

1 **ORAL HISTORY OF:** Dr. Conrad Giles
2 **INTERVIEWED BY:** Susie Citrin
3 **DATE OF INTERVIEW:** Tuesday, May 24, 2005
4 **LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Jewish Federation of Metropolitan
5 Detroit
6 **SUBJECT MATTER:** Leadership in the Jewish
7 community, local and national
8 education, family

9 - - -

10 **MS. CITRIN:** Today is May 24, 2005. I am Susie
11 Citrin, and I'm conducting an oral history interview with
12 Conrad Giles at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

13 Conrad, do we have your permission to use your words
14 and thoughts in the future for educational and historical
15 research and documentation?

16 **DR. GILES:** Of course.

17 **MS. CITRIN:** Before we begin with all the wonderful
18 credos that you've had over the last great number of years, I
19 want you to tell us a little bit about your early life. I
20 know you were born in New York, so do you want to tell us
21 about your family life there, and especially your mother.

22 **DR. GILES:** Well, actually, we briefly spoke before
23 regarding my mother, but as I reflect backwards, which as one
24 gets to be three score and ten and then some, you do
25 increasingly, I recognize, as we recognize in others, that

1 we're a product of our past. I was brought up in a household
2 that had a lot of the symbols of Jewish communal service
3 presented to me at a very early age. I didn't recognize any
4 of that at the time, obviously.

5 My earliest memories of anything Jewish took place
6 around my father's activity as a very young, 37-year-old
7 president of significant synagogue in Long Island, in
8 Rockville Center, where we moved when I was 4. That was the
9 earliest contact.

10 My father was born in this country of English
11 parents, so there was never any Eastern European flavor
12 brought to the household by my dad. My mother on the other
13 hand, who was never religious, nor was my father, came from a
14 more secular, but from Poland and from Romania, and her
15 father's first cousin was Shola Molecha. So I had this great
16 mixture of British "aristocratic" Jewish background, where I'm
17 traced back to Benjamin Disraeli, which is something you
18 couldn't have found in those notes previously.

19 **MS. CITRIN:** No.

20 **DR. GILES:** And on the other side, a side that I was
21 totally detached from, I remember going down to the Lower East
22 Side to be with my great grandparents growing up, and I
23 couldn't stand being on Houston Street at the time. I
24 couldn't stand the smells. The people weren't my people. I
25 was already willing to assimilate into this world which was

1 all around me, and I could have made choices.

2 I was bar mitzvahed. My father was incredibly
3 active in the Conservative movement, one of the four founding
4 members of the United Synagogue Youth Movement. So that was
5 something that my parents, clearly upper middle class. My
6 father was an attorney who made a nice living, not a great
7 living. My mother was a teacher who got a master's degree and
8 went through the various stages in the New York City system,
9 eventually becoming a principal in her last years after
10 serving as a teacher for 50 years in the New York City system.
11 So I had these wonderful professional people surrounding me.

12 Adding to this was this wonderful sense that there
13 was a community beyond our own family. Indeed, when I think
14 about it, I think that in many ways their activity in the
15 community substituted for what was a very small, and like so
16 many, potentially dysfunctional family of my aunts and uncles.
17 Many stories could be told. We are from New York, and that's
18 where Damon Runyan stories came from. I have some Damon
19 Runyanesque stories which aren't pertinent, but I was brought
20 up with a sense that there was a community out there beyond
21 the family, that there were things that could be done in the
22 Jewish community.

23 I went off to school when I was 16 to the University
24 of Michigan. I rapidly went through University of Michigan
25 undergraduate, medical school. I graduated when I was not

1 quite 23 from medical school. So I didn't have much of a
2 childhood in terms of being a teenager. I went to the Bronx
3 High School of Science, which was highly intensive and had no
4 social structure. I came on campus with one goal, and that
5 was to go to medical school.

6 All through those years I had incredibly peripheral
7 attachment to anything Jewish. It was as if I could only have
8 one agenda, and my agenda was clear, and I got there, and I
9 got there very rapidly. As I look back, I think it would have
10 been just as nice to take a slightly slower voyage.

11 **MS. CITRIN:** So you always knew that you wanted to
12 be a doctor?

