we really didn't want to do this particular  
15 thing without his approval.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** Can you tell us what that was?

17 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, actually it was the Joint  
18 Relief Fund had a \$12 million plan to take care of the needy  
19 in the former Soviet Union, and this hunger relief program was  
20 failing -- unless we all participated as Federations, as a  
21 whole, not just from the monies that we allocated through our  
22 regular system, it was not going to succeed and there were  
23 going to be hundreds of thousands of hungry people because the  
24 funds were running out. These people were left really bereft  
25 by the breakup of the former Soviet Union.

1           It was something that Max felt that JDC should just  
2 take the money out of their endowment. Well, they had already  
3 taken some of the money out of their endowment, but you know  
4 that if you break down an endowment too far, and then you  
5 don't have any money as back-up. Finally, after two years, I  
6 was able to talk to Max about it again, to really tell him  
7 that we thought from the leadership of the Federation that it  
8 was a very important thing for us to be one of the people who  
9 were doing this, one of the organizations that were doing  
10 this, because this was not something that was going to go  
11 away, and without this one boost of fulfilling the \$12 million  
12 commitment -- and that wasn't the \$12 million, obviously, from  
13 us -- without us paying our share, our portion, that many  
14 other people would not go along with the fold.

15           Detroit has a unique position in the Jewish world.  
16 You know, when Detroit decides to do something, there are lots  
17 of people who follow. And it really did make a difference.  
18 And he did finally understand. He held back as long as he  
19 thought he could. But it was a moment in time where -- I mean  
20 I truly believed in this. This was something I thought was  
21 really necessary. And there was lots of support out there  
22 from many people, not only within our own Federation, but also  
23 in the Jewish community in the larger sense who really  
24 understood that this was something that we needed to do and we  
25 needed to do it now. And we couldn't wait for other resources

1 to appear because they might not be there ever. And these  
2 people were going to die without this food.

3           What do you do? What do you take away from? You  
4 know, there's a balance in every organization and JDC can't  
5 just say well, we'll just take all the money away from our  
6 children's programs and give it to these people who are  
7 hungry. So there's a balance.

8           It was a feeling of success for me because I knew it  
9 was something that he wasn't wholeheartedly for, and he had  
10 good reasons about why he didn't feel it was the right move  
11 for Detroit, but little by little I was able to change his  
12 perspective. Now, that's not an easy thing to do with Max,  
13 but I think he respected me for it and he respected the fact  
14 that I was willing to come back to him again and again and  
15 fight for it. So that was a part of our relationship. And it  
16 was great. Again, it wasn't that I was being confrontational.  
17 I was being sincere and he was listening to me.

18           One thing about Max I will tell you. He always  
19 listened. There are a lot of people of his leadership level  
20 and quality, but they don't really listen. Max listened. I  
21 can't tell you how much I felt a loss at his going. It was to  
22 me a very personal loss.

23           **MS. DUBIN:** This is a tough question. In the three  
24 years as president, what was the biggest challenge you faced?  
25 Community challenge.

1           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, wow. I would have to say --  
2 obvious the biggest challenge is always that we don't have  
3 enough money to do everything. But on the other hand there  
4 were two community challenges at the time that needed  
5 reorganization and change. You know it's difficult when  
6 you're dealing with a lot of agencies and each agency has its  
7 own leadership and its own organizational requirements. But I  
8 find it very difficult when the agencies don't function the  
9 way they need to.

10           So I would have to say the biggest challenge -- and  
11 I don't know that I want to say which agencies they were, but  
12 there were several agencies where we recognized that there  
13 were great challenges in that agency, that great change needed  
14 to be made. That's one of the roles that you have to play as  
15 the president, that if you see things in the community that  
16 are part of your whole that need to be changed, you have to be  
17 the one to effect change. That's not always the most pleasant  
18 part of being a president. In fact it's probably the most  
19 difficult part because you are dealing then with other lay  
20 people as well as other professionals that maybe have a  
21 different viewpoint, but we have the responsibility at  
22 Federation to make sure that community dollars and community  
23 efforts are as forthright and honest as they need to be and  
24 that they are as effective.

