

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Emery Klein  
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Ruth Broder  
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Tuesday, June 29, 2004  
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation  
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish life, family history,  
6 community life  
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8 MS. BRODER: This is Ruth Broder. I'm conducting an  
9 oral history interview with Emery Klein at the Jewish  
10 Federation of Metropolitan Detroit Building, on June 29th,  
11 2004.

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

15 MR. KLEIN: You do.

16 MS. BRODER: Thank you. Let's start at the  
17 beginning. Where were you born and what year?

18 MR. KLEIN: I was born in 1928 in Humenne, which is  
19 a small town in eastern Slovakia. The uniqueness of that town  
20 was the Jewish flavor. There was a total of 6,000 people, at  
21 least 2,000 were Jewish. The shopkeepers, the doctors, the  
22 lawyers, the pharmacists, they were all Jewish. We had three  
23 synagogues, two actually, one Orthodox, one Conservative, and  
24 believe it or not, even though it was a small town, it had a  
25 Reform temple.

1           MS. BRODER: Talk a little bit about your childhood  
2 and your family. Pull it all together.

3           MR. KLEIN: Life was very, very good for us. My  
4 parents were well-to-do. My father and his brother owned  
5 several businesses jointly. We had a very wonderful  
6 childhood. We went to Jewish schools, regular schools, had  
7 many friends. My aunts, uncles, cousins, every Friday night  
8 got together at our place because my grandmother lived with  
9 us. My parents were always very charitable. They made sure  
10 members of our extended family, who possibly didn't have as  
11 much as we did, were well taken care of. We always had two  
12 tzedakah boxes, one for the poor and the second for the Jewish  
13 National Fund. My father never came home Friday night from  
14 shul without bringing one, two or sometimes three people who  
15 didn't have anywhere to go for Shabbes dinner. Something my  
16 mother expected. It happened on a weekly basis.

17           Czechoslovakia in those days was a wonderful  
18 democratic country. Probably as good or second after  
19 Switzerland. Unfortunately, things got gradually worse in the  
20 late '30s. Czechoslovakia separated from the Czech Republic.  
21 They were <sup>LAWS for</sup> the Jews, on almost a daily basis, restricting  
22 our lives. We weren't able to go out after dark. We were  
23 forced to wear yellow armbands. The synagogues were closed.  
24 We couldn't go to school. There were daily announcements of  
25 new restrictions and new laws.

1            Things got even worse when it came to 1942 when they  
2 started with the transport. First it was young boys, men,  
3 then young girls, and in 1943, all families were taken away.  
4 We were spared at this point yet because among other  
5 businesses, my father owned farmland and he was experienced in  
6 managing land and property. So he was appointed as a manager  
7 of the Jewish farmers. This kept us home yet for another few  
8 months.

9            Later on as the front was coming closer, the  
10 Russians, the Germans and Slovaks were under their influence.  
11 They couldn't rely on Jews who were possibly spies. Again,  
12 fortunately, they felt they could use still my father and they  
13 transferred us to a Jewish farm in Slovakia. We managed to be  
14 there for a while. We had a horrible experience there. I  
15 don't know if you want me to mention it.

16            **MS. BRODER:** Go ahead. It's up to you.

17            **MR. KLEIN:** A cousin of mine with two young girls  
18 were hiding at our place. After a while things got to point  
19 where we felt it was too dangerous. She had Aryan papers, so  
20 she went to the station to go further west. Unfortunately,  
21 somebody recognized her and took her off the train and she and  
22 about 30 other Jewish people were taken to the forest,  
23 executed on the spot and buried. This was the closest I came  
24 to tragedy with my family.

25            **MS. BRODER:** Who else was in your family besides

1 your mother, your father, you haven't mentioned siblings?

2           **MR. KLEIN:** I had a brother, Bernie, who was 20  
3 months younger than I am. My sister, Judy, who was five years  
4 younger. We had an aunt, who was widowed, who was the wife of  
5 my uncle who was a partner of my father all his life.

6           **MS. BRODER:** Was your grandmother with you still at  
7 this point?

8           **MR. KLEIN:** No, my grandmother died before we were  
9 taken away. But in September 1944 our luck run out and we  
10 were taken. We were put on trucks, taken to a nearby  
11 gathering camp, and from there cattle cars into Auschwitz-  
12 Birkenau.

13           **MS. BRODER:** With your family, Emery or separated?

14           **MR. KLEIN:** Yeah. All five of us together.

15           There we were separated, men from women.  
16 Fortunately for us there were a couple of Jewish boys from  
17 Humenne, who were working for the Germans. And the Germans  
18 were very smart. In order to keep as many people on the  
19 front, They used Jewish people to do jobs all kinds of jobs for  
20 them.

21           These three young fellows told Bernie and me -- we  
22 were 15 and 16 -- that we should tell them (A) that we are 18  
23 years old and (B) that we have a trade, which helped a lot.  
24 My sister was 11 years old and they asked my mother, do you  
25 want to be with your daughter? Naturally, she said, yes.

