

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Irving Laker  
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman  
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Wednesday, September 21, 2005  
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation of Metropolitan  
5 Detroit  
6 SUBJECT MATTER: Personal and family history, with  
7 emphasis on entire Laker family's  
8 involvement in Jewish leadership  
9 and philanthropy

10

---

11 MS. ALTERMAN: Good morning. This is Sharon  
12 Alterman, and I have the privilege to interview Mr. Irving  
13 Laker for our Leonard N. Simons Oral History Project. Irving,  
14 it is a pleasure to speak with you this morning. Today is  
15 September 21, 2005.

16 Do we have your permission to use your words and  
17 thoughts for the historic record?

18 MR. LAKER: Yes, you do.

19 MS. ALTERMAN: Thank you very much. We know that  
20 you have a lot to say about your own involvement in this  
21 community and your family's involvement. We're going to start  
22 right at the beginning. When and where were you born?

23 MR. LAKER: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, at  
24 Women's Hospital February 27, 1928.

25 MS. ALTERMAN: Who were your parents?

1           MR. LAKER: My father was Harry Laker and my mother  
2 was Sarah Laker, of blessed memory.

3           MS. ALTERMAN: What do you know about their  
4 background? When did they come to this country?

5           MR. LAKER: My father came first to Canada, and his  
6 grandfather brought my father and a brother to Windsor,  
7 Ontario, where they resided, and then the grandfather went  
8 back and brought all the other family. As a result, my dad  
9 started working as a young man in Windsor, and I remember him  
10 telling me that he went to work for a fish company, and as a  
11 result he was able to earn a few dollars. He'd come across to  
12 Detroit. My mother was here. She came I think as a young  
13 lady with her family. I think she was 12 years old.

14           My father was engaged when he met my mother. And  
15 she was engaged also to Shar<sup>l</sup>~~ys~~Hazeen. So it was always a  
16 story that they used over the years of their marriage, which  
17 lasted 58 years. The beauty of it is my father came across  
18 and went to work for Wolf Sanitary Wiping Cloth Company, and  
19 he took my mother out. He was 16 and she was 15 when they  
20 met, and when he was 17 and she was 16 they got married. I  
21 was born a year later. So not only did we have young parents  
22 -- my mother used to say -- and they eventually had three  
23 children -- she raised four children because my father was so  
24 young. She spent her time saying how much she did when she  
25 trained him because a young man of 17 years of age, he

1 certainly had not settled down. She was much more stable. So  
2 it was always a humorous incident throughout the years of  
3 their marriage.

4 I have two brothers. One is Dr. Jerry Laker, became  
5 a dentist, and a younger brother, Marty Laker. We're all  
6 graduates of the University of Michigan. I came out of the  
7 business school. Jerry became a dentist and he's still  
8 practicing, and Martin was in literature, but he eventually  
9 came into the family business. We had the advantage of  
10 spending a great deal of time with my father during the  
11 working years. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

12 My mother was always at my dad's side, to make sure  
13 that he -- she used to warn him whenever he went to a meeting  
14 or he went to speak somewhere or do something, she said "behave  
15 yourself," because she wanted to be proud of him and make sure  
16 he didn't get hot and bothered under the collar.

17 They were very active in the Pinsker Progressive  
18 Organization. It is still active, and they spent a wonderful  
19 number of years promoting different kinds of charity events as  
20 well as participating. One particular one was a bond drive.  
21 During World War II they were in charges of the bonds for the  
22 United States, and they raised enough money so that they could  
23 have an aircraft put in the Pinsker Progressive Society's  
24 name.

25 So it was a lot of those situations they developed

1 over the years of their participation. We were very proud of  
2 the things my father and mother did. They played leadership  
3 roles and they did so many things. Not only that  
4 organization, my father went on. He was a master Mason, and  
5 he wanted to achieve the top job in the lodge, which was  
6 Worshipful Master. As a result of him trying to do that, you  
7 run for an office and it took him seven times before he could  
8 make the lowest rung of the chair. My mother was distressed  
9 because so many times he went and came home and he had lost  
10 the election. So she said I'm going to do some research  
11 behind the scenes. She went to some of the powers that be and  
12 indicated to them, I don't know why you don't let my husband  
13 become a master. He'll do a wonderful job. So she prevailed  
14 over the years helping him, and then he became Worshipful  
15 Master. In 1952 he raised 52 candidates, which is part of the  
16 organization's strength, and he was an outstanding and  
17 dedicated chairman as Worshipful Master.

18           That was the way he did things all his life. And I  
19 was fortunate because I could see the life that they led, and  
20 I was old enough, because my middle brother, Dr. Jerry, he  
21 came eight years after I was born, and my younger brother came  
22 15 years later. So I had a head start in the relationship of  
23 our family. They were always outstanding when it came to  
24 helping people and doing things, and in their financial  
25 ability to do things, they always helped. We got a great

1 leadership role from our parents and a great inspiration for  
2 what we felt was important. When you see it in your own  
3 family, you then are able to turn around and take the  
4 challenges of the life and make them into beautiful things.  
5 We had a wonderful upbringing.

