

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Edward Meer
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Charlotte Dubin
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Wednesday, September 21, 2005
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation
5 SUBJECT MATTER: personal and family history,
6 professional and business life,
7 Jewish philanthropy

8
9 MS. DUBIN: I'm Charlotte Dubin. I'm conducting an
10 oral history interview with Edward Meer for the Leonard N.
11 Simons Jewish Community Archives at the Max M. Fisher
12 Federation Building on September 21, 2005.

13 Mr. Meer, you've made many important contributions
14 to the Jewish community. Do we have permission to use your
15 words and thoughts in the future for educational and
16 historical research and documentation?

17 MR. MEER: Certainly do.

18 MS. DUBIN: Where and when were you born?

19 MR. MEER: I was born May 26, 1925, a long time ago,
20 in Detroit. I have two sisters. One lives in Detroit, one is
21 younger and that's Norma Handlesman. My older sister lives in
22 Ohio. Whisper is her name, Marianne Whisper. She married
23 Arnold. I just remarried about five and a half years ago to
24 Gloria and she's fabulous. My first wife of 52 years died
25 about seven years ago. I still miss her. It's always the

1 first wife, a lot of good memories.

2 We raised three wonderful boys. Two of them are
3 very religious and the third one, Bryan, he married an
4 Armenian girl. She's terrific. She knows more Jewish than I
5 do, which isn't saying much, but she couldn't be any nicer.
6 My other two daughters-in-law, Jeffrey's wife, Phyllis, and
7 Robert's wife, Shauny. Terrific. I've been blessed with
8 great daughters-in-law. Sons, I couldn't have better sons.
9 They're terrific. Jeffrey is a physician in Detroit. He just
10 called me Sunday. I was in Washington, D.C. to say that I did
11 very well in the last MRI of the stomach. So he gave me a
12 report on it. I'm blessed with wonderful children and
13 grandchildren. I have 15 great grandchildren and two on the
14 way. Maybe more now. That was as of yesterday. I'm very
15 blessed. They don't all live in Detroit but they're in the
16 yeshivas around the country. One by one we're bringing them
17 back here. Getting them homes and moving them back.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** Who were your parents?

19 **MR. MEER:** My dad was Harry Meer and my mother was
20 Tilly Budman. They were wonderful parents. I learned the
21 dental business from my dad, and that's how I got into it
22 really. I went to Central for only two years and that's the
23 first amount of Jewish people I met. We lived in Russell
24 Woods and I'd gone to schools that were not predominately
25 Jewish, but the two years in Central I made up for it. Had a

1 wonderful time. The funny thing is now I'm seeing all these
2 guys and girls over at the Jewish Center where I work out
3 three days a week. I see these old guys there and when I hear
4 them talk, they're my friend, I realize who they are. I'm in
5 their age group. The Jewish Center has been great for me.
6 I'm meeting all my old friends and a lot of the dentists that
7 I used to work with.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** Do you remember your grandparents? Tell
9 us about them.

10 **MR. MEER:** There were the Budmans. They lived in
11 Detroit. My grandfather had a hardware store on Hastings
12 Street and he was a little man but he worked 9 to 9 at the
13 hardware store. He would come home at night and sometimes I
14 was there. I would sit on his lap. He always had Life Savers
15 in his vest. He'd always give me one. Then he had a robbery
16 in his store and he got killed. My grandmother spoke mostly
17 Yiddish which I didn't understand. They lived on Monterey in
18 the old neighborhood.

19 My other grandparents lived in Hungary, Abu Wear.
20 My dad took us there when I was four years old. We went to
21 Europe for six weeks. I've gone back five times in the last
22 ten years because I found my roots there. I went and found
23 the house my dad was born in and I met some neighbors there
24 that knew him and his five brothers and two sisters. At the
25 Jewish Center here at the Holocaust Memorial Center I found a

1 brochure and it had the Jewish people that were taken out of
2 Abu Wear where my dad was born. One of them was my
3 grandmother, Esther, was listed in there and my two cousins.
4 So that got me interested and I went back five times.

5 The last trip I took all my kids and grandchildren.
6 I was a widower at the time. I showed them the cemetery where
7 my great grandfather was buried and tombstones -- the Nazis
8 couldn't find the cemetery. it was sort of in the cove -- and
9 the vegetation was like four and a half feet high, so you
10 could only see the top of the tombstones in a valley. We had
11 it cleaned out and the stones were just as good as they were
12 100 years ago. We took pictures and my kids could read the
13 Hebrew on the stones. It was that easy to read.

14 Then we straightened out our name. We weren't sure
15 if we were Meer or Meer Moore because half my uncles were Moor
16 and half were Meer. I saw the tombstone on my great
17 grandfather and it said Meer but Morris. And that's where
18 Meer Moore started. Half my uncles were Moores and half were
19 Meers.

