

ORAL HISTORY OF: Norman Katz  
INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman  
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Archives  
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History Project

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SHARON ALTERMAN: I'm privileged to be sitting here with Norm Katz. My name is Sharon Alterman. We are interviewing Norman for our oral history project. Do we have your permission to use the subject of this interview for the historic record?

NORMAN KATZ: Definitely.

SHARON: It's a privilege to be here with you, and you've had such a long career within our community. So let's start at the very beginning. We'd like to know about your family. Tell us about your parents.

NORM: Both of them were immigrants. My father was born in Sandomierz, Poland. It was then part of czarist Russia. My mother was born in David Horodok, which is now in Belarus, but it's a Russian area. They both came to America. My mother came in 1914, and it's a very interesting story how she got here. My father came in 1913. I've been closer to my mother's family throughout my life.

My mother was the second of five children. She had an older sister and three younger brothers, the Schecters. The older sister was married to Phillip Eisenstadt. Phillip's Shoes was the name of his business.

What happened is I was named after my grandfather, my mother's father. He had suffered a stroke in 1910, and he was incapacitated to a large extent. So they decided to migrate, fortunately, to America. I guess this is the only time that a stroke was really a life-saver.

At any rate, they sent my oldest aunt, my mother's older sister, to America, and she worked in a sweatshop in Chelsea, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, and she saved up a lot of money, a lot of money for those days, and she sent my mother a ship card. So she got the ship card, and I assume she was taken to the railhead, which was maybe five, ten miles away, by horse and wagon. She got on the train. I do not know if she was alone or if she was with other immigrants. I don't remember. I don't know that part of the story. But she got to Warsaw, and from Warsaw she was supposed to go by train to Hamburg, get on a British ship, and come to the United States, getting in at Ellis Island.

When she got to Warsaw, I know she hooked up with a lot of other immigrants. I don't know if there were 40 or 140; I just don't know. But she couldn't go to Hamburg. The archduke had been assassinated in Sarajevo. She was traveling

all alone. She was 16 or 17 at the time, and klaina shtetl as they said. She was a small town girl. She didn't have the big education, although she was very intelligent. Fortunately she had a good ship agent, and the ship agent took all these immigrants -- I don't know how many there were -- and he took them behind the Russian lines. She got to I think Riga. Then she got on a ship. She told me she thought the ship went to Sweden. Never was in Sweden. It went to England. She got to Liverpool, because I found her records at Ellis Island, and it said that she was born in 1898. She always said that she was born in 1899.

She hooked up with a lady who was traveling with three children, she told me. And it's a very touching story. She got to the United States and somehow or other she got separated from this lady, and she said she felt like a motherless child. She cleared the immigration. They used to check your eyes for glaucoma I think it was. She passed it. But she didn't know how to get to her sister. She told me she was really petrified.

And I have to tell you my mother was a rather good looking girl. She was out past the gates, so she was legally in the United States. That's all you had to do, was get through the date. Some man came through and was yelling out in Yiddish, does anybody need any help. And she didn't know if she could trust him. But she said I've got to find out.

So she went over to him, and it turned out it was from HIAS. He took her to the train station in Manhattan, sent a telegram to my aunt to meet her at the train station in Boston, and told the conductor where to get her off, told her where to get off in Boston. And I have to tell you to this day I make a small donation to HIAS, in memory of that event. I'm very touched by it.

She finally hooked up with her sister. And then her three younger brothers and her mother came to America. Her mother was the only grandparent that I really knew. My father was a little bit different. But at any rate, that's my mother's family.

They were living in Boston with her sister, and then there were jobs in Detroit because Detroit was again like the arsenal of democracy in the First World War, and she was attracted to come to Detroit. That's where she met my father.

My father was born in Sandomierz, Poland, which was right on the Vistula River, and that was the border between Austro-Hungary on the other side of the river and czarist Russia on his side. His father had a little business. I think my grandfather was a gerekhtikeyt, I'm not sure. He came to America twice. Why he did that I don't know. He would have been better if he'd come the first time and stayed and brought his family the first time, because that was in 1899. My father was born in 1895. He was the fifth of seven

children.

His father, they had sewing machines in the house, and they used to manufacture stockings, dishtowels, I don't know what it was. He used to take it across the border into Austria, where he could get higher prices for it, only he neglected to pay the duty. Of course nobody was loyal to the czar; you have to understand that. They found out about him and they issued a warrant for his arrest, and he heard about it first. In those days the Russian passports did not have pictures in them. He literally grabbed his cousin, one of the Schlissels, he grabbed his cousin's passport and he got to the United States ultimately, and he was here for five years. He saved up a lot of money under those days. And he went back to Russia, and he was living there quietly, and they didn't remember the warrant that was out for his arrest.