6 MS. ALTERMAN: Do you know where your parents came  
7 from in Europe?

8 MR. LAKER: My father came from Harjil, Poland, and  
9 my mother came from Kominitz Vidaltz, Russia. So they had a  
10 wonderful background of experiencing poverty and trying to  
11 make Jewish life important to their community and their family  
12 at a young age in each of their own families. They blessed us  
13 and spent a great deal of time in communal living, and it was  
14 a wonderful experience and education for us.

15 MS. ALTERMAN: Where did you live as a youngster?

16 MR. LAKER: When I was first born, I lived with my  
17 maternal grandmother on Delmar and Caniff. That was a  
18 flourishing Jewish community in 1928-29. They moved when my  
19 mother decided she needed her own place, and they moved to  
20 Northwestern Avenue. I grew up in that house and I went to  
21 school at ~~circle~~ <sup>Thurkle</sup>. Then we moved again in the 1930s to Clement  
22 Avenue, and then Grand Avenue, and eventually in 1941 my dad  
23 -- which is an interesting story to tell.

24 A good friend of his was Dave Richmond, and he had a  
25 builder that was going to build a house in 1941. His name was

1 Alex Belkin. Alex Belkin saw my father and said, "do you want  
2 a house Harry Laker<sup>2</sup> because I'm building it for Dave Richmond  
3 and I've got a lot next door. My dad said, "you know, that  
4 sounds pretty good. And here's \$25 as a down payment to build  
5 it." So he was very confident that he could do things, and  
6 they did. As a result we lived in that home at 4019 Tyler for  
7 a long time. I grew up there. My brother Jerry was born and  
8 then my brother Marty. So we had a long history on Tyler  
9 Avenue.

10 MS. ALTERMAN: You mentioned Delmar. Do you have  
11 any recollection of that very old Jewish neighborhood?

12 MR. LAKER: Exactly. Out in that area. As a matter  
13 of fact I can remember as I grew older that at that time the  
14 Purple Gang used to spend a great deal of time on Westminster  
15 and what have you. I was young, so I didn't know at the time  
16 what they did, but as I grew older I found out what the  
17 history of the Jewish Mafia was in that area. Then they went  
18 to Twelfth Street. There was a restaurant that they spent a  
19 great deal of time at. Cream of Michigan, Boesky's later, as  
20 time went on.

21 We had a nice life there. My dad worked for Wolf  
22 for 22 years, and he indicated that he'd like to try it on  
23 his own and see what he could do. So in 1946 my father went  
24 into business, and it was called Ace Wiping Cloth Company. He  
25 had tremendous support with my mother because he had to work

1 during the day to see customers and things he had to see, and  
2 at night there was a night shift. So my mother would come  
3 with three buses. She would make food for him and wrap it in  
4 towels and carry it from bus to bus. This was when my brother  
5 Marty was a little guy, and she used to take him with her.  
6 Then they'd stay through the evening doing the production that  
7 was needed for the orders they received that day, and she came  
8 home with my dad. It was a good number of years they worked  
9 that way until he achieved progress, and it was a wonderful  
10 experience that you could look back and look at the hard work  
11 that parents played. They were leaders to their family and  
12 themselves and they had great respect in the community.

13 MS. ALTERMAN: They sound like wonderful people.

14 MR. LAKER: They were an inspiration. You wouldn't  
15 believe.

16 My father, as he went on later, he became president  
17 of Ahavas Achim, which eventually was Beth Achim, which has  
18 now merged with Adat Shalom. But the years that he  
19 participated and he things that he did, he always showed  
20 inspirational leadership, and he just had a knack for  
21 understanding, doing the right thing and achieving the goals  
22 that were set for the Jewish community, for the organization,  
23 particularly for the synagogue. It was always a lesson that  
24 you don't always learn at the time, but if you go back into  
25 the archives of the history of your family, you see how

1 important those things are. It was a wonderful experience.

2 MS. ALTERMAN: So you came from a fairly religious  
3 home?

4 MR. LAKER: Yes. They kept kosher. My dad became  
5 Conservative as he went into synagogue life. They practiced  
6 the kashrut and they practiced going to shul, and they did  
7 many, many things together that enabled them to be an  
8 inspiration to our family, and showed the importance of what  
9 family life means and how it reflects on your children. I had  
10 a great understanding of what they were trying to do.  
11 Sometimes it took me a lot longer to learn it.

