

1 **ORAL HISTORY OF:** Mark Schlusssel  
2 **INTERVIEWED BY:** Stanley Meretsky  
3 **DATE OF INTERVIEW:** Tuesday, June 21, 2005  
4 **LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Jewish Federation of Metropolitan  
5 Detroit  
6 **SUBJECT MATTER:** Life in the Jewish community

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8 **MR. MERETSKY:** My name is Stan Meretsky and my  
9 camera person today is Eric Golden. Today is Tuesday, June  
10 21st, 2005, and I have the pleasure of interviewing Mark  
11 Schlusssel.

12 Mark, you've already signed the written release, but  
13 I have to ask you on camera for your approval to interview  
14 you, make the tape available for viewing for archive-approved  
15 requests. Is that okay with you?

16 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Absolutely.

17 **MR. MERETSKY:** Great. Let's get started. Let's go  
18 back to the beginning and get a bit of your childhood. Where  
19 did you grow up at?

20 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I'm actually a migrant Jew. I grew  
21 up in the Jewish community as it migrated. My earliest  
22 recollections are on Euclid and Linwood, and I went to Thurkle  
23 Elementary School. There we davened in Young Israel, which my  
24 father was the founder, may he rest in peace, that was located  
25 on Clairmont. It was in a hall. I think it was a Workmen's

1 Thurkle Hall or one of the others, I don't remember. We had  
2 services downstairs.

3 **MR. MERETSKY:** Clairmont and Linwood?

4 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Yes. I remember the building very  
5 well. There were other services being held there. Those are  
6 my earliest recollections, that neighborhood around Thurkle  
7 Elementary School.

8 We lived in a duplex. I remember the family named  
9 Riemers were the other tenants and owners of the building, and  
10 we were their tenants. I remember it was probably 1945, 1946,  
11 when my father brought home the first car that I recall after  
12 the war. He finally had an automobile at that point in time.

13 It was kind of my grand uncle and aunt who lived on  
14 Boston Boulevard. Interestingly, my mother was brought to  
15 this country by a barren aunt and uncle. His name was Chiam  
16 Dorman and her name was Rose Dorman. They were actually first  
17 cousins, and they married I believe in Boston and they  
18 immigrated to Detroit. He was kind of a Damon Runyan  
19 character in many ways. He was the first person I ever saw  
20 with a tattoo. He had a tattoo on an inner arm. And he was a  
21 Kohan, which was really -- Jewish law clearly prohibited  
22 tattoos, but especially for the priestly class. He was a  
23 relatively observant man. They kept kosher, but they drove on  
24 Shabbes.

25 He was quite an interesting fellow. He owned a

1 haberdashery store in Hamtramck, and had become very  
2 successful and retired at I think the age of 35, and after  
3 that he dabbled in real estate and other ventures, the stock  
4 market.

5           They traveled to Europe and they were to bring my  
6 mother's older sister to America, and by a quirk of fate she  
7 refused, as I know the story, and my mother, who was younger,  
8 in her early teens or actually probably 10 or 11, and didn't  
9 have as much of a voice, so she was chosen. She's probably  
10 the only immigrant that came across on the Queen Mary and not  
11 in steerage, because they were quite wealthy at the time. She  
12 was then severed from her nuclear family, never ever to see  
13 them again. They were all annihilated in the Holocaust, save  
14 one brother who came to the United States from Belgium in the  
15 '50s.

16           On my father's side, interestingly, my grandfather  
17 came to this country I think almost a decade before he brought  
18 the family over. He established himself in Detroit in the  
19 junk business and he brought over his wife and three sons. My  
20 father was the eldest of three, and I have a picture of them  
21 that sits in my home today where they have payess, but they  
22 were in sailor suits.

23           They came to this country and interestingly they all  
24 achieved a great deal. My father became a lawyer. He  
25 graduated in 1929. He couldn't have picked a worse year to

1 try and make a living. He taught at the United Hebrew Schools  
2 for many years, decades as a matter of fact. After he  
3 prospered in the practice, he so loved his teaching career, he  
4 continued it.

5 His next oldest brother went to medical school and  
6 achieved distinction. He worked for the VA system and ended  
7 up becoming the associate dean of Northwestern's Medical  
8 School, and he was a very accomplished man. Interestingly, he  
9 was a bachelor. He was very much in love with a woman in the  
10 community and she couldn't wait and he didn't have resources.  
11 She got married. I think that was the love of his life and he  
12 remained a bachelor the balance of his life.

13 My father's youngest brother married and went into  
14 his father-in-law's steel business. He was a lawyer but he  
15 never practiced law.

16 So it was a very interesting family relationship.  
17 My uncle the physician was irreligious and my father was  
18 observant, and in our family household there were cataclysmic  
19 and great debates about religion, especially around holiday  
20 time when my Uncle Morris would come back and he was as we say  
21 in the Passover Seder the wise son -- I wouldn't use wicked --  
22 the non-observant son, equally brilliant, and even in the  
23 Passover Seder they both asked a very good question and they  
24 both asked it the same way ironically.

25 The interesting thing was those debates were

1 sustained in my house between my father and my uncle. I  
2 remember sitting at the table and they would chide each other,  
3 so the whole concept of how the Talmudic rabbis debated was  
4 sustained in my house on all these religious values, and he  
5 would question the religious values, he would question and my  
6 father would come back. It was actually very liberal but very  
7 learned, and they would have these great debates about Jewish  
8 life and the history of the Jewish people.

9           The environment in which I grew up was this  
10 religious Zionistic home. My father was a leader in the  
11 religious Zionist movement. He was a founder of the Mizrachi  
12 movement and a founder of Young Israel and a founder of Bar  
13 Ilan University. So for him the concept of religion and  
14 Zionism were integrated into one totality, and he had very  
15 little respect for the members of the community who rejected  
16 Israel and rejected the concept of waiting for a messianic  
17 experience as the only way to reclaim the land of Israel.

18           **MR. MERETSKY:** I see where you got your start in  
19 being so involved in Jewish education.

20           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Right.

21           **MR. MERETSKY:** Right from your own kitchen table so  
22 to speak.

23           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** It was there, it was very much  
24 there.

25           I was always the rebellious son. He always spent

1 much more time with my elder brother, Herschel, who's an  
2 ophthalmologist, who's a real scholar. Me, I was the  
3 rebellious son in many ways. I still have a recollection of  
4 my wearing these chartreuse pants and colorful shirts, and he  
5 thought that I was totally a wayward son, never to achieve  
6 anything. He was pulling his hair out with my rebellious  
7 nature.

8 My brother was a much more dutiful son with our  
9 parents. I was always testing the limits of our relationship.  
10 He tried to learn with me, and I would rather be out playing  
11 ball. We would learn ~~Pirke~~ ~~Avot~~ the sayings of the Father,  
12 and Shabbat afternoon. He taught me to read the Torah on my  
13 bar mitzvah. I learned in the Yeshiva until I was in my 20s  
14 actually. And I've continued to study on my own over these  
15 years. I'm much more interested now in Jewish philosophy and  
16 Jewish history than I am in the Talmud, which I think is an  
17 excessive preoccupation in Orthodoxy today.

18 **MR. MERETSKY:** We'll have to get you more involved  
19 with the Jewish Historical Society then.

20 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Right.

21 **MR. MERETSKY:** And maybe do some oral histories like  
22 this.

23 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Dr. Edgar was my cousin. His mother  
24 was a Schlusssel. So we're related, and I think he was one of  
25 the founding members.

1           **MR. MERETSKY:** Yes, he was, and he wrote that book  
2 about Jewish physicians.

3           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** He was quite a remarkable man.

4           **MR. MERETSKY:** When I first joined, he was still  
5 active.

6           You've already mentioned some of it, but who were  
7 some of your friends that you grew up with in school, and did  
8 you belong to any Jewish groups, youth groups or anything like  
9 that? Or were just rebellious, wearing the strange colored  
10 clothing?

11           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, no, I was not totally  
12 rebellious. I grew up in Jewish youth groups at Young Israel.  
13 They always had Jewish youth groups on Shabbat afternoon,  
14 which I attended with some regularity. When Young Israel was  
15 on Dexter and Fullerton, it was relatively close to the  
16 yeshiva, and so when I'd get thrown out of class, I'd go there  
17 and play pool. They had a pool table in the back of the shul.  
18 So I'd go play pool in the pool room. And I'd come home and  
19 my father would say, oh, my God, he got thrown out again. I  
20 guess I was always questioning at a level that was not  
21 acceptable.