In 1908 or 1909 the czarina had a baby. This is the Rasputin story. And they gave amnesty. Foolishly, my grandfather decided he wanted to be kosher in the country, so he applied for that amnesty. So instead of 18 months, they gave him 12. It wasn't like a gulag or anything like that. It was like a county jail and their house was about a block and a half away. I've been Sandomierz. It's a beautiful little city.

My grandfather wouldn't eat the prison food because it wasn't kosher. So my father had a job of coming every day

with food for him. He would walk around in the square, but he had to stay there overnight. When he got out, he wasn't allowed to live on the border anymore. But there was the Depression and they moved to Ludz. The Depression was in the whole world at that time, and he decided to come back to the United States. His older three siblings were already married, and he had an older sister who probably felt that she should have gone with her father, but there was no chance -- my grandfather was somewhat of a male chauvinist -- he was not going to come with a daughter, he was going to come with a son.

Anyway, my father was a very scholar, he was a good student, although he wasn't religious later on. So they came to Canada first. He was living in Canada for about three years. He arrived in 1913. In 1916 or 1917 he came to Detroit because there were jobs here because of the First World War effort. He met my mother here.

He told a story, which shows what the immigrants had to go through. He got a job when he came to Canada. It must have been in August or September. It turned out that Rosh Hashanah was shortly after that. So he took two days off. Then he took off a day for Yom Kippur. Then he took two days off for Succoth and two days off at the end of Succoth. And the end of the story was they fired him. He said to himself, enough of this nonsense. He was never religious thereafter,

although we kept kosher in our house because later on my grandmother, my mother's mother, lived with us. So out of respect for her they kept kosher.

My parents, when they met each other, in those days it was unusual, they were Zionists. We were secular in our family. My father on the other hand was very well educated in Jewish matters, not university education. He knew the Tanach by heart. I tested him once and I know that that's true. But they were not religious, they were really secular. If you buttered some bread with a ~~pleshok~~ <sup>fleischk (meat)</sup> knife, somebody cleaned it up and put it back. Put a stone on it and heat it and bury it and all that sort of stuff. They weren't that way.

They were not religious shall we say, but we were in the minority in the Jewish community because the family was Zionist. And it was Labor Zionist, not Likud or anything or anything like that. It was Politizem. The rest of their families came over afterwards.

One of my father's brothers was killed in the Holocaust with his wife. And a nephew that he had by another sister, who died in the flu epidemic in the First World War, was killed in the Holocaust also. My mother's family, all five of the siblings came to the United States, and I was very close to those uncles all the time.

**SHARON:** Could you tell us your parents' names.

**NORM:** My father's name was Joseph, or Yosef, and my

mother's name was Bertha, but everybody called her Bessie. My mother's mother, she came around 1923 with my youngest uncle, the only one that came on a visa. The others came, all you had to do was get through Ellis Island and you were in, and that's how they got here.

**SHARON:** You mentioned David Horodok. I know there's a very strong society here. Did you ever go back to that community?

**NORM:** Yes, I was in David Horodok and in Sandomierz in 1998. I went with my daughter Laura. The David Horodok Society organized a trip, and I remember Asher Tilchen said to us, we had to get at least 30 people to go. Otherwise there wouldn't be a trip. Sixteen of the 30 were my family. I got a good number of my cousins to go and some of them took their children. You might know some of them. Lita Zemmol was one and her son and daughter came, Miriam and Johnny. Laura came, but my other three kids did not come. We were going to go back a second time. Zvi Gittleman ran the trip. He was a wonderful lecturer. He knew a lot about the countries. We were going to go a second time, but my wife got very sick, and we had to cancel it. But it would have been a great trip because I had all four that were going to go on that trip, but we couldn't go.

**SHARON:** So what was your experience seeing the village?



**NORM:** Sandomierz, my father's town, was a very lovely town. It's a cathedral town. Really a walled city, beautiful city. We went through the cathedral, which I'm sure my father would never do. There was even a painting on the wall at the cathedral which was rather anti-semitic. It showed what was obviously a Jewish man and he has his hand on the head of a small child, and it was obvious that it had to do with the blood libel. I couldn't talk to anybody in the church to ask them because they didn't speak English. I speak some German, and nobody could speak so I never found out. But it was obvious to me that it was an anti-semitic painting.

My mother's town was nondescript. It's in the middle of the Pripiet Marshes. When I used to talk to my uncles in particular, I used to say what did you remember of Horodok, and the answer was always the blote, the mud. The Pripiet Marshes were horrible. It was really a nondescript town. But it had a large presence in Detroit. I guess what happened is some people came here, they got jobs, sent for the cousins, sent for the uncles.

My mother was not a member of the Horodok Society, but after I went on the trip, I joined.

**SHARON:** What did her family do in that village?

**NORM:** In that village my grandfather was a butcher. In fact their name is Schecter, which means butcher of course in Hebrew. They were involved in that. My father's family,

as I said, they had sewing machines and made stockings and dishtowels and things like that.

