

INTERVIEW: Nora Barron

INTERVIEWER: Michael Berke

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PLACE: Max M. Fischer Federation Building, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

MICHAEL BERKE: This interview is being recorded as part of the Albert and Pauline Dubin Oral History Archives. My name is Michael Berke, and today is October 8, 2015. I'm interviewing Nora Barron at the Max M. Fischer Federation Building in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Nora, do you give permission to the Leonard N. Simon Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes and for use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

NORA BARRON: I do.

BERKE: Wonderful. So let's start at the beginning. The people who were most important to you in your early life were your grandparents and parents I'm sure. Why don't you talk a little bit about your grandparents.

BARRON: Okay. My grandparents were Norman and Elizabeth Smokler. And they lived in Canada, and then they lived in the United States. They came to Canada when they were very young. I did not know them well because they died when I was very young. My father, Bert Smochler, I will talk about in a moment. But my other grandparents were Julius and Anna Esther Berman. And I knew my great-grandparents as well—my great-grandfather, Bernard Berman, who lived during my lifetime. I remember visiting with my great-grandfather, and I spent a great deal of time with my grandparents. They lived very near me when I was very young, and were a very important part of my family.

BERKE: And your parents?

BARRON: My parents. Bert Smokler, who was the youngest of eight children; he was born in Canada. And he came to the United States to go to law school. He came with his brother. And my mother, who was Toba Berman, married Bert Smokler. And she grew up in Detroit. My grandmother and grandfather, her mother and father, came to this country from Russia. But my grandfather came in the end of the 19th century. My grandmother was born in Toledo, Ohio. Her parents came from Russia. I knew them obviously very well.

BERKE: Your dad's siblings, they came from Canada? How many of them came to the United States? Did any of them stay in Canada?

BARRON: Canada—three stayed in Canada, and the rest came to various places in the United States, a few coming to Detroit.

BERKE: Mm-hmm. Now where did you grow up? Where did your family—you said you lived near your grandparents?

BARRON: I grew up the first five years—four and a half years—on Byron near Webb and Hamilton—in an apartment complex that my grandfather owned. And so there were many relatives that lived in the Rainer Apartments. And that's where the Rainer Bakery began, in one of those buildings. But I lived there, and my grandparents lived on Burlingame, which wasn't far away.

BERKE: I know exactly where Burlingame is. Tell me about your mom and dad and their involvement in community and involvement in their life's work. The Smokler name is an important name in this community.

BARRON: My father began as an attorney and quickly went into the real estate business, and began by building single-family homes. And the company then grew to...before he died it was known nationally. It was a nationally-known company, and they built all over the United States. I'll get into the philanthropic involvement in a moment. My mother went to Emerson College in Boston and came back to Michigan and taught elocution. And she and my aunt, Sara Pergerson, very involved in the community in programming for Shaarey Zedek, for the United Hebrew Schools. And I often saw my mother speaking in front of the mirror with what she was going to say for whatever speech it was that she and my aunt were going to give or be involved with. They put on fashion shows that young people were involved in, and I often was involved in those for community organizations. One of the earliest experiences I remember in the community was with my grandmother. She was very involved in the United Hebrew Schools, and I remember going with her and spending time at the United Hebrew Schools. And Mr. Isaacs was somebody that was a very old person when I was very young.

BERKE: So, you know, it sounds like your mom and your grandmother were before their time, very active in the community. That wasn't a usual thing.

BARRON: My father was as well. My father used his interest in land development for the community. He often went out on the weekends looking for land that could be used for the community. And one of the pieces of land is Tamarack Camp. And so I remember some of those outings with him looking at bare land. And I had no idea what his vision would be. It's now Tamarack.

BERKE: He had a wonderful vision. Isn't there a village named in his honor?

BARRON: For my parents, both of my parents, the Pioneer Skills Village at Camp Tamarack, which had a lot to do with my mother; because she was very involved in antiques and used to go antiquing a great deal, and collected many of the things for the camp. The jail and the office and the store have a great many antiques that were collected by my mother.

BERKE: What are your memories of growing up in the Dexter area, Burlington area, as a young child? What was your interaction? Did you have cousins and any other family members that were with you?

BARRON: This was up until I was four and a half. So I had people in the building that I knew. And aunts and uncles. My aunt and uncle lived across the hall. I had people that lived down the hall and on other floors. The neighborhood, I went to a preschool at the Westminster Church, which was not far from the building. I remember my mother walking me to school and from school. I don't have a great many memories of the neighborhood itself.

BERKE: And where did you go from there? You were there 'til you were four and a half?

BARRON: Mm-hmm.

BERKE: Where did you move from there to?

BARRON: We moved to Prairie and Thatcher, which was Livernois, a six-mile area. And we moved into a small home. And I lived there until high school. So I have many memories of that area.

BERKE: So talk about that a little bit.

BARRON: I went to Hampton School that was about a mile from where I lived. And so that was a long walk, and I made many friends walking with them along the way. The area was quite mixed. It was an area of quite a few Catholic children, particularly on my block, because Jesu was nearby. And one of my closest friends became a nun. But I remember it as being pleasant. I remember bicycle riding, and I remember playing with kids many blocks away, and being able to get to and from school on your own, which you can't do now.

BERKE: Do you remember what school you went to?

BARRON: Yes, I went to Hampton.