22           I had two groups of friends interestingly. I had a  
23 group of secular friends because my father did not want me to  
24 go to day school at yeshiva at the time. Because of their  
25 virile anti-Zionism, he felt that it was not an environment

1 that he wanted his children in. So I went to afternoon school  
2 there.

3 **MR. MERETSKY:** Yeshiva Beth Yehudah, but I did not  
4 go to day school. So I went to public school.

5 Interestingly, most of my friends that I grew up  
6 with in the religious community have either made aliyah or  
7 moved away. There was Samuel \_\_\_\_\_,  
8 who was the rabbi at the time, his son Aaron and I were very  
9 good friends. He moved to Israel. Yudi Gelman, also a very  
10 good friend, he moved to Israel. So some of the friends I  
11 still see in shul, like Michael Dorkin, who I've known since  
12 we were old enough to recognize each other, so we've known  
13 each other for 60 some years. And Jack Zwick, and the late  
14 Abe Selesny, may he rest in peace, these people I loved and  
15 cared for, and I've maintained my relationships with them.

16 My secular friends, interestingly, there were three  
17 with whom I was close. We started a club when we left AZA. We  
18 had a rebellion, again which I led. I guess I'm a kochleffl.  
19 That's all.

20 **MR. MERETSKY:** What AZA chapter were you in?

21 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I think Mendelsohn.

22 Then we decided to form the Princetons. We thought  
23 the AZA wasn't for us and we formed this club. We had pretty  
24 jackets and stuff and we played in basketball leagues. And  
25 out of that group there were four of us who were at Mumford



1 High School. I have maintained a friendship with all of them  
2 for all of these over 50 years, and one of them, Roger Stuart,  
3 who's a physician in Florida, our relationship is so close we  
4 talk almost every day. Literally. So our friendship has  
5 sustained itself over these years. We go off and play golf  
6 together and we visit together, but we talk literally every  
7 day. I call to say hello, he calls to say hello. If we miss  
8 a day, it's a rare thing.

9 All the other three are physicians. One is in Los  
10 Angeles, Howard Molitz, and one's a physician in Houston,  
11 Stuart Rosenthal. Molitz, who divorced his first wife,  
12 married a non-Jewish girl who converted, and she is such a  
13 remarkable lady, she's now principal of the Hebrew Day School  
14 and quite frankly the religious anchor in their house. In  
15 fact she called me, she had just gone to Israel for the first  
16 time, and she met my son on the plane back from Israel. She  
17 said, I have to talk to you about Israel. It's the greatest  
18 experience of my life. So I've maintained very close  
19 relationships with those folks.

20 The group that I grew up with in the religious  
21 community, they kind of left the country and my relationship  
22 with them became attenuated.

23 **MR. MERETSKY:** When was your first trip to Israel?  
24 Since you're mentioning Israel.

25 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** My first trip to Israel was when my

1 father-in-law took his entire family -- I think that was the  
2 first trip; I think there was one before that -- to Israel for  
3 his 60th birthday, and he took all of us. I've been back  
4 numerous times since then.

5 **MR. MERETSKY:** What year was that?

6 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I don't really remember. I can't  
7 tell you specifically. I'd say it's about 25, 30 years ago.

8 I may have gone on a mission before that. In fact I  
9 think it was a mission I went on before that, but they all  
10 seem to blur after a while. There are some Jewish leaders who  
11 can tell you they're on their 70th trip, their 55th. You  
12 know, every time I go, I'm imbued with a sense of excitement.

13 **MR. MERETSKY:** One last question I want to ask you,  
14 what kind of a student were you in high school or college?  
15 Were you a good student? I'm just curious if you were so  
16 rebellious like that.

17 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** The answer was I was not  
18 particularly a good student until challenged by having to get  
19 accepted to college and to law school. I got relatively high  
20 grades. My father didn't know the difference between a C, D  
21 or an E, so his choices were if you got a C, it was as bad as  
22 getting an E. I remember one year I challenged him by getting  
23 all Es on the first card marking. I literally flunked every  
24 course. He said this was totally unacceptable. So I went  
25 from all Es to all As in the scope of third card marking.

1           **MR. MERETSKY:** You were rebellious.

2           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Yeah, I was rebellious child. So I  
3 basically finally just buckled down.

4           **MR. MERETSKY:** How did you meet your wife? Talking  
5 about early years and back then.

6           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** My wife's older sister was a  
7 classmate of mine in high school. We graduated Mumford  
8 together. Adria Meckler, Aronovitz now. I saw her sister and  
9 asked her to fix me up, and so we met. Rosie stayed upstairs  
10 because she couldn't pronounce my last name, little realizing  
11 now that she's been stuck with it for almost 42 years.

12           So then we went out and we got married after my  
13 first year of law school in 1963. And I do remember the date,  
14 August 11th. So it's getting close.

15           **MR. MERETSKY:** It's good that you remember it. It's  
16 very dangerous not to.

17           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I want you to know I didn't remember  
18 it once. I came home from playing a golf tournament and Rosie  
19 said to me, Do you know what today is? And I said, yes,  
20 Wednesday. She said, What's the date? I had completely  
21 forgotten. I only did that once.

22           **MR. MERETSKY:** I'll bet that cost you a bundle.

23           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** It was not a well-advised lapse of  
24 memory. I still hear about that one. Just like we both still  
25 hear about the fact that we went on a trip on my daughter's

1 tenth birthday. Now my daughter, may she be well, is 40. She  
2 reminds us we were there for a birthday party but we were away  
3 on a trip on her tenth birthday, and we're still hearing about  
4 it 30 years later. There are certain things you don't forget.

5 **MR. MERETSKY:** As a lawyer you've had a pretty busy  
6 career, and my question is, how do you ever have time to work  
7 at your job while you're handling 10 or 20 different  
8 organizations. And actually, even before we talk about that a  
9 minute, I want to ask you about one of your leisure time  
10 pursuits. In your file is this interesting card promoting an  
11 art show of yours. And I just was curious how you ended up  
12 becoming a modern artist. I assume those are oil paintings.

13 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Acrylics on canvas. Ironically,  
14 this morning I had a visit from Karen Fink of the Jewish  
15 Family Service. They wanted me to donate two or three  
16 paintings to the new building. So we went down in my  
17 storeroom where I've got a series of 20 or 30 I just finished  
18 over the last year and a half, and we picked out three that  
19 I'm going to give them.

20 It started actually -- again, I guess this is part  
21 of my rebellious nature continuing -- when I was a partner in  
22 the law firm of Pepper Hamilton. They used to have these  
23 retreats and the retreats were arduous. I don't know if  
24 you've ever been a group of 400 lawyers.

25 **MR. MERETSKY:** No.

1           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** It's not a very fun thing. Maybe  
2 this is my own idiosyncratic thing. A lot of lawyers take  
3 themselves way too seriously in my opinion, and I've always  
4 believed we provide a commodity. There's a lot of lawyers  
5 that don't have a sense of humor about all this.

6           So I was in one of these retreat sessions, and being  
7 bored I was doing a geometric and coloring it with pen because  
8 I had tuned out this session long ago. One of the lawyers  
9 came up and said, gee, that's really nice. Why don't you do  
10 that in color? And I thought, gee, that's a nice suggestion.  
11 At that time I was doing a lot of traveling for business. So  
12 I came home and I went to the art store and I bought a group  
13 of 48 color pencils. At the time I liked to do geometrics  
14 because I think I was creating what I thought, and not what I  
15 felt. Now my pieces are very much more abstract, although I'm  
16 kind of melding it. But my pieces were very rigid and very  
17 precise.

18           In my studio if you looked at the pencil stuff, you  
19 could see a sheet of paper that had mathematical formulas. I  
20 wanted to be so precise. If it was 2.6 inches here, it was  
21 going to be 2.6 inches here. And every square was going to be  
22 perfect. So I started coloring them. When I went on these  
23 long trips, I never liked to do work on the plane. But I used  
24 to take short pieces of paper and I loved to do this on the  
25 plane.

