

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Robert Slatkin
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4 SUBJECT MATTER: Personal and family history,
5 leadership roles in Jewish
6 community, Jewish Foundation and
7 presidency of Jewish Community.

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9 MS. ALTERMAN: Good morning. Today is Wednesday
10 August 3, 2005, and I'm delighted to be here with Bob Slatkin.
11 We are participating in the Leonard N. Simons oral history
12 project.

13 Bob, do we have your permission to use your words
14 and thoughts for the historic record?

15 MR. SLATKIN: Yes, you do. I'm honored to be part
16 of this.

17 MS. ALTERMAN: Thank you. Let's start at the
18 beginning. When and where were you born?

19 MR. SLATKIN: I was born in Detroit, Michigan. I
20 can use the beginning to kind of explain how I really went
21 down the road that ultimately led towards at certain times of
22 my life spending half my day working on Jewish community ideas
23 and programs. I really will tell you that my mother Esther
24 and my dad Adolph had a very assimilated home. They knew they
25 were Jewish certainly, but they were also very proud of being

1 American. In some ways I feel left out on those homes that
2 had a lot of religion in it and a lot of Yiddish and that kind
3 of stuff. I did not get that. But I did get a little on my
4 Shabat dinners with both grandparents.

5 My Grandma and Grandpa Slatkin came from Belarus.
6 They spoke Russian as another language. They were very hard-
7 driven people. He became very successful. She was the best
8 cook. I've never tasted certain meals better than she has
9 made and I never will. Sometimes when you go to Israel and
10 you get pickled fish, it sort of reminds me of what my
11 grandmother did.

12 On the Imerman side, my mother's side, they were
13 from Latvia, which means they spoke German as their second
14 language. They were from northern Michigan. My grandmother
15 was second generation. She was born in Au Sable. My
16 grandfather settled into Bay City where there was a bunch of
17 Imermans. If you ever look at the archives that you produce,
18 every once in a while you do something on Michigan and Imerman
19 family always shows up. That was my family from northern
20 Michigan. I'd describe them as complete gentle people. Both
21 of them were a great combination to have as grandparents.

22 I wanted to explain how I became committed. So it
23 didn't stop there. My neighborhood was Jewish. I really had
24 very little choice. The kids I played with were Jewish, all
25 the way through high school at Mumford. I joined a social

1 club there that you still hear drum rolls when I mention the
2 name: The Vagabonds. I'm not sure if we were a little off
3 beat, a little hoody, but we had to be straight, had to be
4 affiliated, so we affiliated with the JCC. That really began
5 a lifelong love affair for me in involvement in the JCC.

6 You'll see throughout things I have to say that
7 informal Jewish education, those experiences that you have in
8 spite of yourself, really is what formed me. I guess
9 throughout my career I've always wanted to make a case that
10 you can be involved informally or have informal Jewish
11 education and end up being as good a leader, as committed, as
12 the person who came up with a great deal of formal training.

13 The next experience I would call notable was I met
14 my wife at a Hillel Hop in 1964. We got married some two
15 years later. I picked a winner or she picked a winner and
16 she's been going along with this craziness of mine, my
17 meetings and hours, all these years.

18 Probably the most meaningful single thing that
19 really got me on this career was a mission to Israel, and I
20 believe it was 1970, before the Yom Kippur War. We spent a
21 lot of time in Yad Vashem. I knew about the Holocaust but I
22 really didn't. When I saw how horrible it was and the only
23 crime these people had committed was being Jewish and it have
24 just as easily been me, it made me angry beyond what I could
25 describe. It made me become what I can describe myself to

1 this day, a never again Jew. I think I find little anti-
2 Semites behind every little corner, although I certainly think
3 things are better now than they've ever been.

4 That led for me to become president of the Junior
5 Division, now called YAD, in 1971. I thank Lillian Bernstein
6 for seeing something in me that I didn't see myself. That was
7 the first time that I really realized that this takes time.

8 I do want to mention my family. My son Jay who's
9 34, and daughter Andrea who's 30, both attended classes at the
10 JCC and participated as they were growing up. We live in West
11 Bloomfield. They both went to Camp Tamarack. Jay was bar
12 mitzvahed at Temple Israel and Andy was bas mitzvahed at
13 Temple Israel. We developed a relationship with the rabbis
14 there who were the best. I have to say particularly for me,
15 Rabbi Monte Syme was important to me.