**SHARON:** Can you tell us a little bit more about how your parents met?

**NORM:** I don't know too much about it except that I think that they met at some sort of a Labor Zionist meeting. It could have been a Habonim meeting also. The Habonim and the Labor Zionists were all one grouping. They met I think probably around 1919, 1920, something like that, and they got married in 1922. I'm the oldest of four children. I had a brother Sidney who died two years ago, in 2011. He was an ob-gyn. And I had another brother who died at the age of six and a half. He died of leukemia. And then I have a sister who lives in New York. She's a judge in New York. She has to retire this year. She reached the mandatory retirement age.

As I said, my father and my grandfather were here in the United States after 1917, when they moved from Canada. The rest of my father's family came over after. Each one has a story of course. But they came over after the First World War. My grandmother died in 1928, and my grandfather, who must have been quite a character, I'll put that way, moved from Detroit. He went to Israel, which was then Palestine, and he lived in Meah Sharim.

He was religious, my father wasn't, but they got along all right, but his father recognized that he was

learned, let's put it that way, but not in a formal sense. He went to a Bes Midrash, not to a Yeshiva, but he was trained to be a balcour in the old country. But as I say, he got away from the religion altogether. We went to schul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but that was about it. If somebody had a bar mitzvah, maybe we would go then, but that about it.

**SHARON:** Did anybody else in your family travel to Palestine in those days?

**NORM:** In those days just my grandfather. He moved in 1929, after his wife died. When he was there, he remarried twice. The second wife was the one that survived him, and he was buried on Yerushalayim, the Mount of Olives, but we don't know where his grave is because when the Jordanians had control of that part of what is now Jerusalem, they took the headstones and used them for paving blocks.

**SHARON:** Desecrated them.

**NORM:** We don't know where he's buried, but we know he's buried on the Mount of Olives.

**SHARON:** It sounds like you had a wonderful early childhood.

**NORM:** I had a happy childhood. I've got to say that. I liked my dad very much. He was an outgoing guy. My mother was a little bit more reserved, I wouldn't say depressed, but there was an element of that in it, especially after my brother died, and he was sick. It was a terrible

thing. In fact I think that leukemia unfortunately runs in my family, not my wife's. We have four children, and number three is my son Steven who lives in Seattle, his oldest child died also of leukemia at the age of two and a half. He has now three children. But the oldest of those three, my daughter-in-law was pregnant with the first one when the older brother died. So none of the three children that are living knew the one that died. It was one of those things. But that's the way it goes and there's nothing much we can do about that.

**SHARON:** So let's go back to your early childhood. Where were you educated? What neighborhood did you live in?

**NORM:** We lived in the Dexter area. When I was born, we still lived in the Oakland Avenue section, when the Jewish Center was on Gladstone and Woodward. I was only about six months old when moved to the Dexter area. We lived in a four-flat on Boston and McQuade. Then we moved to Tyler and Dexter, between Dexter and Homer. I went to kindergarten from there at McCullough School. Then we moved to a two-flat on Fullerton between Dexter and Wildemere. Then my father bought a house on Glendale between Dexter and Homer. It was in an area called Russell woods. All new houses went in over there. He must have had one of the first FHA loans under the Roosevelt administration. We lived in that house until I married Annie. Then when I married Annie, we moved to

Huntington Woods. That was in 1954. So from 1937 to 1954 I lived in Dexter. My folks finally sold the house on Glendale in 1959 and moved to Oak Park.

**SHARON:** What are some of your remembrances of that neighborhood? I know it was a colorful place to live.

**NORM:** Well, in those days a Jewish neighborhood was a Jewish neighborhood. It was completely Jewish. For instance, when I went to Central, I think that something like -- we graduated 750 in my class -- 700 were Jewish. There were maybe 40, 50 students there who weren't, and I was rather friendly with the ones that weren't. I knew some of them rather well. Today a neighborhood is considered Jewish if it's only 20 percent Jewish, like West Bloomfield or Oak Park or something like that.

It was a rather vibrant place. I went to Hebrew School at Tuxedo and Homer. Mr. Nagy was my main teacher. I had other teachers of course, but he's the one I remember most. And he knew my father, and that made it very tough for me. He insisted that I speak a conversational Hebrew. My father and Mr. Nagy were not very religious people, I've got to tell you that, but they wanted sechah they called it, conversational Hebrew. Not that I know that much, I don't, but I could get along in Israel if I have to on my own.

**SHARON:** So that stuck with you.

**NORM:** In fact my bar mitzvah was at the Hebrew

School on Tuxedo and Homer because we didn't belong to any schul. So he arranged to have my bar mitzvah there.

I went to McCullough for elementary school, for the first six years, through sixth grade. Then we went to Durfee, and then we went to Central. Then I went to Wayne University, and then I went to Harvard Law School.