1           From there I decided I needed to get beyond these  
2 pencil pieces, so I called Bob Aaronson, who is an  
3 extraordinary print maker. You know, he's a brilliant artist.

4           **MR. MERETSKY:** I was not aware of that.

5           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Bob is a trained artist. His degree  
6 is from art school and he does these wonderful print works,  
7 and he works on them on the weekends. If you go up to his  
8 office, you'll see a few of them. They're outstanding.

9           So I called him and I said what do I do? He said,  
10 Don't get a lesson. The last thing you want to do is have  
11 somebody else tell you what you should be creating. Just go  
12 have fun, Mark. So I went out and bought some acrylic paints  
13 and I bought some small canvasses and I started toward my  
14 Jackson Pollick career, where I'd start throwing paint on and  
15 doing this kind of work.

16           Eventually I had a one-man show, and it was really  
17 one of the toughest things I've ever done because you're  
18 really hanging out there. I had like 30 pieces in this  
19 gallery in Pontiac, and I kept thinking you must be out of  
20 your mind, Schlussel. These people are walking in here and  
21 they're being nice to you, and then they're walking out of  
22 here saying, did you see that garbage he's got on the wall as  
23 art? I kept thinking about it. You really feel exposed. I  
24 mean there's just no other way to say it.

25           **MR. MERETSKY:** Your personalty is hanging on the

1 wall.

2           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** But I sold ten pieces and some of  
3 them for four figures. So it was kind of a nice experience.

4           I'll something anecdotally about it. It's about how  
5 we have perceptions of people. We always think we're very  
6 politically correct. When I worked at Pepper Hamilton, there  
7 was a partner in the firm who was a gay man, very, very fine  
8 person, and he never connected with me. He thought I was the  
9 ultimate hard-driving, uninteresting, heterosexual male, just  
10 interested in making deals. So one day he walks into my  
11 office and he looks at the wall, and he says, Oh, I like those  
12 two pieces. Where did you buy them? I said to him, I didn't  
13 buy them, I painted them. He said, No, no, Mark, I asked  
14 where did you buy them. I didn't buy them, I painted them.  
15 Look at the bottom; that's my name on it. He said, You  
16 painted those?" I said, Uh-huh.

17           From that point on he had a change of attitude  
18 because he now saw me in a different light, and he came to my  
19 show on the opening night with his partner, and they spent an  
20 hour and a half and they asked me about certain pieces. We  
21 became friends after that. But the ice breaker was all of a  
22 sudden his perception that what he wanted to believe I was  
23 wasn't exactly what I was in terms of the work.

24           So I love the artwork. I'm working on a piece now,  
25 I'm experimenting with a piece. I just bought a beautiful

1 piece of art, and I'm trying to see if I can emulate a Coleman  
2 Shemy that I got. So it's really quite an extraordinary  
3 experience. I'm working downstairs, fooling around with a  
4 piece that kind of melds my desire to be rigid and my desire  
5 to be free.

6 Plus it's also something you leave for posterity. I  
7 mean I hope I live a long life, but my children and  
8 grandchildren will have these things that I've actually  
9 created that's different.

10 **MR. MERETSKY:** And this tape, too.

11 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Right. And this tape, too; that's  
12 kind of nice.

13 When I work on an abstract piece these days, since  
14 acrylics dry to quickly, I can sometimes stay up all night and  
15 work on a piece. I start and I can't stop. I'm painting a  
16 lot more with brushes these days. I went through a period  
17 where I painted a lot with tools, and I still use a lot of  
18 tools because I love texture. I love to create texture and  
19 color. That's my thing. It's about trying to make you  
20 visualize and bring something forward. I couldn't draw you  
21 and I can't do that kind of work, the realism work, but I can  
22 do this abstract, and I really enjoy it.

23 **MR. MERETSKY:** That's great. Well, it's a good  
24 relief. As I started to say before, you are involved with 20  
25 or 30 different organizations. Looking at your CV, you've



1 just been involved with everything, and you've worked your way  
2 up the ladders. Going through, most of the organizations seem  
3 to be leaning towards the Jewish education side. From what  
4 you said earlier, I can see where that came from.

5 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, that's not totally true, but I  
6 think Jewish education was the area where I initially began to  
7 have interaction with the organized Jewish community.  
8 Ultimately my last position was the chairman of Sinai  
9 Hospital. Health care is an area I really have a lot of  
10 expertise in. So it's been a very interesting migration.

11 But Jewish education was always pivotal to me  
12 because it was the cornerstone in my opinion of Jewish  
13 survival. The statistics always indicated that those children  
14 who got an extensive Jewish education statistically were more  
15 probably going to marry within the religion and raise Jewish  
16 children than those who were attenuated from the educational  
17 process, in my judgment.

18 When I started, it was with the late Jacob Siegal.  
19 He was involved with Hillel and I was involved with Akiva, and  
20 it was at a time when Federation viewed Jewish education as  
21 something not to be supported by Federation. I remember  
22 presidents of Federation telling me as we went through these  
23 times that we needed to separate church and state, and I kept  
24 saying to them, are you delusional? What are you, church or  
25 state? I said this is a Jewish community, and without the

1 cornerstone of education. So we had this collective of folks  
2 who were pushing Federation to want to give us additional  
3 funding because of Jewish education.

4           That was at a time when annually they used to have  
5 this open forum on allocations. It was an allocations meeting  
6 where you could go and really express views. It was a very,  
7 very nice event, I actually thought, and people would come  
8 from various institutions and argue why there should be more  
9 recognition of their entity and within the Federation family.  
10 Jewish education was struggling at that time because day  
11 school education was just beginning to be accepted as the  
12 norm. If you take a look at the history of the Jewish day  
13 school movement, you had the yeshivas and then you had the  
14 Hungarian influx and the Orthodox yeshivas became very right  
15 wing. Then you had the development of the more Zionist Hebrew  
16 day schools, which were in effect yeshivas, but they were  
17 structured with the recognition of the importance and the  
18 centrality of Israel to the core of the Jewish existence.  
19 Then the Conservative movement and even the Reform movement  
20 began to recognize that Jewish day school education was  
21 critically important to Jewish survival.

22           Prior to that we were so interested in assimilating  
23 that -- and this is an anecdotal observation -- I remember  
24 when the Russian influx came to this country and I was sitting  
25 at an executive committee meeting of Federation -- at that

1 time I was already involved, more deeply immersed -- and they  
2 wanted to put the Russians in apartments donated to the  
3 community by a series of Federation involved property owners,  
4 but they were in Warren, Michigan. I said as far as I'm  
5 concerned, if you bring them to Warren, Michigan, don't  
6 bother. They said, well, we can get these apartments free. I  
7 said I'd rather pay for apartments in Oak Park because this is  
8 the first generation where you don't have to rip the keparse  
9 and tzittzit off of them. They don't know what a kaput is,  
10 they don't know what sitzas are, they don't know what any of  
11 these Jewish symbols are because they've never been associated  
12 with them. So you've got to put them in the Jewish community  
13 where they can in fact feel a sense of connection and learn on  
14 their own.

15           Interestingly, what I've always loved about  
16 Federation is if you made a cogent argument, people in this  
17 organization have a high degree of respect for each other, and  
18 they judge you on your ideas, not on who you are. I've always  
19 been very respectful of that. They thought that was exactly  
20 an accurate statement, and they rejected the apartments in  
21 Warren and they accepted apartments only within the Jewish  
22 community. So you could always make a difference in the  
23 process.

24           I've never been in a Federation meeting -- and this  
25 is totally anecdotal -- where I have experienced an individual

1 making a personal attack on somebody because they differed in  
2 their views. There were always strong disagreements on  
3 philosophy and ideas, but those were healthy. That's almost  
4 Talmudic in its expression. But the idea that there was going  
5 to be a personal attack -- Stan Meretsky, I think you're a  
6 terrible person because I disagree with you -- never happened.  
7 I always marveled at the discipline or respect people have for  
8 each other's ideas in the process.

9           And though we fought hard about Jewish education, it  
10 was important and people began to recognize that Jewish  
11 education was of singular importance, and I guess the  
12 leadership of Federation decided they'd rather have me in the  
13 tent than outside the tent, and I won't use the appropriate  
14 expression that comes with that.

15           **MR. MERETSKY:** And apparently so because you're the  
16 first Orthodox-oriented Jew to be president of the Federation  
17 here.