16 We went on a private family mission to Israel in
17 honor of Jay's bar mitzvah in '84, with my mother who was our
18 proud sponsor, my sister and her family. That was a never to
19 be forgotten trip as all trips to Israel seem to be. I can
20 say that my kids are dedicated to Judaism and they have
21 positive feelings about the state of Israel. My daughter,
22 after she was bas mitzvahed, stayed active at the high school
23 and became a leader all the way through graduation. I do want
24 to give her recognition for that. She's married to a fellow
25 named Phil Bershad. They live in New Jersey. My

1 granddaughter Eli, our only grandchild, is going to be two
2 this Friday. She's entering pre-school at a synagogue.
3 Hopefully the role will continue. That's a quick story of my
4 family.

5 The JCC. One of the great programs that the Young
6 Adult Division has is called a Liaison Program. Everybody
7 should take advantage of it because it gives you an
8 opportunity to sit on boards of all the agencies and many
9 Federation committees and you're treated for all practical
10 purposes as though you're a member of that committee. I was
11 president, so I think I really appointed myself to the JCC.
12 That eventually led me to become asked to be on a board. It's
13 the early '70s and they're building at Maple Drake now known
14 as the Applebaum Campus. They wanted to give tours of it and
15 they felt tours was the single best way to be sure to get the
16 place filled. I still feel that is the best way. Whenever I
17 go to a JCC type meeting, I always say, "Why don't you guys
18 have tours."

19 We took eight Sundays in a row from our family and
20 we took probably 10,000 people through the building. It was
21 the thing to do on Sunday. If you think the JCC building is
22 difficult to get around now, imagine what it was like before
23 it was dry walled. We had a system not unlike bread crumbs.
24 We knew where we were going but we really didn't know where we
25 were going. We sort of winged it. Yeah, that's the physical

1 activities area.

2 People were just impressed with the size of it and
3 they were proud of it. After it was over we had 14,000
4 members which I think was the highest number the JCC ever had.
5 I think their level amount is around 10,000 members. I'm
6 proud of that.

7 That put me on the Executive Committee. I guess
8 somebody felt I had earned it. Most people on the Executive
9 Committee get a special assignment and mine happened to be
10 JPM, the building on Ten Mile Road. At the time there were
11 problems as far as the Executive Committee was concerned. I
12 think they thought the building's days were numbered and I
13 think they thought that the neighborhood's days were numbered.
14 I went there and met with a rebel group, if you will, led by
15 Marcie Feldman and Janet Levine. They are such sweet girls
16 it's hard to believe that they would be rebels. I went back
17 to the Executive Committee -- and this is something I don't
18 like to do; I like to be a team player. But this one time I
19 had to go back to them and say they're right over there and
20 you're wrong because they are not going to go out to Maple
21 Drake. It's just too far away. The freeway was supposed to
22 be built to take you all the way to the front door. That led
23 to a bunch of things that ultimately led to improvements at
24 the JPM building.

25 At the same time we had a joint Neighborhood Project

1 by the Federation and the Foundation where a person could
2 borrow money for the down payment if they were in a certain
3 area. That allowed a lot of people to buy homes there. Loans
4 were made through Hebrew Free Loan. I don't think there's a
5 single amount of money that's owing. It was a very honorable
6 situation. It brought back this neighborhood. The Orthodox
7 came in and that helped. Then we had the freeway which takes
8 you everywhere. The plaza that goes across the street. But
9 the real anchor in my opinion of what we could call the
10 Huntington Woods/Southfield/Ten Mile Road corridor is JPM.
11 I'm proud that maybe I'm the very first person that said we've
12 got to do something there.

13 On the second renovation, unless I forget, we did
14 this wonderful renovation to Prentis Hall, literally tore it
15 down and started over again. It's a great facility. It's
16 what a JCC should be. It's in the right neighborhood, it's
17 the right size, it's manageable. I'm glad to have been part
18 of it.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were some of the things that you
20 did to the building?

