

INTERVIEW: Morton Plotnick

INTERVIEWER: Michael Berke

DATE: September 10, 2015

PLACE: Max M. Fisher Federation Building, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

MICHAEL BERKE: This interview is being recorded as part of the Albert and Pauline Dubin Oral History Archives. My name is Michael Berke, and today is September 10, 2015. I'm interviewing Dr. Morton Plotnick at the Max M. Fisher Federation Building in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Do you give permission to the Leonard N. Simons Community Archives, Mort, to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes, and for use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

MORTON PLOTNICK: Yes.

BERKE: Good.

PLOTNICK: Happy.

BERKE: Good. Glad you're here. And so let's start at the beginning. We'll start at the beginning.

PLOTNICK: Okay.

BERKE: Talk about your early years of your family and about your parents and where they come from and what they did in their lives in the early stages.

PLOTNICK: My parents came from Europe—mother from Poland, father from Russia. He came with his family about 1917 to Palestine. My mother went with a group of girls from Poland, part of a Zionist group that went to Haifa. She came right in as a seamstress because she needed to have a profession, so to speak. And they met in Israel. My father had been back and forth to the United States. My father went to Israel with his entire family, and the brothers and sisters basically all settled in Israel and ended up there pretty much. A couple of them came here I guess in the 'twenties, 'thirties. And then came back to Palestine. They met in Israel. I was born there. And I came here when I was less than a year old on a ship. And my dad already being a citizen—I had to get citizenship papers when I was thirteen, but basically I was a citizen of the United States at that time. My sister was born here in the States, in Detroit. We ended up come to Detroit because my father—my mother had a sister living here, and that was part of the family, and we've stayed here ever since.

BERKE: So the obvious question—two part—what was the decision to go to Israel by both of your parents independently? Why did they pick Israel? And why did they make the decision to then leave Israel after a time to come to the United States?

PLOTNICK: Well, as I best understand it, both parents understood what was going on in Europe, with my father leaving Russia I believe shortly after the revolution and the First World War. And was in Israel in the late—I think 1917, 1918. And so they just picked up the whole family and made it across to Palestine somehow or another—train, boat, whatever the case might be. My mother was a Zionist. And at that time Zionism was fairly strong. And I had to always think about: Here's a girl who probably was 18, 19, 20 years old. Picked up with a group of other girls, went to Palestine without any family, without any other group of people other than the five or six girls she went with, and made her way, and that was the Promised Land for them. And I think that was also for my father and his whole family, because my grandparents...on either side I never knew. My mother's family basically died in the Holocaust in the Second World War. And my father's parents died in Palestine. My mother—my grandmother, whom I guess I didn't know either, died naturally. My grandfather died in an automobile accident.

BERKE: Oh, really.

PLOTNICK: In the late forties. Yes.

BERKE: And coming to the United States, the reason that they came here?

PLOTNICK: My parents came to the United States about 1937; I was born in '36. And they came because, number one, there were a series of riots. And then the second part of the story, which I heard later on from other uncles and aunts, was that my mother never got along with my dad's family. And so she wanted to be with her sister, and her sister was here. And it was one of two sisters that she had. They both have since died.

BERKE: And what did your parents do once they got to the United States in terms of their occupations?

PLOTNICK: Well, my father was a bricklayer, and he was a mason. And he did that kind of work, construction work. During the war he worked in a factory as a machinist. And then following the war, went back into the trades. My mother was a housewife when she came here. In Israel she was a seamstress. And in Israel my father was a bricklayer, a brick mason. Was involved in building the port at Tel Aviv and a lot of the homes that are right off the port. As a matter of fact, that's where we lived for a while, right where there used to be a Mandy's Restaurant across the street.

BERKE: And did Israel continue to play an important part of their lives when they moved to the United States and to Detroit?

PLOTNICK: Always. Because, number one, they both had family there because my mother had some nieces and nephews who eventually, following the war, made it to Palestine and then when it became Israel. And so we were always in touch with that family. We always had New Year's cards back and forth. And it was a very extensive family. My father had three brothers, two sisters, and himself. And my mother really had just this one cousin/aunt—whatever you want to

call her—that was part of that extended family, and a couple of other peripheral relatives that survived the war. And her two sisters here in Detroit.

BERKE: Do you still have family in Israel?

PLOTNICK: A very large family. As a matter of fact I talk to them on a very regular basis. A lot of my contemporaries, unfortunately, have died. But I still keep in touch with them. And a lot of cousins, a lot of second and third cousins who I really don't know all that well.

BERKE: And did they play a role in...you know, as the evolution of Israel took place, the founding of the state, what did they do to support the creation of the formal state in 1948?

PLOTNICK: You know I don't know what my parents did, but I know my mother was very active in Pioneer Women all these years. She was president of her chapter at one point, the Goldie Myerson Chapter. And she was very happy about that, because when she got to Palestine, Goldie Myerson was one of the people that met her, so to speak, at the boat. And she kind of had that connection with them. And because of the amount of family we had there in our Jewish lives, which were very connected to a place called B'nai David, which was much larger then than it is now even now. I don't even know if it exists anymore. So we always kept a very close connection. I remember '48 dancing on the stage of the state fairgrounds and at Central High School, where there were major rallies for that.

BERKE: How old were you in '48?

PLOTNICK: Oh, '48, I was 12 years old, 13 years old.

BERKE: So when did Israel become part of your—

PLOTNICK: Always.

BERKE: Yes?

PLOTNICK: Because we always had, you know, correspondence going back and forth.

BERKE: And you personally? When did it become a seminal part of your existence?

PLOTNICK: Well, I would say early on. Because at one point, I was always connected to people, if not the organizational, parts of Young Judea, habonim. Not particularly with hashomer. But it was always part of what we did. I mean it was just part of... When I was in the Boy Scouts, you know, part of B'nai David was Israel was a very integral part of all the things which we ever knew. I knew nothing else, so to speak. That's how I grew up. You know my parents spoke Hebrew, they spoke Yiddish, they spoke Russian and Polish. That kind of stuff. And English. It was just always part of our existence. Never was able to separate it.

BERKE: Let's extend that a little bit. Talk to me a little bit about your life growing up in Detroit and the kinds of things that you did and the things that were important to you.

PLOTNICK: Well, you know, interestingly, I mean I went to school. Theoretically I contracted rheumatic fever at one point in the first year of high school. I was going to Cass Tech. Doctors since have said to me I never had it, but I was out of school for a year, so I was homeschooled. And I was always active Jewishly somewhere...be it the synagogue or anywhere else. When I got sick, I was able to leave my house once a day, because we lived upstairs. And went downstairs. And at twelve o'clock, one o'clock, where do you go? Everyone's in school but you. So I walked over to the Jewish Center on Dexter and Davidson.