12 During the course of those years he was developing  
13 his business. I was at the University of Michigan in 1950. I  
14 went in and I wanted to be a football coach, and when my dad  
15 went in business in 1946, I played football for University of  
16 Michigan in 1947, '48, and then I injured my knee, and I said  
17 at that time I would go into the family business by  
18 invitation. And it worked out very well. The business has  
19 flourished. My dad died in 1986. My brother Marty and I  
20 continued the business, and it's now been in existence for 58  
21 years.

22 MS. ALTERMAN: A beautiful story of your family's  
23 history. Now let's talk a little bit more about you. Where  
24 did you go to high school?

25 MR. LAKER: I went to Central High School and was



1 active in sports. As a result my learning was deficient in  
2 some of the grades I needed to go onto college. But I had a  
3 friend, Byron Lasky. He was probably one of the most  
4 inspirational people I met because he had such conviction and  
5 desire and drive. My father and Byron Lasky were two people  
6 that when they made up their mind to do something, they would  
7 do it.

8           Byron went to Albion College and he wanted me to  
9 come with him to Albion. I said no. I went to Highland Park  
10 Junior College because I wanted to go to the University of  
11 Michigan. So I achieved the grade so I could transfer. Then  
12 he left Albion and came with me to Michigan. We were living  
13 way out at 1111 Washington Avenue in Ann Arbor in the first  
14 year we were there, and another friend of mine, Howard  
15 Passman, came to school with us and lived with us. Eventually  
16 he dropped out. He wanted to go back home. He went into his  
17 father's business.

18           I stayed four years, graduated from the business  
19 school, and then every holiday, every summer I spent my time  
20 with my father doing the work. I started at the grass roots,  
21 driving trucks, making bales, doing whatever was necessary to  
22 accomplish the learning, the experience. I always used to say  
23 to my father as I grew into the business, "you give me a lot  
24 more freedom and a lot more leeway to make decisions, and if  
25 you were my son, I wouldn't give you that much authority."

1 My dad was a great teacher, and it was a great  
2 learning lesson because he had so much drive to accomplish  
3 things. "There was no such thing." His words were always to  
4 me, "There's yes and there's no, but no means maybe, not no."  
5 So everything you achieve is maybe you can accomplish it if  
6 you put in the time and effort." So it was a great lesson  
7 that he taught.

8 And seeing my mother and father working together  
9 constantly. She would come down and spend time and eventually  
10 my father gave her the job of signing checks, so that she  
11 could be on the payroll and have Social Security when she  
12 reached a certain age. So there was always a recognition of  
13 their togetherness and their preservation of family life and  
14 the meaning of it and the dedication that they needed to make  
15 their sons achieve goals in education.

16 My mother was so strong, because my father was a  
17 working man, she used to say, you're going to go to school and  
18 you're going to go to college, and there's everything we've  
19 got it'll take. She would borrow money -- and I remember her  
20 words, the Morris Plan was active in those days. What she  
21 would do in her private life, as she was with my father, she  
22 would -- a wonderful cook, she was outstanding. She would  
23 prepare foods and then sold them.

24 My dad's mother, after his father's death at a very  
25 young age, became the caterer at the Shaar Shomayim Synagogue

1 as well as the community. She made wonderful food and people  
2 admired it and they hired her. My mother used to say to me,  
3 you have a nice grandmother, but I can't stand her cooking.  
4 So it was always a tug of war between my grandma and my  
5 mother.

6 One of the stories, my grandmother was very much  
7 interested in bingo. She had five sons and four daughters.  
8 When she got on the phone to one of her daughters-in-law, she  
9 said, "I have to hang up now because the extension is ringing."  
10 And what she really wanted to do is go to the bingo, so she  
11 didn't have time for them.

12 And we had many, many stories of going over to  
13 Canada to visit the family and going on picnics and doing  
14 things because they had a very active young guys, brothers and  
15 sisters, so there was always activity. They had a close  
16 family and we spent a great deal of time visiting the family.  
17 That was important to my mother, that you know your family and  
18 be responsive.

19 My mother had three brothers and two sisters. One  
20 of the brothers didn't come to Canada. He was older. He went  
21 to Brazil. They communicated for a while, but then they lost  
22 contact. Then her two sisters were here. One passed away in  
23 the last ten years. The other one, Aunt Clara, is still  
24 vibrant and still pretty good at 94 years of age. Her  
25 daughter lives with her and also works with us, and that

1 enables her to take care of her mother in a way that is  
2 wonderful. A great admiration for the care and the  
3 understanding. But that was again a teaching of my mother.  
4 She always used to say, "You've got to learn how to take care  
5 of yourself, you've got to learn how to take care so you'd  
6 have opportunities to raise your children the right way."

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** It's pretty remarkable that she  
8 started out as a 16-year-old mother, with these values.

9 **MR. LAKER:** Tremendous common sense.

