

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Douglas Bloom  
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman  
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Tuesday, July 26, 2005  
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation  
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish life, family history, role  
6 as a community leader,  
7 involvement in Jewish Community  
8 Center.

9  
10 MS. ALTERMAN: Good morning. My name is Sharon  
11 Alterman and I'm privileged to be here with Douglas Bloom on  
12 Tuesday, July 26, 2005. We're participating in the Leonard N.  
13 Simons oral history project.

14 Douglas, do we have your permission to use your  
15 words and thoughts for the historic record?

16 MR. BLOOM: Yes.

17 MS. ALTERMAN: Thank you. Let's start at the very  
18 beginning. When and where were you born?

19 MR. BLOOM: I was born in Detroit at Women's  
20 Hospital December 30th 1938.

21 MS. ALTERMAN: Who were your parents?

22 MR. BLOOM: Josephine and Arthur Bloom.

23 MS. ALTERMAN: What do you know about your family  
24 background, your parents and grandparents' history?

25 MR. BLOOM: I know that my father was the first

1 Jewish radiologist in Detroit. He moved here from Chicago.  
2 My mother was born in Detroit. My grandparents on my mother's  
3 side came from Latvia. I think there were five brothers  
4 altogether. My grandfather I believe sold pots and pans. He  
5 came into Canada in the 1890s and worked his way up to Clare,  
6 Michigan. Each of his brothers had a different general store  
7 in a small town in northern or central Michigan. I know when  
8 my grandfather married my grandmother, they married in Clare,  
9 and my grandfather allegedly purchased for my grandmother a  
10 team of horses for the buggy, which must be akin to getting a  
11 new Cadillac or a Mercedes or Lexus today. They lived there  
12 for a while and then moved to Detroit in the early 1900s where  
13 my grandfather started Detroit Cap Company on Fort Street.

14 I never knew my grandfather Emmerman. He was killed  
15 walking down a street in downtown Detroit when a piece of  
16 building, I think the Union Trust Building, next to where the  
17 Penobscot Building is today, a worker was working on the roof  
18 and a piece of concrete fell off and killed him. Which was  
19 really kind of bizarre because when I went to work for my  
20 uncle 30 some years later, I called on a man at the armory in  
21 Detroit to try to sell him some parts, and he asked me if I  
22 was related to this Emmerman who got killed in an accident in  
23 Detroit because he was working construction at the time. He  
24 was next to my grandfather when he was hit and he carried him  
25 to Receiving Hospital in his arms. I was just blown away by

1 the sheer coincidence of that.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** You talked about the fact that your  
3 father was a physician. Was your mother educated as well?

4 **MR. BLOOM:** My mother went to University of  
5 Michigan. I believe at the age of 16. She was an accomplished  
6 artist and a community activist. My father obviously went to  
7 medical school at the University of Illinois in Chicago. I  
8 only met his folks maybe four or five times. They lived in  
9 Chicago. I don't know exactly when they came to this country.

10 My father had two sisters, Esther and Dorothy.  
11 Dorothy was a librarian at the Chicago library and Esther was  
12 the mother of three children, Barret, Mara and Tamara. Mara  
13 and Tamara were twin girls. We've kind of lost track of them.  
14 I haven't seen them I think since maybe early 1950s.

15 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where did you live as a child?

16 **MR. BLOOM:** I lived at 19140 Glouster in Palmer  
17 Woods. I was born to that house. My parents lived in  
18 Highland Park on McClain Street and right before I was born  
19 they moved into Palmer Woods. My father and grandmother owned  
20 the house together. I lived with my mother and father,  
21 brother John, my grandmother Ella Emmerman and my Uncle  
22 Stanley Emmerman.

23 **MS. ALTERMAN:** That's interesting. A multi-  
24 generation home.

25 **MR. BLOOM:** It was. There was a lot of cooks in the

1 kitchen.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What did they cook?

3 **MR. BLOOM:** Mostly good food. My mother was a good  
4 cook, my grandmother was a phenomenal cook. We had a woman  
5 who cooked for us also who learned how to cook, and there was  
6 always good food in our house. There was a rivalry between my  
7 grandmother and my mother.

8 Right behind us there was a large back yard with no  
9 fence, lived my cousin Joan and Muggsy Myers and Henry and  
10 Dehlia Myers. They lived there until my Aunt Dehlia died in  
11 1949. My Uncle Henry died in 1953.

12 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Those are important names in our  
13 community so I assume that your family was involved in the  
14 community.

15 **MR. BLOOM:** Very. I know that Aunt Dehlia was  
16 involved in the community and the sisterhood at Shaarey Zedek.  
17 I believe my mother was president of the sisterhood at Beth-El  
18 and she was active and president of ORT, and I think National  
19 Council and maybe Hadassah. My Uncle Hy Myers was active at  
20 Shaarey Zedek, president of the USO during the war and United  
21 Hebrew School, either president or on the board.

22 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Let's talk about your neighborhood.  
23 What was it like growing up there?

24 **MR. BLOOM:** When I grew up there, there were not a  
25 lot of children. There were very few Jewish people. My first

1 playmate was a boy named Frank Russo, whose father was a  
2 gardener caretaker at the Fisher estate, the Fisher of Fisher  
3 body. And they owned the whole area and sold off the lots.  
4 As a matter of fact my folks bought their lot from the  
5 Fishers. Frank lived above the garage. When I went to eat  
6 there, it was the first Italian food that I ever ate. I was  
7 probably five or six.

8 I would play with Joel Gershensen. He lived on  
9 Balmoral. Eventually Paul Borman, the judge that was very  
10 close friend of mine, we went to kindergarten together. He  
11 lived down the street on Lincolnshire. So gradually as more  
12 and more Jewish people moved into Palmer Woods, I had more and  
13 more friends.

14 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where did you go to school?