13 **DR. GILES:** Since about the age of 8 I never had any
14 question about what I wanted to be. I had one cousin of my
15 mother's who was a physician, but most of my contact with
16 physicians were. Interestingly enough, at a time before we
17 had antibiotics that would be helpful, I had impetigo each
18 summer. It's a strep infection, which I went to doctors a
19 lot. So it was probably the family doctor experience that
20 triggered that, because I was 7, 8 when that happened. But I
21 never struggled with what I was going to do in life. I was
22 always going to be a physician, and I was fortunate enough to
23 be able to be given the appropriate genetic components from my
24 attorney father and teacher mother to be able to achieve that.
25 From that viewpoint, I certainly have had a very satisfying

1 life.

2 My background had enough material to at least plant
3 the seeds for doing something more than what for many is
4 enough of a contribution to society, being a physician. I saw
5 that there were other things that one could be doing and still
6 being successful within their own fields of primary employment
7 endeavor.

8 **MS. CITRIN:** In reviewing some of the material, I
9 was fascinated just even your name, Conrad Leslie, because
10 it's not a typical Irving or Harold.

11 **DR. GILES:** Well, it's easy. I was named for a
12 Charles. And to say Charles Giles, you get yourself into a
13 terrible tongue-tied situation. So the closest thing that you
14 come with a C was Conrad. As I've said so many times, it's a
15 wonderful name for a physician, but if I had decided to become
16 a longshoreman, I don't think it would have made it. So it's
17 a great professional name.

18 **MS. CITRIN:** I know that you graduated from U of M
19 Medical School, and then you went away for a while and came
20 back to Detroit. Do you want to talk about that?

21 **DR. GILES:** Well, after my residency in Ann Arbor --
22 I often say I'm a slow learner -- it took me 11 years to get
23 the skills of my trade as an ophthalmologist. I then spent
24 two years at the National Institutes of Health in research,
25 and it was an incredibly fulfilling number of years in terms

1 of research publications and stuff like that. It also exposed
2 me because I had chances to go to a couple universities and do
3 some lecturing when I was just out of my residency basically
4 because I had a special area of interest, and it convinced me
5 that I did not want to come to a university and be resident
6 full time in an institution. At that time there were a couple
7 places I looked at briefly, the University of Michigan, the
8 University of Miami, and I could have gone into full-time
9 academic medicine without ever hanging out my shingle so to
10 speak, but I saw enough of the politics of academic medicine
11 to say that I'd rather be a solo practitioner someplace in a
12 suburban area and have a teaching affiliation, which I had
13 from the day I opened my office, but I didn't want to go
14 academically full time. So the two years at NIH were
15 important.

16 From that viewpoint I did some interesting work, but
17 so far as I know, I have yet to be named for the Nobel Prize
18 in Medicine, although usually they award that several years
19 after the actual work. So every time the Nobel committee
20 meets, I ask myself is there a possibility that this is the
21 year? It hasn't happened yet, however.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes, but the interesting thing I found
23 about your entire resume was that there is a focus on
24 children, that you chose to help children with eye problems,
25 that you've worked at the Detroit Institute of Children, and

1 down at Children's Hospital.

2 **DR. GILES:** I started out in medicine as a general
3 ophthalmologist, what today is called a comprehensive
4 ophthalmologist. At that time there were only two pediatric
5 ophthalmologists in this country. There was no sub-specialty.
6 And ten years into my practice from '63 to '73, half of my
7 practice was children, half as adult. I looked at the field
8 and recognized that there was a burgeoning sub-specialty
9 within the field, this pediatric ophthalmology. So in 1973 I
10 stopped seeing adults on a routine basis -- I maintained
11 seeing a number of adults who were friends -- and declared
12 myself a pediatric ophthalmologist. I was the last person
13 grandfathered into the American Association of Pediatric
14 Ophthalmology. Thereafter you required a year fellowship.
15 Years later I actually headed a fellowship at Children's
16 Hospital. So I did not have the usual credentials, and it was
17 something I migrated to.

