

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Joel Tauber
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Susan Citrin
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9 MS. CITRIN: This is Susie Citrin. It's May 25,
10 2005, and I'm interviewing Joel Tauber for our oral history
11 project. Do we have your permission to use this tape in any
12 way we see fit for the use by the Jewish Federation of
13 Metropolitan Detroit?

14 MR. TAUBER: Yes, you do.

15 MS. CITRIN: Thank you. Let's start from the very
16 beginning. Would you describe where you were born and a
17 little bit about your early family life and where your parents
18 were from.

19 MR. TAUBER: I was born in Detroit in 1935. My
20 parents were second generation here. My grandparents came
21 from Krisnopol, which was the old shetdels of Eastern Europe.
22 My grandfather on the other side came from Kiev. My
23 grandfather from Krisnopol was semi-Orthodox. My other
24 grandfather was probably extremely liberal. Much of their
25 family were involved with the Communist Party back in the

1 1920s and 1930s, but it wasn't so bad.

2 I had a great upbringing as a child. My parents
3 always treated me well and gave me great responsibility as I
4 grew up. The story I like to tell is of early leadership
5 because I'm one of those people that believe top leadership is
6 a born trait and very difficult if not impossible to train,
7 whereas normal leadership you can train and intermediate
8 leadership you can train. But I showed great leadership
9 tendencies at age 7 when I had formed a gang at McCullough
10 Elementary School, the old Dexter Davison school.

11 I lived on Buena Vista, where there were probably 30
12 kids in our half block. 95 percent Jewish. There were a few
13 non-Jews on our block on Buena Vista. But I formed this gang
14 and was picking on this one young man with my gang. His
15 mother came to school to complain. So the principal called me
16 into his office with the other members of the gang and went
17 over the accusations and said, okay, now who's the leader?
18 And everybody pointed at me. So they got to go and I got to
19 sit under the clock for the rest of the day.

20 Almost all the way through high school I always was
21 at odds with the teachers. My grades were always very good,
22 but I had a great deal of difficulty that now when I look
23 back, it probably stemmed from boredom, but at that time it
24 was just hyperactivity.

25 My mother taught in my elementary school. She was a

1 literature teacher, and I'd say I spent about half my
2 elementary school in her room because the other teachers used
3 to send me there when I got rambunctious. And I had that
4 trait pretty much all the way through high school. I went
5 from McCullough to Durfee, where most of the Jewish community
6 was. Then we moved out north and I ended up at Post and then
7 Mumford High School.

8 Mumford was a great joy for me. Those were idyllic
9 years. We were the first graduating class from the school.
10 Therefore we were seniors all the way through. Ninth we were
11 the oldest, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. So there was great
12 camaraderie in our class, which just had its 50th anniversary,
13 and even among the teachers because they had all just come in
14 brand new.

15 Sports were difficult and I was very active in
16 sports. Because we didn't have a gym, we had to go to other
17 places. Nonetheless I played basketball, football, baseball
18 and ran track for Mumford. I was captain of the football and
19 basketball team. I still say my greatest athletic
20 accomplishment was that I was voted the best athlete in the
21 school in my senior year. That's a little trophy, but I keep
22 it out there very prominent because that's one I liked.

23 MS. CITRIN: Do you still have friends from high
24 school?

25 MR. TAUBER: Oh, sure. Sure. I was first class

1 president of Mumford, and therefore with each reunion they
2 came to my office. I kind of sponsored the reunions. So I
3 remained close with that group of people, plus several other
4 friends. For the 50th they spent over a year, almost monthly
5 in my office. A lot of time I was gone, but they were
6 working, about 30 people planning our 50th reunion.

7 MS. CITRIN: That's incredible.

8 MR. TAUBER: Yeah. That group became so close
9 together. Not only did they have a great union, but then they
10 had a party after because they wanted to stay together. I
11 just got an e-mail today that last weekend they had a senior
12 class trip to Washington. About 30 people went to that.

13 I had a party in Florida for my 70th, and I had a
14 bunch of people from elementary school, high school, and what
15 made it especially nice, a lot of the people, although we were
16 in the same class, hadn't seen each other for years. But I
17 was the linchpin, so when they came, a lot of people got
18 reunited. One college friend that I just got reacquainted
19 with in Florida. I hadn't seen him in 50 years. And other
20 people at the party hadn't seen him in 50 years. And her.
21 She was a date of mine when she was 14 and then married this
22 guy in college, and I hadn't seen her in 50 years.

23 But even during those years in high school, I was
24 always at odds with the teachers. Not a problem on grades but
25 on what they expected of me, and I had this independent

1 spirit. For instance Mumford decided they weren't going to
2 have football in the 11th grade, so I switched to Central and
3 used my aunt's address who lived right near there, because I
4 wanted to play football. The principal, Colonel Clark, heard
5 of that at Mumford and of course brought me back and gave me a
6 great lecture. And it was at the time of the biggest scandal
7 at West Point, and he compared what I had done to the scandal
8 at West Point. He wasn't very happy with me. But he brought
9 me back anyway.

10 They were really great years socially, sports,
11 academically. I think I learned more playing those sports
12 about life and people than I did in the academic part of high
13 school. We had a mixed class, African-American, non-Jews, and
14 it was almost equal, so you learned to get along with people.
15 And you had some run-ins in the years with some of the people
16 and there was a little bit of anti-Semitism. Not much.

17 In college it was a continuation of those same kind
18 of things.

19 **MS. CITRIN:** Did you have problems in college as
20 well? Because I know you have three degrees.

21 **MR. TAUBER:** No, by college I'd outgrown that. By
22 then I'd become more of a conformist.

23 **MS. CITRIN:** What did you major in in undergraduate
24 school?

25 **MR. TAUBER:** Business school. So I got a BBA and

1 then I got a law degree.

2 MS. CITRIN: And then you have an MBA.

3 MR. TAUBER: Yes. And the MBA came about because I
4 had extra credit left over from the BBA, and there was a
5 combined program with law, so I got a bunch of advance
6 credits. So when I graduated law school, I needed 12 hours to
7 get my MBA. So that was kind of a bargain degree, and I did
8 that while I was working, because it's not like today. Then
9 we were anxious to get out, get working, so I did my
10 undergraduate in three years, law school in three years, and I
11 went out and I got my MBA at night school while I was working.

