

ORAL HISTORY OF: Burton Shifman
INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 10, 2013
LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Leonard N. Simon Jewish Community
Archives
SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish Community Leadership Oral
History Project

- - -

SHARON ALTERMAN: This is September the 10th, 2013. My name is Sharon Alterman, and I represent the Jewish Welfare Federation, and I'm very pleased to be here with Burt Shifman, interviewing him as part of our Albert and Paulene Dubin Oral History Project.

Burt, do we have your permission to use the contents of this interview for the educational and historic record?

BURT SHIFMAN: Absolutely. Even without my right to correct mistakes I make.

SHARON: I'm sure that whatever you say is going to be very valuable for our record, and I'm so pleased to be here. So let's start at the beginning. What is your family's heritage? Where did your grandparents come from?

BURT: My grandparents came from Russia, although I only had one living grandparent. That was my grandmother. But both my father and mother were both born, interestingly enough, in the same little village. In fact it wasn't even a

stetl. It was a dorf, which is even smaller, a small village in Russia. Although they came to the United States at five different times, they didn't meet until they came here. My mother had come as a young child, and my father had been a rabbinical student in a shiva in the town of Mozyr. That area now is part of Belarus, and he didn't come to the United States until after the Russian Revolution, when they were forced out of the yeshiva. It was quite an odyssey as to how he got here because immigration to the United States was pretty much closed. So that's a whole story.

Both of them spoke fluent Yiddish. My father was also a Russian speaker. And my grandmother, who lived with us, which was very common in those days, had lived in the United States for almost 60 years, wouldn't speak English. She understood it. Her original thought was if you spoke it, her children would become goyim. So I grew up as a Yiddish speaker in order to talk to her because she was always there.

SHARON: And she lived with you for many years?

BURT: Well, until she died. I of course had been gone for a number of years from home. And she lived to be a ripe old age, in her 90s.

SHARON: So what was your father's profession?

BURT: Well, my father, as I told you, had been a rabbinical student. He came from a large family. One of his older brothers had come with a large group of people,

including my maternal grandfather, from this village -- it was called Gikavichia (ph. sp.) in Russian -- a little after the turn of the century, close to about 1900-1907 period. They were all carpenters. There are many families in Detroit now who were in that group. So even before the automobile industry was big, there was demand in Detroit, as I gather, for people like that, and they came as carpenters.

The brother of my father who had come was single, and he worked until the First World War came, and he was sent to Camp Custer, which was the military base near Battle Creek in those days, and somehow or other he was injured there and was sent back, and he could no longer work as a carpenter. Now whether he had a few dollars or whether the government gave him a pension, I never knew that detail. So he opened a men's clothing store on Hastings Street, which was very successful. But he had at least three single brothers still in Russia, but the revolution had interfered and he couldn't get them out.

So to fast forward to the odyssey of how my father and two of his older brothers got here, they got here. He was going to school part time, but he was also working in his oldest brother's store. In 1923 his uncle, Aaron Shifman, was in a barbershop, and it's an interesting story because as a boy I went to the same barber. A rabbi came in whose name is unknown. He said, Aaron, so-and-so died and I would like to

go to the funeral as would Rabbi so-and-so, would you drive us. So this uncle had three brothers working. So he said sure, I'll drive you.

They went out to the cemetery in Mt. Clemens, which cemetery still exists. It's known as the Hebrew Memorial Society. Coming back they had to make a U-turn to cross the island. In those days they had the tracks there for the interurban car. They got hit by an interurban, and they all got killed. So my father inherited a part of this business, and the three brothers temperamentally were not suited for each other, so he left and opened up a men's clothing store in Highland Park, Michigan, in the very early 1920s, not too long after that happened.

SHARON: What year were you born?

BURT: I was born in 1929.

SHARON: You mentioned Hastings Street. Was it still active when you were born?

BURT: It was, although it had ceased by the time I have any memory of being a Jewish neighborhood. It was pretty much African-American. We didn't live near there. In fact the house I was born in was on Sturtevant, which is about seven blocks north of Davison, and we were in the first block west of Linwood, in fact only one house off the corner of Lawton. I have no memory of that house at all.

The first house I have a memory of is a house on

Princeton. Princeton runs north and south, and it would have been north of Fenkell. There was a Jewish neighborhood which must have developed in the late '20s because we moved there when I was just a little kid, and I remember it in the early '30s, not too far from where the Custer School is on Linwood, which would have been the school I would have attended, but we moved shortly thereafter to Cortland, which as I said about eight blocks south of Davison, and I started kindergarten at the McCullough School.

SHARON: Did you go through the whole school?

BURT: Yes, I went to McCullough, and from there I went to Durfee Intermediate they were then called, and then to Central High School.

SHARON: That was really the core of the Jewish community in those days. What are your recollections?

BURT: Oh, I think it was. There was still a Jewish neighborhood around Twelfth Street, and we would go there on occasion for various purposes. But you asked about the Hastings Street area. Two of my uncles, two of my father's brothers, and in fact one of my mother's brothers, all had clothing stores on Hastings Street in the '30s and '40s, up until probably the time of the end of the Second World War, and by that time one of my mother's brothers had gone out of that business into another business, and one of my father's brothers had also moved his business, but one of my uncles was

still there in those days.

SHARON: But the neighborhood that you lived in on Cortland, what was that like?

BURT: Well, that neighborhood was very much Jewish. There were several non-Jewish families on our side of the street, and on the other side, but I would say 85 to 90 percent of the people on my block, and I think in the general area, at least between Linwood and Dexter, which was a three-block area, were predominately Jewish. And Linwood and Dexter were both streets that had businesses, and you could find like kosher butchers and bakeries and synagogues and things like that on those streets.

SHARON: As a child, what did you do with your time?

BURT: Well, I think I tried to grow up. I guess what might be kind of interesting, I kind of grew up in a bifurcated family. My father's people, his father in particular and his father's family, were very strict Litvaks, people who followed the tradition of Vilna and Scully. What used to bother my father was he was the youngest of maybe ten children, roughly. His mother worked like a dog. She baked bagels at home and then took them to the train station to sell, but his father never worked a day in his life. He was always busy studying. I knew his brother, who lived in Detroit, and I knew his sister who lived in Rochester, New York, and they were in a sense miserable people. I mean they

were inflexible and so forth.

My mother's family, my grandmother was a very observant person, but my grandmother's siblings were less so, and their children not at all. But they were strictly cultural Jews, Yiddishists. They knew every author, and they frankly probably wouldn't go in a synagogue on a bet, even if it was raining, but as far as knowing and knowledge, they were terrific.

So growing up I went to both a shula, which would be a Yiddish teaching school, and to Hebrew school, and occasionally to Sunday school. If there was time, if there was a day when something else wasn't scheduled, I would go to all three.

SHARON: So you were very well-rounded then.

BURT: I was well-rounded. In fact I remember going for a few years to the Farband, which was one of the movements, and there were many in the Yiddish community in particular, and a lot of them had political orientations. And also then the Yiddish newspapers were not organized, but they represented these political views. I remember going to the Farband Camp as a very young child, a summer camp.

SHARON: In Chelsea?

BURT: It probably was Chelsea. I wasn't aware of the location. And I guess they continued for a number of years, that particular camp. But I think some of the other

groups also had summer camps and things of this nature.

SHARON: Was your family Zionist?

