

Oral History of: Elaine Driker
Interviewed by: Michael Berke
Date of Interview: June 21, 2018
Location of Interview: Max M. Fisher Federation Building, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Michael Berke : 00:00:01 This interview is being recorded as part of the Albert and Pauline Dubin Oral History Archives. My name is Michael [Berke 00:00:08] and today is June 21st. I'm interviewing Elaine Driker at the Max M. Fisher Building in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Elaine, do you give permission to the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate or otherwise use this recording for education purposes and for use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

Elaine Driker: 00:00:31 I do.

Berke : 00:00:32 Thank you. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

Elaine Driker: 00:00:37 I was born on June 29th 1938 in Detroit, Michigan at the Old Providence Hospital which was on West Grand Boulevard and something. I don't recall the cross street.

Berke : 00:00:59 Where did you live? Where was your ... When you came home after those few days in the hospital, where did you live?

Elaine Driker: 00:01:08 Well, I'm not aware of where I lived, but it was in the Dexter Neighborhood. It's possible that it was on Richton, but I would not want to be held to that and then I moved to Clairmount, Clairmount and 14th and I lived there. Those were my early, early years.

Berke : 00:01:40 Do you have siblings?

Elaine Driker: 00:01:42 I have two half siblings. My brother passed away five years ago at a pretty young age of 62. My sister lives in Birmingham with her husband and even though there's 15 years age difference, we're very, very close.

Berke : 00:02:09 Can you tell us something about your parents?

Elaine Driker: 00:02:12 I can. My father was born in California. I take that back. My father was born in New York. My mother was born in California. When people are always asking my husband Eugene about his parents and where they came from and they of course were immigrants from Ukraine.

I always tell those same people that I'm a Yankee. My parents were born in the United States. Their parents were born in Russia and Poland.

Berke : 00:02:52 What brought you to ... What brought them to the Detroit area?

Elaine Driker: 00:02:54 I can't answer that question.

Berke : 00:02:56 You don't know?

Elaine Driker: 00:02:56 I don't know and they're both deceased so I do not know that.

Berke : 00:03:02 You lived in the Dexter Neighborhood?

Elaine Driker: 00:03:05 Yeah, the greater Dexter-Linwood neighborhood.

Berke : 00:03:08 What are your memories of their? Of growing up in that neighborhood?

Elaine Driker: 00:03:15 I have a very, very early memory and it's hard for me to believe I really remember this, but I think I do, of being actually in a baby buggy. When I lived on Clairmount, my grandmother, my maternal grandmother had a sister who lived in New Jersey and that sister had a son who was in the navy.

He would come and visit my grandmother in his naval uniform and of course, then I was a little bit older, I was a toddler, but I was like a toy to him. I just remember here was this hero in a uniform. I do have an early memory of that. I actually tried to find him a few years ago. He's obviously not in the navy anymore, but I was not successful in doing that.

Berke : 00:04:19 But there was a good memory.

Elaine Driker: 00:04:21 It was a really good, a good memory of him. His name was [Jules Silberman 00:04:24].

Berke : 00:04:24 Do you have recollection of your grandparents? Your grandmother?

Elaine Driker: 00:04:31 Of my grandmother. I was very, very close to my maternal grandmother.

Berke : 00:04:37 What was her name?

Elaine Driker: 00:04:37 Her name was Dora Wax, W-A-X.

Berke : 00:04:43 That's a familiar sounding name.

Elaine Driker: 00:04:45 Well, you're maybe thinking of Michael Wax, the author, but yeah, I was and remained until her death. I was married, I had a child, but I was very close to her.

Berke : 00:05:03 What role did religion and cultural things Jewish play in your early life?

Elaine Driker: 00:05:15 Not a big role. My father's parents were more religious than my mother's. I remember that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, my father would take me to their synagogue and I'm assuming now it was an orthodox synagogue because I had to go upstairs and we would spend part of the service there. We did not belong to a synagogue, but my grandmother kept ... My paternal grandmother kept kosher.

I still remember she had green dishes that were for dairy and like a burgundy red dishes that were for meat and I also recall that I once mixed up the silverware. As kind and dear and loving as she was, she marched me outside in the front of the house and made me bury the silverware in the dirt and I never mixed it up again.

I have the memory of the synagogue and I guess just more of a cultural memory of her home on Fridays. There was always newspaper on the kitchen floor because someone would wash it the day before and then it had to stay clean while she cooked so that once Shabbat came, she would remove the newspapers and we'd have a ... usually a Shabbat's dinner there.

Berke : 00:07:01 I'm going to take a step back or just wanted to maybe you could share your early school life, elementary and middle school. I don't know what they ... I don't remember what they called it back.

Elaine Driker: 00:07:13 Well, I go back even further.

Berke : 00:07:13 Yeah, or you can go back as far as you like, but [crosstalk 00:07:15]

Elaine Driker: 00:07:15 I will go back further.

Berke : 00:07:17 I like you to share [crosstalk 00:07:17]

Elaine Driker: 00:07:17 Because I was actually at Roeper School when it was on Pallister near between second and third in an old house and I started nursery school there. My husband will tell you I'm the oldest living alumna of Roeper School and I'll argue him on that point. I have some pretty vivid memories of going to Roeper School. I remember that I learned how to tell time there on a wooden crock that had an owl's face on it.

I remember playing and it was a house. It was in the backyard and there were great big gray wooden blocks and we would turn them into something different every day because imagination was treasured there, and then I went from Roeper to Brady Elementary School which was on Joy Road and Linwood I believe.