18           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Yes. I actually understand I'm the  
19 first Orthodox Jew to be president of any major Federation in  
20 the United States because there was always a perception that  
21 Federation was much more a closed environment for those people  
22 who were affluent, the country club set, and more attenuated  
23 from the Orthodox community. Orthodoxy was flowing one way  
24 and the balance of the Jewish community was going another way.  
25 Not that that's changed, to be frank with you, except that

1 there are many more Orthodox Jews now involved in Federation  
2 because I think what's happening is the Orthodox community is  
3 becoming much more integrated into Federation and a lot of  
4 people who are more secularly inclined are much more  
5 attenuated from any of their connections with the Jewish  
6 community.

7 I marvel that I got to be president of Federation  
8 when I did. It was an extraordinary experience, something  
9 that I will cherish and have cherished as one of the seminal  
10 experiences in my adult life.

11 **MR. MERETSKY:** You worked your way up the ladder.  
12 Who were the people who were mentoring you along the way? One  
13 thing I've learned, I've talked to several of the past  
14 presidents of Federation, every one had two or three people  
15 who saw the strength and leadership skills in that person to  
16 guide them up that ladder.

17 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, you'd have to look at people  
18 like Bill Berman, Joel Tauber, who's just a little bit older  
19 than I am, with whom I built relationships and looked to for  
20 leadership. Mike Zeltzer, who was a past president of  
21 Federation and a member of my law firm at the time. Those  
22 were people whose guidance I sought and received in the  
23 process of developing my career in Federation.

24 But I always was kind of an outsider/insider in  
25 Federation, and maybe that's an emotional comment, but I

1 always perceived myself because of the fact that a lot of the  
2 social interaction that was developed was developed at the  
3 country club and other places, and since I was shomer Shabbat  
4 on Friday nights I never went out and on Saturday nights from  
5 May until October Shabbat ended I think by breakfast on  
6 Sunday, so I didn't go out. So you lost a lot of that  
7 connection.

8           Very frankly, and this is a very honest statement,  
9 when you keep kosher, it's very hard for other people to  
10 invite you to their homes because it is an added burden on  
11 them in terms of their style of how they cook and prepare  
12 food. So I always felt that we were the kind of Federation  
13 leader who came from a very different perspective and  
14 viewpoint. I think that my predecessors, Connie Giles and  
15 Joel Tauber in particular, are to be commended that they  
16 judged me on my abilities versus on my social contacts in the  
17 world in which they lived. So from my vantage point it was a  
18 surprise.

19           I always took Federation work very seriously because  
20 I think the Jewish community in this country is unique and we  
21 need to cherish it and we need to build it in an appropriate  
22 way. I think Federation was the one organization which, going  
23 back to the secular church/state argument, that could cross  
24 and interphase with Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews  
25 because of its secular structure. This idea of identifying

1 religiously was not necessary as it might have been in other  
2 entities. Like if you have the Orthodox, you don't want to  
3 recognize the Conservative or Reform synagogues and temples,  
4 all of those kinds of attitudes never permeated in a  
5 Federation world.

6 **MR. MERETSKY:** Is the Orthodox community still very  
7 much separated or somewhat separated from the Reform and  
8 Conservative? Instead of being a bunch of different camps,  
9 it's like the Orthodox and the rest. Is it still like that?

10 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Yes. I think you have the Orthodox  
11 and the rest because one of my deeply held convictions on that  
12 is you have a profound change in the Jewish community. The  
13 Conservative movement, in my opinion, is the movement in this  
14 country that is most buffeted by the changes because it has  
15 adopted a theology which is not ingrained in its membership.  
16 If you were take the average Conservative congregant and the  
17 average Reform congregant, their basic religious practices are  
18 not very different from one another.

19 If you take a look at the three movements in  
20 Judaism, putting Jewish Humanism aside, in the Reform movement  
21 there is synergy between the clergy and the members in terms  
22 of their theology. They practice the same and they believe  
23 the same. Kashrut is not an abiding requirement in Reform  
24 Judaism, and in most instances neither the rabbis nor the  
25 congregants observe kashrut. Shabbat is not a requirement.

1 Using that just as two particular examples.

2 In the Conservative movement, however, other than  
3 the permission granted to drive to synagogue on Shabbat there  
4 is a restriction on driving the balance of the day, and there  
5 is an observance of kashrut with certain liberal  
6 interpretations of eating fish out and things like that. Yet,  
7 if you look at the congregants, you would not find many who  
8 adhere to Conservative philosophy and theology at that point.

9 I would ask the question almost rhetorically, how  
10 many members of any of your Conservative congregations drive  
11 to shul on Shabbat morning and then drive home and put the car  
12 away and observe Shabbat the rest of the day as if it was one  
13 of the restrictions to use their car, use their phone, all of  
14 these mechanical equipment, and the answer is the number would  
15 be minuscule and almost non-existent. So that movement is  
16 being buffeted.

17 So there is Orthodoxy and there is a Conservative  
18 movement and a Reform movement, but they're really moving  
19 closer together because the Reform movement has discovered  
20 that the symbolism of certain practices is important because  
21 of the number of members they have assimilating and out-  
22 migrating beyond the Jewish community. So they're concerned  
23 and therefore becoming more religiously oriented and  
24 symbolically oriented. The Conservative movement is finding  
25 that if they don't change the more rigorous forms of their



1 practice, they're going to lose their members, so therefore  
2 they're liberalizing what they're doing, and as they  
3 liberalize and as the Reform movement becomes more  
4 conservative, they're going to find a common meeting point in  
5 the not too distant future.

6 I actually wrote an article on this I think about 20  
7 years ago, that the Conservative movement as it is would cease  
8 to exist in terms of its religious theology by 2010. I don't  
9 know that I was right on the date, but that was a comment I  
10 made.

11 The Orthodox movement, on the other hand, because of  
12 these trends, is becoming profoundly insular and it also is  
13 dividing itself away from the balance of the Jewish community,  
14 which I think is a disturbing trend on all counts. I find in  
15 Orthodoxy today you have the outer manifestation of  
16 religiosity has become fabric oriented. You wear a black hat,  
17 you wear a black suit, and you have your tzitzits out. Those  
18 are the pass keys to become accepted into the more Haradi or  
19 right wing Orthodox movement. In cities like Detroit, there  
20 isn't a vibrant a centrist Orthodox movement as there is in  
21 other major cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, New  
22 York, and Los Angeles.

23 So these are very kind of disturbing trends. I  
24 think that to me personally they're disconcerting because they  
25 show a chasm that's developing between our religious

1 denominations in Judaism, and they don't speak to each other;  
2 they speak past each other. I think that's disconcerting and  
3 disturbing. We're all Jews. One of my values has always been  
4 I will never be judgmental about whether your practices or  
5 mine are the ones that are the entry key to the world to come  
6 if you want to choose to believe in that portion of the Jewish  
7 theology.

8           **MR. MERETSKY:** Something I don't know anything about  
9 is the Young Israel movement. Isn't that like a modern  
10 Orthodox?

11           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Yes. The Young Israel was and has  
12 been a very modern Orthodox movement, and as a result it was  
13 the Zionist Orthodox congregational movement. The people in  
14 Young Israel, like my father who was the founder of Young  
15 Israel in Detroit -- he was the first president -- were people  
16 who believed in the concept of Torah Em derech erez, which  
17 means a pursuit of scholarship within the framework of the  
18 secular world, and that you can live in both kinds of worlds  
19 and be a traditional Jew. The Young Israel movement has in  
20 fact been the proponent of that for decades.

21           The problem is many of the rabbis that are available  
22 now in the Orthodox movement are far more to the right  
23 theologically than their congregants and the Young Israel  
24 movement is attracting rabbis who are less flexible in terms  
25 of the Orthodox community, in terms of the liberalness of the

1 rabbinate in previous generations of Young Israel.

2 I remember Young Israel rabbis who would dance with  
3 their wives at social parties. Now we have gotten to the  
4 point where you go to certain weddings, and there's a  
5 separation of Mechitzah down the dance floor, so never the  
6 twain shall meet. I always find it fascinating that I'm here  
7 at a wedding, which is celebrating the union of a man and a  
8 woman into one committed being to each other, and we are doing  
9 it through this method of separation. The rabbinic  
10 interpretation is one that I have a hard time adjusting to,  
11 and that is that the male species is basically bad, and  
12 therefore we need to build all these walls of protection so  
13 that we can be pure in our thoughts and actions. So I have  
14 some issues with that.

