

1 **ORAL HISTORY OF:** Hugh Greenberg
2 **INTERVIEWED BY:** Charlotte Dubin
3 **DATE OF INTERVIEW:** Monday, June 20, 2005
4 **LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Jewish Federation
5 **SUBJECT MATTER:** Jewish life, family history,
6 community life

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8 **MS. DUBIN:** I'm Charlotte Dubin. I'm conducting an
9 oral history interview with Hugh Greenberg for the Leonard M.
10 Simons Jewish Community Archives at the Max M. Fisher
11 Federation Building on June 20th, 2005.

12 Mr. Greenberg, you've made many important
13 contributions to our community. Do we have permission to use
14 your words and thoughts in the future for educational and
15 historical research and documentation?

16 **MR. GREENBERG:** Sure.

17 **MS. DUBIN:** The beginning. When and where were you
18 born?

19 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was born in Detroit on April 16,
20 1930, in Women's Hospital. I wanted to be near my mother.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** Speaking of your mother, tell me about
22 your parents.

23 **MR. GREENBERG:** My mother, her maiden name was
24 Teresa Kyle. She was born in New York City to parents who
25 were from Vienna, William and Hester Kyle. She grew up in

1 Detroit after coming here at an early age. She went to work
2 for an insurance agency right after high school which my
3 father happened to own and that's how they met. She married
4 my dad.

5 My father was born in Petoskey. The family had come
6 from Traverse City originally and had a stint trying to farm
7 in North Dakota, which was a total disaster. They almost
8 starved to death and froze to death up there. Then they moved
9 back to Traverse City and my grandparents were married there.
10 They were first cousins, which may explain some of the
11 insanity in our family. In any case, then they moved to
12 Petoskey. My grandfather went into business there after being
13 a lumberjack. He then became a peddler, as his father was in
14 Traverse City. After that they opened up what you call a
15 general store today in Petoskey. That's where my father was
16 born.

17 My great grandfather was a charter member of the
18 synagogue in Traverse City, one of the founders. My
19 grandfather was a charter member of the temple in Petoskey.
20 Both temples still exist and are continuous^{USE} ever since. My
21 father moved to Detroit in about 1911 or 1912 and the family
22 went into the insurance business. They built a nice business
23 in Detroit which lasted for almost 60 years. That's the story
24 of my parents.

25 **MS. DUBIN:** I want to go back to your great

1 grandparents for a moment. Where were they from and how did
2 they find their way to America?

3 **MR. GREENBERG:** It's not really clear. They came
4 from what was Bessarabia at that time. A town called
5 Kishinev. At least my great grandfather who came here with
6 his three sons, one of whom was my grandfather. They went to
7 Traverse City because they had relatives there, which were the
8 Sandleman family. I don't know how the Sandlemans came to
9 this country. They were there maybe a couple of years
10 earlier.

11 They came over on Greek passports. Nobody seems to
12 know why or how. The story my father told me was he thought
13 they were all forged passports. Their name was not really
14 Greenberg. Evidently the name actually had been Himmler,
15 believe it or not, a great name not to have. They came to
16 this country I think in the late 1870s actually. There's some
17 dispute as to exactly when it happened, but that's what sounds
18 right to us when we put all the facts together. Subsequently,
19 my grandfather who had come to this country, married his
20 cousin who was Minnie Sandleman in Traverse City. That's how
21 that beginnings were.

22 It was interesting that my grandfather maintained a
23 kosher house up in Petoskey. They kept it kosher because all
24 the visiting Jewish people from all over the state and from
25 all around stopped at their house. That was kind of the

1 stopping place for people who wanted to go up north. Out of
2 respect for them they maintained a kosher house, which was
3 quite interesting because my grandfather was totally
4 irreligious. He knew a lot about Judaism and he knew
5 historically everything there was to know about Judaism, but
6 he never really was a believer.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** What was the Jewish community like? Did
8 they ever tell you?

9 **MR. GREENBERG:** In Petoskey? I understand it was
10 quite a burgeoning community. There were quite a few Jews up
11 there. I remember some of the names of the people that my
12 father always mentioned, some of whom have spent their lives
13 there. He had a friend whose name was Zalman Fryman, who was
14 his best friend when he was a boy. I happened to be up in
15 Petoskey a few years ago and I said to my wife, I wonder
16 whatever happened to Zalman Fryman. We used to visit him all
17 the time when we went up there. I opened up the paper from
18 Petoskey and there on the front page was the announcement that
19 he had died. It was kind of eerie. That was a long
20 friendship. But there were quite a number of Jewish families,
21 enough so that they started a synagogue. If you go up and
22 look at it, it really wasn't much of a synagogue. It's an
23 interesting history.

24 I was up there a couple of years ago and we happened
25 to go in the back door of the synagogue and right next to the

1 door there's a little plaque, a framed little handwritten
2 document in which it announces that a Purim play is going to
3 be held. The dates, and then it gives the names of all the
4 children who are participating. I looked at this thing, all
5 my aunts and uncles names are listed there but not my
6 father's. I was kind of taken aback. Then I looked at the
7 date on the document. It was 1896. My father hadn't been
8 born yet. He was born in 1900. These were his older brothers
9 and sisters who were participating in this play. It's still
10 sitting there by the back door in Petoskey. I got a kick out
11 of that.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** You were born in Detroit. How did they
13 find their way down to Detroit?

14 **MR. GREENBERG:** The story that I was told is that my
15 father had three maiden sisters and they felt that there
16 weren't any potential husbands for them up in Petoskey and
17 that civilization really was moving to the big city, which was
18 Detroit. So they moved for that reason that there were
19 business opportunities here but they also wanted to find
20 husbands for their daughters, which they did. They all got
21 married. That's when my father and grandfather went into the
22 insurance business.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me what life was like for you in
24 your home.

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** When I was a kid?

1 **MS. DUBIN:** Growing up.