1 They both ended up in the crematorium the same day.

2 MS. BRODER: The day of the separation was the last  
3 day you saw them?

4 MR. KLEIN: The last day we saw my mother and  
5 sister.

6 We got into the camp. I don't know how much you  
7 want me to detail, because I could mention to you the stories  
8 of the Holocaust.

9 MS. BRODER: Tell us something about it.

10 MR. KLEIN: There was a routine. We had to undress,  
11 we shaved from top to bottom, showered. We were lucky because  
12 water came out from the shower, not gas. We were handed a  
13 pair of trousers, a jacket. A little side story. The pants I  
14 got were very short. My father opened the cuff to lengthen  
15 it, and lucky to us, found a gold coin. These were slacks  
16 somebody else had. This gold coin helped us to buy bread the  
17 three weeks we were in Birkenau. We got two slices of bread  
18 every day, which could mean life or death.

19 As we all know, Auschwitz-Birkenau were death camps.  
20 Strictly extermination camps. But fortunately we were shipped  
21 to work in Glivitz.

22 MS. BRODER: In Poland, also?

23 MR. KLEIN: Yes. Upper Silesia.

24 Before leaving we were tattooed on the left arm. My  
25 father got number 13660, I got 61, my brother 62, and the

1 cousin with us 63. This was very important because we now  
2 were registered. We actually existed.

3 In the camp, again a little side story. My father  
4 had enough guts to stop Dr. Mengele, who visited different  
5 camps, and asked him to put his younger son in the kitchen.  
6 Mengele was so flabbergasted, it was like a slap in the face,  
7 he put Bernie in the kitchen, which again, extended their  
8 life because Bernie was able to steal some food and every  
9 night he brought for us.

10 My father and I assigned to night shift, which meant  
11 we worked at night and didn't sleep during the day because  
12 they wouldn't let you. You were supposed to, but every few  
13 minutes, every couple hours. Just to really try to make it as  
14 difficult for you as possible.

15 Again, here me and my father, we were assigned to  
16 Track 30, which repaired railroad cars which came back damaged  
17 from the front. I was given a soldering iron, which I didn't  
18 know what it was, but my father spoke to the foreman, who was  
19 Polish, a very nice guy and he promised him the world. He  
20 said he's a rich man, and when the war was over he would take  
21 care of his son.

22 We managed, we were there for almost six months, but  
23 the Russians were pushing forward and the Nazis started to  
24 flee. They decided to take the Jews with them. This was the  
25 well-known famous death march. Eighty percent of the people

1 were killed and died during march because it was very  
2 exhausting.

3           One night we stopped in a place called Black Halmer.  
4 When we woke up in morning, the Germans were gone. The  
5 Russians were pushing, and they had no time to take care of  
6 us. They literally left us. We couldn't believe it, but we  
7 were all left in the camp. We all broke into warehouses,  
8 hungry. We ate the food, which our stomachs were not used to.  
9 Diarrhea broke out and it was a horrible smell and the  
10 situation was just very bad.

11           My father, brother, myself and three of our cousins  
12 decided to start for journey home by foot to Czechoslovakia.  
13 We walked every day. Slept in abandoned Polish homes. Made  
14 our way with what was available, and continued the journey for  
15 many days. At one point there was a train going our  
16 direction. We waited on the train for six hours till it  
17 finally moved and took us a little further.

18           Eventually we run into the Russian Army, who were  
19 friendly. They said, you working for Germans. And they were  
20 not very happy we worked for the Germans? Later on we ran  
21 into Czechoslovakian Army and their truck took us back to our  
22 home town, which was February 1945.

23           We moved back into our old home. I forgot to  
24 mention, we had a household, two maids, a driver, and several  
25 servants still living in that home. My mother who was in

1 charge of the household had a Christmas tree for them every  
2 year. We came back and our servants were in the home and they  
3 turned the home back to us. One cousin who was hiding in the  
4 forest was back. It was very sad, very difficult. There were  
5 no friends, except for this one cousin no family.

6 MS. BRODER: How many people that were taken out of  
7 your town came back to the town?

8 MR. KLEIN: From the 2000 people, maybe, maybe, at  
9 that point maybe 40, 50, maybe less, but eventually a few  
10 more, but not more than 100 total.

11 My father tried to make living. He bought an old  
12 truck and went out of town to bring food, grocery product  
13 which we sold, trying to make a living. I was very weak and  
14 undernourished. My father took me to Prague to see a doctor,  
15 a specialist who diagnosed me with TB in my right lung and TB  
16 of my back. I was taken to the mountains and I was there for  
17 six months in a cast in a TB sanitorium.

18 After I recuperated, I entered the commercial  
19 academy to try to get my degree.

20 MS. BRODER: You were college age by then.

21 MR. KLEIN: Yeah.

22 MS. BRODER: Emery, wait. Go back a minute. You  
23 hadn't finished high school but you went into college.

24 MR. KLEIN: No. We had tutors. My parents hired a  
25 tutor to prepare me for bar mitzvah in 1941. I had a very



1 quiet, low key bar mitzvah in our home. My brother who was 20  
2 months younger never had his bar mitzvah.

