

1 **ORAL HISTORY OF:** Ellen Labes
2 **INTERVIEWED BY:** Ruth Broder
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4 **LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Jewish Federation
5 **SUBJECT MATTER:** personal and family history,
6 leadership roles, role of women,
7 president of Women's Division

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9 **MS. BRODER:** This is Ruth Broder. I'm conducting an
10 oral history interview with Ellen Labes. This is the 3rd day
11 of August, 2005, and we are at the Max M. Fisher Federation
12 Building.

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

16 **MS. LABES:** Yes.

17 **MS. BRODER:** Thank you. You've made significant
18 contributions to our community and I'm looking forward to
19 discussing some of them with you today in this interview.
20 Before we get to those important things, let's talk about your
21 family. The first question I ask you is halfway rude; when
22 and where were you born?

23 **MS. LABES:** I was born in Detroit, Michigan, May
24 1st, 1933 at Women's Hospital. It's no longer called that.

25 **MS. BRODER:** Who were your parents?

1 **MS. LABES:** My parents were Ethel and Sidney G.
2 Sherman, although my dad preferred to be called Sid.

3 **MS. BRODER:** Who were your grandparents, both sets?

4 **MS. LABES:** My paternal grandparents were Hiah and
5 Himleb Sherman, and my maternal grandparents were Mary and
6 Mayer Jacobson.

7 **MS. BRODER:** Were they all born abroad, or were some
8 of them born here?

9 **MS. LABES:** None of them were born in the United
10 States. My paternal grandparents came from Riga. My paternal
11 grandparents came from a place they referred to as Corland,
12 which I learned was part of the Baltic area. So chances are
13 they came from an area very close to Riga.

14 My parents came from Bay City, Michigan, and Bay
15 City was the in-gathering area for the Jews who had left Riga.
16 There was somebody who set up their residence there and the
17 others followed. All four ended up in Bay City. All of their
18 roots were in Eastern Europe.

19 **MS. BRODER:** When did your parents come to Detroit?

20 **MS. LABES:** Probably in the late '20s, although I
21 don't think my father moved to Detroit until he and my mother
22 were married. My mother came here with her widowed mother to
23 teach school. She was a physical education teacher. As they
24 were childhood sweethearts because they grew up together in
25 this very small Jewish community, eventually my dad followed

1 and they were married in Detroit by Rabbi Hirshman in 1931.

2 **MS. BRODER:** How many of us have that same history.

3 **MS. LABES:** Right.

4 **MS. BRODER:** Where did you live growing up?

5 **MS. LABES:** My first home I don't remember. It was
6 on the west side of Detroit. We lived on Calvert in a flat,
7 and when I was six and my brother was three we moved to
8 Northlawn, which is in the northwest section of Detroit.

9 **MS. BRODER:** So what school did you go to?

10 **MS. LABES:** John J. Bagley.

11 **MS. BRODER:** Did you then stay in that area your
12 whole growing-up period?

13 **MS. LABES:** My entire youth and young adulthood was
14 spent in the house on Northlawn. The year I was married my
15 parents moved to that brand new suburb where everybody was
16 going, Southfield, Michigan. In 1956 they moved across the
17 street from Shaarey Zedek.

18 **MS. BRODER:** So if you went to Bagley, then where?

19 **MS. LABES:** Durfee and Central. This was before the
20 days of Mumford. I chose to go to Durfee rather than Post
21 because there was a larger Jewish population at Durfee.

22 **MS. BRODER:** Then you graduated from Central High
23 School?

24 **MS. LABES:** Yes.

25 **MS. BRODER:** That was a good trek from your house.

1 **MS. LABES:** Yes. We all took buses.

2 **MS. BRODER:** Busing was not an issue.

3 **MS. LABES:** Busing was not an issue. They were not
4 school buses, they were DSR buses. We paid a fee to take the
5 DSR bus.

6 **MS. BRODER:** Where did you go to religious school?

7 **MS. LABES:** Temple Beth-El, from which I was
8 confirmed. My parents were members there for 40 years until
9 they moved to Florida.

10 **MS. BRODER:** What is your earliest Jewish memory?

11 **MS. LABES:** So many things. Learning about the
12 holidays in religious school, that beautiful sanctuary at
13 Temple Beth-El, the old Woodward and Gladstone building.
14 Going every Sunday and Saturday school. As far as personal
15 recollections go, we used to visit my grandmother quite often
16 because she remained in Bay City, and there was always a
17 strong Jewish presence there. It was so much fun to visit
18 Grandma.

19 **MS. BRODER:** Where did you do the holidays?

20 **MS. LABES:** In Detroit.

21 **MS. BRODER:** Did she come down to you ever?

22 **MS. LABES:** No, not that I recall. She still had
23 children and grandchildren who lived in Bay City, so it was
24 very comfortable for her to remain there. But she would come
25 to visit when one of her children would bring her. She was

1 really from the old country and delightful.

2 **MS. BRODER:** Where'd you go to college?

3 **MS. LABES:** University of Michigan.

4 **MS. BRODER:** Did you graduate from Michigan?

5 **MS. LABES:** I graduated from Michigan with a
6 bachelor music degree with a major in piano. I'll bet you
7 didn't know that.

8 **MS. BRODER:** I didn't know that.

9 **MS. LABES:** And Jim and I were married in June of
10 1956.

11 **MS. BRODER:** You have how many children?

12 **MS. LABES:** Three.

13 **MS. BRODER:** Their names?

14 **MS. LABES:** Susan, who lives in Reading,
15 Pennsylvania, with her family. Robert who lives in Cleveland
16 with his family, and Daniel who's here.

17 **MS. BRODER:** Tell me about their families, which
18 means grandchildren.