15 **MR. BLOOM:** I went to Country Day, first, second and  
16 third grade until I begged my parents to let me go to Hampton  
17 where my brother had gone. I went to Hampton Elementary  
18 fourth through eighth. Central for ninth because Mumford  
19 didn't have room for another freshman class. Then Mumford  
20 tenth, eleventh and twelfth, where I graduated in 1956. Then  
21 I went to the University of Michigan where I graduated in 1960  
22 with a degree in business administration.

23 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What kind of religious education did  
24 you have?

25 **MR. BLOOM:** We were classical Reform from Temple

1 Beth-El. But I started Sunday school in pre-kindergarten. It  
2 used to be held in the library. Pre-kindergarten,  
3 kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, all the way  
4 through the twelfth grade. I was confirmed when I was 14 or  
5 15 in the main sanctuary of Beth-El on Woodward and I  
6 graduated from their high school in the twelfth grade, 1956,  
7 and I was very active in the formation and operations of the  
8 Young People's Society, YPS. Nifty and Misty.

9 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So you took leadership roles while  
10 you were in high school.

11 **MR. BLOOM:** I did. Mostly through the temple, not  
12 in high school itself. Although I was a pretty good student  
13 in high school.

14 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were your interests?

15 **MR. BLOOM:** I liked model trains, which I still do.  
16 I liked the activities of the youth group and the politics of  
17 it. I liked photography, girls, dancing.

18 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Sounds like you had a lot of fun.

19 **MR. BLOOM:** I liked racing cars on Woodward Avenue <sup>u</sup>  
20 on Northwestern before they had real speed limits. Going to  
21 Howard Johnson's and the Totem Pole ~~for~~ after movies, going  
22 downtown for movies.

23 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What do you remember about downtown  
24 Detroit?

25 **MR. BLOOM:** I remember as a kid in Sunday school,

1 which was actually Saturday morning at Beth-El, my friends and  
2 I would take a bus downtown, have lunch at one of the  
3 restaurants, usually Flaming Steak or something on the corner  
4 of Grand Circus Park and Woodward, then go to two movies and  
5 take a bus home. It was a quarter and we had a school pass to  
6 ride the busses. It was just a wonderful experience. There  
7 was a really terrific train store downtown on Columbia behind  
8 the Fox Theater that I used to go to whenever I could.

9           When I had braces, Dr. Malbin was in the David  
10 Whitney Building, and I would leave school at three or four  
11 o'clock, take the Hamilton bus downtown, go to the  
12 orthodontist's office and either get a ride home from my uncle  
13 who would stop and pick me up at Grand Circus Park or take a  
14 bus home. In the wintertime it was dark and we never had any  
15 problem, never thought about any problems. Our doors were  
16 never locked.

17           As a kid my transportation was my bicycle and went  
18 riding miles with friends. After dinner ride up to  
19 Cunningham's at Woodward and Seven for either a cherry or  
20 chocolate coke and read a comic book or go to Cunningham's or  
21 Kresge's on Seven and Livernois and do the same thing.

22           **MS. ALTERMAN:** What did you do in the summer?

23           **MR. BLOOM:** Two summers, I think it was '50 and '51,  
24 I'm not sure, I went to an overnight camp, Camp Hiawatha up in  
25 Commons, Michigan, with my friend Steve Bloom. Then I went a

1 couple summers to Cranbrook for carpentry and swimming. The  
2 other summers I went up north. My uncle had a summer home in  
3 Traverse City and my grandmother would go up for the whole  
4 summer and I would go up with her. Her brother Rudolph lived  
5 on the property and her sister Jenny, who lived in Cleveland,  
6 would come in and the two women would spend all day playing  
7 cards, listening to Tiger baseball, smoking. That's where I  
8 learned how to play cards and love baseball.

9           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Do you have any family stories that  
10 are sort of lore that you'd like to share?

11           **MR. BLOOM:** No, not really. I mean my Uncle Rudolph  
12 was a wonderful man. He loved me. Once a year he'd come down  
13 to visit and he and my grandmother would make their version of  
14 perogie, which was dough with meat inside. They would go  
15 shopping. My grandmother loved auctions, buying antiques, and  
16 she would do that frequently with my Uncle Rudolph and my  
17 mother. My grandmother couldn't drive.

18           In the winter my grandmother and her sister from  
19 Cleveland would go down to Florida and spend three or four  
20 months at a hotel. My grandmother would negotiate a very  
21 tough deal with the general manager of the hotel and then my  
22 uncle would either take a train or fly down and privately pay  
23 the hotel the difference between what my grandmother  
24 negotiated and the rate that they really needed. I don't know  
25 if my grandmother ever knew that. It was really kind of



1 funny. It was even funny when I was a kid.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Was your grandmother involved in the  
3 community, too?

4 **MR. BLOOM:** Not that I remember. I know that she  
5 played poker at least three times a week.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where did the earnings go?

7 **MR. BLOOM:** That was interesting because it seems  
8 like it happened every year, but a couple times she would  
9 split up her earnings between her four grandchildren. My  
10 cousin, Joan, Muggsy, my brother and myself. This was in the  
11 '40s and '50s. I never got less than a \$1,000. She was a  
12 tough card player. On New Year's Eve my mother would drop my  
13 grandmother off at whatever house they were playing and then  
14 she would get her the next day and they played all night.  
15 Smoking, drinking and playing poker.

16 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So did any of the earnings go to the  
17 Federation?

18 **MR. BLOOM:** I don't think my grandmother's did. I  
19 don't know. I know my uncle was very charitable at  
20 Federation.

21 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Was he involved in any of the  
22 agencies?