12 While at Michigan I played a little freshman
13 football.

14 MS. CITRIN: I know you were a fraternity man.

15 MR. TAUBER: Yes, Sigma Alpha Mu. We were an
16 excellent fraternity. We were rated the best chapter in all
17 the SAMies two out of three years that I was there. I became
18 an officer. On campus we were first in sports for a Jewish
19 house, very unusual, out of something like 42 fraternities,
20 and we were second in academics. So that was pretty good.

21 MS. CITRIN: Was your family a religious family?

22 MR. TAUBER: As I mentioned, my grandfather was
23 semi-Orthodox. I think he was Orthodox originally, and then
24 as he assimilated more, he became less so. The Passover
25 services always lasted better than an hour, compared to mine

1 at about 10, 15 minutes.

2 My parents were pretty much as the majority of
3 people are today. We went to shul, celebrated the holidays.
4 I went to Yeshivah Beth Yehudah for afternoon school. Talking
5 about trouble, I was always in trouble there. Boredom. So I
6 had very negative experiences with my Hebrew education.

7 **MS. CITRIN:** It's interesting because in looking
8 over your record, I see there is this theme of interest in
9 Jewish education and even to this day you're very interested.
10 Maybe it's because you had such a bad experience.

11 **MR. TAUBER:** That's true, you know, because you are
12 limited and governed by your experiences. Just using the
13 example of the Yeshivah Beth Yehudah as a very bad experience
14 and watching my grandchildren dislike afternoon school as much
15 if not more than I did, I'm working on a program now with Tel
16 Aviv University, and the theme of it is why it's great to be
17 Jewish. And it's aimed at 12-year-old kids. Pre-bar mitzvah,
18 and it's all based on the media that they use. So it's games
19 playing. I have games with an underlying subliminal theme of
20 why it's great to be Jewish. There are mystery stories. And
21 with Tel Aviv University we have schools in Mexico, Madrid,
22 Detroit, New York, Denver that are experimenting with this
23 thing. I don't know if it's going to be successful or not,
24 but it is what's going to be necessary in teaching in the next
25 20 or 30 years. The old methods plain don't work. So we have

1 to develop things that the kids enjoy doing. I'm sure it will
2 be successful in the long term, but I'm not so sure it will
3 now.

4 MS. CITRIN: I haven't seen a lot written about it,
5 but I knew it was a technological program that would appeal to
6 young kids.

7 MR. TAUBER: Well, I see my grandchildren, they're
8 playing games all the time on their game machines, hour, hour
9 and a half at a time, and that's what gave me the idea to
10 let's give them games, the same kind of games, but let's have
11 a message within the game.

12 The other, because you mentioned education, and
13 again, it's a transition where we're limited by our
14 experiences, when I graduated law school, I went to work with
15 Honigman, when there were only four lawyers there, for about
16 six months. Then I had an opportunity to join my father-in-
17 law in the scrap business because he had bought a
18 manufacturing business and he wanted me to try to run that --
19 he was a scrap man -- even though I was fresh out of school.
20 It was not an easy transition because I found my education,
21 even though I had an MBA, BBA and a law degree, it didn't help
22 me much in a manufacturing business.

23 Because of that, some 20, 25 years later, I went to
24 University of Michigan in the '80s and said, you know, you
25 guys aren't teaching what's needed for business. That's why

1 when people graduate and they go into business, and the big
2 companies all have their own training programs, I said that
3 doesn't make any sense. Why don't we join with business, find
4 out what they want, incorporate it in our curriculum, and then
5 when they graduate, they can go right into business and become
6 active. They don't have to waste a year.

7 **MS. CITRIN:** That seems like a reasonable thing.

8 **MR. TAUBER:** It sounds easy, but it was difficult
9 because it involved cross-disciplinary training, and most
10 universities are built on silos: education, humanities,
11 business, and what this took is crossing those boundaries, and
12 it was combining engineering, business, LS&A into an MBA
13 degree and manufacturing, with a heavy dose of practical
14 experience out somewhere in the world working on a serious
15 assignment in corporations. That program has now been around
16 about 10 ten years. We have about 150 in the program a year,
17 and it's been a great success, so much so that the university
18 business school has now changed their model to the model of
19 the TMI. So that's the new model they're going to be using
20 instead of case studies that they did before. They're going
21 to be using this more practical approach.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** That's wonderful. It's so creative and
23 inventive, because obviously when you were a kid, no one
24 allowed you to explore that.

25 **MR. TAUBER:** I think that's probably the reason that

1 I did have those difficulties early on.

2 MS. CITRIN: You had some sort of a communal Jewish
3 experience growing up though. You were mostly with kids that
4 were Jewish.

5 MR. TAUBER: Yes, because of McCullough, Durfee.
6 That was our whole milieu. I wasn't even allowed to go down
7 to the other end of the block because there were some bad kids
8 down there, so I had to stay with just my end.

9 But the Yeshivah Beth Yehudah was so bad that I
10 really lost interest in Jewish education by the time I went to
11 college. That's why I got involved in some of these other
12 things at the university.

13 MS. CITRIN: I remember a really phenomenal personal
14 speech about what your children were going to be like and how
15 you were very concerned about it, and then you founded this
16 Commission on Identity and Affiliation. So I think you had
17 some very creative ideas that had never been done before
18 anywhere in the country. Would you talk a little bit about
19 that.

20 MR. TAUBER: I've always operated on the outer edge
21 of the envelope. That's where I enjoy being, with new,
22 creative ideas. The problem with it is you have lots of
23 failures, because when you're out on the outer edge, some
24 things work, some things don't. I've related a couple that
25 are working, but there were ones that haven't worked.