BERKE: Oh, you said that. I'm sorry.

BARRON: I went to Hampton.

BERKE: And what about after Hampton?

BARRON: Well, went to Hampton from kindergarten through the eighth grade. And I was the last class that was taken in. It was a February class. The last class taken into Mumford before it stopped for a year and half taking in anybody new because it hadn't grown for the number of people there, and nobody was graduating yet. And I went to Mumford.

BERKE: The purple and blue school.

BARRON: Yes. It was then.

BERKE: So tell me about your extracurricular activities as a young woman and a teenager in terms of your Jewish involvement and your communal involvement. Did it start early with you?

BARRON: It started very early. Probably one of my first and early memories was at the state fair for the Birth of Israel, the big gathering that was at the state fair. I remember going door to door with my mother collecting for the Allied Jewish Campaign. I remember attending many, many meetings with her. In high school I was involved in drama, and I was involved in ballet outside of high school. And I started Shaarey Zedek in kindergarten and went all the way through 12th grade. So the issues of getting from Mumford, where there was a bus that took us to Shaarey Zedek. And then I would take a public bus down Joy Road to Grand River and Joy Road, and have a dance lesson. Then we'd take a bus from Grand River to Livernois. And then went down to another bus which went down Curtis and be home. So I had ballet several times a week and went to Shaarey Zedek several times a week. And usually those were tied together. I was involved in Councilettes in high school. And I can't remember what else.

BERKE: Did you ever perform anywhere, Nora, in terms of ballet?

BARRON: Yes, as Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* my senior year at Mumford. And in a lot of little plays.

BERKE: Uh-huh. And in terms of your religious background in terms of the school, what were the things that interested you most at Shaarey Zedek in terms of the Jewish educational component that you had?

BARRON: Well, I grew up in a Kosher home. And I grew up very much because of my grandparents and family, and the family continued to keep Kosher. And what I learned at Sunday School, I think I always felt that the last two years I was very glad that I stayed through 11th and 12th grades, because I felt that I learned a great deal about history and about Israel at that point. And that was the most interesting to me.

BERKE: Where did you go from there? Where did you go on...after high school, where did you go to school?

BARRON: I went to Cornell in Upstate New York.

BERKE: And what did you study?

BARRON: I studied psychology, and I had a minor in fine arts—the history of fine arts. And I was involved in Jewish activities at Cornell. I was in a Jewish sorority, AEP. And I collected for Federation in my dorm when I lived in a dorm. So I continued a Jewish connection in college.

BERKE: Uh-huh. And after you finished school, did you come back to Detroit or did you go somewhere else for a time?

BARRON: I really didn't want to come back to Detroit. I was maybe like the kids today. I really wanted to go somewhere else. In particular wanted to go to New York. I wanted to do graduate

work in New York. And my mother made it very clear that I had been away for four years, and I was going to come home, and I was going to meet somebody in Detroit to get married and stay in Detroit. So I did come home, and I went to graduate school at Wayne, the School of Social Work, directly out of college. And I got my master's degree in psychiatric social work at Wayne.

BERKE: Did you go to work somewhere, for somebody?

BARRON: I went to work for many, many years, yes. The first job was at Children's Center Metropolitan Detroit. And I also had almost from the beginning for three years, along with that job, I had a research grant at Children's Hospital from the Michigan Society for Emotionally Disturbed Children. First year I worked in the Burn Suite, the second year I worked with cystic fibrosis, and then I worked the third year with children with seizures. And I worked very closely with Frank Parcells, who was a mentor of mine, who was a psychoanalyst from the East Side. I worked with him there. And through him also I began teaching at Wayne, and I taught in the School of Social Work. I taught psychopathology of childhood as an adjunct professor—first with Frank Parcells. And then after he gave up teaching, I taught for several years the course. After Children's Center, I worked at Jewish Family Service for several years. And then retired for a very short while when I had children. And went back to work at Roeper School as the social worker, the first social worker they had had there—therapist. And while my children were at Roeper, I worked at school. I would drive them to school in the morning. I would work all day, and then drive them home. So I was both a working mother and a stay-home mother. And after Roeper I worked at Metropolitan Hospital. And then I worked in a private practice in 555 for many years.

BERKE: Has the field changed since you started? How has it changed in your opinion? Is it in the direction it took when you started and the evolution of it.... That's not in the questions, but it's very interesting what you just said. So I'm just curious.

BARRON: I think it's changed dramatically. The recordkeeping has become overwhelming. It was, towards the end of the time that I was there, every session had to be written down. And any insurance that was collected had to have a report go in from the therapist for each session. And I was seeing very, very small children. And I did play therapy, and I saw some adults and some teenagers. And I think today insurance doesn't cover a great deal of this, as much as it used to. And so I think people are being seen for shorter periods of time and more stopgap measures. I had many patients, many clients, that I saw for four or five years—several times a month.

BERKE: I'm familiar with your really very distinguished career. I want to take a step back just for a second, because I'm interested—you went to Mumford High School and then on to college. Are any of those people that you were with then still your friends?

BARRON: A few. I'm very good friends with Edwina Davis, who was a friend of mine in high school, and I see all the time both here and in California. We walk together. And a few other people, yes. But I was the only one—that's not so; there was one other that went to Cornell—Sissy Goldman, who is in Florida now. But when I went off to college, most of my friends that did go to school stayed in Michigan and went to school in Michigan. And when I came back, I was really on a different life path than many people, because I continued to go to graduate

school. And then I continued to work. And there were really not too many people that were...I had no peers really that were doing that.