23 **MR. BLOOM:** No. My mother I don't believe was  
24 active in Federation. I don't think they were active Hadassah  
25 or National Council and Temple Beth-El. I don't think they

1 were active in the '50s in Federation. I think my brother got  
2 active in the Junior Division. I didn't when I graduated from  
3 college but he did. I don't know if he kept that up or not.  
4 I do remember that sometime in the 1950s my uncle was giving  
5 Federation \$100,000 a year, which I think was a lot of money.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Significantly. What are your  
7 recollections of your college years?

8 **MR. BLOOM:** They were kind of chaotic until maybe my  
9 junior year. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I thought I  
10 was going to be a doctor. I wanted to make my father happy.  
11 I did really well in high school chemistry and in biology and  
12 physics. I did less well at Michigan in chemistry, biology  
13 and physics. So by the end of my sophomore year I knew that  
14 medicine was not for me and I went into business school.

15 Finally I figured out how to study and pay attention  
16 because I knew it was going to be important, and I was taking  
17 18 hours a semester. It was a lot of hours, but I wanted to  
18 take as many lit school courses as I could in addition to the  
19 required business school courses. My degree was in real  
20 estate, business administration, but I majored in real estate  
21 management because that's what I thought I was going to do.

22 Right before I graduated my parents sat me down and  
23 said, your uncle has this wonderful business, an automobile  
24 parts manufacturing business. He has no children except you  
25 and your brother and he's already put your brother in his own

1 business. So we think you should go into that business and  
2 some day it will be yours. So after I graduated from Michigan  
3 I started to work for my uncle. As a matter of fact I started  
4 a week before I actually went to the graduation at the U of M  
5 stadium. I started as a relief switchboard operator and clerk  
6 making \$40 a week on June the 11th, 1960.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you progressed from there.

8 **MR. BLOOM:** I worked for him until he died in April  
9 of '69. By the last three or four years, when he was in ill  
10 health, I really was running the business.

11 During the riots our factory came under pressure  
12 from the neighbors. They were burning Lafayette Street down.  
13 We were on the east side of Detroit. We were making bomb  
14 fuses for the Viet Nam War. I called Chrysler Tank Plant  
15 where they were ordering these parts. They got us a squad of  
16 soldiers, paratroopers who didn't have any ammunition in their  
17 guns. They weren't allowed to have ammunition until a couple  
18 of days later when the Secretary of Defense allowed them to  
19 put ammunition in their guns. So our factory was never  
20 touched. They burned right up to Lafayette on Beaufait and  
21 then they went around us and burned the rest of the street  
22 down.

23 Shortly after that we moved to our second location  
24 at Connors and Mack. Put up two huge additions and moved out  
25 of Lafayette.

1           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Have you continued in the  
2 manufacturing business?

3           **MR. BLOOM:** My uncle died in '69 and he left his  
4 business to a foundation. I worked for that foundation as  
5 chief operating officer through 1977. In 1970 I started my  
6 own business independently of my uncle's business, a totally  
7 different business. In 1977 I left my uncle's business full  
8 time to operate my own steel business.

9           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Did you have a family?

10          **MR. BLOOM:** I got married in 1961 to a girl that I  
11 went all the way through high school and part of college with.  
12 We had David, who's now 41. We had him in 1964.

13 Unfortunately the marriage ended in divorce in 1968. I got  
14 custody of David and we lived there for another year and then  
15 bought a small home in Birmingham where I'm living to this  
16 day. David and I and a housekeeper moved in there.

17                 Then I was married in 1972 and that woman had two  
18 children. We put an addition on the house. She developed a  
19 brain tumor and died in 1976. I met Barbara a year later and  
20 we got married nine weeks after we met and we've been married  
21 and living in that house ever since.

22          **MS. ALTERMAN:** So tell us about your family today,  
23 kids and grandchildren.

24          **MR. BLOOM:** In Detroit is my son David and my  
25 stepson, who I really consider to be my son, Andrew. He's 42.

1 David has two girls, Rachel 11 and Sara 8. David married a  
2 Korean woman when he was working in Korea and they moved to  
3 the United States when Rachel was 2.

4 Andrew is married to Denise and they have two  
5 children, Clare 5 and Ben 3, and they live in Rochester Hills.

6 Barbara has an older son Matthew who lives in  
7 Seattle. He has one daughter, Ashley who is 17. We don't see  
8 them as often as we would like but we see our four  
9 grandchildren who live here very frequently. It's really  
10 wonderful. It's wonderful time in your life to be able to do  
11 and enjoy that. As my son David said to me I treat his  
12 children nicer than I ever treated him and of course he's  
13 right. I've told him he's right. Grandparenting is different  
14 than parenting. Sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's not,  
15 but usually more fun.

16 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I know you and Barbara are so devoted  
17 to your children and you're also devoted to this community.  
18 When did you develop an interest in communal leadership?

19 **MR. BLOOM:** I got active at Temple Beth-El in their  
20 brotherhood. I was president of their brotherhood for a  
21 couple years and I went on national board of the National  
22 Federation of Temple Brotherhoods which is a Reform movement.  
23 I was on that board for maybe five or six years

24 From there and the officership of the regular  
25 congregation, I got active at Federation. We went on a

1 mission in 1983 to Koake (ph. sp.). There was three busses.  
2 After that we came home and Geli took as many people wanted to  
3 on a tour of the Detroit Jewish institutions. That's when I  
4 think Barbara and I were hooked. It's when we started  
5 lighting shabat candles, getting active in the Jewish  
6 Federation.

7 I was put on the Center board maybe in '85. Before  
8 the board I was put on the Senior Adult Committee, which  
9 consisted of myself, Jerry Lester, Rita Hadow and Miriam  
10 Sandweiss, who was the director of the JPM senior adult  
11 programming. The three of us were the Senior Adult Committee.  
12 From that little beginning I ended up in 1995 as president of  
13 the Center. It's kind of funny because if you look at all the  
14 presidents of the Center you'll see my Uncle Hy Myers was a  
15 president, my cousin Bob Slatkin, I am, my cousin had a nephew  
16 Brewster who was president, and a cousin Jacob Keiden who was  
17 president. A lot of Blooms or Emmermens or Myers that were  
18 presidents of the Center.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** A family business. Tell us a little  
20 about JPM. You talked about the fact that you were on the  
21 senior committee, that that was a focus.