1 The whole continuity and identity issue, the way it
2 was approached. was mainly conversation and not action, and it
3 was very hard within a Federation to get funding and to get
4 motivation to move in new and unusual directions. A good
5 example of that is you know that I was chairman of the group
6 that merged United Jewish Appeal, UIA, CJF. It took me six
7 years to merge those. It was extremely difficult. Then I was
8 the first chairman and the executive. I had a grand vision,
9 and that goes somewhat to your question. To be able to do
10 things that are beyond what any individual Federation could
11 do. That's the point of a UJC, of a national organization.

12 Things like Birthright for instance. One of the
13 areas that I wanted to get into with UJC was to train 5000
14 teachers and Jewish professionals a year in existing programs
15 in the universe, but provide the funding, the coordination to
16 be able to do that. Everyone says that's the number one need
17 of the system. We just don't have enough. And even though
18 all Federations agreed to that, I could never put together the
19 funding and the commitment to move forward on that. And there
20 were several other grand ideas such as that which would affect
21 continuities.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** It certainly would.

23 **MR. TAUBER:** Good teachers.

24 **MS. CITRIN:** I think just merging those
25 organizations in itself was cataclysmic, I think.

1 **MR. TAUBER:** In my business experience I did a lot
2 of merging, buying and selling companies. This was so much
3 harder. I could put a merger together in a year, year and a
4 half, even a tough one two years. This took six years. And
5 the reason was is when you eliminate Jewish organizations,
6 you're also to some degree eliminating their history. So you
7 have people who are committed for their whole lifetime to
8 that, and are involved in it currently. They volunteer and
9 it's very meaningful, very emotional, and they really don't
10 want to see their organization merged into another
11 organization, and that's what made it so difficult.

12 It was working with people, and as we know, the
13 Jewish people are kind of ornery anyway, and a lot of what I
14 had to do in the merger was working with the human factor and
15 making people comfortable with it. Because it was, oh, yeah,
16 that's a good idea, let's do it, and then six months later
17 they would think, well, I'm not going to be president of such
18 and such anymore, and so they kind of backtrack on what they
19 had agreed to do, and that's why it was put it together, come
20 apart, put it together, come apart. So it was difficult.

21 **MS. CITRIN:** Are you happy with what the
22 organization looks like today?

23 **MR. TAUBER:** No. No, because we had a grander
24 scheme for it, a greater vision. One of the things that came
25 across our desk after we did it was a plan to eliminate every

1 genetic disease in the Jewish community. A geneticist came
2 and said for a couple million dollars of research, within ten
3 years there will no longer be any Jewish diseases, directly
4 associated with the Jewish population. A lot of other
5 diseases but not our unique diseases, which there were about
6 ten of them. No appetite for the funding of it. I couldn't
7 raise the money to be able to do something as significant as
8 that.

9 **MS. CITRIN:** That would be incredible if that
10 happened.

11 **MR. TAUBER:** Yes. So when I say I was disappointed,
12 it's because after my term of office ended, there became great
13 budgetary constraints, and the Federations were pushing very
14 hard on budget cutting. So they cut out all the things that
15 we had set up to be able to do this original thinking,
16 renaissance and renewal, a special trust for Jewish
17 philanthropy, which was made up of large donors, Federations,
18 UJC, to be able to accomplish some of these things. So that's
19 why I was disappointed.

20 The one nice thing that came out of it, and my main
21 interest from my background at UJA, was to stabilize the
22 dollars going to Israel, because they had gone just in my time
23 of involvement from the 60s, down to the 40s, and today into
24 the low 30s. But the last four or five years the total
25 dollars going to Israel -- because some is not directly

1 allocation, some is in extra money coming out of the
2 Federation -- has pretty well stabilized. And I just saw that
3 going down and down. So from that point of view UJC was
4 successful, and they do serve the Federations well. I really
5 wasn't too interested in a trade association. I had a grander
6 scheme in mind.

7 And it may come back. The current executive
8 president, Howard Rieger, now is trying to rebuild some of
9 those things.

10 **MS. CITRIN:** It's interesting, when you talk about
11 going from the Yeshivah to an international star on the Jewish
12 scene, it's incredible.

13 **MR. TAUBER:** It has been, looking back, a fantastic
14 run. The things that I've been able to do, in business, but
15 Jewishly.

16 **MS. CITRIN:** I looked in your records and saw that
17 you started out in the Junior Division, and became president
18 of that in 1964. I read in 1969 you were part of a young
19 leadership trip and you went to a concentration camp. So you
20 had some early experiences.

21 **MR. TAUBER:** I started out in young leadership, and
22 I joined that more because I was a joiner. Not with any great
23 Jewish commitment, but some of the mentors people had looked
24 up to in the community were heavily involved in the community,
25 so I just became involved. My former wife said I would join

1 anything, AAA, it doesn't matter.

2 Then I got involved through that, set up a program
3 there to put Junior Division members on boards of agencies,
4 because I wanted to go on the Jewish Community Center board.
5 As a youngster I used to sneak into the Center to be able to
6 play basketball. So I thought I could give a little bit back.
7 I got on their board and over the years worked my way through
8 to become president of the Center, treasurer of the Jewish
9 Family Service, all through that Junior Division.

10 An interesting battle that arose was during the
11 building the current Jewish Center. The Center was built. It
12 was a very poor design. In fact I was one of the few in favor
13 of really suing the architect because it was not a functional
14 building. Although we had 14,000 members on the day we
15 opened, that quickly dropped to about 9,000 or 10,000. The
16 Center was in deep financial trouble, as you know, and has
17 been on and off for many years, but it was really in deep
18 financial trouble.

19 One of the ways out was to build up the health club,
20 and the only way we could do that was to build another section
21 of racquetball and handball courts, because those are the
22 things that the members wanted to bring. We felt with the
23 charges that would kind of stabilize the income. But the
24 committee had just -- I think the original budget was \$9
25 million, I think they had put in \$12 million. Marty Citrin

1 had been ~~the~~ the building committee chair and then president of
2 the Federation, and Alan Schwartz was involved, Bill Berman
3 was involved from the Federation point of view. And the
4 Center came with a proposal, to spend another \$1 million on
5 these courts. That leadership would have no part of it
6 because they had just overspent. The budget -- big money at
7 that time -- was \$700,000 in the red. So they weren't looking
8 favorably upon the Center.