BERKE: So it's interesting that you became so involved in the Jewish community in addition to everything else that you did. How did your work life impact on the direction that you took in the Jewish community and as a philanthropist in the community? Did it have an impact?

BARRON: I'm sure it did. The time of meetings has an impact on things. And I think my interests had an impact. I began with Women's Division and did some activity with Women's Division. But I didn't have any time during the day to go to meetings. That wasn't an option for me. And very early on I became interested in the agency work. And I think that my interest just lay in that area rather than the more traditional roles that women followed, particularly in those years.

BERKE: So the agency that comes to mind, obviously for me, is the Jewish Vocational Service and your involvement with them and the fact that you were the first woman, I believe, whoever served as president of that agency.

BARRON: That's true.

BERKE: So talk a little bit about that it.

BARRON: But prior to that I had been on the board of Jewish Family Service, which was a logical step because I had worked there. And my uncle, Milford Pergerson, when I worked there had been a president of that agency. So I was interested in that board, and I was on that board for a while. Marlene Handler, who was serving on the board of Jewish Vocational Service, said to me she thought that Jewish Vocational Service would be something I would be interested in. I wasn't so sure. I just hadn't thought in that direction, nor was I really aware of what the agency did. This was a long time ago. This was in the 1970's. And she said, "There aren't too many women on the board, but I think you'd be a very good person." This was down on Woodward in Detroit.

BERKE: This was when Al Ascher was the director?

BARRON: Al Ascher, yes. Al Ascher was the director. So I began going to meetings, and I was somewhat over my head in knowing what was going on. Most of the people involved were attorneys or in the money fields—money managers or accountants. And all of the presidents had been one of those. They'd all been male, and they'd all been one of those. And that was my idea of how the agency was run. But I became more active in the programming and more active in what a lot of the clients were doing at the agency and the workshop and fascinated by what was going on there and took a greater role in the agency.

BERKE: So how did you serve as president?

BARRON: It was probably two years as president, but I'm still on the board. I've been on the board for a very, very long time. I was at the board on the time when the agency moved from

their main headquarters to Southfield. And the thing that scared me when I was asked to be president, I said, "What do you expect from me? Because I'm not one that will be able to help you with your legal issues or help you with your financial issues at all." And the answer was: We have plenty of people on the board and plenty of people that work at the agency that can do that. But I can give a different perspective: the human issues, the social issues that the clients were facing.

BERKE: Has that changed at all over the years, Nora?

BARRON: Has what changed?

BERKE: The service that Jewish Vocational Service provides to its clients?

BARRON: The services expanded dramatically from the time that I was there. It's much larger agency. It has a larger workshop. It has a larger presence off site. There's a lot of off-site training of people, particularly people who have disabilities. They are trained in workplace rather than just in a workshop. There are different activities that are being...different things that are being offered through agency. And the list is very, very broad.

BERKE: I'm going to go offline a little bit. We'll talk about your family later on. But I remember you just said to me your mother said you were going to come back and find a wonderful husband to marry. So I think now's a good time to talk about your wonderful husband. Why don't you say a few words about Guy.

BARRON: Well, I've never been so dutiful. [Laughter] I drove home with my father from Cornell, and said to him, "I really am sorry that I'm coming home for one particular reason: I have many male friends at Cornell. And I don't know how that's going to happen in Michigan." And my father said, "Well, your mother already knows two people that live within a block, who have girlfriends elsewhere. And they could be male friends of yours." At Cornell there were five men to every woman. So it was very easy to have many male friends. So I came home, and the first evening I was home, I went to a party in someone's backyard. And the first person that I met when I walked in was Guy. And he was one of the two people that my mother had in mind that lived within a block of where we lived at that time. We were living in a different area at that time. And we met that evening, and we went out. He had no idea where I lived. I said I had a car. You'll have to follow me home. I knew who he was. And I drove him by his house and then to my house which was three houses away. He thought I was pulling his leg. And we went to Baker's Keyboard Lounge. And a cute story about that evening is when it came to pay for the check, he said, "I hope you like doing dishes, because I don't have a wallet with me." I did because I had driven. And I paid for the evening, and I have never let him pay me back because I had said that would always be an excuse to call him.

BERKE: That's a great story.

BARRON: We dated for two years while I was in graduate school, and got married after I graduated.

BERKE: So tell us a little bit about your early life together.

BARRON: Early life together. That actually fits in with a lot of my philanthropic life, too.

BERKE: Good.

BARRON: We both worked. And the deal was that I was going to work for two years, and we'd save everything that I earned, and we would live on what he earned. And Guy was building homes at that time. He was working for his dad and then eventually went to work for my father. I was working at Children's Center and had this research grant. And we put away everything that I had earned for two years, and we went around the world for nine weeks.

BERKE: Wow!