20 My dad came to America when he was about 16. I
21 heard he sold some horses. They raised horses and they had a
22 nice home which I did see several times. Took my children
23 there. I found the home and it was kept up. I had 11 people
24 with me on that trip and we all went and used the bathroom.
25 The woman who bought it was very nice.

1 This little town where the Nazis went to take out
2 these few Jews to extermination camps, it's unbelievable.
3 Three and a half hours north of Budapest and they went up
4 there and got my grandmother and two cousins. That's about
5 the last we heard of them.

6 I had a very warm feeling in Budapest. Felt like my
7 dad was there with me. I went to a Hungarian restaurant with
8 my wife and we were sitting in the garden eating there. It
9 was very elegant, very nice. There was a Gypsy orchestra. My
10 dad loved Gypsy music. I had them play a couple of songs he
11 used to love and I had tears coming down in my eyes. And I
12 don't cry that often. I just felt like he was there singing
13 with the Gypsies the way he used to do at the Hungarian
14 Village here.

15 When my parents came to America, they became very
16 active in B'nai Moshe. They were actually founders of B'nai
17 Moshe on Dexter and Lawrence. My mother was president of the
18 women's club and my dad was very active. I'm still a member
19 of B'nai Moshe 50 some years later. My wife Gloria is Shaarey
20 Zedek, so I go with her. I've enjoyed a wonderful life. I've
21 been very fortunate.

22 **MS. DUBIN:** Let me ask you a question about that.
23 We will talk a little bit more about your philanthropic
24 contributions, but where did that come from, was there
25 something about your home growing up, was there someone who

1 was particularly charitable, something that was instilled in
2 you?

3 **MR. MEER:** My mother always had that little blue and
4 white box hanging up in the kitchen and I always liked that.
5 I didn't think my dad had that much money to give away to
6 charities, so I really don't know what he did. We lived very
7 well and comfortable. We lived around Central High School.
8 You could leave your door open at night. You could walk down
9 the streets at night. Everything was so wonderful.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** What did you do for fun?

11 **MR. MEER:** I like to exercise a lot, I like to go to
12 plays, I like to travel.

13 **MS. DUBIN:** As a child.

14 **MR. MEER:** I don't even remember. I just had a good
15 time all the time. I went to Hebrew school, that sort of
16 killed things four afternoons a week.

17 **MS. DUBIN:** Where was that?

18 **MR. MEER:** That was in the basement of B'nai Moshe.
19 Had a bar mitzvah at Lackers on Cass Avenue. That was
20 different in those days. It was all the adults. The kids
21 weren't really included, maybe two or three. I have a picture
22 taken of my bar mitzvah. I was pretty tall, I was probably
23 5'9". Very poor student but I bar mitzvahed and I enjoyed it.

24 Lately I so appreciate being a Jew. The Jewish
25 people are so wonderful to each other. We look after our

1 people. I've realized it more since I've been philanthropic
2 because I see what results you get. It's just terrific.
3 We're a wonderful group, especially our Detroit group is so
4 active. Now we're getting active in the Florida group because
5 we're there about six months of the year.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** As a child did you benefit from this
7 philanthropic community, did you go to camp?

8 **MR. MEER:** Yes, I did, but it was always my dad
9 would sent me to a camp.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** What camp was it?

11 **MR. MEER:** You never heard of it. Avrunin. It was
12 out near Jackson, Michigan. A Jewish camp with kosher food.
13 I loved it. I was active in sports and I used to be the best
14 track man there. In high school I played a couple years of
15 football. I loved that. That's where I met Jewish children.
16 Until then I hardly knew them.

17 **MS. DUBIN:** What public schools did you go to?

18 **MR. MEER:** I went to Winterhalter and Tappan
19 Intermediate. The war was on, so I was at Tappan through the
20 tenth grade. Then the 11th and 12th grade I met Jewish kids.
21 It was quite a culture shock, I used to take a date to the
22 Docks Theater and buy popcorn and ice cream. I get over there
23 and they're taking their dates to the Terrace Room and places
24 like that. I said, wow, I've been missing this all my
25 childhood.

1 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you have a girlfriend?

2 **MR. MEER:** I met my wife in high school. She waited
3 two and a half years for me until I got out of the army. I
4 could make you a tape of that. We could spend hours hearing
5 my war stories.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** Let's try it. Tell me a little bit.

7 **MR. MEER:** At 18 I knew I was going into the
8 service. I went to Custer and Alabama in six months I was in
9 the Pacific. Two months later I was doing beach heads in
10 Pacific. I was only 18, you're invincible, nothing is going
11 to bother you. I was attached to the Marine Corps. They
12 didn't have big mortars. A Jewish boy shouldn't be in these
13 kind of outfits. Anyway I was in there. We had a mortar that
14 was four inches big, fired a 26 pound shell, which we could
15 drop in a barrel at a mile and a quarter. We were good at it.
16 The Marines didn't have a mortar that big, so I spent 21
17 months attached to all these different Marine Corps. When we
18 would go to one island, we would go with them.