BURT: Oh, absolutely. Very much so. And that was interesting. My father would talk a great deal about what life was like in this dorf, in this little town, and he said it was not uncommon in the early part of the 20th century for a bitter rival, actually fights, between the Bundish, who were the most socialist, the Zionists, the religious, and so forth, in conflict all the time. And some of his family eventually ended up with the Politizion, which was a somewhat left labor Zionist group and had emigrated to then Palestine. Of course after the revolution you couldn't leave Russia other than surreptitiously.

An interesting fact of geography was that there had been a war between Russia and the newly created Poland after the First World War, and they set the boundary in such a way that towns like Vilna, which was the Yerusolim of the west was in Poland, and certain other towns, and then to the east that was closed. So if you were in that part of what is now Belarus, which had been part of Poland, you were free to emigrate. And that was why some of the organizations had people who emigrated to then Palestine in the '20s and '30s because you could go. The Poles were happy to get rid of you.

SHARON: There were a number of Zionist organizations for youth in Detroit. Did you have any

affiliation with them?

BURT: Yeah, I was part of a group called Young Judea. and I remember the leader was a man named Max Chomsky, who was a Detroit attorney, and he was a very Jewishly well-educated man. I don't doubt that he was otherwise. But we used to meet -- you'll recall there was a Hebrew school over on Parkside, which would have been in the Jewish neighborhood that retrenched north of Fenkell. I can remember having meetings of Young Judea there, and it met at other places as well.

SHARON: Did you have any thoughts of going to Palestine?

BURT: Then, no, no. Never thought of it at that time. And I don't think anybody in my family thought about it, although my father had family members there.

SHARON: We were talking about your education. You went to Durfee and Central. And while you were in high school what were your interests?

BURT: Well, the easy answer would be girls. But I think that to a certain extent people who grew up as I did during the Great Depression very much thought about how are you going to make a living when you get out of school? What are you going to do? What opportunities and what kind of thing did you want to do. I think that was really a very big thing. Sports, interested in sports to a great extent. You

couldn't, if you lived in Detroit, not be interested in some sport because Hank Greenberg, you know, was the most revered person in the community.

SHARON: Did you ever know of him?

BURT: Oh, yes. The problem was as kids playing baseball, everybody wanted to be a first baseman. Nobody wanted to play another position. Why? Because Hank was a first baseman. And the biggest problem was the first baseman's mitt was different than everybody else's mitt other than the catcher's. So everybody wanted a first baseman's mitt, and when they had to play someplace else, they didn't have the proper mitt. So this was a big problem.

SHARON: Let's go back a bit. You spoke of the Depression. What was your family's experience?

BURT: I was aware of the fact that people had a hard time making a living. I don't know if Detroit was worse or better than other communities in that respect, but I do know that some of my father's cousins who were in New York, who were from the more observant part of the family, came to Detroit to work for my father and uncles because they couldn't make a living in the New York City area in the '30s, and I remember them very well. So things were somewhat better here.

I know in my father's case in Highland Park there were many municipal workers and state workers who were paid with scrip, and my father would take that scrip as payment,

and he was able to stay afloat. I don't remember ever suffering, but I was aware. There were families on my street that to a certain extent I knew were having a hard time.

In a way that ended up as an adverse factor career-wise. When I was in high school, I was sure I was going to go to medical school. And even though one of my junior high school teachers, who was an observant teacher -- most people didn't like her because she was tough -- said, you are a natural lawyer. Well, we had a family down the street who I knew. The mother was a friend of my grandmother's. He was a lawyer who in the '30s was a shoe clerk. We had a teacher of civics in junior high school who was a lawyer. They couldn't make a living. So I thought, hah, you can't make a living. A lawyer is a shoe clerk. I'm going to end up being a doctor. And that was kind of what I thought about it. When I say adversely, because in actuality, I was born to be a lawyer.

SHARON: Why do you say you were born to be a lawyer?

BURT: Because it just fit. When I went to law school, people would think this is difficult. I said, I don't know what's difficult about it. There's nothing to it. And I was working full time while I was going to law school. It wasn't difficult at all.

SHARON: What were you doing?

BURT: I did a lot of things. Of course I was

married. I didn't plan to be a lawyer at all. I had no interest in being a lawyer because what I had seen, it didn't seem to me that it was a very lucrative occupation. I knew there were some lawyers that maybe made a good living. I didn't know any, I didn't see any. My father had a lawyer who was a very nice man, but I didn't think he was economically doing particularly well.

In fact what happened was when I was at the University of Michigan, when I realized I wasn't going to be a doctor -- I wasn't going to work that hard frankly; I was more for having a good time for most of that. So I ended up, after getting a bachelor's degree, getting an MBA, and I was going to work in accounting and finance. Well, the first thing I discovered was that the large national accounting firms, at least in the Detroit area in 1950-51, were not hiring Jews. Period. The small firms were just a lot of hard tedious work. So I did some other things. I sold insurance. And I decided to go to law school. In the MBA curriculum the course I liked best was business law. And I thought that was nothing. They have a book; why? It's ridiculous. So that's what I decided to do.

At that time I looked around. What was the cheapest law school I could go to and still work. The cheapest law school was Wayne State University. So that's where I went.

SHARON: Were you married at that time?

BURT: I was married at that time.

SHARON: With a family, too?

BURT: Not when I started. By the time I finished, yeah, but not when I started. Sue worked for the Detroit Board of Education, and because she was what they called in those days a speech correctionist, she was assigned a number of schools. So they gave her bus tickets to go to the schools. What would happen was, we had one car of course, and she would take the car and I would take the bus tickets because I was working in the downtown area primarily, and I could get to law school with the bus tickets. So that was our transportation.

SHARON: Did you go to law school at night?

BURT: I went both day and night. In other words I would take classes in between times when I had work to do or people to see, and then I was able to take classes at night as well. So I was able to graduate from law school in about two and a half years.

SHARON: It sounds like you were a natural born student.

BURT: When it came to law, it was very easy for me.

SHARON: Let's talk just a little bit more about community at this time, as you were growing up. We spoke off camera about the diverse community in this city. So what kind of community did you get involved in as a young man?

BURT: Well, in the area in which I lived, it was a heavily, heavily Jewish community. I mentioned the shops and stores and the kosher butchers and so forth. But additionally you had Hebrew schools. In fact the Hebrew school I went to was part of the United Hebrew School System. We started classes in the McCullough School. Then they built a building over on Lawton just to the east of the school. It was called I think the Rose Sittig Cohn Building. It was a very nice building, and the Hebrew School moved over there. But there were also private Hebrew schools. I had friends, family members who went to private Hebrew schools that existed in the community.

Then of course there were the shulas. Some of the Yiddish speaking groups. And then the various landsmanshaftn also had things. One of my early memories, my parents and my family came from this little village. It was like a suburb -- that's probably the wrong word -- which would be a larger place called a tura. So there was something called the Turover Aid Society. My maternal grandfather had been one of the founders of that group.

They would have a picnic every summer at one of the parks and there were people all over. And many of these various landsmanshaftn had this kind of thing. Sometimes we would go to those things.

I always had the feeling, and I didn't hear the word

until very recently, something called otherness. I saw the word either in a paper by an African-American writer or I heard it in connection with Oprah Winfrey's example in Switzerland of otherness. Well, if anything in the community in which I lived and in Detroit, which Justice Brandeis of the United States Supreme Court called the most anti-semitic city in the country, there was a distinction; we knew there was an otherness. We knew when you were not in this enclave, ghetto, whatever you want to call it, we were conscious of this anti-semitism. I don't think I was the only one that was conscious of it.