BARRON: That was between my jobs. It was between my job at Children's Center and going to Jewish Family Service. And that was between jobs. And we visited the countries we thought we would not get back to. So we didn't really go to Europe. But we went through Russia and through Turkey and India and three weeks in Japan and Hong Kong, many, many places, most of which we've gone back to, and spent very little time in Europe. And a lot of the traveling I've done since then has been philanthropically. But we had a wonderful time. We built a house before we were married. Guy built our home in Huntington Woods. And we had had—again this is like what's going on today—we had had a big disagreement about whether we should live downtown or whether we should live in the suburbs. And Guy wanted to live downtown, and I wanted to live in the suburbs. And then he convinced me that downtown was the place to live. And I decided that's where we were going to live. Probably at Lafayette Park, which is where people were living then. And he said, "No, I'm building now. I want to be able to build a house. I want to live in the suburbs." Well, we bought a lot and built in Huntington Woods.

BERKE: Easy access to downtown from Huntington Woods.

BARRON: Yes, it was sort of in between. And then we had children.

BERKE: We'll talk about your children a little after.... So let's talk about...you said that, you know, your relationship with Guy sort of precipitated your involvement in Jewish philanthropy. I know that you're very, very involved in programs related to Israel, and we'll talk about, you know, some of those programs. So tell us about that.

BARRON: I really don't know which came first. And certainly my interest in Jewish philanthropy—because that preceded Guy...but he has been my largest supporter. I have done a lot of the things that we're going to talk about on my own, actually a lot of the travel on my own. But he has supported me really in every possible way, both financially and time-wise and encouraging me in anything that I wanted to do within the community. And within the community several of the positions I've had have just been things that have come up. I co-chaired with Norman Wachler; he and I co-chaired the Disabilities Subcommittee. This was an opportunity to look at all the agencies in the Detroit area, and to see what could be done to better help them deal programmatically with disabilities and help them deal with people that might

come to meetings. So sign language began in some programs. The steps and the access to buildings were changed. And that helped me with a broader look at the community. I became active in JARC, I was active JVS, and in many things within the Detroit community. And one of my greatest supporters and perhaps biggest mentor in my early years, when he came to Detroit, was Bob Aronson. I knew there were things I wanted to do in the community, and I often chatted with him and tried to decide what it was or what the best place—or what it was I could do best. And had many lunches with him. But my family has been really in depth involved in the community. My Uncle Bill Berman, who is about to celebrate his 98th birthday—

BERKE: That's wonderful.

BARRON: Is still enormously active in the community. My brother, whom we haven't talked about—I have a brother who is five years younger than me and hasn't since he went to college lived in the Detroit area. But he is very involved in the Jewish community wherever he has lived and very involved in the JDC, as my Uncle Bill has been involved. So I think that I've come by an awful lot of things by osmosis and by just being around things being discussed and talked about.

BERKE: I know that you have—I said a moment ago—very strong involvement in...and I know that Bob Aronson was somewhat responsible for your involvement in Partnership 2000 in Israel. And you were right there right at the beginning of it. So why don't you just talk about that a little bit. Talk about the program and the enormous benefit that that program has had both to people in Israel but just as importantly to people in the Detroit area.

BARRON: Partnership 2000 is a program run by the Jewish Agency. And it is a partnership of regions in the United States that have been partnered with regions in Israel. And they are mainly areas in the south and in the north and did not begin in the big cities—although possibly the poor areas of Jerusalem were at the beginning of the partnership. The first year of the partnership I was not on the board, but I was asked to chair a cultural committee. I have a great interest in art and music and dance and started going on the trips to Israel in our partnership area. And the partnership area was chosen because of Bob Aronson, because it was close to his heart and family in the area of central Galilee. And so my first activities were going on these trips to Israel to see what this partnership area was. Well, it was a little bit of a poor description of what was going on then. There were three communities, and the three communities are still the same that we're involved with: central Galilee, and Nazareth Elite, and the Jezreel Valley. Except the people in those areas and the mayors in those areas had almost nothing to do with each other. People didn't know each other. They were not a community. They were very, very separate communities with each mayor very much looking out for his own area and his own people; and anything that was going on down the way a bit was not of any interest. Through the years that I was involved, people got to know each other in these communities, they got started doing things together; the mayors started working together. And it really became one central community. And initially the programs were to do something on the ground in Israel with the people there. And it has become progressively a two-way street with us very much learning from the communities in Israel, and people going back and forth. From the partnership grew the Camper Program, with campers coming every summer to the Detroit area.

BERKE: Didn't counselors come from there also?

BARRON: Counselors have come from there. Yes, counselors come, too. And many of the campers had become counselors and become involved in our community in other ways. But the community has really become a community. And the people, anybody who was involved then and has been involved now or still involved, have made family in Israel, have made friends, have made family. It's really become part of their lives. And this area has become part of the lives of the people there. When I go through customs and I'm asked if I have family in Israel because they see so many stamps in my passport, I say I don't. And they say, "Well, what are all these—who are you visiting?" I said, "Well, it's even better than family. It's like family."

BERKE: What's the last time you were there?

BARRON: I was there—I've been there every single year...this year not as often. But there have been years that it's been up to five times that I've been there.

BERKE: What do you see—

BARRON: I was there last summer during the disruption between Gaza and Israel. Not to be called a war because it wasn't. But the thing that I was there for at that time was to see the programs that we had developed that were active during peacetime. How they were functioning during a very different time in the country's life.

BERKE: Talk a little bit about that. That's interesting. Articulate some of the programs that we've started.

BARRON: That we've been involved with.

BERKE: Yes.