19 I was on about four islands in combat. You remember
20 Okinawa; that was a big one. Pelau, that was slaughter. We
21 lost 10,000 men there for nothing. We could have bypassed it.
22 They were already in the Philippines.

23 And then Angora was a little island. My first
24 landing was there. When you're 18 and you climb down that
25 rope ladder at four in the morning and you've got a pack on

1 your back, you get in this little landing craft and you circle
2 for two hours, it's pitch dark, and you smell this diesel fuel
3 from the engine, it's a smell you will never forget. Whenever
4 I get behind a bus and I get that smell I think about the
5 landings there. Some of the men fell off in the water over
6 our head. We hit a sandbar. You never saw them again. They
7 drowned.

8 Well, we landed on the beach and we got in as far as
9 we could go and we dug in our mortars. They were perfect for
10 small islands. Our range was only like a mile and a half.
11 There was only one other Jewish fellow in the outfit.

12 We were on firing missions. That meant you zeroed
13 in on a spot and you bombarded it for a half hour with these
14 26 pound shells. I was in chemical warfare. So I said, who
15 uses chemicals? That's pretty safe. But I didn't know they
16 fired high explosives and different kinds of smokes and things
17 that were necessary on the front line. Two days a week I used
18 to go up on observation; then I would shake for the next five
19 days. You never get used to being shot at, believe me. Even
20 though at 18 you feel invincible, it still scares the hell out
21 of you. Every landing I went on, the night before you
22 couldn't sleep.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** How long were you in combat?

24 **MR. MEER:** Two and a half years. I went overseas
25 and in six months we were in combat. They needed these heavy

1 mortars. My mother thought I was in flame throwers, so
2 wherever she saw a flame thrower she looked for Edward. We
3 toted this mortar. It would break down in three pieces. In
4 Hawaii training, we would take it over a mountain at night.
5 It was like a tripod. Interesting.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** You mentioned that there were only two
7 Jews in your outfit.

8 **MR. MEER:** Right.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you ever feel any anti-Semitism?

10 **MR. MEER:** Just once. There was a fellow that was
11 very Italian from the rough section of New York and he would
12 pick on me. Call me names. I said one day this has got to
13 stop. I tackled him and we had it out and he never bothered
14 me again.

15 For the Jewish holiday we'd go to Atlanta. I had a
16 three-day pass so my name didn't show I was Jewish, but
17 everybody knew I was Jewish. I never had a problem. I heard
18 remarks and things, but it didn't bother me. I was raised in
19 a gentile neighborhood and some expressions I just got used to
20 hearing. It wasn't bad. I was a good athlete, so wherever I
21 went, I blended in with the kids.

22 I left Tappan in the 11th grade and went to Central.
23 That's when I met Norma Jean. She was my wife 52 years. Had
24 a great marriage, raised wonderful children.

25 I worked like hell building up a business. I had a

1 lot of close calls in the war years. I tell my kids these
2 stories, they can't believe it. We were walking on the side
3 of a hill for protection. One of my friends, Eddie Myers,
4 said I lost my watch. " So I went back with him to look for it
5 and the other guys in my outfit went down this incline into a
6 railroad track that was submerged and the Japs were zeroed in
7 on it. In the next two minutes they must have put 25 shells
8 in there and most of my squad got wiped out. If it wasn't for
9 Eddie Myers' watch, I would have been down there with them. I
10 had a lot of things like that happen. I could write a book.
11 Unbelievable.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you come back changed a great deal?

13 **MR. MEER:** Yeah. I grew up. You're on your own for
14 two and a half years and you come back. It's like a different
15 world. I'm wearing khaki all the time and people are telling
16 me what to do. I was lucky I made it back. I lost two or
17 three of my best friends and five or six were wounded and came
18 back to Battle Creek. It's funny I never went over to see
19 them. I didn't want to see them. One guy lost part of his
20 leg and another guy part of his arm. I just couldn't pull
21 myself over to Battle Creek Hospital to see it.

22 You know another thing in combat, you never think
23 you're going to get killed. I used to go up twice a week on
24 observation and I remember we're sitting in a fox hole once
25 and somebody said a shell landed up there in the observation

1 post. This was the day before I went up there. Two or three
2 of the guys, we were sitting there, they smiled like thank God
3 it wasn't me. They didn't want to smile but it was on their
4 face. Then I realized they were saying thank God it wasn't
5 me. We were 18, 19 years old. We were veterans already.