10 As we grew and my brother became a dentist and my  
11 other brother came into the business, we were able to achieve  
12 certain things. When you have young, energetic people in your  
13 organization like my brother and me and people that we hired,  
14 we were able to develop a business. As the years of the  
15 business changed, we had to entertain thoughts of doing other  
16 things. So in 1985 we bought a company that put us in the  
17 garment rental business. We bought a company to help our  
18 wiping cloth business, which was the nature of what we did,  
19 and they had three garment stops. I remember talking to one  
20 of the competitors. Sam Cascade was a community laundry guy,  
21 and he indicated he'd buy those stops from us. When we made  
22 the deal, he changed his mind and didn't buy the stops. So  
23 that put us into what we call the garment rental business.

24 We achieved in 13 years -- because we sold it in '95  
25 -- a tremendous amount of goals that we were able to put and

1 market our products, and we were good at it because we  
2 understood how to deal with automotive plants, how to make  
3 sure that they got their uniforms, and we grew very fast. In  
4 '95 we were able to sell it and bought back the wiper  
5 business. I explained to my brother that's what I want to do,  
6 I want to have a place to hang my hat. As of today, at 77, I  
7 still go and spend a great deal of time. My brother's there  
8 and we have three major people that work with us that carry  
9 on. We have had a great deal of success in trying to keep the  
10 business alive and cooking. Sooner or later we'll pass it on  
11 to some of the people who've dedicated themselves to our work.

12 I have a daughter who was in art school. She  
13 graduated from Michigan State. She worked for a couple  
14 schools and did some wonderful things in art work. Then she  
15 said, Dad, I can't get another job. I want to come in and  
16 work with you. As a result Andrea Laker came into the  
17 business and does a remarkable job with selling.

18 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Let's go back a little. First of all  
19 I'd like to ask you about your own religious education because  
20 obviously the values you learned at home really set you on the  
21 right path. Did you have any formal religious education?

22 **MR. LAKER:** My mother hired a rabbi. I went to  
23 regular school and in the afternoon he would come. I remember  
24 it so vividly because I used to love to play baseball. I  
25 would go into the fields off Richton Avenue near Petoskey.

1 There were a lot of fields where we used to play ball. And my  
2 mother would come running with the rabbi behind her to get a  
3 hold of me to come back home and do my Hebrew and what have  
4 you. So I grew with an individual teacher.

5           Then I went to a Hebrew school on Clements Avenue.  
6 The rabbi was Rabbi Rosen at the time, and he had a classroom.  
7 On the outside there was a wall so we could play handball. So  
8 I was always athletic. So he had to come and get me to bring  
9 me back into the classroom. One thing in those days, when you  
10 had teachers who were rabbis, they also had a big stick to  
11 make sure that you attended to your responsibility. So my  
12 education was very outstanding from the standpoint of the  
13 rabbi's desire and my folks' desire to make sure that I had  
14 learning.

15           As I went further, and I could see the value, I was  
16 a member of Beth Achim with my father. At the time I said to  
17 my father, because of the children, I wanted to get them  
18 educated at the Shaarey Zedek Hebrew school. So I'm going to  
19 join there. Of course he was willing. He let me feel  
20 comfortable doing it, because I would feel disappointed if my  
21 son left me and not stayed with the Hebrew.

22           Eventually, I had my two daughters, Andrea and Kim.  
23 One is married now in Needham, Massachusetts, and I have a  
24 wonderful son-in-law, and I have two grandchildren who are  
25 terrific. One is 20 years old and he's at Penn State, and the

1 other one is very athletic and at Needham High he plays  
2 football, basketball. He's a jock right through and through,  
3 and a good student.

4 My other daughter, Andrea, was married and she had a  
5 son and got divorced, and then she got remarried and divorced  
6 again, and then she's raising my youngest grandson whose name  
7 is Josh, and he went through Hillel for eight years. He has  
8 been a wonderful student and he loves basketball. For several  
9 years he played on the Hillel basketball team and was a pretty  
10 good athlete. He then wanted to go to Country Day because of  
11 the great basketball history in the school, and I was  
12 ~~preferring~~ that he go to the Jewish Academy, but Andrea said  
13 it's probably that it's better that he's there where the  
14 discipline of his education would be even more so. And she  
15 was right. The classroom sizes are smaller. Last year he was  
16 the point guard in the ninth grade for Detroit Country Day,  
17 which was quite an achievement. So I used to come back from  
18 Florida whenever I could to see him play.

19 One example, he was on vacation with us in Florida  
20 and then he said to me, "Grandpa, I've got a game near  
21 Lansing." I said, "Well, we've got to go to this bris in New  
22 York first." So we flew to New York, came back to Florida,  
23 then we flew back to Michigan so he could play basketball and  
24 flew back to Miami where <sup>we</sup> were staying, and he was able to turn  
25 around and get everything in. So he was a high flyer at that

1 time. But he is a wonderful young man and he has a great  
2 education that's coming to him. And my daughter's done an  
3 outstanding job of raising him by herself.