19 **MS. LABES:** Coincidentally and fortunately each of
20 our children has a boy and a girl.

21 **MS. BRODER:** Very good planning.

22 **MS. LABES:** Well, leave it to an obstetrician.

23 **MS. BRODER:** Which would be your husband.

24 **MS. LABES:** Which would be my husband. Jim Labes.

25 **MS. BRODER:** Did you have a career after college or

1 did you get married right away?

2 **MS. LABES:** After I graduated from college, I met
3 Jim at the University of Michigan. We became what was then
4 known as pinned. I moved to Chicago, which is where he was
5 from. He was in medical school at the time. I worked for
6 Encyclopedia Britannica.

7 **MS. BRODER:** Did you go door to door?

8 **MS. LABES:** No. I worked in their sales promotion
9 office and I also worked in their editorial office. Prior to
10 that I worked for McCann Erickson, the ad agency. Four years
11 later our first child was born, so I stopped working and
12 became a stay-at-home mom.

13 **MS. BRODER:** When did you come back to Detroit?

14 **MS. LABES:** 1965.

15 **MS. BRODER:** You didn't use your music in your
16 career then?

17 **MS. LABES:** I did not. It was very impractical but
18 a marvelous thing to study.

19 **MS. BRODER:** Let's move on into your community work,
20 which there is a lot of, and we'll cover as much as we can.
21 Did you do anything in the Jewish community in Chicago?

22 **MS. LABES:** I didn't. We left Chicago when our
23 daughter was two and our son was two months and Jim went into
24 the Army. He was under what was known as the Barry Plan that
25 the Army used to have, which allowed a doctor to finish his

1 residency, and after that he had to repay the armed services,
2 so we knew we would be going. Jim was stationed at Fort
3 Justice, Virginia. He was an officer, so he was allowed to
4 bring his family. We were there for two years and then we
5 moved to Detroit, at which time we had had our third child.

6 I was very involved in our Jewish community on the
7 post. There were 12 Jewish couples, all of the men were
8 professionals, either doctors or dentists. We had a Jewish
9 chaplain and we had a sisterhood in which I was involved, all
10 12 of us, and we held services for the high holidays. It was
11 a close-knit Jewish community if you could call it that. We
12 had a minyan and there were one or two Jewish enlisted men who
13 would attend the holiday services. It was like a very small
14 town. It was fun.

15 **MS. BRODER:** When you came back to Detroit, you
16 became involved in community affairs. You go back a long way,
17 into the '70s. How did you get involved? What was the
18 impetus that got you involved? Did somebody bring you in?
19 Did you have mentors? How did it start?

20 **MS. LABES:** Actually my first involvement was at our
21 children's elementary school. I became a room mother and I
22 joined the PTA. I was a library volunteer and eventually I
23 became president of the Leonard School PTA. Very interesting.

24 A neighbor of mine in the early '70s told me about
25 something called Phone A Gift, calls made by women to women to

1 raise funds for the Allied Jewish Campaign, which was run by
2 the Jewish Welfare Federation. I thought, well, my kids are
3 in school full time, I'd like to do something in the
4 community. I went to a session which was held at the Labor
5 Zionist Alliance Building on Ten Mile west of Greenfield. I
6 doubt the building is still there. I got hooked.

7 It was either that year or the following year Jim
8 and I went on our first mission to Israel. We were part of a
9 national young leadership mission. We'd just made the cutoff
10 date for age. The only other couple from here was Penny and
11 Harold Blumenstein.

12 **MS. BRODER:** That was probably their first trip,
13 too.

14 **MS. LABES:** Probably.

15 **MS. BRODER:** What year would that have been?

16 **MS. LABES:** '71 or '72. That totally hooked me,
17 that first trip. It was just phenomenal.

18 **MS. BRODER:** What made you go on the trip? Did
19 somebody enlist you to go on it?

20 **MS. LABES:** I cannot remember the details, but we
21 must have had some idea that we wanted to visit Israel. We
22 certainly knew about Israel. We had the opportunity to go and
23 we said why not. It was the trip that opened our eyes. We
24 had made one or two prior trips to Europe, but this was our
25 first to Israel. It profoundly affected both of us in a very

1 positive way.

2 **MS. BRODER:** One of the major positions that you had
3 was president of the Women's Division. And I say division,
4 because in those days that's what it was, and that's what
5 comes to my tongue more easily. You certainly worked your way
6 up to that. You must have done a lot of things before you got
7 to that point. What were your early jobs in the Women's
8 Division? And then let's talk about the presidency.

9 **MS. LABES:** I know I was involved with what was then
10 called Spring Forum Institute. I continued to work on Phone a
11 Gift. It was so long ago, Ruthie, that I don't know whether
12 or not I was chairperson of those events. I may have been. I
13 did fund-raising, too.

14 I will say that my first love is education because I
15 don't think one can be an effective fund-raiser unless one has
16 the education to know why you are asking for support. I was
17 an education vice-president for three years. Through a stroke
18 of luck I was asked to be president. My predecessor served
19 only one year, Jane Sherman. She took it only on condition
20 she would serve only one year. She was very interested in
21 National UJA work. I was nominated to be president and it was
22 a wonderful two years.

23 **MS. BRODER:** Talk a little about it. What were your
24 visions, what do you think different happened while you were
25 president? Did new things get started?

ms. Broder

1 **MS. BRODER:** The one thing I recall that really was
2 strengthened, what was called the Business and Professional
3 Women's Division, which we no longer have. It was sort of
4 foundering because so many women were going back to work, the
5 Division thought there should be a niche for working women.
6 It was called the Working Women's Division. I said let's call
7 it the Business and Professional Women's Division. For a
8 while it was very successful and reached out to a lot of women
9 who couldn't attend daytime functions and who were running or
10 working in a business and had a family, but they wanted to be
11 part of the community, and we let that happen.