15 **MR. MERETSKY:** I can understand that one.

16 Does the Orthodox community get a larger share of  
17 the Federation's budget money even though they're not as  
18 involved with the Federation?

19 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, I'd recharacterize your  
20 question into a different answer. I guess this is almost the  
21 politician's answer. Federation focuses its dollars on those  
22 people who are most in need of the support services that it  
23 provides. As it turns out, the Orthodox community has a  
24 preponderance of those needs in many areas. Hence, the Jewish  
25 Family Service provides a lot of those services.

1 I was just at a meeting yesterday talking about the  
2 health care program that Rachel Yoskovitz is working on -- a  
3 very remarkable Jewish servant by the way -- and that program,  
4 there are a number of families in the Orthodox community that  
5 have a significant number of children and they have a meager  
6 income. The fathers dedicate themselves mostly to learning  
7 Torah, and in their world view this is the critical preeminent  
8 role, and therefore there is a focus of dollars to support  
9 them in the way of the social services.

10 When we move to education, I think there's a belief  
11 that the more strongly you educate and support the day school  
12 movement, the more likely you are to have a sustained Jewish  
13 community, and since the preponderance of kids that go to the  
14 day school movement are Orthodox, the answer is yes, it's  
15 getting a preponderance of those dollars.

16 **MR. MERETSKY:** Any particular incidents or comments  
17 that you got when you were president about being Orthodox  
18 versus the rest? I know you say there was never any name  
19 calling or anything in the board among people who are  
20 involved, but just somewhere out and around as you were doing  
21 your job, were there any comments? Or did people just accept  
22 it?

23 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** The only thing I got feedback on was  
24 when early in my tenure as president I made the decision that  
25 the Jewish community should acquire Binai Moshe, and ensure

1 that it stayed in the Jewish community, and then sold it on a  
2 very sweetheart deal to Yeshiva Beth Yehuda for its girls  
3 school. That was referred to behind my back by many of  
4 predecessors as Schlusssel's folly. Although a couple of those  
5 presidents have come to me in years since and said, you were  
6 right on that issue and we were wrong, because it was the  
7 linchpin that insured the vitality of Oak Park, Huntington  
8 Woods, and Southfield. We have a very interesting dynamic in  
9 Detroit that is something that has not really gotten the  
10 national recognition that it should have gotten and that is  
11 through the loan program and through the acquisition of the  
12 B'nai Moshe for the yeshiva, and Beth Shalom expanding its  
13 synagogue and the building of the cholil, you have reverse  
14 flight, something that's never happened. We've had a  
15 tradition in the Jewish community of fleeing from the African  
16 American community, and I think the views of our liberalism  
17 have come to bear in a very positive way, too.

18 **MR. MERETSKY:** So you were on the border of one of  
19 the founders of -- I've always called it the North Oak Park  
20 Project, but I know it has another name.

21 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** The Neighborhood Project. That's  
22 what it was called. It was an extraordinary program, giving  
23 the people the impetus to buy homes. But you also have a free  
24 exchange. Now you have African Americans buying from Jews and  
25 Jews buying from African Americans. It's the healthy kind of

1 approach. If you went into the eastern part of Southfield,  
2 starting at the Ten Mile Road/Greenfield quadrant and move to  
3 Ten Mile Road and Southfield, there's been a substantial  
4 influx of young Jewish families into that area that have just  
5 made it a very vital and viable Jewish community. This is,  
6 again, a Federation activity that should be getting major  
7 kudos for the vision of the leadership of Federation.

8 Most of them don't live in the area. I am the only  
9 past president that lives in the area, and you have a vice  
10 president of Federation, Gary Torgow, who lives in that area.  
11 But other than the two of us, I can't think of anybody else  
12 who lives in that area.

13 But the vision of supporting the programs came from  
14 everybody.

15 **MR. MERETSKY:** The Detroit community is very  
16 unusual. It's like a barbell. You've got one end in West  
17 Bloomfield, the other end in Oak Park/Huntington Woods.

18 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Right.

19 **MR. MERETSKY:** And just like a cylinder running  
20 between them.

21 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Right.

22 **MR. MERETSKY:** Northwestern Highway and Orchard Lake  
23 Road. It's very interesting. I've never seen it anywhere  
24 else. But whoever came up with the idea that started the  
25 Neighborhood Project, I think it was brilliant, because at

1 that time I was living in Huntington Woods and I know how it  
2 helped my area, and my synagogue, Beth Shalom, over there. So  
3 I've watched it all these years.

4 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, I think the project -- every  
5 successful project in Detroit has many fathers as they said.  
6 It's only the failures that are orphans. Rabbi Groner played  
7 a pivotal role in the Neighborhood Project in many ways, both  
8 in his support and conceptualization of parts of it, and also  
9 because many of his congregants were important in Federation  
10 and politicking to make sure it got done. So he amongst all  
11 the clergy deserves the kudos for what happened with the  
12 Neighborhood Project, quite frankly.

13 The other interesting thing about that program that  
14 I think is phenomenal is there was never a default. To my  
15 knowledge there was never a default. Every person who  
16 borrowed money paid it back.

17 **MR. MERETSKY:** That's awesome.

18 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** So that tells you how successful it  
19 was and the integrity with which these people took the  
20 resources, used them properly, and return them to the  
21 community.

22 **MR. MERETSKY:** Mark, I'd like to have you talk about  
23 Sinai Hospital. You were involved with that for many, many  
24 years, up through the sale of the hospital. I'd like you to  
25 talk about some of the reasons for the closing, the community

1 problem that you had to deal with on that whole subject, the  
2 time it took. I know there were a lot of deals that were  
3 negotiated on that.

4 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, the Sinai closing has within  
5 it a lot of Jewish history, and it is something that still  
6 saddens me to this day that we didn't have the ability to  
7 preserve that institution. But if you think back, they  
8 started with the North End Clinic. Many of the doctors in our  
9 community who were physicians who were Jewish were denied  
10 staff privileges at many hospitals in this community. It was  
11 a highly discriminatory process. And as a result of that,  
12 there was a need to develop a separate institution, and the  
13 will of the leadership of the Jewish community came to bear.

14 Interestingly, in most cities the hospital was a  
15 power center equal to Federation, whereas in Detroit the  
16 funding for the hospital came from Federation's leadership, so  
17 there was never a power battle because it was almost an  
18 integrated process.

19 I want to digress for a minute because there's an  
20 anecdotal story that I think is important.

21 **MR. MERETSKY:** Please. Go ahead.

22 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Early in my presidency of Federation  
23 there was a lawsuit pending by a nursing home on Maple Road,  
24 which was an attempt to thwart the right for the Jewish Home  
25 for the Aged to get a certificate of need, and this will



1 dovetail into the Sinai because it tells you the power of the  
2 changing demographic, but I'd like to tell the story now.

3 I called the CEO of Beaumont Hospital, who owned a  
4 significant piece, and asked him to come to a meeting with me  
5 to discuss dismissing the lawsuit. So I went to the meeting  
6 with him, and we met actually at the Jewish Home on Seven Mile  
7 Road at the time. I said to him, almost pleading, We need to  
8 have you dismiss that lawsuit. You're hurting indigent or  
9 basically poor Jewish folks who need a nursing home  
10 environment and I'd really request that you dismiss it. His  
11 response was, I don't see any compelling business reason why I  
12 should do that, and therefore I'm not.

13 So then I said, Well, I'm going to give you an idea  
14 of what I think might be a compelling reason. I've called the  
15 *Jewish News* and I've looked at your census, which is about 20  
16 percent Jewish these days, and you're building a facility on  
17 Orchard Lake Road, and from my vantage point I think what  
18 you're doing is destructive to our whole Jewish community and  
19 anti-Semitic, and I'm going to have a press conference with  
20 the *Jewish News* and that's going to be the byline of my  
21 presentation.

