

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Susan Citrin  
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman  
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4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation  
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish life, family history,  
6 role as a woman leader

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8 MS. ALTERMAN: Good morning. I'm Sharon Alterman  
9 and I'm very happy to be here with Susie Citrin, interviewing  
10 her for the Leonard M. Simons oral history project. Today is  
11 Thursday, July 28, 2005. And before I start the interview I  
12 have to say that Susie is one of the people that made this  
13 interview series happen, and we're just so grateful to you for  
14 all the time and energy that you've put into this project.  
15 And we can say so many things about you, Susie, because you're  
16 just a wonderful leader in this community and just reading all  
17 about you, the words compassionate, enthusiastic, kind, just  
18 kept reoccurring over and over again. We're very proud of  
19 you.

20 MS. CITRIN: I hope you're not going to cut this out  
21 of the tape.

22 MS. ALTERMAN: Of course not. Let's begin. When  
23 and where were you born?

24 MS. CITRIN: I was born here in Detroit. I think  
25 I've never left this place. I lived on Pasadena between Homer

1 and Petoskey in the old Jewish neighborhood. Went to  
2 McCullough School and then moved at the age of 8 to Oak Park.  
3 But my parents as I think perhaps a lot of parents in those  
4 days didn't really investigate school systems. So although we  
5 lived in Oak Park, I went to Ferndale school systems. I first  
6 went to Andrew Jackson and then Paul Best, which no longer  
7 exists. I just went there a few days ago and it's now the  
8 John F. Kennedy Middle School. It's kind of funny to go and  
9 see it doesn't exist anymore. Then I went to Ferndale High  
10 School.

11 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Let's go back a little. Who were  
12 your parents?

13 **MS. CITRIN:** My mom, Shirley White was her name, she  
14 was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, and she was from a family of  
15 six. Like many families they all had to work very hard. She  
16 had a bit of a college education. She went to Wayne State  
17 University, actually when it was a high school; she went to  
18 Old Main.

19 My dad, who was born in Toronto, came to the States  
20 when he was very young. He had very hard life. He wasn't  
21 able to get an education. His father died when he was very  
22 young. His mother remarried twice. He had step-sisters and  
23 half-sisters and real sisters, and he had a brother who ran  
24 away when he was very young because they had a very tough  
25 life. So he went into business with my grandfather when my

1 father and mother got married, and they opened a little shoe  
2 store, which was on Six Mile and Livernois near the Varsity.  
3 That's what he did until he couldn't stay there any longer  
4 because of the crime. He closed up the store and he worked  
5 for Crowley's in his later years. He actually died on the day  
6 of his retirement. He went to work and he never came home.

7           So I came from really meager beginnings. At an  
8 early age I baby-sat and brought money home. It wasn't for my  
9 use; it was to put into the family kitty. When I was 16, I  
10 actually got a pretty good job, working at doctors' offices as  
11 a receptionist. I worked my way all through college. Went to  
12 Wayne, to went Wayne graduate school, worked in a psychiatric  
13 clinic. So when I actually graduated, I had a master's degree  
14 in French, and I taught for two years at Wayne and two years  
15 at Oakland University. But then I had some children. In  
16 those days women didn't have careers. They -- they chose  
17 usually to stay at home with the kids. So there I was.

18           **MS. ALTERMAN:** What are your children's names?

19           **MS. CITRIN:** Laura is the oldest, she's 33. And  
20 then there's Willie; he's 30. And Johnny is 29. They're all  
21 characters and fun. They get along really well and we love  
22 them. They're all over the place as you know.

23           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where do they live?

24           **MS. CITRIN:** Laura lives in Manhattan and she's a  
25 television producer, and she just recently got married.

1 Willie lives in Malaysia and he has a gorgeous little wife  
2 named Maggie, and they're expecting their first baby. So I  
3 guess I'm going to be a Bubie pretty soon. Then Johnny, who  
4 lives around the corner from us, keeps reappearing like a bad  
5 penny for food or things like that. Actually he's a lot of  
6 fun and he keeps us going.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What does he do?

8 **MS. CITRIN:** He's a financial planner. We gave him  
9 all our money and we don't know what happened to it, but if we  
10 need \$5 we always have to ask him. He's fun, too. This  
11 character, he teaches spinning at Beverly Hills Racquet Club.  
12 We didn't know he did that. He gets up early in the morning,  
13 teaches spinning and then goes home and showers and puts on a  
14 business suit and goes to work. So he has a secret life.  
15 Most people know about him. I guess they fight to get into  
16 his classes because he's a lot of fun and in good shape.

17 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I wanted to ask you several other  
18 questions. Do you know anything about your grandparents'  
19 background? You mentioned that your father came from Toronto,  
20 but where were your grandparents from?

21 **MS. CITRIN:** They all came from Russia. I know my  
22 grandmother came from David Horodok. I know there's a current  
23 group here in Detroit that continues with the tradition of  
24 sort of keeping all the Horodokers together. Roz Blank is  
25 really wonderful. She's just so enthusiastic. I'm a member

1 of the David Horodok Society because my grandmother was a  
2 Horodoker. All my grandparents came from Russia. The other  
3 ones I don't know. My grandmother's name was Green; my  
4 mother's mother's name was Green, and she married my  
5 grandfather whose name was White. A mixture of colors.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** You started to tell us about your  
7 schooling. Obviously you were a good student and you worked  
8 and went to school. What were some of your interests as a  
9 young person in elementary and high school?

10 **MS. CITRIN:** I played the violin. People don't know  
11 that about me. I played the piano and I play the guitar. Not  
12 well anymore. I guess orchestra was kind of fun. I actually  
13 wanted to take art classes. My parents were from the old  
14 school, you take classes that will get you a job like  
15 shorthand.