25           When we raise money as a whole, we're representing

1 every portion of our dollar that's allocated. So we have to  
2 be very careful about it. So I would have to say that dealing  
3 with those kinds of issues was about the most difficult thing  
4 that I did. It's a very fine line you walk.

5 It's not like you're elected president of the United  
6 States and people put their votes in. You are elected but  
7 it's a little more vague than -- we have our red states and  
8 blue states so to speak. So you have to be careful about how  
9 you do it. So that kept me up a number of nights.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** What do you think is the biggest  
11 challenge that faces Federation today?

12 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** I think the biggest challenge is  
13 having enough money and having enough donors to further all  
14 the good things that we do, because we do a lot of good  
15 things. We will continue to have this really strong  
16 relationship with Israel and we will continually have more to  
17 do here in our own local community because we have  
18 populations, both the old and the young, that are going to  
19 require a lot of money. So we have the elderly population --  
20 you know, thank God, it's wonderful, people are leading a  
21 longer life, sometimes healthier, sometimes not. We're going  
22 to need continued funds to make sure that those people are  
23 cared for in an appropriate way.

24 And I think that education in our community -- that  
25 was a very big focus of my presidency and it remains a very

1 large focus for me. We need to support our Jewish educational  
2 system, because the only way we're going to grow Jews is to  
3 make them Jewish, and the only way they're going to understand  
4 about being Jewish as not just part of their identification is  
5 to understand who they are, and you can't do that without  
6 educating them Jewishly.

7           So if we don't have enough money to give our  
8 children quality Jewish education, whether through day school  
9 or supplementary school, then our Jewish people will diminish,  
10 and that's something that I don't want to see on so many  
11 levels that I couldn't even begin to describe them. But we  
12 can't afford to be smaller than what we are because our needs  
13 are going to continue to grow, regardless of how many people  
14 support our efforts. And with the challenge of having so many  
15 other opportunities for people to become involved or support  
16 other things outside of Jewish causes, or just simply not  
17 support anything at all. We have lots of people who don't  
18 support anything. But how are we going to do it and how are  
19 we going to make this a better Jewish world unless we have  
20 Jewish children who understand about being Jewish.

21           I grew up in a Jewish community. I didn't have a  
22 problem with Jewish identity. It never occurred to me. But  
23 my children and my grandchildren could have a lot of problems  
24 with that. They don't live in Jewish neighborhoods where  
25 everybody in their school is Jewish unless they go to Hillel.



1 I mean as it happens for my children. Or Akiva or the  
2 yeshivas.

3 So how do we do that if we don't give them quality  
4 Jewish education in every area that we can service Jewish  
5 children? And I think that's going to be a challenge because  
6 we don't have enough money currently to do that. And you have  
7 to balance the needs of the community. So it's going to  
8 continue to be a struggle. We're going to keep fighting  
9 though.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** That touches on what you just said about  
11 Jewish education a little bit, doesn't it?

12 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** It does. Shalom Street, which is  
13 our new children's museum, teaches about Jewish traditions and  
14 values and culture. It's not a religious institution in the  
15 sense that we do not teach about religion. We talk about it,  
16 but not in the sense where we are teaching Talmud or Torah.  
17 That's not our role. We talk about values that are Jewish,  
18 not that they don't translate into the greater values of the  
19 world, but they're particularly important to us as Jewish  
20 people.

21 We tried to create a place that was fun and  
22 exciting, and someplace where you could learn without actually  
23 feeling like you were learning, that you weren't in school.  
24 And I do believe the value of a museum on any level, where  
25 parents take their children, is that both parents and children

1 learn. So as we're teaching children, we're teaching things  
2 to parents who maybe didn't have the advantage of having a  
3 good Jewish educational background.

4 It's also a great place in my mind to be able to  
5 teach diversity to the community, that by bringing children  
6 from other cultures and religions into that museum and talking  
7 about who and what we are, we can do a lot toward teaching  
8 tolerance and in an environment where the positive sides of  
9 Jewish life are represented: the home, tzedakah, repairing  
10 the world, just Jewish environment.