9 Hugh Greenberg and I saw that if we didn't put those
10 courts in, we were going to have shut up about half the
11 center, close it off, cut down the utilities because it wasn't
12 usable. It came time for the board meeting, and unusually
13 they had a night board meeting, which they didn't very often
14 have at the Center, and I had gone to several of the board
15 members and lobbied. It just so happened the ones I lobbied
16 with were through my father-in-law and they were quite
17 elderly.

18 We had the board meeting out here at night instead
19 of the middle of the day downtown. They went through the
20 agenda, and about ten o'clock at night this subject came up.
21 You don't often see these kinds of debates at a Federation
22 board meeting, but Hugh and I were pitted against three very
23 powerful officers of the Federation, and some of those I had
24 lobbied with were barely hanging on at ten o'clock at night.
25 I think we won that vote at something like 15 to 12, which was

1 highly unusual, in favor of doing the building.

2 I distinctly remember thinking, well, that's the end
3 of my Federation career. I put these guys on, I beat them,
4 and they're not going to be too favorable to me to be involved
5 in Federation. Well, I was entirely wrong. Marty, Bill nor
6 Alan ever in any way or in any shape ever held any of that
7 against me. And I think that's a real credit to the
8 community, that we could have that kind of discussion. It was
9 heated. And they weren't happy. But once we were done, the
10 decision was made, we all moved on.

11 You mentioned the trip to the concentration camp.
12 The most important trip of my life was the concentration
13 camps. It was Mauthausen. That's one that will bring tears
14 to the eyes. As I said before, my involvement was because I
15 was interested in being involved, and there wasn't a great
16 deal of Jewish dedication, at least conscious Jewish
17 dedication; let's put it that way. Maybe there was some from
18 my grandparents.

19 MS. CITRIN: Well, it's nice to feel that you belong
20 someplace.

21 MR. TAUBER: Yes. And Jews are pretty good.

22 After the Junior Division I got into the Young
23 Leadership Cabinet. Herb Friedman created that and taught all
24 of us at a very young age. His theme was you're the younger
25 generation, I want you guys to all take over the Federation

1 system as you go, and I'm going to train you to be able to do
2 that. We had two, three day-long seminars about Jewish
3 history, what it meant to be Jewish, some things that had
4 happened to our people, and I had had nothing like that
5 because school was not that kind of experience. So it really
6 got me thinking.

7 Then when I got to the concentration camp,
8 Mauthausen -- and I still tell the story today -- I looked
9 around and I saw literally hundreds of ways that they were
10 killing Jews: parachuting them off the end of a mountain,
11 shooting, covering with water and leaving outside to freeze,
12 electric fences, these kinds of things where you hang, by a
13 doctor, I mean ones that you can't even imagine.
14 Dismemberment. It was horrible. With the history I had of
15 our people and standing there, I remember thinking to myself,
16 I'm going to commit the rest of my life to making sure this
17 never happens again. I'm going to have kids. I don't want
18 this to ever happen again.

19 The way I think you do that is you stay organized
20 and not be afraid to speak out, any time, any place. The era
21 of that -- my 20-20 hindsight -- the era of that previous
22 generation was no one really spoke out enough. There was
23 some, but not enough demanding, not enough pressure. We had
24 some political power but we didn't use it, or know how to use
25 it maybe. I know we could have bombed the concentration

1 camps, we could have done a lot of things during the war very
2 easily.

3 So I committed myself right then and there. I would
4 say that I have maintained that to this day until I die of
5 continuing involvement. The positions are only a way to carry
6 that commitment out. It's not an end in itself in any of the
7 positions. It was just a way to do what I said. Even though
8 I am no longer directly involved at UJC, I'm still doing three
9 or four major Jewish projects, the difference being that
10 they're of my selection, so I can be very comfortable, rather
11 than in an organizational institutional way. But I'll
12 continue doing these things.

13 **MS. CITRIN:** Well, that's good.

14 I read that you went on a lot of trips, but the one
15 that stands out besides the concentration camp was when you
16 greeted 14,000 Ethiopian people.

17 **MR. TAUBER:** Let me talk about that experience and
18 how -- because it's kind of the theme of this discussion --
19 how it affected me later. I'm doing four things now in Jewish
20 life. One, I'm helping Israel write a new constitution.
21 They've asked a group I belong to to gather opinions of the
22 North American Jewish community on things that affect the
23 Diaspora that are going to be in the Israeli constitution,
24 when and if it's ever completed. Most people think there one
25 but there isn't a constitution.

1 There are critical issues -- Who's a Jew; minority
2 rights; religion as state, that we have a stake in. The nice
3 thing is for the first time ever the Knesset came to us and
4 said we'd like not your money; we want the opinions of world
5 Jewry as we develop this new constitution. So that's one of
6 the project. We just started it, and we had our first
7 meetings in New York with nine Knesset members a month ago.
8 So that project is going, and we'll be in Detroit and spread
9 around the country.

10 **MS. CITRIN:** To quote you, before we had a concern
11 about physical survival and now it's a concern about creative
12 survival.

13 **MR. TAUBER:** Right.

14 **MS. CITRIN:** So here you are working on a
15 constitution.

16 **MR. TAUBER:** That was a long time ago.

17 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes, this was in 1996. You said, we
18 can't worry any more about attacks from the outside, but only
19 attrition from within.

20 **MR. TAUBER:** Let me come back to that, because
21 that's one of those tough things. I'll cover just the four
22 that I'm doing now.

23 The second project that I'm doing is Tel Aviv
24 University and this games playing. I'm chairman of Tel Aviv
25 University's American Council. The reason I did that is

1 because Ed Robinovich, the president, is a good friend of
2 mine, but also they promised to work on this project for me.
3 So that's the second commitment I have.