18 I originally wanted to be a pediatrician and I had a
19 chance encounter with the Department of Ophthalmology chair at
20 Wayne State, Albert Rudman, Sr., who called me a damn fool
21 when he heard that I was going to become ophthalmologist, and
22 he referred me to an article which indicated that
23 ophthalmologists had the greatest sense of satisfaction after
24 the age of 40, and the pediatricians had the least sense of
25 satisfaction. I was 21 and I was making this decision. So I

1 took his advice, this particular article, and decided to
2 become an ophthalmologist. And again, it has been an
3 incredibly professionally fulfilling career.

4 One thing that it enabled me to do that I'm not sure
5 I could have done in perhaps any other specialty, and that is,
6 much like dermatology, although it isn't dermatology, you can
7 circumscribe your hours. Therefore, it permitted you to have
8 a schedule that allowed you a relative comfort that you're not
9 going to get a call that's going to take you away from, heaven
10 forbid, a committee meeting. So as a result it really was an
11 enabler in terms of permitting me to do things in the communal
12 world that had I been a cardiac surgeon or a neurosurgeon or
13 an orthopedic surgeon I couldn't have done. So there was an
14 interesting adjunct to the fact that I'm an ophthalmologist.

15 **MS. CITRIN:** I've reviewed your file, so I know a
16 little bit about when you first got started, but when did you
17 wake up one morning and say, you know, it's time for me to do
18 some community work and volunteer? Did you have an awakening
19 or was it just something that you did?

20 **DR. GILES:** Clearly there was a design, but the
21 design was rather sketchy. It goes this way. I'm a New
22 Yorker by birth. I come to a community that I only knew
23 because I went to a school nearby, married a Detroit woman,
24 and I knew that I wanted to be part of the community. That
25 just to be a practitioner was for me not all that I wanted.

1 I guess the interesting facet of that is the precise
2 trigger is very familiar to me. I went to a bar mitzvah at
3 Temple Beth El where we belonged at the time, and the rabbi
4 said something about the parents of the bar mitzvah. And I
5 said, I want the rabbi to be able to say something about my
6 son Keith's father. I said, I've got to be more than just a
7 physician. I want to do something that somehow makes him
8 proud that his father is part of this community, that I'm not
9 just here, passing time, and taking and not giving.

10 So the opportunity, there was a young leadership
11 group what was formed in 1967 and had four co-chairs, three of
12 them extraordinarily wonderful: David Hermelin, Joel Tauber,
13 and David Page, and it was a start of activity that obviously
14 I didn't know where it was going to go. Actually my first
15 committee was one that was chaired by David Page, examining
16 the Hillel Foundation in Ann Arbor.

17 Because other family members were active in
18 Federation, I requested that I have some activity, and that's
19 where they put me, and that was a wonderful experience because
20 I had a chance to get to know and admire and later love Bill
21 Haber of ORT fame, Social Security note, and of course dean of
22 students and professor of economics at the University of
23 Michigan, all of which he did in a way that if all of us would
24 do as a single career would be incredibly significant, he had
25 all of these things and he did them so well that the nicest

1 thing we can say about him in addition to all of that is that
2 he was a Jew. That's always been a very important sense that
3 I had. That was my first wonderful exposure to the Federation
4 process.

5 **MS. CITRIN:** Going back to Ann Arbor again and
6 helping with U of M Hillel is really quite an important thing
7 in your career.

8 **DR. GILES:** Well, it was a nice moment. I was a
9 member, as so many people. That's where the real strength of
10 this community lies. It's easy to be president and be
11 satisfied. This community permits people who aren't
12 presidents, who do work in committees, and who do have a sense
13 of accomplishment because things do happen as a result of
14 those processes. That's what makes this community great.

15 I felt that I was making a contribution as one of
16 four members of the committee that met in Ann Arbor three or
17 four times for three or four afternoons. And I think that
18 came as well from leadership, to make you feel that way, and
19 credit David Page with that, who of course is a great
20 community leader and one who we can be proud to call our own
21 certainly.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** I notice also that you went from the
23 Hillel, and the first recollections in the folder are of you
24 working in Campaign, which a lot of volunteers don't like to
25 do. I mean you sort of jumped right in.

1 **DR. GILES:** Actually I was at the JFS dedication.
2 My first board was the Jewish Family Services. I lived next
3 door to Joe Gadon, who was then president, and I served on a
4 committee here which I was not terribly delighted with, and I
5 said Joe, I'd like to try that if it's available. He of
6 course welcomed me. Joe is another one, a wonderful,
7 wonderful man, a giving man, and a good leader.