BERKE: That's where you lived in the Dexter and Davidson area?

PLOTNICK: We lived on Fullerton, yes. Well, we moved from Philadelphia and Twelfth to Monterey and Linwood. And then we went to Fullerton and Dexter. And then we went to Oak Park. That was our transition kind of thing. And I always went to Yeshiva Beth Yehuda that was part of, you know, the whole growing up—at least for me—all the others got _____. So I was always very involved Jewishly. And ended up when I went to the center, I would go downstairs—because what was a kid my age doing when there was no one else around? I shot pool. And then became like a supervisor for the game room and started working at the center. And I used to teach roller skating, worked the game room, had clubs. When the center moved out to Curtis and Meyers, I moved there. The club leading was always part of that Jewish world. I was active in B'nai B'rith. I subsequently became international president of B'nai B'rith Young Adults. And the local B'nai B'rith Adult Council. National conventions. BBYO. Then I started working for them part time. Sold encyclopedias part time, delivered newspapers part time. And the amazing part is I still see a lot of those people. And I went to school. Got a degree in education and taught school for eight or nine years. And then—

BERKE: Where did you go to university?

PLOTNICK: Wayne State University. And then got a Ph.D. from Michigan State. Still taught school. And then was looking for a job that would be close—good for my Ph.D. And was teaching at Oak Park at the time. And then ended up going to interview for a job at the Jewish Center.

BERKE: We'll talk about that in a second.

PLOTNICK: Okay. But, you know, so at that point I was looking for a job really working at a university, dean of students. But I kept Kosher, so it was very hard to find a position where I could keep Kosher, because my criterion was if it had a Kosher butcher, then I could go.

BERKE: Before we get into that, because that's going to be a good portion of the discussion that we have....

PLOTNICK: Okay.

BERKE: A little bit more about your family. Like do you have siblings? Do you have... what was life like growing up in your parents' home? And what was your interaction and your relationship to your mom and dad? And what influence did they have on your kind of journey?

PLOTNICK: Well, I suspect that they were pivotal in all the things that I did, because they had passions about religion, they had passions about Israel, they had passions about Jewish life. And in that process, we lived in neighborhoods that were very Jewish all the time. So I really knew very little. I had some cousins because my mother's two sisters, they had kids. And then we had lots of people on the block, and my parents had a lot of friends. And we got to grow up with a lot of people, a number of them connected to my parents when they came from Israel—or from Palestine really—that came from Palestine in a sense the same kind of routes that came. And a lot of those people have stayed friends over the years, the kids. And we had a very rich life. I mean we had a very terrific life. We had family that lived around us. We had all the Hardeem[sp] and all the _____ and all the holidays and, you know, all the other good stuff of life that we had. And it was a very full Jewish life. And because of that I always just kind of stayed connected. I just didn't know anything else.

BERKE: And siblings?

PLOTNICK: I have a sister who lives in Chicago who taught special ed. there. Married to someone that was an extended part of our family, that my mother was connected to: second, third, fourth, fifth cousins kind of thing. He also taught school. And they had almost—not an arranged marriage, but I think their parents and my parents were very happy when they got together. So she's lived in Chicago the entire life, and I've got a couple of nieces and nephews through her. And then I've got only a couple of cousins that live in Detroit, and that's it. And we get together regularly for dinner, just, you know, the older folks.

BERKE: You've alluded to it a couple of times, and I want you to kind of pinpoint on it: the importance that religion played in your life growing up and in your family's life growing up. I know that you dealt with the Hardeem and all those things. But, you know, specifically the formal religion. What role did that play with you, Mort?

PLOTNICK: Well, I'm really hard pressed to tell you what formal role it played. It has been so much a part of my life that I was always active at the synagogue, and I led the youth group with a friend of mine, Ray Kaliff, over the years at the B'nai David. We were part of the Boy Scouts with my cousins and Ray and a bunch of other people that we grew up with kind of thing. When there was a change of rabbis, as I grew older, I was part of the committee that was part of the indoctrination of the new rabbi, the ceremony. So religion's always been a basis around which I've lived. I grew up quasi-Orthodox. I am not quasi-Orthodox today. I do keep Kosher. People will assume that because I keep Kosher, I'm much more Orthodox than I am. I'm a relatively secular Jew in that sense: very strong culturally and have some religious tendencies, but basically toward kasher, maintaining Jewish life and passing on the traditions to kids and to family.

BERKE: You said you went to Cass High School.

PLOTNICK: For about four months. Played football.

BERKE: Yes?

PLOTNICK: Yes. And got hurt. And that's when they thought I had rheumatic fever.

BERKE: How was the high school experience?

PLOTNICK: It was fabulous. I wanted to be an automotive or—I really wanted to be an aeronautic engineer. When I got sick.... That's why I went to Cass, because of _____. When I got sick and the doctor was talking to me about—when I told him what I wanted to do—he said, “You can't do that.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “Because you're Jewish.” I said, “What's that got to do with it.” It's because nobody in those fields will hire someone that's Jewish. And you've got to understand this was in the fifties. It was a long time ago. As it turns out, I'm very happy with where I ended up in terms of teaching. I ended up— He said, “Well, you should become a dentist.” I like just working with people. It's always been a passion of mine.

BERKE: Did you define that experience in your own mind as anti-Semitism or just what life was?

PLOTNICK: Well, I think it was just life what it was. I mean having grown up in a Jewish neighborhood and, you know, around lots of people and things which were Jewish, I never even thought of anti-Semitism in that sense. But, you know, that was one issue where he was not far off.

BERKE: So anti-Semitism, you never experienced it as you were growing up in any venue?

PLOTNICK: Actually not really. The only time I really knowingly understood that there was an anti-Semitic feeling was when I was working on my Ph.D. I was one of the few kids at Michigan State that was Jewish at that time for the Ph.D. Got to know a lot of people: African-Americans and people from all over. There was one other Jewish person in that program, I think, at the time. But it was very interesting that after first semester, which I ended up getting all A's in, my advisor said to me, “Oh, you can't get all A's. It's not right.” I said, “Well, why not?” He said, “Well, it's just not right.” And then someone else said to me that they kind of understood that there was a lot of anti-Semitism at the school at that time. And one of the kids that I was with, he said, “You know I've never met Jews before. I thought you all had horns on your head.” And it wasn't until then that I really had a taste of anti-Semitism on a personal basis.

BERKE: And how did you react to that?

PLOTNICK: The way I react to a lot of things: I kind of laughed and said, “Such is life.” That's not going to stop me from doing what I want to do. But it was an interesting experience.

BERKE: Were you involved Jewishly when you were going through college and university?

PLOTNICK: Well, that's when I was very active in B'nai B'rith, AZA. I was president of B'nai B'rith Young Adults. And then I became international president of B'nai B'rith Young Adults.