**SHARON:** You must have been a good student.

**NORM:** I don't know how good a student I was, but I managed, let's put it that way.

I just heard a couple of hours ago that one of my good friends died, Harold Berry. I used to walk over to his house, a block away, and his father drove us to Durfee and to Central. Getting home I was on my own.

**SHARON:** So what kind of interests did you have as a young man?

**NORM:** It depends on what age you're talking about, but I was interested in -- I like history, I've always liked history. In fact I had debated going to get a Ph.D. in European history, either German and Russian, and teaching, but I finally decided to go to law school instead. So I liked history very much, I liked geography. I wasn't much of a scientist. My mother wanted me to be a doctor. My brother accommodated her. But my sister and I both became lawyers.

I was always interested in politics, history and politics, current events, things like that. I was not a

scientist. Chemistry was tough for me. Physics was tough. I didn't really concentrate on those. I really concentrated on geography, on history, and things of that sort.

**SHARON:** You mentioned that your family was very Zionist. Were you involved in any youth organizations when you were a youngster?

**NORM:** Yes. You'll be surprised, you think of me as different now. But I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair, which was a pretty left wing organization. I remember that I was the youngest one in my class in Mr. Nagy's Hebrew School class. Most of my friends were about three years older than me. So people are rather surprised when I tell them that Bill Schumer was in my class, David Mondry was in my class. Two of the members of my class made Aliyah in the 1940s. I don't know what their Hebrewicized names were, but Zvi Fastestien was one and Ben Putnik as I remember, who was a veterinarian, who also made Aliyah. They lived in of all places in a Hashomer Kibbutz. Ein Hashofet or Ein Dor, one of the two. I think it was Ein Hashofet, which was named after Louis Brandeis.

We were a minority in the Jewish community by being Zionists.

**SHARON:** Did you ever give any thought to making Aliyah?

**NORM:** Yes and no, but never seriously, because by

the time I went to law school, I couldn't go over there, although one of my friends did go to Israel and became a lawyer there. His name was Ben Barish as I remember it. I don't even know if he's still living or not. I can't tell you. I've lost track of him.

**SHARON:** I'm interested in your career at Harvard. What brought you to Harvard?

**NORM:** When I graduated Wayne, I was accepted at the University of Michigan Law School, and this is a story so like my father. I said to him, I have an acceptance at Michigan, so I know I'm in a good school. There's no problem there. But know, maybe it would be easier for me if I was one of the very few who practiced in Michigan from Harvard. So he said, "Stick the iron in the fire." So I made the application. I think, but I'm not sure, but I think that I was the first graduate of Wayne to went to Harvard Law.

I think, but I do not know this, but it's an instinct that I have. I believe that -- they told me when I applied that they had no experience with anybody from Wayne and would I please take -- there was no LSAT in those days, the law school aptitude test -- the graduate record exam so they could compare me to other Ivy League schools. I said yeah, because I wasn't worried if I didn't pass it because I could go to Michigan, so I didn't care. So I took it and they accepted me.



I later found out that there were a lot of Jewish students at Harvard the year that I went there. I wouldn't be surprised that maybe we were 20, 25 percent of the class. They had had very good experience with those who came from City College of New York, CCNY, and maybe they felt that here was another urban school, let's see what we can get here. Three or four people since then have gone, but I was the first one that went there.

It turned out that when I got out of school, I obviously had to find a job. And I think, without knowing, I was a competitor with another fellow who became a friend of mine later for the same job with Karbel and Eigis was the name of the firm, and I got the job because they wanted to see what a Harvard guy would do. He was law review and I wasn't, but they gave the job to me.

Getting an entry level job is very, very important. You have to get started somehow or other. I had never been in a law office before I graduated. They didn't have the system they have now. We don't have in law like an internship for doctors, and there was no real experience. We had a lot of theoretical knowledge, but not very much in the way of real practical experience. Now they give you much more practical experience. They have clinics and things like that, which we didn't have in those days.

The class, as I said, had a lot of Jewish students

in it. There was certainly no bias against the Jewish students, at least when I was going. I had a good time while I was there, there's no question about it. My second year I lived in a house with three other men. And then one of those men and I -- there were no women at Harvard in those days. The first females showed up in September of '49; I graduated in June '49. One of the men in my second year became my roommate. We moved into a very nice dorm. He became my mahut. His daughter married my son. That's the one that lives Seattle.

SHARON: Who is that?

NORM: Steven. I guess he wanted to escape from his mother and father, and decided to move to Seattle. And I remember I said to him, "Well, do you know anybody in Seattle?" He said no, but he had been there once when he was ski bumming. I said, well, my old roommate, with whom I was in contact a lot, I said, I know that he has a son over there, and you'll need to talk to a doctor, to a dentist, who knows what, at least he can give you some advice. So I said, I'll call him up and we'll set up something.