BARRON: We're involved with many programs with the elderly and feeding the elderly. We're involved with many teenage programs, where teenagers are doing volunteer work. Volunteer work is not as familiar a thing in Israel as it is here. And the volunteer programming has become much greater in Israel since—in the last many years. So I'll give you an example: Adults that went—older adults—that would go for their midday meals to a community center where the meals were being served could no longer get down from where they lived in their walkups. And they could no longer get their meals because of the bomb threats and the missile threats. And so many of the teenagers became the go-betweens. And they contacted the elderly. They got medicine for them. They got the meals for them. They did shopping for them. So that people that were doing very different things in a volunteer way changed their hats during time of difficulty.

BERKE: Those are lessons that could be learned here, too.

BARRON: Yes.

BERKE: What do you see as—you know, you've been involved for such a long time—what do you see as the main challenges that are going to be facing our region as we moved forward over the course of the next, you know, five to ten years? Do you have a sense of where they're going and where we're going in our involvement with them?

BARRON: I think everything is very fluid. I think it much depends on what happens in that area of the world. It depends on the government. And that's another thing that dealing with Israel through partnership you become very well aware of: That whoever is in a position today, may not be in a position tomorrow because the parties change, the thrust changes of what is important, and where early education may have been the most important thing when the Pact Program, the Ethiopians were first arriving. Today that is not *the* most important thing. English language is becoming much more important for our region; and keeping young people at home as they do in Detroit are trying to do is an area that's important for our region in Israel. Much depends on what's going to happen around them as well as what's happening in Israel.

BERKE: What do you think? What's going to happen?

BARRON: I don't know.

BERKE: It's kind of—we're living in interesting times, although we could say that in just about any time. I notice that you and Guy started your own foundation. Are these the kinds of programs that you support together? Are there other things that you support through your philanthropic dollars from this foundation?

BARRON: Our philanthropic foundation supports a great many things. Many art projects, many Jewish projects in Israel. The Millennium and Centennial Funds, which we have here, are particularly interesting programming. The first one was for programming—new programming—in our region in Israel. And hopefully programs that would have an impact on our area here. So there were some experimental programs, some programs that were carried over to this area here. And I'll give you an example: Witness Theater. Did you see Witness Theater when you were there?

BERKE: No, I did not.

BARRON: Okay. When I was in Israel—and we haven't gotten to JDC yet.

BERKE: We will.

BARRON: Well, when I was in Israel and watching programs that went on in Israel, one of the programs that was available there was for elderly was Witness Theater. Maybe I should save that for when we get to JDC. But I'll talk about some of the other things—

BERKE: Okay. Please.

BARRON: —that we've supported there. There was a program of Arab-Israeli Science Learning at the Archaeological Museum in our region. And it was a fifth-grade program. And they felt that

the children, fifth grade, was just not enough for these kids to be together. And so we extended it to the sixth grade to see if that would make a difference in the relationships of the children. There was a program...I'll tell you whether it worked or not. There was a program at the Oppana for dance students, and this was expanded to deal also with Arab and Israeli children. Several of these programs were picked up by the community—of the programs that we started—and several were found to be just one- or two-year programs. Some of them got kids hooked here on what they were doing, people were doing, there. But all of the programs, I feel, were successful in that the people that were involved in them came away with an experience...whether it was continued or not to me was never important. There are many people that want to program that's going to last. And for us I feel that a program that touches people may not need to last. It just may be a one-time thing or a one-year program. And that it lasts in their life, and then their families' lives.

BERKE: And it may lead to something else.

BARRON: And it may lead to something else, yes.

BERKE: That's interesting. Does Guy share your same interests? Or do you have your own specific interests? How do you deal with supporting community as a couple and as a family?

BARRON: Guy will travel with me wherever I go. No. Guy will travel with me often when I go. Not wherever I go. And many of those travels have been through the JDC. I keep jumping ahead.

BERKE: No, that's okay. That's good.

BARRON: Guy has traveled with me to many of the adventuresome places that we've gone. But we've also visited our region. We've gone on all of the larger major missions. And this, too, we'll talk about later, I'm sure, when I talk about my grandchildren. We've gone with our children and grandchildren to Israel. And he has been very supportive of these things. Our philanthropic foundation outside of Federation does a lot of work in the arts. And he is more involved in that than I am. But I would say most all of our travel is around arts or philanthropic endeavors.

BERKE: So talk about some of the non-Jewish things that you and Guy are involved in. It's nice that we have...people in our community have a holistic approach to helping people, and I like that.

BARRON: Well, we've been involved...from early on we were involved in the young people's programs at the museum, involved in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Also involved in the New York Philharmonic because we travel to and from New York very often. We have been supportive of new young artists from all over the country, whom we have helped in their relocating some of their artwork, either by helping them to make connections with museums.... I'll give you an example: This is a good example of how we work together and it isn't work. We were talking down the street in New York after dinner one night, and we looked in the window of a restaurant. And there on the wall was a picture of an ice cream truck and you'll wonder where this story is going. For our grandchildren's birthdays we most often give them an original piece of artwork. It could be something from an artist you've heard of; it could be something