4 My daughters appreciated their Hebrew education, and  
5 they both help in their synagogue life, dealing with the  
6 growth their kids and also helping other people. They always  
7 used to say to me, I'm going to quit. I'll have my bas  
8 mitzvah and then I want to quit. I said okay. You're 13. As  
9 part of your education, at 16 if you want to quit, you'll  
10 quit. If you quit your regular school, then you can quit your  
11 Hebrew school. If not, you graduate. If you want to quit,  
12 then you'll quit both because it's education.

13 They said, "I don't learn anything." I said, "I  
14 know you learn. My job is to get you in the building. It's  
15 your job to do the rest." And we were able to get them to go  
16 through until they went through high school, and they  
17 graduated. So we were proud of those achievements. It was a  
18 wonderful dedication that they had, because when they went to  
19 other communities and got married, they were ahead of the game  
20 because Shaarey Zedek's educational school was terrific.

21 My daughter in Needham was very, very instrumental  
22 in making sure the kind of school that her sons went to in the  
23 Boston area, and they achieved their bar mitzvahs. She  
24 married into a family ~~that~~ the disciplines of Hebrew in  
25 education were not as important as they are to our family, and



1 she led the way, and I was proud of what she accomplished.  
2 And it was a wonderful experience to know that I had grandsons  
3 that had their bar mitzvahs, because if she left it to her  
4 husband, chances are that might not have come to pass.

5 MS. ALTERMAN: Let's talk a little bit about how you  
6 met your wife.

7 MR. LAKER: We're married 52 years. It's hard to  
8 believe where the time went. We got married April 15, 1953.  
9 I was working with my dad, so we could afford one car. When  
10 she borrowed the car, I would work and achieve those things  
11 that we had to do, and she would take the children. We lived  
12 in Palmer Park, and as a result she was able to wheel the kids  
13 and do the things she had to do in shopping because our needs  
14 were different at that time and we had a growing business. So  
15 not everything was available in the monetary way. It was a  
16 struggle, but as you struggle, you achieve. And as you  
17 struggle, you learn, and it was a great learning experience  
18 for my wife and me.

19 Our children were born and we made sure that they  
20 had a wonderful education because my father and mother were so  
21 instrumental. I remember as we grew up my dad used to go on  
22 the road. He'd go to Lansing and Muskegon and Grand Rapids.  
23 And he said, "I'm taking the kids with me." This was during  
24 the summers when they were young. So he would take them out  
25 to dinner at night.

1 He was always singing in the car when they were  
2 driving, but one of the things that was so meaningful was he'd  
3 take them into a restaurant <sup>where</sup> and they had a band. So he used  
4 to go to the band leader and say I've got two wonderful young  
5 ladies that want to sing, if you'll be so kind. So they'd  
6 bring up the stage and my dad introduced them as Tacha Machia  
7 Tacha Metzia. That was their names to these people.

8 So they always had a great time with the  
9 grandparents. They took them to New York, they took them  
10 wherever they could. And they had a wonderful education, that  
11 family life was meaningful. We probably don't always  
12 understand it at the time that things happen, but as you look  
13 back, you can really take and appreciate the kinds of learning  
14 experiences you have when you have a close family and a  
15 meaningful family.

16 My wife and I were able to have a lifetime with my  
17 parents. My brother Jerry has three daughters. One daughter  
18 is married to a Swiss national. She was always outgoing. And  
19 he was in Israel where they met. They have one son, and I  
20 have been at his bar mitzvah. That's Jerry's oldest daughter.  
21 He has another daughter who's married to Steven Winkler, who  
22 is in the building business and with three grandchildren for  
23 my parents. The older one now is at the University of  
24 Michigan and the other two are just wonderful guys, both in  
25 their education and what they achieve.

1           My younger brother Marty had a daughter and two  
2 sons. The daughter married Tyler Smith, who is a computer  
3 genius, and has spent time in developing a type of business  
4 like e-bay and selling products, and is very successful with  
5 it so far. And she has one son and one on the way. She had a  
6 misfortune; she had a baby and they lost it, and it's buried  
7 at Shaarey Zedek in the family plot. My father and mother are  
8 there, and I used to tell my brother, don't worry, your mother  
9 and father are watching out for that little baby. Then he has  
10 an older son who has finished medical school and trained in  
11 surgery and bariatrics and he's a specialist in laproscopic  
12 surgery. He is married and they just had a new baby. He's  
13 here in Detroit. He came back from New York. He's at DMC,  
14 creating different opportunities for surgery that he does, and  
15 he's very talented.