6 Okinawa had a lot of experiences there. We used to
7 shower every day. They had these tombs and we used to move
8 the caskets out. They bury them in a sitting position so
9 they're only this high. They were small people. We'd move
10 the caskets out of there. I don't know if that's proper or
11 not, but it was safe in there from shells and things. And we
12 would sleep in the tomb at night.

13 Coming over the tomb was fresh water. It would come
14 down like a shower and it was ice cold. We'd take a shower
15 once a day, which we were lucky to do. Then one day some guys
16 walked up the hill and there were two dead Japs in the water
17 there all the time. By then they were all bloated up. Is
18 this the right things to say? I don't want to get anybody
19 sick or anything. They were bloated up to twice their normal
20 size. I saw quite a bit of combat and made it back safely.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** Did they ever tell you about what your
22 fellow servicemen were going through in Europe? Did you know
23 about the Holocaust?

24 **MR. MEER:** No. We would get Stars and Stripes
25 occasionally. We didn't know about the Jews or anything. We

1 were just cut off. The Stars and Stripes would tell us a
2 brief article about the war in Europe. When the war ended
3 there, of course we didn't believe it. We'd just left
4 Okinawa. We were going back to Hawaii to regroup to hit
5 Japan. People say the atomic bomb was terrible, but it saved
6 our lives. I would have been in there the fifth or sixth
7 wave.

8 In the operations, the invasions I had seen were so
9 fouled up that I couldn't imagine how bad that would be. We
10 would land on the wrong beach. We were shelling our own men
11 all night long. Nobody knew it. Twenty six pounds of TNT is
12 a lot of trouble. I learned to grow up fast in survival.

13 We ate K rations all the time and then later on C
14 rations. Okinawa is the first big scale operation, so by the
15 third day we got hot food which meant baked beans and
16 something else. I don't want to tell you what we called it,
17 but you survive, you eat, you live. That's the main thing.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** You came back grown up.

19 **MR. MEER:** Yeah, 21. I got out the end of '45 and I
20 enrolled at Wayne in January of '46 and used the GI bill. I
21 went there about two and a half years. I wanted to get
22 married and I had to go to work. I dropped out of Wayne and
23 got about three years credit there. I'm sorry I never
24 finished.

25 **MS. DUBIN:** What did you study?

1 **MR. MEER:** Strictly business courses. I didn't
2 matriculate, I just took strictly accounting and economics and
3 courses that would help me. I already figured I was going
4 into the dental business because my dad was in it, all his
5 brothers. My dad lived a very nice life.

6 I think he made the money playing pinochle
7 truthfully. He and his brothers would get together. They
8 were all in New York or Texas or Buffalo. They'd get together
9 and play cards. If it was three days, they'd play pinochle
10 for three days. You'd hear all of a sudden the cards fly
11 across the room and I thought they were going to kill
12 somebody. But that's the game they enjoyed.

13 I went to the World's Fair with my dad, I was 14. I
14 get over there and had been in New York four days and didn't
15 get to the World's Fair. They're playing pinochle. And
16 mother is talking to her sisters-in-law. I said I'm going to
17 go. So I took two subways to get to the World's Fair. That
18 was in '39. If I didn't go on my own, I never would have seen
19 it.

20 When I came back from the Mariana Islands to Hawaii,
21 we were on a merchant marine ship and nothing to do. We
22 played pinochle 12 hours a day to stop the boredom. I got
23 pretty good at it.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** Did you play for money?

25 **MR. MEER:** We didn't have any money. We'd get paid

1 maybe every six months. This ship usually takes seven days to
2 get back, took us six weeks. Then they wouldn't let us land
3 in Hawaii because we were all malnourished.. We had scurvy, a
4 little bit of everything. Stayed there a couple months and
5 then came home.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me about the business that your
7 father started.

8 **MR. MEER:** My dad, he must have done very well
9 before I got in it because he had two or three salesmen. He
10 had some franchises on some dental equipment which were hard
11 to get. I thought it was a nice business to go into. So when
12 I went to Wayne, I worked in the afternoons. I'd take a bus
13 down and go to work at my dad's office as delivery boy, stock
14 boy or whatever needed to be done.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** What was the name of the company?

16 **MR. MEER:** Meer Dental. I went in there and I
17 started learning the business and go to college in the morning
18 until I decided to get married. When I went in, he only had
19 three employees and I was one of the three. We were out of
20 ten supply houses. We supplied the dentists with x-rays and
21 sundries. I learned the business, I did deliveries. I'd take
22 a streetcar out to East Jefferson with a \$6 order. It's like
23 an hour each way to deliver an order that was \$6.

24 I found out that of the places in Detroit we were
25 number 10. So the only way I could go was up. I couldn't be

1 in the office with my dad. We were like sandpaper. He was
2 fast and I was just the opposite. I did it slow and tried to
3 do it right. He was Hungarian.