And that, in a sense, was the first time I was back to Israel after I was born was in 1954 when I went as a delegate to the First World Jewish Youth Congress. And I represented the B'nai B'rith Young Adults, and I went with the international presidents of AZA and BBG.

BERKE: Where was that held?

PLOTNICK: Jerusalem...Jerusalem.

BERKE: Was that your first time back to Israel?

PLOTNICK: Yes.

BERKE: Since you were one year old.

PLOTNICK: First time. And at that point I even made the point—that I still have it in the minutes—was that I believed that at that point that every Jewish kid should experience Israel for a period of time. Very prophetic in many ways.

BERKE: Visionary.

PLOTNICK: Well, you know, it was one of those things that you kind of knew that this was going to be a mind-blowing experience for kids. And it was another way to connect kids to the Jewish world and to Israel.

BERKE: So you got your Ph.D. You went to Wayne State University; got your Ph.D. at Michigan State.

PLOTNICK: Right.

BERKE: What was your first job after you graduated?

PLOTNICK: I went back to teach elementary school. [Laughter] I mean that's what I was, an elementary school teacher.

BERKE: So let's talk about that for a few minutes.

PLOTNICK: I used to teach in the Oak Park School System, and I student taught in Detroit. Oak Park I was at Roosevelt full time. Einstein I did some student teaching in. And then I was at Pepper as well.

BERKE: Yes?

PLOTNICK: And that was good. I taught sixth grade, fifth grade, depending on the schools.

BERKE: General studies?

PLOTNICK: General studies. At that point everyone was. I used to teach... I mean I taught my kids.... Interestingly enough, I taught my kids the stock market. And many of those kids in the past number of years have come back to me and said they're still in it. I taught electronics. I had kids bring in old TV sets and radios. We would fix them. We did a lot of things that just were not being done in a lot of other places. It was a lot of fun.

BERKE: What was the profile of the classes you teach—you taught rather?

PLOTNICK: Well, I teached? [Laughter]

BERKE: Thanks, Mort.

PLOTNICK: The reality is that Oak Park at that time was very heavily Jewish, very heavily middle class. Many of those parents were either first generation or really just were immigrants like my parents were; because again, my family, my sister was the only one born in America. That kind of stuff. And it was a very strong, supportive, family-driven kind of community. It was a great place to work. Just terrific, you know. And at that point I would've loved to have been a principal of a school. And I interviewed in the City of Southfield for a principal's position. My Ph.D. thesis was on the effect of mailed materials to volunteers at a nonprofit organization. I worked with ADL. You know pre _____; that kind of stuff. I interviewed, and the superintendent of schools was the only person that insisted I have a Ph.D. And you had to go through two or three committees. And the committee process was very interesting. Because one was a group of teachers, then I'd go to administrators, and then God knows. And in one of the first committees is: What would you do if a black family moved—no, if a colored family moved into your school. Because at that point it was very heavily white. And so I knew who I was. And so I said what I thought reflected me, which was what color? Pink, blue, polka-dot, brown? At which point I knew I wasn't going to get the job. It was really kind of simple. One of the other groups said to me—asked me: You're Jewish, aren't you? I said, "Yes." At that point there were no Jewish administrators in that system. I said, "Yes." They said, "Well, which of the two or three groups of Jewish life are you?" I said, "Well...." And she said, "Oh, I know we have no right to ask you the question—but...." I said, "Yes, that's right. You have no right. But since you're asking me.... This interview is being done on a Saturday. One, if I was very Orthodox, I wouldn't be here. Second of all, you should understand, since you asked the question, that there's 126 different sects of Jewish life in the world. I'm somewhere in between the first three or four that you mentioned." At which point I also knew I wasn't going to get the job. Superintendent then called me and said, "You know, I would have loved to have hired you, but you're far too advanced for this group of people. They just don't want to deal with some of the issues that you're raising." [Laughs] So I never got the job. And then I interviewed for a job at the center.

BERKE: So let's talk about that. What attracted you to the center? Or was it just happenstance? I know you went to the center, you said, when you were a young man. But was it happenstance or was it something that you were interested in pursuing from your perspective?

PLOTNICK: Well, it was purely happenstance, because at that point I was working part time for BBYO. I was always working teaching Sunday School at different synagogues and temples. And

someone said there was a job opening for director of Educational Services and Cultural Arts. And at that point I had some resumes out, and was offered a job in Small Town USA somewhere at some university, which didn't meet my initial criteria. And when the job opened up at the center, Irwin Shaw, who was the director, who also was not a social worker, interestingly enough...he was the only exec in the country who was not a social worker.

BERKE: That's interesting.

PLOTNICK: And everyone else in the system that were "leadership" were all social workers. I interviewed for the job. He offered me the job. I said, "Fine. I'll take it." It sounds terrific for me given what my background was. And then one of the people that was head of the BBYO said, "No, you can't take the job. You're not a social worker." [Laughs] Such is life. And then that's how I got the job. So it was really happenstance at that point. I was thrilled, and the book fair had just started. I created a relationship with the publishers in one of the first years I did work there when I was working on the book fair. Where we created a relationship with a bunch of the publicists. I would go to New York once a year and pick out the authors I wanted, and my deal was very simple, and that was: You should pay for the honorarium, if any. We'll pay for the room and board and flight. At which point we got some of the top speakers in the country for nothing. And book fair became a very resounding success, and the formula basically worked. We started to create a route for other centers. At that point the only center doing it was Detroit. And we just kind of—

BERKE: And how many centers are doing it now?

PLOTNICK: I can't tell you, but there are a lot.

BERKE: Lots.

PLOTNICK: A lot of them, right.

BERKE: So what else did the job description contain in that first center job that you had, besides the book fair. And we'll talk about some of the other things that you were innovating and creating.

PLOTNICK: Well, the job was really running a... We had a bunch of classes: We had dance, we had art, we had ceramics, we had music, we had a whole series of things. There was a theater group called the Center Theater, which I had a relationship with because they were "within" the context of the department volunteers. We did lots of work with athletics. And over the years I became just more involved. The library was part of what I was doing. Any of the class courses and activities were part of what we did. When Wayne County Community College moved in, I became the liaison for them. And so on. It's still an ongoing job, at which point then, as things opened up, I became program director and assistant director, and then I became the exec when we moved out to the _____.

BERKE: You dealt with all the constituencies at the center?

PLOTNICK: Yes.

BERKE: And staff?

PLOTNICK: And staff.

BERKE: Uh-huh.

PLOTNICK: Oh, yes.

BERKE: What was the thing that you liked the most?

PLOTNICK: I guess I just enjoyed the action, you know, the Jewish connecting of people and programs. The things like we would bring in _____. They would come on in and, you know, the FBI was there, and this one was there. It was just very, very enjoyable. It was just a great niche for me.