21 **MR. SLATKIN:** In those days in the building itself
22 we created a new corridor from the side door. That's the main
23 door now off the parking lot. We created a hallway that went
24 directly back and to the right is the swimming pool. That was
25 new construction. Then we went straight ahead and then to the

1 right, if I recall, there was the health clubs, some built on
2 old, some built on new. We just cleaned the place up. We
3 bricked it, we made it more attractive. It was really a dump.
4 It was what I think the rebel group was looking for. Now the
5 ball was in their court. I always loved that when it goes
6 into somebody else's court and how well they attend it and
7 what have you.

8 I must mention also that Bob Aronson decided to take
9 this project on. One of the first times our director showed
10 was that he could do anything with literally no money and come
11 up with it somehow.

12 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Were there some issues with the use
13 of the Orthodox community and the rest of the Jewish community
14 using that building?

15 **MR. SLATKIN:** I really believe that the Jewish
16 Community Center is safe haven for the Orthodox. I don't know
17 why. I'm not sure it's true at the Applebaum Campus. People
18 are elbow to elbow. As far as I know there's been no problem.
19 I haven't been there for a while. I think there's a food
20 facility and I think it's kosher. I think it's a wonderful
21 example where the Orthodox are mixing with the non.

22 Providing them space for the mikvah didn't hurt. I
23 wish I could say that with a Yiddish accent. Bob Aronson one
24 day said we're going for a walk and we met at the JPM. We saw
25 this terrible building. That was their mikvah. We were told

1 that this was the one where most of the Orthodox women went to
2 and people were waiting until two or three o'clock in the
3 evening and they needed another one. What was controversial
4 about allowing the mikvah, and they were calling me mikvah Bob
5 for awhile when I was president of the Foundation, was it's a
6 private use on a public campus. It was also for the people
7 that support that area and were a part of the area. Bob
8 Aronson said to me more than once that I was the only person
9 that could have done it. I've dealt with other people that
10 I'll tell about that were the only persons that could have
11 done it. The reason being is because I think the one party
12 who might have put up a fuss would have been the Temple Israel
13 group for a variety of reasons. My relationship with Rabbi
14 Syme was too strong for him to give me a hard time if I wanted
15 it. So that is something that completes the picture of that
16 campus and really ends a certain stage of my Federation
17 career.

18 Now we're through the early JCC years. Let me tell
19 you what happened afterward. It's kind of an interesting
20 story that I believe if everybody is 100 percent honest in
21 giving these interviews, you might hear more of this. Frankly
22 I was an agency guy. I had risen to the top of the agencies,
23 maybe arguably the most important agency. I was through and
24 no one was calling me. I wasn't quite a Federation guy. I
25 was on the Board of Governors because I was president of an

1 agency, and for some miracle they kept me on afterwards, but
2 no one was calling my number.

3 But one good thing happened during this time.
4 Incredibly good thing. Rabbi Syme, Monte Syme, was also on
5 the board and the meetings were downtown. For a period of two
6 years or three, he asked me if I would drive him to the
7 meetings. That began a period where we really became close.
8 The freeway was under construction so it would literally take
9 an hour there, an hour back. Imagine two hours with your
10 rabbi talking about everything, personal things, about his
11 kids, about everything. Things I wouldn't even tell his kids.
12 He knew things about mine.

13 One day we went to a meeting and he sits and listens
14 to the committee reports and he says, you're not on any
15 committee. On our way back, I got to tell you because I know
16 you all think of me as this macho guy, but I started to cry.
17 I said, I don't know why, I just don't know why. Rabbi Syme
18 said, let me see what I can do. I think he made a couple
19 calls. He called Bob Aronson and he said this guy was one of
20 the best presidents the Center ever had. He is just this
21 really hard worker. Give him a chance. So Bob did.

22 There were a bunch of smaller jobs when I first got
23 back in, but at least I was on the track again. I often would
24 tell Rabbi Syme, of blessed memory, thank you so much for
25 doing this for me. He'd actually get a little upset and he'd

1 say, I didn't do it for you, you did it for yourself. He
2 said, I just gave you an opportunity and you rose to the
3 occasion. He said, there's been other people I've tried to
4 help at Federation and most of the time it goes nowhere.
5 Always a very fond memory of Rabbi Syme.