I was just an elementary school student. I was in the Brownies, then I was in the Girl Scouts. When I was in the fifth grade, I had a really mean teacher, Mrs. [Levy 00:08:50] and she kind of had it in for me. I think I was a bit impish. I guess that part of me goes way back. Anyway, I had pigtails, braids and the boys sitting behind me, [Chuck Rosen 00:09:10], Chucky Rosen dipped my pigtails in an ink well that had ink in it.

I, of course, screamed and the two of us got into a lot of trouble and I do remember that to this day, but I had a good experience at Brady and then went on to Hutchins. It was called Hutchins Intermediate School and that was I think on Woodrow, Wilson. I loved Hutchins. I was there for two years. It should have been three, but I was there for two years.

Just as a little sidebar about seven or eight years ago, just maybe more than that, just on happenstance. A couple of women and I who all went to Hutchins just found ourselves in the same space and started going out to lunch and then dinner and now we have maybe 15 people women in this group that has been named by Hutchins' hotshots. That has carried my Hutchins experience has carried through to this day, then we moved and my third year of intermediate school was at Durfee. I was just there for a year. There is something that needs to be mentioned although I didn't know at the time how significant it was going to be, but in the ninth grade, there was an election of class officers.

Back in the day, there was a nine A and a nine B and the nine B were the younger, the nine A were the ones electing the officers and we in the nine B had to go to the assembly to hear their speeches because we were going to vote. One of the people running for class president was a young man by the name of Eugene Driker.

Little did I know just how significant that would eventually be and by the way, he lost the election.

- Berke : 00:11:42 But did you vote for him?
- Elaine Driker: 00:11:43 I can't remember. I probably did. He lost the election, but eventually ...
- Berke : 00:11:47 Let the record show that Elaine Driker voted for Eugene.
- Elaine Driker: 00:11:51 Yeah, probably, probably. Then I went from there to Central High School which was right next door on Linwood. High school was wonderful. I loved it. I loved every minute of it. I even didn't mind going to classes, but it was just a great experience.
- Berke : 00:12:12 Good. Yeah. Now, we'll take a step back because we've covered a number of things. Tell me whether ... I think we talked about whether religion played an important part in your life as you moved up in through the school. I assume that you had a number of Jewish friends and whether or not they had an impact on you as you began to create your sense of being and belonging in life as you knew it then.
- Elaine Driker: 00:12:47 Well, I always knew I was Jewish and I went to a school that in the 1950s, a high school was probably 90% Jewish so yes, clearly, all of my friends were Jewish. My parents, oh and I just should say that at this point in my life, my parents had been divorced and my father remarried a Jewish woman. They did not belong to a synagogue. It was an economic thing, but somehow they felt ... No, let me say that differently.
- They felt that it was important for me to have a Jewish education and somehow, they were able to arrange for me to have that Jewish education at Shaarey Zedek. Shaarey Zedek at that time was on Chicago Boulevard. I went to Sunday school. I went to Hebrew school. I had a consecration in the 10th grade. It was a big event and I graduated from there in the 12th grade.
- I went all through. I was involved in the junior congregation and probably some other activities, but that was my religious home

even though we did not attend there as a family. My sense of Jewishness strengthened because of that experience even though we weren't what I'd call a shul-goers.

- Berke : 00:14:32 I assume your parents were supportive of that because they wanted you to have that Jewish education.
- Elaine Driker: 00:14:37 Oh, well, not only supportive, but responsible for it. They made it happen.
- Berke : 00:14:44 Did philanthropy wind its ways through that process when you were [crosstalk 00:14:50]
- Elaine Driker: 00:14:49 No. Everything I know about philanthropy I learned from my husband who's a very good teacher by the way.
- Berke : 00:14:58 Yes, out of order, but tell me a little bit about that.
- Elaine Driker: 00:15:01 Well, I'm not sure where he got it either, although I know he has spoken about his immigrant parents. His mother was always giving money and working on behalf of the Pioneer Women. I guess he learned it by seeing his parents. Philanthropy is a big word for what they were doing, but being generous to organizations that were helping people less fortunate than they were.
- Eugene has always, I mean at least just long as I've known him, felt that it's important to be philanthropic in the community and he always has been and not only in a personal way, but he's been involved in fundraising for a host of organizations and institutions. He has said to me on more occasions that I can count since it makes me feel so good to be able to do this.
- I've learned how to feel that and how to do that truly from him and we've been very fortunate that we've been able to be philanthropic to the extent that we are, a lot of people aren't. We feel good about that.
- Berke : 00:16:43 We're going to come back to that, but I want to move along the educational line. Tell me about your university life as you moved out of Central High School and onward.
- Elaine Driker: 00:16:54 Well, I really had no choice about where I was going to go to school because my family could not afford to send me out of the city. With scholarship money, I went to Wayne State. What was Wayne then I think it became Wayne State while I was there.

Yeah, that was a good experience too because a lot of my friends were there. For some reason, up to this day, I don't quite understand. I joined a sorority Delta Phi Epsilon and it provided a social outlet, although in my second year, I met, re-met Eugene now grown up.

He was a member of Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity and he asked me out in my second year at Wayne and then he kept asking me out and I kept saying yes. Eventually, we were pinned and then engaged and then married.