16 My father played the violin so I still have his  
17 violin and play it once in a while. They wanted me to take  
18 violin. I played throughout high school in the orchestra.  
19 But I also took classes that were really useful and helped me  
20 to get into college. But if I had my drothers I would  
21 probably now take an art class because I love to paint and  
22 draw and patchkee. That's my secret stuff that no one knows  
23 about. You're not going to show this tape to anyone, are you?

24 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Of course not. What else did you do  
25 in school? Did you take any leadership positions as a young

1 person?

2           **MS. CITRIN:** No, because in Ferndale out of 600 kids  
3 in my graduating class, there were only six students that were  
4 Jewish. In fact one I still have a relationship with to this  
5 day, Cheryl Horowitz Rudin, who lives in New York and Florida.  
6 I write her and we e-mail now and everything. We weren't  
7 asked to participate. In fact in those days it wasn't  
8 underlying, it was very blatant anti-Semitism. I came from a  
9 home that was not really religious, so I knew I was being  
10 discriminated against but I really didn't know exactly why,  
11 why I was so different than anybody else. In those days they  
12 used to have sororities and fraternities, just like they had  
13 in college and of course you didn't even think of asking to  
14 join one of those clubs.

15           It was fairly lonely. We had a club. All the  
16 Jewish kids got together. We thought we were very clever. We  
17 formed the club called the Abstracts and we wore sweatshirts  
18 with big scarlet letter As on them, thinking that no one would  
19 get the idea that I came from The Scarlet Letter. But hey, we  
20 were adventuresome in those days.

21           It was tough going to Ferndale. If you ask my  
22 mother. who is now 94, she'd say oh. it was a wonderful  
23 school. It really was not a terrific school. They didn't pay  
24 their teachers well, so they didn't get the cream of the crop  
25 as kids who went to Oak Park or Mumford had as teachers. It

1 was really tough. Even when I went to Wayne, after I  
2 graduated, those Mumford kids and Oak Park kids sort of stuck  
3 together and they didn't allow you to come into their circles.  
4 It was fairly lonely.

5           That's when I met Robert, who was my Prince  
6 Charming. He came into my life when I was sitting in Spanish  
7 class and he was carrying this big huge briefcase and had a  
8 big huge soup ladle in it that his brother had made a joke and  
9 confiscated from the London Chop House, which was a very fancy  
10 restaurant. I was very curious because as I said, I came from  
11 very meager beginnings and we didn't go to restaurants. We  
12 couldn't afford it. My first date with him was to go to the  
13 restaurant across the street from the London Chop House, which  
14 is the Caucus Club. I was just overwhelmed because I'd never  
15 been to any place like that before in my life. So I said I  
16 guess this guy's for me, takes me to good places.

17           **MS. ALTERMAN:** That's still a the love affair?

18           **MS. CITRIN:** Yes. We kind of like each other. Two  
19 outcasts; right.

20           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Did you participate in any Jewish  
21 activities?

22           **MS. CITRIN:** No. The only thing I have to say is  
23 the life saving for me were my friends Cheryl and Barbara  
24 Barris. They said, let's join BBG. We had a blast. We  
25 joined the Freeman BBG, which no longer exists, but it was a

1 chapter from Oak Park High School. And of course we came in  
2 there like gangbusters. We were so glad to find a social  
3 activity, seriously.

4 I liked BBG and AZA. I mean I remember we used to  
5 have parties together down in somebody's basement and dance to  
6 Johnny Mathis records. So you can tell I had a great time.  
7 It was fun. I think that was my first flavor of the idea that  
8 there was a Jewish community out there. I did take violin  
9 lessons when I was younger at the Jewish Community Center from  
10 someone who was in the Detroit Symphony and he gave lessons at  
11 the Center. But I don't think I felt as much a part of that.  
12 My mother took me to the lessons, but as being part of BBG and  
13 suddenly waking up and realizing that I really had a place  
14 somewhere, that I didn't belong at Ferndale High School. It  
15 was terrible there. Really was. I joined things like the  
16 French Club but how exciting could that be? There was really  
17 no social life there at all. There was just a few of us that  
18 stuck together. BBG was really an awakening for me. There  
19 were people who really enjoyed being together because they  
20 were Jewish. I came from a very secular background, so no one  
21 judged me that I didn't know certain things about being  
22 Jewish. It was just coming together as one young Jewish  
23 person with a whole bunch of other people. It was fun.

24 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Did you have any Jewish celebrations  
25 in your home?



1           **MS. CITRIN:** We used to have a Passover once in a  
2 while. I think most Jewish people do have some sort of  
3 Passover celebration. I remember my mother making an attempt  
4 at it and we had the little books from Manashevitz that had  
5 the story, but my father didn't speak Hebrew. It was nice to  
6 get together as a family and have dinner, but it wasn't  
7 something that we did every single year.

8           When I was a kid, I remember my parents celebrated  
9 Christmas. We got Christmas gifts. I know later on in life,  
10 when I had children myself and we went to Birmingham Temple,  
11 the first thing I did was sign up for the rabbi's class. It  
12 was a two-year study program because I couldn't bring children  
13 into the world and not have any kind of information myself. I  
14 felt I was really lacking. To this day I love to take Jewish  
15 classes, SAJE and all sorts of stuff like that. Go to Jewish  
16 lectures, just to learn about who we are as a people.

17           **MS. ALTERMAN:** That's very interesting because in  
18 view of your background, certain things had to be happening in  
19 your life because you have taken such important leadership  
20 roles. What do you attribute that to?

21           **MS. CITRIN:** Well, I think some people have a very  
22 good feeling when they go to synagogue or temple and they feel  
23 a great contentment. I know when I first started going with  
24 Robert and his family, it felt good to go as a family but I  
25 didn't understand what was going on. We went to Temple

1 Israel. How complicated can that be? It was nice. I don't  
2 mean to say I didn't enjoy going to services, but I felt sort  
3 of out of it.