22 He said, Are you threatening me? I said, No, I'm  
23 telling you. Threats are something people don't intend to do.  
24 Telling you something is just forewarning you that that's  
25 going to be consequence, and we'll see whether the Jewish

1 community will follow its Federation leadership once this  
2 story breaks. He said to me after mulling this for a minute,  
3 minute and a half, How much time do I have to get rid of that  
4 lawsuit? I said, Well, the *Jewish News* has already gone to  
5 press, so it will be next week. He said, Where are you going?  
6 I said, Back to my office.

7 I went back to my office and within an hour and a  
8 half I received a phone call from their attorneys asking where  
9 we could deliver the dismissal order.

10 I tell you that story because of two things. First  
11 of all, I got my courage to do that from watching with great  
12 respect actually the African American community assert its  
13 rights without fear. And I was always an anomaly. I said I'm  
14 an Orthodox president but I don't have a shtetl mentality. I  
15 basically think that we need to assert our rights as Jews  
16 without fear that -- you know, Jews are always whispering,  
17 like Aunt Jenny's got cancer. Nobody can say that out loud.  
18 We all think if we go along, we'll get along.

19 This was a perfect example of being assertive in a  
20 way that was good for the community. The lawsuit was  
21 dismissed, the objections went away, and ultimately the Maple  
22 Drake facilities were built. A lot of elderly Jews live a  
23 very dignified and wonderful life because of that.

24 **MR. MERETSKY:** My father.

25 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** And I tell you that because that's

1 the changing demographic in terms of the Sinai Hospital.  
2 Sinai Hospital had lost the loyalty of its Jewish patients as  
3 well as many of its Jewish doctors, because once the world  
4 opened up to them, being accepted on other hospital staffs,  
5 they moved to other facilities, and Sinai being a singular  
6 facility -- 609 beds, but it was operating basically at about  
7 a 480 bed capacity -- it could not compete competitively with  
8 the systems that were around it.

9           One of the things that we did at Sinai -- and I'm  
10 one of the few people who became president of an agency at  
11 Federation after I was Federation president, which is again an  
12 interesting -- I don't think there's ever been a president of  
13 Federation who after his presidency, other than myself, has  
14 become a president of an agency. So I became chairman of  
15 Sinai I believe in 1995. I finished my presidency of  
16 Federation in 1992.

17           There were some extraordinary people on that board  
18 in my opinion. One of them who I revere, if you want to talk  
19 about a mentor and a great person, was Bob Sosnick, may he  
20 rest in peace. I thought he was a remarkable human being.  
21 And I would say that on tape a hundred times over. He was a  
22 man of great dignity, extraordinarily charitable without  
23 wanting the covet of charity. He did it all for the right  
24 reasons. An absolutely incredible mind.

25           We invited onto the board Jerry Schostak, and he

1 became an extremely valuable ally, a very, very bright and  
2 very forceful member of the team.

3           The key was to create a value proposition so that  
4 Sinai would have to be acquired. I happen to be a health care  
5 lawyer. I've done health care legal work and real estate  
6 legal work for the last 30 years. You know what the numbers  
7 are, and I've had a lot of experience in this area, so I knew  
8 it was inevitable that if we didn't sell the asset, we'd have  
9 to close that asset at some point.

10           From a Jewish community point of view, the tragedy  
11 of it is Sinai Hospital made us bigger than we are. It added  
12 a sense of power. It was geometric in its power. Federation  
13 was a community of nursing homes, of a hospital, a highly  
14 regarded hospital with very fine physicians, and when we had  
15 to contract, we lost something of that nucleus and that power  
16 base in my judgment in terms of the perception of the Gentile  
17 or general community. So this was not a moment of joy. This  
18 was a moment of singular sadness on my part.

19           I still feel saddened by it, but there were  
20 circumstances that dictated that the decision had to be made  
21 and had to be made in an appropriate way. So my predecessor  
22 brought in the Hunter Group, and we worked with them. And I  
23 said to them, Can we keep this place propped up with very good  
24 numbers for a couple of years if we do the restructuring, and  
25 the answer was yes.

1           What I believe happened was that the Detroit Medical  
2 Center presumed that Grace Hospital was going to be very  
3 viable and Sinai was going to shrink and disappear. Well, as  
4 it turned out, the reverse happened. We started becoming very  
5 profitable. The year before the merger we made I think about  
6 \$12 million and they lost a comparable amount of money I  
7 believe. So it became imperative that one of those two  
8 hospitals had to go for the other to survive.

9           We began negotiations with three or four groups, a  
10 for-profit group and two not-for-profits. Providence had some  
11 interest, a real serious interest. A for-profit had some  
12 serious interest, and the DMC had some serious interest.

13           The State of Michigan made it very clear to us --  
14 and I won't go into this -- that their chosen acquirer was the  
15 DMC because their fear was that the DMC has so much  
16 infrastructure and medical gloss associated with it, they  
17 didn't want another competitor in that area. So we were  
18 informed in very circuitous ways by the Attorney General's  
19 Office that if we sold to a for-profit, we would be sued and  
20 they would tie us up in court for two years whether we would  
21 succeed ultimately or not. So prudence dictated that that  
22 wasn't going to be the choice.

23           So we embarked upon this negotiation with the  
24 Detroit Medical Center, which led to a successful conclusion,  
25 and the two people I mentioned, Bob Sosnick and Jerry

1 Schostak, were instrumental and pivotal along with the CEO,  
2 Phil Shengold, in making this happen. So the four of us  
3 basically pushed through this transaction.

4 And the miracle is, the progeny of that is the  
5 Jewish Fund, which is the fund that now houses roughly \$60  
6 million, the asset of the Jewish community that we need to  
7 actually support Federation and is a support foundation.

8 There's an interesting anecdotal story about that,  
9 too, and I won't mention a lot of names other than Max Fisher.  
10 The way the deal was structured, Sinai Health Care Foundation  
11 really had control of the hospital board. We had a concern  
12 that if those dollars were sent that way, it would be utilized  
13 by the Health Care Foundation not in the way that the Jewish  
14 community as a collective might use them. So we needed to get  
15 all of the Health Care Foundation appointee board members to  
16 vote in favor of disassociating, in effect, to get the money  
17 into the Jewish community.

18 So there was one vote that was critically needed,  
19 and I called Max Fisher and as is typical, he was the unsung  
20 hero. He went and got a commitment and called and said we  
21 have the commitment. And when I called the vote, there was  
22 shock around the table that the votes went the way they did.

23 So here again, between Max and Jerry Schostak and  
24 Bob Sosnick, we were able to maneuver this process forward.  
25 And Schostak was particularly critical at the time of closing

1 in ensuring that the deal would be consummated. So all of  
2 these people played a pivotal role and led to the infusion of  
3 a significant foundation for the Jewish community which will  
4 be self-perpetuating for generations to come.

5 Last year we gave Federation, when it was having a  
6 tough year, \$500,000 to support certain agencies. We talked  
7 yesterday in this meeting about the Jewish Family Service  
8 Health Care program. We're talking about supporting some  
9 additional funding, but we've given them \$288,000 already for  
10 that program. So this was a miracle and a great event for the  
11 Jewish community.

12 One of my great experiences in terms of the  
13 negotiations and the politics of pulling this deal together,  
14 it took tons of hours and it was an intriguing enterprise to  
15 ultimately get the sale done. I was saddened, and still am,  
16 when the Medical Center chose to tear down Sinai rather than  
17 Grace. I actually think that was a huge mistake on their  
18 part.

19 **MR. MERETSKY:** Yes, because that was a much newer  
20 building.

21 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** It was a much better building, and  
22 the doctors felt attenuated at Grace. The Grace doctors  
23 didn't feel attenuated at Sinai. You would have kept a lot  
24 more business at that. It was bad judgment in my opinion, and  
25 I voiced it at the time.

1           **MR. MERETSKY:** You wouldn't want to mention any of  
2 those names since this is going into the history, the person  
3 Max Fisher called?

4           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** No, I really would not. There are  
5 certain things I think would be better left to the  
6 imagination. I'm saving it for my memoirs. I just think that  
7 there are certain things that would be preferred to be left  
8 where they are.

9           **MR. MERETSKY:** One of your absolute main thrusts has  
10 always been education, and this area has gone through so many  
11 changes and a lot more to come. How do you see the future?  
12 What do you see of the Jewish education in the community? How  
13 do you see it playing out over the next 10 or 20 years?

14           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** This is a view from somebody who has  
15 stepped back and has not been immersed in the process for the  
16 last number of years.