22 **MR. BLOOM:** JPM to me is the epitome of the Jewish  
23 Center. It's small, it acts as a community center. When you  
24 go there even today, you'll see bicycles parked in front.  
25 It's a very family-oriented, family-related institution. I'm

1 not saying that the Kahn building isn't, but it's much larger.  
2 You have to drive to get there and it's very difficult even if  
3 you live close to it, which is so hard to do because the  
4 campus is so large. There's sidewalks in Oak Park and people  
5 just use it and gather there after school. When they're  
6 leaving the religious schools or the day schools, they can  
7 walk there and have a Coke or whatever in the coffee shop.

8           Two of my granddaughters, Rachel and Sara, went to  
9 pre-school there. I was fortunate that Rachel was there when  
10 I was president and I could see her almost every day when I  
11 went over to the JPM. I am a member of the health club and I  
12 exercise at JPM. It's just a warm, caring wonderful place.  
13 You hear lots of languages spoken there, most of which I don't  
14 understand. Even English is sometimes difficult. It's a  
15 heartwarming community center, which is different from a big  
16 city community center like the Kahn building.

17           **MS. ALTERMAN:** When you were a youngster, did you  
18 ever go the Center on Meyers?

19           **MR. BLOOM:** I never stepped into a Jewish center  
20 until I got active in it. Ever. I was shocked. It just  
21 wasn't something we did. If we did anything in the Jewish  
22 community, it was at Temple Beth-El. I was part of the youth  
23 group, high school. That's where all my activities were  
24 centered.

25           **MS. ALTERMAN:** You eventually became president, as

1 you mentioned. What were some of the issues that you dealt  
2 with during your presidency?

3           **MR. BLOOM:** Well, I discovered very shortly after I  
4 became president that the Center was kind of broke, and we  
5 that really didn't have a lot of money if any, and we would  
6 have difficulty balancing our budget. David Page was  
7 president of the Federation at the time, and he had appointed  
8 a committee of business practices. We were the first agency  
9 that they dealt with, when we asked for help and they gave it  
10 to us. They sent in consultants to see if in fact we were  
11 broke and where the money went and where it was coming from.

12           After that we had to deal with very bad publicity in  
13 the *Jewish News*. Every time something happened we would lose  
14 another 100 members. I learned very quickly to be very  
15 careful about what I said in an interview to the newspaper  
16 because things somehow get taken out of context even with the  
17 best of meaning from reporters.

18           We dealt with opening up the Center for general  
19 membership. Prior to my being president we had a policy of  
20 accepting only Jewish members. In middle 1995, maybe early  
21 1996 we changed that policy to allow anybody in the community  
22 who wanted to join.

23           We dealt with the United Way when they started to  
24 cut their allocations to non-essential agencies to what they  
25 considered essential agencies. People at risk mostly that



1 they have to deal with. Their funds were shrinking, the Big  
2 Three was not doing as well as it had been, so they had to  
3 make some changes. So the Center, which had been receiving  
4 quite a bit of money every year, a half a million or 600,000  
5 from the United Way was being cut 10 percent a year.

6 We had to deal with an aging structure in West  
7 Bloomfield and an aging almost decrepid Center in Oak Park.  
8 Those issues were all dealt with. We made some minor fixes in  
9 both places and eventually a major fund-raising campaign took  
10 place that Federation took a lead in, and we were able to fix  
11 the place up and make it more user friendly. Improve service.

12 Under my term we had two executive directors, Mort  
13 Plotnik, who had been executive director for 25 years, and  
14 then his assistant, LeAnn Klienfeld, became executive director  
15 when Mort went into the development department to head it up  
16 to raise money. Right after my presidency we hired David  
17 Sorkin from Willmington, Delaware, to become the new executive  
18 director. He started right after my last day as president,  
19 maybe a month after he started.

20 It was during my presidency that we instituted the  
21 Center Line, the president's column in the monthly bulletin  
22 that comes out from the Center where the president expresses  
23 his feelings about what's going on in the state of the Center.  
24 An unedited version is what we came out with and that was  
25 really a first for our center. I was really proud of that.

1 I was very proud of the fact that we were able to  
2 stabilize some of our membership and get some quality back and  
3 clean the place up, get the hair out of the sinks of the men's  
4 and the women's bathrooms, clean the floors and change the  
5 light bulbs, all of which had not been done on a successful  
6 basis as a means of cost cutting, to help balance the budget.  
7 It was a vicious circle. The more we cut those costs and  
8 services the more members we lost.

9 The Center still has financial difficulties and at  
10 some point in time this community is going to have to figure  
11 out how much it wants to pay for because a lot of the services  
12 at the Center provides there is no revenue, and they really  
13 are expensive. Operating those two buildings are expensive  
14 also. So at some point, as I said, the community will have to  
15 decide what's important, what needs to be subsidized and what  
16 doesn't. I think then the Center will be able to be in good  
17 footing.

18 **MS. ALTERMAN:** That's really the major issue, isn't  
19 it, in terms the Federation's view of the Center and how it  
20 relates to the community?