12 I think the greatest thing that ever happened was
13 all the wonderful women I've met and able to work with. How
14 everybody had the single goal of supporting our campaign and
15 supporting our Federation, and the emphasis on quality
16 programs and emphasis on fund-raising with a certain amount of
17 gentleness, which I think is necessary, how to go about it,
18 training volunteers to do this, becoming part of the
19 community. It was a wonderful experience.

20 If I can say this delicately, in the early years of
21 Women's Division I believe that most of the presidents came
22 from the German Jewish community, a community of wealth.
23 There was a certain aura, if you will, about Federation, the
24 Women's Division, being the president. I think with my
25 election it widened the choice so to speak. I think it was

1 for the better, I really do.

2 **MS. BRODER:** You've told what the Women's Division
3 was in the past and how you began to see some of the changes.
4 How much do you think it has changed now it's been 20 years?
5 I think maybe it might be a different Women's Division again.
6 Do you think it has changed and in what ways?

7 **MS. LABES:** I really don't see definitive changes
8 because we always encourage younger women to participate. I
9 see a lot of younger women now, which is just wonderful. We
10 still have the same goals. I don't think we have enough
11 emphasis on education as we used to do. I would like to see
12 that change because I still think it's important. Of course
13 the goals of our fund-raising in actuality have increased
14 unbelievably and we've always been successful. So obviously
15 we're doing something right. But an organization shouldn't
16 stay stagnant, and I don't think the Women's Department, which
17 is what it's now called, will ever be stagnant. But it had
18 always had a reputation, as did Federation, by the rest of the
19 community that it was an elitist and is an elitist
20 organization. It is far from that. Federation welcomes
21 everybody. I think with the diverse board we have now we're
22 seeing that. It's wonderful.

23 **MS. BRODER:** It certainly is more open these years
24 to the Orthodox community.

25 **MS. LABES:** Absolutely. Which is what we have to

1 do. They have to be a part of us and we need that community.
2 They have to understand that we're for them as well. I think
3 slowly it's happening.

4 **MS. BRODER:** Let's talk a bit about the women moving
5 into the Federation as a whole. We used to call it the Men's
6 Division and we don't want to do that. I think there have
7 been big changes there. Can you talk about that a little bit,
8 how the women have moved up.

9 **MS. LABES:** Well, up until the last few years I
10 don't think there was ever a woman who was co-chair of the
11 campaign. I can't remember if it was Jane Sherman or Florine
12 Mark or Susie Citrin, but now as far as I can remember within
13 the last 10 years there has always been a woman that's co-
14 chair of the general campaign, which I think is absolutely
15 necessary. We've had one woman president, and I am so proud
16 of Penny, but I think there should be more. Not because we
17 should have a woman because she's a woman, we have very bright
18 capable women in our community and as we're told over and over
19 again, women control and have access to vast sums of money.
20 It's not only the monied group that we have to get, which is
21 important, because to be a leader, you've got to lead in that
22 also. But we have great talent in our community, and I think
23 sometimes Federation is missing the boat by not tapping more
24 women in executive lay positions or in executive professional
25 positions. Absolutely.

1 **MS. BRODER:** It is coming and it's certainly a lot
2 better.

3 **MS. LABES:** Slowly. Everything moves slowly here
4 but it will happen. We have women who are vice-presidents of
5 Federation and hopefully they're on the inside track, so to
6 speak. It's not the gender of the person it's the capability.
7 And I think that the capabilities of women have to be called
8 to the attention of those who put the candidates in line.

9 **MS. BRODER:** You have been on the board of
10 governors.

11 **MS. LABES:** I have been.

12 **MS. BRODER:** How did you find that experience?

13 **MS. LABES:** The absolute truth?

14 **MS. BRODER:** Yes.

15 **MS. LABES:** It's a rubber stamp. The executive
16 committee makes all the decisions. Now, I haven't sat on the
17 board of governors in the past four or five years. I don't
18 know if things have changed. With each new administration I
19 would hope that it changed, but all of the major decisions are
20 made by the officers, the executive committee and they're
21 brought to the board of governors for approval, but it's a
22 foregone conclusion that whatever they suggest and support,
23 that will be done. It's a big body and I don't know how more
24 democratically it could be run, but it has to be changed.

25 **MS. BRODER:** Have you ever been at a board of

1 governors meeting where there's ever been any kind of a brou-
2 ha-ha for lack of a better word, about decisions that were
3 made? Has that ever happened in your experience?

4 **MS. LABES:** Not in my experience. And again, I sat
5 on the board I think twice. One as a representative from the
6 Women's Department. Of course when I was president 20 years
7 ago I sat on the board and most recently it was in the late
8 '90s. But I cannot remember when anything was overturned by
9 the board of governors that the officers hadn't already
10 decided.

11 **MS. BRODER:** Education I always thought was your
12 first love.

13 **MS. LABES:** It is.

14 **MS. BRODER:** I know you've had important jobs in
15 campaigning, too. I think you were chair of the Lion of
16 Judah, were you not?

17 **MS. LABES:** A while ago yes.

18 **MS. BRODER:** You were the chair of the Days of
19 Decision.

20 **MS. LABES:** Yes. With Irwin Alterman, yes.

21 **MS. BRODER:** Involved with Phone a Gift.

22 **MS. LABES:** Every year. I was never chair but I'm
23 always here. It's no longer called Phone a Gift but for the
24 telethons, yes.