17           **MR. MERETSKY:** I'm sure you followed it closely.

18           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I haven't been president of  
19 Federation for 13 years, so it's a long time ago.

20                   There are a series of concerns that we should all  
21 have. The cost of day school education is becoming  
22 prohibitive for families with young children. Our day schools  
23 are in some difficulty. The two more right-wing yeshivas,  
24 Drachai Torah and Beth Yehudah, are in very difficult  
25 financial straits. Beth Yehudah has lost a number of its



1 patrons, particularly Marvin Berlin, blessed memory, and  
2 Hannah Karbal, so there's some trouble there.

3 Hillel has become very expensive and therefore more  
4 elitist, and the common person can't really afford it,  
5 although they have a very wonderful tuition scholarship  
6 program that I think is going to help in some way.

7 The afternoon school education in this community  
8 does not provide much education. You know, when United Hebrew  
9 Schools was at its prime, it had 5,500 kids, and they went  
10 almost 10 hours a week. They were getting what today might be  
11 a day school education that produced some very highly  
12 Judiciously educated students. Today, for a kid to go to Sunday  
13 school on Sunday and expect to know anything about their  
14 religion is just not realistic. Kids have dancing and tennis  
15 and golf. In fact I'm going to two of my granddaughters'  
16 dance recitals tonight at seven. So I know about all this.  
17 They're the joys of grandparenthood, but they're spread all  
18 over. They've got all these other activities.

19 The day school movement has really proven to be the  
20 anchor of Jewish continuity. The afternoon school, which is  
21 really a Sunday school movement, has not. I see that as a  
22 significant problem. But I don't know how it's correctable  
23 because the momentum has swung to so many other outside  
24 activities that kids are not going to, nor are their parents  
25 going to tolerate an afternoon Jewish education of three to

1 four days a week.

2           **MR. MERETSKY:** How do you feel in the long run that  
3 this will affect the Jewish community? Do you feel it is  
4 weakening more? Intermarriage more? Dispersal of the  
5 community?

6           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Oh, there's no doubt in my mind that  
7 our assimilation statistics in the United States are  
8 staggering at this moment. You know, I've commented in the  
9 past a Jewish -- I'll pick a young man -- had a choice between  
10 100 percent -- although Jews are 2.5 percent of the population  
11 -- his dating mix was 100 percent Jewish and therefore the  
12 statistical probability of his marrying a Jewish girl was  
13 pretty high. In today's world if he feels free to date  
14 anybody and 97.5 percent of the girls he's going to go out  
15 with are non-Jewish, the statistical probability of a Jewish  
16 marriage is declining precipitously.

17           I think if you really read the tea leaves and look  
18 at history, the Jewish community in the United States has  
19 reached a zenith and is in decline in many ways. The Orthodox  
20 movement is going to be the vital movement, but in many ways  
21 it's -- I'm looking for the right word -- it's gotten to the  
22 point where it would prefer in many instances to have its  
23 young people not educated secularly. They discourage college,  
24 they discourage so much secular education, and they say Torah  
25 learning is the predominant force. So these young people

1 don't have the skills to compete in a very competitive  
2 economic society. So therefore, they're economically  
3 disadvantaged, and the people who are going to be able to  
4 support that kind of economically disadvantaged group are out  
5 migrating and no longer Jewish, and becoming attenuated to the  
6 Jewish community.

7           If you look back and use as an example a Max Fisher  
8 or an Alan Schwartz, who were the forerunners of breaking down  
9 the barriers in the secular community, in terms of charitable  
10 organizations. Now look at all the Jewish money and all the  
11 Jewish leadership that's involved in the symphony, the art  
12 museum, culture and education on a state-wide level, and  
13 therefore for a young person who wants to express themselves  
14 philanthropically, the Jewish community is not the only  
15 address anymore. So the whole thing is in a tremendous state  
16 of flux. I think the Jewish community is changing  
17 dramatically as result of all of this.

18           **MR. MERETSKY:** Most of those institutions, the  
19 symphony, the Detroit Institute of Arts, wouldn't even exist  
20 today were in not for the Jewish community. Namee Jarvi has  
21 been incredible and the Jewish community has supported him, as  
22 they say, to the Max. Look at the Max.

23           The DIA, the same thing. Most of the cultural  
24 institutions in this community would not exist were it not for  
25 the Jewish community, and yet they still put an awesome amount

1 of money into our community as a whole.

2           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** But as assimilation occurs, and the  
3 grandchildren of some of these folks are no longer affiliated  
4 with the Jewish community, the desire to support this  
5 community is going to diminish. So we have an interesting set  
6 of challenges in front of us in my judgment, and I think that  
7 recognizing that this is a declining community is going to be  
8 one of them.

9           **MR. MERETSKY:** Well, I know for myself, being a  
10 member of the B'nai Brith Youth Organization is what really  
11 brought me into the Jewish community. I knew I was Jewish,  
12 but not active until I made those contacts and learned that as  
13 a teenager, and I personally think that's where our community  
14 needs to be spending more of its money is into that group,  
15 because that's the pivotal time in a kid's life.

16           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** I totally agree with you. I think  
17 we've got to focus our dollars on Jewish education and those  
18 kinds of services and camp programs and Israel programs.  
19 These are things that need to connect the Jewish youth with  
20 their future to give us chance to have some high level of  
21 continuity within the Jewish community.

22           I may be somebody who sounds pessimistic. I  
23 basically look at it as being realistic, that we're seeing a  
24 significant outward migration in the Jewish community and the  
25 statistics of how those people choose to raise their children

1 is not encouraging for the Jewish community.

2           You know, the rabbis are faced with a conundrum, so  
3 they've been somewhat ambivalent about how much outreach they  
4 do, and their ambivalence in my judgment has been not in the  
5 best interests of the community.

6           **MR. MERETSKY:** Let me ask you one more question, and  
7 that is what do you consider the greatest success of your  
8 career, in either the Jewish community or the secular  
9 community, the thing that you're most proud of that you've  
10 accomplished over all these years?

11           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** You know, I can't answer the  
12 question that way. I think the fact that you're sitting in  
13 the Max Fisher Building, that happened during my tenure as  
14 president. Bob Aronson had just come to the community. No  
15 one was going to 163 Madison. It was an empty building.

16           Now if you look around here, this building is filled  
17 with meetings of both Federation and other Jewish communal  
18 activities. So would I say that's a very important career  
19 event? The answer is yes, I would say that's one of them.

20           I'd also look at the Sinai Hospital sale and the  
21 Jewish funds, \$60 million of assets. Was that a career event?  
22 The answer is yes. I'd say that was pivotally important.

23           And early in my career when I negotiated the  
24 overpasses on a pro bono basis for the Orthodox Jewish  
25 community to protect the vitality of Oak Park both north and

1 south, I negotiated with Neal Goldsmith to get those decks on  
2 I-696. That was historic, that we proved to them that they  
3 would be dividing a community that didn't drive and destroying  
4 the fabric of the Orthodox community. So again, that was  
5 unique. We were able to get them to build those decks, which  
6 have had a remarkably positive impact because Oak Park is  
7 connected and not severed. And we also negotiated and got the  
8 certificate of funding of one of the Federation apartment  
9 buildings at that time.

10 So overall, on a pragmatic basis, I'd say those were  
11 all events that I'd say were rather seminal, showing the  
12 community representing the Orthodox community and being the  
13 first Federation president who was Orthodox is also a moment  
14 of great accomplishment in my opinion because it allowed  
15 people to be less judgmental about the community that they  
16 knew nothing about, and to be more open, to be receptive to  
17 the values that the Orthodox community espoused as integral to  
18 the Jewish community as well.

19 So all of those things I guess come to mind as  
20 events that I think were pivotal in terms of my experience in  
21 leadership of Federation.

22 **MR. MERETSKY:** Any other comments or thoughts or  
23 stories that you'd like to add at this time?

24 **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** One of the experiences I had before  
25 I became president of Federation is I became president of

1 JESNA -- Jewish Education Service of North America. That  
2 organization, which has prospered over the last 20 years, was  
3 structured to try and provide on a national level the  
4 infrastructure, support, educational tools, pedagogical tools,  
5 ideas about Jewish education.