- Berke : 00:18:13 Did you finish school before you got married or was ...
- Elaine Driker: 00:18:16 Within a space of 10 days and it's the anniversary of it right now, within a space of 10 days in this order, I graduated from Wayne State, I got married and I turned 21 in a space of 10 days. Yes, I did finish school. Eugene was still in law school at Wayne.
- He had two years of law school to finish and I took a job teaching in Livonia, Michigan, but I also took a class in music appreciation at Wayne in the [Emma Schaver 00:18:59] building and I did that probably for, I don't know, a semester or two while he finished law school.
- Berke : 00:19:08 What subject did you teach?
- Elaine Driker: 00:19:11 I taught sixth grade.
- Berke : 00:19:13 What school?
- Elaine Driker: 00:19:14 Well, I started ... It's a little complicated. I was hired by the Livonia Public Schools and I was called an emergency substitute in a regular position, that was my title. I was in a number of schools over the course of two years.
- Berke : 00:19:42 Mm-hmm (affirmative). You got married. Where did you get married? Where were you married at?
- Elaine Driker: 00:19:50 At the Rainbow Terraces on Wyoming.
- Berke : 00:19:53 Who married you?
- Elaine Driker: 00:19:54 Officiated?
- Berke : 00:19:55 Yeah.

Elaine Driker: 00:19:55 Rabbi Morris Adler because he had been my hero all through my religious education.

Berke : 00:20:06 Did your relationship with Gene, you talked about it a moment ago in the whole issue of philanthropy, did it begin right from the get go? Was there an evolution of how you began feeling about ...

Elaine Driker: 00:20:19 I think there was ...

Berke : 00:20:20 Supporting the community.

Elaine Driker: 00:20:21 I think there was an evolution. I think his evolution came before my evolution.

Berke : 00:20:27 Yeah.

Elaine Driker: 00:20:27 I just want to mention something.

Berke : 00:20:29 Please.

Elaine Driker: 00:20:32 Eugene grew up religiously at the [Sholem Aleichem 00:20:36] Institute. His parents were founding members. They came from Ukraine. They, as I said a few minutes ago, they were part of a Landsmanschaftn and also involved in a lot of organizational life and with some other people founded the Sholem Aleichem Institute which is a Yiddish cultural organization, somewhat like the Workmen's Circle, some people or more familiar with that.

They had a school and Eugene went to school there. I want to underline the word cultural. It was a Yiddish cultural organization. In a sense, we were a mixed marriage which we had to come to grips with and find a middle road that both of us were going to be comfortable on.

Berke : 00:21:39 It's apparent that you did.

Elaine Driker: 00:21:41 We did.

Berke : 00:21:41 Yeah. Where did you make your first home after you got married?

Elaine Driker: 00:21:47 After we got married, we rented a, what is called a flat, an upper, the upper floor of a two-story brick home on a street called Manor which is a block east of Myers and this was near Puritan. We rented this upper flat and it was roomy and comfortable and we had no furniture and our dining room table

was a bridge table, but it was home and we lived there for two years.

Berke : 00:22:35 What year were you married in England?

Elaine Driker: 00:22:37 1959.

Berke : 00:22:39 The migration out of Detroit was just beginning to get at seeds of evolution as the neighborhoods began to change and our Jewish community began to leave the traditional Detroit Jewish neighborhoods, how did you and Gene feel about that when that started to occur?

Elaine Driker: 00:23:05 I don't think, I'm going to speak for myself. I really didn't think much about it if anything because we were married in 59, we were ... I was making \$4,500 a year in my teaching job. Eugene was in law school. He wasn't making anything. We neared a place to live that wasn't going to cost a lot of money and I don't remember just how we found this particular spot, but it was pretty inexpensive and it was convenient to where each of us have to go every day.

We moved there and as I said a minute ago, we lived there for two years. At the end of those two years, Eugene was very fortunate to be offered a position with the attorney general's honors program, the US attorney general's honors program.

They had never selected anyone from Wayne. They hadn't even come to Wayne to interview, but this particular year, they interviewed. He applied and he came and then forgot about it, came home one day and he said, "I just had this interview. They're supposed to let me know."

At Christmas time, out of the blue, he got a call from Washington saying the position is yours if you would like it. Here were two people who never live away from home except only went to summer camp. All of a sudden, faced with a very quick decision of do we move to Washington the following June.

We decided to do it. We left Detroit in 1961 for three years and I think it was in those three years that the real Exodus of Jews from the city was pretty, pretty strong.

Berke : 00:25:13 Okay.

Elaine Driker: 00:25:13 I think when we came back in '64, a lot of changes had occurred that we recognized, maybe not immediately. We had a small

baby. We were trying to find a place to live but it ... I think that's the bulk of the time when that happened.

Berke : 00:25:33 Where did you decide to live finally processing all of those things when you came back three years ago?

Elaine Driker: 00:25:41 Well, we weren't sure where we wanted to live. We decided, "Okay, we know this neighborhood. We're going to rent another place for a year." I actually think we lived with Eugene's parents for a month or so while we figured this all out. He left his government job. We came back to Detroit and yeah, we lived with his parents for a few weeks or maybe a couple of months.

We found again a flat, an upper flat on London. London is a street that goes from Livernois to San Juan and it is one block south of Curtis. It's a very short street. It's only claimed to fame other than the fact that we live there, is that it was at Livernois at backed up to Cobo Cleaners when Jack Ruby of whatever kind of fame you want to call that, owned Cobo Cleaners.

We just had this upper flat. Again, it was beautiful. I think we paid 95 or something like that dollars a month in rent and we scoped out the neighborhood and we scoped out what had happened to the Jewish community and where was everybody?

Where was our family? Where was our ... Where were our friends? We thought there just didn't seem to be any need for us to move much further than where we were and we learned about a community called Green Acres. Green Acres is between Livernois and Woodward and it's just south of Eight Mile.

We started looking at houses there and we found just a really lovely starter house to be our first house and it was priced, I think we paid \$19,000 for a three bedroom, three bathroom, maybe two and a half bathroom home. We bought it. We moved there in 1965 with our daughter who was then two years old.