BERKE: You know when I think of you—we've known each other for a minute or two over the years—the one word that sticks with me is innovative.

PLOTNICK: Thank you.

BERKE: You're welcome. It's true. Talk about, you know... I view you in that context of being an innovator not only for the center locally, but for the center movement. So why don't you talk for a moment about some of the innovative things that you started here that have now—you alluded to it a moment ago with book fair; you might want to talk another word or two about that. But there've been some other things that you've done.

PLOTNICK: Yes, well, I did not create book fair. But what I did do was create a process and a system whereby we could provide a lot of things given the limitations of budget, which we had, for nothing. Including ordering directly from the publishers at the booksellers' costs, etc. In addition, what we did was we began to create a series of programs, for example. And I'm blending what we did both at Curtis Meyers and at Maple and Drake. But, for example, we put together and developed a whole—years ago—a film festival which did not do all that well. But began the infancy of what we do now in terms of the film festival. In addition to that, we always had music festivals going on. We created the High Run, which was a walk and a run. This one probably was in the mid-seventies, where we gave away silver highs that were donated—my role in life was always to get as much donated as I could—to every participant. And for people that finished eighteen miles, it was great, and that was the marathon. It was eighteen miles—the high. And then we had for a family, they could walk for one mile or one kilometer, and, you know, we had it for everybody. The whole theory with me was always inclusivity. In addition to that, we created... For Christmas Eve, most places were closed. So we created the only place in town, which was you came Christmas Eve, and we had four, five, six hundred people that would always come. And since then a lot of that's been replicated in different kinds of places. We were one of the first centers in the country that really hired a great number of non-social work individuals. We also did a lot of working with expanding camp in terms of the specialty camps.

Most camps over the years have been a day camp with just a multitude of individual activities for four weeks. We created the whole issue of the one-week camps, the travel camp, the sports camp, the arts camp, the music camp, and all the other _____.

BERKE: How many kinds do you think have gone through the camp program, if you had to put a number on it? I mean I think it's kind of profound if you were to quantify it.

PLOTNICK: Well, I'll tell you that we once did a study—this had to be in the seventies, mid-seventies—where we assumed, and I think we were close, that 80 percent of the kids under the age of five in the Jewish community entered the center at one point during their first five years of life. Between preschool, between nursery, between sports and athletics, and swim and camp and everything else. And I would suspect that most probably three quarters of the Jewish kids in this town have at one point or another entered the center in a variety of different ways.

BERKE: Have you had any stories that have come back to you over the years where people have said to you how important the center was to them?

PLOTNICK: Yes, as a matter of fact. I mean I can tell you that a number of the people who have come back to the center and talked to me have gotten married because they met at the center. It's those kinds of things. And there's a ton of stories of people who—we saved their lives because we had the exercise. We saved, you know, this, and we saved their kids because of experiences that we provided for them over the years. And so there was just like an ongoing set of relationships. In addition to that, you talk about innovation impacting a community, is that in 1982, I believe it was, I got a call from someone that they were going to have a regional set of Maccabi Games in Memphis, Tennessee. I basically forced a layperson and our staff to go down. We sent down fifty or sixty kids, which was that many out of 300 that were totally there. And I sent them down and said to the people, I said, "Well, tell me we're going to do it again next in two years." At that point it had not developed, but I said, "We'll do it in two years." At which point there was this Israeli—it was part of Maccabi World Union, that had basically had a Shaliach in Memphis. And I met with him, and I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll take care of it. We'll do it on _____ basis, and we'll really make it a big deal." From my perspective one of the things the center's always lacked was there was no ability of a kid to be in one of our clubs and go anywhere else. I loved the model of BBYO because there was a national, there was a regional, there was all this stuff. And so I figured this was a great tool, not only for kids, but also to bring in adults that would normally not be part of the center.

And so move forward quickly: In 1984 we did the games. We had the opening at West Bloomfield High. It was terrific. At which point I said to the guy, fine. We're going to do this. Then Toronto was going to do it the next year, and it was a bit of a failure. Plus they lost a lot of money. Chicago did it in '88. They lost a lot of money. And no one was going to do it after that, because they hadn't been able to line anybody up. I turned to the president, who was Richard Madden, and said, "Richard, we're going to do it. We will turn to the community, we'll make it work, and we'll create a model for everybody to follow continentally from that point on." And he looked at me, and he said, "Do you think we'll make money?" I said, "We'll make money. Don't worry about it." As luck would have it, David Hermelin was my emcee. And then we had to get clearance from Federation to do it. Federation said, Well, we really don't want you to take the

risk because everyone else who's done this lost money." I said, "Don't worry about it. We won't lose money." He said, "Well, you have to give me the guarantee." I went to David, and I said, "David, I need a guarantee." I told him what for. He said, "Are we going to lose money?" I said, "No, we'll make money." Guaranteed we did. In 1990 we had at The Palace 16,000 people at the opening night ceremonies.

BERKE: I was there.

PLOTNICK: You were there. Okay. We had 4,000 participants. It was the largest set of games that has ever occurred in this country—Jewish. It was the largest Jewish event for all intents and purposes. And from that point— We made a lot of money for that time. And then I would go around to different centers speaking to their boards and their staff showing them not only how to run the games, but the model...if you follow the model, you'll make money. Anyone that followed the model, ended up making money. And I am happy to say that through today, everyone that follows the model makes money. And the reason you have to look at it from the point of view of raising money is because the risk factors are significant. The good news is that Bill Davidson and Bob Sosnick donated The Palace, picked up the total cost including a Kosher reception. But if you involve that group of people who would normally not be supporters of the center particularly in ways that they're comfortable in, it just returns significant dividends throughout. And this is something we created and helped other communities replicate in ways that continue to enrich the lives of Jewish kids and communities. We brought in a lot of volunteers. And to this day we still send teens out all over the place. And it's a very, very significant program.

BERKE: And you should note—and I'll let you note it—that it's right up to today we had a very successful Maccabi game right here in this community. How many was that that this community has held now, Mort?

PLOTNICK: Well, five maybe? I don't remember. I don't keep track of it that way. [Laughs]

BERKE: But this was a very successful Maccabi game as well, right?

PLOTNICK: Oh, yes. And so when you talk about— Oh, yes, yes. We did incredibly well. And when you think about it, we had close to 4500 people at the opening night ceremonies at the Fox. And we continue to have—talk about the impact that the center has, the number of Maccabi kids that are coming and going through centers is incredible. And it creates that national focus that someone can participate. Early on we had decided to have things like music and dance. We had debate, we had chess, we had, you know, gymnastics. And each time there was a set of games, they evolved into something else. Some stuff was dropped off, some stuff was added. And so it just depends upon where the community was or where the environment was at any given time, depending upon the sport. But the core sports basically were there. Men, women, boys, girls, that kind of stuff.

