Sandy: We’re here today, July 19 [2005], and I’m with David Sarnat, who has agreed to do an interview for the Esther and Herbert Taylor Oral History Project of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. Thank you for coming today, David.

David: My pleasure.

Sandy: I’d like to begin by asking you to talk a little bit—because we want to get into your communal service and your time here in Atlanta—about your early life; where you were born and where you were educated, and really what led you to a career in Jewish communal service.

David: I was born in Chicago, [Illinois] and lived partly in Chicago and [partly in] Los Angeles, [California], back and forth, depending on the vagaries of my parents’ business. I started [college] at University of Illinois and I finished at Roosevelt University, with a degree in history. I then went to, what was then Western Reserve [University]—and subsequently became Case Western Reserve [University]—for a master’s in social work. I wound up in Cleveland, [Ohio] doing the master’s, and then took a job for two years in a settlement house in St. Louis, [Missouri].
As a youth, I was always involved in Zionist\(^1\) youth activities and spent a year, in 1961, in Israel\(^2\). When I was in St. Louis, I had a next-door neighbor whose father was the Planning Director for the Council of Jewish Federations\(^3\). Every time he would come to St. Louis, and we would meet with him, he would ask me, “What’s a nice Jewish boy like you, doing in a place like this?” So, finally I said, “Okay, make me an offer,” at which point I interviewed in Minneapolis [Minnesota], and Cleveland—which I had vowed I would never return to.

The interesting thing is that, Minneapolis offered me more money, but everybody was telling me that Cleveland was the premier [Jewish] Federation in the country. So I took the job in Cleveland in 1969, and started as an associate in the Community Relations department, doing what they called “urban affairs”. [It] primarily dealt with Cleveland Federation’s involvement in a project to help Jewish inner-city merchants sell their stores to minority purchasers. It was done with the Greater Cleveland Growth Association—which was the Chamber of Commerce—and the city, and others. I was then immersed in that, and from that, got involved in things such as developing the Heights Area Project\(^4\), which was a neighborhood stabilization program. In the early 1970s . . .

Sandy: Was that Shaker Heights or Cleveland Heights?

David: Cleveland Heights. What was happening was a process of integration of Cleveland Heights, which was an inner-ring suburb that had the majority of the Jewish institutions. The Federation—which was always a forward-looking Federation—said, “If this pattern continues, what you’re

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\(^1\) Zionism is a movement that supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.

\(^2\) Israel, a Middle Eastern country on the Mediterranean Sea, is regarded by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the biblical Holy Land. Its most sacred sites are in Jerusalem.

\(^3\) The Council of Jewish Federations is an association of Jewish community organizations in the U.S. addressing issues of budgeting, campaigning, public welfare, public relations, and business management services.

\(^4\) The Heights Area Project was established as the Cleveland Heights Project by the Jewish Community Federation in 1969 in an attempt to halt or slow the move of Jews and Jewish institutions out of Cleveland Heights.
going to have is integration and then re-segregation. What can we do to minimally slow down the process, so people don’t get financially devastated, and hopefully maintain the community as an integrated, viable, community, open to all?” So that was my charge.

We formed something called the Heights Area Project, which involved all the Jewish organizations in Cleveland Heights and University Heights. Then, through that, we formed something called the Heights Community Congress⁵, which still [exists]. It’s probably thirty years [old] now, I know a few years ago it had its twenty-fifth anniversary. [It] involved, not only the Jewish community, but the Catholic community, the city, the Board of Education, the Protestant community. I remember we came up with one of these convoluted kinds of organizations, in terms of representation. We had classes of membership, so there was a Jewish class of membership, and a Protestant, and a Catholic, and all that.

We met in the basement of a nunnery. There was a Catholic priest—who had not much to do, other than to be a chaplain to the Carmelite Sisters⁶—and he was rather bored, and he offered his facility. It was a great place to meet, because they were cloistered and never talked to anybody. So it was very quiet, and we could have our meetings in the basement of this cloister.