If I had to write a piece on what a perfect neighborhood would look like, Green Acres was it. We had a wonderful 10 years there, wonderful neighbors, lots of kids. One of our neighbors went on to become the longest serving senator in Michigan's history.

Carl Levin was a neighbor on run through. We loved it and where we bucking a trend? Maybe, I don't know really know but we were comfortable, our kids were happy. We started them

off in public school and then things got a little dicey. We then moved them into private school, but they thrived and we thrived.

- Berke : 00:29:09 Have you always lived in Detroit?
- Elaine Driker: 00:29:11 Always. My tombstone is going to say she never lived in the suburbs.
- Berke : 00:29:16 Was there ever any thought of moving to the suburbs as you were making your move from home to home?
- Elaine Driker: 00:29:23 Oh, I'm sure there were thoughts, but never anything north of Eleven Mile. I think maybe at one point we looked at some houses in Huntington Woods. There were sleepless nights even though I just said our kids thrived, I worried about them in one way or another, but there was never any appeal for us to move to the suburbs and we were happy. We just liked our community.
- Berke : 00:30:00 The kids were comfortable there even though there were some issues?
- Elaine Driker: 00:30:03 Well, once they left the public school, there were no issues. I mean, kids growing up have issues, right? I think the proof is in the pudding, they turned out okay. We were lucky, but they turned out pretty good.
- Berke : 00:30:23 There you were in Detroit and the bulk of the Jewish community moved northwest by in large. Did you ever feel isolated from the Jewish community by making the decision to stay in Detroit?
- Elaine Driker: 00:30:37 I never felt isolated, not for a minute.
- Berke : 00:30:40 How did you deal with ... because I know the Jewish community is clearly important to you, I assume it was back then, how did you stay engaged when you and Gene moved?
- Elaine Driker: 00:30:51 Well, first of all, we belong to a temple that was in Oak Park, Temple Emanu-El. We were both active there, maybe me a little more than he was, serving on the board and various committees and heading up there in endowment campaign and on and on and on.

I was working at the time at Detroit Edison, the forerunner of DTE and I met Leon Cohan who was at the time the board chair of the Jewish community council. That's what it was called at

that time. He asked me if I would consider being on the board and I learned about the organization and I thought this is my kind of organization.

I was interested in human rights. I was interested in diversity. I was interested in how the Jewish community could be more involved and impactful in the greater Detroit community and so I said yes. That began kind of a 19 year love affair.

I exceeded all term limits at the council, worked closely with David Gad-Harf and other stellar people. That was a real connection to the Jewish community organizationally, then I of course became involved in Hillel of Metro Detroit after my arm hurt so badly from Miriam Starkman twisting it for so many years.

Berke : 00:32:52 [crosstalk 00:32:52]

Elaine Driker: 00:32:52 Right. Just little things that would come up now and then I was involved in setting up a photography exhibit, a black Jewish photography exhibit. I coached here at the behest of the late great David Page, the black Jewish initiative under the auspices of the council.

I was very involved. Was I involved in the Federation world? I was not. I did not feel any sense of any lack for not being there because I had found my pathways and I was happy to be on them.

Berke : 00:33:36 Let's start with the first thing first then we'll go to the second.

Elaine Driker: 00:33:39 Okay.

Berke : 00:33:40 Let's talk about the Jewish community council which I still call it that.

Elaine Driker: 00:33:43 Right.

Berke : 00:33:44 No matter what, I still call Pine Knob Pine Knob. What are the things that you're most proud of in your 19 years stay at the Jewish community council as you moved up the ranks? I'm sure you have some thoughts about that.

Elaine Driker: 00:34:02 Well, I liked what they were doing. I liked both David Gad-Harf and the board's efforts to become engaged with minority communities in the metropolitan area that spoke to me. Most of this during my tenure was trying to engage with the black

community, but there were efforts in the Arab American community as well.

I mentioned a few minutes ago the black Jewish initiative at David Page's urging, the Federation gave a grant to the council, save money, to set up a black Jewish initiative. The purpose of that was to try to engage the Jewish community in the city of Detroit and he asked me to co-chair it which ... and I agreed to do that with ... I had a few co-chairs, but Gary Torgow was one of them. I believe we started that together. We weren't successful interestingly enough even though we kept at it for quite a few years. The timing wasn't right. The concept wasn't right. It should have been a grassroots thing and it was a top down thing, but nonetheless, I'm very proud of the effort that was expanded and I was honored to be asked to lead that. That's another thing that I felt pretty good about.

I want to say back when you mentioned the upper echelons of the council and I was on the board for 19 years and I had various leadership roles. I was never able to assume the chairmanship of that board even though I was asked because I was working full-time and had a family at home and just couldn't handle that although it would have been kind of a dream job.

Berke : 00:36:33 Yeah. I'm going to come back to that eventually, but I do want to talk about you were working and at the age of 40, you decided to go back to school in urban planning, what was the reason that that was the road you decided to march down?

Elaine Driker: 00:36:51 I actually went back at 39. I turned 40 in graduate school, very important distinction. [crosstalk 00:36:58] Well, it's a long story which I'll try to shorten. When my kids went back, we're finally in school and I wanted to do something and I didn't want to go back to teaching.

I had read about an organization. I read in the paper about an organization called the Central Business District Association which was kind of like a PR group for downtown under the leadership of a very creative woman by the name of Diane Edgcomb.