8 So my first activity, and it was coincident with
9 that because you're right. And part of that was triggered by
10 committee as well, outside of Federation. In order to join a
11 country club in those days you had to be seen as a legitimate
12 contributor to Federation, to something, but the Allied Jewish
13 Campaign was what we were supposed to be giving to.

14 I remember getting the call from Ben Gutow, an
15 allergist. I'd given \$200 the year before, which for me I
16 thought a commitment, and I knew that I had to give more in
17 order to become a member of Franklin Hills. He said, Well,
18 we'd like to have you give the same as you gave last year
19 unless you can add something to it. I said, Ben, I'm going
20 from \$200 to \$800. There was silence at the other end of the
21 phone. Nobody had ever quadrupled a gift without being asked.
22 Obviously it was triggered not because of any sense of
23 commitment. It was triggered because I wanted to play golf,
24 it was because I wanted to be part of a different society.

25 Thereafter the exposure that was permitted because

1 of the young leadership group that I talked about, my golfing
2 foursome -- Joel Tauber, Larry Sherman, and Jimmy August
3 beginning in 1967. We never got past the second hole without
4 talking about community. To this day where my golfing
5 companion is most frequently Larry Jackier, we cannot play a
6 round of golf without getting distracted in the best sense of
7 the word with things about community, whether it's our
8 community or Israel. You know, it's simple to even suggest
9 that a country club atmosphere somehow influences you to the
10 point where you become more deeply involved in something
11 Jewish.

12 We don't have hanakeas on every tee. Our club by
13 its nature was known as the German Jewish Reform Club. But it
14 did represent a lot of leadership to the Federation, but
15 Jewishness and country clubs were not something that were
16 intertwined, but there were people within those clubs for whom
17 the same set of standards and ideals meshed very well with
18 things that build the Jewish community. So from that
19 viewpoint that's that action.

20 **MS. CITRIN:** But it's not only that you became
21 involved in the community. When I looked at your work
22 throughout the ages here, there's a work with non-
23 institutionalized elderly, there's work on a demographic
24 study. I mean there's really ground-breaking kinds of things.
25 Obviously the most important one, perhaps, to you, maybe not,

1 is the one where the UJA and the Council of the Jewish
2 Federations meld together. So if you have to think about one
3 thing personally that you've initiated, because the
4 initiations are vast.

5 **DR. GILES:** Let me tell you something that I think
6 is important, and anybody who doesn't recognize this has not
7 given it as much thought as they might because they all have
8 the intelligence, I believe, to articulate this, and perhaps
9 some have. Hopefully some have. There is so much groundwork
10 in everything that every president of this Federation -- we'll
11 take that as the title from which we can leap and talk about
12 this as philosophy -- that has come before you, that you
13 basically when we talk about it colloquially, standing on the
14 shoulders of giants, it's true institutionally. The
15 leadership that came before me, the leadership that came after
16 me, all should be very slow to take credit for any single
17 action that took place in their three years, or extended to
18 the point of their executive committee involvement. I'm
19 moving backwards to when there were vice presidents for five
20 to six years. Each of us who comes to the chair has such a
21 wealth of activity that has preceded him or her in that
22 position -- and thank goodness there is a her -- that for
23 anybody to say I did X and take full credit for that is not
24 really as reasoned as they should be.

25 Yes, all the things that you've said. And I've

1 given some thought because of a prior conversation that you
2 had with my wife Linda to what was the single most significant
3 thing, and I think that in reality, and this is something that
4 I want taped. It does not have to be distributed to my
5 family. Probably the best thing I've done is have my wife
6 involved in this Federation. Of all the things I can think
7 of. Because nobody else did that. Except I can't even take
8 full credit for that.

9 Once you're exposed -- and incidentally, the first
10 committee appointment that she was received was not by me but
11 by my dear friend and predecessor president Joel Tauber. He
12 gave her her first job, and the rest is really history. She
13 asked me, what I did think was her most significant
14 contribution was. I won't go into that because she'll have
15 that opportunity to do that herself. But I really believe
16 that because I can take much of the credit but the institution
17 takes the rest of it. You can have a first job, and many jobs
18 you may do well but you don't like where you're doing it. Or
19 you may do badly and not get another one.