2 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was born in the Depression in
3 1930. It was not a great time to be born. Having heard all
4 of the horror stories of the Depression I came to the
5 conclusion that I was really quite privileged. I lived very
6 well compared to what many other people did. My father was in
7 business and it became a struggle for him, but he still
8 managed to make a living, not a fabulous living. Before the
9 Depression my grandfather and father had been very wealthy
10 actually. They had built up a wonderful business, had bought
11 property, they were doing quite well. They lost all the
12 property and lost everything they had except their business
13 which they kept. They struggled. But I lived relatively
14 well. I was never deprived of anything, although my father
15 was struggling in business. We ate regularly, lived in a nice
16 house. So other than knowing what was going on in the
17 Depression and hearing my father talk about it and how
18 terrible things were, I didn't really suffer like many others
19 did.

20 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you have any siblings?

21 **MR. GREENBERG:** I have a sister. Her name is
22 Barbara Fleishman. She lives in New York City now. She was
23 married to a prominent member of the Detroit community, Larry
24 Fleishman, who was a very important person in Detroit. He was
25 the president of the Detroit Arts Commission, he built and

1 organized the south wing of the Detroit Arts Museum. He was
2 very active in the Jewish community, too, while he was here.
3 They moved away must be 38 or 39 years ago. He was an art
4 dealer. Very much interested in arts. Opened up a gallery in
5 New York. He passed away and my sister still lives there and
6 is very active in the New York community.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** Was your family close, you with your
8 sister, did you have fun together?

9 **MR. GREENBERG:** When we were kids, we sure did, but
10 she's about six years older than I am, so I was kind of a brat
11 brother. She tolerated me. We've stayed reasonably close
12 over the years. Since she moved to New York, of course we're
13 not as close as we used to be. We still talk to each other
14 regularly and see each other at important occasions.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** Were there Jewish observances in your
16 home? Was there any celebration of shabbat, holidays, things
17 like that?

18 **MR. GREENBERG:** We celebrated all the main holidays.
19 Passover, Purim sometimes. We had no shabbat celebrations in
20 our house. We were not a very observant family although we
21 were very Jewish. It was interesting that I always felt very
22 dedicated to the Jewish community, the Jewish people, suffered
23 through all their trials and tribulations of our people. My
24 dad did, too. When it came to the religious traditional
25 observances, we weren't very observant at all.

1 We always belonged to a synagogue. My father was a
2 charter member of Temple Israel. I went to Sunday School. I
3 never was bar mitzvahed. In those days in Reform synagogues
4 there was no such thing as a bar mitzvah. It came much later.
5 But I was confirmed and was active in the temple, youth group
6 and stuff like that.

7 We were not what I would call a very observant
8 family. I came from a family, quite honestly, that to be kind
9 I'd say they were agnostics. I think my father was genuinely
10 an atheist. I don't think he believed at all. To his dying
11 day he didn't believe anything like that. But he was
12 certainly dedicated to the Jewish community and to Jews
13 everywhere. He gave generously and was very active in the
14 Detroit Jewish community. He was involved with the Home for
15 the Aged, on the board for 30 years as an officer.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** What was his name?

17 **MR. GREENBERG:** Samuel J. Greenberg. I remember
18 virtually every Sunday morning he left to go to the home. In
19 those days the lay people had a lot more involvement with the
20 operations of these agencies, although they had very talented
21 professionals. In those days the people on the board were
22 really active. They went every Sunday morning making plans
23 and doing things.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** You're a very charitable man. Did any
25 of this come out of your childhood?

1 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, yes, my father and mother. My
2 mother was very active in Hadassah. It all came from there,
3 I'm sure. It was always stressed that we were responsible for
4 everybody else. Kind of an inbred thing.

5 I should just tell you something funny. Jennie
6 Jones passed away a week or so ago.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** Jennie Jones was?

8 **MR. GREENBERG:** Jennie Jones was a very dear friend
9 of my mother's.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** She was well known for?

11 **MR. GREENBERG:** In this community? Oh, she was a
12 dynamo. She was into everything. Involved with the
13 Federation, with Hadassah. You talk about a woman activist,
14 she was it.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** She was president of the Women's
16 Division, wasn't she?

17 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, sure; that too. I don't know
18 what else she didn't do to tell you the truth. Anyway, I
19 remember I was 12 or 13 years old and Hadassah was doing a
20 mailing. They were preparing a mailing in the basement of my
21 house and Jennie Jones was there supervising. I was licking
22 envelopes and putting postage stamps on it. I must have been
23 13. When she passed away, I was reminded of the involvement
24 of hers and my mother's with her. Those were important days
25 of getting used to the idea of charity and tsadaka and all

1 that.

2 **MS. DUBIN:** It sounds as though it would have been
3 in the middle of the Second World war. Do you recall?

4 **MR. GREENBERG:** 1943, 1944.

5 **MS. DUBIN:** What was the Jewish community like where
6 you were living and their response to the war?

7 **MR. GREENBERG:** That was very interesting. I was
8 living on Northlawn which was the heart of a Catholic
9 neighborhood. There were very few Jews. I moved there in
10 1935. I grew up in a neighborhood with nothing but Christian
11 friends. I didn't know Jewish kids. I was the butt of some
12 overt and not so overt anti-Semitism. These were the days
13 when Father Coughlin was spouting off and Gerald L.K. Smith,
14 and Henry Ford. These were days when it was not easy to be
15 Jewish. We had no Federation, no unified Jewish community who
16 could even speak against what was going on. It was
17 interesting. That didn't come until later. We suffered a lot
18 in terms of feeling very, very helpless and nobody was coming
19 to our aide as a Jewish community. We felt very threatened by
20 all these virulent anti-Semites. I remember that very well.

21 My father was a very pugnacious man and he did not
22 take that easily. He came from up north in a tough country
23 and he did not take it easily. He was very outspoken about
24 what his feelings were. Even in Washington when Franklin
25 Roosevelt was president, there were Jews who were very close

1 to him. They kept quiet mostly, didn't speak out even against
2 the Holocaust. They felt powerless. Interesting time.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** Did your father suffer for that?