25 **MS. BRODER:** Talk a little bit about the Lion of

1 Judah, just so we have the history of what it is.

2 **MS. LABES:** The Lion of Judah is a national women's
3 organization affiliated with the United Jewish Appeal where
4 women who give a minimum of \$5,000 automatically are part of
5 this national organization. I believe it's very strong in
6 Detroit. I remember the whole conversation in our city when
7 it was debated whether or not Detroit should adopt the lion
8 pin. There's a gold pin in the shape of a lion that most
9 probably all major cities which have this division use. It's
10 a badge of honor. It's also an enticement to women who like
11 the lion, but they have to earn it so they have to pledge a
12 minimum of \$5,000.

13 That meeting about whether or not we should adopt
14 the Lion of Judah pin was probably one of the most debated
15 issues that I can remember in the Women's Department. It was
16 ultimately decided that Detroit should have the pin available
17 to those who wish to have it. You pay for that separately.
18 Each year should you desire that you continue with your pledge
19 or increase it, you can add a small diamond to the paws of the
20 lion. Some women do, some do not. When you get to the Ruby
21 Lion of Judah, which is a gift of 10,000 and above, you are
22 given a ruby which is put in the pin. It's done I think in a
23 very tasteful manner. A lot of women like to wear it to
24 identify themselves with the national organization. As I
25 said, I think it's been a tremendous success.

1 I will admit, I was one of the ones who felt that we
2 don't need a piece of jewelry. If I were to have a piece of
3 jewelry, I certainly wouldn't want one that hundreds of other
4 women had. And that we could get our women in Detroit to
5 pledge that amount of money without their needing a piece of
6 jewelry. I was proven wrong and I admit it because it's been
7 a wonderful tool.

8 **MS. BRODER:** I'm smiling because I was at that same
9 meeting and spoke against it, I think vociferously at the
10 time. I wouldn't do that again because it went against what
11 the majority of the women wanted, but the minority does every
12 once in a while get its voice heard.

13 **MS. LABES:** It was a good meeting.

14 **MS. BRODER:** I had the same objections that we in
15 Detroit don't need incentives to give money. I thought we
16 were above it.

17 **MS. LABES:** That's what my feeling was. You and I
18 were wrong. Our differences of opinion with the majority and
19 the majority wins. That's how it is and it's proved to be
20 very successful.

21 **MS. BRODER:** That's interesting. I'm glad to be
22 able to talk about it. I think I've held it in a lot of
23 years.

24 Let's talk about some of the other things you've
25 done in the Women's Division or with Federation. As I said,

1 education was really your great love and one of the things you
2 were very involved in was COJES. I think that's probably
3 ongoing.

4 **MS. LABES:** Absolutely.

5 **MS. BRODER:** Explain what COJES is and talk about it
6 because it's quite a wonderful committee.

7 **MS. LABES:** I would love to. COJES stands for the
8 Commission on Jewish Eldercare Services. It's a consortium of
9 those Federation agencies which provide service to the older
10 adults in our community. We all realize that our population
11 is aging and hopefully they're aging healthier. As they age
12 their needs for increased independent living are seen. Bob
13 Naftaly, who was president at the time, I think it was 1996,
14 came up with the idea, I'm sure with input from other
15 professionals in the Federation, that we form this commission
16 of agencies who would work together rather than competitively
17 to bring to this particular community, which is getting larger
18 and larger, those much needed services.

19 I became the co-chair in 1996 and Michael Pearlman
20 was the chairperson. In 1999 I became chair and John Jacobs
21 was my co-chair. We had a number of different subcommittees
22 formed. We had and have a wonderful board made up of lay and
23 professional people. Because of this consortium and the
24 agencies working together, we've been able to expand and
25 enhance the services that we can provide to our older adults.

1 Seeing as I'm getting to be one of them, I wanted to be in on
2 the ground floor.

3 We provide much needed transportation. We provide
4 in-home support with homemaking and medication reminders. We
5 partner and have partnered with the National Council of Jewish
6 Women for over 30 years in Meals on Wheels, which is not only
7 for the elderly but would certainly serve the elderly. We
8 have a guardianship program for the frail adults who have
9 nobody in the world in this community and who are at the hands
10 of perhaps guardians who have little or no interest in them.
11 We have a chaplaincy program. We have a number of programs
12 that really allow older adults to remain independent for as
13 long as they can. And should the time come when they go into
14 assisted living or a nursing home, these programs still
15 continue, transportation still continues.

16 I am so proud of COJES and I know that several
17 communities throughout the country have looked to Detroit for
18 guidance in setting up similar programs in their communities.
19 We have a lot farther to go because the needs are always
20 greater than the services we can provide and we know that.
21 Our community has been very generous financially in enabling
22 the different programs to take off and expand. But it's
23 ongoing and it's superb.

24 **MS. BRODER:** This is one need that certainly isn't
25 going to go away.

1 **MS. LABES:** It's not going to go away and it's
2 certainly going to increase. We can be very proud of this.

3 **MS. BRODER:** Have you had any community forums,
4 programs or anything to bring to the community at large what
5 you're doing to educate the community at large?

6 **MS. LABES:** We did. We used to have forums. What
7 we wanted to do was to encourage adult children of the elderly
8 to look for assistance before it was needed. Because when
9 it's needed, it's too late because of the numbers of people
10 who need our services, and there's just so many spots that can
11 be filled.

12 The forums met with less than successful return.
13 Many professionals attended, which is good, to get the word
14 out, but we haven't had a forum in a long time because I think
15 a lot of adult kids hesitate to face up to that decision that
16 they have to make for their elderly parents about whether or
17 not it's time to see that they move into another kind of
18 environment, whether it's time to ask for help from the
19 community. And as I said, often they wait till it's almost
20 too late.