21 **MR. BLOOM:** That's correct. It's funny. If you  
22 talk to people, they'll say to you, the Center, who needs a  
23 center? I haven't been in the Center in four years. Well,  
24 but you went to Book Fair last year. Yeah, every day for ten  
25 days. This is a real person that tells me this. I said,

1 well, isn't that the Center? Oh, that's not the Center.  
2 Well, it is the Center. Our center had the first Jewish book  
3 fair in the United States. It's the oldest and the biggest.  
4 Well, no, it can't be the Center. I mean the Center is this  
5 rundown building that nobody goes to. Well, then why is the  
6 parking lot full? Well, I don't know, maybe you're parking  
7 for the apartments. No, we're parking for people who are  
8 using that building. The child development is full. Oh,  
9 people go there? Yeah, lots of people go there. Well, I  
10 don't have young kids, so I wouldn't use it.

11 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So what's the issue; when you walk  
12 into the main lobby and you see no one there?

13 **MR. BLOOM:** Well, that's a problem with the design  
14 of the building and that can't be corrected. One of the  
15 thoughts early on in the rehabilitation process was to tear  
16 the building down and start over again. It was in 1975 or '76  
17 when it was built. It was a wonderful facility. But there's  
18 too many halls and with rooms off those halls. So unless you  
19 go into a room you don't see people. The lobby is wonderful  
20 but there's hardly ever anybody in the lobby because they're  
21 either in the gallery or the restaurant or the gym or  
22 classroom or music room or the dance room downstairs, child  
23 development or outside on the playground. The place is filled  
24 every day with users -- Shalom Street is busy all the time.  
25 But you never see anybody in the lobby or the hallways. That

1 is a problem.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Has open membership made a  
3 difference?

4 **MR. BLOOM:** No. I think when you refer to open  
5 membership you mean allowing non-Jewish people to be members.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Yes.

7 **MR. BLOOM:** I think our experience is similar to the  
8 experiences of most big city or metro city centers. Maybe we  
9 have 5 percent or less of non-Jewish members. When you get to  
10 smaller cities, in order for a center to survive, they might  
11 have 20, 30, 40 even 50 percent non-Jewish members. In fact  
12 on one of the statistics I heard when I was president was  
13 York, Pennsylvania, had a 65 percent non-Jewish membership.  
14 But they had a Jewish Center. At one time York was a populous  
15 community and had a lot of Jews living there. The families  
16 died out or moved out but the Center remained. It depends on  
17 the size of the community. I would be surprised if we had  
18 more than 5 percent. I think it's probably 3 or 4 percent  
19 non-Jewish members.

20 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Now, with the talk of the Jewish  
21 Academy coming to the Center, what do you think that's going  
22 to mean to the facility?

23 **MR. BLOOM:** Well, it's going to mean that the  
24 facility is going to be squeezed for space for its regular  
25 activities and that's the downside. The upside is that you're

1 going to have these young people and their families associated  
2 with the Jewish Center and hopefully using the facilities. I  
3 think that the talk is that the academy would occupy the  
4 entire second floor, but they also have use of the gyms and  
5 the pools and the auditorium and the social hall. All of  
6 these are facilities that they don't have to build if they  
7 went someplace else. And they're very expensive facilities.  
8 I know the community of West Bloomfield does not want them in  
9 these portables much longer. I think they have a deadline of  
10 next September, as a matter of fact to get out. A year from  
11 this September.

12 From a community standpoint it really is a fabulous  
13 use of resources. But both parties are going to be squeezed  
14 for space, the Academy and the Center.

15 **MS. ALTERMAN:** It will be nice having young people  
16 there.

17 **MR. BLOOM:** It would be wonderful. If you go there  
18 now and the kids from the Pitt Child Development Center are  
19 running around with their classes. It's an exciting sound to  
20 hear. We used to go to JPM to child development to see my  
21 granddaughter Rachel. I mean just walking down that corridor  
22 and hearing these kids it's so heart warming and so  
23 encouraging. For me it's the future of the Jewish people that  
24 these young kids will eventually become adults like me and  
25 you, and be active in our community, and carry on.

1           **MS. ALTERMAN:** What about Ford Hospital, do you  
2 think that will have an affect as well?

3           **MR. BLOOM:** Eventually it will. What the president  
4 of Ford Hospital has told the community is that they're going  
5 to build a major 300-bed facility attached to this emergency  
6 care medical center they have now right across the street on  
7 Maple. If they do that, it's going to bring in a lot of  
8 people, they're going to need rehabilitation, and the Center  
9 has all that health club equipment there available for that.  
10 It also means the doctors and nurses will have a place to go  
11 to exercise or eat or learn or broaden their horizons or send  
12 their children. It will be a good shot in the arm for the  
13 Center. That won't happen for several years. I don't think  
14 they have final approval of the funding and I don't think they  
15 have final approval from West Bloomfield to put the facility  
16 up. But this is their plan.

17           There's a lot of good things that are going to  
18 happen. The Center gets better all the time. We just hired a  
19 new director, Mark Litt, who came from Austin, Texas. I had  
20 lunch with him yesterday. I'm very impressed with his vision.  
21 I think he's going to do good things for our community. He  
22 believes in not over-promising and under-delivering. He would  
23 rather under-promise and over-deliver. That's a wonderful way  
24 in my opinion to act. That's what I try to do in my own  
25 business, is deliver more than I promised.

1           **MS. ALTERMAN:** There's so many exciting things at  
2 the Center and I know you've been involved in a number of  
3 initiatives. Tell us about the Barbara and Douglas Bloom  
4 Matzo Factory.

5           **MR. BLOOM:** Well, when they decided to enlarge and  
6 modernize the Center, they needed to raise money and they had  
7 naming opportunities. We were one of the first people  
8 approached since I had just been a past president. We saw  
9 that this matzo factory was available for naming. We jumped  
10 at the opportunity because it was so important to us that  
11 young people carry on the traditions of Judaism and learn  
12 about Passover. I think I developed a sense of my Judaism  
13 because my Uncle Hy Myers for a couple of years, seems like  
14 forever but I'm sure it was only three or four years or five  
15 years, led our Passover Seder every year for those few years.  
16 It just stuck in my mind. It was an important event for me.  
17 And I loved, even though I heard the story, before, and  
18 before, and before, as you know with young kids even your  
19 grandchildren, they can't get enough of the same story. They  
20 like the familiarity of it. So we had the opportunity to name  
21 the matzo factory.