11 The environment of the world is a very important  
12 thing to everybody, but Jews actually have written about in  
13 their very earliest writings of Jewish life. So we can teach  
14 those things to lots of people. Certainly to our Jewish  
15 children, but hopefully to the world that's around us and make  
16 a better life for everyone, because I think the people who  
17 understand Jewish life and culture and have kind of an  
18 acceptance of it treat people better. It will be easier for  
19 Jews to live in a world if there is more tolerance of  
20 diversity.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** You, your husband and family have a very  
22 major stake in education, and through the Millennium Campaign  
23 I believe you gave a million dollars for education. Can you  
24 tell us about that?

25 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Well, actually, we gave the

1 million dollars -- we participated in the educational trust.  
2 However, we also gave a Jewish life fund for the Millennium  
3 Fund that was for Israel experiences for young adults. I had  
4 a very strong belief that the young adult trips are a great  
5 turning point for most young people. You know, there's a  
6 point in college where whatever they did at home is sort of  
7 non-existent in their college life. Now they're about to step  
8 into the next part of their life. If they go on a trip to  
9 Israel and they feel connected to Israel, their perspective of  
10 Jewish life changes a great deal.

11 I know what it did for my own children. Both of my  
12 sons went on the young adult trip in their time in the singles  
13 mission. I will tell you that Ricky Blumenstein was a changed  
14 person from that point on. He was a person that maybe didn't  
15 even have quite a focus about what he might want to do. He  
16 was working already, but he was definitely -- it's very hard  
17 to say that just because I lead the kind of life I do and I'm  
18 so active in the community, or that my husband is active in  
19 the community or cares so much, that your children are going  
20 to follow in your footsteps because we know that isn't true.

21 But Ricky went on this singles mission and turned  
22 into Mr. Super Jew. That's all I can tell you. He is  
23 amazing. And he's done many different things since that time.  
24 And that was -- it's scary to say -- it was probably 15 years  
25 ago. He encouraged his older brother to go on a trip, always

1 a little farther behind the younger brother in those things.  
2 It also changed his perspective.

3 I think if you can send young people to make that  
4 connection to Israel, you can change the rest of their life.

5 I will tell you that the trip to Israel that Harold  
6 and I took when were what would be considered young adults --  
7 it was a young leadership mission; we were already probably in  
8 our early 30s and it was a national mission -- it definitely  
9 changed our life. That was a turning point for me and for  
10 Harold, too. He had already gotten a little excited because  
11 when the '67 war came, he actually somebody to tell that he  
12 wanted to increase his gift because he was so thrilled that  
13 the Israelis had been so clever and they were standing up the  
14 fight. He was so proud. So proud. He called to voluntarily  
15 called increase his gift to a gift that I thought, oh, my God,  
16 how could we afford that? I think it was \$5,000. I don't  
17 know what it was, but I thought it was way more money than we  
18 could afford. Which just goes to tell you how life can  
19 change. People don't even realize what they can afford.

20 But that trip, we were there for two weeks, and it  
21 was a true leadership training. We went all over Israel and  
22 we learned and talked to people. We were with a lot of other  
23 young people who were kind of in the same place that we were.  
24 We came home transformed.

25 So as much as I can say that my background

1 encouraged me to become involved, that my early ORT experience  
2 encouraged me to become involved, even my leadership training,  
3 I have to tell you that the most changing experience that I  
4 ever had was going to Israel.

5           So I think that if you can take young people to  
6 Israel at that point, you can change their lives, too, and  
7 make their sense of responsibility, of history, and of  
8 commitment. It's a lifelong thing after that because you  
9 never forget it.

10           I love taking people to Israel with me who have  
11 never been there. I watch them, and it is such a joy to see  
12 them experience it because it just brings back my first trip  
13 to Israel. I mean I actually feel like that every time I go,  
14 but it does bring that "oh, my God" feeling that you have when  
15 you go to Israel for the first time. People have no idea.  
16 They have no idea. So that's why I did it.