So I called up my roommate -- Mort Fine was his name -- and I said, I'd like your son's address and telephone number. He asked why. I told him that Steven was going to move there. I said, I hope he doesn't bother your son too much, because his son was married and had a child I think at

that time. He said, "Don't worry about that. I also have two unmarried daughters." And he married one.

SHARON: What a nice story.

NORM: It was a rather warm wedding in Philadelphia when they got married, because Mort lived in Philadelphia, and his daughters had moved out because of his son, they moved out to Seattle. Unfortunately he has passed away already. But his widow's still living, and obviously we see her when we go out to Seattle to see the sons, the children.

SHARON: Let's go back a little. Tell us about how you met Ann.

NORM: Actually Ann met me. She won't admit it, but that's what happened. Apparently she had heard from one of her girlfriends about me. At that time I was the chairman of the Young Adult Division. They called it the Junior Division. Avern Cohen was my predecessor and Milt Lucow was my successor as I remember it. I had gotten active in Federation because my boss, Sid Karbel when I first started to work over there -- and I only worked there about 16 months -- he said, go down to Federation; you should get involved. He was really my mentor when it came to this. He was a wonderful person. I still see his son, Bobby Karbel. I don't know if you know him or not. He said you should get yourself involved in Jewish matters and he suggested Federation.

I didn't know what Federation was. As I said, my

father had voted twice for Norman Thomas, who was the Socialist candidate for president in '28 and '32. He was also in '36 and '40. So he was a socialist.

At any rate I went to the Federation, and the next thing I knew, somebody volunteered to be in charge of five solicitors. So I raised my hand. Next thing I knew I was getting more involved. And I think Avern Cohn chose me as his successor if I'm not mistaken, and I chose Milt Lucow as my successor. That's how I got started with Federation, was back in 1950.

**SHARON:** What were some of the activities that you participated in then?

**NORM:** You mean at Federation?

**SHARON:** Yes.

**NORM:** Well, I became ultimately chairman of the Junior Division as it was called then. I guess you call it Next Generation now or something like that.

I became a solicitor when we graduated out of the Junior Division, and my next position was -- the Campaign was organized on trades and professions, and I became the head of the lawyers division. Normally that job should have been two years, but the Six Day War broke out at that time. So I got three years as a result. So I was there for a while.

At a later point I was the chairman of the Culture and Education Committee. They were combined in those days.

Now they're separated. The I was chairman of the Education Committee. I was president of the United Hebrew Schools. I've been on the board of governors. As I remember, I was in Eight over Eighty, but I didn't have to do any work with that. And I got the Lifetime Achievement Award. I didn't do anything for that.

**SHARON:** And Partnership 2000.

**NORM:** Yes, I was on Partnership 2000. I enjoyed the time of Partnership 2000 quite a bit.

**SHARON:** I want to ask you about that, but we have to go back to Ann. How did she find you?

**NORM:** She heard about me. Apparently one of her girlfriends I'd gone out with or something of that sort. Her sister was married to Bill Ratner, and Bill had an older brother who was not married yet. She saw him one day and she said, Do you know Norm Katz? And I barely knew him; I barely, barely knew him. So he said yes, he had met me. She said, Can you fix me up with a date or something like that? And the next thing I knew he called. I wasn't in at the time. I was practicing law by this time. And I didn't know who it was, but it said Dr. Ratner. He was a dentist. I thought was I involved in some sort of a negligence case? I couldn't place him. At any rate, he fixed me up with the first date. And the rest as they say is history.

Annie came from a much different background than I

did obviously. I don't think that her family was very socialist.

**SHARON:** What was her background?

**NORM:** She was Reform. She was Franklin Hills. Really was very different than me. As I've often said, we were two people who were as far apart as we could be, but still Jewish. She was from the Reform side and I'm from the secular, not from the religious side. We're now four children and eleven grandchildren.

**SHARON:** So what kind of a home did you and Ann build together?

**NORM:** Well, we bought a house just before we got married in Huntington Woods. We lived there for six years and two children. There were very few lots in Huntington Woods at that time, but we found one on Hendrie, and the late Fred Kay built the house for us. We lived there for 25 years. So we were six years in the first house on Bordman and 25 years on Hendrie. And we've been in our present house now 27 years. We're married 59 years already. It will be 60 years in June. So we've lived in three houses.

**SHARON:** In terms of your children, their religious education, what kind of education did they have?

**NORM:** They went to United Hebrew Schools. There was no Hillel in those days. Although those who live in Detroit, my daughter Laura's three children, all went to

Hillel and then they went to Frankel. Now two of them are at the University of Michigan, and one is a junior, an eleventh grader, at Frankel, the Jewish academy.

The oldest son, who lives in Potomac, Maryland, he's a lawyer and he works for the Farm Credit Administration. He's been there about 20 years. He has three children, and they have gone through Hebrew school, but it's synagogue oriented.