3 I went to school and I finished eventually my stint  
4 there and at the commercial academy. Anti-Semitism was all  
5 over. We went out for breaks to class, it was nothing unusual  
6 to find on the blackboard "Jews get out." Things were just --  
7 very soon we realized that this is not a place for Jews to  
8 stay. Even though my family lived there all their lives for  
9 generations, we saw the need to leave the country.

10 My father had a sister in Detroit. My father and my  
11 stepmother, because my father had remarried, wanted to go to  
12 United States. I failed to mention that in this interim we  
13 were visited by an Israeli Shilach, who appointed my brother  
14 and myself to be in charge of a Zionist organization.

15 **MS. BRODER:** Were they trying to urge you to come to  
16 Israel at that point?

17 **MR. KLEIN:** Eventually to go to Israel, but first to  
18 organize the 15, 20 kids who were there. We tried our best,  
19 went to summer camps, and the idea was to get ready for the  
20 ALIYAH. My brother and I were the last people to leave the  
21 city. We helped everybody else to get out.

22 And there were all kind of stories I could tell. A  
23 girl had no papers whatsoever, I managed to get her the papers  
24 of a friend of mine who didn't come back, and on this paper  
25 she was able to get a visa and go to Israel.

1 MS. BRODER: But you didn't go to Israel.

2 MR. KLEIN: Not yet. My father wanted to go to  
3 Detroit, my brother and I wanted to go to Israel. We were  
4 listening to BBC, to the news, and watching the United Nation  
5 in 1948, the birth of Israel, it meant lot to us. Very much  
6 encouraged by it.

7 We had a big family discussion. My father said,  
8 we'll go wherever you want to go, promise we'll never  
9 separate. We'll give it our best try in Israel, but if it  
10 doesn't work, you have to promise that we'll go as a family to  
11 the United States, which we did.

12 So we went to Israel. In preparation for it I took  
13 a course in operating movie projectors. My father bought a  
14 chicken incubator. So we came to Israel and with help from  
15 cousin of ours, who made ALIYAH many years ago, we were  
16 assigned an Arab home outside of Karaba (ph. sp.), a home  
17 without plumbing, without electricity. Schleppling water by  
18 the pail. We were also assigned some farm land. So we were  
19 trying to work the incubator, get some chickens. We found out  
20 you have to keep kerosene light<sup>ON</sup> at night to fool the chickens  
21 so they produce more eggs. We planted corn. The chickens  
22 were dying. I as a businessman put the corn on the trucks. I  
23 had to sell it. But there were no buyers. Things were not  
24 easy in those days.

25 After a while, my father still had a little bit of

1 money, and he was given all kind of propositions. Among  
2 others, to buy a movie house. I thought I would be able to  
3 use my expertise. But the deals were not good deals. My  
4 father finally said we tried everything. We have to go. We  
5 agreed to go with them.

6           However, the Czechoslovakian quota was very low and  
7 we found out we cannot not go to United States. So my aunt in  
8 Detroit made arrangements for us to go temporarily to  
9 Montreal, to Canada. We got an 8-day Italian transit visa to  
10 come to Rome, go to the consulate, pick up our visa and go to  
11 Canada, just to find out that the Canadian consul was a  
12 horrible anti-Semite, who had literally refused to give visas  
13 to anybody who came from Israel. So instead of eight days we  
14 spend eight months in Rome. Only on the intervention again  
15 with my aunt here, went as high as Mackenzie King, who was the  
16 former prime minister of Canada, until the consulate finally  
17 got a telegram, which I saw, issue visa to Klein family with  
18 no question asked.

19           **MS. BRODER:** So you went to Montreal and that was  
20 1950.

21           **MR. KLEIN:** We came to Montreal and tried to make  
22 the best of it. First week I got a job as a bookkeeper with  
23 the Kukes family. Later became controller and eventually  
24 vice-president. The Kukes, Bella and Harold, were very nice.

25           **MS. BRODER:** They lived here but they had a business

1 there?

2 MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry, let me back up.

3 MS. BRODER: What did you do in Montreal?

4 MR. KLEIN: I worked as bookkeeper for local  
5 company, also became controller. Did well, considerable. But  
6 then at my father's urging we left there and came to Detroit.

7 In Montreal I must tell you my boss was very ardent  
8 Zionist. We went to meetings and we tried to contribute as  
9 much as we could in the circumstances, but they were always  
10 interested in what was happening in Israel.

11 We came to Detroit and here again tried to make a  
12 living. The very first week, as I said, I saw an ad in paper,  
13 seeking jobs. I got a job with the Kukes. I hadn't unpacked  
14 my suitcase and I was sent to work. I eventually became  
15 controller, vice president. And became very close to the  
16 Kukes, Bella and Harold were wonderful. A wonderful  
17 relationship.