4 When I was dating my future wife, she went to
5 Michigan State. My dad used to pick her up in Lansing and
6 bring her home on the weekends. She never understood what he
7 said in all those trips. No freeways, it was like an hour and
8 a half, two hour trip. She just smiled and shook her head.
9 He had a Hungarian accent. She never knew what he said.
10 Finally she did understand after we got married. My dad was
11 quite a guy.

12 His vacation was to go to northern Michigan to
13 Charlevoix, take my mother. No air conditioning, no radio in
14 the car. He'd make calls all the way up there on dentists
15 along the way and on the way back. Then they'd stay in
16 Charlevoix three ^{OR} four days. That was his vacation.

17 **MS. DUBIN:** What was it like for Jews in Charlevoix
18 back then? I thought there were some codes.

19 **MR. MEER:** You could stay at a hotel or if you
20 didn't own property. He'd just go up for three or four days
21 and then come home.

22 We had a cottage on Cooley Lake in the summer for
23 two years in a row. That was a long way out. Had to go to
24 Northwestern, one lane each way, go to the end and turn right
25 another five or ten miles. Funny thing is I remember my

1 mother driving to I thought was Keego Harbor to buy kosher
2 food. Nobody remembers it, but I remember going with her. I
3 thought it was Keego Harbor.

4 We rented this small cottage. All my uncles stayed
5 upstairs, a big room with no partitions. There was a porch
6 that slept a couple people. I learned how to swim out there.
7 I must have been 7, 8 or 9. In the 1930s.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** The business continued to prosper?

9 **MR. MEER:** Not really. It took a while. Our credit
10 rating wasn't that good. I had trouble getting different
11 franchises and people that would talk to me. We were small.
12 We had no salesman. I hired one salesman, but he was an
13 alcoholic. When he was sober, he was great, but we never knew
14 when he would come to work.

15 I learned the business and I went out on the road
16 and I knocked on doors for 25 years and built up territories
17 and then I would put salesmen out there. Eventually I got the
18 lines of equipment. I used to go to dental conventions. I'd
19 wait outside the room for the sales manager to come out. They
20 weren't interested in talking to me. I was just a small
21 nobody. Finally one of them gave me a chance at some new
22 equipment, and I think it was called Weber Equipment. It was
23 third out of the four lines. Wasn't great but was good stuff.
24 I started selling that and in two years I was the biggest
25 Weber dealer in the country. This is over 50 years ago. Then

1 they started to come to me to sell their products. These are
2 the guys that wouldn't see me before.

3 Eventually we ended up with 40 branches and 700
4 people. I moved from several different buildings starting in
5 downtown Detroit where we were for a long time. My dad had a
6 way of saying to the people, we owned the building we were in,
7 which we didn't. It was the Charlevoix Building, an old
8 building, 11 stories. He kept saying, well, I didn't really
9 own it, but I was there long enough to own it. Everybody said
10 when he passed away, what are you going to do with the
11 Charlevoix Building and all your property in Florida? We
12 didn't have any property. He never said we did but he sort of
13 insinuated that we should have had. He was a salesman. He
14 liked to talk. It was a lot of fun.

15 I really enjoyed all the sales and the guys we met.
16 I used to bowl with Alpha Omega Dental Fraternity. I did a
17 lot of things and enjoyed it. My biggest thrill was young
18 dentists out of school, picking him up and showing them
19 locations. I would tell them where to go. They were so naive
20 they didn't know anything except for Don Sherman. I would
21 show them locations and I became a real estate man because I
22 knew where they should go and they didn't know. I'd show them
23 the one I wanted them to take, then show them two or three
24 other places I didn't want them to take, then I'd show them
25 that one again and they would take it. I never had one go

1 bankrupt on me. They all did very well. Eventually their
2 sons or daughters would come in the business and they'd bring
3 them around. It was great. I was in it for 50 some years.

4 We got an offer seven or eight years ago to sell
5 out. Two of my boys were working there. They were both
6 attorneys but they never practiced. My middle son is a
7 physician in Oak Park in internal medicine. I talked to the
8 boys, I said I got a great offer. By then one of my son's was
9 running it. I said it's hard to refuse, it's stock, no cash.
10 But if it goes through all right, we're going to be very
11 wealthy. They said let's do it. This was eight years ago. I
12 was a little worried about what would they do. We went and I
13 got all this stock, \$45 a share. I couldn't sell any for six
14 months. Then I sold as much as I could and then it nose
15 dived. It went from 45 to 11. When I married my second wife
16 six years ago, it was at 11 and I married her and the stock
17 kept going up. It was a great marriage.

18 I'll tell you another thing. Before the deal went
19 through on selling the business, I had a direct line to God.
20 I said, God, if this goes through and I get all this stock,
21 I'm going to give it away to charity. And I did. I started
22 giving it away. The amazing thing is I might give away half
23 million dollars to some organization or a million. The stock
24 would go up again and in about four months I was back to where
25 I was. So I said, He's watching me. I kept on doing it and

1 the stock kept going up. It's about 80 right now although
2 I've given away a lot of it. I'm very happy with what I did
3 with it because I see the results, the apartments and stuff
4 like that.