20 In this institution if you do a good job, you're
21 rewarded, one, because you've done a good job and people will
22 tell you that, and two, because there are other jobs. We have
23 an enormous depth of commitment and committed leadership, but
24 there are a few people who have skills that go well beyond
25 others.

1 If you want to set family aside for a moment,
2 probably -- and I'm not sure it was such a great
3 accomplishment -- the merger of the Council of Jewish
4 Federations and the United Jewish Appeal at the national
5 level, the accomplishment there was that I survived the
6 process, which was extremely difficult, and unfortunately
7 difficult. It didn't have to be that difficult. There are a
8 number of factors that came into place.

9 As we sit here in 2005 and look at that institution,
10 we look at it with two faces. One is a face of some
11 disappointment that it hasn't achieved all that we had
12 expected it to, and two, which is the face I want to put on
13 it, the fact that there has been enormous progress since its
14 inception, and keeping in mind that the merger of the two
15 organizations in New York, when they had the same kind of a
16 Council/UJA setup in that institution, took 11 years in their
17 view before they finally functioned in a fashion that made
18 them proud.

19 I believe we will make that decade and that we will
20 function, that we will achieve what we set out to achieve, an
21 efficient organization which combines both the Council and the
22 UJA at the national level.

23 **MS. CITRIN:** It was a very contentious time and you
24 were at the helm, so it must have been hard, and yet you got
25 there.

1 **DR. GILES:** It was a contentious time. I could only
2 reflect on how much easier it would have been because in the
3 normal sequence of events, if my dear friend David Hermelin
4 had not been ambassador to Norway at the time, the timing
5 would have been that he would have been the president of UJA
6 at that time, and the partners who would have been putting the
7 merger together heading the organizations would have been
8 David and myself. It would have been a vastly different
9 experience. I'm not sure that the two systems would have come
10 together any more easily, though I think they would have. But
11 there are many reasons we mourn the loss of leadership, and
12 David in particular. That was one additional one. You don't
13 need another one, but that was on in a personal sense that I
14 had.

15 Again, putting those organizations together, these
16 were two organizations that had existed, one, the UJA since
17 the '40s, and CJF had been in existence for close to 75 years.

18 **MS. CITRIN:** When I think about you and your
19 leadership, I think of the Giles report, which really changed
20 the face of Jewish education in this community. Your
21 demographic study also, you were involved in 1990 in, and here
22 Linda, your wife, is chairing it in 2005. So it's very
23 interesting. Any comments about either of those?

24 **DR. GILES:** Two things. Number one, the Jewish
25 Education Report, and I was always disturbed but my mother

1 would have been proud to have it called the Jewish Education
2 Report because again, it wasn't my report. That I headed a
3 committee that finally produced the report was fine. I won't
4 say that there wasn't leadership involved. But the leadership
5 comes from so many different areas.

6 The professional, Harlene Appelman, who was
7 incredibly important, and that would never have happened
8 without Harlene. The contribution of every member of that
9 committee somehow, unfortunately, is denigrated when you put
10 somebody's name on the report.

11 However, the report indeed did change the face of
12 education here, but the face is ever-changing. The single
13 most important demographic study that is changing the face of
14 Jewish education was the Jewish population survey from CJF in
15 1990, which pointed out we had this enormous inter-marriage
16 rate, and the only thing we had any handle that might change
17 that would be Jewish education. So that as a result
18 communities have looked at their priorities, and that report
19 was just another example of looking at that priority, coming
20 up with a different format which not only changed it, but
21 changed even further during the term of office because in time
22 Linda became the first chair of the Alliance for Jewish
23 Education, co-chair along with Bob Naftaly. So that was an
24 evolution.

25 Incidentally, she served on the first education

1 committee that Joel Tauber had chaired during my presidency,
2 and following that report, which was tabled, we then
3 reformulated the committee and I was appointed to handle that
4 in those years.