BERKE: And what, as you perceived the Maccabi game as one of kind of the founding visionaries of it, what role did you see the Maccabi playing in the Jewish identity of these kids?

PLOTNICK: Well, one of the things when I was active with the National Organization of Centers, there used to be the Jewish Welfare Board, JWB. I put a lot of pressure on them, and eventually they did change the name to JCCA, Jewish Community Centers Association; because it was a large part of their program. And no one identified handily with JWB, as they would JCCA. JCCA has taken on the role and responsibility of connecting Israel to the games. And when we originally worked out the package, basically the franchise to use the name, JCCA Maccabi, using the name Maccabi, is that we met with the Maccabi Canada and Maccabi USA and Maccabi World Union in order to create the JCC Maccabi Games. And it's evolved. It used to be the North American Maccabi. But then we called in JCC Maccabi so that it's clear that it was the center that was the owner and driver of that particular set of things. Subsequently there have been kids that have gone to Israel on the JCC Maccabi experience. And so JCCA a number of years ago opened up an Israeli office. And because of that, there's the ongoing connection and link to the Israel JCCA Maccabi and to the Maccabi World Union Adults and all the other stuff. A number of our volunteers subsequently become active on a continental basis, intercontinental basis, with the Maccabi World Union and Maccabi US Sports with Israel.

BERKE: What other ways do you see the center serving to maintain Jewish identity and relationship to Israel?

PLOTNICK: Well, the center about 30, 35 years ago, I organized the trip from the center to go to Israel. We did a couple of trips like that. And this was basically before the missions and before a bunch of the stuff that went on, which generally early on was for high-wealth individuals. And when we created the Israel experience for the Center, it was for laypeople and volunteers and just, you know, members of the Center. And we always took, you know, 20, 30, 40 people, which is a beginning entre into all that. We've had a Schliach always from Israel. We've always had an Israeli representative. And then subsequent to our having it, Federation took that role over, and basically that role became a Federation role and was not really connected to the Center. But it was something that Irwin Shaw created, and then we just kind of perpetuated and expanded it. We were also, by the way, the first agency in this community to have Hebrew. We taught Hebrew. We had a little _____. We took groups of kids to Israel back in the 'sixties and the 'seventies. I mean so it was like...we were doing something that really very few communities were doing. At one point we had Hebrew immersion classes that had 400-something students. At the same time the reports we got out of New York was they had a thousand. Now for this community to have 400 and then to have a thousand gives you a sense of what the power of this community has always been: the strength of the community, its connection to Jewish life, connection to Israel. And the center has always played a very significant role in that. And it's been a very great partnership with the community, with Federation and so on.

BERKE: Let's pick up on that. What role do you see the center playing in the well-being of the community, Mort?

PLOTNICK: Well, it is—

BERKE: Both back then and now.

PLOTNICK: Well, look. The center has always been a place that the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed have had a comfortable place to be. That doesn't mean that there hasn't been tension. But we provide a series of services, particularly to people that may not have the capacity to pay for things like day camp, pay for membership, to pay for some of the services which we provide. And the center has a library which has always been a community library. And as you know, varying synagogues and temples have libraries, but they're generally restricted to the people that go to that particular institution. We're a community system in that sense. The center plays a pivotal role in the number of kids that we just educate in terms of preschool. We are a very neutral territory that's clearly Jewish. And that's what we've always had: Jewish *Community Center*. It's always been that. Or as the new marketing comes on, it's called the "J." But that stands for Jewish, and people kind of understand that's what it is. So I think that we continue to play a role. And recently, as you know, the JPM facility for a number of reasons is closing. And a lot of people are very concerned that when that announcement was made, that there was a spot in the community that would be taken away from them. And fortunately it's been worked out in a way that there will be a spot continuing on.

BERKE: Are you pleased with that?

PLOTNICK: Oh, look! I think that given what the circumstances are, what's transpired in the past couple of years, it most probably was something that might have been avoided. But the realities are that—

BERKE: How could it have been avoided?

PLOTNICK: Well, I don't quite know how it could have been avoided, but I do know that over the years there's no question that JPM facility was always a costly venture for the Center. And as long as we always balanced the budget, which we traditionally did do.... Everyone knew that it was a loss-leader. But the community was committed to keeping that loss-leader. And then apparently there was a point where people have said, we're no longer able to maintain that lost-leadership. And so therefore let's come up with another alternative. And I think Federation's come up with a very good alternative to that. And I think that's again a signal of the strength of community within the context of the evolution of what happens, the evolution of services, the evolution of how people think about how varying things. Look, JPM was very strong and important when it came to neighborhood projects, the stabilization of the Oak Park Community, stabilization of the Oak Park Southfield, if you will, Huntington Woods area, and so on.

BERKE: Talk about the role that JPM played in the stabilization of the community. I think that's an important factor to talk about, Mort.

PLOTNICK: Well, look. JPM has always been.... JPM opened in 1955, I think it was, as a United Hebrew School's JCC combined activity. And so therefore there was a recognition on behalf of the community that there had to be a Jewish presence in the Oak Park area because that was where the apparent move was in terms of Jewish population. What people don't quite understand is that for almost probably ten years, twelve years after the JPM building was opened, there was no bus transportation from Detroit to Oak Park. And therefore it was a community center, if you will, that was basically a preschool center and had some very minimal activities.

As transportation from Detroit to Oak Park was developed, and as people were moving from the Detroit metro area into the Oak Park Southfield area, the Center took on some different roles. It took on the role of preschool, it took on the role of—it maintained its role as a Hebrew school. In addition to which, what it did was that it created a force in the community that said there is a strong Jewish presence there. And that strong Jewish presence, not unlike when Maple Drake was developed as a Center property, many of the soothsayers said, Well, what's the Center building a building beyond the pale of Jewish world? And at this point, after forty years in one single facility, the Sam Francos and the others who made the decision to buy the land, knowing that it might be traded, and the decision of the community to build the facility during what was a very negative economic time, proved to be very fortuitous because it's a very strong presence. It gives the Jewish community and gives lots of Jewish members of our community an anchor in terms of where to go. JPM provided that service for a long period of time—and still does. Or still did. And it will in a sense be resurrected in a way. But then part of the strength of that community was that when there was a concern about the movement of Jewish population from Oak Park, and the perhaps—I won't say, you know, the fusion of the Orthodox community and some concerns about what was going on in Huntington Woods at the time—Federation stepped in and did the neighborhood project, loans, all kinds of stuff. When the Russians came out of Russia, the center in Detroit, Curtis and Meyers, was the first place where they went. And we developed a strong ESL program, an acculturation program. The center was the core of that. That was one of the jobs, by the way, that I had. We had a strong corps of volunteers. We moved out to the Maple Drake with the Kahn Building at that time and brought that with us. And many of our volunteers went on to get degrees in ESL and continue to be people who teach ESL. But the Russian community at that point, it was another place for them to hang onto because that's where the housing was for them. So the building has always been a strong force in Jewish life. Both Federation recognized that. And most synagogues, temples understood that.