I just called her one day and I introduced myself and I said, "Could I come and volunteer for your organization?" She said, "Well, you know you have to be really serious about this. You can't call in the morning and say someone invited you out to lunch and not come in. I have to be able to rely upon you." And I said, "You have my word." I started to volunteer there. I was

working on a few different things and eventually, it was fun. It was interesting. I was involved in some downtown neighborhood redevelopment attempts, one in Greektown, one in Capital Park. I was involved in stuff at the Eastern Market. I had a fair amount of responsibility and I realized that one, I really enjoyed what I was doing, I enjoyed my interaction with various city departments, particularly the planning department.

I knew that Diane was going to be at the head of this organization till she took her last breath and if I wanted to be involved in anything significant, urban wise, it wasn't going to happen with a degree in elementary education. I had to do something else.

Coincidentally, my brother had a degree in urban planning and Eugene's brother had a degree in urban planning so I spoke to them and said, "Okay, I can do this." Of course, I had the support of my family. The logical thing would have been to go to Wayne, but Wayne's a program, urban planning program then was not accredited and all the classes were at night so that didn't fit.

I took myself up to Ann Arbor and I convinced the dean that I needed three years to do a two year program because I had to incorporate my commute and he agreed. I did it. I just commuted to Ann Arbor for three years, two momentous things happened. One is I turned 40 and the other is M-14 opened. Those both happened during my tenure at University of Michigan.

- Berke : 00:40:09 Yeah. M-14 certainly made it easier.
- Elaine Driker: 00:40:12 It made it easier, but it wasn't as pretty as driving on Plymouth road in the fall.
- Berke : 00:40:18 That's good. What was the focus of your studies? Did it have anything to do with the work that you had done in the community with black Jewish issues, black Jewish relationships or ...
- Elaine Driker: 00:40:30 None.
- Berke : 00:40:31 It just started to go off in a completely [crosstalk 00:40:33]
- Elaine Driker: 00:40:33 No. It had nothing with that and it was just a general urban planning program. I saved all my studio classes till the last year because they took a lot of time. I took a couple of directed

studies because it meant I didn't have to go to Ann Arbor, but I guess what it did was focus my interest on neighborhood development, community development, economic development. I took a couple of classes in the business school as part of my program.

Berke : 00:41:09 Yeah. How long were you involved professionally in the urban planning?

Elaine Driker: 00:41:17 Well, I have ... No, I had a very non-traditional career.

Berke : 00:41:22 That's why I'm here.

Elaine Driker: 00:41:22 Yeah. My actual planning experience career wise probably lasted a year and a half where I was working in the Seven Mile Myers neighborhood for a woman who had a firm and I was trying to ... We were trying to set up a business association there and then I worked for her on another transportation related project.

Then someone had told me about Detroit Edison having a strong economic development component so I went there and interviewed, but they had no positions and we'll call you, your resume is in the drawer. One day, I got a phone call.

Who did I get it from? Oh, this guy who had interviewed me and he said ... I was so excited, he said, "No, no, I don't ... still don't have a position for you, but there is a position that just opened and I somehow think you might be interested in it." Well, it turned out that the position was to be an assistant to the chairman of the board of Detroit Edison.

It was like, "Oh my God. I'm just a little girl from Dexter. How is this going to happen?" But I interviewed and I actually ... Leon Cohan interviewed me, the chairman Walter McCarthy interviewed me and they offered me the job and it was I ... like I couldn't believe it. I started working as Max assistant and what I did along with a co-worker was staff all of his volunteer activities in the community and they were many from the parade company to the DSO to WTVS, you name it.

He seemed to be the chair of it. I learned, oh my goodness, so much about the community and so much about all the organizations and the corporations and the people who ran them. It was an amazing experience. Toward the end of it, [Joe Hudson 00:44:00] of Hudson's fame convinced the movers and

shakers at Detroit Renaissance which was an organization. It came before the current business leaders of Michigan.

It was an organization of the CEOs of mostly Detroit, but a little metro also major corporations. He convinced them to undertake a strategic, a public sector strategic planning project for the city of Detroit, to be staffed by loaned executives from a whole host of local corporations and to come up with recommendations for improvements in crime, education, economic development, image and race relations.

I heard about this and I thought, "Gee, I have a background in planning and I've done strategic planning, wouldn't this be interesting?" I threw my hat in the ring and lo and behold, Edison selected me to be a loaned executive to this project. In 1987, I was assigned to be the staff leader of the race relations taskforce.

That was number one, the most difficult year of my life professionally or personally and it was a life-altering experience. I can come back to that, but ...

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| Berke : | 00:46:00 | I think I don't want to leave that because I ... |
| Elaine Driker: | 00:46:02 | Okay. |
| Berke : | 00:46:03 | No, I'm interested in your assessment of the success of the beginning of that initiative, why was it difficult for you and why was it life-altering for you. I think those are things that we should stick with rather than leave them I think. |
| Elaine Driker: | 00:46:24 | Well, first of all, in hindsight I realized that you cannot ... No one can create a strategic plan for race relations. It doesn't work that way. It was difficult for me because I thought we could. It was frustrating and disappointing. |

We had a taskforce of maybe 20 people that I was responsible for over the course of this 11 months of trying to understand what we were doing and come up with recommendations. They as a group and individually were challenging. I learned so much. I thought I was a liberal person going into this and I learned that in so many ways, I wasn't yet or that I had a long way to go might be another way of putting it.

It was life-altering in terms of what I learned and what I faced and the people I worked with. I was responsible to two individuals who were the volunteer chairs of this taskforce. One

was Al Glancy who was then the Chairman of Michigan Consolidated Gas. The other was Arthur Johnson who at the time was either the head of the NAACP or had already moved on to Wayne State, but also a former neighbor of mine and friend and a very special and honorable person.