21 **MS. BRODER:** When they get pushed to it then they --

22 **MS. LABES:** Then they have to make a decision
23 quickly and it's a shame. I have a neighbor who had to go
24 into an assisted living facility and I believe according to
25 her caregiver that it must have been a very rapid decision.

1 She's out in some facility in Sterling Heights. I said, why
2 there? That's where she could get in. It's a crying shame.

3 **MS. BRODER:** Away from the Jewish community.

4 **MS. LABES:** Away from the Jewish community. She's
5 Jewish, she's been living in the community. She has children
6 here. For whatever reason, and this is digressing, but the
7 point being that we've got to plan for these things when we
8 can. You can't always plan. The beauty about COJES is it's
9 not an economic issue. Whoever needs the assistance receives
10 it. Now, those with unlimited financial funds can have round-
11 the-clock care for their elderly parent and they're not faced
12 with the same decisions. But we don't base it on economic
13 need.

14 **MS. BRODER:** Do people come to you and ask about
15 nursing home care insurance and those kinds of things or don't
16 you get that kind of interplay?

17 **MS. LABES:** Sometimes they'll ask.

18 **MS. BRODER:** Now I'm talking about the people that
19 are going to become elderly themselves. I'm not talking about
20 their children.

21 **MS. LABES:** I don't know the answer to that.
22 Sometimes the children will ask for names of nursing homes.
23 COJES can't recommend --

24 **MS. BRODER:** I'm talking about the insurance plans
25 that are out there to help these people that have the money.

1 **MS. LABES:** I don't know if that information has
2 been sought by the COJES department. Do we invest in long-
3 term care; is that what you're talking about?

4 **MS. BRODER:** Yes.

5 **MS. LABES:** I think that's an individual decision.
6 And to my knowledge I don't know if a professional here has
7 ever been consulted and I don't know if it would be
8 appropriate. They could give them information.

9 **MS. BRODER:** That's what I mean.

10 **MS. LABES:** But referrals or recommendations I don't
11 know.

12 **MS. BRODER:** My concern is that that is out there
13 for people to buy and they may not know it.

14 **MS. LABES:** Right. Well, usually if they have any
15 kind of insurance, their insurance person will mention it,
16 hopefully.

17 **MS. BRODER:** The Women's Foundation, fairly recent
18 in our community. I think you were there at the beginning.
19 Let's talk a little about that.

20 **MS. LABES:** The Jewish Women's Foundation is
21 wonderful. It gives grants to programs in our community and
22 in Israel which will enhance the lives of Jewish women and
23 girls. Every year we award grants to seven to ten different
24 local organizations within the Federation and Jewish
25 organization which are not part of the Federation family,

1 which have devised new programs which follow our guidelines,
2 which has never been done before in the community or a program
3 which may have been started. The program that is being
4 represented as a grant has been enhanced in new ways that have
5 never been done before.

6 We've completed three grant cycles and all of the
7 trustees on the Jewish Women's Foundation have an equal voice
8 and equal vote. In order to be a trustee you pledge a minimum
9 of \$10,000 payable over five years. And at the end of the
10 five years you have an opportunity to re-up, as they say in
11 the army or you can have an inter-generational pledge of
12 \$100,000 which would be for a woman, her daughter, daughter-
13 in-law, granddaughters, or a lifetime pledge of \$50,000, which
14 would be for the woman herself.

15 We receive grant applications from all over the
16 city, a few from out-state, and usually two or three from
17 Israel. We select one from Israel. The innovations of these
18 programs have been eye opening. It's a credit to the
19 community, and I'm very proud to be part of the Foundation.
20 The maximum amount that we give in a grant is \$10,000. At the
21 beginning of the cycle we set a limit as to how much we can
22 give. This is interest that is earned on the pledges of the
23 women who are part of the Foundation.

24 Initially the United Jewish Foundation helped us
25 because we were a baby, brand new, and we hadn't worked up to

1 earning any interest yet. So they helped us in our grant
2 cycle for the first two or three years and now we're on our
3 own. We're flying. It's thrilling.

4 We give three or four educational programs a year,
5 which are open to the general community at which we certainly
6 try to encourage women to become trustees if they are able to.
7 We've touched a lot of lives and we've reached out in all
8 directions. It's marvelous.

9 **MS. BRODER:** How many trustees are there today?

10 **MS. LABES:** Well, I heard after our second fund-
11 raiser that was held this past June, called Women Lighting the
12 Way, six new women became trustees, so I believe we're up to
13 131.

14 **MS. BRODER:** Is this a national program?

15 **MS. LABES:** Yes, it is. I believe we were second in
16 the nation. I believe Chicago was first but you can check on
17 that. There are a few others. New York has one, I believe
18 Boston. There aren't many yet but I think this is going to
19 catch on. Women can do it and we are doing it. We're showing
20 the community what can be done, and when you work together,
21 it's very thrilling.

22 **MS. BRODER:** You were involved and this goes back
23 somewhat, in the Soviet Jewry Committee of the council, I
24 think.

25 **MS. LABES:** Jewish Community Council and we were

1 part of the National Council on Soviet Jewry, yes, in the mid
2 to late '80s.

3 **MS. BRODER:** Were you the chair of that?

4 **MS. LABES:** Yes, I was.

5 **MS. BRODER:** Of the Detroit chapter?

6 **MS. LABES:** Yes. It was part of Jewish Community
7 Council.

8 **MS. BRODER:** Tell us about that. I don't think it's
9 as active.