BERKE: So do you think that—neither one of us can look into the crystal ball—but it seems like a solution for JPM. How do you see the role of that facility as we moved forward? The role that it'll play in the activities of the community?

PLOTNICK: Well, I would suspect, depending upon what the final configuration of facilities is, it will continue to serve because (a) they're keeping the pool, which for the Orthodox was always of particular importance. Second is that if you're going to run a day camp of any sort, which I believe most probably will occur in one form or another there, having water is an important part in the summer. In addition to that, there'll be a series of rooms that will be available to varying members of the community for varying cultural activities. And what will be lacking will be the gym. And that's one of those trade-offs that one has to make. But it will become an opportunity for people to participate within a Jewish setting, which is a nonreligious Jewish setting in particular. And it will serve as a resource also for the Federation Apartments which is on that property, and for the varying religious institutions that surround their property. So I think that, you know, the role will be changed somewhat. But it will not be eliminated by any stretch of the imagination. I think it will continue to serve as a bit of an anchor for the property.

BERKE: I'm going a little bit out of order in things I wanted to ask you, but that's the nature of our relationship.

PLOTNICK: Fine.

BERKE: We've talked about the role that the Center has played in the community to some extent. From your mind's-eye, Mort, what role do you see, as we're moving forward down the road, if we could take a snapshot of this community—I'm not even going to go out very far—but ten years from now, what role do you see the Center playing in the community's wellbeing?

PLOTNICK: Well, I wish I had a crystal ball.

BERKE: Not an easy question.

PLOTNICK: [Laughs] Look, I would suspect that the Center will continue to enrich its cultural activities through the Berman Center, through the varying trips that the center takes to varying cultural institutions, provide significant services to the senior population. And as the demographics show, you've got a strong senior population that's going to stay within the area, that don't particularly take winter vacations in Florida but stay around here. In addition to that, it becomes the one place where like through the Kenny Goldman League, preschool, day camp, where we maintain strong connections. I think those things will continue to evolve. I think you can also see the day camp to continually evolve to be more in terms of the theater arts, the computer technologies. And it may evolve into a number of other things as well. One of the things that we know is that life changes; it moves very quickly. And I think that the center has demonstrated through its varying activities...special needs continues to grow. That will continue to evolve in areas perhaps more of specialty than of general. And that's, you know, to focus on those people in need in varying ways. Financial. We need to explore the arts, computer technology. As you know, the center is the house also of the ORT community outreach program which teaches technology and so on. So I think that, you know, between that, the Shalom, some of the specialties that share a gallery, we create those things which bring in community. And over the years the Charach Gallery, for example, early on in its existence. You know we had a sukkah building contest where architects from all over the community, all over the state, came in with all their Sukkot things. So I think, you know, we'll continue to do those things and press the creativity, the things which connect Jewish life to the Jewish world as well as to the non-Jewish world.

BERKE: You know there seems to be a migration, turnaround. People—young people—moving back into the community. Do you believe that the center will take advantage of outreaching to those people that weren't here even five years ago?

PLOTNICK: I think the answer is yes. I think the answer has got to be that there are a number of things that are going to happen. First of all, a lot of that in-migration tends to be at this point downtown through what Dan Gilbert is doing and all of the varying companies. But I think there's a point where that group begins to have children. They begin to get married. I don't know if they're going to take to the suburbs. I don't know if they're going to create community centers downtown. I think the downtown synagogue is most probably one of the few Jewish places that's there. I know that there's a Chabad House that is down there now. And I think there have been varying attempts to create some sense of Jewish havurot downtown. I think that's going to continue to go. And it might well be that the Center may play a role in that at one point.

Federation may play a role in that at one point. I think it's really almost too early to figure that all out; although we also see there's a fair amount of house-buying around where the center is and where JPM is. So we also see that there is that kind of movement there. And I think that's going to continue to make the center an important part of the community because that group's going to filter into the services which we're providing for kids. And what we know is that when we provide services for kids, there's a good chance they'll continue on with those things. BBYO is housed at the center. So that there's a whole series of things that portend positively. And the movement of young Jewish professionals and nonprofessionals I think is a good sign for us.

BERKE: Good. You know we've alluded to it when we talked about JPM about some of the financial challenges that have faced the center over the years. Let's spend a moment—I'm not going to, you know, get into the details—on some of the challenges that you faced as the exec, in making sure that the center continued to function in the appropriate manner moving forward.

PLOTNICK: Well, you know, Federation has always been a strong and integral part of the center. But early on in the process we began to understand that we may have to raise our own money to maintain our ability to provide services. At which point we created things like the Patron Programs and, you know, just a whole series of fundraising activities which were not particularly viewed with strong pleasure by Federation. But nonetheless, you know, we did that. And at the end of the day, what we were able to do was always balance our budgets. So in the years that I was the exec, we always balanced our budget. We had set away a number of phones, we had a number of supporters we helped create corporate sponsorships before most other institutions, including Federation, were doing that. We held the first meeting in Florida for the Detroit Jewish Community. And we still, as you know, run a golf outing in Florida, which I run, which nets a tremendous amount of money for the city in Detroit because we raise it for scholarships for kids to go to camp and stuff. And so we have always been on the cusp of raising money and creating sponsorships and creating the ability to provide services but maintaining controls on budget. It's a very challenging kind of a piece because there's always a new curve ball that's coming at you. So that when I was the exec, we knew that the United Way, which we were a part of, was going to continue to reduce our allocations, which we did. And then we absorbed a piece of it. Federation absorbed a piece of that. But at the end of the day, we still had to balance the budget ourselves, and it was never simple. However, we were able to create, as I said, in 1990—well, this was maybe fifteen, twenty years after we opened in Curtis and Meyers, we had the Maccabi Games that netted a lot of money and gave us a lot of respite for two or three maybe four years. And we were able to do some upgrades.

And so the center we were always in the position of living not hand to mouth by any stretch, but watching carefully how we spent our money. And so we were very cost-conscious about what we did. As a matter of fact, at one-point Federation brought in a series of laypeople who were terrific in terms of the management. They came into our system to evaluate how we were using our utilities, this, that, and the other thing. And ended up going back to Federation and saying to us: You do more than we do in our own professions because we just charge it back to clients. As a nonprofit, you can't charge it back to anybody. [Laughs] And so we were buying gas from the wellhead for a long time. We were doing all kinds of things—simple things. We had a great crew of people. We had great maintenance people who knew what they were doing. So that if, for example, in fluorescence, if you take out the fluorescent tube, that doesn't do very much. You

had to disconnect—okay?—the transformer to save the energy. Our folks knew that. When the building was built, it was overly lit, and we cut back about 40 percent of the lighting. No one knows it, but it saved a lot of money.