4 The third is now I'm spearheading something, I'm
5 trying to learn about the 21st century. It is a petition
6 drive, an open letter to the president, saying make as a
7 primary focus of your foreign policy a continuing involvement
8 in the Israeli Palestinian issue. We have a web page, and I'm
9 trying to get hundreds of thousands of signatures on this
10 letter to give the president the support and as a politician
11 to know there's a lot of people behind him, and some of these
12 minorities that are out there talking left, right about
13 negatives, there's a vast majority, some 70 percent of the
14 American population, that's behind that initiative.

15 And that brings me to the fourth one, which goes
16 back to my experience, which was another life-changing
17 experience of meeting Ethiopians. I think it was '92 when
18 they came off the plane. It was a beautiful experience.
19 About a month ago UJC came to me and said we'd like to run a
20 separate campaign for the Ethiopians because they're second
21 class citizens in Israel, and we think with some money we can
22 intervene and assist that. So I'm in the midst of doing my
23 due diligence because I don't want to get back into the
24 institutional kinds of battles I've had. So I've set criteria
25 of specific programs, commitment by the Federations, a theme

1 of the campaign, and if they're willing to do that, I'd take
2 it on, but with a very good co-chairman who was on the tarmac
3 with me when I met the people, and she's a wonderful woman.

4 **MS. CITRIN:** Describe for us when they came off the
5 plane.

6 **MR. TAUBER:** Oh, a most moving experience of my
7 lifetime. It brought tears to my eyes. This was the last
8 plane. A C-135 was the last plane. They had some 747s with
9 1200 people on it. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but
10 the whole end drops down because it's for tanks and trucks.
11 They opened it up, and there are 250 people crammed into this
12 thing, flying five, six hours in this vibrating plane.
13 Standing next to me of course the Jewish Agency, prime
14 minister, these very tough pilots that had been flying the
15 plane. There's nothing tougher than an Israeli pilot.

16 These people all came off. They didn't run off like
17 you or I probably would have done. They came off very
18 quietly. They were gentle people. They greeted some of their
19 predecessors that were there. They do cheek to cheek to
20 cheek, not like the French, twice, or us, once. They just
21 kept doing that, and very quiet. The last guy off was their
22 chazzen, who was their rabbi. I didn't say anything, but it
23 was clear to everybody what he was saying was here I am, I
24 brought my people back after 5000 years. And that's the kind
25 of experience that blows your mind.

1 **MS. CITRIN:** I've got tears in my eyes.

2 **MR. TAUBER:** There wasn't a dry eye. I mean these
3 big tough pilots that flew them.

4 The reaction of the Israeli public was something
5 probably never done before or after. They were so excited
6 with these people, they brought clothes, they brought food. I
7 followed them to the absorption centers and they had some
8 brief instruction. All the Israeli bringing everything. You
9 couldn't stop them. Finally they had to block the street
10 because there was so much there of the outpouring.

11 Unfortunately they weren't integrated into the
12 society the way they should have been, and so we have the
13 problem today. But that one-month period for the Jewish
14 people was as good as Entebbe.

15 That experience on the tarmac now brings me to a
16 potential responsibility now.

17 **MS. CITRIN:** Something you can take in your
18 direction and with your creativity and your good thoughts and
19 ideas.

20 **MR. TAUBER:** I'm a consensus builder. I like to
21 lead, but I like to lead with people who are following. So
22 you have to have some sense of consensus. I'm perfectly
23 comfortable with that, going around and getting consensus.
24 But once the consensus is done, everybody says I want to do
25 what they say, which is the great deficiency in the Federation

1 system. It's yeah, yeah, yeah, we're going to do that, and
2 they go back to the community and can't get it approved or
3 change their mind. I don't know. It doesn't happen.

4 **MS. CITRIN:** But the things that you're working on
5 will really have great impact, a constitution or better lives
6 for Ethiopians.

7 **MR. TAUBER:** It's fun. It's a little too much right
8 now but it's fun in that it's stuff that I really enjoy doing.

9 I led a discussion in New York in our first meeting
10 about a month ago on religion and state and all the
11 ramifications that means that we don't even understand. I had
12 an ultra Orthodox member of Knesset there and I had a
13 liberal member there. Just listening to them and their views
14 and then how the American Jewish community reacted to them.
15 Fascinating. So a most enjoyable project.

16 **MS. CITRIN:** I did want to touch upon when you were
17 campaign chair for this Federation in 1982, there was an
18 emergency campaign to help Israel raise money so that they
19 could protect themselves against the PLO. Then just recently
20 you had an opportunity to meet face to face with Mubarak and
21 Hassad, and I think you met with Arafat.

22 **MR. TAUBER:** I did meet with Arafat. I'd worked so
23 long in the Jewish community, from the campaign and the
24 missions, but through the UJA/UJC experience, part of what
25 you're doing is representing the Federation system, maybe the

1 American Jewish community, but certainly the Federation system
2 to the government of Israel. So I have had the opportunity to
3 meet with these people. So I met with Mubarak several times,
4 Arafat several times, Abass twice. And then a lot of the
5 lesser players, and ones that are quite prominent. You see
6 these are people. And yes, they have political points, but
7 they are people.

8 On the Israel side I've had some kind of
9 relationship with every prime minister since Shamir. I just
10 had lunch Monday with Sharon. About six of us.

11 I did tell this story. About five years ago I did
12 have a bit of a run-in with him. He was part of the minority
13 government, and it was my job as head of UJC to dis-invite him
14 to the general assembly. I had a nice thing to talk about
15 with him, things we wanted to do and we wanted the president
16 to come. He had just walked up on the Temple Mount and a lot
17 of people thought that he had started the Intifada. So
18 Chicago didn't want him.

19 So I went through my whole spiel, and he looked at
20 me -- a very smart man -- and he says, you're dis-inviting me,
21 aren't you? He says, I'll tell you what. I'm going to give
22 you 24 hours -- by the way he didn't remember this on Monday
23 -- and at the end of 24 hours I'm going to call in the world
24 press and I'm going to tell them that the American Jewish
25 community now supports the Palestinians and Arafat, and

1 they're trying to undermine the minority in Israel. They are
2 trying to de-legitimize us.