At the very first meeting of this group of 20, Al Glancy from Grosse Pointe born and bred stood before this group and he said, "My name is Alfred E. Glancy." I think the third. My father was killed in a robbery by a black man and it was like, "Wow." I can't tell you how that impacted everyone sitting around the table.

It was a very, very challenging experience. I don't think anything we recommended ever came to pass because it couldn't. Race relations are here to stay and each generation tries to improve from the generation before the steps are baby steps, it's an incremental process and it's not a blanket process. I've always believed and all of my life experiences have made me believe that things happen on an individual basis.

It's pretty hard. Obviously, various race-related things have been legislative, the civil rights act and things like that, but the true coming together of the races and in today's age, I have to put it beyond race of the ethnicities and the religions. It has to be on a personal level and grow from there.

Berke : 00:50:06 Let me ask you a question, this isn't even on. Detroit in certain ways has experienced a real renaissance that I never thought that I'd see in my lifetime which is very exciting. What's your assessment, Elaine, of how that renaissance is or is not impacting what you've just talked about about the enhancement of race relations?

Are we doing enough in your opinion to enhance race relations as part of the agenda of this downtown Detroit? Other places. I'm concerned...I shouldn't be editorializing, but I'm still concerned about the neighborhoods and ...

Elaine Driker: 00:50:51 Well, the neighborhoods are ...

Berke : 00:50:52 Renovation of the neighborhood as a key ... I'm really very interested in [crosstalk 00:50:57]

Elaine Driker: 00:50:57 The neighborhoods are coming along. They haven't had the same attention as downtown and midtown to this point, but when you say are we doing enough, I don't know what that means.

Berke : 00:51:09 I'm not sure I do either.

Elaine Driker: 00:51:12 Because the focus has been on economic development. It's been on Dan Gilbert owning 95% of the office buildings downtown, I just heard that statistic yesterday. It's been on Todd Sachse and Richard Broder who we saw at a downtown restaurant last night constructing probably 75% of all that's going up.

I told Todd he should run for office, he wouldn't have to have any posters because his name is everywhere on his construction signs. The neighborhoods are ... That's all going to happen in terms of housing stock and recreation. I don't know how to answer the question of are we doing enough?

I'm going to tell you a story that David [Kurzman 00:52:12] who is now the he'd of Jewish Community Relations Council told us a few weeks ago, we were meeting about something. He told us that on a Friday night in downtown Detroit in a loft behind the Fox Theater.

A group of young blacks and Jews came together for a Shabbat dinner and he said it was one of the most remarkable things he'd ever been at. But again, it's a grassroots kind of thing. It's young people who I think are not ... Young professionals who I think are not as burdened by the horrors of race-related things as perhaps I am or you are of course now we're burdened by the horrors of the whole immigration turmoil and disaster that's going on, but I'm hopeful that not even my kid's generation, my grandchildren's generation will make progress in this area. I don't sense that they see the same barriers that perhaps some of our cohorts did.

Berke : 00:53:39 You have optimism albeit. Maybe couched a little bit because we don't know quite where we're going. Is that fair?

Elaine Driker: 00:53:49 Optimism tampered with realism.

Berke : 00:53:52 It's better [crosstalk 00:53:54]

Elaine Driker: 00:53:53 Yeah.

Berke : 00:53:53 This is a natural segue into that other arm-twisting program that you got involved in. Besides Miriam's very positive arm-twisting, what was it about the Metro Detroit Hillel that attracted you to really want to become involved in it at very meaningful levels

wherever you placed your hat including right up to the presidency of the agency.

Elaine Driker:

00:54:27

Well, I have to continue my career path in order to answer that. Eventually, the strategic planning project was for a year. Then we spent two years, I joined what was called the implementation team trying to implement 50 or so recommendations that came out of these five taskforces.

One of those recommendations came out of the image taskforce and it was for ... It was a recommendation to create an institute that would teach new journalists. Not new, but newly arrived in the Detroit area journalist about the community to give them a context and a background within which to do their reporting because in those days, it was, "If it bleeds, it leads." It is today on some of the news outlets, but then it was really ... It was really profound.

This was an attempt to take these people who sometimes got off a plane at 10:00 in the morning and we're standing on a street corner with a microphone at noon talking about something and teach them about the community within which they were reporting.

This implementation project ended after two years and there I was and I thought, "You know, again, I could do this." They farmed this, all it was was an idea to Wayne State University. They needed somebody to do it. I went over, I talked to my old friend R. Johnson who was by then at the university and to David Adamany and a couple of other people.

They hired me and all I had was a desk, a computer and three words, Detroit Orientation Institute. Eventually, I created that program and I ran it for 12 years before I handed it off to the next director, but it was at that time that somehow I came ... Miriam spotted me on her radar screen and she talked to me about Hillel and would I get involved.

I just couldn't because I was too busy, but when I left the university and when would that have been? 2001. I think she asked me again and I said, "Okay." No, she didn't ask me again. What she asked me was she said that HMD, Hillel of Metro Detroit was undertaking a strategic planning initiative. Would I be interested? Would I serve on just a committee just for the strategic planning initiative? Again, this was my background, it was something I knew how to do, by then I had done it a couple of times with the Jewish community council and I said, "Okay."

We went through that process, we had a facilitator and there were people who were not on the Hillel board at the time. We got through all of that and then she called and she said, "You know? You were so good at coming up with all these ideas for improving the board. Do you think you might have some time to just help us with the board development initiative?"