It was not uncommon, at least in high school, after football and basketball games at other schools, to be hearing anti-semitic remarks, calls of Abbie, Sheeny, Kike, a number of things. Very common. Very common. I played football as a freshman, and the lineman across from me would use those kinds of terms. So this otherness was there.

But it was reinforced in many ways. One of the best examples I can give you, and I was thinking about it as I knew we were going to have this interview, one of my classmates while I was in McCullough School, I don't remember what year it was but I would guess it to be '37, '38. His family moved from Fullerton, which was a couple of blocks further west from Cortland out to Warrington, in what would have been in those days Sherwood Forest. I remember being invited to a birthday

party there, along with another boy from the class. I remember the classmate saying don't say anything at the birthday party about my being Jewish. At the time I thought it was strange, but as I reflect on it, that was a very telling kind of comment.

And I've told Sue about it. She had lived in that same area far longer. Her family had moved out there when she was a very little girl, but she talked about when she was maybe five, six, seven years old, which would have been in the '30s, she was playing with another girl down the street who had a big outdoor doll-house. The girl's father came out of the house saying, You go home. We don't want any Jewish kids playing here. So that was an extreme, but we were always conscious of it.

We'd go to the ballpark. If you wanted to go swimming in the summer, you'd go out to the city pools at Rouge Park. You wouldn't go to the Crystal Pool on Eight Mile Road. Why? Because you knew that Jews weren't welcome there.

The Crystal Pool was located on Eight Mile and Greenfield, and I don't think anybody knew what the political unit it was in. It happened to have been in what was then the village of Oak Park, which subsequently became a city, and where I subsequently lived and served initially as a justice of the peace and as a municipal court judge. Well, I got to know the owner because he had some violations. His name was

Hennings Rylander. I remember he came to court about something, and I kind of suggested, Mr. Rylander, I don't think you're going to get much sympathy. So if the city's regulations make it difficult for you to operate your pool, maybe you don't want to operate anymore. And he closed up.

SHARON: Father Coughlin of course was such a force in this community. Did he have any impact on your family?

BURT: My family would listen to his speeches. There's a Yiddish word called tsiter. Tsiter means to kind of shake it, but more than a physical shaking, kind of an aggravation or agitation, about his comments.

Justice Brandeis said it is the most anti-semitic city, with Henry Ford publishing The Protocols of the Elders of Zion; you had Father Coughlin and he had a magazine called Social Justice. Then you had Gerald L. K. Smith, who was a rabid anti-semite. I think he had a publication called the Cross and the Flag. These were being sold openly on the street corners and at newsstands. You went to downtown Detroit, you saw these things. Then there were other groups called the Silver Shirts.

There was something called the Black Legion, which was an offshoot of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was very much in evidence in some places. I was not aware of it in the city, but I do remember in Highland Park, where I spent a good part of my growing up, James Ellman was a prominent Detroit

lawyer, his family lived in Highland Park. And I forget whether he was running for mayor or a position as an associate municipal judge. And a man named Walter Cleese, who I only knew as somebody my father knew and was a customer of my father, Cleese was supposedly a Klan member, and the fact that Ellman was Jewish, everybody knew it in Highland Park, and he did not get elected.

In fact later on I worked for a law firm when I got out of law school in Detroit, Friedman, Myers & Keys, William Friedman, who was a very fine, prominent lawyer, graduated from the University of Michigan Law School way, way back, had been appointed a circuit judge to replace Harry Keiden who died, he couldn't get elected.

A number of Jewish lawyers had run for judge. The only one that ever got elected was Harry Keiden. And that's an interesting story because my father-in-law, who was a boy in Detroit, when he was growing up knew Harry Keiden, they would campaign for him outside of churches on Sunday as Harry Kadan, which is very Irish. But the point was that you saw that and felt it.

SHARON: You also spoke about the landsmanshaftn. What was their connection to Eastern Europe during those years?

BURT: Well, first of all, in the '30s those that were from towns in Poland, which remained Poland, had contact

with their kinsmen, whoever was left in those places. Those that were from towns which were then in Soviet Russia had no contact. Communication was difficult. You could send letters, but that was about it. In those days you couldn't even send packages as I recall. Later on you were able to send things to people. This is why most of the landsmanshaftn in the Detroit area died out. Part of that generation died out. In many cases their children had no interest. But unless you were from an area that was Poland, there was no influx of new people. So that also contributed to the fact that these landsmanshaftn died out.

One of my memories of the landsmanshaftn, I went to Russia about 1970 for a number of reasons because my father had been there several times in the earlier years and he still had sisters, he had nieces, nephews, looking for ways to get them out. And I went also to see if I could facilitate that. That's a whole chapter in itself.

Anyway, when I got back, I remember going to a meeting of the Turover ^{FAREN} ~~Florain~~ as it was called, in English the Turover Aid Society, and telling them about what I had seen and what had happened, and where things were. The reason I remember it so vividly is I hadn't given a talk in Yiddish in years. This is 1970. I had to go back and think, How do you say this? How do you express that? It was very difficult.

SHARON: I bet. We're talking about a lot of things. You mentioned Soviet Jewry. When Soviet Jewry program became so active in this community --

BURT: Oh, yeah. Obviously. And the Vanik amendment, which made travel possible. But even before that, we were able to get several families out of Russia, even before that. Some had come here and some had gone to Israel.

This is an interesting story. My father got a letter, and I wish I could remember the year and I forgot to ask my brother about it, from a woman who said that she was the daughter of one of his nieces. This was a letter from Poland. You didn't get many letters from Russia. She explained who she was, and she and her husband, and I think they had one child, lived someplace in Poland, not too far from Warsaw, et cetera. My father knew from the letter it was genuine. She knew too much about the family. My brother was still single, so it was a long time ago. My brother was skiing in Switzerland, and my father said, go find these people.

SHARON: Not so easy to do.

BURT: So my brother went to Poland -- he didn't speak Polish -- to contact them. He was supposed to meet them someplace; they weren't there. I think he told me he went by horse and buggy or horse cart to some village and he found them. Now, we were able to get that family to Israel. That

was easy. They were in Poland.

But I had some cousins -- they would be the children of my cousins, like second cousins and forth -- who were educated, engineers and so forth, a couple of them spoke passable English. We were able to get a couple of them out even before that, before the mass exodus of people from Russia to the United States where they were able to get jobs as chemists. Then afterwards even more family members came, and they have made their way in the United States, and I have kept contact with some and not with others. Geography.

SHARON: No one came to this region?

BURT: One family came, and that would be a good 20 some odd years ago. I said he was an engineer. He was the son of one of my father's nieces. And his wife and an infant, still a babe in arms. My father and his brother arranged an apartment for them, because he didn't speak any English. He told me was an engineer. I never met a Russian Jew who wasn't an engineer. I don't understand that at all, but at any rate they were all engineers. So he had some menial jobs, he learned English, he got hired by Ford Motor Company as an engineer. He worked for Ford for several years, and then he called me one day, and he said, I'm leaving. I said, Wait, where are you going? He said, IBM hired me away from Ford. So he went to work for IBM and I forget where they assigned him, but I kept in touch with them. Then I talked to him

several years later and he said, Well, we're coming back. Ford stole me back. So he was obviously a very talented engineer. And it turned out his expertise was the computerized control of equipment in machines, and he was very successful at Ford Motor. He was the only one who lived in Detroit.