4 **MR. GREENBERG:** I don't think so. He could have.
5 He once tried to pick a fight with Gerald L.K. Smith, a fist
6 fight. My mother dragged him off of him. His business was
7 basically with Jewish people. He had quite a few Polish
8 customers, too, but no Germans in those days. He didn't
9 suffer from it. Emotionally he suffered, I'm sure. Everybody
10 did in those days. He managed to keep a straight head on his
11 shoulders. But I was aware of it as his son. I knew he was
12 furious about what was going on and felt very, very helpless.
13 So when the Jewish community started to organize, he was one
14 of the people deeply involved in the beginning. My dad was a
15 very close friend of Isador Sobeloff.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** Who was?

17 **MR. GREENBERG:** Isador was the first director of the
18 Federation. They happened to be close personal friends. My
19 father was a great supporter of his and he of my dad. They
20 worked together along with other people, Joe Holtzman, Lou
21 Berry and people like that, who were the strong people in our
22 community in those days.

23 The Jewish community began to form and to have an
24 identity and a factor to be dealt with. Not just in Detroit
25 but all over the country Jews started to assert themselves

1 after World War II. And that's why today Jews are in the
2 positions they're in, because they became a unified force. We
3 can thank those old-timers for that.

4 **MS. DUBIN:** You mentioned some significant names.
5 Were any of these people inspiring to you? Was there any
6 person who encouraged you?

7 **MR. GREENBERG:** Sobi got me involved in the Jewish
8 community really as a youngster. He was very inspirational.
9 He was a very, very charismatic guy. He didn't look like it,
10 but when he spoke, you listened.

11 One of the others who was really significant in
12 terms of my involvement in the community was Irwin Shaw. When
13 I met him, he was the head of the Jewish Community Center. I
14 always felt Irwin was a person who was not always given the
15 recognition he deserved. He was a very important force in
16 moving this community ahead. I appreciated what he did. He
17 got me involved with the Center and all kinds of things. I
18 was always grateful for that. He taught me a lot.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** Let's go back for a moment to your
20 childhood. What were you like in public school?

21 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, you want me to brag? I was
22 wonderful in public school. I was a bright kid. I was double
23 promoted twice. I loved my teachers and we got along
24 wonderfully. School for me was wonderful.

25 I was a great athlete. I was little but I was fast

1 and I was agile. I played baseball and football, but in high
2 school I was a tennis player. I played on the school team. I
3 still play occasionally.

4 I was a happy kid. I was quite successful in
5 everything I tried. I was spoiled. Not many people can say
6 that. I felt very gratified all the time and having a good
7 time. I really did. Those were good days. I even got to the
8 point when the anti-Semite kids would pick on me, I would
9 fight back and they stopped. That was interesting. The
10 minute you asserted yourself even if they beat you up, if you
11 fought back, they didn't bother you any more. That's a lesson
12 I learned very early in my youth.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** Where did you go to school?

14 **MR. GREENBERG:** I went to Winterhalter Elementary
15 for kindergarten. Then we moved up to Northlawn and I went to
16 Bagley. I went from Bagley to Post Intermediate, and I
17 graduated from Highland Park High. Then I went to the
18 University of Michigan where I got a BA in economics. Then I
19 got married one month before I graduated from college, Miss
20 What's Her Name.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** What is her name?

22 **MR. GREENBERG:** Carolyn Greenberg is my wife. And
23 if you check, she's another one of these interviews you've
24 handled.

25 **MS. DUBIN:** What was her maiden name?

1 **MR. GREENBERG:** Her name was Carolyn Kaplan. Our
2 families were friends so we knew each other. We started to
3 date when we were 16. When I got out of college and was
4 married, I had to go to work. I went to work for my father in
5 the insurance business for a very short time.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** I'm going to go back to that, but I want
7 to know who your friends were.

8 **MR. GREENBERG:** My friends?

9 **MS. DUBIN:** Growing up.

10 **MR. GREENBERG:** Gosh, they're all still my friends.

11 **MS. DUBIN:** That's who I want to know.

12 **MR. GREENBERG:** My friends are lifelong friends.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** Any of them in the Jewish community
14 whose names we would recognize?

15 **MR. GREENBERG:** Names you would recognize? Well, at
16 the age of 14 I had my first date, and she was a little girl
17 that I had gone to parties with. We spent a lot of time
18 together. For the next couple years we were out together all
19 the time. Her name was Marianne Shapiro, who is now Marianne
20 Schwartz and who is still one of my dearest friends. We are
21 close to this day as couples, obviously. Marianne and Alan.
22 As a matter of fact Friday we're going to Stratford together,
23 the four of us.

24 I could name you so many people that were my friends
25 in those days and still are. Joe Isaacson, who's a doctor,

1 Irving Keene. People I've known for my entire life. To me a
2 new friend is somebody I've only known for 15 years. I could
3 name 30 or 40 people that I've known since I was five years
4 old that I still see. That is very unusual. This community
5 is special in that regard. We keep our friends for a long,
6 long time. Most of them back the Federation, too. It's a
7 nice warm feeling. You come into a room and your whole life
8 history is sitting in front of you.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** We'll go on to your college days then.
10 You mentioned that you majored in economics.

11 **MR. GREENBERG:** Right.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** I seem to recall that you were involved
13 in some organizations.

14 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, gosh, yes. I was president of
15 the Association of Independent Men. Then I was drafted to
16 join a fraternity. I became president of the Pi Lam
17 Fraternity for a couple years. I was in the Senior Honorary
18 Society, the Druids of Michigan, I was tapped for that.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** Why the Druids?

20 **MR. GREENBERG:** Why the Druids? That's what they
21 were called. That was the senior honorary for the literary
22 school.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** The Independent Men's Association, what
24 was that?

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** There were lots of men who lived in

1 dormitories and didn't belong to fraternities and in those
2 days they had an organization. I don't know if it exists
3 anymore. I've lost track. Being president was my job at that
4 point, aside from trying to learn something while I was in
5 school. But I was involved in lots of activities. I was
6 chairman of the homecoming dance a couple times. I got to
7 meet all kinds of famous orchestra leaders. Claude Thornhill.
8 I got to meet Nat King Cole and lots of others. It was fun.
9 Those were good days, too, let me tell you.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** And then there was Carolyn Kaplan.