I had by this time been on the board of the Detroit Institute of Arts for a few years and I was sharing their governance and nominating community. I did know a lot about boards and board governance. I thought, "Well, okay I can do that." I did it and one thing led to another. Finally, I was at a point where I was able to serve on the board. I said, "Yes." And my arm hurt.

- Berke : 00:59:01 Well, that's a good thing. What are some of the things that you're most proud of and I came on board a little bit after you and was the beneficiary of your wise council, still am.
- Elaine Driker: 00:59:15 Thank you.
- Berke : 00:59:16 But I'm curious, what are the things that you're most proud of as you led up to the presidency and the two years that you spent as president in Metro Detroit Hillel?
- Elaine Driker: 00:59:25 Well, one of the things I learned in urban planning school was how to be a problem solver, how to break something down into different elements and figure out what tactic or tactics would improve how these work individually and then how they work as a whole. I certainly did that with the whole board development and nominating process and board expectations and terms and term limits and by-laws.

I was pretty proud of that because back in those days, I think there were like 85 people on the Hillel board, this is before I joined it. From your community work, nothing happens when you have 85 people. I wasn't sure any of them really or most of them knew why they were on the board. I'm proud of that work that I did with Miriam to trim that board to make it a functioning operational effective board. That's one thing. Then of course the fundraising because by then, being both a student and disciple of my husband for I don't even know how many years. At that point, I knew a few things about fundraising and HMD was raising no money at all.

I think I helped the organization open its eyes to what was possible. I worked hard on the hidden jewel tour in the early years and I'm not sure we made a ton of money, but we made

some friends and board members and supporters eventually. That was a second thing, but the third most significant thing and I'm really proud of this is I think that I helped Miriam see what the possibilities for HMD were and that the possibilities were possible and that people would work for them under her leadership and under the board leadership that the organization could go really far.

That was a hard sell, but as I look at the organization today, I'm so proud of where it has come and I do have to say with some degree of modesty that I think some of those seeds were planted during my tenure.

- Berke : 01:02:17 Well, I don't have to say it with modesty. Absolutely, unequivocally. How are you feeling about where we are now and where we're going to?
- Elaine Driker: 01:02:29 With HMD? Oh I feel ...
- Berke : 01:02:31 We'll talk about the community.
- Elaine Driker: 01:02:31 Yeah, I feel great. I think we're in really good shape. I really do.
- Berke : 01:02:40 Yeah.
- Elaine Driker: 01:02:41 I think we're going far and I do want to mention, I don't know if you actually asked me this or if I just want to mention it, but the thing that really appealed to me about getting involved in HMD was that it married three of the things that meant a lot to me and continued to mean a lot to me. One is Wayne State and while I know we at HMD represents six universities, Wayne has always been the home physically and the starting point for HMD.
- My love of Wayne, my love of young people, my love of Judaism. Here they all came together in this organization and it was like I saw that thing last night you had me at Shalom, it was like you had me at HMD.
- Berke : 01:03:32 Perfect marriage.
- Elaine Driker: 01:03:33 Yeah right.
- Berke : 01:03:36 No, I couldn't agree with you more. I think that ... I just want to take another step back because I think another thing that Metro Detroit Hillel is involved in is the whole issue of community relations and building relationships between community ... The

disparate communities, the Muslim community, the African-American community. We were both together at the Israel at 70 yesterday.

There were a lot of faces there that weren't the traditional Jewish faces. That was exciting for me. I want to mention that you received the activist of the year award from the Jewish Community Council. That played into the things I would hope that were important to you in Metro Detroit Hillel.

Elaine Driker: 01:04:29 Of course.

Berke : 01:04:31 I also want you to comment, we use it as part of our byline. It's like a plug for Metro Detroit Hillel that 75% of the kids who graduate from our six schools end up staying in Detroit and will be making a contribution to the community's one being. Maybe say just a word about that from your perspective.

Elaine Driker: 01:04:55 I just want to broaden that a little bit because I am blown away by the return of young Jewish singles and families to Detroit and if those come through HMD, all the better. I think you know we live in Palmer Woods. We just celebrated 43 years living in our house in Palmer Woods.

All of a sudden in the last year or two, we are seeing people pushing baby buggies up and down our streets. I could probably name 10 of these young families who are Jewish who have moved into Detroit. Not just in Palmer Woods, but also in Sherwood Forest and in the golf club, university district which is south of seven miles. That's very hopeful to me. We met around the corner, our two young doctors and they have a baby who's I don't know, maybe a year and a half and a block away of somebody who works for Dan Gilbert and has a baby who is two months old. The head of city of Detroit is a young Jewish man and he's got two kids and lives I don't know, a few blocks away.

These are interesting signs that we're seeing. To me, the more the merrier, I have to comment at this point that ... We've lived 43 years, 10 years before that in Green Acres as the Jewish community was moving further north and west. I know a lot of people in our family thought we were crazy and I'm sure there were people in the community who did as well.

There were times when we thought we were crazy too, "Why are we doing this?" All of a sudden as Eugene loves to say, we're trendy. Probably I'd say in the last three or four years, we've had maybe a dozen young couples call us up. We're thinking

about living in the city, we already live in the city, we'd love to come and talk to you and hear your experience.

It's like this is pretty exciting and you mentioned the Israel and 70 celebration last night and I think it's important to note that the Federation finally has recognized that there needs to be involvement, organized involvement in the Jewish community.

I credit Scott for his leadership and of course, the various board shares who have participated in that leadership, but last night was very significant to me that that number of people were down on the river celebrating Israel's 70's anniversary, that was big.