4 I sort of feel when I'm doing things in the Jewish  
5 community, that that's what makes me Jewish. That's sort of  
6 my religion. I have a cultural historical approach to  
7 Judaism. I love to go hear the music and feel a part of a  
8 larger group. But I think I get my best feelings about being  
9 Jewish in going to a meeting in this Federation building and  
10 sitting around with other Jewish people and helping people. I  
11 think also because I came from very, very poor beginnings. If  
12 I can give something back -- I'm really lucky today. I'm  
13 going to get tears in my eyes. I really feel that I'm very  
14 blessed to have what I have. If I can give something back,  
15 it's really worth while.

16 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you do so much.

17 **MS. CITRIN:** I think people don't understand. They  
18 must think I'm wacky because I do get a good feeling when I go  
19 to the archives meetings and people, oh, she gets excited  
20 about archives.

21 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Old paper.

22 **MS. CITRIN:** Old paper, yeah.

23 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Did you have any mentors? How did  
24 you get going on this path of leadership?

25 **MS. CITRIN:** I don't know. That's an interesting

1 question because when I came to the Women's Department -- in  
2 those days women weren't as active in the general Federation.  
3 Thank goodness that trend has changed because there are some  
4 very smart women who have so much to give to this community.  
5 They do a good job in Women's Division, which is now the  
6 Women's Department, but we weren't really allowed to be on  
7 committees in the past. There were very few women on the  
8 board of governors.

9 Carolyn Greenberg was really the first person that I  
10 met. Ed~~the~~Jackier. These were very smart women and they had  
11 a lot of wonderful ideas. It always amazes me when I go to  
12 committee meetings how people come up with these incredibly  
13 brilliant ideas that I would have never thought of myself. I  
14 enjoy going to meetings and hearing people's thoughts. It's  
15 in a sense like going to my old BBG meetings because I get to  
16 be with people and we have fun and we have food. It's very  
17 nice. I think of it like coming to a party every day. Maybe  
18 people think I'm nuts.

19 Shirley Harris also. Carolyn Greenberg was the  
20 president and she invited me over to her house and I got to  
21 meet her children, who are now old. Edythe Jackier. Freda  
22 Stollman was around but I really didn't know her that well.

23 **MS. ALTERMAN:** But they took an interest in you,  
24 obviously.

25 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes. Also when I first started out in

1 Federation I had been working as an undergraduate and through  
2 graduate school at a place called Adult Psychiatric Clinic. I  
3 think if I had to choose today, I would have chosen a career  
4 in art or in social work or psychiatry. My job was to type  
5 away on a dictaphone and type all the reports that the  
6 psychiatrists read into these little tapes. I'm sure now they  
7 just talk into a microphone, and it actually types it  
8 automatically on a computer, but I was the little computer  
9 typing away. The cases were just so interesting and amazing.

10 I asked if I could volunteer at Jewish Family  
11 Service and that's where I really sort of got my start. Sam  
12 Lerner was there. Laura was just born in '72, and then in the  
13 mid '80s I ultimately became the president. I hung around a  
14 lot. People like Edythe Jackier were the chair of the  
15 Volunteer Services Committee, so I volunteered and we went to  
16 nursing homes. I just really felt good about all the stuff  
17 that was going on in the community.

18 Now, today, when you look at Jewish Family Services,  
19 it's really grown and has two sites, a new building. When I  
20 first started out, it was at the Jewish Center on Meyers and  
21 Curtis and it was a little building set aside. People may not  
22 remember but I remember as a young woman I would drive there,  
23 I was so proud to come to the meetings. Maybe people don't  
24 realize the joy that they give a young person by just inviting  
25 them to a meeting. I was happy as a clam. What could be

1 better than doing something? It wasn't actually therapy. I  
2 would have loved to have been a therapist, but it was having  
3 some impact on people who really needed it.

4 **MS. ALTERMAN:** You mentioned that you were the  
5 president of the agency. Tell us a little bit more about that  
6 agency. What it did then and what it does today.

7 **MS. CITRIN:** It started out, as I remember, over the  
8 Avalon Theater. So it started from this little store front  
9 area. It started to help immigrants settle. Part of it was  
10 the Resettlement Service, which at the time was a separate  
11 agency at the time.

12 It seems to me when I became president we were  
13 helping a lot of elderly people. At the time there was not a  
14 lot of drug problems, you didn't hear about domestic violence.  
15 As the years went by. we established a secret apartment where  
16 women could go with their children if they were abused. So  
17 there's a lot of new problems that have come along today that  
18 didn't exist or we didn't want to realize existed in those  
19 days. A lot of it was helping people who needed coping  
20 skills, whether it be immigrants or others.

21 We would give financial assistance. I remember we  
22 had an account at J.C. Penney -- I think it still exists to  
23 this day -- for kids who needed school clothes. They would  
24 give them an account number and a slip that said they could  
25 spend \$200 and they would go to J.C. Penney and pick out

1 something of their own.

2 I'm sure that we're doing things differently at  
3 Jewish Family Service. I know when I was president, they had  
4 a transportation service and they didn't charge anything. Now  
5 the transportation service has grown and they drive I don't  
6 know how many people. Huge numbers of especially elderly  
7 people because as the population ages, people can't drive.

8 Now they're charging a nominal fee. What they  
9 discovered was that people who made an appointment for the  
10 service figured they're not paying for it, so they didn't call  
11 to cancel, so the driver would show up. This gives them the  
12 responsibility if they've paid for it even if it's only \$2,  
13 that they ought to make sure if they cancel, they call.