22           The Center always charged an admission fee of \$3 a  
23 person. After we funded the factory they still had a need to  
24 charge different congregations or groups that were coming  
25 through \$3 a person to offset costs. Barbara and I decided

1 that we wanted to make that available to the community as  
2 well. On a separate basis we fund the administration or  
3 admission fee for all of the visitors. This last year was  
4 their biggest matzo factory ever. We haven't got the bill yet  
5 but I'm sure it will be wonderful and we'll be very happy to  
6 pay it. It really highlights Passover. It's exciting to see  
7 our name up when our grandchildren come up and say Bubbie and  
8 Grandpa, that's your name, that's my name. It's very exciting  
9 to see that.

10 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you've also done other very  
11 important things in the community, one of the being the  
12 Partnership 2000.

13 **MR. BLOOM:** I was very fortunate. We were at a  
14 Federation annual meeting that I think was held at the Center  
15 before it was renovated. After the meeting Bob Aronson came  
16 up to me and he said, I'd like you to be on this Partnership  
17 2000. We're going in October to Israel for four or five days.  
18 There's four of us plus Tova and myself and we want you to be  
19 part of it. I was. I was in the first meeting and eventually  
20 became chair of it.

21 It was a wonderful experience for me. I'd been to  
22 Israel as a tourist on maybe six or seven missions, but I had  
23 never been there to meet the people really and to interact  
24 with them. What the partnership did was it brought together  
25 Israeli Jews and Detroit Jews, all communities, but our area



1 was the central Galilee who didn't know each other. Even  
2 though we may be saying the same words to each other, they  
3 really mean different things to different people. I liken it  
4 to just people walking by each other and not exactly  
5 understanding each other.

6           During my time on the partnership we really  
7 developed an ability to understand them. I think they had an  
8 ability to understand us. At first I couldn't understand why  
9 Jews from America would be interested in working with and  
10 helping and being partner with some Jews who lived in Migdal  
11 Ha'emeth or Nazaret or Leder or the Jezrah Valley. We  
12 couldn't understand why they were surprised. We had exchange  
13 visits between our groups. I think I went to eight or nine of  
14 those meetings either in Israel or United States. It was  
15 really a wonderful time.

16           The partnership is still flourishing. At the  
17 beginning of this last intafada the entire focus had to change  
18 to security. Before the intafada the young people in Israel  
19 got out of school at noon or one o'clock. Because there were  
20 these roadside bombs every place it wasn't safe to have these  
21 young people running around the towns unattended because their  
22 parents were working. So we had to develop with the Israelis  
23 after-school programs. Hot meals and after school programs.

24           The economy got very bad in Israel during this last  
25 intafada. There were many people, I don't know what

1 percentage but very high, that didn't have enough money for  
2 hot meals. Our partnership was furnishing at least one hot  
3 meal a day to these kids. That was vitally important to us in  
4 Detroit and of course to our partners in Israel. Then we  
5 provided security guards for the schools. We would rather  
6 have done other things in education and medicine or in the  
7 arts, but when you have to feed your face and keep safe, you  
8 have to put that ahead of anything else.

9 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were some of the initiatives you  
10 were able to do prior to that time?

11 **MR. BLOOM:** We formed this PACT Natanya~~at~~ Parents and  
12 Children Together, to work with the Ethiopian arrivees and  
13 help integrate them into Israeli society. They come from a  
14 totally different background than the Israelis or people from  
15 this country. The father is the boss of the family, but in  
16 many cases when the father and children got to Israel, the  
17 father was too old to learn Hebrew and he had to rely on his  
18 children to translate for him and take him to the doctor. And  
19 that's a whole different issue about receiving medical  
20 attention. When the children had to become the interpreters,  
21 they end up running the family. It was a total breakdown as  
22 far as I could tell in the Ethiopian family structure.

23 What's interesting is that Ethiopians had no real  
24 experience going to doctors. They didn't know how to say my  
25 stomach hurts, head hurts, arm hurts, so it was very tough to

1 communicate with doctors. And of course they didn't want to  
2 tell the doctor private things. It became very difficult for  
3 them to receive really wonderful care until the children were  
4 able to intervene and help them receive the proper medical  
5 care.

6           That generation, the parents' generation, is going  
7 to be difficult to integrate because they don't have the  
8 Hebrew language. Their children will be integrated because  
9 they're going to go into the army and that's really a great  
10 leveling institution in Israeli society. The issue was not to  
11 make them an underclass society and that's one reason why PACT  
12 Natanyah was born. Other communities have funded other PACTs  
13 throughout Israel.

14           **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were you able to do in the  
15 medical field in terms of the relationship with our community?

16           **MR. BLOOM:** We had a number of visits between the  
17 hospital in Afulah and University of Michigan Hospital and  
18 Wayne's medical school. We learned from them, they learned  
19 from us. When we worked with incubators to develop new small  
20 companies in Israel, they were doing a lot of things with  
21 medical technology, most of which came from Russia that some  
22 of the hospitals here expressed an interest in. I think it's  
23 been a very positive experience for both doctors here and  
24 there to share common knowledge.

25           We also worked on incubators in developing small

1 businesses. On our first visit we were riding around in a  
2 small bus with a broken shock so we would bounce, bounce,  
3 bounce all over the central Galilee. There were six on the  
4 bus. We said, let's put a list together of all the things  
5 that we would like to accomplish. Why don't we try to attract  
6 some interest from the three major universities in Detroit,  
7 MSU, U of M and Wayne, and see if we can't put together joint  
8 programs.