16           My brother Marty's younger son is in orthopedic  
17 surgery and orthopedic health, and he has a wife who came from  
18 Rhode Island, and she's an OB-GYN. So they're both in  
19 training at DMC also. He hopes that they will stay here. So  
20 he's had very successful educational results with his  
21 children. And I remember my mother and father saying to those  
22 young kids and my brother and sister-in-law Renee, you must  
23 urge them to become doctors, because you can be proud of that.  
24 Not that you're not proud of all your children, but a doctor  
25 always had a connotation in Jewish life that was very

1 meaningful. So they achieved those goals. So we've been very  
2 blessed having family members who participate in family life  
3 and are responsible to what they do.

4           And they're also in communal life. My brother  
5 Jerry has been active at Shaarey Zedek. He's the president of  
6 the Men's Club. He and his wife are very active in other  
7 communal organizations. He has dear friends, the Kelleys, and  
8 they created like a comparable home like the JARC Home, and my  
9 brother has been assisting and helping wherever he can.

10           Of course our number of charities that we help on as  
11 a result of my folks, number one, when they were married 50  
12 years, we had a party. We had a lunch at Beth Achim and a  
13 dinner at Shaarey Zedek, and in their name we gave a  
14 scholarship to Beth Achim, and that is merged with Adat  
15 Shalom.

16           I want to introduce Ruben Isaacs if I may because  
17 he's been a family friend, and he's also been able to turn  
18 around and through his advertising skills and his work, he's  
19 been able to help our family develop the kind of understanding  
20 that is needed. He's a very dear mentor to me now.

21           **MS. ALTERMAN:** It's nice to have you here.

22           **MR. LAKER:** You can indicate about the scholarship.

23           **MR. ISAACS:** You've had it for over 30 years.

24           Probably given about \$80,000 to send students to Israel. They  
25 apply for it, they write a brief that's analyzed by a group,

1 and then every so often I would say we're giving it to this  
2 person, but there's another one there. It's so close. And he  
3 would simply say, okay, give it to him, too. So instead of  
4 having one every year, about every fourth year you had two.  
5 And it's still ongoing. It started at Beth Achim and is now  
6 at Adat Shalom. They do a good job of publicizing it and  
7 making it something worthwhile, sending a child or two to  
8 Israel every year for a year of study, that is something.

9           MR. LAKER: Part of the requirement also and Ruben  
10 was instrumental in helping was the fact that the young man or  
11 young woman would go to Israel. In the meantime it was a  
12 requirement that they write to my mother and make sure that  
13 they would explain what they were doing, and we got wonderful  
14 letters from the various students that went. They had to come  
15 back a year later and come on the bimah and speak about their  
16 educational rewards in Israel. Some of the students that have  
17 gone there have been outstanding, and they've gone on to do  
18 wonderful things. So that's been a great deal of pride and  
19 pleasure to our family.

20           We also got interested in the JARC Home and we  
21 dedicated in my family's name a home that's still present that  
22 has people living there. And my wife Beverly and Renee and  
23 Elaine all participate in going to the home and helping with  
24 whatever they can. Renee is a great horticulturist, so she  
25 spends time creating the flowers and the beautiful things that

1 are there. Beverly spends time talking to the various people  
2 that live in the JARC Home. So we have wonderful rewards for  
3 that.

4 I can remember when I was asked to be Bar Ilan  
5 honoree and one of the wonderful things that I was able to do  
6 because of David Hermelin, who was a great inspiration to so  
7 many people, but he was a great inspiration to me because he  
8 had time for everybody and he always made time and he had such  
9 wisdom in dealing with so many things. And he always called  
10 upon me if I could help him with different things and vice  
11 versa.

12 Beverly and I had the pleasure of being honorees at  
13 the Israel bond program, and we had Jewish National Fund in  
14 honor of my father and mother and created a forest in the  
15 years they were there. We were also very active with the  
16 Jewish Theological Seminary where we made a dedication to New  
17 York where I remember one student came back and saw the  
18 picture of my mother and father in the archives they have  
19 there for the Jewish Theological Seminary. And of course  
20 we've had our wonderful participation in the Allied Jewish  
21 Campaign and the Jewish Federation, wherever we could spend  
22 time and add to the dimensions that are necessary that would  
23 create a better Jewish community, and certainly whatever we  
24 could do to help with Israel.

25 Larry Jackier has been a great inspiration to me and

1 whenever it comes to Jewish causes and he's achieved so much  
2 that I counsel with him all the time on those things that are  
3 very important.

4 In my religious endeavors at Shaarey Zedek, Myron  
5 Milgram, <sup>was very helpful.</sup> ~~who was active in Jewish circles.~~ His family was  
6 very dedicated to charities and he was very dedicated in  
7 becoming a president of Shaarey Zedek. He helped me with the  
8 grass roots of developing my relationships at Shaarey Zedek.  
9 I became president of the Men's Club, I became president of  
10 the synagogue, and we've had a wonderful exposure, my wife and  
11 I. The present officers of Shaarey Zedek and the new cantor  
12 they just brought on, our family has taken on an initiative to  
13 help support him to develop the program that's needed for what  
14 we want to do at Shaarey Zedek. So we're very inspired by  
15 that.