5 The demographic study is a very interesting process.
6 I recall sitting in meetings in which people in the audience
7 said, well, we know who we are. We used to be 75,000 people,
8 now we're 60,000 people because everybody's leaving town.
9 Well, then as now we have a responsibility to our constituency
10 to use as little anecdote and as much science as possible in
11 determining community priorities, in determining the
12 allocation of funds, and determining the manner in which we
13 raise funds, and understanding the mind-set of those from whom
14 we are raising funds.

15 We spent a lot of time talking to one another.
16 There has never been a room in this particular Federation that
17 has been filled with people other than those who were
18 committed to the things that the Jewish Federation is
19 committed to. And one line is proving that we really feel
20 that we're responsible for one another, first of all, and
21 second of all, committed to improving the quality of the life
22 of every Jew.

23 So if we talk to ourselves, we're going to get a
24 very, very poor slice of what's out there, and that's why it
25 was important in 1989, it's going to be important in 2005 that

1 we do the study. And am I proud that Linda is co-chairing
2 this? Of course I am. Am I delighted that I had nothing to
3 do with the appointment? I sure am, because obviously there
4 are far more objective people out there in assessing her
5 talents than I who have to make those decisions. I think it's
6 important stuff though.

7 **MS. CITRIN:** Oh, absolutely. Talking about Linda
8 and your family, I noticed six children and I counted eight
9 grandchildren. We always ask people, if they'd like to, to
10 comment on their families.

11 **DR. GILES:** Well, actually it's now ten and an
12 unannounced eleventh on the way.

13 **MS. CITRIN:** Oh, my goodness.

14 **DR. GILES:** Well, when you blend families, as my
15 wife has done, you still count, and you count both sides, and
16 I've been blessed with six children, four of whom have my
17 genetic component, and two of whom have Linda's, and they're
18 all my children and they're all her children; they're our
19 children. We're proud of them.

20 It was really an interesting phone call I received
21 Jared, whom I know you know.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** Absolutely.

23 **DR. GILES:** It was on Thursday night. He said,
24 Conrad -- this is my stepson -- do you happen to know the
25 phone number of the Federation here in Chicago? I said, no, I

1 don't know that phone number, and this was after six o'clock.
2 I said, I'm sure that somebody in Chicago must and I'm sure
3 they have a web site. I would go to juf.org and see if you
4 can't find it. And I said why? He said, well, I'm due to go
5 to a dinner there, and as we were talking he was typing on the
6 computer, and he said, oh, it's at 5:30 and it's now a quarter
7 of six for the JUF Real Estate fund-raising.

8 To me it is one thing to spend a life involved in
9 the community, and in the case of everybody you're
10 interviewing, everybody's received back so much as a result of
11 what they have done, the community has rewarded each of us.
12 Locally, nationally, whatever. But the real mark -- they
13 always say the mark of a great Jewish parent is that he has
14 Jewish grandchildren. Well, I'll go the next step, and that
15 is I not only want Jewish grandchildren, but I want Jewish
16 children and grandchildren who are involved in Jewish
17 community. I will feel somehow that if the activity within
18 our blended family stops with the activity of Linda and
19 myself, that we will be at least in part unfulfilled.

20 Diseases skip generations. The Jewish people cannot
21 afford to skip a generation, and if it's going to skip a
22 generation, I sure as heck don't want to be partly responsible
23 for it.

24 **MS. CITRIN:** That's amazing. That's really amazing.
25 We haven't talked at all about Israel, and you've

1 been involved in missions and travelling there. I don't know
2 where to begin. Is there something in particular you'd like
3 to talk about?

4 **DR. GILES:** You know something? This goes back to
5 something that we didn't talk about, and very quickly. While
6 involvement in this community occurred into the '70s, the
7 moment that changed my life in terms of making certain that
8 the rest of my life is going to be spent deeply involved was
9 32 years ago when, on my first mission to Israel, I stopped at
10 Mauthausen outside of Vienna. In those days the immigration
11 route brought the Russians who were immigrating through
12 Austria to the Shaunau castle. I remember being there.

13 But we stepped into Mauthausen. We were taken by a
14 guide -- I have some very female traits about me; tearing up
15 is one of them.

16 **MS. CITRIN:** I am, too, because I've been there, so
17 I know exactly what you mean.