18 After ten years Harold and his brother sold the  
19 company, and my brother and I said, it's time for us to go  
20 into business for ourselves. My brother wasn't happy with his  
21 job. And because we had some contacts in the import/export  
22 business, we started an import/export company, later  
23 specializing in electronics. I put in \$250, my brother put in  
24 \$250. Had old Underwood typewriter in my father's basement.  
25 Worked very hard, and we succeeded, and 30 years later when we

1 sold the company, it was a well-established AAA-1 rated  
2 worldwide electronic firm with offices in Troy, Hong Kong,  
3 Taiwan and warehouses in Budapest. But we felt the time had  
4 come. We worked very hard and then I had bypass surgery, so  
5 we sold out.

6 Now let me retract a little bit back.

7 MS. BRODER: Yeah. I'm going to take you back.

8 MR. KLEIN: In 1967, I was fortunate to meet and  
9 marry my wonderful wife, Diane. In 1969 we had Jeff and in  
10 1970, Barbie came along.

11 MS. BRODER: Let me go back a minute. Did your  
12 father come to Detroit with you and Bernie?

13 MR. KLEIN: He came actually before us.

14 MS. BRODER: Did Bernie get married in Montreal?

15 MR. KLEIN: Yes.

16 MS. BRODER: The family ended up all here?

17 MR. KLEIN: Everybody here. My father's request  
18 that we kept --

19 MS. BRODER: To stay together. Okay.

20 MR. KLEIN: Business was prospering. With  
21 encouragement of Diane, we felt it was time for us to give  
22 back to the community.

23 MS. BRODER: That's where I want to take you next.  
24 First of all, your earliest recollections of community work  
25 here and what people influenced and mentored you in this

1 community.

2           **MR. KLEIN:** Diane got immediately involved with  
3 Hadassah because her mother was very much involved and in  
4 Federation. My first contact with Federation was through  
5 Mercantile Division. Why? Because in my business I was  
6 selling to retailers. I met Sol Chicurel, Irving Cohen, Sid  
7 Freedland and many others. Believe it or not, after many  
8 years I became the chairman of the Mercantile Division.

9           During the same period, I met Sheila Ordin. Sheila  
10 Ordin was the woman in charge of project called CANS. Can  
11 Against Needless Starvation, which was a grassroots  
12 organization collecting food, primarily cans, which didn't  
13 spoil, and delivering it to the needy Jews. I remember Diane  
14 and I with our two toddlers going on Sunday mornings with  
15 deliveries, to see people who lived in a garage in the inner  
16 city and I tell you they affected us. We just couldn't accept  
17 the fact that we lived in an affluent community and there's  
18 people who live in horrible conditions. Like I said, this one  
19 in a garage, that one in an apartment, without food, medical  
20 care or anything.

21           We decided to do what we can to bring this to the  
22 attention of the organized community. So even though we did  
23 not know Bill ~~A~~runin we made a date to see him and went  
24 downtown, and he prepared to send us to <sup>SAM</sup>Lerner, who was the  
25 executive director of Jewish Family Service. We had several

1 meetings with him and he wanted to conduct a study, because he  
2 didn't believe there were Jewish people<sup>LIKE THAT</sup> in the community.

3           During this time I got to know Bob Naftaly, and we  
4 became friends ever since.. We asked Lerner to come with us  
5 to food delivery, but to no avail. Eventually we pushed it to  
6 -- Edythe Jackier<sup>with</sup> was president of Jewish Family Service.  
7 Eventually we got the program to be accepted, not only  
8 accepted by Jewish Family Service, but it became the top kind  
9 of program, poverty program for Jewish Family Service. Martin  
10 Deutsch, who was the chairman of the nominating committee of  
11 Jewish Family Services, called me and he told me that my name  
12 was proposed for the board, but also told me that someone  
13 said, over his dead body would I get on the board.

14           **MS. BRODER:** Did you get on?

15           **MR. KLEIN:** Needless to say, I got on. Sam became  
16 my greatest fan. I was the only one whose calls he returned.  
17 He urged me to become president of the Jewish Family Service,  
18 which I didn't do because I thought of my involvement at this  
19 point.

20           During this time Bill called me and asked me to  
21 serve on the board of Hebrew Free Loan. They explained to me  
22 it's the oldest Jewish agency run by old-timers who are very  
23 zealously guarding their nickels, and they were very  
24 antagonistic against Federation. So I did get on the board.  
25 They urged me to help to get the agency into the right tracks,

1 that loans are more important than collecting interest and  
2 things like this. Needless to say, again, I don't know how  
3 many years later I became president. You know very well today  
4 Hebrew Free Loan is a very important agency of Federation.