6 Now that leads to my mid-career, which included the
7 Real Estate and Property Management committee which I should
8 spend a moment explaining. I co-chaired it with Doug Atkin
9 and the Foundation is a organization that is separate and
10 works in partnership with the Federation. *The Jewish News*
11 refers to it as the banking investment real estate arm of the
12 Federation. I'll buy that definition not entirely because
13 it's not an arm, it's a second complete independent
14 organization, but it still describes it well. One of their
15 major things was this Real Estate and Property Management
16 Committee; it does everything. It's the landlord of all the
17 campuses, all the improvements. It was very important for me.

18 I then went on to become co-chairman of the Allied
19 Jewish Campaign from the years 1994 to '96. So Rabbi Syme,
20 just to make the connection, made that possible. Other things
21 that happened afterward were all because of him.

22 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Bob, can we talk about the Real
23 Estate and Properties Committee. What were some of the issues
24 that you dealt with during your chairmanship?

25 **MR. SLATKIN:** I'm hesitating a little because I am

1 going to get back to this committee. It's always great when
2 you have money and it was a few years later that we did have
3 money, when we get into what I call the community benefit
4 years when the general fund was really up there. Then there's
5 a slew of things to talk about. But they, as I said, are
6 responsible for all the buildings, all the construction.

7 It's interesting. Every single approval for every
8 single project starts at the Real Estate Committee then goes
9 to the officers. I just mentioned I was co-chair of the
10 Allied Jewish Campaign. I thought this might be a good point
11 to talk about some of the important mentors in my Federation/
12 Foundation career, Jewish community career. Keeping in mind
13 that if you mention too many people you're going to leave some
14 out so I had to pick just certain names. I want to pick Bob
15 Naftaly first from the Federation who was president when I was
16 president my first year. We had our famous presidents'
17 meetings which we now have at least once a week. They may
18 have been every couple weeks at the beginning.

19 There has never been anybody that I have arm
20 wrestled with more but enjoyed being with so much as Bob
21 Naftaly. Some people described the room as somewhat with
22 tension, but Bob and I never looked at it that way. It was
23 like I represented management and he represented the players,
24 and we did a lot of good things during what ended up being the
25 golden years, I think. Bob has a heart as big as gold and

1 usually it's for the elderly and for Jewish education.

2 Penny Blumenstein was my co-president and she is a
3 sweet, wonderful person who absolutely is one of the most
4 knowledgeable people that I know in this community. She's not
5 just good on one or two topics; you name it and she's good at
6 it. I really respect her for it.

7 One time we had a program that your daughter-in-law
8 was involved in and we needed to invite past presidents. I
9 was going to cover informal Jewish education until they told
10 me, you probably shouldn't have one of your chairmen as one of
11 your speakers. We thought we could do it like Slatkin can and
12 only one name came up. She could have done formal Jewish
13 education just as well. I cannot say enough about her.

14 I have to mention my Foundation fellow presidents,
15 Mickey Maddin who really started the ball rolling and brought
16 the Foundation to a higher level and made it possible for me
17 to be president. And then Mark Hauser who followed me, and we
18 never missed a beat I don't think.

19 Then I have to mention two professionals. Of course
20 Bob Aronson who was the one who we believe opened the door at
21 the beginning but certainly kept opening the door. He would
22 tease me and he would say no one else wanted this job. But
23 that didn't matter to me, I loved it. Then I have to mention
24 Mark Davidoff who was here for about 10 years. I don't think
25 there was a day that went by that I didn't call him about

1 something. So Bob opened the door and Mark helped me
2 accomplish these tasks and I couldn't have done it without
3 him. I really miss him, but he's doing well and that's the
4 most important thing.

5 That brings me to the Foundation days, if you will,
6 when I was president of the United Jewish Foundation from 1997
7 to the year 2000. I'd like to mention some of the things that
8 I think were accomplished during that time. Probably on the
9 lighter side, I was the one who combined our board meetings.
10 It wasn't on the lighter side to the professionals who had to
11 prepare for meetings for both people. There used to be three
12 separate meetings for the Foundation and it was quite silly.
13 Other than governance which we worked out, it made more sense
14 to have one meeting. So all you people out there who are glad
15 that you have to go to one meeting and not two, you can thank
16 me.