6 One of the concepts I always had, and today you  
7 could really do it, there are probably in the United States  
8 maybe three dozen fabulous, incredible Jewish educators, and  
9 when they lecture now, they may lecture to 50 kids, 20 kids,  
10 100 kids. If we would use the Internet and we would use all  
11 the media we've got, why couldn't we get those people  
12 lecturing to 5,000 kids? Why should we not be using all of  
13 these electronic tools to get these great educators into  
14 everybody's either household or into the schools, so that if  
15 you went, to use your example, Beth Shalom Sunday School, you  
16 would have as your lecturer some great teacher from Boston,  
17 because there are some great schools in Boston, or from  
18 Baltimore, or wherever.

19 My hope was with JESNA is that they would in fact do  
20 that, and that there would be a development of using the  
21 electronic tools of bringing Jewish education into almost as  
22 many houses as possible and schools as possible.

23 You know, the interesting thing was, I had this  
24 Shabbat lunch this week at one of my dear friends, Michael  
25 Chapp. Michael Chapp is a world renowned physicist at Ford

1 Hospital. He runs a lab of 40 to 50 people, does all this  
2 research, travels the world. He also was a Talmudic genius at  
3 13. He's a very amazing guy. But we were talking about our  
4 yeshiva days at lunch. There were three or four of us and we  
5 all commented that each of us used to get whacked on the  
6 knuckles by the rabbi. We all commented about getting whacked  
7 and how these guys were Talmudic geniuses but pedagogical  
8 midgets. I mean if there ever was a way not to teach. I  
9 didn't like coming home having my hand hurting.

10 The truth is in the Orthodox movement today, there  
11 are lots of people teaching who could take advantage of these  
12 pedagogical skills. There are such advance tools on teaching  
13 that we ought to be taking advantage of, but an individual  
14 community may not be able to afford it. JESNA was supposed to  
15 be the medium and can be the medium to facilitate that kind of  
16 educational improvements.

17 I was the first president during the founding  
18 period, and it was a very difficult time. It was really a  
19 draining period in terms of for me emotionally because it took  
20 so much time and effort. We were always broke and were always  
21 just starving for money. But one of the great things we did  
22 there was hire Jonathan Woocher, who was and is renowned  
23 nationally as an educator and a scholar, and he's still  
24 running JESNA and doing a great job.

25 I'll conclude with Morocco, because what I found out



1 about Morocco was both the great sadness of what's happened to  
2 the Jewish community and one of the great joys I had in the  
3 Jewish community. When you look at Morocco, the Jews predate  
4 the Arabs in Morocco, and nobody knows that because we've had  
5 so much revisionist history in the Arab world. All history  
6 begins and ends with Mohammad and Islam, and they have  
7 distorted and torn apart all of the other artifacts that  
8 disprove that in particular places, and Morocco is one of  
9 them. So what was once a vital Jewish community has declined  
10 to a mere shell of itself.

11           One thing that was fascinating, when I was in  
12 Morocco, I was mourning for my mother, and I needed a minyan,  
13 and there are two stories I want to share because I think  
14 they're both -- one still will bring tears to my eyes.

15           One day we were at a place and I said I need a  
16 minyan, it was time to daven minchah and 15 men appeared  
17 instantly. They pulled out their yarmulkahs, because in  
18 Morocco if you wear a yarmulkah outside at this point when we  
19 were there, it was unsafe. They all knew all the prayers by  
20 heart, and it was the most moving experience.

21           The other thing that moved me in Morocco in that  
22 sense is that they don't have a mashgiach in Morocco, they  
23 don't have people supervising. The women are trusted to keep  
24 the kasharat. And I thought what a remarkable society, that  
25 they have not risen to the level of mistrust. If you said

1 your house was kosher, everybody sat down to eat. And frankly  
2 that's how I live in terms of my life. If somebody tells me  
3 their house is kosher, I eat there because to me, to say to  
4 them, I don't trust your kasharat is a much greater averya, or  
5 violation of Jewish law, and an insult then to in fact eat if  
6 it's not up to your standard. I've always lived my life that  
7 way. And I marveled at Morocco.

8           The final thing yet about Morocco was one of the  
9 most moving experiences I've had in my life in the community.  
10 We were visiting a nursing home in Morocco and there was a  
11 fellow on our trip whose last name was Maimon. He is a direct  
12 descendent of <sup>MAIMONIDES</sup> ~~Maimonedes~~, an Orthodox young man. He's not  
13 young anymore; he's my age now. He came from Seattle. Maimon  
14 is a Sephardic family.

15           Sitting on the porch of this nursing home was an  
16 elderly woman and he asked the nursing home staff about her.  
17 They said she hasn't spoken in quite a long time, and she just  
18 sits there. He walked up to her, and he put his hands on the  
19 two arms of her wheelchair. I think he was an accountant, but  
20 he was a hazen in terms of the holidays at his synagogue. He  
21 had a gorgeous voice. I actually get choked up when I  
22 remember this event. He began singing this Sephardic lullaby.  
23 She opened her eyes and she took his hand. She got out of the  
24 wheelchair and danced with him. It was such a singular moment  
25 of Jewish connection, that it was an awesome experience.

1           As you look back on your life and you think about  
2 those kinds of events, where else could I have done that? So  
3 my Judaism has always served me well.

4           I'll tell you another story that comes to mind. It  
5 has nothing to do with Federation. I was in Zurich on  
6 Chalomoid Succoth. I had to go negotiate a deal and I had to  
7 stay over because of Shabbat. I got directions from the  
8 concierge at the hotel to the shul. It was a couple mile walk  
9 and I went. And I had my first experience with being patted  
10 down because I was a stranger.

11           I went in and I was davening, and the people in  
12 front of me, a family, said would you like to come to our  
13 house for Shabbat lunch? I had nothing else to do, and I said  
14 I'd love to, and I went with them. It turned out the  
15 grandmother, the mother of the father of the family, came from  
16 the same town as my father, and she knew my family, and she  
17 told me about my family because she had come from the same  
18 town in Poland, Galishi, as my family had come from. What an  
19 extraordinary experience I had.

20           Then when I went to Russia and went to visit  
21 Refusniks, which was also an extraordinary experience, when  
22 the Soviet Union was still in its glory, and we were followed  
23 by the KGB and all this. We took a subway to visit one family  
24 and my Yiddish is very poor. But there was something almost  
25 like a miracle. We got there and he only spoke Yiddish, and I

1 didn't speak Russian, he didn't speak English, and I spoke to  
2 him for almost two hours and I was absolutely fluent. It was  
3 as if the window in my head opened, and I carried on this  
4 conversation. It was an amazing experience because I realized  
5 that all that stuff that I'd heard for my youth had been  
6 stored up, and there was a moment when I needed it, and it  
7 came out, and it was real, and I was able to communicate with  
8 him.

9           So if you look at your life in the Jewish community,  
10 you know, I've grown as a human being and I now have children  
11 who are following in my footsteps, and I'm one of those unique  
12 presidents. My children are active in Federation. My son  
13 Jeff and my daughter-in-law Amy both won the Young Leadership  
14 awards. My older son Ira is active at the Jewish Community  
15 Council. My daughter Ellen Berlin is active at the synagogue,  
16 Adat Shalom. She's Orthodox by practice but her husband is  
17 Reform, and so they daven at the Adat Shalom, which I think is  
18 a wonderful compromise. I think a lot of David Sells. I  
19 think he's done a great job in that congregation. It's going  
20 to be sad to lose him when you've found the appropriate rabbi  
21 for your congregation.

22           So when you see your children participating at that  
23 level, and when I went to shul, my grandson led adon olem, I  
24 know that I've led a very full life, filled with, as they say  
25 in Yiddish, naches. So this has been a wonderful ride in

1 terms of my life experiences.

2           **MR. MERETSKY:** Well, thank you very much. We truly  
3 appreciate your allowing us to interview you today. I know  
4 when your grandchildren and your great, great, great  
5 grandchildren have a chance to view this tape, it will mean a  
6 lot to them.

7           **MR. SCHLUSSEL:** Well, they're terrific because of my  
8 wife. I always joke about the fact that my wife came from  
9 Shaarey Zedek and when I married her, I said she's a bella  
10 chuya now. She's now Orthodox, and she's the rigorous  
11 religious one in our house and always chastising me about my  
12 defections.