3 Well, needless-to-say, I went back to Chicago,
4 called special meetings, and within 24 hours it had changed
5 and I introduced him as our guest at the general assembly.
6 But he went on for an hour and a half after that and talked
7 about his view of Arab/Israeli relations and what he would do
8 if he were prime minister. He had been booted out of the
9 government a couple times. He didn't have a lot of
10 credibility. So I really wasn't buying it. And I told this
11 story on Monday.

12 I said, of all the prime ministers, Rabin and some
13 good ones, you're one of the only ones I know of that said
14 here's what I'm going to do, and that's exactly what you've
15 done in your five years in office.

16 So it's given me that continuity over the years to
17 be able to have those kinds of relationships, and through that
18 involvement, with the presidents of the United States as well.
19 And it's been a good run.

20 I'll give you one example where maybe some good --
21 because Max Fisher has done a tremendous amount of good in the
22 political arena. He taught me early on, he said get involved
23 in politics. Even though you're on the Democratic side, get
24 involved in politics.

25 We had a problem in Azerbaijan and we had a Jewish

1 Agency group there that was bringing Jews out and the
2 government of Azerbaijan decided they were going to throw the
3 Jewish Agency out because they didn't want all this
4 disturbance. They were having enough trouble. So I was in a
5 meeting with the president with a group of Jewish leaders, and
6 they were all jockeying for position.

7 I knew Clinton pretty well. He said to me, what's
8 on your mind? I said, well, we've got this problem in
9 Azerbaijan, and they want to throw our people out, and we're
10 rescuing people there, people that have a right to go to
11 Israel and I could use some help. He turned to Madeline
12 Albright and Burger and said, do you know anything about this?
13 They said no. He said -- and this is an exact quote -- "I
14 have some markers out on Dalawan, president of Azerbaijan.
15 Let me see what I can do." This was on a Thursday.

16 On a Sunday, the following Sunday, I got word from
17 Israel that they'd called in the Jewish Agency, and today you
18 got some help from pretty high up. He says, I think you can
19 stay here, and they worked out the situation.

20 **MS. CITRIN:** Isn't that amazing.

21 **MR. TAUBER:** That's what you can do when you're
22 involved in the political process. There were those that
23 criticized me when I was head of the UJC for my political
24 involvement with Gore, with Clinton, and the Democratic Party.
25 But I never used my UJC position as part of that. I was there

1 as an American citizen. Nonetheless, there were those that
2 criticized me, totally incorrectly, because you can accomplish
3 -- you don't want to use UJC.

4 MS. CITRIN: Right.

5 MR. TAUBER: But as an individual you can affect,
6 maybe in a little, minor way. Max, during the Ethiopian
7 crisis, that week called President Bush at that time and he
8 called the Ethiopian rebels who were on the outskirts if you
9 remember. That's why we rescued 12,000 in a weekend. He got
10 them to hold off going in until the Monday so we could get the
11 people out. I did that. I was there. I saw it. We had to
12 pay \$25 million on the Wednesday.

13 MS. CITRIN: I thought there was a little price for
14 that.

15 MR. TAUBER: Yes. And we never knew what happened
16 to that money by the way. Anyway, we came up with the \$25
17 million. We don't know if the new government got it or the
18 old government, but it took us about two days at UJA. We
19 didn't go through process. \$25 million to rescue our Jews, we
20 came up with the \$25 million and rescued them.

21 My political involvement, I was with APAC when APAC
22 was two people delivering checks to congressmen and senators.
23 That's got to be 30, 40 years ago. It's important. Very
24 important.

25 MS. CITRIN: According to the record you've been

1 involved since the early '60s.

2 **MR. TAUBER:** Forty-five years.

3 The jobs as campaign chairman in Detroit, Federation
4 president were the best. They were so much fun because you
5 had more direct contact with people and you could implement
6 your policies and your own ideas. The national scene is way
7 more politic. Not at UJA. UJA was a ball. Believe it or
8 not, we had about 16 people running UJA, and we just made the
9 decisions and went off and ran emergency campaigns, ran
10 regular campaigns, and we just went out and raised money.

11 The Exodus Campaign we raised \$920 million to bring
12 out 1,250,000 people from the former Soviet Union and the
13 80,000 from Ethiopia. Whoever heard of that in the history of
14 mankind? Go all the way back in history. One group of people
15 helping 1,250,000 people from the former Soviet Union to the
16 United States. People we didn't know, had no relationship
17 because of the Iron Curtain, and came up with \$920 million to
18 do it. What kind of people are we?

19 **MS. CITRIN:** It's pretty phenomenal.

20 **MR. TAUBER:** It's just amazing, and how we changed
21 the nature of Israel. Those million Russians changed Israel
22 totally, economically, culturally, for the good. There were
23 some bad. You know, there's the Russian Mafia and others
24 there, but by and large it was a great, great influx of people
25 for Israel.

1 **MS. CITRIN:** Being at the helm of those
2 organizations must have been an incredible rush to be at the
3 head when you rescue people from Syria or Sarajevo.

4 **MR. TAUBER:** It was a high. And you go see them.
5 In '89 I took my two step-daughters, Shelley's two kids, the
6 younger one to be bas mitzvahed at the Wall. But before I
7 took her, I wanted her to go on the same path as the Russians
8 we were rescuing. So Shelley and I and the two girls went to
9 Russia, met with some of the people that were leaving, went to
10 Vienna, where if you remember they transmigrated to Lidispole.
11 Then I took them to Lidispole. So they saw the people as they
12 moved through, what Jews do with other Jews, and we had
13 trouble with the dispalacia, should they come here, should
14 they go there, and there were big fights in the Jewish
15 community.

16 **MS. CITRIN:** Who wants to go to Israel, who wants to
17 come to the U.S.

18 **MR. TAUBER:** Well, most of them wanted to come to
19 the United States, but we were not letting them.

20 Then I took them and got them bas mitzvahed at the
21 Wall.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** What an incredible experience that must
23 have been.