16 So I've had great mentors and great people that have  
17 been able to turn around and give us the guidance that we  
18 need. But it started with the family and it started with  
19 sharing all these things with my family.

20 Besides the growth of my brother, Dr. Jerry Laker,  
21 my sister-in-law Renee and my brother Marty went to Temple  
22 Israel, and they took on a project of their Siddur. It was  
23 their personal joy to help the Rabbi Yedwab develop that, and  
24 it's the present Siddur that they use for their services on  
25 weekdays as well as Shabbes. And it was a pleasure that I

1 could see that if my dad and mother were alive, they could  
2 appreciate the kind of education they gave all of us, and they  
3 became an achiever in their own right.

4           So if you're lucky enough to have that, and I'm  
5 proud of that, if you're able to turn around and have a  
6 brother and a sister-in-law and another brother and sister-in-  
7 law that are active in Jewish life because of the learning  
8 experience with our parents. When you can pass that on,  
9 you've then done the legacy that you'd like to do, and they  
10 did it. They made sure that everyone achieved at a high level  
11 for what they wanted for their children and grandchildren.  
12 And so far everybody has participated in a major role in  
13 trying to do things.

14           My brother Jerry has a daughter who went to Alaska  
15 and she got married to a Jewish young man in Alaska, in  
16 Fairbanks, and she was able to turn around and create 40 acres  
17 outside the city, and they worked together and they built  
18 their own house, they did their own things. She was an  
19 outdoorsman, graduate of the University of Wisconsin and he  
20 was a graduate of Ohio State, and they developed such a  
21 wonderful, wonderful life. And they have one child and  
22 another one on the way.

23           We have so many plantings of family members in  
24 different aspects of life where we're turning around and  
25 making contributions to Jewish life in the various areas, and



1 it's rewarding to see what your parents give you and what you  
2 can carry on.

3 MS. ALTERMAN: Your family really left you a  
4 wonderful legacy. ~~Your parents.~~

5 There are several things I'd like to ask you about.  
6 I know that you were very involved in the development of the  
7 Holocaust Memorial Center here. I'd like you to talk about it  
8 a little bit.

9 MR. LAKER: Again, Myron Milgrim had a great  
10 influence on my life, and he in turn got us involved, and we  
11 were chairmen for one of the dinners, and I believe it was one  
12 of the biggest attendance that they ever achieved. And the  
13 beauty of it is that there was so much that you had to take  
14 from the history of Jewish people and pass on. And again, as  
15 you play the role, your offspring understand and they learn,  
16 as time goes on that these are the things that are meaningful.  
17 Having that history so it's imbedded in your mind so it'll  
18 never happen again, Jewish life becomes stronger and better.

19 Now, we've dedicated the Wall of Faith at the  
20 Holocaust where the old Holocaust building was and the night  
21 that we did that dedication, we had a gathering of people, and  
22 Rabbi Rosenweig showed what -- we had a little dinner and a  
23 little program, and my dad was not feeling good, and I took  
24 him home, and the next morning unfortunately he died. But  
25 here's a case where you were able to dedicate the kind of

1 Jewish life and the lessons of the Holocaust that he was a  
2 participant the night before his passing. So it was a great  
3 meaning again. You just don't exit Jewish life without  
4 leaving a mark that is so important to your own family and to  
5 the community by setting an example. So we have tremendous,  
6 wonderful feelings about those things, and we did it with the  
7 Holocaust.

8           **MS. ALTERMAN:** In '97 you dedicated the Irving and  
9 Beverly Laker Education and Youth Complex at Shaarey Zedek  
10 which I'm sure you're very proud of.

11           **MR. LAKER:** Yes. We had a wonderful opportunity.  
12 What was happening at Shaarey Zedek, we were in the northwest  
13 area of the community, but we were getting people that were  
14 moving further northwest, and the driving for the education  
15 and what have you for the members as well as the non-members  
16 that attended the Hebrew school. It needed something in that  
17 community as a temporary measure because Shaarey Zedek had a  
18 wonderful facility, but it needed to have something where  
19 people could go and make it convenient. We developed that,  
20 and it was an outstanding program and a labor of love.

21           My wife was very instrumental, and she often tells  
22 me when she used to drive and see the students come out of the  
23 building, how happy it made her and how proud we were of what  
24 she participated with me in developing that school. It's  
25 still in existence and still trying to do many more things.

1 So we hope we can help in many ways for the Jewish community  
2 for education.

3 MS. ALTERMAN: You've made a great contribution  
4 there. One thing that we didn't talk about is the fact that  
5 you as a business, ~~and we're backing up a bit, but you talked~~  
6 ~~a lot about your business, and you~~ <sup>have</sup> been in Detroit a long  
7 time, probably longer than most.