5 MS. BRODER: I have a personal interest.

6 MR. KLEIN: Because your son is now the president.

7 MS. BRODER: My son is now the president, right.

8 MR. KLEIN: Hebrew Free Loan does wonderful work.

9 Now this got me deeper and deeper involved in  
10 Federation. In 1982 I was very pleased to be appointed to  
11 board of governors, executive committee. In 1987, if my dates  
12 are correct, I became co-chairman of the Allied Jewish  
13 Campaign with my good friend Paul D. Borman. Unfortunately, I  
14 was able to only do it for a year, because I had my first  
15 bypass surgery.

16 During my tenure I tried very hard to get survivors  
17 to participate to become supporters. I only partially  
18 succeeded.

19 MS. BRODER: Why do you think that was? Do you have  
20 a feeling why survivors do not get involved in the campaign?

21 MR. KLEIN: Everybody worries about themselves  
22 making a living. It was just matter of education.  
23 Eventually, more and more survivors did participate, but it  
24 was a difficult breakthrough. I devoted lot of time to it.

25 Let me just come back. Eventually I was involved in



1 several different committees and chaired some, like the  
2 Collection Review Committee, Mrs Barbara Goldman, who I also  
3 admire very much. Hebrew Free Loan was to me an organization  
4 which has the largest influence on me.

5 MS. BRODER: Why?

6 MR. KLEIN: Interviewing people every Sunday.  
7 People coming asking for loans, for bare necessities, for  
8 health reasons, to pay the dentist, to put kids through  
9 school, to have a bar mitzvah. There were many cases where  
10 the breadwinner got sick. No money. To me this was very,  
11 very important. Again, we live in affluent community and for  
12 me to allow to help people in our community who don't have  
13 anything. When I came to Montreal as an immigrant and got  
14 help, this was always <sup>IMPORTANT</sup> to me, Hebrew Free Loan had the money to  
15 help those who need.

16 MS. BRODER: Do you remember when you got the award  
17 from the International Association of Hebrew Free Loans, do  
18 you remember what you said?

19 MR. KLEIN: I really don't. I said what I'm saying  
20 now, that Hebrew Free Loan had a tremendous impact on  
21 me, because of me seeing the people coming asking for interest  
22 free loans, it reminded me when I was an immigrant. I could  
23 never forget.

24 MS. BRODER: You used the word "greenhorn", you  
25 said, I remember when I was a greenhorn". I read your speech.

1 It was lovely.

2           **MR. KLEIN:** You asked me about mentoring. My  
3 situation was somewhat different. When I came to this  
4 country, I was almost 30. Very strong Jewish upbringing. I  
5 had a love for Israel. So I didn't need mentoring per se.  
6 When I saw a need or situation, I was the kind of guy that  
7 goes for it and try to get involved with both my feet. In  
8 many cases I ended up in charge of certain projects. No  
9 question that many people in the community I admired and I'm  
10 sure influenced me.

11           One was David Hermelin, who I loved who he was and  
12 what he did. We did many projects together. I will not  
13 forget when Diane and I bought a large home and David came to  
14 see it before we even finished the deal. He says, great,  
15 finally somebody in the community who will be able to share,  
16 because in those days he had most of them in his home.

17           One morning he called me, Emery, we have a very  
18 serious situation. There's somebody -- and I won't mention  
19 the name he told me -- and family will lose their home unless  
20 in next six hours we raise \$15,000. This is back years ago.  
21 You raise half and I raise half. And we did. We partnered in  
22 so many different things that cost me money.

23           **MS. BRODER:** You want to know something, I want to  
24 talk right now about your fund-raising prowess, for which you  
25 are most famous in this community, and for which many people

1 --

2 MR. KLEIN: You should have been last night at the  
3 dinner. IDF.

4 MS. BRODER: I know. Talk about the fund-raising  
5 and how you come to it so naturally, and how you feel about  
6 asking people for money all the time.

7 MR. KLEIN: I have no problem asking people for  
8 money because I start off with giving. Even though many times  
9 I ask for more than I give, but I feel very strongly and I  
10 know I give the maximum pledge. I always feel, I don't care  
11 who it is, I give at least as much. But I'm what they call in  
12 community a quality pledge. I always start off every fund-  
13 raising I do, the first name is mine, maximum cash I can. But  
14 I have no problem. Even though I may give \$2,000, I'll ask  
15 someone for 20, because when I fund-raise for something, I  
16 feel strongly about it.

17 Much of these people I know, I have lunch and  
18 breakfast with them, and so on. I have no problem calling  
19 people I don't know and I invite them for lunch or on <sup>the</sup> phone  
20 explain to them why I'm asking what I'm asking. Somehow, I've  
21 been successful since my Mercantile Division days, Hebrew Free  
22 Loan, and so on. How did I get to <sup>YAD</sup> Ezra? Because of the CANS  
23 project led me in Yad Ezra, where we're again, feeding, around  
24 the community 1100 families, 2400 hundred people who come every  
25 month for bare necessities.

1           **MS. BRODER:** Did CANS become Yad Ezra? Does CANS  
2 still exist?