10 **MS. LABES:** As far as I know it's defunct. When the
11 end of communism came and the former Soviet Union opened its
12 doors and Jews could enter this country, as long as they had a
13 sponsor, it became a non-issue. But during the days of
14 communism it was very difficult for Jews to leave the former
15 Soviet Union. They were being persecuted and they weren't
16 allowed to practice their religion. But nobody could practice
17 religion at the time in the former Soviet Union. This was a
18 grass roots organization that developed throughout the country
19 working to hopefully allow Jews to immigrate to the United
20 States.

21 **MS. BRODER:** Talk about welcoming Soviet Jews to
22 this community then because you must have.

23 **MS. LABES:** We were part of what was called a Family
24 to Family Program. When a new former Soviet Jewish family
25 would arrive, those who had signed up for the Family to Family

1 Program would be paired with a new family. We were paired
2 with a young family who came from Azerbaijan. They had two
3 young sons. He was a doctor in the former Soviet Union. They
4 lived in Baku. I believe she was an accountant. She had to
5 work as a manicurist while her husband went back to school
6 because the United States would not accept his Soviet
7 credentials. So he had to put several years of schooling and
8 now he is an internist in private practice and they're doing
9 very well.

10 **MS. BRODER:** Do you still have contact with them?

11 **MS. LABES:** Unfortunately no, and I really should.
12 They're a lovely couple.

13 **MS. BRODER:** They're still here?

14 **MS. LABES:** They're still here, yes.

15 **MS. BRODER:** You were active as a volunteer and a
16 professional with the Jewish Family Service?

17 **MS. LABES:** Yes.

18 **MS. BRODER:** Which was called something different
19 then or different now.

20 **MS. LABES:** Years ago it was Jewish Family and
21 Children Services, but then they decided children were part of
22 the family so we'll call it Jewish Family Services. I was on
23 their board and then I was the coordinator of the volunteer
24 department for three years as a professional.

25 **MS. BRODER:** What was the experience of becoming a

1 professional in something you had been a lay person in? Did
2 you find it different?

3 **MS. LABES:** I loved it. I was so impressed with the
4 staff. They're outstanding social workers. And what the
5 agency does is phenomenal. They are a credit to the
6 community. I think they accepted me. I did not have an MSW,
7 but for that job you didn't need it. I certainly knew about
8 volunteers and volunteering. But I met a totally different
9 group of people who weren't affiliated, if you will, with
10 Federation or who volunteered for Federation activities. It
11 was a wonderful experience that I had. I look back on it with
12 much fondness.

13 **MS. BRODER:** You were active in the National Council
14 of Jewish Women.

15 **MS. LABES:** I still am, yes.

16 **MS. BRODER:** What different positions have you had
17 there or programs you've been involved in?

18 **MS. LABES:** You want me to go through all of it?

19 **MS. BRODER:** Well, the ones that you remember best.

20 **MS. LABES:** Well, the National Council of Jewish
21 Women has a lot of community service programs as well as
22 advocacy programs. I loved and still do the community service
23 programs. I was chair of Meals on Wheels, I was chair of
24 Space for Changing Families which provides support groups for
25 those people who are widowed and divorced and is still

1 ongoing. I was chair of the Education Assistance Program,
2 which works with the Jewish Education Loan Service to provide
3 interest free grants to deserving Jewish students in Michigan
4 universities and colleges. I was vice-president of Public
5 Relations and vice-president of Community Service. I continue
6 to sit on the board. It's a national organization which is
7 outstanding in what it does.

8 **MS. BRODER:** Did you ever go on trips to Israel with
9 that group?

10 **MS. LABES:** No, I didn't. Most of the trips we took
11 were Federation sponsored. We went on a couple of missions
12 sponsored by Hebrew University and last August our immediate
13 family went to Israel to observe the bas mitzvah of a
14 granddaughter and grandson who are siblings. That was
15 wonderful.

16 **MS. BRODER:** I want to talk about the miracle
17 missions. I know you were bus captains at least twice.

18 **MS. LABES:** The first one in 1993 and second in
19 1995. I think there were 1260 people give or take on the
20 first one. It was an absolutely phenomenal time. As many
21 times as we've been to Israel, new things opened up for us.
22 Just the idea of all of those people from our community being
23 there at one time was so exciting. We traveled as individual
24 buses except for perhaps three events when the entire mission
25 group got together. I believe at that time it was the largest

1 mission from any single community in the world to have gone to
2 Israel. It may remain the largest to have gone. It was non-
3 stop to early morning to late evening. We made good friends.
4 We were captains of bus number one. It was hilarious. We
5 loved it tremendously and so much we went back in 1995 and we
6 were captains of bus 18. The guides were wonderful, the
7 people were wonderful. I think everybody who went got
8 something out of it in a very positive way.

9 **MS. BRODER:** I think you had a unique bus on your
10 second mission because I think I asked you to do it. You said
11 you had JARC residents on your bus. You had been active in
12 JARC.

13 **MS. LABES:** I still am, yes.

14 **MS. BRODER:** What was that experience like?

15 **MS. LABES:** It was phenomenal. The people on our
16 bus accepted the JARC consumers. These are people who are
17 developmentally disabled. They have a high level of function.
18 We had a husband and wife and an adult daughter of a staff
19 person here and one staff person from JARC. They had the time
20 of their lives. They were just part of the bus. The rest of
21 the people looked at them no differently than any other
22 missionary. I know it was the highlight of their lives. It
23 was a moving experience for me. This is what JARC is all
24 about, to make their consumers part of the community. They're
25 not only in the community but they're a part of the community.

1 **MS. BRODER:** I think the reason that bus jelled so
2 well was because of the bus captains and the way they took in
3 the JARC members without hesitation.

4 **MS. LABES:** It was a good bus.