from a local artist you've never heard of. But we try to give them something that is a piece of art that they would enjoy today, but that would be just as appropriate when they were an adult. So these roughly painted ice cream trucks looked like something that fit in our category of gift-giving. We went in—the restaurant was closed. We knocked on the window. They were cleaning up. We got into the restaurant. We asked the name of the artist, and they gave us his name. And they said—the guy that was cleaning up said, “Be sure you mention my name because I want a commission if you buy it.” [Laughter] He said, “The work is for sale.” We called the artist. We went to visit him. He lives down in Chelsea, and we went to his studio. And we saw what he did mainly was he was a graffiti artist on outside walls in New York, but had permission for where he painted—often in parks, often along the river, and they were often car races. And when he found we were from Detroit, he said, “Oh, my goodness! This is something. I would love to be able to paint in Detroit on some buildings.” After a couple of years of working on it—and Guy started going to the museum—and talking to people at the museum. Talked to David Page who was involved with the conservancy. Talked to General Motors. He got permission—the artist got permission—to do the first permanent wall painting down on the Riverwalk. And it's a—Guy would know the number of feet—but it's a very, very long car race with an ice cream truck in it that this artist was able to paint. So these are some of the things that...we've met many artists in many unusual places that we have...an example is in Cambodia. Do you really want to hear this? [Laughs]

BERKE: Absolutely do.

BARRON: We had no intention of going to Cambodia looking at art. But there was an art exhibit in the hotel we were in. And it was decommissioned weapons from the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian war. And we met with the person that was in charge of this exhibition. And they had taken the decommissioned weapons, and they had made an art project where they had brought in metalsmiths from England to teach the graduate students in the university how to make something other than pagodas and temples. And each artist had to make something that had to do with peace. This was called the Seeds of Peace Project.

BERKE: Uh-huh.

BARRON: Where they took these guns and turned them into ploughshares. And we fell in love with many of the pieces. We bought several for ourselves. We have one here, a couple in California. But there was one large goddess who was breaking a weapon over her knee, life-size, and we felt that this would be something that should go in a university museum. First thought was Cornell because I'm very involved with the Cornell museum...or the Harvard Museum where Guy was involved. But we decided we wanted to see it. And so the University of Michigan was building a new building or expanding their museum at that time. We asked if they were interested. And through the Frankels they said they were extremely interested, and they built a niche for this goddess who sits in Ann Arbor now, so she can be visited.

BERKE: Isn't that wonderful!

BARRON: So these are...it's just not anything planned.

BERKE: That's sometimes the most wonderful things when they're not planned.

BARRON: And that's how many of my stories have....

BERKE: That's lovely. Lovely story. Thanks for sharing that with the community. I think it'll be a wonderful thing. So now we'll step back. Let's talk about the thing that is near and dear to your heart, and then we'll talk about your family that's really near and dear in a moment. But let's talk about the JDC and your involvement in JDC and some of the things that you have been participating in for the well being of our global Jewish community.

BARRON: Okay. I really like to travel.

BERKE: I could tell. [Laughter]

BARRON: And I loved going to Israel, and I loved being part of the partnership. And I loved being chair of the partnership area, and I continued to be involved in that area. But in one of my many talks with Bob Aronson, I said, "I want to do something more. I want to be involved in something else not in the Detroit area but elsewhere." And I first went to Jewish Agency meetings for a few years. And I said, "What about the JDC?" I said, "I've heard about this from my brother who's very involved. I've heard about this from my uncle who's very involved." He said, "We have very few people from Detroit that are on the board of JDC. And," he said, "your family is very involved in that. So let's try to find something else." So after a few years of really looking around, I said, "Bob, I really would like to look at the JDC." He said, "Well, why don't you go and attend a few meetings and just go to some of the small meetings and see how you feel about it." And I became a regular at the board meetings which are held in New York. And loved what I was seeing and doing there, and was put on the board. Initially my first... I think my first serious involvement was the Africa-Asia Committee. And then I became involved with working with Echelon, the elderly. And I became involved, as the rest of my family has been, in Brookdale, at the JDC-Brookdale Institute. And have been extremely involved with that. Now I am the co-chair of the adult and people with disabilities program there. And I've remained very active in JDC with the IDP, which is the International Development Program. Done a lot of travel with them. Been involved with work with the elderly and work with many... again, disabilities is a program that is starting again there that I'm involved with.

BERKE: And you plan to continue, I assume.

BARRON: I do. Now during my tenure, my brother was chair of JDC. And now Penny is, Penny Blumenstein. My brother is going to be, once again, chair of Brookdale. And I'm going to continue my involvement there. But I've done an enormous amount of travel with them. And Guy has gone with me to many of the places.

BERKE: So you've mentioned your brother now three times. We should talk about your brother a little bit and your relationship with your brother.

BARRON: Irv Smokler, as I say, is five years younger than I am. And because we've really never lived in a community as adult together, we see each other when we're passing through at

meetings or visiting each other in various places. And his family and mine are close. And we talk to each other and spend some holidays together.

BERKE: Okay, let's talk about your family. I've got some other things...I'm taking a little bit out of order. But it seems a logical next step. Talk about your kids and their spouses and your grandchildren.

BARRON: Okay, we have two sons. I'll go back just a little. Both my father and my father-in-law were attorneys who became buildings, but were attorneys. Both of our sons are attorneys. So Guy says he's the only one that...the way he practices real estate law is without a law degree. We have a son in Detroit area who is Judge Mark Barron, a 48th District judge, and had been a prosecutor. And he's married to Lori Kaftan Barron. They have two sons. They've been married a long time. They have two sons who are five and seven and are at Brookside right now, having gone to Temple Beth-El preschool.