14 I know they charge for a number of the services that  
15 they didn't charge for before. We just gave it to people  
16 especially immigrants who came with nothing. Now they have to  
17 have sponsoring families who actually put forth some money and  
18 I think Jewish Family Service somehow matches it.

19 There are not as many Russians coming. When I was  
20 president, there were a number of Russians. There was a big  
21 influx. Once they came, many of them didn't have the skills  
22 and jobs that they needed.

23 One of the things I think we made a mistake in is  
24 that we didn't involve them in the Jewish communities as such.  
25 In hindsight I think when the entire community looks back,

1 they say, gee, that was a group of people that we missed  
2 because we didn't involve them as much as we could have in the  
3 Jewish community. It's hard because they needed language  
4 skills, jobs, basic things and adjusting to a whole new  
5 culture.

6 My husband is a very quiet loving man and he was  
7 teaching English to Russians as they came and he really  
8 enjoyed it. Sort of a hands-on experience.

9 But Family Services changed and has grown. I'm sure  
10 there were drug problems 20 years ago, but I think it's become  
11 more prevalent and people are talking about it.

12 Also people have health insurance but it only covers  
13 to a certain point, especially in terms of psychiatric care.  
14 We have people who started out in therapy and then suddenly  
15 they realize their money has run out but they still need the  
16 therapy. A lot of that has changed as well. But now we're in  
17 West Bloomfield. Who would have thought that people in West  
18 Bloomfield and the Birmingham area have problems, but they  
19 have the same problems as we do.

20 When I was president, we got a huge grant from  
21 Skillman to help young single mothers. Now, 20 years later,  
22 being a single parent is fairly common. Now women have  
23 children and they've never been married or divorced. We were  
24 teaching these young women skills.

25 I didn't participate in the group therapy that they

1 had, but I remember being in the building and one young  
2 mother, I thought she was carrying a handbag, and I looked  
3 down and she was actually carrying her baby by the arm. When  
4 they had the group therapy, the therapist told us they had to  
5 feed the mothers first before the babies because the mothers  
6 had to take care of their own physical needs before they would  
7 even think about caring for their children. So we have all  
8 the problems that the rest of society has.

9           When you asked about mentors, there were some people  
10 at Jewish Family Service that I just admired. Marilyn  
11 Hertzberg was one of them. I was sort of envious that they  
12 could work and have a family as well.

13           **MS. ALTERMAN:** You have done a great deal of work,  
14 not only locally but throughout the world. You have strong  
15 connections to Israel, you've been a mission chair.

16           **MS. CITRIN:** Well, hanging around Israel is fun.

17           **MS. ALTERMAN:** When was your first trip?

18           **MS. CITRIN:** 1969. We were married a year and we  
19 went on the Detroit Service Group Mission with Ruthie Broder.  
20 We went 30 years later and we had lunch on the veranda of the  
21 King David when she was mission chair, one of the Michigan  
22 Miracle Missions. It was just a great feeling to be there  
23 with her. I think I've been there 17 times.

24           When we went the first time, I was just totally  
25 amazed. I'd never quite understood. I'm trying to explain



1 this, but when I went to BBG, I was just like taken over by  
2 the feeling that there was another group of people that and I  
3 really belong there. I know many people feel this way when  
4 you go to Israel and the plane puts the first tire on the  
5 runway and you land and they start playing hatikva on the  
6 plane. The whole trip was overwhelming to me.

7           We went first to Israel with the Detroit Service  
8 Group. Carolyn Greenberg was there and Hugh and Ruthie Broder  
9 and Brewster, a few other people. Then we went to Mauthausen,  
10 Austria. That was the second part of the trip. Usually  
11 groups go there first and then it's from the darkness into the  
12 light. But we went from the light into the darkness. I  
13 remember I couldn't speak for a couple of days after I got  
14 back. I really was just so overwhelmed by the emotion of  
15 being at a concentration camp.

16           We actually went again a few years later to  
17 Mauthausen with the National Young Leadership. Larry Jackier  
18 was the chair of the mission so we had to go. We went with  
19 500 other young people. I was young in those days. I  
20 remember going to Mauthausen and I felt a lot better about  
21 being there, only because when we went the first time, it was  
22 a very small group of people, and it was overwhelmingly sad to  
23 realize what had happened there. Although Israel was  
24 wonderful, this reminded us of where we had been. It was bad,  
25 it was hard.

1 I went again with Robert and Larry and Shelly  
2 Jackier and a whole group of Detroiters. Richard Krugel.  
3 Everybody was on that mission. We've still been friendly with  
4 everybody. It was a better way of seeing our history.

5 I was there for the 25th anniversary with Robert.  
6 We went on the Queen Elizabeth II, which was docked in Haifa.  
7 That was the ship that Sadat was supposed to blow up. Every  
8 night they would send Jewish frogmen over the side of the boat  
9 to see if there were any bombs that had been planted that day.  
10 Thank goodness there wasn't. I guess he changed his mind. It  
11 was very eerie to be on this luxurious ship and then to come  
12 back from Israel with sandals and grubby blue jeans. It was  
13 fun.

14 Through the years the different trips we've been on  
15 we've made such incredible friends. The Jacobsons, Nancy and  
16 Joe, Marcie and Michael Feldman. You share these experiences  
17 and you bond together. Just like we do here in this building.  
18 You have wonderful experiences with people.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I know that you've led some missions.  
20 Do you want to talk about the family missions and community  
21 missions that you've been involved in?

22 **MS. CITRIN:** Well, the one that they actually put me  
23 in charge of, Edie Slatkin and I, who's just a dear, dear  
24 friend. She and I took a group of 16 Hadracha women. I  
25 think every mission has been wonderful because you go to

1 Israel, what could be better than that. And every time you go  
2 it changes. Something new is added or done or they have a new  
3 sound and light show in the old city, a new park. The people  
4 are wonderful.