17 The next thing that came along was probably what
18 most people would say it's the most important thing I did, was
19 the Jewish Life Fund. You must understand that already there
20 was talk that we had to do something for Jewish continuity,
21 Jewish renaissance, if you will. The thought process was all
22 formal Jewish education. Day school, afternoon school,
23 anything to have to do with education. When you get five
24 people in the room, the person who's talking about informal
25 gets pushed aside because it just seems so less important when

1 you're talking about a synagogue success or failure versus
2 Camp Tamarack. It just seems to take a second place.

3 I said in the Jewish Life Fund which was half of the
4 Millennium Campaign, and that was this \$55 million plus
5 campaign that was run by Bob Aronson of which one-half of it
6 was really Jewish Life Fund and the other half for JCC
7 renovation, which I also got involved in. I think that I
8 helped name more categories that ended up being informal
9 Jewish education such as programs at the JCC, Camp Tamarack,
10 missions to Israel, family program, over half the money they
11 raised was for informal Jewish education, which to me is
12 bringing more people into the tent, if you will, and it's
13 giving them an equal importance in terms of the continuity of
14 our people, which I've always felt, and I don't think I'm the
15 only one, but I think there are others that might not agree,
16 and it's kind of been my consistent banner throughout my
17 career. I also knew that not everybody could come up with a
18 million dollars which is what the Millennium Campaign cost.
19 So we came up with the community level Jewish Life Fund which
20 still goes to this day.

21 Then another important item I would put up there is
22 one of my contributions that is notable, was the Community
23 Benefit. I was around during the period of time when the
24 stock market was really growing and we had made a deal with
25 our endowment givers that we would guarantee them 7.5 and 10

1 percent on pay scales and that the money that was over that
2 would go for communal purposes into the general fund and the
3 money below that would come out of our pocket. Well, we just
4 had a boom and we got up to \$63 million. I was president. We
5 formed what we called the Community Benefit and it basically
6 created a building boom for one thing.

7 You asked me during my time about the real estate.
8 We renovated Akiva. We took a synagogue and made it Akiva,
9 the Brown Centers, the entire JCC renovations, the Jewish
10 apartments, the Meer apartments that Yeshivah Beth Yehudah had
11 worked on and there were others. But those are the ones that
12 I was involved with and the Foundation, because they had
13 money, could help seed various aspects of this or match
14 certain funds.

15 Then of course we increased our grants tremendously,
16 mainly to Jewish education but to other areas. It was right
17 during the very height of our wealth that I said, "This has
18 got to stop." That is another notable thing because I knew
19 that it was luck and we couldn't continue with this luck. We
20 eventually formed a committee, and I must single out David
21 Page as another person I would mention who led this committee.
22 He might be the only guy that could have done it, as Bob
23 Aronson once said about me. We got two-thirds of it done.

24 As you know, nevertheless, the economy slipped on
25 us, the stock market went down to about half. You know there

1 are certain kinds of grants that are hard to stop because
2 you'll stop programming. We found ourselves watching our
3 general fund go down day by day, and it went down to about \$17
4 or \$18 million. That caused us to have to rethink all of our
5 grant making and now we decided that everything has to kind of
6 pay for itself. What we raise in the campaign is what we
7 invest back into the agencies. That campaign is getting
8 better and more important.

9 I guess I just want to say that the golden age
10 cannot be taken away. Those wonderful things that we did
11 exist and they're wonderful. And I also want to say something
12 that maybe people don't think about a lot. If we didn't have
13 the donor change, instead of being \$20 million, depending on
14 what time we declared a urgent reason to stop, we could have
15 been in a \$20 million deficit. That's how much difference it
16 made. It kept us from losing our general fund.

17 MS. ALTERMAN: What were the changes that you made
18 to the rate of return?

19 MR. SLATKIN: You know, other people who could speak
20 better on that topic than me, but I think what the rate of
21 return really is and that's it, and I think that we charged
22 somewhat of a fee to handle this, no more than any other
23 brokerage house would be. They have to take the ups and the
24 downs. There's no guarantees. As you can tell from that
25 arrangement, the general fund is never going to grow again,

1 which is a beautiful lead-in to what I want to say next.