5 **MS. BRODER:** Every place that you've been involved,
6 and if I've forgotten some things, which I probably have, if
7 you can think of anything else. I know it's going to hard for
8 you to answer, where did you find the most enjoyment in all
9 your activities? Does one thing stand out more than anything
10 else in everything you've done? How do you look back and
11 value? It's so varied what you have done in this community
12 and what you're still doing.

13 **MS. LABES:** No, because I get so much pleasure out
14 of all of it. Each one brought to my life a certain quality
15 that I hadn't seen before. I certainly have met the most
16 wonderful people in all the different organizations. I've
17 learned more about the community, learned about the needs of
18 the community, and each organization addresses a certain need
19 and tries to meet that need.

20 One thing you didn't mention which I'm relatively
21 newly involved in, for the past half dozen years, is Yad Ezra,
22 which is the state's only kosher food bank. Who would ever
23 have thought that there are 1100 Jewish families in our
24 community who every month get free food. This happens in our
25 community. My eyes have just been opened to so much of what

1 is there, the good and the sad. It has become my life and I'm
2 fortunate that I can do it. I feel fortunate.

3 **MS. BRODER:** Looking overall at Federation, the big
4 picture, from the time you became involved to what you see
5 today, what changes do you see, what good things, what not so
6 good things? I think there have been major changes in the way
7 this community has been functioning in recent years rather
8 than many years ago. I think you go back far enough to
9 remember those years.

10 **MS. LABES:** I think it's more egalitarian now, which
11 I think it should be. But I still think Federation has a way
12 to go to reach more of the community. After this newest
13 demographic study is completed, we'll know exactly how many
14 Jewish residents there are in the community. Right now we're
15 working with a figure of 96,000, give or take. Omitting those
16 who are below the age of 21, children, teenagers, I would
17 venture to say there's still a very large population. A very
18 small percentage support our campaign. We're missing the boat
19 somewhere here. I don't know what the answer is, but I've
20 been thinking about it. This may sound totally off the wall,
21 but if we held focus groups for some of these folks who for
22 whatever reason will not or do not give to campaign, have the
23 focus groups run by an outside professional organization, not
24 in this building, have it in a neutral building with no
25 Federation staff or lay people around so the people could

1 speak freely, I would like to find out why so many thousands
2 of Jews in our metropolitan area who can financially afford to
3 support the community aren't doing so. Now, as I said, this
4 may be way off the wall, but we've got to start reaching more
5 people. We keep saying that every year but we're not doing
6 anything differently.

7 **MS. BRODER:** Do you think that there is a very major
8 difference between our generation, yours and mine, and our
9 children's generation, let's not even look at our
10 grandchildren yet, can you identify some differences in the
11 way we relate, and it may not just be your children
12 necessarily, but children in general of that next generation,
13 the 40 somethings.

14 **MS. LABES:** I don't know how concerned and involved
15 they are or care to be. If we don't replace ourselves, and
16 I'm sure many people have sat in this chair and said the same
17 thing, there's not going to be a Federation because somebody
18 has to replace this older generation. I hope I'm wrong. I
19 see several young people, by that I mean 30-40-year-olds,
20 moving up, but there are a lot more out there who for whatever
21 reason don't know, don't care and we've got to reach those
22 people.

23 **MS. BRODER:** There's a big world out there which I
24 think the 30-40-year-olds have discovered, something that we
25 call the general community, which the Jewish community is very

1 much a part of, but is this taking away, is this diluting some
2 of the stuff that's happening in the Jewish community because
3 they're finding so many other things to do?

4 **MS. LABES:** Perhaps. Younger people today are so
5 involved with their families, careers, that they do have X
6 numbers of free time if you will. They may choose to work in
7 other issues, particularly during a political year. They use
8 their energies to support candidates, which are needed. But I
9 can't believe that if they weren't approached in the correct
10 way, that they would ignore their Jewish community. I would
11 hope that they would consider that equally as important to
12 what they're doing in the general community.

13 **MS. BRODER:** So finding ways to bring them in would
14 be a high priority.

15 **MS. LABES:** For me it would be, just like getting so
16 many of the people who aren't supporters now to become
17 supporters. We have to branch out and look for new resources
18 and new people. Not only in funds but in people.

19 **MS. BRODER:** This would probably then be a critical
20 issue facing our Federation community. Can you think of other
21 critical issues, not the lack of people to work in it, but
22 other critical issues facing Federation and the Jewish
23 community in the years to come? Where might we be falling
24 down and what more could we be doing?

25 **MS. LABES:** I think here in Detroit we're faced with

1 the issue of young adults leaving the city. If we have a
2 smaller base, because we're not replenishing ourselves, then
3 we've got a major problem, too. And I don't know the answer
4 to that. We're a part of the Jewish community and metro
5 Detroit itself has to find ways to keep our young talented
6 people here. If they leave, we don't have much of a community
7 left. Not everybody is leaving but we certainly know that
8 lots of young people today are leaving.

9 **MS. BRODER:** Two of your children don't live here.

10 **MS. LABES:** Right.

11 **MS. BRODER:** It's not just a Jewish community
12 problem, it's a Detroit problem.

13 **MS. LABES:** Oh major.

14 **MS. BRODER:** Detroit metropolitan.

15 **MS. LABES:** Major Detroit problem. Detroit has its
16 own problems.

17 **MS. BRODER:** It's going to take some very creative
18 thinking.

19 **MS. LABES:** Right. And I don't know what the answer
20 is.

21 **MS. BRODER:** You're a creative thinker, so it's time
22 for you to put your thinking cap on and bring these ideas to
23 us, because I think you still have the energy for that.
24 You're not on the board of governors now, are you?

25 **MS. LABES:** I'm not.