And so it was that kind of thing. Our folks would do everything with that facility. They repaired, they built. Another example was that our first need was a garage because we had equipment. And as you know, having been part of Federation, when the move was made out to center, we were doing our own lawn and maintenance. And then when Federation Apartments moved down, we did theirs as well. And so we needed to build some garages. So the first garage we built I got someone to give us the steel. I got someone to give us insulated doors. I got someone to give us the roof. And it cost us \$6,000 for the roll-up doors which I could not find the supplier for. And our guys built it. I mean they were welders, they were... whatever it is. And the township was fine with that kind of thing. We built all of our outdoor facilities ourselves. And so we became a very self-contained unit where we expanded without really utilizing significant funds by any stretch of the imagination. In addition to that, we had some very nice donors, you know, who understood where we were. And I'll never forget: One of the donors came to me in the second year of operation. First year of operation we had put in the budget \$350,000 of costs we would not be able to recoup because of getting into the membership cycles. Someone at, say, Federation said, "Well, you know, we're going to cut that out of your budget—and if that happens—come to us. We'll help." So we lost about \$150-, \$170,000 the first year, which was significantly less than what was projected. Federation said, "Well, how could you do that?" A lot of people were very upset with it. But it was part of the projection. You took it out of the budget. I mean, you know, startup costs. One guy came to me and said, "I'll give you \$25,000. And I said, "No. I don't really want the 25,000. What I'd really prefer to have you do is build me an outdoor day camp site. So that we can always earn the money from that facility." And so he gave 25,000, but built the outdoor day camp site. And so we were very creative in terms of how we balanced the budget. And in all the years that I was the exec, we never had a problem. There was a challenge, but it was never something we didn't overcome. But we did a lot of things from a very business-like point of view. And when we were told not to do because someone else would take care of it, well, what can I tell you? [Laughs]

BERKE: You already have. [Laughter] Talk for a moment—we were talking about fundraising. You know you and I knew each other pretty significantly over the years but really as colleagues. Our first relationship together was when it was decided that there was going to be a capital campaign at the Jewish Community Center.

PLOTNICK: Mm-hmm.

BERKE: So talk about that, one of the most important capital campaigns that there's ever been really convened in this community. And what the goals of that were and what the achievement of that was.

PLOTNICK: Well, you know, when it came time to do the fundraising for the building initially at the corner of Maple and Drake, that was really a program that was developed by Federation and the Center with Hugh Greenberg serving as one of the chairs of that. _____ was then president of the center as well. And then subsequent to that, we did a number of renovation kinds

of programs. And then the one you're talking about was when it was really decided to do a significant renovation to the entire facility. And remembering that the facility's 40 years old, so that the couple of renovations, given the nature of the facility, is very little. We were able to get—I would tell you that, as you know, the first five, well, really, the first gift of three, four, five million dollars was gotten by our work at the center. I mean before that there were million-dollar gifts, but there was not a multimillion-dollar gift. And subsequent to that, there were multimillion-dollar gifts. I think that we were very instrumental in helping the community price itself more appropriately, if I can put it that way. And because of that, I think the community has benefited and the center has benefited from that as well. It was a successful campaign. Federation, yourself, and many others; Hugh Greenberg was one of the leaders. We were able to capture the imagination of a lot of people and make it work. And it's always a very challenging thing to raise money. It's always a challenging thing to raise money, but we were always very able to entree the right people at the right time. And Federation was a significant resource for us on that. No question about it. As were you.

BERKE: And the achievement? What did we finally raise?

PLOTNICK: I think it was like 10- or 12-, 15-million dollars at the time. Which was also part of the Millennium Campaign that was tied into Federation.

BERKE: Right.

PLOTNICK: So the number could be significantly more. But I think that the Center's part was in that ten-, 15-million-dollar range. And it was more given what the community did from the _____ point of view.

BERKE: I have a few more questions. I want to talk to you about the people who have had influence on you over your life. But I want to start with one at least in my mind who I think has had a great deal of influence on you, and that's Irwin Shaw. So I'd like you just to talk about Irwin a little bit and your relationship with him and the impact he had on molding you as a very fine executive in this community.

PLOTNICK: Well, thank you for the nice words. Irwin most probably was one of the most brilliant guys I really ever met. He was also, in my estimation, a very smart guy. First, he hired me. How bad can that be, right? But one of the things that I learned in the first year was we printed a Brook Fair Brochure. And there were two names that were spelled wrong. At that time maybe it would cost \$500, \$700. But I showed it to him. And he said, "You know, we've got to reprint this." But, you know, it's a lot of money! No, got to reprint this. It's always got to be done right. It was a very important lesson, because I always remembered that. It was much better to do it right than just to save the money. And I like spending wisely. But wisely doesn't mean you don't spend. It means that you spend intelligently. Irwin made me... Irwin was the guy who basically influenced this community in terms of Hebrew and Jewish. During that period of time, most agency execs around the country and most—and I don't know Federation execs anywhere near—but we're very into the populist movement of the Ecumenism and everything else. Well, Irwin was into that as well. His primary role was Jewish. That's why he created the Jewish program, brought in the Shaliach from Israel, who subsequently did a lot of other things with us

and came back another time. He brought in the first schlichim to this community. He understood the role the Jewish, Hebrew and Israel could play in the community. And by the way, for that was pretty much an outcast in the center world at that time. I learned that from him. Nothing wrong with being an outcast as long as you knew that you were straight out with your mission. And I was straight out with my mission all the time, because he had taught me well enough to understand how to do it. One of the things that Irwin always loved about me was my entrepreneurial spirit, because that was not his shtick. But we worked very, very well together. And he was a guy of tremendous capability. He made me international chairman of the World Movement to Change the way Hebrew is written. {Laughter}

BERKE: What does that mean?

PLOTNICK: You know in Hebrew, the Israelis read all the Hebrew without the _____, all the little pieces. He was going to change that. Yours truly became the chairman, not understanding any of it. But he couldn't be for whatever reason. And we supported that program. The center supported that program for a number of years. I don't know if anybody particularly knew about it. I don't know if anyone particularly cared. But he basically raised the money. I helped him raise some money for it. But it was one of those projects that he was always committed to on a continental basis. And that's also something that I've always remembered: that you've got to be more than what your little space in the world is right now. You've got to go beyond it, and you have to have that ability to impact—and impact and sit in the back, which both he and I enjoyed always doing. At any of the events, we stayed in the back—as long as we could.