5           The second thing is that you take first timers  
6 usually. And the Hadracha group were mostly first time women.  
7 I'd never been on a trip like that with women. It was very  
8 emotional and exciting. I was responsible for these people.  
9 We did all sorts of different things. One of the women had  
10 been there as a teenager and she reconnected with her old  
11 flame from the kibbutz. That was interesting. We had to  
12 physically put her on the plane to go home. Her mother made  
13 her come back the first time and we made her come back the  
14 second time. I think she would be there now if she could. We  
15 just all bonded. To take first timers and see their faces I  
16 feel like they're opening a special gift that you've given  
17 them.

18           We've been to Europe also. The first time we went  
19 to Prague, we went with Larry Jackier and his dad. His dad  
20 was one of the leaders. We had a blast. But it was a  
21 different Czechoslovakia; it was before their freedom.  
22 Everything was a closed society. It was very colorless, even  
23 though the city of Prague is very beautiful. It wasn't bombed  
24 during the war.

25           The second time we went, it was like a different

1 city. I don't know if you know that Prague is the marionette  
2 capital of the world. They were everywhere. We actually have  
3 one in our home. It was a different feeling.

4 At that point Jews were coming out of the woodwork  
5 and you saw this rejuvenation of Jewish cultural life. It's  
6 continued. We've been to the former Soviet Union and they  
7 have Hillels all over the area, they have what they call  
8 Hassids, which are really Jewish centers, but they're not in  
9 the sense of a health club and classes and Shalom Street.  
10 There people go for haircuts, social services, food. I'm sure  
11 you've heard <sup>about</sup> the experience from other people. They have sort  
12 of a meals on wheels and they deliver packages to people who  
13 can't get out of their homes.

14 I remember visiting one woman who hadn't been out of  
15 her apartment for five years because she just couldn't walk up  
16 and down the stairs. In Russia there's oftentimes five or six  
17 apartments in a circular area and then the center is like the  
18 bathroom and kitchen. They all share that and they're  
19 squeezed into these little rooms. I remember she had a  
20 walker. She said they don't sell these walkers here. This  
21 came from the United States and the Hassid. They're giving me  
22 this walker. I would be dead by now. I wouldn't be able to  
23 walk around my apartment. She had somebody visit her at least  
24 once a week to make sure she was okay.

25 I don't know if people know in the former Soviet

1 Union if you had a child, they oftentimes sent that child to a  
2 completely different area of the country to work and go to  
3 school. Families were really split up very easily. She did  
4 have a son but she didn't know where he was. It's a hard life  
5 there. To feel like you're a tiny piece of that whole process  
6 I think is incredible.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I'm sure that this gave you such a  
8 passion for spreading the message and doing the kinds of fund-  
9 raisings you do.

10 **MS. CITRIN:** Yeah. I like to fund-raise. Probably  
11 one of the few people who do. I'm not asking for myself. If  
12 I ask for somebody else, I know I was in that position once  
13 when I was a BBG girl. Somebody had to ask for money in order  
14 to keep the thing going. Even the Jewish Center when I took  
15 violin lessons. My parents were savvy enough. I think I  
16 would have been a great camper, party girl that I am.

17 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I know that Yad Ezra is one of your  
18 favorite agencies. Tell us about your involvement there.

19 **MS. CITRIN:** It's funny because Leah Luger and I go  
20 back about 12 years now. I remember Yad Ezra when it was in  
21 the basement store front thing on Ten Mile Road in Oak Park.  
22 On the corner of Ten and Greenfield. They used to pass the  
23 food down through the window.

24 They were feeding a lot of Russians and elderly  
25 people, but the Russians had very different food tastes. They

1 didn't like peanut butter and jelly. They didn't quite  
2 understand this concept of smooshing up peanuts and making a  
3 butter out of it. They had to change the menu to fit the  
4 clients that they were serving.

5           Then they moved to another building. Leah came on  
6 and I was sort of a newcomer there, too. I was the first  
7 dinner chair. It was fun.

8           The thing that I like to do is oftentimes stuff  
9 where you feel like you have some impact on the organization.  
10 I'm a pretty good typist, having typed up all those  
11 transcripts for those darn doctors that I worked for, for six  
12 years, so I offered to type in some names into the computer  
13 system. I don't know that much about computers, but I do know  
14 how to type. When she came on we started up this whole data  
15 base. That was fun. I worked a lot of hours there just  
16 typing like a mad woman. It was helpful to them getting  
17 started. Who would have thought that we would have been so  
18 married to computers?

19           I worked on the dinners and I was an honoree. I've  
20 had some honors which have been very nice but I find them a  
21 little embarrassing. If everybody knew how happy I was doing  
22 this stuff, I hope other people feel this way, too. The honor  
23 is just icing on the cake. It's fun to be with people and  
24 knowing that you're doing something that's a little important  
25 and has some impact on somebody.

1           **MS. ALTERMAN:** Is Yad Ezra as important today?

2           **MS. CITRIN:** Oh. yeah. Last year I did the cover  
3 for the dinner program, being this artist, and the invitation.  
4 I just turned it in. Leah said where is it, I need it. I  
5 just finished the cover for the ad book. It came out pretty  
6 nicely, I must say. It has to be different than the last one  
7 so that was fun.

8           **MS. ALTERMAN:** You're very creative and obviously  
9 that was one of the reasons that drew you to Birmingham  
10 Bloomfield Art Association.

11           **MS. CITRIN:** It was fun. I hung around there a long  
12 time. They said, okay, well, make her the president. I loved  
13 that place. When I first started to have children, I took a  
14 class with Robert. We took pottery. We'd come home  
15 absolutely filthy dirty from the pottery and we'd have to take  
16 off our clothes which was a lot of fun. Maybe you want to cut  
17 that out of the tape, I don't know.