That’s my early days, and I was there for ten years.

Sandy: Before we move on, even though it’s Cleveland, tell me about a couple of the people you enjoyed working with there. I know you have fond memories of Sidney Vincent and Judah Rubenstein.

David: Cleveland, when I took it, was the preeminent Federation. So there was a staff, a professional staff, probably of thirty individuals. Each of them, in their own way, had a lot to offer. The head of the staff was [Henry] Hank Zucker. He was the Executive Vice President, and the Executive Director was

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⁵ The Heights Community Congress was a collaborative organization focused on maintaining and ensuring orderly neighborhood integration between Jewish and non-Jewish elements of the community.

⁶ The Carmelites are a Roman Catholic mendicant religious order.
Sidney Vincent. These were both extremely capable individuals, who could have taken any job nationally, but chose to make their career entirely in Cleveland. Hank was previously a social worker with the Public Welfare Department, [which was] started in the Depression\textsuperscript{7}. His parents were immigrants from Hungary. He looked like an IBM\textsuperscript{8} executive. He was very quiet, very professional looking, always well-dressed, but very subtle.

Sid Vincent was a former English teacher at Glenville High School, which—at one time—was the heart of the Jewish community. As a matter of fact, many of the laymen there were his students at one time. He was the opposite [of Hank]. He never could match. All these plaids and stripes, he didn’t look like an IBM executive at all, but was one of the more articulate and profound thinkers.

Hank, in his own way, was very profound. He initiated the whole endowment fund program for the Federation movement in the country. Cleveland had the first endowment fund because of Hank’s forward thinking. He also was the brains behind the [Annual] Campaign\textsuperscript{9}, whereas Sidney was really the guy behind the community relations and the planning effort of the Federation.

There were probably a dozen other people that went on to major positions. Bernie Chansky was the Planning Director when I started, and became the Director of the Boston Federation. There was, Howard Rieger, who started a year after I did, who’s the head of UJC [United Jewish Communities]\textsuperscript{10}. There was Stanley Horowitz who, when I started, was a planning associate and went on to be the head of UJA [United Jewish

\textsuperscript{7} The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place mostly during the 1930s, beginning in the United States.

\textsuperscript{8} International Business Machines (IBM) Corporation is an American multinational information technology company headquartered in New York, with operations in over 170 countries.

\textsuperscript{9} The Annual Campaign is the Federation’s primary vehicle for securing funding for the welfare and vitality of the Jewish community, locally, globally and in Israel.

\textsuperscript{10} The United Jewish Communities (UJC) organization incorporated in 1999 as a result of the merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, (CJF), United Israel Appeal (UIA), and United Jewish Appeal (UJA).
There was Ted Farber, who went on to become the Federation Director in Washington DC. Barry Shrage, who subsequently went on—after Bernie [Chansky left]—to be the Federation Director in Boston.

So it was really a place that spawned all kinds of leadership, and it was also a place that allowed for all kinds of diverse skills. You mentioned Judah Rubenstei, Judah was an ABD [All But the Dissertation] in history from Harvard, whose passion was the local Jewish history, et cetera. He also had some other assignments, which he sort of “fumphed” around with, but he really did this. He put together the Cleveland Jewish Archives\textsuperscript{12}, and a lot of the other material related to the history of the Jewish community. He and Sidney collaborated on a book on the history of the Jewish community of Cleveland.

All of these people were invaluable [to me] as a young professional. [Each was] someone that you could learn from and interact with. We used to say there was no one there that you couldn’t go in and ask advice [from], and get sound reading on any issue you had. So it was probably the best ten years of my professional life, in terms of stimulation and growth and being given opportunities to do new things and develop new ideas.

\textbf{Sandy:} You were there ten years. Then, were you planning to move on? How did the job in Atlanta . . .