5 I just came from Darcha Torah now. We're remodeling
6 that place. It was a boys and girls school, a really rundown
7 building. We're modernizing it. That's my third gymnasium
8 I've built. It will be open in about two months. They've
9 gone from 100 to 400 students now. It's an Orthodox school.
10 I see the kids playing out there, the guys are wearing
11 yarmulkahs and the girls are in long dresses and everything.
12 That's my life.

13 Did I tell you I have 15 great grandchildren and two
14 on the way?

15 **MS. DUBIN:** Yes.

16 **MR. MEER:** They're all extremely happy, bright and
17 beautiful children. I enjoy their company. I told you we're
18 moving them back to Detroit now. I just had lunch with my
19 architect, Seymour Mandel, who does these buildings and
20 doesn't charge anybody for them. He's wonderful. He's an
21 unsung hero.

22 **MS. DUBIN:** Besides Darcha Torah, there are a few
23 other gymnasiums. What others?

24 **MR. MEER:** Akiva. I did one for Beth Yehudah.
25 That's the old B'nai Moshe in Oak Park, I added a gym there.

1 **MS. DUBIN:** Is that the girl's school you're talking
2 about?

3 **MR. MEER:** Yeah. There's a gym on the side there.
4 I first started through Morrey Ellenberg and his
5 buddy. These guys are wonderful. His buddy is an attorney.
6 They got me interested in the schools where my granddaughters
7 went. They didn't have a science laboratory. I put one in.
8 \$50,000. The kids were happy, my granddaughter was happy.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** That's at Beth Jacob?

10 **MR. MEER:** Yes. On Church Street. From there they
11 told me about a pre-nursery school which they wanted to build.
12 They showed me the spot and I said sure, let's do it. How
13 many kids would we handle? This is three and four year old
14 kids. They are so darn cute. I love children. I built a
15 school for them and it's up to 150, 200 students now. It's on
16 Lincoln Road.

17 **MS. DUBIN:** It's Beth Yehudah.

18 **MR. MEER:** It's a pre-nursery. I see them with
19 computers and everything. I can't believe it. For my
20 birthday they invite me every year and they sing Happy
21 Birthday, Mr. Meer. That was my first, and that was over a
22 million bucks or so. I feel like Donald Trump standing there.
23 When I go there ,these kids are so cute. Mr. Meer, I'm going
24 to buy you a new suit. I said I don't need a new suit but
25 thank you anyway.

1 From there I got involved with Geli Gelford with the
2 Federation and he led me to the apartments I built, senior
3 citizen apartments.

4 **MS. DUBIN:** Two towers; is that right?

5 **MR. MEER:** Two towers there. They're beautiful.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** The Meer Apartments.

7 **MR. MEER:** Yes. He led me to those. Some of the
8 things I turned down but the ones I liked I did.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** I see Jewish Family Service Hospice
10 Office.

11 **MR. MEER:** I just did that recently. My Circle of
12 Friends, I'm really proud. Have you seen that building?

13 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me about that.

14 **MR. MEER:** Circle of Friends was started by a rabbi
15 six years ago who came to Detroit with his wife, strangers.
16 And they started this group of children. Two of them were my
17 granddaughters. He had eight volunteers. Sunday and one day
18 during the week they devote two hours to go to somebody's
19 house who had a child who needed help. Autistic, crippled or
20 something. Spend two hours so the mother could get out and do
21 shopping or get her hair done or something like that.

22 The last dinner I went to they had 600 volunteers
23 and there were over 1000 people at the dinner. Four years ago
24 the rabbi got up and he said. my dream is to have a building
25 somewhere where I can take these crippled children and these

1 with mental problems, have a place to give them therapy for a
2 day. The mother can drop them off, they'll stay with us. I
3 went to him after the dinner, and I said don't announce it now
4 but your dream's going to come true. We're going to build
5 this building.

6 It was supposed to be 5,000 square feet. Next thing
7 I know it's 22,000 square feet. It is terrific. On the lower
8 level they have a miniature city. They've got a bank there, a
9 dental office, a drug store, a laundromat. These kids, some
10 of them have never been out of their house and they get out in
11 the real world they don't know what to do. We put a library
12 in there. It's a whole miniature city down in the lower
13 level. They even have a street there with little cars and
14 stop lights where you can get in and learn how to get around
15 the city. They have a bank where you can withdraw fake money
16 and go to these stores and buy things. They've never been in
17 drug stores or markets. We have a supermarket and it's
18 fabulous. Rabbi Shemtov and his wife Bossi did the whole
19 thing. It's marvelous. I couldn't believe it could be that
20 nice. I'm very proud of that. I kicked it off and they got a
21 lot of money elsewhere to build it. It's the only one in this
22 country like that.