24 **MR. TAUBER:** You were talking about passing it on to
25 the next generation. That's how I chose to do it. And with

1 my three kids, I took them to Israel many times as part of the
2 UJA missions. My son and three of his first cousins were bar
3 mitzvahed at the Wall. Next year I'm hoping, God willing,
4 I'll take four of my grandchildren that are 12 and 13. I want
5 to take them to Wall.

6 MS. CITRIN: You have five children.

7 MR. TAUBER: And nine grandchildren.

8 I speak about this with the young leadership of
9 Federation. I just had a meeting with a Legend. Because of
10 that I went back and looked at how many times I spoke to the
11 Young Leadership Cabinet and the Young Adults Division here.
12 It's 13 times in the last 15 years. The theme always is you
13 have to prioritize in life, and the priorities are clear.
14 Always been clear to me since I was 19 or 20. One, family;
15 two, business; three, physical fitness because my dad died
16 when I was very young; four, philanthropy; five, social. I
17 have maintained since I was 20 those same priorities.

18 What changes is the amount of time you have
19 available, but not the change in priorities, because in the
20 early years it's all family and business and you're trying to
21 get ahead, and a little bit of the others. Athletic I always
22 did because of my dad, and I enjoyed it.

23 Now later in life, it's mainly philanthropy, but
24 still business, still family. And it's very important to keep
25 that perspective, and I warn these young people, don't distort

1 it. I've seen people lose their businesses because they got
2 too involved. I've seen divorces because they got too
3 involved. Balance. Patience and perseverance as Max always
4 said. There's plenty of time.

5 MS. CITRIN: Do you want to talk a little bit
6 because you mentioned you were there at the signing of Clinton
7 and Arafat and Rabin were all together on the White House
8 lawn, and it's one of the treasures you have in your office.

9 MR. TAUBER: Because I was always involved in
10 politics, always interested in politics -- I've supported Carl
11 and Sandy for instance since the day they took office -- so I
12 had a natural tendency. So I got involved through my other
13 positions, especially in later years, in the politics of
14 Israel, the politics of the United States, with my primary
15 emphasis on peace, at least some kind of an agreement, in the
16 Middle East. And as I told you, I made that commitment to
17 myself in the concentration camp, and this of course was the
18 ultimate, if we could bring those two people together. So
19 it's always been a primary focus. And that's when I met with
20 Arafat and Mubarak, always as a private individual, trying to
21 help the process.

22 That's why I'm doing this petition drive. I don't
23 know if it's going to be helpful. Is it needed? I don't
24 know. But it can't hurt. And it's an easy thing to do, I
25 think.

1 I started out as a dove. People are people. You
2 sit down and you talk to them. You give them something, they
3 give you something. I buy and sell companies. You negotiate
4 and you make it happen. I'm terribly naive, terribly naive.
5 Over the years -- because I had this conversation with Arafat
6 and I learned he -- and I am 100 percent convinced he never
7 intended to have a peaceful settlement with Israel. He was
8 looking for the demographic changes and he was looking for the
9 Arab world to support him in a war against Israel, and he said
10 it many times back in the '60s when they formed it, and he
11 never really left it if you look at what he's saying, because
12 he wanted to wipe Israel out. The Jews could live in the
13 Palestinian area if they wanted, but it was going to be a
14 Palestinian state. That was his objective.

15 So there were a lot of things we were doing.
16 President Clinton had Arafat to the White House more than any
17 other head of state during his term of office, because Clinton
18 is the same kind of guy. You know, he thinks he can talk
19 anybody into anything. He's smooth, understands people. You
20 couldn't with this guy.

21 So I never became a hawk, but I certainly moved into
22 the center, and quid pro quo, and a lot of the things that
23 even though I didn't agree with it five years ago when I had
24 that meeting with Sharon, I certainly agree with today. And I
25 think his policies have brought us to the point we're at now,

1 so that I think there's a real opportunity now. I wrote an
2 article in the *Jewish News* just recently about this is as good
3 an opportunity as I've seen, and therefore everybody has to do
4 -- and I said in the article, everybody, the Arab countries,
5 the Europeans, Russians, United Nations, all have to really
6 contribute if they're going to bring this thing together
7 because that's the kind of effort this thing is going to take.
8 There's too much hatred and the parties can't do it.

9 Let me talk a little bit about my speeches in 1999
10 because I went around the country and I probably gave 50, 70
11 speeches. One a week maybe. My theme was we've reached the
12 golden era of the Jewish people. We'd just left Lebanon. The
13 world was basking in praise of Israel. Anti-Semitism was at a
14 minimum. We were the most prosperous people in the history of
15 the Jewish people in North America. Israel GNP was growing.
16 We had done the Exodus campaign. That added about 4 million
17 Jews in Israel. Everything was great and I went around
18 talking about that. I said we no longer have to worry about
19 our survival. We don't have existential problems now. Now
20 it's quality. We have Nobel Peace Prize winners, we're active
21 in government, Kissinger, et cetera. Everywhere you looked
22 Jews were playing a prominent role and we weren't being
23 attacked as a people anywhere in the world. It looked pretty
24 good. So I went around speaking about that.

25 Of course then we hit the Intifada. Anti-Semitism

1 increased and we're back where we always were. And once again
2 I prove relatively naive. You have to understand that we're a
3 minority wherever we are. We've had difficulties in our 3000
4 year modern history. And we always have to understand and
5 protect ourselves and guard against those kinds of conditions.
6 We'll have good periods: Spain, Golden Era, and then it will
7 turn bad, and it can happen in the United States. Of course
8 it can happen in the United States. Will it? I doubt it, but
9 it could. Therefore as a people we have to stay very strong.

10 And one of the things I said to Sharon, because he
11 also believes that, any agreement with the Palestinians -- and
12 hopefully there will be one -- is not one that you encounter.
13 It's not an agreement between Canada and the United States.
14 Because I think their view of the Palestinians is the same as
15 Arafat's view, and that is we don't want you here, and they
16 have a long history of patience -- Crusaders, Turks, et cetera
17 -- they'll out-wait us. And therefore, no matter how good the
18 agreement is and how good it may get, and I have hopes that
19 the societies will work together over the next 20, 30 years
20 and some of that will go away, Israel must stay strong. They
21 must keep a qualitative edge. And their military has to stay
22 strong because you can't depend -- our history proves you
23 can't depend on those kinds of things.