\textbf{David:} One day Stanley Horowitz—who succeeded Hank as the Executive of the Federation—came into my office, and says, “Would you like to go to Atlanta?” I said, “I don’t know where Atlanta is.” The furthest south I had ever been was Washington DC. So I said, “I know nothing about it.” He said, “I’ll come back in a couple of days.”

What happened was, the Council of Jewish Federations had contacted him to ask if [David] Sarnat was interested, and that was the protocol. So he came back, and said, “I looked into it. I think it might be something you want to look at.” I said, “You want to get rid of me?” and he

\textsuperscript{11} The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) was a Jewish philanthropic umbrella organization founded in 1939 and ultimately merged into the UJC in 1999.

\textsuperscript{12} The Cleveland Jewish Archives collects print and non-print material that documents the history of the Jewish community in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.
said, “No, if I wanted to get rid of you, I’d get rid of you. But why don’t you look at it.”

So, I came down to Atlanta and was impressed with the potential for growth and development. Because what was here—the assessment I made, which I think was borne out—was that you had a very strong community on the verge of tremendous growth, that needed direction, with leadership that were willing to take on new ways of doing things. It was a community that was growing, had tremendous potential and a very positive—albeit somewhat rudimentary—history. A very positive history as a community working together, rather than some communities that have a history of controversy and fighting and not working together. That was never the case in Atlanta. So I decided to take the job.

Sandy: When you first got here, who was the Executive Director?


Sandy: Was he retiring?

David: Yes, Mike Gettinger was my predecessor, and he was retiring and had been here fourteen years. I was only the third Executive [Director]. Prior to that was [Edward M.] Ed Kahn, who had been here, I think, two thousand years. [grins] They had just effected, a few years earlier, the merger that formed the Federation. Previously they had the Jewish Welfare Fund, which was separate from the Jewish Social Service Bureau [and the Federation]. Ed Kahn was the executive of all three, which meant he controlled all three and split up the lay leadership. So it was an interesting control issue.

Sandy: What year was that?

David: January 1, 1979. When I got here, there were four professionals, counting myself. There was me, Marvin Schpeiser, who directed the Community Relations; Marilyn Shubin, who was the [Annual] Campaign Director, and—I forget her name—a young woman who was doing the Women’s Division. Shortly after that, she left and Margaret Weiller—who was sort of in a support staff position—was promoted to Women’s Division Director. So those were the four. Mike Gettinger acted part-time as an Endowment Director. Mike, ideologically when he was the executive, never
started the endowment because he felt it was competitive with the Annual Campaign. But in retirement you do all kinds of interesting things. [grins]

Sandy: Did he want to retire?

David: I can’t speak for Mike. He was a very vital, active individual. He lived a good number of years after that and had all kinds of interests, so my guess is that . . . I don’t know whether he wanted to, you’ll have to ask others.

Sandy: When you got here and you looked at the Federation, which had amazing potential in your estimation, what were some of your long-term goals?

David: There were a number. One was structural—it was one of the largest functional Federations. In other words, the executive of the Federation was also the executive of the Jewish Family Service⁰¹ and the head of Hillel⁰² and the Jewish Vocational Service⁰³. The first thing I said is, “I have a hard enough time running the Federation, let alone the other components.” So one of the goals was to shore those entities up in such a way that they could be independent and function by themselves. The other was the Annual Campaign, which at that time, was raising about $4 million. It structurally needed to be dealt with, so one of the goals was to raise the Annual Campaign. Then three, was to enhance the Federation staff, because if we were going to grow the community we needed a planning function, we needed additional campaign hands, et cetera. So those were the three pieces that I looked at as we moved ahead.