23 **MS. DUBIN:** It's called the Meer Family Friendship
24 Center?

25 **MR. MEER:** It's not really the Meer. It's Circle of

1 Friends, we call it. It's my campus and I kicked it off. I'm
2 so proud of that. Makes you feel good. You go there and you
3 see these kids. They can write on the walls there if they
4 want to. They have all these different things for therapy.
5 You have to see it to believe it. It's a kid's dream come
6 true and these kids really need it.

7 I got a building for Yad Ezra. This is bragging. I
8 don't want to brag.

9 **MS. DUBIN:** It's not bragging. I probably would
10 have asked you if you hadn't.

11 **MR. MEER:** Okay. Yad Ezra needed a building and I
12 had a building on Coolidge that I owned. Tried to buy it
13 back, they wouldn't sell it to me. We found a building, I
14 bought it and this architect redesigned it and now they have a
15 nice place on Eleven Mile Road.

16 **MS. DUBIN:** That's the kosher food project.

17 **MR. MEER:** Yes. These people come in through a side
18 door so they won't be embarrassed. They can pick up canned
19 food there. It's just wonderful.

20 **MS. DUBIN:** Is there a great need?

21 **MR. MEER:** Yeah. You wouldn't think so in a city
22 this big. They give food to people from St. Clair Shores,
23 past Livonia out in Plymouth. We don't think we have people
24 here struggling like that but they are. Jewish people. We do
25 wonderful things for our people. I'm happy to say I'm one of

1 them. I enjoy it.

2 **MS. DUBIN:** Do you think this deal you made with God
3 had something to do with your continuing interest in
4 philanthropy?

5 **MR. MEER:** It did. Every time I gave away that much
6 money the stock would go up. It's up around 90 now. I got to
7 see if I have any more money to give away.

8 **MS. DUBIN:** Do you have a wish list?

9 **MR. MEER:** I got a lot of people giving me lists
10 every day. They want to come over to see me for a few minutes
11 and I know what that means. You have to stop somewhere.

12 **MS. DUBIN:** Jewish education seems to be important.

13 **MR. MEER:** Yes.

14 **MS. DUBIN:** Is there some influence and impetus from
15 your family that makes you want to support Jewish education?

16 **MR. MEER:** Not particularly. I think it's a good
17 thing to do. And senior citizens, I like to help them out.
18 It's rough. I'm pretty well set, but I see prices going up.
19 I don't know how people live today. Things are so expensive.
20 Some friends of mine retired, they thought they were well set
21 and now they're looking for work part time. It's
22 unbelievable. Every time I gave away money, the stock would
23 go up. Isn't that wonderful?

24 **MS. DUBIN:** Has it made you a religious person?

25 **MR. MEER:** Yes, it did. I always believed in God

1 since World War II. I did a lot of praying in the fox hole.
2 It worked. I made it home. I never did graduate college.
3 Gloria graduated but Norma Jean only had three years at State.

4 **MS. DUBIN:** Does Gloria join with you in your
5 philanthropic interests?

6 **MR. MEER:** Yeah. She's very interested. Fabulous
7 lady. She lost her husband and we met. We lived close by and
8 never knew each other. One of her girlfriends said you got to
9 meet this girl. I was too shy. I'd been a widower for two
10 years. I can't do that. When I went up to her house for a
11 date after they talked me into it, remember Red Skelton, he
12 did a skit where he was a salesman. He knocked on the door,
13 hope nobody's home, I hope, I hope, I hope. That's the way I
14 felt. I took her out and we liked the same things. The
15 theater, the movies, travel. She likes Florida now. I talked
16 her into that. We've had a wonderful life. Five years.
17 Started over again.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** What's your proudest achievement?

19 **MR. MEER:** My charities. Not only that. Building
20 up a dental company. I started with three employees. We have
21 about 750, 40 branches around the country. I really went from
22 the bottom of the totem pole to like the second largest in the
23 country. I like setting up young dentists. Really made me
24 feel good to go back and see them doing so well. When they
25 introduce me to their son or daughter, I'm just very proud of

1 what I did. A lot of gentile dentists, too, all over.

2 Some people wouldn't deal with me because I was
3 Jewish. But eventually I hired the salesman that called on
4 them and they ended up dealing with me. I enjoyed selling,
5 enjoyed meeting the people. I'm very fortunate. That's why I
6 want to help people out.

7 **MS. DUBIN:** Looking around at the Jewish community
8 which you've helped so much, what do you think the community
9 has to do to continue the achievements that it's made over the
10 years? Do you feel there are things the community should be
11 doing to support those who are in need?