11 **MR. GREENBERG:** That was an ongoing story. We
12 started dating when we were 16. Maybe six months before we
13 graduated from high school I started to take her out. We were
14 very close. It was kind of love at first sight, tell you the
15 truth. Seems to be lasting. We just celebrated our 54th
16 wedding anniversary, so evidently she's here to stay. I told
17 her the trial period is almost over and she can rest now.
18 Anyway, we've had a great love affair all these years.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** Did she share your interests in various
20 subjects? Israel, for example?

21 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, yes. We've always been
22 dedicated to Israel. All Jewish activities, obviously the
23 Federation. I think I've been on the board of the Federation
24 for maybe 30 years. I was on the Executive Committee for 25
25 years, in all the different offices. I think I was vice-

1 president for something like 10 years.

2 I was president of the Center. I just finished
3 chairing the fund-raiser for the Center that just ended. We
4 raised \$37 million. I felt very good about that. Although
5 I'm not active in the Center on an ongoing basis anymore, I'm
6 still dedicated to them. It's a great organization and an
7 important part of our community.

8 I was on the JVS. Carolyn was president of the
9 Women's Division. Both of us have been very active.

10 I'll never forget, if you want to hear a funny
11 story. When I first joined the Federation, the first thing
12 they do is give you pledge cards. In those days you used to
13 take the pledge cards and go to the person's house and knock
14 on the door. The amount of money we were getting was very,
15 very small in those days. But they gave me these pledge
16 cards, said, okay, call on these people and get a pledge. So
17 I was going from door to door in my neighborhood, which was
18 northwest Detroit, and I'd say I'm here from the Allied Jewish
19 Campaign, and I would like your pledge. The fellow would say,
20 well, how much did I pledge last year? I said, well, you
21 pledged \$20, but the needs are great, I wish you'd give us,
22 I'd say 50, how about \$25. Okay. I'll pledge \$25. This went
23 on everywhere I went. I was getting increases. I'd think,
24 oh, my goodness, I'm a natural. I was very proud. I brought
25 in the slips, and they looked at me and said that's very good

1 but did you look at the back of the slip? I says, no. Well,
2 these people haven't paid. We gave you all cards of people
3 who haven't paid their pledges. I said, well, no wonder they
4 were so willing to give me an increase, they hadn't paid.
5 That was my first experience with fund-raising. So I wasn't
6 such a natural.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** You are a natural and we're going to go
8 back to that. There is one aspect that we didn't bring up and
9 that was your army experience. I thought that was kind of
10 important. It sounds as though it may have been during the
11 Korean War?

12 **MR. GREENBERG:** Right.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** Can you tell me about that experience?
14 After you graduated from college?

15 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was married. What happened was I
16 told you I was a tennis player. When I went to Michigan, I
17 was going to play on the tennis team. I had a physical -- I
18 don't know if you want to know all this stuff -- well, anyway,
19 I went to have a physical and they found a spot on my lung.
20 They said you can stay in school but you cannot participate in
21 any physical education activities. So I was not to be a
22 tennis player anymore. I didn't. The spot stayed there,
23 didn't seem to change much. When I was called to be drafted,
24 they checked my records and they took an x-ray, and they put
25 me off as a deferment because of my illness. I didn't feel

1 any illness. I was fine.

2 Anyway so Carolyn and I were married and we thought
3 I was going to go into the army. Two years later they looked
4 it over and said, well, it hasn't changed, we're going to
5 draft you now. That's when I went in. Must have been 1952.
6 So from '52 to '54 I was in the army and out of the 24 months
7 I went to school 14 months. They trained me to be an
8 electronic fire control specialist, if you will. You remember
9 the Nike missile, that missile, I was trained to teach people
10 how to operate the electronics and how to repair them and so
11 on, the control systems and all that stuff.

12 After 14 months they sent me to England, would you
13 believe, in the middle of the Korean War. I became an
14 instructor. I taught all the British and American
15 installations in England how to operate the Nike missiles.
16 That was my job in the army. They didn't get the missiles
17 until four or five months after I got there, so I only spent
18 five months actually training people after all the money the
19 Government spent educating me. It was pathetic. Nothing has
20 changed. The army always worked that way. When I went to
21 England, by that time we had a baby and so Carolyn stayed here
22 and I was over there.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me about the baby and the family.

24 **MR. GREENBERG:** The baby's name is Daniel Greenberg.
25 He's very active in our community, too. He's been very active

1 in Federation, Home of the Aged, all that stuff, like his
2 grandfather. He's married, his wife's name is Lana, they have
3 two sons who are Matthew and Nathan.

4 I have a daughter Amy, she lives in Oakland,
5 California. She has two children. The oldest is Rae, she's
6 in her senior year of high school, and Eli who is now 14.

7 My youngest son is Ned who lives here in Detroit.
8 His wife's name is Lisa and they have three children. Their
9 names are Talia, Sam and Bennett. Sam is named after my
10 father and Bennett is named after Carolyn's grandfather.

11 **MS. DUBIN:** Who were you named for?

12 **MR. GREENBERG:** My name is Hugh William. My
13 grandmother's name was Hester and her husband's name was
14 William Kyle. I was named after my maternal grandparents,
15 both of whom were gone when I was born. I knew my father's
16 parents but I never knew my mother's parents. Hugh from
17 Hester, that's kind of a reach.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** Now we're going to have a discussion
19 about your involvement in the Jewish community.

20 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was never involved in the Jewish
21 community. Much.

22 **MS. DUBIN:** Why did you become involved?

23 **MR. GREENBERG:** That's a very good question. Well,
24 my father was, first of all. He was very active. I would
25 think the truth of the matter is I was drafted by Sobi. He

1 said in no uncertain terms I had to get involved. That I was
2 somebody who had a lot to offer and that I should do it. He
3 made me feel like -- you know what a guilt trip is, if you
4 don't do it, you're not doing the right thing. That's how it
5 really started. Right after that he suggested I get involved
6 with an agency and he sicced Irwin Shaw on me. I became
7 involved with those almost simultaneously. That was the
8 beginning.