18 **DR. GILES:** We went into the gas chambers, and we
19 walked out of the gas chambers. Well, I walked out. The
20 thousands of people who didn't walk out. I lost nobody I know
21 of in the Holocaust. Zero. As I indicated, my paternal side
22 came from England and Spain. My maternal side came from
23 Poland and Romania, but they all got out. My grandfather shot
24 off his toe so he get out of the Russian army at the time. I
25 didn't lose anybody. So it was not a personal loss. But of

1 course that's not a proper characterization because every Jew,
2 every Jew who died is a personal loss. That changed
3 everything.

4 That was my first mission to Israel. I've been to
5 Israel perhaps 40 times subsequently. The majority of that
6 was not on missions but on activities with the Jewish Agency
7 for Israel, which I served on its board of governors for six
8 years and its executive committee for three. Those are fond
9 moments of input in an agency which is, as you know, is the
10 recipient of two-thirds of the monies from our overseas
11 campaigns, the other third going to the Joint. I've served on
12 the executive committee of the Joint sort of peripherally when
13 I was president of CJF. But these are two incredible
14 organizations which have great talent attached to the
15 leadership and serving with those people for that period of
16 time was exciting.

17 You cannot help but feel this way about Israel and
18 be as deeply invested as I think most of our leadership is.
19 It is central. It is where our soul is. You don't have to
20 make aliyah in order to feel that you are part of that country
21 and the country is part of us.

22 In 1948 I was president of our junior congregation
23 in New York, and my mother recently showed me the editorial I
24 wrote. At that time I was 15 years old. I said I shared my
25 love and feeling for Israel, but I knew I would never go to

1 Israel and live there, and that was because at that time I
2 wanted to be in this country. Even then there was this
3 dichotomy of feeling. One, the willingness, the desire to be
4 part of Israel, but recognizing that my role as an individual,
5 even back 55 years ago, if I was going to do anything, it was
6 going to be in this country.

7 So my 40 trips to Israel have been incredible, as
8 you mentioned, some on missions.

9 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes. The Michigan Miracle Mission.

10 **DR. GILES:** Right, we co-chaired the Michigan
11 Miracle Mission, although all of us will remember with
12 greatest fondness the leadership of David Hermelin, who makes
13 every room he is in, ever venue he has been in one that each
14 of us would want to be with in.

15 **MS. CITRIN:** Absolutely. Well, looking towards the
16 future, if you had a crystal ball and you could envision what
17 this Jewish community might look like, any ideas? Any
18 thoughts?

19 **DR. GILES:** Well, one, when looking at the Jewish
20 community, has got to have some perspective with respect to
21 the overall community. Let me direct it to what I think the
22 Jewish community is going to look like, understanding that I
23 believe that the economics of our area are probably going to
24 mitigate against any large expansion of the Jewish community,
25 because at this point in time it's hard to see an economic

1 renaissance around the corner of the general community.

2 As long as we have institutions of the type, with
3 the leadership of the individuals who we now have in place,
4 and if you look forward to the leadership coming forward, this
5 will remain as great a Jewish community as exists in all of
6 the Diaspora. We are understandably the envy of virtually
7 every community in North America who knows us at all. We have
8 had the best of leadership, and even in those years and in the
9 years that will follow in which we may not have, in the view
10 of some, the best of leadership. The institution is so strong
11 and there is such a firm foundation upon which many layers
12 have been built that the institution is going to continue to
13 drive this community, and it's going to remain central to what
14 I would submit is going to continue to be a vibrant Jewish
15 community.

16 I think that we have challenges ahead of us. I
17 think that we are going to have to change some priorities.
18 But this is going to have to be an evolution. This community
19 has prospered because it's recognized that within it there are
20 many different constituencies. There are people who relate to
21 the social service aspect of what we do and feel that we are
22 not placing enough emphasis there. There are others who feel
23 that we are short changing education and not doing enough for
24 the youngsters in schools.

25 The fact is that while our needs are finite and our

1 sources for those needs are practically infinite, we don't
2 meet them, and therefore, by the very nature, our community,
3 when it's viewed from those who are living within it, there's
4 always going to be an element of discontent. That doesn't
5 mean that institutions that feel ^{they} are not getting everything
6 they should are not vibrant, exciting, productive and quality.
7 It does, and hopefully will continue, to mean that those who
8 are responsible for leading those institutions and those who
9 are responsible for raising funds to sustain those
10 institutions are prodded to do more.