The most important [part] in any Federation is financial resource development, because there’s an old Talmudic saying, “Ein kemach, ein Torah,”⁰⁴—if you don’t have the bread, don’t talk to me about Torah. If you

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⁰¹ Jewish Family Services organizations deliver essential services to vulnerable individuals and families, helping them achieve well-being, health, and stability.
⁰² Hillel, The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, is the largest Jewish campus organization in the world, working with thousands of college students globally.
⁰³ Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) works with individuals to help find employment and build their career, while partnering with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces.
⁰⁴ Ein kemach, ein Torah; ein Torah, ein kemach — “If there is no food, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no food”. If there is no food in our stomachs or if we don’t have the physical or emotional essentials for life, then it is impossible for us to absorb the words of
don’t deliver the bread, which is the money, then everything else becomes theoretical. So [there was] a lot of attention on raising the Annual Campaign.

Sandy: Was it difficult to move those agencies to independence?

David: Yes, because I think the major resistance came from the lay leadership, who couldn’t understand why the Federation was no longer involved; why the meeting of the Federation board wasn’t spent two-thirds of the time talking about Jewish Family Service and Jewish Vocational Service and Hillel. To disengage some of the lay leadership from their involvement with those agencies was difficult.

One of my major battles was with Marvin Goldstein, who became President [of the Federation] after Max Rittenbaum—who was the first president while I was here. He fought me tooth and nail on the thing because he thought that it was wrong. But I think history will bear me out that spinning it off and allowing it to develop [was the right thing]. If you look at Jewish Family Service today, it’s a very vital, active, organization with a great cadre of lay leadership and a board. I think the theory is that no one wants to serve on a board that is subservient to another board. Either you’re on the board and you make the decisions—and no one wants to be the executive in an agency that has to answer to another executive—either you run your own shop or you don’t. So there was some resistance, but when you looked at models around the country, it was obvious that we were the last hold-outs of communities our size, in terms of functioning that way.

Sandy: There was a basic model that you were trying to follow.

David: If you look at the way communities are organized, as a community grows, functional Federations only can serve in smaller communities. Once you get to be a large community, it’s just a matter of focus and time and effort. You can’t focus on the agenda of a Federation if you’re also dealing day-to-day with direct services that are very important and vital. Something’s got to give; either the Federation functions give, or the direct services become mediocre. So if you want to have a superior product, both in the Federation and

Torah or experience spirituality. And if we do not have spirituality in our lives, then we are
the direct services, you need to allow them to grow. It’s just like children—I don’t want to say the agencies were children—but at a certain point you’ve got to cut them loose and allow them to grow. Otherwise, they become infantilized, which I think happens to agencies.

Sandy: So that was one of your goals. The second goal was to enhance the staff. Who were some of your early hires and some of the areas where you really needed to hire people?

David: I don’t remember the exact sequence, but first we replaced the Women’s Division Director, and Margaret Weiller came in. Then I brought in a Planning Director, who was Max Kleinman, who came from the Metro West Federation. Subsequently, he went on to be the Executive in Minneapolis [Minnesota] and now is in Metro West again as the Executive. He was here for four years.

We added a marketing or PR [public relations] function, with Jane Leavey and Gail Evans, who sort of job-shared. Actually, I think there was someone before that [too]. Since we didn’t have much money, you did whatever you could—you begged, borrowed, and stole staff — [to Sandy] like you. [grins] Evans then went on to work for CNN as a researcher and she subsequently, I think, owns CNN now [jokingly]; and Jane is still here and runs this museum [William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta, Georgia]. Then we brought in additional planning staff, and some additional campaign staff.

The other thing was, we only had one bookkeeper. Well, you can’t run an enterprise like this with one bookkeeper. Rose Klein was the bookkeeper, and she was wonderful in running a mom-and-pop operation. Under guidance [she] continued to be a good bookkeeper. But I remember one

missing the essential nutrition for our souls.

David Sarnat, and archivist Sandy Berman, worked together with Jane Leavey to establish the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, which contains thousands of photographs, manuscripts, records and oral histories of the Jewish community. The project was made possible by a grant from the National Historic Records and Publications Commission, and became a major part of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum of Atlanta.
of [her] first questions. She came into my office one day, and she said, “We’ve got some money, should I send it to UJA?” I looked at her, and I said, “Rose, is that all you’re going to tell me?” She said, “Well, that’s all I used to tell Mike.” I said, “I need more information.” She said, “What do you need?” I said, “What are our cash needs? How do I answer that question? We’ve got money, but I don’t know what we need next week, or [in] a month, or what the cash flow is, what we can anticipate.”