Berke : 01:08:34 Yeah, I agree with you. I couldn't agree with you more. Who are some of the people, you've mentioned of course Jean and Arthur Johnson and some other. Who are some of the other people that have been mentors, inspirational in moving your life career forward if you want to acknowledge some of those people.

Elaine Driker: 01:09:00 Well, I'm going to first acknowledge my maternal grandmother who just gave me unconditional love. Whatever I did was good. That gives you a sense of confidence although my sense of confidence was buried pretty deep until I got in touch with it a number of years ago. She was pretty important.

Berke : 01:09:30 I think you mentioned her name before, but ...

Elaine Driker: 01:09:31 Dora Wax.

Berke : 01:09:32 Yeah. I just want to make sure that we go on record. We go on twice.

Elaine Driker: 01:09:36 Then I thought about this a little bit. I had a professor in graduate school by the name of Jerry Crane. In the middle of my second year between the first and the second semester, I quit the program and re-enrolled the same day because I didn't think I could finish it.

Jerry Crane said to me, "Your degree will be your union card to get you into anywhere that you want to be. That was a pretty good lesson. I'm glad I drove back to Ann Arbor for the second time in one day and re-enrolled. He's someone that I recall.

Walter McCarthy was certainly a mentor at Detroit Edison, Arthur Johnson goes without saying, "Was a mentor and a dear

friend." My children have taught me a lot. My grandchildren have taught me even more. Of course, my husband has been ... He's been a guiding light. He has been supportive of all of my efforts, some a little crazier than others, but he's been supportive, encouraging, looked after things for three years while I was doing my graduate school thing.

Of course, I looked after things for 40 years while he ... Maybe 50 practicing law, but no, he's been ... He's a pretty special person and has been a very, very important part of my life.

Berke : 01:11:33 Okay. I don't want this opportunity to go by. You mentioned your children, but there's a likelihood that they'll be watching this one. Let's mention them by name and ...

Elaine Driker: 01:11:45 Okay. Our daughter Elissa as I mentioned was born in Washington. She is a clinical social worker. She has her own private practice. Her husband is Jay [Zerwekh 01:12:03], he's a hospital consultant and Elissa has three children. Their father is [Perry Ohren 01:12:15] who is as you know the head of Jewish Family Service.

Their names are Charlie, Caleb and Rebecca. Charlie is about to go off to graduate school at SUNY in Stony Brook New York to study philosophy. Caleb will be a senior at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He just returned from three months in Cuba where he did his junior semester abroad.

Rebecca will start college in the fall at St. Olaf College, also in Minnesota. I think it's Northfield, Minnesota. Our son Stephen is a physician. His wife Jennifer is also a physician. They practice medicine together. They have two daughters Sophie who will be starting Tufts University in the fall which is where her father went to school and Emma who we call Emma Dee will be in the 10th grade at Berkeley High School. I know I'm bias, but they're wise and wonderful people. Very, very proud of all of them.

Berke : 01:13:45 It's a parent. Can I take a step back? You'd mentioned a number of people in the community at large. Any people in the Jewish community? I know you mentioned David Gad-Harf.

Elaine Driker: 01:13:56 Yes, I did.

Berke : 01:13:57 Are there others that you would like to acknowledge at this point?

Elaine Driker: 01:14:01 Well, I'm going to acknowledge Miriam. Miriam Starkman because I've learned a lot from Miriam. Of course, the beauty of our professional relationship is that we've also become friends. But yeah, I've learned a lot from Miriam and she has even to my sometimes great frustration she puts a couple of pins in my balloons when my right brain goes off on some crazy tangents and makes me realize, "No, we really have to look at it that way."

Yes, David Gad-Harf, Miriam, Kathy [Straus 01:14:47] has always been a role model for me and [Jeannie Weiner 01:14:51]. I don't want to miss those two wonderful women. I met Kathy when we were both a lot younger than we are now and she was very active in the league of women voters in Detroit.

Kathy is also a life-long Detroit resident and she got me interested in the whole political process. Genie I met through the council and she is truly my role model. She is an amazing leader and I've learned a lot from her.

Berke : 01:15:28 What's your assessment Elaine about our future in the community?

Elaine Driker: 01:15:32 What do you mean by our? Who are you talking about?

Berke : 01:15:34 Our Jewish community, our future and as we move forward, are you encouraged by what's ahead for us even after you and I go longer on this planet?

Elaine Driker: 01:15:50 Planet? Oh, that's a hard question to answer. I'm concerned by the rate of inter marriage. I'm concerned by the dwindling numbers of affiliated Jews. I'm encouraged by organizations like the Well who are meeting people where they are Jews, where they are.

I'm encouraged by our new Rabbi at Temple Emanu- El who happens to be my son-in-law's son. His name is Matthew Zerwekh and he has written to the congregation saying, "I will meet our members where they are and our perspective members where they are." But the numbers worry me.

The philanthropic future of our local Jewish community I think there's some reason for concern if we don't replace the Bill Bermans of our community who have been so philanthropic. Do we have a next generation coming through? Are we cultivating that next generation to that extent? I see signs that we are, but I think it's a challenge.

Berke : 01:17:34 I concur. You couldn't have said it better. Anything else you'd like to share as we conclude these few very precious moments together?

Elaine Driker: 01:17:45 No. I think I've pretty much said it all. I'm delighted to have been able to do this. I'm very honored to have been asked.

Berke : 01:17:57 We're very pleased that you're determined that this is something that you wanted to do.

Elaine Driker: 01:17:57 Certainly.

Berke : 01:18:03 On behalf of the archives committee and the Federation, I thank you for your time and energy.

Elaine Driker: 01:18:09 You're very welcome.