1 **MS. BRODER:** No. But you're still active in the
2 Women's Department.

3 **MS. LABES:** I sit on the board as a past-president,
4 yes.

5 **MS. BRODER:** You can speak up.

6 **MS. LABES:** Oh, I do.

7 **MS. BRODER:** What do you think of the place of our
8 Jewish community in the general community, how do you feel we
9 are received as a Jewish community in this overall Detroit
10 metropolitan community?

11 **MS. LABES:** I really couldn't begin to answer that.
12 I would hope very positively. I must say that we're very
13 parochial here and I don't have contacts in the general
14 community. Everything that I do, everybody I seem to know is
15 within the Jewish community. So I really don't have the
16 answer for that.

17 **MS. BRODER:** Do you think that our Jewish people are
18 active --

19 **MS. LABES:** Oh, yes. If you look at the board of
20 the symphony, the board of the opera, the Detroit Art
21 Institute board, the other museum boards, there are
22 sprinklings of Jews on the boards as there should be. Major
23 corporations, that I don't know. There might be a token.
24 We're a very insular community here. I would hope that we're
25 received graciously, but I don't have the answer.

1 **MS. BRODER:** Do you think Detroit's a unique Jewish
2 community?

3 **MS. LABES:** From what I've been told, yes, because
4 we are so insular. I've been told in San Francisco there are
5 no Jewish neighborhoods. People live where they want to live
6 no matter what religion they are. Here we tend to move to the
7 northwest side and congregate together. Chicago has a bit of
8 that but, New York is a nation unto itself so it's hard to
9 say. I think because I've lived here almost all of my life, I
10 don't know that much about other communities. I would venture
11 to say from people who have moved here from other communities,
12 we're very insular.

13 **MS. BRODER:** You've been on the national board of
14 which now the National Council of Federations -- it's got a
15 new name, United Jewish Communities. Were you not at one time
16 on the national board?

17 **MS. LABES:** I was on the Business and Professional
18 Women's National Board, when we had an active business and
19 professional division. I don't even know if that's a national
20 part of the Women's Division of the UJC now or not. That was
21 a while ago.

22 **MS. BRODER:** One thing we didn't talk about is why
23 that division failed or maybe it didn't fail, it went out of
24 existence. What happened to the business and professional
25 women? They're still out there. They're still working.

1 **MS. LABES:** More than ever. It's just has been
2 absorbed in our Women's Department. We don't have special
3 programming anymore for that division. Those women who wish
4 to be active somehow can juggle both. It did fade away in the
5 mid to late '80s in our community.

6 **MS. BRODER:** I'll give you a minute or two to think
7 about this or a second or two, about a message that you'd like
8 to give to future generations or to your own children, your
9 own grandchildren, to the people in Federation. What would
10 you like to say to them that reflects what you've done in your
11 life or how you feel maybe they should conduct their lives.

12 **MS. LABES:** I think becoming part of one's community
13 is essential. I think it is life affirming. I think one can
14 gain so much more by it and from it than one gives. You can
15 learn so much about yourself, about your community, about the
16 world Jewish community, and I speak only as a Jewish woman in
17 our community. It's probably been one of the most exciting
18 trips I've ever had and I hope to be able to be part of this
19 for a long, long time. It's been a fantastic growth
20 experience. You're able to give so much but you get so much
21 more back in return that it's well worth the effort and well
22 worth the time. If you're fortunate enough to be financially
23 supportive of the community, it's well worth it as well.

24 **MS. BRODER:** Are any of your children involved
25 either in the Jewish community or in general community

1 activities?

2 **MS. LABES:** Yes. Our younger son who lives here
3 sits on the Community Services Budget and Planning Division.
4 I think he's on the board of one of the agencies. He's very
5 closed mouth and he did this all on his own. I have no idea.

6 **MS. BRODER:** In other words do as I do, not as I say
7 maybe?

8 **MS. LABES:** I think so. Our daughter is very
9 involved with her community. She's president of the Jewish
10 Community Center of Reading, Pennsylvania, and her husband is
11 president of their Federation. They are leading the way for
12 our grandchildren. They're also very involved in the general
13 community because it is such a small Jewish community in
14 Reading, that you automatically become, if you choose to, part
15 of the general community, which both of them have done and
16 continue to do.

17 Our older son has worked for a non-profit
18 organization in Cleveland that works with the blind. They all
19 have been doing something.

20 **MS. BRODER:** We didn't talk at all about Jim and his
21 activities, but I know he's been active, too.

22 **MS. LABES:** Yes. He sat on JVS board for several
23 years. He was chairperson of the Physicians Division when
24 there was a Physicians Division of campaign for several years.
25 Continues to work actively in the campaign. I believe was on

1 what was called the Culture and Group Services Planning and
2 Budgeting Division. I don't know if it's still there or still
3 called that. He has been active as well and he's been a lot
4 busier than I in his professional career, but he's managed to
5 do it.

6 **MS. BRODER:** So your children have learned
7 basically, whether you knew it or not, they were watching what
8 you were doing.

9 **MS. LABES:** I guess something rubbed off. Well, it
10 seems to be, yes. And I'm pleased. If a child can learn by
11 example and not by being told, it's going to be a lot more
12 successful.

13 **MS. BRODER:** Can you think of anything else that you
14 want to bring up, something maybe I didn't bring up about
15 anything? Family, community, anything. Is there a question
16 or two that I have not asked?

17 **MS. LABES:** I don't believe so. I think it covered
18 a lot of ground and you refreshed my memory on several things
19 because I've been around for so long, but it's been a
20 wonderful ride. When I walk into this building, I feel like
21 I'm home.

22 **MS. BRODER:** That's a very nice way to end. I thank
23 you.