3           **MR. KLEIN:** No. Because Jewish Family Service took  
4 the project over, calling the poverty project, which they took  
5 care of all the people who needed help.

6           **MS. BRODER:** That didn't become Meals on Wheels  
7 either, then.

8           **MR. KLEIN:** No. This was called the Poverty  
9 Project, which became the flagship program for Jewish Family  
10 Service, even though Lerner was fighting me on it, but he  
11 eventually accepted and realized how important it is.

12           But I did fund-raising, as I say, for Federation,  
13 for Hebrew Free Loan, for -- but very soon I got involved  
14 politically. To me, political involvement is a question of  
15 survival. I remember times when Jewish people couldn't  
16 participate in the political process. And I hope this never  
17 happens again. I feel strongly that every citizen should not  
18 only vote but be an active participant in their lives, in what  
19 happens. This is especially important for Jewish people, who  
20 are a minority in this country. And we have to make sure that  
21 we elect people to Congress, the Senate, who would protect our  
22 human rights, our civil rights, our civil liberties and  
23 women's right, to make sure we appoint the right judges, and  
24 so on. For Jews who are concerned about Israel, that they  
25 elect officials who will be there for Israel.

1           You have to remember that the American government  
2 gives more money to Israel than all Jewish organization  
3 combined. This was wanted besides financial support.  
4 Unfortunately, the way the world is today, United States is  
5 our only ally of Israel. We felt without the United States,  
6 Israel couldn't exist. They don't like us in Washington  
7 because of our good looks. We have to do our share and I'm  
8 glad to do mine.

9           So I worked in politics, A, through AIPAC. You know  
10 what that is. It's a Israeli lobby, is a one issue situation  
11 but very important and educating congressmen and senators  
12 about Israel, and taking them to Israel and so on. And I'm on  
13 the national executive committee.

14           Then the MOPAC, it's a political action committee,  
15 which I started back almost 20 years ago with the help of  
16 David Hermelin, and David Mondry, for purpose of helping  
17 Democratic candidate to get elected. Candidates who are good  
18 on our issues. Israel number one, and number two, our social  
19 issues. I was always involved only in Democratic politics  
20 because of my feelings, who I am and what I am.

21           And I've been doing this for more years than I care  
22 to remember. I'm trying to get somebody to take over for me,  
23 and hopefully Ira Mondry eventually will, going in the  
24 footsteps of his father, who was my co-president.

25           And this to me, I mean, Jewish community is

1 obviously very, very important to me, and there only can be a  
2 Jewish community if there's a strong Jewish community. To  
3 have a strong Jewish community, we have to be activists. They  
4 cannot just sit back and criticize or complain. That's not  
5 the way I do it or the way Diane does business. We are doing  
6 our share to the best we can in various different areas.  
7 Politically very much so. And in the community as much as we  
8 can.

9           **MS. BRODER:** I think it's obvious that these roots  
10 of philanthropy are very deep inside of you if they started in  
11 Czechoslovakia when you were a little boy. This is a legacy  
12 you got from your father.

13           **MR. KLEIN:** That's why I say mentoring is different  
14 for me than maybe other people.

15           **MS. BRODER:** Your father was your mentor.

16           **MR. KLEIN:** Absolutely. My father, my mother and  
17 this was just taken for granted. That's the way it is to be.

18           **MS. BRODER:** This is what we do.

19           I want to talk a little bit more about Federation  
20 and how you looked at Federation as your first came here, as  
21 you said, as a "greenhorn" and how you look at it today and  
22 the direction it's going in. Do you think it's going in the  
23 right direction? What do you think Federation is  
24 contemplating on doing, and are they in the right place?

25           **MR. KLEIN:** Ever since I joined Federation, I was

1 not afraid to raise my voice. I criticized. I was very, very  
2 vocal when Federation wanted to buy a big building for  
3 millions and millions of dollars. I was called up when the  
4 Federation asked for my opinion, which was a very good deal,  
5 but first they wanted to spend lot of money.

6 I was advocating many things over the years. Some  
7 of them I succeeded with, some of them were ignored. But  
8 there's no question, Federation made a lot of progress.

9 Now you say, how did it change from when I started.

10 **MS. BRODER:** When you started to where you think we  
11 are today.

12 **MR. KLEIN:** We are fortunately devoting more time  
13 and energy into Jewish education. I said before, Jewish  
14 education will lead to Jewish community, and it's very, very  
15 important. We are devoting a lot of time to endowments and  
16 endowments are very important because that's the insurance for  
17 the future.

18 We are more inclusive federation than before. We  
19 were very elitist when I came. I was surprised that I was  
20 asked to serve on the board.

21 **MS. BRODER:** They saw a good thing when they saw it.

22 **MR. KLEIN:** But today, Federation is more  
23 considerate of other people. It used to be no Jewish food and  
24 no kosher food served at an event, obviously offending the  
25 Orthodox community. So these things rapidly changed and

1 improved.