2 We began to realize that we didn't have a general
3 fund to speak of for emergencies. We've both been around to
4 know that emergencies are going to occur. They always do. I
5 must say the reason I'm putting it on my list is because I
6 wanted to do this when I was president but we just couldn't
7 figure out a way. If the only vehicle was the general fund,
8 no one would give because it had too many things it could do
9 besides emergencies, as we've heard. What we did was form the
10 Legacy Fund and it's chaired by Bill Berman and Bob Aronson.
11 I'm proud to be on that committee now. It's mainly
12 testamentary giving. It is a fund that will eventually
13 replace the emergency fund aspect of the general fund. It
14 will keep us from being vulnerable. It's protected and a very
15 solid program.

16 PACE is another one that people talk about. It's
17 similar except PACE is perpetuation of campaign and the
18 programs from the campaign and Legacy Fund is for emergencies.
19 Having been through emergencies, it's my favorite and that's
20 where I have left some of my estate.

21 The last thing that I'd like to mention while
22 talking about my Foundation years and it's kind of a special
23 thing that we call the Grant Maker Mission or sometimes the
24 General Community Initiative. Because the Foundation had some
25 money we decided to take an initiative. I believe something

1 that we always wanted to do, Bob Aronson wanted to do, which
2 was to get involved with the general community and invite them
3 to Israel. We started talking to other foundations such as
4 Bank One, McGregor Fund, Council of Michigan Foundations, the
5 Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, the Kresge
6 Foundation, the Hannan House and I know I'm missing some
7 others, but that's the kind of group we went to and we took
8 them to Israel. It was the best mission I was ever on because
9 we not only did Jewish sites but we also did non-Jewish sites.
10 We really bonded with this group. It was co-chaired by Julie
11 Cummings and Bob Aronson was our professional. We went to all
12 these various places and we realized how much we really had in
13 common with people. It was very good for the soul. These
14 people did not want to let this go.

15 This initiative actually lasted for three years. We
16 kept having reunions. A couple of them were in Grosse Pointe,
17 which is kind of interesting. I'm really glad to be part of
18 it, and I really hope that if we ever get any money to speak
19 of or if somebody wants to come along who's particularly
20 interested in the general community, this is a great
21 endowment.

22 And now I'm sort of like through my Foundation
23 career. You know, when you've been president and you know
24 everything largely because they have to let you know
25 everything, and largely because if you're the Foundation

1 president, you have the money, and then the next day you're
2 not, it's quite a change. But I must say that they had
3 something waiting for me that would turn out to be probably
4 the most difficult job I've ever been involved with, even
5 harder than being president of the Foundation.

6 That was the renovation that we talked about of both
7 campuses and buildings. Most of it was on the Applebaum
8 campus and we had about \$28 million to spend for renovation
9 and we had an endowment for about 7 million. The whole thing
10 was \$35 million and has been considered to this day the
11 largest single undertaking that this community has ever been
12 involved in. Although it was rewarding, it was also quite
13 miserable. The reason it was is because no one would believe
14 you couldn't do everything for \$28 million. We had to take
15 \$13 million off the budget in order to come close to spending
16 the amount of money that we had. That was my job.

17 I was probably getting people a little upset.
18 People on my committee, off my committee, we had egos on my
19 committee like you wouldn't believe. People that wanted to do
20 more than what we could do. Members, there were certain
21 things we couldn't do that they wanted, and there's still some
22 anger out there. But as I said we did the best we could. I
23 would say that keeping within the budget, it doesn't seem like
24 a great thing to be remembered for, and I'm not going to be
25 remembered for it, but I know that I did, and I know when I go

1 into the JCC, which is much nicer than it's ever been before.
2 The health clubs and physical fitness open to everybody, just
3 amazing. And I feel like I was part of it.

4 But it wasn't just that \$28 million that's going to
5 be remembered, but it's this measly little \$100,000 that we
6 spent for the Jewish War Veteran permanent exhibit around the
7 same time, maybe at the end of that period that I think might
8 be remembered. And I have to mention Geli right out, Alan
9 ~~Gelfonte~~ ^{Gelfond}, who raised most of the money himself. We went ahead
10 as though we had the money. If we hadn't, we'd have been in
11 big trouble and Geli got it. Remember, the source of the
12 monies were people in their 80s and it was difficult.