BERKE: Their names?

BARRON: Their names are Quinn.... The eldest is Brooks, and Quinn is the younger one. And in California my son—our son—Eric is married to Wenise Wong and they have two children: Violet who's 11, and Lee who's six. Eric is an attorney and was with a big law firm for many years and then taught at UCLA. And now coaches track. I think both of our sons have found things they really enjoy doing.

BERKE: And let me guess that the reason that you have residence in California is because of those kids out there?

BARRON: It helps. [Laughter] They're in Los Angeles, and we're in the desert. But makes them very close during part of the year, and the other children very close during the rest of the year.

BERKE: It's good planning, Nora. [Laughter]

BARRON: Yes.

BERKE: So let me ask you a couple of questions related to community. You know we're in some momentous times now, both locally and in Israel and internationally. What, from your perspective, do you see as the challenges that we as a Jewish community are facing on a whole variety of fronts? I'm sure you've given thought to that.

BARRON: Well, I don't think that my feelings are much different than many of the people in the community. The community is getting older. And so we certainly have to be more aware and more receptive to the needs of the elderly. At the same time, there has been a real pressure or work or involvement in getting more younger people involved and coming back to the community. And I think this is become successful. I see this in my own children, and I see it with many others. So I think we have to be careful to meet the needs in unique ways for the younger people in the community.

BERKE: Do you think we're up to it?

BARRON: I think we're always up to it. I think Detroit does a splendid job. It doesn't matter where you are in the country or what meeting you're at or who you run into, they are well aware of what's going on in Detroit.

BERKE: Yes. Detroit is a bellwether for communities around the world. We should all be proud of who and what we are. And I think we take justifiable pride in that. Who are some of the other people? You've mentioned a number of people who've impacted your life: you know, Bob Aronson, Penny Blumenstein, and others. Your Uncle Bill.

BARRON: Scott Kaufman has done a great deal of mentoring and helping me do spur-of-the-moment kind of things...as Bob used to do. We work out often with Bob—with Scott. And so we see him. And he will do some of the same things that Bob did. Bob called me—didn't call me. We were having lunch one day, and he said to me, "What are you doing tomorrow?" I said, "Nothing in particular." He said, "Do you want to go to Macedonia?" Well, I had no idea where he was talking about. I truly did not know where Macedonia was. And I said, "Certainly!" And I said, "But you'll have to explain a little more." And he said, "Go home and get your passport and come down to the Federation office immediately." Which I did. And I called Guy, and he said, "I know. You had lunch with Bob Aronson. Something's up." I said, "Yes, I'm going away for the weekend." He said, "Where?" I said, "Well, where do you think?" He said, "Philadelphia." I said, "No, Macedonia." And still I wasn't sure where it was. But what was happening was that—this was during the time of the war in Croatia, and there was a camp that had been set up in Macedonia for some of the people who were escaping from the fighting right across the border in Macedonia. And Israel was sending an airplane full of supplies to this tent camp, and they were taking seven people from the United States to go and meet these refugees they were going to bring back to Israel. These were not Jewish refugees. These were just people that were trying to get out of the tent camps. So I brought my passport in, and we flew to Israel, and we got on an Israel plane along with an Arab woman who was Miss Israel at the time. And big bundles of supplies. So we sat like every third or fourth seat, and we flew into Skopje, I think it's called, in Macedonia. And we landed and spent the day there and brought a planeload of people back to Israel.

BERKE: That must have been something special.

BARRON: That was a fascinating experience and a fascinating day. And one of the couples that came on the plane was a couple whose family had during World War II housed a very famous Haggadah. They were a Muslim family that the father had been a librarian, and he had been given by a friend of his the Haggadah, and they housed it in their house during World War II. And they were given little cards in case they needed any help ever from Israel. And they presented these to the Israel medical tent that had been set up in this camp and said, "Can we get on that airplane?"

BERKE: Oh.

BARRON: So that was one thing that Bob said will you do tomorrow? Scott Kaufman said to me one day when we were working out, “What are you doing this weekend?” Nothing in particular. “Well, I’m going tomorrow to Israel.” This was last summer, and this was in the middle of the plight of the Gaza and the difficulty that was going on, and I said, “I’d love to go.” And so there were four of us that went for several days to Israel. So it’s often spur-of-the-moment kind of thing, and people that...just because I’m there it seems to happen.

BERKE: But it sounds like it’s things that excite you.

BARRON: Yes, very much.

BERKE: Let me ask you a question: I mean you are a person of this community, an important person in this community. What is your confidence level that the next generation is going to be able to do the kinds of things that your generation and other generations have done to keep this community of ours whole and vibrant?

BARRON: Well, I don’t think they’re going to do the same things we’ve done. I think they’re going to do different things because I think the world is different today. But I think that the people are just as enthusiastic and just as excited as we were about things. But I just think they’re going to go about doing things in different ways. I think they’re going to make different kinds of connections and different kinds of programming and different kinds of ways of involving people.

BERKE: Are you confident that the Jewish community will continue to stay vital and vibrant?

BARRON: Yes.

BERKE: Not just in Detroit, but I’m talking in general.