2 Weaknesses, unfortunately losing a lot of people.  
3 We still not reaching out to a good part of the community. We  
4 need to do everything we can to do. We are obviously losing a  
5 lot of young people, because people go to college and don't  
6 come back. We're losing people to retirement because they go  
7 south or wherever they go, and don't come back. We need to  
8 make sure somehow that we fill the vacuum. Our pledges are  
9 less and less. I was glad at the last board meeting we're  
10 going to give special effort for a campaign to reach people  
11 who are hidden. Hiding, never came forward. So this is good  
12 and I hope we'll continue this way, because the future is very  
13 important.

14 I am now fortunately a grandfather, having two  
15 grandsons and two granddaughters. It's very important for  
16 their sake and for sake of all Jewish kids and grandchildren  
17 to have the Federation here to organize the Jewish Community.

18 **MS. BRODER:** Emery, I want to talk a little bit  
19 first about your trips to Israel, because once you became a  
20 member of this community, you've gone on missions with our  
21 community, and I want to know what that meant to you when you  
22 went back there.

23 **MR. KLEIN:** You heard from my previous statements,  
24 we lived in Israel for about six months. It was not our  
25 desire to leave, but because to keep the family together we



1 decided to come here. I really never lost contact with Israel.  
2 I've supported everything here with Federation and otherwise  
3 all the various different projects. We went on several  
4 missions. We helped co-lead for Jane Sherman a very emotional  
5 mission. It meant a lot to Diane and me. Diane went several  
6 times, also, because of my health I couldn't always  
7 participate. Every trip to Israel is refreshing to me. It  
8 adds to our desire of being Jewish. I was persecuted and  
9 suffered a lot because I was Jewish. I lost my mother, my  
10 sister and most of my extended family because I'm Jewish. But  
11 I never stopped loving being Jewish. That's my heritage and  
12 Israel is very important to me. So is it for Diane, and I  
13 feel very fortunate in this regard, because Diane feels the  
14 same way as I do. We try to instill this in our children.

15 MS. BRODER: Have you taken your children to Israel?

16 MR. KLEIN: Yes.

17 MS. BRODER: You thinking about going on a family  
18 mission or your grandchildren are too young?

19 MR. KLEIN: No. Too young. We took them to Europe  
20 twice. Once they were too young, and then when they both got  
21 married, we told them we want to take family trip, I couldn't  
22 believe they wanted to go back to my home town and the  
23 concentration camps I was in. It was quite a trip. They got  
24 a lot out of it. I was glad they wanted to do it. It was an  
25 experience which I'm sure they will never forget. Diane and I

1 will never forget.

2 MS. BRODER: You went back to Auschwitz?

3 MR. KLEIN: Yes.

4 MS. BRODER: Did you do that just with your family  
5 or did you do that on a mission?

6 MR. KLEIN: I did a mission, too.

7 MS. BRODER: You've been back twice, then.

8 MR. KLEIN: Yeah. They wanted it. The first time  
9 they were too young. And to my surprise they chose it. It  
10 was their vacation time and they chose to spend it to go to  
11 Auschwitz. We said Kaddish. It was a very emotional  
12 experience.

13 MS. BRODER: This is the thing about the Holocaust  
14 and being in a camp that I have always wondered about. I have  
15 visited Auschwitz twice now. I don't understand why anybody  
16 survived. I don't know how you did it.

17 MR. KLEIN: You ask me, strictly luck. No  
18 smartness. Nothing else. A couple small things which helped  
19 us, my brother being in kitchen, stealing that piece of bread.  
20 And number two, the gold coin which we found. Small little  
21 things like that which helped us to extend our lives to give  
22 us nourishment. They were torturing us. There was no food.  
23 We were starving, literally.

24 MS. BRODER: How big is the desire to live and get  
25 through it? Is that a big part of it?

1           **MR. KLEIN:** Absolutely. Absolutely. United States  
2 bombers, we were hoping they would bomb us. We were not  
3 afraid about us, we were hoping they will destroy the camps.  
4 If it has to be including us, so be it. We were very upset  
5 that they didn't. I never forgave Roosevelt for not doing  
6 anything. And he was a Democrat, but still.

7           **MS. BRODER:** Brewster's father never once voted for  
8 Roosevelt, because he said he was not good for the Jews.

9           **MR. KLEIN:** He was not good for the Jews.

10          **MS. BRODER:** The death march, too. I don't know how  
11 you physically survive a thing like that.

12          **MR. KLEIN:** It was unbelievable. My father even  
13 schlepped one of my cousins who couldn't walk properly. How  
14 we did? Don't ask. I mean, the desire of wanting to live, I  
15 suppose. We went literally from hour to hour and day to day,  
16 and togetherness. Being together with my dad and my brother  
17 helped a lot.