17           **MS. DUBIN:** You were a leader on miracle missions.

18           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Yes. Several times actually.

19           **MS. DUBIN:** What were they?

20           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Miracle missions are great. It's  
21 like when you go to camp, and at the end of camp you have this  
22 great big party at the end of camp and all the awards are  
23 given and everybody says, oh, my goodness, what a wonderful  
24 thing, that's kind of like what a miracle mission is. It's  
25 like having your whole camp together and you're having all

1 these wonderful experiences and everybody is having a good  
2 time. You go off to your little activities during the day,  
3 and then you come together for these big events. You just  
4 have such a wonderful sense of community. And people who felt  
5 absolutely no connection at all feel a connection.

6 Now, I can't say that 100 percent of them come home  
7 and get involved or give money or do any of the other things  
8 that you want them to do, but you gave them an experience that  
9 is wonderful, and it's just a great feeling. It's just like  
10 being at the big football game and you won, and that's how you  
11 feel.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** Going from far away to much closer,  
13 you've taken some leadership roles in the city of Detroit as  
14 well. Do you feel a special responsibility here for some of  
15 the things you're doing with the Detroit Symphony, New  
16 Detroit?

17 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Yes, New Detroit I did while I was  
18 president. Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan and  
19 actually Henry Ford Hospital. It's interesting, in some areas  
20 I became involved because I was kind of anointed to be a  
21 Jewish representative. New Detroit you do as the president of  
22 the Federation because it's really top community leaders  
23 representing their organization. It was an interesting  
24 experience. I can't say that I was particularly effective,  
25 but it was a representative.

1           Henry Ford Hospital System I was sort of anointed as  
2 the Jewish representative. There are not a lot of Jewish  
3 people on that. Again, when you have to represent the Jewish  
4 community, you'd better be able to say something about the  
5 Jewish community. So a couple of times when things have  
6 happened, I have been able to speak my mind.

7           I must have not offended anybody because I moved up  
8 in the organization and I'm on the executive committee. Now  
9 that they're planning to build a hospital in our community, it  
10 turned out to be a very fortuitous thing that I was there  
11 because I really think that we can make this great synergy  
12 between -- it's going to be right across the street from the  
13 Jewish Community campus. There is so much that the Jewish  
14 Community campus can use and effectively at the hospital  
15 because they have a population that needs immediate assistance  
16 and care, and there will be people there on a 24/7 that will  
17 be available to them. It's going to be a very effective  
18 association.

19           And actually I think it turns out to be a very good  
20 organization, much different than I thought. I didn't realize  
21 that truthfully hospitals are charitable institutions. They  
22 do an awful lot to care for the indigent. They have a real  
23 public responsibility.

24           I would have to say the Detroit Symphony Orchestra  
25 is because I just absolutely love the symphony. It's just an

1 organization that I'm involved with on just a personal level  
2 of loving the music and feeling that it's very important for a  
3 community like ours, Detroit and its metropolitan area, to  
4 have a fine symphony orchestra. I think culture is a very  
5 important part of our lives and we need to support it. I  
6 think that too many people don't realize, they kind of take  
7 for granted, that we have things in our city as if they were  
8 just going to exist on their own. It's not true. We need  
9 support for cultural institutions because what kind of world  
10 would it be if we didn't have any culture at all? Life  
11 doesn't work that way. You are a whole person when you also  
12 include culture in your life.

13           The Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan I  
14 would have to say is probably most closely aligned with the  
15 things that I do here because it's all about helping people  
16 and giving money and doing it in the right way. It's  
17 truthfully a grant making organization, but it does some  
18 wonderful things in the sense that it can pool money, make a  
19 real change and a difference in various areas, and do things  
20 to help other communal organizations be better organizations,  
21 which they've done twice now and it's been so effective.