12 **MR. MEER:** I don't know. I think they do very well.
13 I was at Kadima dinner last night. I never heard of them
14 until two, three years ago.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** Kadima does what?

16 **MR. MEER:** They help mentally challenged and
17 autistic children. I was introduced to that three years ago.
18 There's so many of these organizations that do great things.
19 I want to support them. I have a list of about 100 I support.
20 I can't handle any more.

21 **MS. DUBIN:** You've been a supporter of the
22 Federation campaign for more than 60 years.

23 **MR. MEER:** A long time, yeah. But I never had
24 enough money to make it count until about seven years ago. I
25 would give it away, the stock would go up. He's listening.

1 In Marco we have a temple down there. I added on a wing in
2 honor of my first wife, Norma Jean. I've been going to Marco
3 Island for 30 years. I love it. If the hurricanes stop, I'll
4 be much happier.

5 **MS. DUBIN:** Do you still consider yourself a
6 Detroiter though?

7 **MR. MEER:** Oh yes. This is my home town. Get a
8 little embarrassed down there once in a while. I went to the
9 All Star game, baseball at night. They had all the streets
10 closed off. You could only get on here and get off there.
11 They're ashamed in Detroit and I don't see it getting any
12 better. Got a bad start 60 years ago and just terrible what's
13 happening here.

14 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me what do you do when you see your
15 grandchildren? What do you do together?

16 **MR. MEER:** Not enough. They're restricted. They
17 can't eat out at all.

18 **MS. DUBIN:** They're Orthodox?

19 **MR. MEER:** Yeah, all except one. I go and play with
20 them. I love kids. I have beautiful grandchildren. I don't
21 want to brag but they're so smart. Can't believe it. Called
22 up the little one the other day. She's three years old. What
23 are you doing, I said. I'm talking to you. That shut me up.

24 **MS. DUBIN:** What life's lessons would you give to
25 them? What legacy would you want to leave?

1 **MR. MEER:** I tell you they're a whole different ball
2 game. I'm still not used to it after 35 years. I don't know.
3 They have to accept other people more. I'm probably a gentile
4 to them. They respect me and I take good care of them and I
5 love them. I can only eat with them at the Jewish Center or
6 this new restaurant that opened on Woodward. I have a problem
7 with that. In Florida they bring their own food. I have a
8 condo five doors away with koshert, kashert I should say.
9 They bring their own food and they can cook in there and bake.
10 There's plastic silverware and paper plates. They bring their
11 own milk, bread, all this stuff. It makes it hard. I'd like
12 to take them out to dinner. There's nowhere to take them
13 unless we go to Miami, which is two hours away. I have a
14 great time with the great grandchildren now.

15 **MS. DUBIN:** Are you proud of their learning?

16 **MR. MEER:** They're fabulous students. One of my
17 grandsons is in Chicago, who's a rabbi, and he went to law
18 school and is passing the bar now. I'm especially proud of
19 him because he's going to work. They others are davening all
20 the time, which I'm not that keen on. I'd rather see them go
21 out and work. Let them daven from five to ten.

22 My son Jeffrey, who's the internist, he davens
23 probably seven, eight hours a day. He's in the office three,
24 four hours. Then at night he takes in patients. They come to
25 his house but he can't turn them down. I don't like that. He

1 said, if they come to my office, I have to charge them. If
2 they come here I don't charge them. He's a gem.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** Your other two sons?

4 **MR. MEER:** Robert, he's the oldest. He's an
5 attorney who never practiced. He's in the dental business.
6 He's the one who has all these grandchildren. Brian, my
7 younger one, who I can take out to dinner and play with his
8 daughter Jennifer, his wife Lisa. I can do things with them
9 much more than the Orthodox.

10 **MS. DUBIN:** Tell me more about your family.

11 **MR. MEER:** They live in Chicago and New Jersey. We
12 visit them once a year and they come here once or twice a
13 year.

14 **MS. DUBIN:** I have another question for you. You've
15 been so successful in life and I wondered if along the way
16 there was someone you looked to as a mentor.

17 **MR. MEER:** I've been looking all the time. I can't
18 find anybody. If you know somebody around. Where do you
19 look, the want ads under mentor? I could use somebody.

20 **MS. DUBIN:** Have you been one to someone?

21 **MR. MEER:** Not really, no. I was so tied up in the
22 dental business. That was my life. At night I would come
23 home and make phone calls. I did not get active in many
24 organizations. I would just give money because I didn't want
25 to go to night meetings. I wanted to be home with my family,

1 which I still enjoy tremendously. I'm a happy camper. I feel
2 wonderful.

3 **MS. DUBIN:** Is there any last question that I
4 haven't asked of you?

5 **MR. MEER:** I think we've done very well.

6 **MS. DUBIN:** Thank you so much. It's been a
7 pleasure.

8 **MR. MEER:** Thank you. You're great. Okay. Sign
9 off.