So, at that point I decided we needed to hire someone that had a little more sophistication. We hired a business manager, a nice gentleman from Rhodesia—Zimbabwe, now—who had a real interesting history. I never saw the guy make a wrong decision, he made right decisions. In World War II—he’s a German Jew—he left for Italy. Wrong place. I mean, Italy was not the place to go if you were escaping [the Nazis]. But [he] finally wound up in New Zealand somehow, and fought with the British Army in World War II. He decided to immigrate to Zimbabwe, which didn’t last, and then immigrated to the United States. We hired him. He was a wonderful gentleman, but not totally appropriate for the position. We then had to upgrade that, and we hired some more business staff, we hired some more bookkeepers, and as the Campaign and endowment grew, we hired an Endowment Director fulltime. Then we started augmenting the staff in that way.

**Sandy:** When did Noah Levine come on?

**David:** That’s a good question. I think Noah may have been my first hire, but he came in [as] Community Relations and Planning, which he suffered

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18 Cable News Network (CNN) is a news-based television channel owned by Turner Broadcasting System, and headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. CNN was founded in 1980 by Ted Turner as one of the first 24-hour cable news channel.

19 World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945. The vast majority of the world’s countries eventually formed two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis.

20 Between 1933 and 1945, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party controlled Germany through a dictatorship and lead the country into World War II. By the end of that war, more than half of the Jewish population of Europe had been killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust. In Italy, Benito Mussolini was leader of the National Fascist Party and Prime Minister from 1922 to 1943. He supported Hitler’s Nazi party in the war.
through, then took over the [Annual] Campaign when Marilyn retired. He may have been my first hire, and then Max Kleinman.

**Sandy:** So you still have two of your hirees at Federation—not hirees, but people you work with—Rose Klein and Noah.

**David:** . . . and Jane, yes, and you. I mean, I didn’t hire you, I borrowed you . . .

**Sandy:** . . . then you hired me.

**David:** Right.

**Sandy:** So the first goal was to get the agencies independent, the second was to enhance staff, and the third goal was to work on raising more money. How did you initiate that?

**David:** First was reorganize, structurally, the Campaign. We developed a different structure. At that time, there was the physician’s division, the dentist’s division, and then it was all money.

**Sandy:** Scrap . . .

**David:** No, there was no scrap division. The only specific trade or professional division was the dentists and the physicians. So we put together some kind of trades and professional structure to relate to that. We then also initiated a very active missions program. At one time I think Atlanta had one of the more active missions to Israel programs, which was very successful. We also initiated a leadership development program—a young leadership program—which also helped feed new people into the Federation. That was primarily through the [Annual] Campaign and I think it was a much more intensive orientation—in terms of campaign—than we’d had before.

I took on, personally, the development of certain prospects that we identified as having potential, and was able to move some of those gifts and to maintain some of the historic leadership. I think what you had here, in terms of major givers, was an historic, strong cadre of major donors, and it never got down below that. So [the goal] was to expand the number of people in the $5,000 and over [donor group] and $10,000 and over and $1,000 and over, etcetera. Basically, that’s how the Campaign grew.
Sandy: Who were some of the individuals, early on, the lay leadership—that you either developed personal ties or professional relationships with—that you felt were instrumental in those early years of building that new Federation?

David: Remember, I said that when I came down here, my assessment was that there was a willingness on the part of the leadership. So I have to tell you that the whole cadre of officers were open and willing, especially the more senior people. When I was hired, David Goldwasser was the President. He passed away the weekend before I started my job, and Max Rittenbaum then became President. Max was a wonderful, sweet, man who was very supportive of new ideas. I think the whole cadre of officers, whether it be Marvin Goldstein or Gerald Cohen or Betty Ann Jacobson or Phyllis Friedman, were all part of that initial group that I worked with.