22           They had the Touch the Future Campaign, which helped  
23 all these community organizations recognize the importance of  
24 endowment and have endowment campaigns that will effectively  
25 keep those organizations alive for many, many more years. And



1 they did another program that helped organizations learn about  
2 how to better organize themselves and how to go out and raise  
3 money. Not just the raising of the money because that was  
4 different. That was nine or ten organizations that ended up  
5 being able to do that. This was about how do you create  
6 within your organization the ability to raise money and  
7 endowment money, and it was such a wonderful community program  
8 because they could never have afforded the expertise that was  
9 given through the Community Foundation.

10 So aside from the fact that they are helping in so  
11 many areas, and I chair the Program and Distribution  
12 Committee, so I really see everything that comes in and out of  
13 our organization and how effective we are with the amounts of  
14 money that we have. So that's a great organization.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** You've said a little bit about your  
16 children. Maybe tell us a little bit about your  
17 grandchildren.

18 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, my grandchildren. The reason  
19 you have children. The reason you keep them alive. I have 11  
20 grandchildren, and it's really the benefit of raising a family  
21 is to get these grandchildren, who are of course all  
22 absolutely adorable, but they're also very close to my heart.  
23 I have managed to establish a really good relationship and a  
24 close one with each one of them, in spite of the fact that out  
25 of the 11, seven live much farther away. My oldest grandchild

1 is nine and the youngest was just a year old.

2           Every year I have one two or three grandchildren.  
3 It's been a very interesting experience. I think there was  
4 one year between Ricky's two youngest that we missed, but  
5 aside from that every year we've had two or three  
6 grandchildren. But they are a blessing.

7           One of the things that grandparents can do is, by  
8 spending time with their grandchildren, have discussions that  
9 their parents never would have. Now, some of them are a  
10 little young for that yet, but the ones that are a little  
11 older, if you develop a relationship with them that is close  
12 enough, they know they have somebody who unquestionably loves  
13 them but also is a good person to talk to if they have a  
14 little problem. So that's what I've tried to do.

15           I try to spend time individually, somehow, with each  
16 one. The ones that are out of town, we have sleepovers at the  
17 hotel, one by one. And the ones who are in town, of course, I  
18 get much more quality time with them. But I manage.

19           I'm lucky I have the ability to get there to see  
20 them because it's not so easy once they get too busy to get  
21 them to come to see me. But next month when we're celebrating  
22 this big birthday for my parents, everyone will be here. It  
23 will be a unique experience for me to have all of my family,  
24 including my parents, in one place at one time. I'm a lucky  
25 person.

1           **MS. DUBIN:** Is there a life's lesson that you would  
2 like to pass on to your grandchildren?

3           **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Follow your heart. Don't be  
4 afraid. Everybody's afraid. I'm not a big one for  
5 challenges. I don't look at things as challenges. I'm always  
6 surprised when things are never as hard as I think they were  
7 going to be, and because I'm a great believer in taking on new  
8 things, keep at it, because I feel that it's keeping me alive  
9 and young.

10           Somebody asked me once was it really hard to give up  
11 the presidency, and I said no. It isn't because I didn't love  
12 it. It was the best job that I ever had because it was so  
13 rewarding in so many ways, in spite of all the angst you have  
14 with a job like that. But you know, it was time for somebody  
15 else to come in and put their energy into it.

16           I think that when you let other people come in and  
17 do new things, you continue to grow, and you go on and do  
18 something different, and you continue to grow. And that's  
19 what I would always say: Don't get stuck in a rut. Try  
20 something new. It's really a way to keep yourself young and  
21 to invigorate every job that you do, because everybody gets a  
22 little tired after a while and things get to be the same. The  
23 little things start to fall by the wayside and you don't take  
24 care of them. Guess what? When you're new on the job, you're  
25 looking at everything and you're putting all your energy into

1 it. And that's a better way to do things. So that's what I  
2 would tell them.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** Can you think of anything I've forgotten  
4 to ask you?

5 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** Oh, I can't imagine that there is.  
6 It seems to me that I've been talking forever.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** It's been a joy. Thank you very much.

8 **MS. BLUMENSTEIN:** And thank you.