The latest one, the one that came last, was an interesting story. He had been a petroleum engineer in Russia, and he came to Detroit. We got an apartment and furniture and for them and so forth. And he had two children and I think a mother-in-law as well. Anyway there was really no work in Detroit for a petroleum engineer. But I remember he said there was an opportunity out in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and it was a good job for an engineer, but I wondered what kind of a community was it. I had belonged to Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park for 55 or more years, and I remember that we had a young man who had been in the congregation and whose camping experiences the synagogue had funded and so forth. So I asked Rabbi David Nelson, Do you know what happened to so and so? Yes, he's a rabbi in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I remember calling him, and I asked him what's this Bartlesville like that I can tell this cousin, and he said, Tell him it will be like living in internal exile in Bartlesville. So he went out to Bartlesville and he worked

for the company. Then eventually he got a job with an oil company in Oakland, California, and his family moved out to California.

SHARON: I know you've had a lot of interest in the community and you've been active in various organizations. What are some of the highlights of your career?

BURT: Well, I don't know about the highlights. A lot of it came actually as a young adult. We moved out to Oak Park in 1954 because we couldn't afford a house in Detroit. It was too expensive. So the minute I got to Oak Park, I got involved in what was then the Oakwood Lodge of B'nai B'rith, and shortly thereafter in the Congregation Beth Shalom. We had not long after that organized the South Oakland Round Table, which was part of the National Roundtable of Christians and Jews. That kind of kept me going.

I was very familiar with B'nai B'rith because my father was a member, and I remember as a boy they used to have father and son banquets every year and dinners, so I was involved in those organizations.

SHARON: What about Rabbi Sperka's influence on you?

BURT: Well, Rabbi Joshua Sperka was the rabbi of Congregation B'nai David when I was growing up, and sometime in the early '50s he went to work for the Jewish National Fund in Detroit. A man named Percy Kaplan was the director of the fund. So the rabbi got me involved in the Jewish National

Fund. Through the years I worked locally and eventually became the local chairman of the region, and then the national vice-president, and an international officer of Karen Keyem Israel, which would be the Hebrew words for the Jewish National Fund. And I traveled to Israel for them probably in the 1959-'60 area -- it might have been a year or two later than that -- on some of the projects, and I stayed involved with that for a long time.

There were a number of issues in the south Oakland area which got me involved with the Anti-Defamation League, the ADL, back in the early '50s probably. That was always a big part of what was going on.

In a lot of ways this otherness was somewhat of an issue. Many of the people I went to high school with were faced with the question of say higher education. Well, when I told you that I got out of school and that the big accounting firms weren't hiring Jews, when I got out of law school in 1954, the dean arranged for me to be interviewed by the silk stocking law firms of Detroit, and I had these interviews and I told you I was a top student. In addition, it was very unusual, I had a background in accounting and had an MBA. They were very pleasant. I never got hired by any of them. Yet people who in law school copied my work and couldn't copy it straight got hired. Simple. Detroit was a much more closed employment community than many other places.

So many of the young people I went to school with, some of them I went to college with, looked for occupations where they wouldn't be subjected to it. For example many of them became pharmacists. Why? Well, it was an occupation if you worked a few years in those days, in the '50s, and you made a few dollars and you saved your money, you could open a drug store. Many became CPAs. Why? Well, at least the big firms wouldn't hire you, but you could work. Many became teachers. Why? Because that was employment where, at least on the surface, the prevalent and pervasive anti-semitism wasn't there, wasn't present. And that affected the careers I think of many people. Not too many went to engineering school? Why? Well, because engineers had to work for somebody. Unless you were a government engineer, employment was difficult.

So I think that affected many things. Not just careers. But from careers, what kind of life you led and the things with which your children would be familiar. How many wanted to become doctors. Well, but of course the number of spots for Jews was limited and restricted. And it was common knowledge. So many of them ended up as pharmacists, some of them went to dental school. But that I think explains a lot of the career and occupational fields in which people were involved in the Detroit community.

SHARON: So when you weren't hired by these firms,

what did you do?

BURT: Well, I was very fortunate. There were a couple of Jewish law firms in Detroit. One of the largest was Friedman, Myers & Keys. I mentioned William Friedman. So I was hired there, and I worked there for several years, and it was a wonderful experience. I learned a great deal working there. And after several years I had developed a certain amount of my own practice.

And the other thing was I was living in Oak Park and I was driving to downtown Detroit, and by then I had become involved in the Oak Park community, and I was a member of the Oak Park Board of Education. Then there was a vacancy, as I mentioned, as a justice of the peace. The justice of the peace had resigned, and they had appointed somebody, and I decided to run for that office and got elected. So I decided that I probably ought to relocate my professional life. So I left the firm. I think I stayed in downtown Detroit for a short while until I could find a place to practice out near Oak Park.

Just an interesting sidelight. Finally I and another young man had left the firm at the same time, and we formed a partnership. We eventually found some space along Eight Mile Road in Southfield where they were building some office buildings. That would have been the late '50s, '58 or '59 maybe. Anyway, at that time I think there twelve lawyers

in Southfield. If you look at the state bar annual roster, they show you, and I think the last count was 1800 or 2000 lawyers in Southfield over that period of time.

SHARON: So you relocated in Oak Park very early. What was community life like for you?

BURT: Well, Oak Park was burgeoning. They couldn't build houses fast enough. And of course any new construction until streets got built. And one of the other problems was the sewer system wasn't adequate for the number of houses, primarily the storm sewer system. So the flooding. I can remember the big flood of '54 where your basements got flooded, and that was a constant thing.

But Oak Park, because it was so heavily Jewish, it was kind of looked down upon by many other people. Some of the governmental units and services became issues in Oak Park.

You mentioned Father Coughlin earlier. Because I held a public office, I became quickly involved in the Oakland County Bar Association and the Oakland County Association of Judges. One of the judges had died and his funeral was at the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak. I wanted to go to the funeral, but to go there, and I kept thinking about Father Coughlin, it was so strange for me to walk into that building, because I had memories of him.

Going back to the memories, I told you people would sit around the radio and listen. One of my early memories.

He would be on the radio. Hitler would also be on the radio. I told you my grandmother would never speak English. So we'd have the radio on and we'd hear Father Coughlin or something. She say to me, vos vertl? What is he saying? And I say (Yiddish and I can't get it all). There's going to be a war. And she'd say (Yiddish). I only want to know one thing. (Yiddish) Is it good or bad for the Jews?

Subsequently, someplace about 1960, '61, '62, summer, having dinner at home, I get a call from the sheriff of Oakland County, a man by the name of Frank Iron. Judge, I hate to bother you at home. Okay, Frank, what's the problem? And he had recently been elected sheriff at the last election. He says, You know, I was recently elected sheriff. I know that, Frank. And he said, I got a lot of help from the people the Shrine of the Little Flower in my campaign. Yeah, Frank. Father Coughlin is in jail in Oak Park. I said, Yes, Frank. What is he in jail for, Frank? He said, Well, I'm not sure and I'm having a hard time getting information. Would you do me a little favor. Find out what the situation is and call me. Okay. All right, Frank, I'll do that. So I assume he didn't want to be too apparent in his inquiry.