18           Then I started taking painting classes with a fellow  
19 named Robert Wilbert, who was the head of the department at  
20 Wayne. He would teach classes. A lot of artists augment  
21 their incomes by teaching classes there. It gives them  
22 exposure to people who might come to their shows and buy their  
23 works. Today I'm still taking classes from him. He stopped  
24 teaching for a while and then about 30 years later he's  
25 teaching after his retirement. Tuesdays is my hiding place,

1 no one can find me because I take his class and I paint.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Didn't you have some professional  
3 input there also?

4 **MS. CITRIN:** It's interesting. From you I learned  
5 how to do archives, so I've been working on their archives.  
6 We're going to have a 50th anniversary celebration in 2007 so  
7 we're working toward getting the archives in shape. It's in  
8 pretty good shape. I'm very proud. Thanks to you and your  
9 tutelage I was able to get it into some semblance, 50 years of  
10 stuff.

11 I was president and my job was to get it through the  
12 building process. I have to brag that I know about every nook  
13 and cranny in that building. It's built on an old water  
14 treatment plant site. It has some huge tanks on the property  
15 which we're going to excavate and make into classrooms,  
16 actually the back buildings which we just completed a few  
17 years ago. They're actually built on huge water tanks as the  
18 foundation. They didn't have to lay any foundation, they just  
19 built the building on top of the tanks. It's been an  
20 interesting experience.

21 There's always exhibitions going on. It's neat  
22 seeing some of the kids' art work. Classes in jewelry,  
23 pottery, sculpture, you name it. Now they have the Eisenhower  
24 Dance Company there. People dancing, people creating. You  
25 get stimulated by all the art work that's just hanging there



1 and realize the exciting thing about the human mind and what  
2 it can do. It's fun.

3 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Among your many honors you received  
4 the Heart of Gold --

5 **MS. CITRIN:** I was going to wear it all today.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** -- and you also received an honor  
7 from the Jewish Historical Society, the Leonard M. Simons  
8 Jewish History Award.

9 **MS. CITRIN:** I wish I would have known Leonard  
10 Simons. He had a real vision. When you see somebody like  
11 that, they're an inspiration that he had this vision for an  
12 archives and that he knew of the importance of preserving.  
13 Now I know that, but at the time I didn't realize how  
14 important these documents are. Even these wonderful tapes  
15 that we're doing. I've been privileged to be in some of the  
16 tapes. You really learn from your elders and what they have  
17 to teach, their visions and what they went through in order to  
18 be the people that they are.

19 I think the archives are incredibly important. I'm  
20 glad we did this project because I think that hopefully 40  
21 years from now -- I mean we have some old tapes that we're  
22 looking at from somebody who did them a few years ago.  
23 Hopefully 40 years from now we'll look at those same tapes and  
24 say this is really neat. This is a little snapshot of what  
25 was happening at the time and how it got to be here. If you

1 look at 1900, and you look at the Jewish community, there  
2 probably were a few chaders and a few kosher caterers. Now  
3 when you look at our Jewish community a century later, in  
4 2005, all the wonderful agencies we have, camps.

5           And there are things that we don't have. We used to  
6 have a hospital, but we don't have it anymore. I think  
7 archives are so important. I know you're working on the Sinai  
8 collection from our once Jewish hospital. I think people will  
9 understand it's very hard to close up an agency. Usually  
10 communities don't do that. The agencies just keep going and  
11 going until I don't know what. We've actually closed  
12 agencies, closed Borman Hall.

13           Things are different. The way we care for our  
14 elderly is so different today than it was 100 years ago. My  
15 grandmother I remember was in the old folk's home near Dexter  
16 and Davison. As a kid I remember visiting her. It wasn't a  
17 medical facility, just a place where older people lived. Now,  
18 today, we have a whole panorama and rainbow of services that  
19 we offer elderly people depending on what they need. It's not  
20 just a little building there and put them in there. There are  
21 people who are thinking about this and planning for this.

22           I know we're doing a new demographic study. I was  
23 involved in the demographic study a few years ago. It was  
24 amazing to see how many Jews we actually had in our community  
25 and how things are changing. They have inter-married. How

1 are we going to approach all of these problems? I hope I'm  
2 around for another 100 years so I can see what the Jewish  
3 community is going to be like. It's really fascinating.

4 We started out with nothing. A few shuls, a few  
5 chaders, boys were bar mitzvahed but not girls. God forbid a  
6 girl have a bas mitzvah. It's just amazing. We have women  
7 rabbis. I'm describing something everybody knows, but it's  
8 amazing especially in Detroit. In Israel they've heard about  
9 Detroit. When you meet people from the general community at  
10 large in the United States, they know about Detroit. Detroit  
11 is the example of what ought to be. We've made a few  
12 mistakes, but I think we have some incredible things happening  
13 in this community and continue to happen. I feel privileged  
14 to be a member of this community.

15 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you've also taken leadership  
16 roles as campaign chair, working on the endowment fund.  
17 What's your message when you go out to solicit?

18 **MS. CITRIN:** I'm so involved in Hillel of Metro  
19 Detroit because I went to Wayne. Having come from Ferndale, I  
20 realize how important it is for young Jewish people to find a  
21 spot some place. A lot of people at Hillel of Detroit are  
22 people in med school, very few under graduate students any  
23 more. That's a change in our community. We have I think more  
24 Jewish professors at Wayne than we have Jewish students, but  
25 they're all scattered all over this community. It's neat if

1 you're the person that can provide for them the Shabat  
2 dinners, plays, make mezuzahs for the old folks at Fleischman.  
3 If you could be part of that, what a neat thing.

4 I'm active in BBYO. What did I know? I get  
5 vicarious thrills out of going to BBYO meetings. There's over  
6 1000 kids that belong to this organization. Maybe there's  
7 another person like me in there who will just love to be part  
8 of the community.