BERKE: So in that vein, who were some of the other people over the years who have had influence and have made an impact on your professional life?

PLOTNICK: Well, I would say that aside from my parents who created a whole milieu and environment for me, I think a number of the people whom I really respected are the people who worked with me. Without their pushing me and without them manipulating me the way they did, I don't think the center could have achieved the kinds of things that it did do. From a professional point of view, some of my best friends at the center are always the maintenance crew. I mean they knew what was going on, they could tell me what was going on all over hell and gone. It was fabulous. But it was the people that I worked with that really helped me understand it. From an academic point of view, a lot of nice people, but not the people that particularly were thinking from my perspective out of the box the way they could have and should have.

BERKE: Any center laypeople that stand out in your mind? I know that's a risky thing to ask, but it's okay, we can ask it.

PLOTNICK: Well, the answer is I was.... Look, Hugh Greenberg was the president of the center when I got the job, who worked with me very closely over all these years in varying capital campaigns. When we became the leaders of the JC Maccabi movement on a _____ basis, he was the first _____ chairman for a number of years. He just was a guy that stood out. You know, all the rest. I mean Joe Tauber and, you know, Doug Bloom and Richard Manz. Everybody fortunately had great things to say and great things to do with respect to how to

expand the sphere of influence, how to raise more money, how to provide the needs of the community. And how to put needs of the community out front of where they thought their needs were. And so take a look at the gallery, you know, Manny Charach and that family. You know, that kind of stuff. As you well know, I mean the community was very much opposed to putting that facility in. It wasn't until I personally made a guarantee of a quarter of a million endowment, that they allowed it. It took us a year and a half to accept a million-dollar gift. You ask yourself the question, and yet it's now a very treasured piece of our facility and of the community. And it's a place where we bring in lots of exciting Jewish/Israeli connecting kinds of things.

BERKE: So you were tired as the executive director. I know you—

PLOTNICK: Seventeen years ago.

BERKE: We know you still have a relationship, an ongoing relationship.

PLOTNICK: Right.

BERKE: But tell us some of the other things that you've been doing since you officially retired from the executive directorship?

PLOTNICK: Well, when I retired, a number of people knew that I was doing well with fundraising, so I started doing some work with some of the fundraising: some organizations, synagogues and temples primarily. Some non-Jewish groups. And you and I, as you remember, Michael Berke and I got together, formed a company, and we did a tremendous number of things between the hospitals and inner-city groups and nonprofits all over, synagogues, temples, and so on and so forth. And so I continue to do a number of those things. We decided to move to Florida. And then I still on a major basis run the Golf Outing for the center in Detroit, but I run it in Florida. I started the one up here, which we still run. And then in Florida this past year, we raised close to \$80,000 net, which is not a bad chunk of change. But that kind of like goes into the budget; and, you know, that kind of helps all the kinds of stuff, and was active in the games when they've been here subsequent to when I retired. And this past set of games, we raised something in the area of \$800,000. Not bad.

BERKE: Not bad at all.

PLOTNICK: Not bad.

BERKE: Not bad at all.

PLOTNICK: And that will keep the center for a day or two. [Laughs] Whatever.

BERKE: So I want you to stay—live and be well for a long time.

PLOTNICK: Thank you.

BERKE: So this interview could not conclude without our spending a moment talking about your family.

PLOTNICK: Okay. My family. Well, first of all, you're part of my extended family, Michael, thank you.

BERKE: Thank you.

PLOTNICK: I have...my first wife is still alive. My second wife, Judy, has been married now for some 33 years. And I've got two kids by my first marriage: Suzie and Rick Letterman, if you will. And two grandkids with them. Both of them...one of my granddaughters just graduated as a special ed. teacher who's looking for a job. Anybody out there know... [Laughs] If this gets televised, I'll live in the world. And my grandson is at Columbia College in video and film and in music. My son out in San Francisco teaches at San Francisco State University: film, video. And his son is 14 years old, has two records that've been out. One's a tape, and one's a CD published by some outside publishers. And he's clearly a very interesting kid. Very gifted. And then on Judy's side we have a son Michael—and Jackie; lives in Florida with two granddaughters. One of them will be bat-mitzvah-ed this coming year. And Steven and Laurie _____ out in Seattle with two grandsons, one of them 17 who's going to finish school in about a year, year and a half. And then the other one's in college in environmental sciences in the State of Washington. So between Danny and Alison—my daughter-in-law, Alison, in San Francisco now works at the center in San Francisco teaching music. She's a singer and a composer and a pianist and all the other good stuff in life.

BERKE: And you see them often.

PLOTNICK: We see them not as often as we'd like, but yes. [Laughs] Yes.

BERKE: So if you had to encapsulate everything that we've talked about, Mort, in this last hour plus, what would you say is the thing that you're most proud of related to your career as a professional in this community?

PLOTNICK: I think that the thing that I'm most proud of is the fact that I was able to connect Jewish people to the Jewish world by all the means that we had available, that we had an impact both locally and globally, given what we've done in terms of the JC Maccabi Games and the arts fest. And just the influence on people; because a lot of our people in working...a lot of people who worked for me—assistant directors—are now heads of Federation, you know, centers and all the other good stuff of life. So I just feel it's been my blessing to be able to work in the job that I loved. Still love doing what I do. I'm happy I'm not the executive director right now. [Laughs] Given the number of factors. But having said that, I still enjoy my time. I enjoy meeting people, working with people, and helping people raise money in both the Jewish world and the non-Jewish world. And I think it's been good for me, it's been good for the people I've had the ability to meet and learn from.

BERKE: I don't want to put words into your mouth, but you're encouraged, I think, that the center is going to come out of this with their heads held high.

PLOTNICK: Oh, yes! Absolutely! I don't think there's any question about that. I mean— Look, lots of stuff happens in the world. And unfortunately lots of things happen globally that would never be something we are ever attuned to. Tragically, there's a lot of stuff to worry about other than the center right now in our world, given what's going on. But I think the center has strong leadership. And I think the Federation works very closely with the center. And because of its strong leadership and the combined partnership, I see only good things continuing to happen. Again, we have to kind of recognize that the center—75, 100 years old at this point; I really don't even know—but the institution continues to do important work from its early beginnings as an acculturation center and a place for kids and adults to hang out, to where we are now. We are that as well. And as someone once said to me, "We used to acculturate people to become American. And now we acculturate people to remain and continue to be and expand their Jewishness." So I think that's a great place to be. And it's a great institution to be a part of.

BERKE: Anything else?

PLOTNICK: No. But we should all live and be well.

BERKE: _____.

PLOTNICK: Thanks.

BERKE: So on behalf of the community, I want to thank you for this valuable addition to our archives. And thank you for your time. This has been terrific.

PLOTNICK: Thank you for having me. Peace, Michael. _____.

[End of Interview]