So I called, and here was the story. A car is going down Coolidge north from Eight Mile and it's kind of weaving, and the public safety officers they were called in Oak Park, the police, stopped him and said, Did you know you were

weaving and speeding? The guy says, Well, I'm a doctor and I'm late. Oh. What kind of doctor are you? And he starts asking questions. Then he says, I'm Father Charles Coughlin. Are you a Catholic? He says yes. What's your name? Gerard Brochel. And he said, I'm a priest and I have somewhere to be. And he said to him, I'm Gerald Brochel, I'm a Catholic, and you're going to jail. He eventually got released and paid his fine, never appeared in court. It wasn't quite getting even, but it was as close as it ever got.

SHARON: Well, let's segue from Father Coughlin to the Jewish community in Oak Park and Beth Shalom.

BURT: Beth Shalom got organized by 1954, and they actually held services in a school. The only synagogue that existed in 1954 was the Young Israel of Oak Park, which was located on Coolidge just north of where the Oak Park city hall was. Subsequently, Temple Emmanuel then was built, and by 1956-'57 Beth Shalom had built a social hall and a relatively small building on the site on Lincoln. By that time I was a member, and they were holding services. There was no sanctuary and services were held in what became the social hall later on, on Lincoln.

Then almost contemporaneous, a little bit after that, the B'nai Moshe moved to Ten Mile Road from its location on Dexter. Then after that there were a number of other -- I'm trying to think of the other synagogues that were built in

Oak Park. But also interesting was the Catholic Church had Our Lady of Fatima on Oak Park Boulevard, and then a Methodist Church was built. Faith Methodist Church was built on Scotia in Oak Park about the same time that Beth Shalom was. So even though it was kind of a heavily Jewish west of Coolidge, east of Coolidge that was less so, which was another interesting problem.

There were several school districts in the territory of Oak Park, and that's an odd phenomenon in Michigan because of the way school districts were organized in the 19th century. So the eastern part of Oak Park was in the Ferndale School District, the northern part of Oak Park is in the Berkley School District, and the part between roughly Ten Mile and Eight Mile, Greenfield to just east of Coolidge to probably Scotia was the Oak Park School District.

Well, I mentioned I was elected to the board of education of Oak Park. I think '56 is when I was first elected. Anyhow I was at a meeting, and the influx of Jewish students was fascinating because of the small school district. They had a very small school. They had to build schools every year, building one and two schools. But what was very interesting in that period of time was the new superintendent. James Pepper had been the superintendent of schools out in Brighton, Michigan. I remember at a school board meeting in '56-'57, and it might have been a little bit later, he was

saying how proud he was of how many students from the high school were going on to college and how well they were doing.

The president of the school board was a man named John McDade, who was a teacher at Cooley High School. Now, John, from the name, obviously wasn't Jewish, but John understood precisely what was happening.

SHARON: Right.

BURT: He said, Doc, yeah, I'm sure the school is helping, but it takes a bad cook to spoil a good steak. So to Pepper it was amazing these kids were doing so well, and the Oak Park school system in those days was a terrific school system. But something I learned in those days on the board of education, a lot of student achievement is the result of home and parents. And if you really wanted to know, you could expect better achievement if you have parental involvement and interest.

Now, the kids going to the Ferndale School District in particular, they experienced some anti-semitism, I don't think among the faculty because there were Jewish teachers in the Ferndale school system. It was not the school system itself but among other students, much less so than in the Oak Park school system where the Jewish students became the majority. That was a different situation. And I think some of that same feeling occurred in Berkley.

It was also interesting in Huntington Woods. The

eastern part of Huntington Woods was in the Royal Oak School District, the western part was in Berkley. It was a bad situation. The elementary students had to cross Woodward Avenue if you lived in the Royal Oak portion. Then those student who went on to Dondero High School experienced to some degree, some a higher degree, some a lesser degree, of anti-semitism. Less so I believe for the portion going to Berkley as more and more Jewish students went to school.

Although economic opportunity for Jews increased, there was still a lot of the latent kind of anti-semitism, and I don't know that we've ever eradicated it because an interesting example to me was that in about 1969 or '70 we wanted a larger house and were going to move from Oak Park. I located a house and we finally made an offer which was accepted behind the Kirk in the Hills in Bloomfield Township. The real estate agent was an agent for I think the oldest real estate firm in Birmingham. She was a very nice woman. The seller was anxious to sell.

The man who owned the agency had been gone for about a month vacation at that time. He lived about a block away from the house we bought. When he found out she had sold that house to Jews, he was livid. This was 1969-70.

SHARON: So things hadn't changed that much.

BURT: Well, things change slowly and I think they change, but it's a condition that when I think back, I

remember seeing in the 1930s -- we had a summer cottage one time on Cass Lake. I remember my parents driving out there, and I was in the car on a Sunday, and we were looking for cottages to rent. From the street that you drive along, I think it was called Front Street for the cottages that face on the lake, some of them had signs, "for rent, no Jews". I remember that vividly.

Employment ads in those days, "gentiles only". So have we moved from that? Yes. Some of it is a law that changed. Have we moved from restrictions on admissions to medical schools? Yes, we have.

This is something I got secondhand from reading. In 1954 Herbert Bloom, who was an oral surgeon in the community, had a patient who needed to be hospitalized very quickly. He couldn't get his patient admitted to a hospital because very few Jewish doctors had admitting privileges to hospitals.

SHARON: That was before Sinai.

BURT: Most of the Jewish doctors were general practitioners. Why? They couldn't get residencies and employment. There were only a couple Jewish surgeons in Detroit. And that's changed completely. That's part of the reason for the existence of Sinai Hospital and the need for it. Again, things move, but sometimes at a glacial pace.

And it's not just Jewish anti-semitic feelings. Even as to African-Americans. I mentioned the Oak Park Board

of Education. After I left the board, some years later I became the attorney for the Oak Park Board of Education. When the Carver School area, that part of Royal Oak Township was attached to Oak Park, it was kind of a cause celebre, and that would have to have happened around 1960 or someplace in that time frame. The principal of that school, a man by the name of Joe Hudson, he stayed as the principal of the school and became part of Oak Park. There was a tradition in the Oak Park School District that in June the board of education, the administrators and all the principals would have a dinner. After the Carver School was attached, Elaine Lakoff, whose husband Gershwin was on the board of education, had arranged for a dinner I think at a restaurant on Livernois near Eight Mile called the Alamo. But she thought she'd better check to see what their reaction would be if one of the guests was going to be this Joe Hudson and his wife who were African-Americans. That's 1960 plus. I can't tell you how many years plus, but that was not an uncommon situation.

As late as the 1960s, at that time we were the attorneys for the Southfield Public Schools, and school population in Southfield had dropped. One of the schools within the school district was the Annie Lathrup School, which is just off of Southfield in Lathrup Village. The school district was not using it as a public school. They wanted to sell it or rent it. The Akiva School -- in those days it may

have been called the Yeshiva Akiva -- wanted to rent it, and the public schools were very happy with that, get a renter in there and have the building be used and bring some money for the betterment of the public schools.

The Lathrup Village city council, we actually had to threaten them with a lawsuit to get their approval for some reason. This is in the 1960s for sure. It may have been as late as 1970, I'm just not sure about that. So I'm talking about a glacial pace.

I mentioned the "for rent" signs. My father-in-law, Sue's father, was Louis Kerner. Sometime in the 1940s he had been told that the Greenbriar Hotel was a very nice place for spring. So he wrote them a letter saying he would like reservations, and they wrote back, thank you for your inquiry, but we do not accept guests of the Jewish faith. Now, the question he had, the subsequent governor of Illinois whose name was Kerner, how did they know?