One of the problems we had when I was president of the Hebrew Schools was the high school. Not enough children were going on after bar mitzvah. Although as I said, I did because my father wanted me to be conversational in Hebrew. Not that I'm very good at it. I don't use it that much. But one of our problems was how do we retain children. I remember this was a constant problem all the time, and we worked at it. But then we got the synagogue affiliations in.

When I was going to Hebrew school, the Hebrew schools were separate. There was one at Philadelphia and Byron, there was one at Parkside, there was Tuxedo and Homer where I went, there was one at Rose Sittig Cohn. They were free-standing buildings. But before I got involved in Hebrew Schools, it had changed to be synagogue schools. Then after they were synagogue schools, and we wanted to retain them, we had a central Hebrew high school. But we really didn't retain big numbers, considering the numbers that went through to bar

mitzvah to go the Hebrew high school.

We do a better job of Jewish education now through the parochial schools. And I must say that originally I didn't cotton to the idea of having parochial schools, but I have to say today that that is the -- if we're going to retain a Jewish community, we'll have to do it. And I remember thinking to myself, is it too narrow a school? Because, you know, only Jews. But my high school, as I said, had 750 students who graduated, 700 were Jewish. And I remember when I was in law school, I had a lot of friends who were Catholic. I remember talking with them many times. Many of them were the product of parochial schools, and they had no trouble getting along with the Jewish students. Of course they were all intelligent people.

I've come to the conclusion that if we want to preserve our Jewish identity, I guess we'll have to go for parochial schools. And I must say I have gone to grandparents day at both Hillel and at Frankel, and I am very, very impressed with the quality of the education. Education has always been something I've been very interested in. I realize there are a lot of things that are very important. Center is important. Plays are important. Yad Ezra is important. JARC is important. Kadima is important. My interest has always been in education, and I really feel that it's necessary to get that Jewish education, and I think that the parochial



school system is going to be the wave of the future. It's already the wave of the present.

SHARON: So Laura is your only child that's in Detroit?

NORM: In Detroit. The other three wanted to get away from their parents. I always say we were lousy parents, we chased them away. My wife, who was a clinical psychologist, why don't you say that we raised them to be independent? That we took them up on it, and let them go, and that's the way it was. I said, that sounds very good to tell people, but we chased them away.

SHARON: That's not what I hear about you from Laura.

NORM: I've often wondered when Annie and I are off the scene -- we make an effort of course to have them get together periodically, go on vacations together, something like that. What's going to be in the future I can't tell you, but we'll be in four different centers.

SHARON: You've laid the seeds for that kind of relationship with your kids.

NORM: Yes. All the grandchildren as cousins know each other. There's no question about that. Whether they will be able to continue that when they get married -- none of them are married yet. They run in age from 16 to 26 today, in 2013. But when they will, they'll each go off and branch off

in their own direction, as my children have done. Although they live in four cities, they still stay in touch. Some are closer than others, relationships. But you know, when major things happen, we get together. There's no question about it.

One of the things that has worked very much for family cohesion has been skiing. That sounds strange. I'm not much of an athlete, but I really love the skiing part. They all wanted to go skiing with the father and mother. So it was togetherness.

**SHARON:** Whatever works.

**NORM:** Whatever works, that's what you do.

**SHARON:** I know you've had a lot of roles in this community, and you mentioned Partnership 2000. Were you the chair?

**NORM:** No, I wasn't the chair; I was just a member of it. I was on it for two years. Made some friends over there. There was one thing that I was really very pleased about that we had something to do with. Partnership 2000 has a relationship with three communities: Nazareth Illit, Migdal Ha'emek and Zezre'el Valley. There is a place in I think it's Zezre'el Valley it's called Tower Electronics, which is a very large company. It's on the NASDAQ stock exchange, I think. They made a deal with Toshiba of Japan, and they greatly expanded it. It was a big plant when I visited it the first time. It was twice the size when I visited it the second

time. And they needed to get workers, but since the Japanese don't speak Hebrew, and Jews don't study Japanese, they study English, so English was going to be the language of the company when they wanted to communicate with one another. And that was the days when we were getting a lot of immigrants from the Soviet Union. There were even some from Ethiopia coming in, and they wanted to change demographically the Galilee, the lower Galilee. Here were job opportunities now.

And if I remember this thing correctly, I talked to Bob Aronson, and I said, why don't we teach the Russian immigrants, who are highly educated, and we can teach even the Ethiopians, who will have the less educated jobs, enough English so they can work over there. And we did do that. It turned out that we were going to make arrangements at a technical high school in Nazareth Illit, where they could do this. And I was talking to the human resources person -- Shalom, I can't remember his first name -- at Tower Electronics. Tower is a translation of migdal. Migdal means tower. Migdalamich.