BARRON: I think that it’s going to—yes, I think that it always has. I think that it just will continue with a different face on it perhaps.

BERKE: There’s a question here, but I’m not going to even ask it, other than to say, you know, it says: What are you most proud of? And there are too many things that you’ve articulated that you’re most proud of. You really have had a rich experience.

BARRON: I want to get back.... The Witness Theater was one of the things that I really—

BERKE: Yes.

BARRON: That, and I have a couple of short other things.

BERKE: Good.

BARRON: But the Witness Theater was a program where elderly people who had lived through the Holocaust and now were living somewhere else that started in Israel. But in Detroit when I brought it here, we found a group of elderly people who were connected to the center somehow,

the Jewish Center. And had histories, had stories. And many of them hadn't told their stories before. But Witness Theater found a group of young people in their teens who were the same age as most of these people when they lived through the Holocaust. And the program is to hook these people up together, to get to know each other, to get to know each other's stories, over the period of a year. They met every few weeks, and they got to know each other, and then they began sharing who they were and what experiences they had. And at the end of the year, they wrote a play together. Now we had professionals help them. We had professionals who were fluent in dealing with the elderly and dealing with psychological issues and dealing with playwriting. And they wrote a play where the teenagers took the roles of each of the elderly people, and they told their story through their voice...through the voice of the elderly given by the teenagers. And we made a point of including...we opened this up to the community for young people to come. It was quite a commitment because you had to be in your junior or senior year, and most people have their extracurricular commitments really underway by then. And we wanted...I in particular wanted there to be some non-Jewish people involved. We did have a non-Jewish young man who was very involved in the program...because we wanted the perspective of somebody, and we wanted him to bring it back to his community what he learned. And then the program was presented twice at the Berman Theater, and it was phenomenal! And this was a one-time thing, one-occasion thing. But I think everybody that dealt with it has really more than a lifetime of experience they got from this. And their families as well. I'm very, very proud that that guy was as well.

BERKE: It sounds wonderful. I mean really. You said there were a couple of others.

BARRON: I'm proud of what we've done and how it has impacted our children. I gave a talk yesterday, a coffee talk. And Lori, my daughter-in-law, was there. And this was about my work overseas—or my work with JDC. And work with IDP and, well, a lot of my work. But she talked about her having gone because, she said, "I went because of my mother-in-law. I went to Cuba." And what she had gotten from that. But she said, what she gets most of all, is that we often bring the programs that we're debating on supporting to our adult children...not the grandchildren, but we bring it to the children. For them I might bring two or three programs and say, Which of these appeal to you more? And let them decide.

BERKE: Mm-hmm.

BARRON: So that they have their finger in this. Lori has become very involved with her children in the community, and I called the other night. They were at Simcha Torah program. My daughter-in-law in California, Wenese Wong, agreed when she married Eric, the rabbi that married them, to raise the children Jewish, and has become involved in the temple—the synagogue near them, the university synagogue. We took her family, we took Eric and Wenese, and Violet when—and Lee when he was two and she was seven, to Israel. And this was one of the most interesting trips of all the trips we've ever had, because when Wenese, no matter how hard we tried, could not understand why we were so involved in Jewish things because we are not religiously Jews at this point. We are very much ethnically and involved in the community, but not very religious. She didn't understand what Israel had to do with all this. She just didn't. And we spent the first week we were there traveling. And then the second...the end of the trip we spent living with a family we had met through Partnership who had young children the age of

my grandchildren. And she understood. She left Israel absolutely getting it and wanting to go back as soon as she possibly could.

BERKE: That's wonderful.

BARRON: And I'm very pleased to be able to do that...not by showing, by being involved, and by helping my kids to be involved.

BERKE: And to share. I mean the fact that you've been able to share that with your family.

BARRON: Yes.

BERKE: You can't put a price tag on that.

BARRON: No.

BERKE: It's wonderful. So anything else that you want to share before we conclude this? This has been wonderful for me listening to you.

BARRON: I think one of the things about JDC that has been most exciting for me, and for Guy as well, has been the IDP end of the organization. This is the International Development Program, which is not supported by Federation dollars. But is supported by a mailbox that runs through Federation and all the Federations in the country. For natural disasters that have happened mainly in modern Moslem countries—moderate Moslem countries like Turkey and Tunisia and the tsunami area—people are often wondering what we're doing traveling to Sri Lanka and India and Thailand and how this impacts the Jewish part of the organization. And all of the help that is given for these disasters is given through the Jewish community in these countries. And so the Jewish communities get the kavod for having this money having been raised in these wonderful programs having developed—been developed. And Guy has gone along on many of these; it's been very exciting.

BERKE: Do they appreciate it?

BARRON: Does who appreciate it?

BERKE: The people who are recipients of it.

BARRON: I'm not so sure how they feel they got what they got. But of course they have to, because life is a thousand percent better after a well is built or a school is rebuilt.

BERKE: And it's who and what we are. That's what we as Jews do. We don't look for the kavod.

BARRON: Yes.

BERKE: We do it because it needs to be done. It's wonderful, Nora. Thank you so much for taking the time with us.

BARRON: You're welcome.

BERKE: It was wonderful.

BARRON: I appreciate your questions.

BERKE: It's my pleasure, my pleasure.

BARRON: Thank you.

[End of Interview]