And I'll give you a better one. Sue went to high school at a school called Ms. Neuman's School, which was west of Woodward, and I think the vicinity of Seward in Detroit. It was a private school, and she graduated in 1949. Anyway, she was called into the office of the head mistress and there were two other Jewish girls in her class. The head mistress said, we have a problem, I'm going to tell you about it. You know the senior class always takes a trip to Bermuda. Now,

the hotel that we've been going to for years does not accept Jewish guests, so the three of you will not be able to go on the senior trip. 1949.

Glacial? If something can be slower than a glacial pace, after all, the war was over. We had seen the effect of what pervasive anti-semitism can produce. Here is an educational institution and it's still going on.

Has that changed? Yes. I think that has changed.

SHARON: Burt, I know that in your youth you used to travel through the state and meet Jewish families that were in small towns.

BURT: Yes.

SHARON: What are your recollections of them?

BURT: Well, the reason for it, my father suffered from very severe hay fever, and he tried shots. In fact Carl and Sandy Levin's uncle was an early allergist, and Dr. Levin gave him a shot. Didn't work. He really got violently sick. So we had to go up north every summer. We would try to start sometime in August. We would go earlier than the real hay fever season because he couldn't take a chance. In fact one of my earliest recollections, when I was a very little boy, was that I was sitting in a high-chair, eating a lamb chop and being fascinated by the fact that it had this paper little thing on the end, and I'm sure it was the Perry Davis Hotel in Petoskey.



Anyway, to go up there took forever because we would drive through a town, West Branch. A man named Gittleman had a general store there. My father knew him, and we'd stop and see Gittleman. When we got to Traverse City, he knew a man named Netzor. He had a men's ware store on Front Street. And so on. So anyway we would stop and I got to know people in some of these towns because we stopped every year, particularly in the Traverse City area. And I'm trying to remember the name of the man that had the shoe store in Petoskey.

Eventually the spot that he liked best was on the Leelenau Peninsula. A family had opened a resort up in a little place called Omena, which was just a crossroads north of Traverse City. That was interesting. There was also a very nice place there called the Omena Inn. They didn't accept Jewish guests. A family named Lesser had a large farmhouse and they converted it. So we spent time up there. Then there were families in Traverse City that would come up there for a meal and so forth for Jewish interests. So that's part of my interest in these out-state communities.

And my mother had a very large family in Bay City, Michigan. Some of them had moved out to other parts, and I remember one summer we actually had a cottage in Linwood, Michigan, which is outside of Bay City. I remember Bay City in the '30s had a very active Jewish community. There were at

least two synagogues that I was aware of. There was a kosher butcher and so forth. One of my father's cousins was married to the daughter of the man who the combination shocet/cantor in the synagogue. So we knew people there.

And then in Midland, which was kind of an offshoot, my college roommate was from Midland, Michigan. Another college roommate was from Grand Rapids. So in a way I kind of saw what was happening in some of these communities.

Well, these people were, as has been over the history of Jewish settlement, probably started as peddlers, made a few dollars, settled down and opened a store. Then they would send for other family members, and this was how you built a Jewish community. I mentioned Petoskey. The man's name was Zellman Freiman. He had been born in Petoskey. His father had been there. If you go through some of the cemeteries in the area of Boyne City, East Jordan, Charlevoix, in some of those cemeteries you'll see Jewish graves that have been there for hundreds and more years of families that had had businesses and lived there, died and were buried there.

Most of these people, eventually the communities shrank. I also had family in Flint. Because in the smaller community, if there was no Jewish life, the first thing you did when you had children was worry about daughters if you had any. You worry about your sons, but you worry about your daughters more. If they went away to college, that was fine,

but then you thought you'd move to the bigger city because they would have more opportunity to meet Jewish people.

So I've always had an interest in these smaller communities and Jewish life in them. One of them in particular, I remember one of my cousins in the late '30s was a student in Albion College. I forget where he went to school before, but my uncle was concerned that he was becoming too radicalized at the big university. Anyway, he told me that on the high holidays and Passover the mayor of Albion at that time was a man whose last name was Weiner. He owned a scrapyard, which is a typical Jewish business in these towns, and he would invite the Jews from Albion College to his home for Passover and on other Jewish holidays. And this was not an uncommon thing in these towns where you had colleges and a few Jewish families.

SHARON: So what was your impression of their life?

BURT: Well, I think to a certain extent they were somewhat more accepted in a way despite their Jewishness because people got to know them. The prejudice is an unfounded kind of dislike. So if you got to know people, they had greater acceptance. Their problem was that the greater acceptance is the exact problem we have when we talk about assimilation, intermarriage now. With acceptance comes a kind of lessening of communal ties and bonds. They had no community. It's like a cafeteria. If you're limited to

eating at a separate section, and then the whole cafeteria line is open, you've got all these choices. You become tempted. Not only tempted, it's understandable why you will choose from the wider breadth. And that is I think part of the cause for the issue of assimilation and intermarriage.

It reminds me very much of medicine, which does tremendous things these days. I remember one of the doctors, I asked him about a medication I was taking. He said, it's good, but there's no free lunch. You never met one without a side effect.

So as opportunity opens up and employment opens up and where you live becomes opened up, then to a certain extent you and your children are exposed to more and different people. And if you make romantic choices, marital choices, social choices from that group, not unexpected. It's the side effect. So with the benefit, the question then becomes, how does a community, if you want to preserve a community or preserve some part of it, how do you do that?

SHARON: When you were growing up, you were talking about your extended family. So different from that.

BURT: Well, first of all, I think it's part of the immigrant generation. There was a tendency to live closer. I told you because of what I called the ghettoized existence, I probably had within two blocks I had at least ten first cousins, innumerable second cousins. As far as playmates,

they were all there.

My mother's two brothers lived within eight blocks of us. My father's two brothers lived within two blocks of us. My mother must have had twenty cousins, my father a similar number, living within the same area. So on any kind of a holiday or social occasion there were scores and dozens of people. When my parents moved from that area, they moved a long way out, north of Seven Mile Road on Canterbury in the late 1940s. Even then, after Yom Kippur, break the fast, literally hundreds of people. It got to be too much for her as a practical matter. So there was that kind of clanishness, yes. Understandable.

It reminds me of throwing a stone in a pond. You throw a stone in a pond, the first circle is very tight, and the circles begin to get less defined. And I think that's what happens over time with families. They disburse, they come in, and they lose contact with each other.

SHARON: Who were the strongest influences upon you when you were a young man?

BURT: Well, it would have to be my own family. My father, my mother, my grandmother. One of my mother's brothers in particular I think was to a great extent. But I think a lot of it was the atmosphere in which I grew up. I've had people say, oh, it's kind of an easy existence. Well, when you're young and you don't have any real problems, that's

true. But I think that the idea of striving and knowing that you had to look to find a way to make a living.

I know when I tell my grandchildren that I never went to high school, college or law school without working at the same time, they can't comprehend that. That seems kind of strange to them. Yet, in the society in which I grew up, everybody pretty much worked after school and high school. Everybody had a paper route. I mean I had more jobs than I can possibly remember. In college I worked at a men's wear store in Ann Arbor. I had experience working in my dad's store, and that was a natural thing. And I told you when I went to law school, I had a number of jobs.

But I think those kind of community interactions had a lot to do with it.

SHARON: Did Sue come from the same kind of a family background?