11 Because what I said the beginning of this little
12 diatribe about the institutions is that the minute we say the
13 needs are so enormous that they're infinite, we let ourselves
14 off the hook. They're not infinite; they're finite. We know
15 how much we can use in every single institution, and we know
16 that we're not meeting them, and we know that the resources
17 are there. It's the job of leadership to husband those
18 resources, the job of leadership to make sure that we use them
19 efficiently. Never be content with what we have and recognize
20 that while we have this enormous ability to have this great
21 community, it can still be greater, and even more than that,
22 by generating increased funding, we can do more for the less
23 fortunate communities and the less fortunate people who are
24 outside of the boundaries of North America who also require
25 our continuing care and support.

1 **MS. CITRIN:** Before we come to a conclusion, I would
2 like to talk about your mother. Is there something you'd like
3 to say about her?

4 **DR. GILES:** I mentioned my father, and really at
5 that point I just mentioned that she was teacher, didn't I?
6 Well, she's 95 years old and will be up here from Hollywood,
7 Florida, to celebrate my birthday on Bastille Day, which she
8 does every year. When you say that about a 95-year-old woman,
9 you've said a lot because it means she's clearly mobile.
10 She's traveling by herself, she lives by herself.

11 What's even more remarkable about my mother is that
12 the quality of her life is not only wonderful, but the quality
13 of her life has permitted her to do the kinds of things that I
14 hope my children someday are able to do.

15 As I mentioned to you earlier, she was volunteer of
16 the month in her Broward County Federation about a year ago.
17 She is the immediate past president of the Women's American
18 ORT group in Hollywood, and has had that job on three
19 different cycles.

20 But more remarkably is that she does something which
21 every campaigner in the world would be proud to say they do
22 and few do. She does all of her solicitations face to face.
23 She's responsible in her building in Hollywood for 125
24 solicitations, and she refuses to pick up the phone to make
25 that solicitation. She does it face to face.

1 She is bright, she's committed, she's organized.
2 She has this enormous feeling which she has managed to
3 transmit to her children, and I have a responsibility to those
4 genes to keep myself as healthy as possible. I probably won't
5 have the red hair that she has today.

6 **MS. CITRIN:** Oh, my goodness.

7 **DR. GILES:** I can only hope that I have the kind of
8 spirit, energy and continued commitment that she has.

9 **MS. CITRIN:** I just want to ask you one last
10 question. Any dark secret that we don't know about that you'd
11 like to tell us -- anything else that you'd like to talk
12 about? You mentioned ORT just a little bit ago, and I know
13 you've been involved in that.

14 **DR. GILES:** My involvement with ORT is not with the
15 World ORT Union. I'm involved with UJC in the Israel Advocacy
16 Initiative.

17 I had mentioned the person who is most important in
18 my life earlier, my wife. I can't sit in this room and think
19 about community without thinking about David. And the deep
20 dark secret I have is David was younger than myself by a
21 couple of years. I mentioned the quality that was so
22 important in wanting to be in the room with him. I guess the
23 secret I have -- it's not such a secret; my wife knows this --
24 I don't think Doreen does -- a day doesn't go by in which I
25 don't think about him. I think about him largely because,

1 one, I miss him on a personal level. But two, he means so
2 much to so many people, most of whom will never know him, most
3 of whom will never have any concept of the impact that he has.
4 Indeed David couldn't possibly have known the kind of impact
5 that he has.

6 Whatever we are individuals, as I indicated earlier,
7 is the product of everything we've been exposed to. And the
8 many institutions in this community that David led or was part
9 of leadership, that he influenced, his legacy will be the
10 vibrancy of this community, and I believe that along with Max
11 Fisher and his generation, David Hermelin in my generation,
12 the two names that will forever be etched in the institutional
13 memory. And since this is an oral history and photograph
14 history, I would like to leave the end of this with paying my
15 respect and tribute to him.

16 **MS. CITRIN:** Thank you. That was a wonderful
17 tribute to an incredible man.