24 I wanted to talk about that a little bit because I
25 think it's important.

1 **MS. CITRIN:** Well, it's interesting that you've
2 admitted that sometimes you actually change your opinion.

3 **MR. TAUBER:** You have to or you die. Things change,
4 conditions change. If you're not flexible, it's not much
5 good.

6 **MS. CITRIN:** Do you want to comment at all about
7 your family?

8 **MR. TAUBER:** Sure. You mentioned I have five kids
9 and nine grandkids. I'm a typical example in that my oldest
10 daughter married a non-Jew, got divorced five or six years
11 ago. But the children from that marriage are not very Jewish.
12 I do the most that I can, but if it's not in the home, it's
13 difficult. So I don't know when they make the decision
14 whether they're going to make the decision to be Jewish or
15 not.

16 My other six grandkids, they're the result of Jewish
17 homes, and my kids from the things that I did with them -- not
18 because I said it but because of the missions we went on and
19 we took them on retreats and I think you did some of that kind
20 of thing as well.

21 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes.

22 **MR. TAUBER:** They all have a great Jewish
23 consciousness, more than I had early on, so that both my
24 daughters in New York are involved with the Federation and
25 involved in other Jewish charitable fund-raising efforts.

1 They're in the midst of raising their kids, and are not real
2 active.

3 My son, who moved on to San Diego, to my great
4 dismay, and fault because I sent him there to run one of our
5 companies, got very involved in the Federation. And even
6 though he was only there a couple years, they made him
7 campaign chairman. And he's on the Young Leadership Cabinet.
8 A lot of the same kind of things that I did he's doing. Even
9 though, I must say, because we're extremely close, I advised
10 him against taking the chairmanship because he has little
11 kids, starting a business, all these other things, but he
12 decided to go ahead, which was fine. But after a year he
13 decided not to renew for a second year. It was a little too
14 much.

15 MS. CITRIN: It's a lot of work.

16 MR. TAUBER: Yes it is a lot of work. But for me
17 it's habit. I've said to my wife, why am I doing this?

18 MS. CITRIN: I think you enjoy it.

19 MR. TAUBER: There's no question I enjoy it.

20 Jewishly I'm very proud of my kids. I'm very, very
21 proud of the ways they're raising their families. My nine
22 grandkids of course are great, beautiful, intelligent, all the
23 things. And they really are.

24 MS. CITRIN: Any secrets that we should know about?

25 MR. TAUBER: The best is my marriage to Shelley has

1 put me into a situation that's beyond belief in relationships.

2 MS. CITRIN: Now you're going to make me cry.

3 MR. TAUBER: It's true. My first marriage -- and
4 Shelby was and is a wonderful person -- our personalities
5 clashed all the time. Not her fault, not my fault, but they
6 clashed. In this marriage it's total compatibility. I mean
7 100 percent. We've never had an argument in 22 years. We've
8 had discussions but never an argument. She's just been
9 supportive, a wonderful wife in everything that I do.
10 Although she never wants to take the forefront, she's behind
11 the scenes and encouraging me to do some of these things;
12 maybe you ought to do it. So that has just been a tremendous
13 joy to me.

14 MS. CITRIN: I was sort of surprised at how long
15 you've been married because you seem like newlyweds.

16 MR. TAUBER: And I feel like a newlywed. It's
17 really beyond belief that we've been so fortunate, and we both
18 cherish it and probably of that comes from first marriages.

19 A lot of my major speeches, I remember one at UJA I
20 said something like the Jewish people will never be separated
21 from Jerusalem, and I'll never be separated from Shelley.
22 That's paraphrasing, but it was a pretty good one.

23 Another personal comment and this is a bit sad, but
24 in redoing my offices in the past two weeks, I've been going
25 through my pictures and memorabilia, and I had probably half a

1 dozen people who played the biggest role in my life, men who
2 played the biggest role, and were the most loyal, dedicated to
3 everything that I did, and I think they were six and five of
4 them are gone, and that's so very sad. Max Fisher certainly
5 played a major, major role in everything that I did, and
6 tremendously supportive person.

7 My brother-in-law, Ken Dishell you remember Ken?

8 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes, I do.

9 **MR. TAUBER:** We were in business together, spent all
10 the years. During the divorce he stayed in the business with
11 me and supportive and helpful. My father and my father-in-
12 law.

13 And David Hermelin, we were friends since we were
14 six years old. All those trips that you were talking about,
15 he was right at my side. We were together in everything we
16 did, and he was one of those guys I was on the same
17 wavelength. Again it was like my wife. We did things
18 together. We were not in competition.

19 The other one who's still alive is Marv Lender, who
20 is like a brother in that we do -- we're doing this
21 constitution project and we do a lot of things together.
22 We've been in business together. The non-verbal
23 communication. He's a smart guy. I mean we'll be in a
24 meeting and we're thinking exactly the same thing. And he'll
25 say something or I'll say it, it doesn't matter, it comes out

1 the same.

2 Those kinds of relationships are unique. I don't
3 have 50 close friends, although I had a couple hundred at my
4 party. But those kinds of relationships are very special,
5 very important to me.

6 **MS. CITRIN:** I think that's a wonderful way to end
7 this interview. This had been really a great thrill for me to
8 interview you because I look at you as one of my mentors.

9 **MR. TAUBER:** Thank you.

10 **MS. CITRIN:** All the things you've done, I don't
11 think people understand the expanse of your participation.

12 **MR. TAUBER:** I like it behind the scenes.

13 **MS. CITRIN:** But it's really wonderful.

14 **MR. TAUBER:** Max said you can get a lot more done
15 behind the scenes. If you're out front, people are going to
16 take shots at you. When you're behind the scenes, you can
17 maneuver, you can make things happen. You don't have to just
18 do it for show. You're not doing it to impress anybody. Back
19 to the old commitment at the concentration camp. That's all
20 it's about.