BURT: No. Much smaller family. Both of her parents were born in the United States. She also had only grandmothers, but she had two grandmothers rather than my one. And I think it's interesting, she made the point that her mother didn't want the grandmother to speak in Yiddish because it wasn't American enough. So she never really learned the language. And they were to a great extent less observant. In fact I think until Temple Israel was organized, they probably didn't belong, any part of the family belong.

because her grandparents were more affiliated with -- it's interesting. They had a hand laundry, which was another common Jewish occupation in the Detroit area because you had a lot of single men working in the factories and they would take their laundry out. So it was a social group: the laundry ladies. They would get together socially and play cards. So politically they were more on the left. And then the yidishkeit and not at all religious.

SHARON: What about your children?

BURT: Well, two of my daughters went to law school. One of them practiced law for a while. The other didn't like it at all and never practiced law, and ended up working in the field of public relations. The one daughter who practiced it for a while ended up living in Europe. My oldest daughter she became the deputy secretary general of the Permanent Court of Operation at the Hague. She became a deputy registrar of the International Court of Justice at the Hague and worked for law firms in Europe. I think very recently she worked in Canada. She's very much involved in alternate dispute resolutions. She was the editor of the International Journal of Arbitration. In fact she recently worked for a law firm in Manhattan. And she still lives in Manhattan and works for a non-profit which is involved in promoting international alternative dispute resolution.

My youngest daughter actually went to Brandeis for a

master's degree in management of non-profit organizations and worked for the Boston Science Museum for a number of years. Interestingly enough, part of her job eventually became fundraising or development, and she worked with a company that one of the people they used was a very large event planning company. They actually hired her away from the Boston Museum of Science. She left them and now she is an event planner on her own.

SHARON: Well, that leads us right into a discussion of your current work with the Ravitz Foundation. I'm interested to know about Ed Ravitz.

BURT: Well, I think it's important that people understand. I want to tell you a little bit about Edward Ravitz. Edward Ravitz grew up a couple blocks from me on Elmhurst. His parents were immigrants. He was the oldest of three children. He was I'm told very bright. I never knew him. I think he was born about 1919. I think he graduated from Central High School about 1936 would be about right. The family was very poor. There was no money for him to go on to college. So he worked with his father as a carpenter when there was work.

He got drafted into the army in 1940. It was a peacetime draft. He and Ed Greenberg. I knew Ed Greenberg, I didn't know about Ed Ravitz. It was very difficult for him. He was short in stature. He was sent on to a training camp

down in Louisiana. His stories about the pervasive anti-semitism could make your stomach turn.

Anyway somebody said to him -- he was getting pretty smart -- why don't you apply to officer candidate school. But, he said, I've had never been to college. Apply anyway. He applied and got accepted. Eventually he ended up as an officer in the south Pacific and was decorated for bravery in combat.

He came back to Detroit about 1945, and he and his father tried to do some home building. They were carpenters. They were pretty good at building houses, but they didn't understand that the building business was a building of finance.

Anyway, to speed up a little bit, Ed eventually was hired by the Edward Rose Company because they saw the crew, the carpenter crew that he was heading, got more work done than other people. They had some projects in the western part of the state that needed somebody to superintend or do something to straighten out some problems. So in 1968 I guess he went out there and straightened out the problems. Then they said, why don't you stay out there. See if you can find some land we can build some more on. So he did and opened up an office there, looked for land and started to build. At one point I think they built something like 12,000 single homes, 25,000 multiple units. The office in Kalamazoo had about 600

employees, and for somebody whose family was too poor to send him to college, by the time of around 1998 he had an estate of over \$100 million.

He decided that he had provided well enough for his family and he wanted to do something charitable for the community. He was never very specific about it. He always was involved, though not a religious person, in the Jewish community. In the later years he was a very substantial donor to the Federation I think in some years before his death at the rate of about a half million dollars a year to the Federation.

So Ed set up a foundation in 1998, and when Ed died in 1999 there were very few specific things that he wanted done. One was \$5 million to Federation. He left the rest in a foundation. He and his accountant and his lawyer were the board of the foundation, and after his death his wife became a board member.

For whatever reason his wife decided to sue the foundation with the claim that the money that went to the foundation actually belonged in the estate. His accountant, a man by the name of Bruce Gelbaugh in Kalamazoo, who was actually working on behalf of one of Ed's daughters, who had already gone through the millions of dollars that he given her. But in any case, this litigation got to be very complex.

The law firm that was representing the foundation

was having some problems. Ed's lawyer at that time, who was part of the law firm, was somebody I knew. He was a tax lawyer I had worked with in the past. So he asked me to come into the case.

Go fast forward, eventually we defeated that case. It had to go to the Michigan Court of Appeals. But the attorney general of Michigan, who has supervision over charitable organizations, said she can't be on the board if she's suing. So I was appointed to the board about twelve years ago. Neal Zales, who was Ed's lawyer, died I would say maybe six, seven years ago, and I succeeded him as president of the foundation.

Ed never left any direction, but Bruce Gelbaugh who, as I said, had been an accountant in those years, and would write his checks, said that he often told him the stories of what had happened and what it was like growing up poor. So to a certain extent, although Ed gave us no direction, we tried to look at what were the things that interested him and in which he was interested, and then tried to also look at the fact that he obviously was interested in the Jewish community. You don't give millions and millions of dollars if you're not. And he did leave money for medical research, a couple specific things at that time.

So I guess we go to the old principle of healing the world; Tikkun Olam. So we try to balance off what we do with

Jewish institutions, causes, things of Jewish interest, that maybe don't get necessarily get money from other organized groups to supplement that. We also, because of his experiences in this anti-semitic world, look for things that can improve that situation to a great extent in our view. Then in the general community we look for the general principle that you can't be an island, and I said about healing the world.

And we also have an interest in the smaller communities. Part of it is my own experiences. But remember, Ed had his offices in Kalamazoo. He worked in Kalamazoo for many, many years. Kalamazoo is a relatively small Jewish community. There are two organized synagogues there. So that's another example. So we kind of looked at what did these people experience. They don't have a community. Their ties are lessened. One of the biggest things when I got into this small community area is what do they miss? Well, we may have a synagogue building, we may have a few families, but we have nobody to reach our children. We've been working on how we're going to do that.

One of the things we settled on, well, suppose we help you with sending them to Jewish camps. Jewish camping seems to have some effect. We're still working on the issue of how can we provide lessons. We've tried things like PJ, a library, and so forth. We've been looking at the fact that

some organizations -- I keep thinking about the 92nd Street Y in New York puts on programs all the time that you can dial into. Could we do lessons. And this is something I think eventually we will get, so that a community that has 10, 20, 30 families, have a few younger children, will have some way of educating those children Jewishly. That's been one of the things on which we focus.

SHARON: So it sounds like you work closely with them to try to find --

BURT: Well, that's one of the things, one of the programs that I know that I have a particular interest in and we're very much involved with.

And I also think one of the interesting things has come about with this Hillel Campus Alliance of Michigan, this idea that schools like Western Michigan, Central Michigan, which are growing, and they'll have large Jewish enrollments because both of them will have medical schools very shortly, and that will attract people. Ferris Institute, Saginaw Valley, I mentioned Albion College where my cousin had gone.

Anyway, the number of Jewish students is too small to have a Hillel staff, so whoever organized this, and I've been dealing to a certain extent with Cindy Hughey, who's the MSU Hillel director, and who kind of superintends this, hiring staff and sending staff out to provide programming for these groups, and that's something in which we have an interest and

which we're anxious to fund and do fund.

In fact one of the new people she just hired was a young woman from the Detroit community who had gone to Western Michigan and talked about what benefits had come, and she's going to work on these various campuses. And that goes back to my cousin's experiences in the late 1930s at Albion College.