9 **MS. ALTERMAN:** This is a wonderful interview because  
10 you're so enthusiastic. I think a lot of things that you say  
11 we can pick up as a message.

12 Who are some of the people you remember on those  
13 trips to Israel?

14 **MS. CITRIN:** As I mentioned, Ruthie Broder. She's  
15 been a long time friend. Larry Jackier. They've all been  
16 long time friends because we all marched around together in  
17 all sorts of foreign lands.

18 I think the one person that sticks out of my mind  
19 that I always wanted to emulate was David Hermlin. We were  
20 on the first Michigan Miracle Mission and Bob Aronson had this  
21 incredible idea to take as many people as he could cram into  
22 three airplanes. We took 1284 people on that first mission.  
23 In spite of the fact that David had a lot of positions and he  
24 was chair of ORT and head of this mission. We were co-chairs,  
25 Conrad Giles and myself and Larry Jackier and Jean Sherman. I

1 felt I was in the presence of someone who was very, very  
2 talented and special in the way he dealt with people.

3           On the mission I used to handle the lost and found  
4 every day and remind people who's sweater is this and who left  
5 their hat at breakfast. Every morning at the hotel he would  
6 just get people so enthusiastic. He'd be the crowd pleaser,  
7 raising spirits, making jokes. Everybody loved him. He had  
8 this special talent. I don't think you see that in very many  
9 people.

10           Doreen is so lovely and she was a wonderful  
11 compliment to him. I remember going to see them in Norway  
12 just before he got sick. We were so tired when we got off the  
13 plane. He had kosher hot dogs and french fries that he made  
14 himself. Then the next day we were invited back, the whole  
15 group was, Ben and Marty Rosenthal were there, Larry and  
16 Eleanor Jackier, Michael Horowitz, a whole host of us. We all  
17 went to the home again and the whole place had been  
18 transformed and he had other groups there. It felt so warm.  
19 They had taken out all the couches and furniture and put  
20 tables. There were maybe 150 people that Doreen served dinner  
21 to. She's always so gracious and kind.

22           I remember we went to another dinner and he was  
23 doing another group from another city. It was at a hotel and  
24 the singer hadn't shown up for the entertainment and he  
25 literally got up and started singing what he said was his and

1 Doreen's love song and he started singing (I don't know the  
2 song). When the actual entertainment came, they didn't want  
3 to hear them. They were willing to listen to David because he  
4 was so humorous. I think this community really misses him.

5 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Several other things that you have  
6 participated in that have had a real impact on this community  
7 and one is the SAJE program.

8 **MS. CITRIN:** Yes. Seminars on Adult Jewish  
9 Enrichment. As I said for me this was one of the most  
10 important things that I felt I was involved in. My friend  
11 Sharon Hart with Irwin Alterman were the originators of this  
12 program. They had seen this program in Atlanta called Jewish  
13 U or something like that. They sort of copied the footprint  
14 of the program but it was just once a year give adults in the  
15 community three or four week courses in anything you could  
16 imagine from Jewish cooking to the Kaballah. We got the  
17 rabbis to teach the classes.

18 For me it was so much fun to work on this. Jewish  
19 education for adults is so important. I didn't have any  
20 Jewish education at all, but for people who did who were my  
21 age they always have some bitterness or they didn't like it or  
22 wanted to quit. They only did it to get through the bar  
23 mitzvah. Here we are once again giving three nights a week  
24 different classes each night for four weeks. It was fun to  
25 plan the programs and get all the rabbis and teachers to

1 participate. We'd have cake and coffee in between classes  
2 where people got together. That was almost as important as  
3 the classes themselves. They felt they belonged to a  
4 particular group.

5           We discovered that a lot of people that took the  
6 SAJE class weren't affiliated with temples or synagogues.  
7 Many of them went on to Melton, which is the Federation's  
8 year-long program for Jewish education. And so even today in  
9 2005 we have about 100 people that are signed up for the fall  
10 and I would say at least half of those took SAJE classes. It  
11 was like an entre for people who were afraid of Jewish  
12 education or had a bad experience or no Jewish education at  
13 all. Suddenly they're taking classes and they're saying, this  
14 is really nice. I understand it now. When I was 10 years  
15 old, it didn't seem so great, but now I enjoy doing this. In  
16 the past we've had 600 or 700 people sign up for classes.

17           We're changing the program a little this year so  
18 we're going to have SAJE For All Seasons and try to have the  
19 classes year-round so people if they want to can get a  
20 dabbling of Jewish education. It's interesting because I  
21 thought it would be the same people to sign up year after  
22 year. It's not. We get people that we've never seen before.  
23 I would say only a small percentage are repeaters. We have  
24 people who say, I can take a class, isn't that neat. I can  
25 come to the Jewish Center and take a class with other Jewish

1 people and reconnect. It's been terrific.

2           The other thing I do is with Anita Naftaly, I've  
3 been chair -- see I hang on as chair for a long time as you  
4 know. With archives I'm there for a lifetime. I'm a lifer.  
5 But Anita is incredible. Like yourself she's just the  
6 consummate professional and she does work with kids with  
7 special needs. A few years back some people in the community  
8 looked and said there are kids in this community who are not  
9 coming to after school programs at the synagogues or temples  
10 or they're not attending Jewish day schools because they have  
11 special needs. We have not addressed their situations and how  
12 we can welcome them. We have 23 teachers in all of the  
13 different after school and day school programs and they kind  
14 of shadow the kids. You would think that they were just a  
15 helper in the classroom but they are young women who have  
16 special ed degrees. We don't have any men. It would be nice  
17 but we don't have them. They help those special needs kids  
18 get through the religious programs. This past year we helped  
19 over 700 and we think this year it's going to be about 800  
20 kids.