9 The more involved you get, the more involved you
10 get. You know that. It was kind of a natural progression. I
11 just spent my whole life doing this kind of stuff up till now.
12 I found it gratifying. I was very lucky. I did a lot of
13 things that made me feel like I made a difference. You know,
14 a lot of us do things and you feel like you're going through
15 the motions and you're like a rubber stamp or something like
16 that. I didn't have that feeling. I really got involved. I
17 did things that made a real impact on our community and that
18 was very gratifying.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me some of those.

20 **MR. GREENBERG:** Well, first of all, at the Center I
21 took over as the president. I had been involved in the Center
22 for many, many years. And I took over as president when they
23 had moved into Maple Drake, and there were huge problems. The
24 building was not properly designed and the costs of operating
25 were terrible. It was a huge undertaking that the community

1 really hadn't prepared for. I happened to be in the wrong
2 place at the wrong time, and I became president right after
3 that. Along with the help from the community, the Federation
4 obviously, we were able to put it on a more even keel. Not
5 that the Center has ever been a very self-sustaining
6 organization, but it got to be more tolerable in terms of what
7 it could afford to do. Those were really trying times. I
8 think we made a real impact and made it a much happier place.
9 It still has its problems, and I don't think they will ever go
10 away completely.

11 **MS. DUBIN:** That wasn't your only experience with
12 helping the Center. You did this for the Ten Mile Center --

13 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, the fund-raising? That was
14 later on. I became sort of the official fund-raiser for the
15 Center. This time though when I asked people for money I made
16 sure they had paid their pledges before, that they weren't
17 just adding onto their arrears. I did. I got to the point
18 where I became a pretty good fund-raiser, which is an
19 interesting thing. If I have any criticism about our
20 community now, we have no lay fund-raisers anymore. The money
21 is raised fundamentally by the professionals now. The real
22 aggressive men who used to do this kind of thing are not
23 evidenced anymore.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** Why is that?

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** Well, I say this not in an unkind

1 way, but the professionals have become very professional.
2 There are lots more of them and they're more dedicated. They
3 can do more things. In the old days the staff of the
4 Federation was so small they had to rely on all the lay people
5 to go out and be the arms, legs and voice of the Federation.

6 I remember when the major gifts were all raised by
7 the leaders of the community. If somebody wanted a gift from
8 somebody and a substantial amount of money, they would send
9 out Joe Holtzman or Lou Berry or Paul Zuckerman or Max Fisher
10 even to do the soliciting. Sol Eisenberg. People who were
11 very active and influential. Those are the people who went to
12 their peers and asked them for money. You don't see a lot of
13 that now. One of the last people in this community who could
14 really do that was David Hermelin, who was a pretty decent
15 fund-raiser himself.

16 Aside from me, I don't know who goes out and raising
17 money anymore for major projects. Of course Bob Aronson and
18 his staff do the major part of it. Which is fine. The only
19 problem is it's one aspect of involvement for younger people
20 that they don't really get. They don't have that face-to-
21 face, knock heads for people to give them a better gifts. I
22 think something is missing when you don't do that. This is
23 probably not an exclusive idea with me. There are others who
24 believe that, too. I think it's a problem we should be
25 facing, and we should see if we can't get some of the younger

1 people to go out and do the soliciting.

2 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me about the Neighborhood Project.

3 **MR. GREENBERG:** The Neighborhood Project. It was
4 one of my pride and joys. I was involved from day one. The
5 first chairman. In those days we started out with the Home
6 Loan Project. In order to encourage people to stay in the Oak
7 Park/Southfield area, we tried to give them incentives to buy
8 homes there because the Jewish community had a huge investment
9 in terms of homes, retail establishments in the Ten Mile
10 Greenfield area. The Jewish Center was there. Federation
11 apartments were there. There are synagogues all over the
12 place. We felt it was very important to maintain that
13 neighborhood as a Jewish neighborhood.

14 So we started this Home Loan Program in which we
15 would loan anybody who didn't have a down payment for a house,
16 we would loan them the equivalent of the down payment, which
17 made them qualify for a mortgage and we stimulated people to
18 buy homes initially. I have to tell you, I was the chairman
19 of this thing, and I was really skeptical as to whether we
20 could pull it off, whether it would really work, whether we
21 could get people to come and borrow money and buy homes. It
22 started out very slowly, but within a few months it was taking
23 off like a jack rabbit. We couldn't believe the success we
24 were having.

25 The fact that that neighborhood is what it is today

1 I would say is 95 percent due to the Neighborhood Project.
2 The Federation was so farsighted in doing what they did. They
3 maintained the neighborhood and today the prices on those
4 houses are unbelievable. The neighborhood is burgeoning. In
5 those days we thought maybe it would be only an Orthodox
6 community but it's not. It's now about a third Orthodox Jew,
7 a third Reform and a third Conservative.

8 After a while they started loaning money to improve
9 homes, not just to buy. If you needed or wanted to put an
10 addition on your house, they would loan them the money. Last
11 I heard, there has never been a loan that wasn't paid back.
12 They were revolved. As people paid us off, we would make more
13 loans. I understand and the last I heard there was probably
14 1200 home loans that were made in that area, which meant we
15 encouraged 1200 people to either stay in that area or move
16 into that area. We had programs that kept them at the Center.

17 One of the other things we did, and I was deeply
18 involved with this, me from my Reform background. B'nai
19 Mosh~~e~~ who had a synagogue on Ten Mile Road, decided to move
20 out. We made it possible for Yeshiva Beth ~~Yehuda~~to buy that
21 building and turn it into a girl's school because we felt that
22 was important in keeping the neighborhood Jewish. It was not
23 easy, but I sold it. It's still there and operating. It's
24 still struggling and it always will I suppose, just like the
25 Center. But it was a very important aspect of keeping that

1 neighborhood Jewish.

2 **MS. DUBIN:** Where did the loan funds come from?

3 **MR. GREENBERG:** Federation. We had three-quarters
4 of a million dollars that the Federation set aside for the
5 home loans. They set aside \$750,000 and from that we doled
6 out 4,000, 5,000, 6,000 was the most we ever gave in those
7 days. But it was enough because it made it possible for
8 people to qualify for mortgages.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** Was the United Jewish Foundation
10 involved in that?