9           The first program we put together was sending  
10 business school students over to Israel to work on some  
11 specific projects. Then a group of Israelis spent quite a bit  
12 of time at MSU learning about working together in the  
13 committee forum and working together as a group to get things  
14 done. They had no experience doing this. They called that  
15 group the MSU Group and to this day those people are still  
16 friends and still work together to help their community.

17           I'm not sure where Wayne stands in the equation  
18 because when I left the partnership, they still hadn't done  
19 any programming with Wayne. But Michigan still sends  
20 students. During the intifada they had to meet their business  
21 counterparts in Israel and I think Prague. It was too  
22 dangerous to send our kids from the United States over to  
23 Israel. But I would think that pretty soon they'll be going  
24 back again.

25           Some of that was funded by local benefactors here in

1 Detroit. Stanley Frankel I know has been a major resource for  
2 funding those programs. I think at one point it was the  
3 largest overseas program of any university in the United  
4 States.

5 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Very successful.

6 **MR. BLOOM:** Yes. And appreciated. We do learn from  
7 them and they learn from us. It's a real partnership.

8 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What are you working on at the  
9 moment?

10 **MR. BLOOM:** That's interesting. One of my earlier  
11 jobs at Federation was I chaired the Education Division which  
12 is normally a three-year job, but I became president of the  
13 Center at the end of my first term as chair. So I gave that  
14 up to become full time president of the Center, and starting  
15 in the fall I will be the chair of the Community Services  
16 Division. I am an officer of Federation. I think I'm  
17 secretary although I'm not really good at taking notes. In  
18 fact I've never taken any notes. I'm still active on  
19 Campaign. I was Campaign co-chair two years ago. I think I'm  
20 going to have a full plate with the Community Service  
21 Division. Plus I went back on the executive committee of the  
22 Center. That's taking up quite a bit of my time.

23 Other than that besides building a house and  
24 planning my new model train and doing some business  
25 consulting, which I have a meeting at noon today with our

1 first client to start that, I don't have much free time.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Let's go back and talk about some of  
3 the issues facing this community at this point.

4 **MR. BLOOM:** The biggest issue that I can see is the  
5 ability to fund the programs that need funding. We have an  
6 aging community. We don't know where everybody lives. I  
7 don't know how many Jews are in the Detroit area, it depends  
8 on whose numbers you believe. It's 96, 74, 78, 110, but they  
9 don't all live in Oak Park or Birmingham or Bloomfield Hills  
10 or Southfield. They live in Novi, Rochester, Livonia, Canton.  
11 It's very hard to provide services for people who are so  
12 spread out.

13 It's very hard to sustain the community through  
14 donations when your donor base is well over 75 years old. As  
15 much as we would like, these people are not going to be with  
16 us forever, so we have to develop a new donor base. We can't  
17 rely on trouble in Israel to raise money. We have to give  
18 money to our community here and in Israel without having a  
19 major emergency to get us to give money.

20 Then figuring out what's important in the level of  
21 spending. We raise the money but are we going to spend it on  
22 education? Day school education is vitally important but I  
23 believe that if there was no Orthodox day school funding,  
24 those people would still send their kids to school. They  
25 would find a way. It's important for us to fund their

1 education so that they get a really well rounded education and  
2 they are part of our community.

3           The education at the synagogues and temples is more  
4 problematic because their enrollment is declining and nobody  
5 seems to understand why. Is it because there's less kids? Is  
6 it because parents aren't sending their kids to Sunday school  
7 until its time for a bar or bas mitzvah? We don't know those  
8 things. But connecting with the population is very difficult  
9 and expensive.

10           We need safety nets and those are expensive. Jewish  
11 Family Services receives more money than any agency in this  
12 community and it's a safety net. Hebrew Free Loan is a safety  
13 net. I was also active in Neighborhood Project and that was a  
14 fabulous institution. But it outgrew its need, which was  
15 something you don't usually see, is that an organization is  
16 sun-setted. It just disappeared and some of its activities  
17 may be picked up by the Center or other groups in the  
18 community, but basically there's no more Neighborhood Project.  
19 But we do still have a need for Hebrew Free Loan.

20           JARC provides vital services although they're not  
21 part of the formal Jewish community. JVS provides a powerful  
22 service to the Jewish community but they also provide services  
23 to the non-Jewish communities.

24           So we're going to have to do an increasing vigilant  
25 job on allocating funds. That's one of the challenges we're

1 going to be facing in the Community Services Division and the  
2 other two divisions.

3           And then how we educate our kids and who's going to  
4 pay for it, how do we reach the families of those kids, and  
5 how do we get these kids that we're educating to bring their  
6 parents into the fold, these are all vital issues that I don't  
7 think anybody has a true answer for.

8           When I was growing up, there was no question that I  
9 was going to Temple Beth-El and I was going to be active in  
10 the youth group. My parents didn't tell me I had to, it was a  
11 normal natural course of events. I don't think that that  
12 takes place today. I went to a basically a Jewish high  
13 school, Hampton Elementary School was maybe 50 percent Jewish,  
14 50 percent Catholic, or maybe 60 percent Jewish, 40 percent  
15 Catholic. But everybody was striving for education.

16           At Michigan I was in the minority. In the 1950s  
17 fewer than 10 percent of the students in Michigan were Jewish.  
18 You didn't think about going to Sunday school then, you  
19 thought about grades and what you were going to do in your  
20 future. We have to figure out how to reach these young people  
21 today who are about to have children or have young children  
22 and how to bring them into the community so that they take on  
23 from Barbara and from me and from you and your family.  
24 Somebody has to follow us.

25           **MS. ALTERMAN:** What kind of leader are you?