8 MR. LAKER: I was born in 1928 and I've been here  
9 all my life. My activities have been as a result of influence  
10 of my parents in the community, and wherever we could help we  
11 tried to help. Seven and a half years ago I had prostate  
12 cancer and what happened is I had to get treatment. Dr.  
13 Jeffrey Forman was my doctor. I remember we used to go down  
14 to Harper Hospital, and he had equipment that we used to take  
15 to help with the treatment. Unfortunately there were nine  
16 other people that I used to go and take the treatments, and I  
17 had it in the pelvis, the hips and the shoulders, and it was  
18 imbedded pretty good. But they'd go in for five minutes; I'd  
19 go in for a half hour for the treatments on the various  
20 things. But it was successful. I'm seven and a half years,  
21 and everything that we've done with Dr. Forman's formula and  
22 catering and his wonderful way with people enabled me now to  
23 be -- you're never cured, but it's arrested so we're not able  
24 to have any problems, and that's seven and a half years. So  
25 we're very proud of that.

1                   Unfortunately the people I was in treatment with,  
2 there were ten of us, nine are gone. So it's another sobering  
3 experience in life where everything happens to you, and then  
4 you're fortunate because there's a destiny here. There's a  
5 destiny to do things that enable us to help so many other  
6 people. And we're doing it. Our family is very much  
7 dedicated in that way.

8                   **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you've done such good <sup>WORKS</sup> words,  
9 throughout your family group.

10                  **MR. LAKER:** We're very proud of it, and we feel good  
11 that those things are available to us.

12                  **MS. ALTERMAN:** Is there anything else that we  
13 haven't talked about that you'd like to mention?

14                  **MR. LAKER:** Well, as a result of my association with  
15 Dr. Forman, he invited me to participate in the Doctors  
16 Practice Plan, where they have an organization of creating the  
17 kinds of things they want to do with income that they have.  
18 They created a foundation, and I'm on that group that takes  
19 the earnings that they have and develop<sup>s</sup> that and give<sup>s</sup> it away  
20 to students and doctors and scientists, they have money coming  
21 out so they can develop other programs, and I'm a part of that  
22 program, which is a blessing because you could see what is  
23 needed to help in the practice of getting more scientific  
24 discoveries and helping to eradicate some diseases we have.

25                  Dr. Forman is an outstanding person, and even at his

1 young age he's been able to turn around and make a tremendous  
2 ~~involvement~~ This past year he was invited to Atlanta because  
3 he won an international award <sup>for</sup> ~~of his~~ achievements with his  
4 patients. He's a very dear friend. I promised him when he  
5 was treating me, I said when our new house was built five  
6 years ago, we will turn around -- and that was before the  
7 Weisberg Center -- we will help develop the funding by having  
8 a dinner and a program at our home, which we did, and we were  
9 able to turn around and help raise the money to build the  
10 Weisberg Center, which is on Northwestern.

11 Again, every time you learn it's because you have a  
12 family history and you must participate, and the rewards, you  
13 can't imagine how grateful I am that those things are  
14 available and that you can feel good, because life is what you  
15 put into it, but also what you recognize. That's important.

16 MS. ALTERMAN: You've given so much back to this  
17 community, and we are very grateful. Is there a message you'd  
18 like to leave other than what you've already talked about,  
19 your family history and how important it is?

20 MR. LAKER: Yes. I think one of things -- I ran  
21 into somebody and he pointed out something for the Jewish  
22 community as a whole in the Federation that because of the  
23 decline in the economy in the Michigan market, many of our  
24 young people are moving to other areas. His thoughts, and he  
25 echoed it to me, and said if we could create more

1 opportunities through the Federation for young people so they  
2 don't leave the community, I think that would fortify what we  
3 have to do, because if everybody takes off and goes to other  
4 places, and we don't create that kind of a stop gap to make it  
5 more meaningful to stay in Detroit because there are  
6 opportunities. I think through Federation there's a lot of  
7 things that could develop that way. And that way you retain  
8 the people that will participate for the future. So that's a  
9 project that needs a lot of attention because we're losing so  
10 many young people to other areas of the country.

11 **MS. ALTERMAN:** That is very important. I agree.

12 Well, we're going to come to the end of our tape,  
13 and it's certainly been a pleasure speaking with you. Thank  
14 you so much.

15 **MR. LAKER:** Well, I'm so happy that I got invited to  
16 participate because you've stored so many wonderful feelings,  
17 and if you can echo them, and if in any way this helps others  
18 to get inspired to do things, then the purpose is served.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Thank you. Your family really is an  
20 inspiration for this community.

21 **MR. LAKER:** Thank you very much.