21           One of the new things we started was an early  
22 childhood recognition of kids with special needs. In the  
23 preschool we're looking at kids who are two and three years  
24 old who are going to Shaarey Zedek or Temple Israel and we're  
25 identifying them and trying to help them early. What happens



1 is they may have dyslexia, they might have mild case of  
2 autism, if we can catch that early, then we help them to avoid  
3 the stigma later on of being different in a classroom. If we  
4 catch it early, it's oftentimes retrainable and we can help  
5 them through it. If you don't catch it early, then when  
6 they're 10 years old it's very sad but they have all sorts of  
7 other social problems. They have emotional problems because  
8 they're not accepted. They're just different, they learn  
9 differently. It's very exciting. I'm the chairman that  
10 oversees those teachers and that program.

11           Then we have an adjunct committee called Family  
12 Circle Committee and we have programs for the parents. As you  
13 can imagine every Jewish parent wants to have the perfect  
14 child and then suddenly this child is born and you notice that  
15 the child is a little different, needs help in different areas  
16 that oftentimes parents aren't able to know about. So we have  
17 these special programs and we invite experts to come in to  
18 talk with the parents. It's very satisfying. I see Anita  
19 constantly barraged with questions from parents who just want  
20 to know everything. Are they giving their child the right  
21 medication? Do they have them in the right setting for  
22 school? Is there something else they could be doing for them  
23 after school? We provide those programs that bring in an  
24 expert that deals with kids with special needs.

25           We're doing one in November on my birthday that's

1 called The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystanders. Sometimes  
2 as bystanders we enable the bully to have his power. It's  
3 going to be interesting. I guess I'm in a daze all the time,  
4 amazed by everything that I'm involved in. It's just really  
5 learning with archives, special needs, Jewish education. It's  
6 a good rich life.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** There are so many positive things  
8 that are happening in this community. What do you think are  
9 our problems and critical needs?

10 **MS. CITRIN:** I'm a member of Birmingham Temple, so  
11 in our temple we have a number of people who are inter-  
12 married. I know that our rabbis believe that when a couple  
13 comes to you and they say that they want to get married,  
14 they've already decided that and it's hard to ask the person  
15 who's not Jewish to negate all that they've learned throughout  
16 their life. Our rabbis don't insist but strongly suggest that  
17 they take this two-year program that I took. The first year  
18 is Jewish philosophy and the second year is the history of the  
19 Jews. In the philosophy part they teach them how to celebrate  
20 Jewish holidays and the beauty of the rituals that we have.

21 Oftentimes after that there's a commitment ceremony.  
22 It's a conversion but not a conversion in the traditional  
23 sense. Some Jews may not feel comfortable with what we do but  
24 we do have a number of couples who come regularly. In fact  
25 our immediate past president was someone who wasn't Jewish,

1 named Sims. He wasn't Jewish and he became the president of  
2 our temple because he and his wife decided that this is where  
3 they wanted to be and their children to be. I think maybe  
4 there might be some adjustment and just like we have female  
5 rabbis and female cantors where we never had them before,  
6 maybe some people will change and understand what's happening  
7 at the Birmingham Temple.

8 I feel like I belong there because I didn't have the  
9 Jewish upbringing. They said for me to go there and take  
10 their classes. It's a cultural historical approach to  
11 Judaism. There's other organizations like that. Rabbi Wine  
12 has had a great impact but there's always been the Workmen's  
13 Circle and Jewish Parents Institute. I think when you look at  
14 our population, I don't know what the new study is going to  
15 show, but the old demographic study there were 40 percent who  
16 were affiliated, 60 percent who are not with any synagogue or  
17 temple. Where are those 60 percent? They said we had 96,000  
18 people in this Jewish community. There's about 50,000 people  
19 that are not affiliated in any way.

20 I think we have to be hopefully creative as we've  
21 been in other areas. Look at the way we care for our elderly  
22 that we didn't do before, and the special needs kids. I think  
23 it's going to come to reaching out to a non-Jewish community  
24 and embracing them in a different way than we've done before.

25 I don't know what the answer is. Hopefully if we're

1 around 50 years from now we'll look back and say we went  
2 through a transition, just like we've done in other areas.  
3 We've changed, become more accepting. I think it's going to  
4 be an interesting time.

5 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Susie, we're coming to the end of our  
6 interview. I want to ask you if there's anything that I have  
7 forgotten to ask.

8 **MS. CITRIN:** No. I just want to mention my husband.  
9 If I don't mention him, I'm in deep doo doo. He's such a nice  
10 even tempered fellow. I don't know how I got him. Pulled the  
11 wool over his eyes. We have a lot of fun together. I  
12 couldn't do what I do without his support and he's very active  
13 also. Very quietly, but he does his Hebrew Free Loan, he  
14 taught english to newcomers. He delivers meals for Yad Ezra.  
15 He just wants to do something nice every so often. I have to  
16 thank him.

17 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Do you have a message for either the  
18 community or your family?

19 **MS. CITRIN:** Oh, my goodness. For my family, move  
20 back home so I can see you. That's another problem. In this  
21 Jewish community we make it so wonderful the world out there  
22 is a candy land. We send our kids away to school, to New  
23 York, to live out the big adventure then they're not here. I  
24 miss them sometimes. We talk to each other every day  
25 practically and we have a lot of fun but I do wish they lived

1 around the corner so I could see them more often.

2 Any message for the community, I don't know. As I  
3 said, this community is just such an incredible community and  
4 it has a reputation globally for its creative stuff that it  
5 does. I want to be around for a long time so that I can see  
6 all the good stuff that's going to happen.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** I certainly hope you are. Thank you  
8 so much for all of your wisdom.

9 **MS. CITRIN:** This was so much fun. I didn't know I  
10 could talk this long.