13 Let me explain to you why there was a need for it.
14 In 2002 the war veterans, World War II veterans were just
15 under-recognized. Tom Brokaw wrote a book that was a best
16 seller called The Greatest Generation. There was no memorial,
17 nothing really to remember. Every time you went someplace,
18 you'd see one to World War I but never to World War II. You
19 know that that was corrected nationally, Bob Dole and others,
20 and now there is a memorial in Washington D.C. But there
21 wasn't then and this was particularly true for Jewish war
22 veterans. So we put together something that I know you're
23 involved in right now, Sharon. I can't think of the length of
24 it, but somehow 22 feet comes to mind, but I'm not sure.

25 MS. ALTERMAN: About 60 feet.

1 **MR. SLATKIN:** At any rate, as you know it is
2 virtually from ceiling to floor. It's back lit, very well
3 done. It is in a well traveled part of the Center and about
4 to become even more well traveled because I think the academy
5 is going to move into the building permanently. I saw the
6 layout and it just puts that as even a more important
7 corridor.

8 We purposely use the word "exhibit" instead of
9 "memorial." Because it was a memorial to the few brave souls
10 that still survive but they also had their little memorial
11 which is now a JPM that they love just as much. It's a
12 memorial because we have names, we have a kiosk that you can
13 look up. It will become even more of a memorial after the
14 last of those people pass away. To me it was all about the
15 young people that used that facility and that go by it every
16 single day, and realize that Jewish men and women went to war
17 in a higher proportion than our percentage of the population
18 and they fought and they were involved and they were part of
19 the greatest generation, and it's the greatest generation
20 because it saved our democracy. Jewish people had a huge part
21 of it.

22 One of those people is Ray Zussman who won a
23 congregational metal of honor. His story is just incredible.
24 If you want to hear it, go to the exhibit. His actual medal
25 is there along with a narrative of what he did. There's not

1 too many Jewish congressional medal of honors. This is one of
2 them and we have it. It's important for the younger
3 generation to know because they might be hearing about the
4 holocaust and it's hard to understand the Holocaust, but it's
5 not hard to understand that Jewish men and women went off to
6 war and fought and held their own.

7 I find that I want to now say, and by the way what a
8 surprise; that's informal Jewish education. I'm sort of like
9 going to end up in really the same place that I started and
10 that is that I feel that informal Jewish education is very
11 important, and I will always be a spokesman for it. I'm not
12 trying to diminish the importance of other things, I'm trying
13 to raise the level of how a person can become connected in
14 that way.

15 In fact a good example is the Birthright trip to
16 Israel. A lot of people are going to Israel and getting
17 connected at that point. That might lead to other things.

18 That's where I'll leave this conversation and tell
19 you that I know one of the questions that interviewers like to
20 ask and maybe we're about to ask it so forgive me if I am
21 asking a question you might have asked. What do you feel you
22 accomplished? I don't know exactly, I certainly mentioned
23 everything that I thought was notable. I guess what I want to
24 think is that I made a difference, that if I wasn't around,
25 things might just be a little -- maybe there wouldn't have

1 been a mikvah, maybe we would have been in deficit more so
2 than we ended up. We never were in deficit but we could have
3 been if we hadn't made the donor change. Maybe young people
4 that are in the JCC building will have a better building, will
5 be able to see the Jewish war veteran exhibit, very important
6 time in our country's history. Maybe the campuses are a
7 little bit nicer as a result of things that I was involved in.
8 And maybe the Jewish Life Fund and Detroit Legacy Fund might
9 have been a little different. That is where I hope that I
10 made a difference.

11 And I will tell you that I hope I will continue
12 making a difference. I certainly do not look at this as an
13 end of a career. To me it's equally pleasure and
14 responsibility. I hope to continue to get pleasure and take
15 on responsibilities for our people, and it probably would be,
16 knowing me, it's certainly not going to be informal Jewish
17 education; it would probably be along the lines of what I've
18 done.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Bob, thank you for all your
20 leadership and I think this was a beautiful interview. You
21 told us so much about what's current in this community and all
22 of the efforts that you made. Thank you again.

23 **MR. SLATKIN:** Thank you for asking me.