SHARON: Building on that experience.

BURT: And that's what was done, and I think that's an important thing.

And I won't say that we look for offbeat, you know, things, but try to see whether or not we can find some area where what we can provide is going to be meaningful.

Part of it I come, just to give you a rough idea. Foundations are required to distribute 5 percent of the average value of their assets annually. So in our case that comes to something just under \$2 million, depending on the value of our assets and securities. It might hit \$2 million, it might be a little less.

Well, that's a lot of money, but if you look at dividing it up among various agencies, you will find that a little bit may not be meaningful to some, but it will be to others. And I keep thinking of the Holocaust Center. Well, part of that ties to the fact that the Holocaust Center is twofold. It's a museum in part, but it's a big educational

function.

If you go back to Ed Ravitz's experiences and my experiences growing up, can people who visit the center benefit in learning about other people, learning acceptance, learning what happens if you demonize people. The lesson of the Holocaust is if you let people be demonized so that they're thought of as less than you and less than human, killing them seems to be relatively easy. The Nazis demonstrated that it was relatively easy. So we've been working with them, and we intend to increase that, to see whether the educational activities of the Holocaust Center can be expanded and made better. We've met with them, and we are working with them and we have participated with them.

The same thing becomes with the so-called defense agencies: ADL and the American Jewish Committee. We've very substantially supported certain ADL activities. We're working on a project right now with the American Jewish Committee on how do we deal with the situation of North America's largest Muslim community being adjacent to the Jewish community. I think it's very important to deal with that now because whatever Jewish influence we have politically is at height. It's going to recede in time, and I think that if we also can see what we can do about finding some common ground with the Muslim community, would it be a lesson for what goes on in the Middle East? I don't know that it's a lesson. But at least

it may in a way have some beneficial effect on the anti-Israel propaganda and some of the movements, divestment movements that have occurred. Anyway, this is a project that is underway right now with the help of the University of Michigan Dearborn which we have funded.

I think these are all the kinds of things. I never really found out when they were on my newspaper route what they read of the newspaper or not at the Ravitz house. But anyway we think that's what Ed would want to see done.

SHARON: It really sounds like you understand his vision for the use of the money.

BURT: Well, and that would be the kind of thing. Obviously philanthropy is interesting, and it's an interesting thing about Jewish philanthropy. If I go back to the ghettoization when Jews were not socially acceptable, they couldn't belong to the clubs -- everyone knows in the Detroit area, the Detroit Athletic Club was a place where Jews were not accepted, golf clubs and so forth. Jews were not invited to serve on the boards of things. Well, as I said, when the cafeteria line opens and you have a broader choice, so Jews now, their money is welcomed. The Art Institute, obviously very important. The Detroit Opera Theater. Those are very valuable things, no question, culturally.

But more and more Jewish money is going to non-Jewish causes than would have been the case 50, 60 years ago.

Now is that good? Well, it's obviously good in the communal sense, in a larger community sense. But on the other hand if there are activities and needs of the Jewish community which differ from that of the general community, it presents a problem, because some of the larger sources of funds have been reduced.

The other thing is I think generationally. You've to look at what happens in future generations, and that trend will probably be accelerated. How are we going to cope without the larger givers?

The other point is, as we all know from the Haggadah, there came a pharaoh who knew not Joseph. There's a generation now that knew not the Holocaust. They didn't grow up with the pervasive anti-semitism that I did. They're not sure that there's really any need, that there is any anti-semitism. They haven't experienced it directly. So the real issue for the Jewish community is I guess in response to a question that one of my brilliant granddaughters asked me when she was much younger, if you're Jewish, do you have to be Jewish all your life?

So if I was going to say that the Ravitz Foundation had a mission, is we would like to help the Jewish community give reason to be to young Jewish people to be Jewish all their life.

Going back to Groucho Marx's point, he wouldn't want

to be a member of any group that would have him, it may be that we ought to think about the Jewish community and its groups and resources and institutions in the same way that I used to think about the Oakland Bar Association when I was the president. We were voluntary. Nobody had to belong. So we had to do something annually to make people want to belong and want to renew their membership.

When I became an officer of the State Bar of Michigan, it was very interesting -- I'm going to come back to that -- they didn't seem to have any direct activities on getting members to renew because they didn't have to. You had to belong.

Well, to me the Jewish community has to come along and say to itself, we have to be organized and operated so people want to renew their membership annually. I'm not talking about paying a Campaign amount. I'm talking about participation. It's participation that's the key.

Now, when you do that, when you have intermarried couples, if there's a renewal of membership, if it's that attractive to one spouse, it could well be as attractive to the other. And to me that's the kind of goal.

Just as a segue, I was telling you about the influx of Jewish people in Oakland County. There had always been a small Jewish community in Pontiac, and there was a temple and a Conservative synagogue. There were a few Jewish lawyers in

Pontiac. But there were very few Jewish lawyers out here when I became involved in the Oakland County Bar Association. No Jew had ever been a director, let alone an officer of the Oakland County Bar Association. I eventually became the president. Then the State Bar of Michigan, to which every lawyer must belong, no Jew had ever been elected a commissioner of the State Bar of Michigan until I was in the 1970s. That wasn't active anti-semitism. I never experienced it in Pontiac when I first came out here to the court.

Anyway, my point being, that's how the world has changed. Now with the change, are we as a Jewish community prepared to deal with the side effects? And how are we going to deal with the side effects? And is it possible to deal with the side effects? And the last point would be, has anybody really stopped to think about why should we continue to exist? Now, that may be a silly question, but the answer is you have to show people, you have to offer people the reasoning for why.

I've always felt, and it was something pretty obvious to me, that being Jewish, as Mordici Kaplan, who's been a strong influence on me once said, Being Jewish is a matter of peoplehood. What a people are has no anthropological, it may have some sociological definition, but it's a much larger thing than religion alone. Why should we exist? I think it's kind of gastronomic. If the only two

spices you had were salt and pepper, would your food taste as good? Would a world without people with different ideas and views be as good a world for everybody, as well as the people who provide those views? And I think that to a certain extent would describe where we're trying to go.

We're too small to make it happen. It's not going to happen in my lifetime. But if your goal is to try to bring to the Jewish community this idea that we must carry on in such a way that people want to join, and I guess that's my view of things.

SHARON: On that note, I think you've left us with a good message. Thank you. Is there anything that we have missed that you would like to add?

BURT: Well, first of all, you know, I could go on for hours. The last common was, one of the common phrases when I was growing up was the Yiddish phrase, Schwer zu sein ein yid, which means it's hard to be a Jew. Well, but that's part of what we are. In other words at Sinai we were given something. And when you're given something, and have to maintain it, that's work. That's our goal in life. But that doesn't mean that difficulty requires us and mandates us to do something to keep it.

I keep thinking about exercise. They say no pain, no gain. If you want to improve your sports performance, everybody says, oh, you've got to work on it. You've got to

practice. You have to do certain things. Well, I think it's the same with the Jewish community. What we call practice, we may not necessarily agree on what that practice is, and it may very well be that the religious institutions can reinforce that obligation to do, but that practice means what can I contribute in order to get something out of it. And will the more I contribute, the more I do, the more I'm active and involved, will I get the same amount of benefit out? And it can. I think if it works for exercise, it's got to work in life.

SHARON: Thank you, Burt. A beautiful message. And I've really enjoyed talking with you.