18                 Another story, I got sick, a sore throat. My father  
19 said, why don't you go to the infirmary. I thought they will  
20 kill me. Believe it or not they thought I had diphtheria and  
21 where they were killing healthy Jews, they took samples of my  
22 throat culture, sent it into the city and came back. Little  
23 story of while I was infirmary, I was feeling good, I was  
24 helping to sweep up, so I got an extra piece of bread. But at  
25 the same time, if I wouldn't see it, I wouldn't believe it,

1 the camp doctor came and marked certain charts with an X,  
2 which means that person never woke up in the morning. Seeing  
3 a son coming to visit his father, was told his father is dead,  
4 the only question he had, where is his ration, where's the  
5 breakfast. That's how dehumanized people were. Experiences  
6 which you could not forget.

7           **MS. BRODER:** It's with you forever. How long did it  
8 take you when you came to this country to be able to talk  
9 about the Holocaust?

10           **MR. KLEIN:** I was different from my brother. Many  
11 people can't talk. My brother couldn't. I felt very strongly  
12 it's important for people to know. When I came to Montreal, I  
13 could not believe how little people knew. I made a lot of  
14 friends. There was a strong Jewish immigrant community in  
15 Montreal. We joined an organization called The New World Club  
16 for young people. They knew so little of what happened and I  
17 felt it's very important that they know. I was ready to  
18 answer questions and talk right from the beginning.

19           And I did it for Sidney Bokosky, who interviewed my  
20 brother and me for the Shoah Project, Spielberg. I felt it's  
21 important. Difficult as it was, but I felt I had to do it.  
22 My kids would ask questions as they were growing up.

23           **MS. BRODER:** They didn't say, we shouldn't talk  
24 about that?

25           **MR. KLEIN:** Absolutely not. That's why I want them

1 to see this, Ruth.

2 MS. BRODER: They'll see it.

3 I think at this point we should try to decide if  
4 there's anything else you think is vitally important that I  
5 have forgotten to ask you. I know that you have received  
6 several awards. We didn't talk about Bar Ilan or Yeshivah  
7 Beth Yehudah.

8 MR. KLEIN: Yeah. Yeshivah Beth Yehudah, for  
9 example, the Federation led me to Yeshivah Beth Yehudah.  
10 Avern Cohn and Bob were very instrumental about me accepting  
11 the award, because I had no connection to Yeshivah. They felt  
12 that I could be a good bridge between the Orthodox community  
13 and Federation. According to Gary Torgow, I have accomplished  
14 that.

15 MS. BRODER: That's good. And Bar Ilan?

16 MR. KLEIN: Bar Ilan is going back again, I always  
17 believed in education. I never wanted to accept any honors  
18 and so on, but I was first a chairman of Bar Ilan dinner on  
19 the encouragement of Frieda Stollman, who I very much liked.  
20 They had me for several lunches and persuaded me to co-chair  
21 the dinner. Later on, Sharon Hart and I don't know who else,  
22 was very instrumental in convincing me I should accept the  
23 award from Bar Ilan.

24 MS. BRODER: What was your first remembrance and  
25 contact with Carl Levin? As long as he's the Jewish senator

1 from Michigan, we should talk about him.

2           **MR. KLEIN:** Obviously being involved in politics, I  
3 followed not only local but national races and very involved  
4 in it. I can proudly say they have people in the Senate and  
5 Congress I'm very close with, outside of Michigan, which helps  
6 because I don't need to use my influence. If there's an issue  
7 coming up in front of the Senate or Congress, and I should  
8 make calls. Top leadership in Senate. Naturally, Carl was a  
9 natural for me and so was Sandy. Obviously supported both  
10 their races every time, became close friends with Carl and  
11 Sandy. I'm proud to say that I was able to raise substantial  
12 amounts of money for them, which was always needed.

13           **MS. BRODER:** And you're able to always tell him when  
14 you think he's wrong.

15           **MR. KLEIN:** Absolutely. Sometimes Sandy calls me  
16 and before he finishes I give him so much hell that he forgot  
17 why he called. Carl knows that I'm outspoken and will tell  
18 him, I'm not a "yes" person. But again, he knows if he asks  
19 me something, I'm there to do it.

20           **MS. BRODER:** Do you think that your background and  
21 what you went through, is the most important reason that you  
22 have gone the direction you have gone, in our community and  
23 become as active as you have become?

24           **MR. KLEIN:** I would say so, because I look back and  
25 I cannot forget my past. I want to make sure that our

1 children and grandchildren will never go through what I went  
2 through. There's always conversations back and forth that can  
3 it ever happen here. And while I hope it cannot happen, but  
4 we live in very dangerous times. We have to do everything we  
5 can that we fight terrorism, that we fight all this horrible  
6 evil situation, anti-Semitism and growth in Europe. As I said  
7 before, we must have an organized Jewish community who is  
8 there to make sure the rights are protected, that democracy is  
9 protected. Many times overlooking political parties, but to  
10 do what good for us as Jews and for our children and  
11 grandchildren. Many times I am very, very worried. I'm an  
12 optimist. I hope things will work well for all of us and we  
13 all come through this horrible situation that is now  
14 prevailing in the world.