1           **MR. BLOOM:** It depends. Sometimes I think I'm  
2 pretty good. I classified myself one time when I was in  
3 business as a lazy boss. There as an article in *Fortune*  
4 *Magazine* about being a lazy boss. I read that article cover  
5 to cover and said, that's me. A lazy boss is a person who  
6 hires good people, delegates, gives people responsibility and  
7 authority and follows up to make sure they do what they're  
8 supposed to do.

9           **MS. ALTERMAN:** That sounds like it's smart, not  
10 lazy.

11           **MR. BLOOM:** There are people I know in this  
12 community and at work who consume themselves with details and  
13 facts and they never were able to see the whole picture. When  
14 I'm chairing a committee or when I was chairing a management  
15 meeting in my business, I liked to hear everybody's point of  
16 view. I didn't care if there was an argument as long as it  
17 was civil or wasn't mean spirited. Lots of ideas came out and  
18 I like to think of that as a big funnel. All these ideas go  
19 into a funnel and eventually out of this tiny spout will come  
20 one or two things which is the direction that the committee or  
21 the organization or business is going to go. That's how  
22 basically I became what I am as a committee chair or president  
23 or an owner.

24           Other people have different styles and it works for  
25 them. I believe kind of, at least in business, being a

1 benevolent dictator, but first I had to get everybody's  
2 opinion and that opinion had to be vested. They had to have a  
3 stake in what they were suggesting. That worked for me and  
4 it's worked for me in the community. Whether it's the right  
5 style or not, I don't know. It's right for me. We'll see how  
6 we do with this Community Service Division if I can remember  
7 some of my old skills and try to harness everybody's energy  
8 and ideas. Everybody has a different idea. You know, people  
9 look at the picture on the wall behind you, Sharon, and they  
10 see lots of different things. It doesn't mean they're wrong  
11 or right. They just see different things. That's what we  
12 have to be able to do with the Community Services Division, as  
13 officer of Federation and on the Executive Committee of the  
14 Center, is get people's ideas, listen, analyze and try to do  
15 what's best at the time and for the moment and hopefully for  
16 the future.

17 **MS. ALTERMAN:** We're almost coming to the end of our  
18 interview but we have a couple more things I'd like to talk  
19 about. We missed talking about your bar mitzvah.

20 **MR. BLOOM:** Well, when I went to Temple Beth-El,  
21 they didn't offer bar mitzvah. It was a classical Reform  
22 congregation and bar mitzvahs were not offered, but  
23 confirmations were. I never did have a bar mitzvah, and I  
24 never missed it or thought about it. None of my friends with  
25 minor exception were bar mitzvahed. They were either

1 confirmed or if they went to a Conservative synagogue, I  
2 didn't attend with them.

3           The first time I went to Israel, which was on this  
4 co-op group, the security for El Al was at the Kennedy Airport  
5 and they said, you're Jewish. I said, yeah. You bar  
6 mitzvahed? No. How can you be Jewish if you weren't bar  
7 mitzvahed? Well, I went to Israel a couple years later and  
8 got the same question from different security people. Went  
9 again, got the same questions.

10           I said, you know maybe there's something wrong with  
11 this. Maybe I ought to be bar mitzvahed. I thought about it  
12 and I said I'm going to be 60 and I really wanted to sell my  
13 business, but I think I want to have a bar mitzvah. It's  
14 important to me. I approached Rabbi Roman, we belonged to  
15 Temple Kol Ami, and I said I want to be bar mitzvahed. He  
16 said, we can do that. I don't speak any Hebrew. He said, my  
17 wife Lynn teaches Hebrew.

18           So for one year I met with her once a week except  
19 when I was on vacation. I started Rabbi Yedwab's textbook on  
20 learning Hebrew, and I learned how to read and speak Hebrew.  
21 Then we went into the Torah portion and I learned it. When I  
22 was 61, I had a bar mitzvah at Temple Kol Ami on a Saturday  
23 morning where I led the congregation. I did my own devar  
24 Torah, and it was one of my most proud moments in the Jewish  
25 community. I was really happy. My family was there and they

1 saw how important it was to me.

2 I got so many positive comments from friends about  
3 it's never too late expressing my Judaism which is very  
4 important to me. Barbara encouraged me every day and she made  
5 me a wonderful party. She really is a remarkable partner. We  
6 do almost everything together and we like having meals  
7 together and dates.

8 She's active at the Center and with her  
9 grandchildren and she's active at Oakland University's early  
10 childhood center where our grandson goes now. She started  
11 volunteering there when our granddaughter Clare went there.  
12 She makes phenomenal art, although she wouldn't consider  
13 herself an artist. But everything she does is fabulous. We  
14 are really quite blessed in the life we have and in our love  
15 and devotion and experience with the Jewish community.

16 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Barbara's quite a lady. So talented  
17 and brings so much to this community, too, in terms of her  
18 creativity.

19 **MR. BLOOM:** Thank you. I'm going to tell her you  
20 said so.

21 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What is your message to this  
22 community or to your family based on your life experience?

23 **MR. BLOOM:** It's never too late to learn, to  
24 appreciate something new, and it's important to be and do, to  
25 be active not to be passive. If you care about being Jewish,

1 be active. It doesn't make any difference how much you give,  
2 just be active.

3 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Thank you. Is there anything we  
4 failed to discuss that you'd like to talk about?

5 **MR. BLOOM:** Want to talk about Lionel trains? I'm  
6 working on my new train now at my new house.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** One other question. Along the way  
8 did you ever have a mentor?

9 **MR. BLOOM:** No. I really didn't. When I was  
10 growing up, I would see these file boxes filled with cards and  
11 my mother would be calling all the time. There was almost  
12 always an ORT meeting or Council meeting or Hadassah meeting  
13 at our house. It was something that came very naturally to  
14 me. Something I wanted to do. I was happy to do it and I got  
15 a lot of enjoyment out of it. Probably enjoyed it more than  
16 what I was able to impart.

17 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Thank you.