So at any rate, he said you don't have to go to the high school. We have facilities here. If you'll pay for the cost -- if my memory is correct, I talked with Bob Aronson about it at that time, and we did do some educating for those who didn't speak English. The Russians were very well educated when they came Israel, and it was an easy transition

for them. For the Ethiopians it was a little tougher.

Shalom said he needed to get some Ph.D.s. So he went to Argentina. Those were the days of the dictatorship in Argentina. It was relatively easy to get them out. He said he could give them five-year work permits, but he couldn't get enough. He finally wound up in India. They needed the help, but they gave them one-year visas. They wanted Jews to come basically. And I was very proud of the fact that Partnership 2000 did this. I don't know if they would have gotten the jobs anyway, but we made it easier for them, and I was very pleased with that result.

**SHARON:** There was so much cooperation between Detroit and there.

**NORM:** Nowadays I understand it's a little different. More of the students are coming from Israel. They're going to Camp Tamarack, they're going to schools here, which is very nice. I think Partnership 2000 is good non-education educational, if I can put it that way.

**SHARON:** It's really built bridges.

**NORM:** It's built bridges. It was an educational process. They get to know us and we get to know them. And all of life is learning on the job.

**SHARON:** So you've had a lot of involvement in our Jewish community. Have you been involved in other organizations in the general community as well?

**NORM:** Actually, there was one item which you'll be surprised about. One day my second son, the one who lives in Seattle, Steven, came home from school. He was nine years old at the time. He said that the YMCA had come to the school and wanted to recruit kids with their fathers to belong to the Indian Guides. Cub Scouts are mother/son. This would be father/son and they wanted to encourage a father/son relationship. And he said to me, why don't you go over to it. Okay, I'll go over to it. So we had a tribe in Huntington Woods. They were all Jewish guys. We knew one another. We weren't exactly gung-ho guys to tie knots and things like that or to make wampum belts or whatever it was, but we got involved in it.

And every one of the tribes had to send a delegate to the central at the YMCA. I was appointed the delegate for our tribe. And some of those guys were really gung-ho. They took this much more seriously than we did. At any rate I went to those meetings, and they would spend an inordinate amount of time on nonsense. Should we charge for a hot dog \$2 or \$2.50 when we're at Camp Oeasa, which was the YMCA camp. And I wanted to go home already. I remember many times saying, you know what, we don't have to keep discussing this. We've said everything there is to say. \$2 or \$2.50? Let's get it over with. So I would take the lead on these sorts of things.

And to my great surprise one day the social worker

-- it was a big group. I think there were 500 kids and 500 fathers. He came over to me and he said, would you run to be chief of the whole thing. So I said, what do you want a Jewish chief for? No, no, don't worry about it. I thought I couldn't possibly win. Okay, put my name up. And I won hands down because I guess they all knew me, because I was always pushing things along.

Invariably I couldn't go home anyway even when we did this thing because they all wanted to go out and have a beer afterwards, and I'm not much of a drinker. But I became the chief of the Indian Guides at the YMCA. But I didn't stay active after I finished my stint. Maybe I should have because I was always interested in politics that I'd been involved with there. Maybe I would have gone on to elective office, but I was having too much fun practicing with my partner.

I have a picture at home of me in an Indian headdress and the headdress goes down my back all the way to my ankles. I remember -- Annie is a little bit more culturally inclined than I am, and in those days the Metropolitan Opera used to come to Detroit at the Masonic Temple. So I went with her. It was a black tie affair. We got out of the car and they had a red carpet, and we walked up the red carpet, and somebody took a picture of us that showed up in the Detroit News or Free Press, I can't remember which. All of a sudden at the YMCA was posted a picture of me in the

headdress next to a picture of me looking at the chief.

**SHARON:** How elegant you were.

**NORM:** See what kind of guy we've got here. The chief goes to the opera. Those guys didn't go to the opera very much. I was active there for several years, I'd say about three or four years.

**SHARON:** Were you involved in the Detroit Historical Commission at one time?

**NORM:** Oh, yes. I forgot about that. Roman Gribbs -- Ray we called him -- appointed me to the Detroit Historical Commission, and I enjoyed that work, but about nine, ten months later he asked me, he said, I owe somebody a favor. Would you mind if you resigned? Sure, Ray. No problem.

I'm trying to think of the other things of that sort. Most of my activity has been with the Jewish community.

**SHARON:** What are some of the major issues that you've seen during your life span in the Jewish community?

**NORM:** Well, I remember the discussion whether we should have parochial schools versus going to the public schools, and then in the afternoon get it supplemented like I had done. That was one of them.

I remember we had some social issues. I'm looking at the pictures of the heads. I didn't know Sobeloff well. I knew who he was. Bill Avrunin I knew. Sol Drachler I knew. Sol I knew personally, on a personal basis. His father-in-

law, Michael Michilin, who was a Hebrew school teacher, and my father were very close friends. Mike Zeltzer I knew very well. We happened to be in the same building. At that time I think I was president of the Hebrew Schools. If I had to find out something, I just went upstairs. I could always talk with him. And I know Bob Aronson. The other two, between Mike and Bob, I didn't know that well. I knew them, but that's about it.