11 **MR. GREENBERG:** I don't really differentiate when it
12 comes to the money. The money probably came from the
13 Foundation, but as I recall, it was a Federation program. To
14 my knowledge they got all the money back. It was ended about
15 two years ago. One of those programs that actually came to an
16 end. We don't have many of those. We felt the need had
17 passed and we didn't have to do that anymore. The
18 neighborhood is solid on its own now. It doesn't need that
19 kind of infusion. Talk about feeling good about something you
20 were involved in, I never fail to drive around in that
21 neighborhood now and look at what's going on and feeling like,
22 boy, we really did something here. The Federation should be
23 really proud of that. I don't think they publicized it
24 enough. Somebody ought to make a movie about it or something.

25 **MS. DUBIN:** I think your reach was beyond the

1 Detroit Jewish community. I recall that you were chair of the
2 North American Youth Maccabees games.

3 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was involved in the formation of
4 the Maccabees games for the JWB in those days, which is now
5 the Jewish community Center's Association. I was the first
6 commissioner if you will of the games. We started out with
7 one venue, a thousand kids or something like that. I don't
8 remember what city it was. But that program has become the
9 salient program as far as I'm concerned, for the Jewish
10 Community Center Association today. They have thousands of
11 kids every year going to these games now. They may have two
12 or three venues at one time because of different school
13 schedules, you know.

14 The amount of Jewish identification that has been
15 garnered from those games is incalculable. It really is.
16 Kids who had no other Jewish identity, when it came to sports,
17 this was their way into being Jewish. Many of them, I know
18 from firsthand experience, who probably never would have
19 identified very much as being Jewish, getting them in through
20 the athletic programs made them committed Jews. The
21 friendships all over the country, all over the world. I hear
22 stories all the time. With e-mails now these kids from Israel
23 are corresponding with kids from Philadelphia and from all
24 over. They've become fast friends. The impact is
25 unbelievable. It was a thrilling thing to see. I must have

1 been at ten games. It was my job to say, "let the games
2 begin." To see the parade at the beginning of the games and
3 seeing these kids marching with signs from wherever they came
4 from. All the cities, all the countries; Mexico, Argentina,
5 Romania, all over the world. They had an experience that was
6 absolutely incomparable.

7 I could tell you a funny story. We had the games in
8 Chicago and I was sitting on a dias there and next to me was
9 the mayor of Chicago. His name was Washington at the time.
10 The kids were marching in. The contingent from Los Angeles
11 came in and there are three tall black kids in this
12 contingent. The mayor looks at this and he nudges me and he
13 said, I thought you said this was for Jewish kids. I said
14 yes, it is. He points to the contingent from Los Angeles. He
15 says, look there's three black kids here. How come? I said,
16 well, there are three possibilities. I said first of all,
17 they may be from Ethiopia; that's one possibility. Or they
18 may be black Jewish kids or kids who have been adopted by
19 Jewish families who were black and being raised Jewish. And
20 the third possibility is, Los Angeles just wants to win.
21 Well, I thought he was going to fall out of his seat. I can
22 still see him laughing, he was laughing so hard. I did check
23 into it and these were kids who had been adopted by Jewish
24 families, all three of them. Jewish people do things like
25 that. These were really Jewish kids. And they did win.

1 Another gratifying experience with the games. They're going
2 gang busters, doing so well.

3 It was not easy selling the JWB on the whole
4 concept. I worked very hard to get them to realize that this
5 is a way to get kids to identify as Jews.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** What was the origin of the idea?

7 **MR. GREENBERG:** There was a Maccabees group who
8 started this on a very small basis. Maccabees America.
9 Maccabees Games of Canada and the JWB together on a very
10 limited basis done this. Mort Plotnik, who was at that time
11 the executive director of the Jewish Center, talked to me
12 about it, said this is something we should capitalize on. We
13 called a meeting of all these organizations and told them they
14 were handling it the wrong way, that it should not be three
15 organizations trying to do the whole thing, that one
16 organization should be doing it with the help of the others.
17 One had to take the lead and actually make it happen. The
18 natural one to do it was the JWB because they had the
19 connection with all the Jewish Centers all over the country,
20 which is where the kids were. In all of these things there's
21 always a turf war. This is our thing, you know. Try to get
22 them to be amenable to the marriage, if you will, and to take
23 a secondary role was not easy. This had to be done in
24 cooperation with the Maccabees Games in Israel, because they
25 own the name. We had to get the Israelis to buy into the

1 youth games named Maccabees. So it took probably a year and a
2 half, two years to get everybody in line to do this.

3 Finally it fell into place and we started the
4 organization, and my reward was that I became the first
5 commissioner of the whole games, which goes to prove my
6 favorite theory, is that no good deed goes unpunished. I did
7 that for quite a few years. and then I finally said it was
8 time for somebody else to do this. They put another person
9 in. But by that time it was a howling success. We had been
10 to Chicago, Baltimore, Toronto, Detroit a couple times. When
11 I get my newsletter from the JCCA, every year they talk about
12 the different venues and where it's going, how many kids are
13 involved. We're talking about thousands of kids every year.
14 Quite an impact.

15 See what I told you before that I've had a lot of
16 reward, because I've always been involved in the Allied Jewish
17 Campaign, always collected and solicited money, but you never
18 had the same direct reward that you knew exactly what your
19 money had done or your time. You never felt it was a causal-
20 effect relationship, that you did this and here's what
21 happened. That's why at least cases I was very lucky to have
22 this satisfaction.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** That is a great segue into the American
24 Jewish Joint Distribution.

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** My all-time favorite. That is

1 without question the most effective, meaningful organization
2 in Jewish life.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** The Joint.

4 **MR. GREENBERG:** The Joint. It's not well known.
5 Not as well publicized as it should be what their role has
6 been in history in terms of the Jewish people, what they have
7 done.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** What role did you play?