The big problem was the need for funding all these things. And that's another thing that I was: I was chairman of the Campaign in '92 and '93 I think it was. I remember in those days I think it was \$31 million.

One of the things I was constantly talking about with David <sup>PAGE</sup> Paige, who appointed me, and with Mike Zeltzer and a few others, was we got two-thirds of our money -- we raised \$33 million, but let's talk 30. We got 20 of the \$30 million from 500 givers, and we got \$10 million from, in those days, 16,000 givers. I remember saying we've got to broaden this base. The 500 -- of course there's always a new 500. Somebody dies and somebody else comes up. It was a constant problem of how do you get the people to give. It's a process, it's not an event. You get people in and you start them off.

I remember Geli once told me -- Allen Gelfond -- that somebody who had been only a \$100 giver left his estate for \$300,000 to the Federation. His family didn't need it,



and this is what he wanted to do. So you never know. Great oaks from little acorns grown.

How do you get people involved? And the big question was how do you educate people to give? It doesn't happen overnight because I remember the first time with Sid Karbel sent me down to Federation, I believe my first donation was \$10. Of course I didn't earn very much in those days either. Ultimately before the current problem arose economically, I've given substantially more than that. But it was a process. I slowly built up to it. How do you do that? That was one of the big things we were constantly worrying about.

How do you get people to send their children for education? I was always involved in the education part. I wasn't very much involved with the Center, although we donated to the Center when it was built.

But how do you involve people? How do you get them to be involved? Because once you're involved, it becomes routine for you. You just simply do it. There's an old saying that if you have something to get done, get a busy person to do it, and it's very necessary. No doubt about it.

I would say the most important thing of all is getting people involved. How do you do it? And you never know where it's going to come from? I would never have dreamt when I was a youngster, all I knew about it was the Histadrut.

I didn't know anything about the Federation at all. It was Sid Karbel who was my mentor who said get involved. This is a much broader basis and it includes everybody. It includes Zionists, it includes Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, they're all there. It's a big tent; let's put it that way. But you have to get people active, and how you do it I don't know. I can't tell you.

**SHARON:** Have you been following the young adult movements currently?

**NORM:** I haven't followed too much. I remember I was invited once, about three, four years ago, to a reunion and I was so far the oldest one there. I remember one of my friends said, you were the chairman in 1954?

**SHARON:** That's a long time ago.

**NORM:** A long time ago, 60 years.

**SHARON:** So you've told us your message and how you feel education is so important. Are there any other words that you'd really like to leave us with before we end our interview?

**NORM:** Yes. I don't know how you do it, but you have to involve people. You can't be bashful. Sometimes it's a matter of asking. Some people will do something, some you have to ask twice maybe, but you have to show that you really want them to do it.

I know that all these things are important, but I've

always felt that education was the key to the future. I know that my family jumped into the middle classes in one generation, and the reason was we became professionals in my case, my sister, my brother and I. The education I think is the key to everything, and your life is so much richer and so much more fulfilling if you are educated.

I am currently teaching English as a second language. I signed up with the Oakland Literacy Council. By serendipity they assigned me -- I thought I would get an inner city person who stopped school, or I would get a Latino who wants to learn English as a second language. To my great shock and surprise, but he could be a personal friend, I received a Syrian doctor who is 68 years old as my student. He's a Christian, not a Muslim. And I've learned an awful lot about Syria. He's really an outstanding person. And he has learned about us, I have learned about him. And I find that very fulfilling now. Of course I'm now retired, so I want to do something with my time, so this is what I'm now doing.

I'm also going to school. Just this last semester I took a course at the University of Michigan Dearborn. The semester before I took a course at Oakland University. I took two courses in fact. In fact the first course I took at Oakland University was taught by my late partner's daughter-in-law. Maybe you know her. Do you know Kelly Victor?

**SHARON:** Oh, yeah.

**NORM:** David Victor's wife. David and I are in the same office. It keeps the brain going, let's put it that way. Education, to me you've got to be doing something. Otherwise you'll wither away on the vine. It won't do.

Of course this has always been a Jewish emphasis, this study and education. You don't have to be a genius at it, you just have to be interested, and it will make all the difference in the world.

**SHARON:** Thank you, Norm. It's been a pleasure talking with you. Is there anything that we've missed?

**NORM:** Well, as I said, I'm prejudiced in favor of education. I would put a lot of the money and effort into the school system. There's the old saying that the Jesuits said: You give me the child and I'll give you the man. I should say the adult. I don't want to be a sexist. But I really feel that education is the key to progress is the key to understanding and knowledge, and it probably is what differentiates the Jewish community from the many of the other communities around here, and I really feel strongly about that.

**SHARON:** Thank you. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.