9 **MR. GREENBERG:** They save lives everywhere. You
10 hear about Jews having problems in Argentina, problems in
11 India, problems in Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union, before
12 it was the former Soviet Union. They were always there in
13 some role. Very often subrosa, they were under a different
14 name, auspices, funneling food, money to organizations and
15 people in all these countries. What they've done through
16 history, the 20th century anyway, in terms of being there and
17 saving lives.

18 If you really want to feel good about what you've
19 given to the Allied Jewish Campaign, you have to do what we
20 did; traveled around in different parts of the world. We went
21 to Bulgaria, Hungary.

22 **MS. DUBIN:** Who's we?

23 **MR. GREENBERG:** My wife and I, Carolyn, and others.
24 I was on the Eastern Europe Committee for a few years. To
25 have people come up to you and touch you like you're something

1 sacred because you're from the Joint. It was embarrassing.
2 They'd say, if it weren't for you, we'd all be dead. We'd
3 have no food, shelter, no medical care. They'd list all the
4 things that the Joint does for them. Everywhere you went this
5 is what happened. Old people, young people, didn't make any
6 difference. The best known name in the Jewish world is the
7 Joint.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** Also known as the JDC?

9 **MR. GREENBERG:** Yes. American Jewish Joint
10 Distribution Committee, commonly known as the Joint. To these
11 people it's almost sacred. I mean most of them say they would
12 not be able to exist without the Joint. First of all we'd
13 starve, we don't have any food. Makes you really feel like
14 you're representing somebody who makes a real impact.

15 That's another pet peeve of mine. I've always felt
16 that we at the Federation here do not publicize. We're always
17 talking about what we're doing for Israel, which is fabulous
18 obviously, and it's probably number one. But this other
19 aspect of saving these lives all over the world through the
20 Joint is not given enough recognition. And the professional
21 level of the people, it is so inspirational to meet these
22 people. They go and live in these places. Hungary, Romania,
23 which is a hell hole. Romania is a third world country.
24 Poverty is common, hard to believe. They go and live with
25 these people and dedicating their lives to this kind of

1 activity. I don't know people like that. In my society
2 people are looking out for themselves most of the time. I
3 don't know where they find them. Some of the people in the
4 Joint are from South America, Israel, Europe, totally amazing
5 people.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** Any particular incident comes to mind
7 when you think of the trips that you've taken?

8 **MR. GREENBERG:** Well, I could list you a hundred of
9 them. One, we walked into this woman's house. It was a room
10 maybe 12 x 12 was her entire house. She didn't have any
11 inside plumbing. This is in Romania. This is not a new
12 African country. She had a wood stove, no refrigerator, had a
13 little bed, table and chair. She was old. Her husband had
14 died. She was on relief, which in Romania meant she got
15 nothing. She had to decide between eating and putting wood in
16 her stove because she couldn't afford both. The Joint was
17 keeping her alive. The lighting in the room was one light
18 bulb in the middle of her room. When we came in, somebody
19 turned the light on and she got very upset because she
20 couldn't afford to pay for the light bulb. Until we
21 understood and turned off the light she was much happier
22 because she couldn't pay for electricity. She had no income.
23 But the gratitude she had for the Joint was just unbelievable.
24 She knocked us all out, she really did.

25 It wasn't just there. Everywhere we went. They had

1 old folks homes that they support. They have a camp for
2 children in Hungary. We were there for the tenth anniversary
3 of the camp. They, along with Ron Lauder, formed this camp.
4 They bring kids in from all over that area. They had kids
5 from Romania, all the different surrounding countries. They
6 teach them what Judaism is all about because during World War
7 II and thereafter it was not popular to be Jewish. A lot of
8 these kids never knew they were Jewish. Their parents never
9 told them. We met young people in their 20s and 30s who just
10 found out that they were Jewish. They get an indoctrination
11 in what it is to be Jewish. They teach them prayers, about
12 the holidays.

13 The interesting part about it is, keep in mind these
14 kids are coming from all different countries. Finland, Soviet
15 Union. No common language. So whatever they do, they have to
16 do it in five languages at the same time. The staff is
17 Israeli, by the way. They all sing together and they play
18 together and they're all totally different languages.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** Speaking of Israel, you've been there
20 many times. There was one mission in particular that I read
21 about. The "Who is a Jew" question.

22 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was there a couple times on that
23 issue.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** In what capacity?

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** I don't remember. I think I

1 represented Detroit. Whoever was the executive director asked
2 me if I would go because he knew how strongly I felt about the
3 issue.

4 **MS. DUBIN:** What is that issue?

5 **MR. GREENBERG:** Well, the issue is, at that point in
6 time the definition of who was a Jew was being left pretty
7 much to Israel. The Orthodox community was very narrow as far
8 as we were concerned in how a Jew was being defined. So you
9 had to be Orthodox to be Jewish. You had to follow all
10 Orthodox traditions and everything had to be done by those
11 measurements. It didn't work for everybody.

12 It was interesting, on our mission were people from
13 other parts of the country, about 11 of us all from the United
14 States. We met with the Knesset, we met with the prime
15 minister, and we met with the outgoing prime ministers on both
16 sides. And we're stressing the fact that this was intolerable
17 to us as Americans. First of all, some of the people in our
18 group were not born Jewish. Some of them had a mother who was
19 not Jewish and a father who was and were strongly identified
20 with the Jewish community from all over the country. People
21 from California, everywhere. The definition that was given
22 was totally unacceptable to us as to who was a Jew and they
23 were trying to put it into even stricter law in terms of
24 maintaining the definition was very narrow and you didn't
25 deviate from it. The battle goes on by the way. This is not

1 over. We were able at that point to get them to back off.
2 They stopped trying to narrow their restriction as to who was
3 Jewish. We were part of an ongoing program from a lot of
4 different people.

5 **MS. DUBIN:** Itzak Shamir was the prime minister at
6 that time?

7 **MR. GREENBERG:** Shamir, yeah. He listened. He said
8 he'd give us 20 minutes. He stayed for two and a half hours.
9 We told him he was making a terrible mistake. First of all he
10 was going to alienate probably the largest number of Jews in
11 the world, who did not agree with him. He was prepared to let
12 it go through. The Orthodox politically had a lot of impact.
13 We had to tell him there were Conservative Jews, Reform Jews
14 who are the largest bodies of Jews in the world and you cannot
15 ignore them. From some of the people there who made speeches
16 I was mild.

17 There was a young woman who got up and said you
18 know, I have a home here in Israel, I raise my children
19 Jewish. My mother was not Jewish, my father was Jewish. I'm
20 a dedicated Jew. She pointed her finger and said, and you are
21 not going to tell me I'm not Jewish. She pointed her finger
22 right in his face. Young, adorable girl. He was taken aback.
23 He really listened to her. You're not going to tell me I'm
24 not Jewish or my children aren't Jewish. She said, I spent my
25 whole life dedicated to Israel, to the Jewish cause. You're

1 not going to say -- she took off on him.

2 There were others like that. Many people in the
3 group, by the new definition were not really Jewish. Some of
4 them didn't know they were Jewish. They could not prove it.
5 One of them came from Poland and he was told he was Jewish but
6 he wasn't really sure. He was told his mother was Jewish but
7 he had no way to tell. His mother had died, his father was
8 gone. But he was a big shot in the Jewish community and his
9 attitude was the same. Who are you to tell me I'm Jewish or
10 not. It was a striking experience.

11 It did have some impact evidently. It's an ongoing
12 battle between the Orthodox community and the rest of the Jews
13 as to who makes the decisions about all these things. Every
14 prime minister who comes into power wants to stay on good
15 terms with the Orthodox community because for some reason
16 they're the swing votes all the time as to who is going to
17 govern in Israel. That was a fascinating experience. I did
18 it twice in a matter of a year and a half.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** We've kind of come full circle. You
20 started in Detroit with your birth here, and now we're coming
21 back to Detroit. As a lifelong Detroiter you continue to be
22 involved in the city.

23 **MR. GREENBERG:** I've done other things, too.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** Detroit Institute of Arts. Detroit
25 Symphony.

1 **MR. GREENBERG:** I was on the board of the Detroit
2 Symphony.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** United Foundation.

4 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, yes, I was on the board. I
5 forgot about those things. I'm not in any of those any more.
6 First of all you only stay on for a period of time and then
7 they make room for other people, which is as it should be.
8 I'm a great believer in having people leave and make room for
9 new younger people. The other part is that I spend a good
10 part of the year in Florida now. I'm not here most of the
11 winter when you should be active doing things.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** Where is your heart?

13 **MR. GREENBERG:** Here. I'm a Detroiter. I will
14 always be a Detroiter. That's a very interesting question
15 because they would like to pirate us away down there and have
16 you become Floridians, you know, for very practical reasons.
17 Our roots are all here. Our family is here. Even if our
18 family weren't here, this is where our history is.

19 **MS. DUBIN:** In recognition of what you and your wife
20 Carolyn have done for the community, you received the Butzel
21 Award in 2000.

22 **MR. GREENBERG:** Yes. I got a half a Butzel Award
23 she got the other half.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** Any special thoughts about that?

25 **MR. GREENBERG:** It's very gratifying and an

1 incredible honor. This is the best that we have to offer to
2 our people. It's something we will always cherish and always
3 try to live up to. It's really a challenge to say you better
4 keep doing whatever you've been doing, and we will do that,
5 I'm sure. It's nice to be involved in a group of people who
6 have been so involved in our community.

7 When I gave my speech, I noted the fact that I have
8 known every single one of the Butzel award winners from day
9 one. Julian ~~Krolik~~ I knew as a young kid, I knew every
10 single one of them. It's hard to believe. It's now 54 years
11 or so they've been giving it. 1951 was the first Butzel
12 Award. I wasn't there at the award but I knew the man. He
13 was a friend of my dad's and his daughter was a good friend of
14 mine. Not just in passing, I knew them quite well. It felt
15 good to be added to that group. They were all amazing people.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** What legacy would you leave to your
17 children and grandchildren? What life lesson would you like
18 to pass on?

19 **MR. GREENBERG:** Oh, that's the easiest thing in the
20 world to tell them what they should do. I think really that
21 it's very important to give back. You have to be worried
22 about other people as well as yourself. It's a Jewish
23 tradition, let's face it. I think it's very important for
24 them to maintain their Jewish identity and to be proud of it
25 and to pass on the good things about being Jewish to their

1 kids, which they are doing. To try to make the world a better
2 place.

3 I should tell you, my youngest son last Monday was
4 made the president of Gleaners and the Oakland County Food
5 Bank. He just engineered the merger of those two agencies.
6 About a week and a half ago they concluded the merger and they
7 elected him president of the organization, which is a great
8 tradition. Feeding the poor and hungry is what he's very much
9 into. He's great at it. He will be a great leader in this
10 city. That's kind of gratifying right there. Just happened
11 this week. If you'd interviewed me a week ago, I wouldn't
12 have been able to tell you about that.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** Is there anything I've neglected to ask
14 that you'd like to add?

15 **MR. GREENBERG:** Let me think. I think you've hit
16 all the highlights. Well, the Federation itself, just in
17 terms of what I've seen happen to the Federation in terms of
18 its growth and the fact that it has become a spokesman, if you
19 will, for us. Going back to what I was telling you about when
20 I was young, there was no organized Jewish community. We were
21 just individual synagogues, we were individual people. No
22 voice, no central location. All the agencies were
23 independent. A lot of them were raising money by themselves.
24 So the formation of the Federation in itself was a landmark
25 occasion for this community. As I said before, for all the

1 communities in the United States. UJC, which is now having a
2 little struggle, but the point is there was never any place
3 like that that was a home that spoke for Jews in the United
4 States. The fact that people like B'nai Brith are around,
5 American Jewish Committee, all of those, it's added a lot of
6 lustre to being Jewish and of course good part of it came from
7 the state of Israel being formed. We've got to be grateful to
8 them, too.

9 I think we've covered all my bases and the things
10 that have made me feel good. I hope people continue to be
11 inspired to make the community grow. And they are. There are
12 a lot of young people now who are coming forward to take over,
13 which is great. I think that's it.

14 MS. DUBIN: Thank you.