Also some of the major donors continued to be very strong supporters. Erwin Zaban—who, to this day, is an enigma to me in that he never took any kind of formal position—basically was one of the more instrumental people in the growth of the community. He was the kind of person that, once you had his sanction and approval, you pretty well could move ahead on new ideas. Then there was Sidney Feldman, who was the past president of the Federation. He was wonderful, in terms of being supportive. Sidney’s feeling was, “Okay, I’ve done my thing, I’ve been President. When you need me, call me.” He was the kind of guy that, when major issues came up, we would go and talk to him and he would weigh in in terms of being able to get things to happen. Milton Weinstein, who was a past president, also was very supportive and very helpful.

I think that environment, again, goes back to my initial assessment of the positive history of the community, where people were willing to move ahead and were very receptive to new ideas. I never once—in the early days here—ran into people who said, “No, we don’t do it that way here.” It was

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21 Long-time member of Atlanta’s Jewish community, Betty Ann Romm Jacobson became the first female president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 1986.
always, “Oh, that’s interesting. We never thought about it that way.” I think that was always very positive.

**Sandy:** I’ve listed a few other people I’ve thought of. I remember going to early board meetings and there was always a table of “old-timers”, and some of these people I think you had a relationship with. If you could say a few words about each one . . . Bill Breman.  

**David:** Bill was always involved. Bill was—while involved with the Federation—really I think, more . . .

. . . interested in service to the elderly, and that was his prime concern. But also was a wonderful guy. He was not as easy—in the early years—to pin down, but he was always supportive. He was always the one that would argue against the overseas allocation, saying we needed to keep more money locally. I remember a conversation I once had with him about allocations overseas for the elderly in Romania. We had a discussion, and he said, “Well, let them support their elderly, we need to support ours here.” So he was a little more narrowly focused in terms of that, but also open to new ideas.

There was “Greenie”, who was always there. He was probably the consummate campaigner.

**Sandy:** What was his name, for the tape? Everyone knew him as “Greenie”, but . . .

**David:** Dr. Greenberg. What was his first name?  

**Sandy:** Irving.

**David:** [Dr.] Irving Greenberg, that’s right. “Greenie”—who again was one of these characters you don’t forget—he never used to send a bill with a specific charge to his patients. He used to basically say, “Here’s a range. You’ll pay whatever you think you can afford and what you think I’m worth.” That’s the kind of guy he was, and that carried over to his work with us. He

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22 William (Bill) Bremen was a life member of the Temple, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, B’nai B’rith Anti-Defamation League, and the American Jewish Committee. In 1990, with a
was one of the founders of the [Greenfield] Hebrew Academy\textsuperscript{23}, very committed to Jewish education. He was one of these guys that would take three thousand cards in a campaign and solicit them. I mean, he would do whatever you asked. Again, not someone that took a title or was necessarily involved in that way.

Henry Birnbrey also was involved. In the early days he was an officer of the Federation, also committed to Jewish education. He himself was a child in Germany that was evacuated to England and then grew up in Alabama [U.S.] during the war. So he had this strange Alabama-German accent [grins]—still does—which was interesting. Who else?

Sandy: What about Joe Cuba?

David: Joe Cuba was again, an old-timer, sort of a curmudgeon kind of guy. He was also very committed to Jewish education and to Israel. In getting to know him, I learned that he at one time was an itinerant solicitor for the United Palestine Appeal\textsuperscript{24}. That had nothing to do with the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]\textsuperscript{25}. It was a precursor to the United Jewish Appeal. He used to go around the Southeast raising money for Palestine. He was also one of the guys that was involved early on with our endowment fund. He was an accountant by training and was very helpful and sort of a character in his own way, but very supportive.

Sandy: Did you know his brother Max [Cuba]?

David: No, Max had passed away before I came here. But Max was legend as one of the real leaders of the Jewish community, and of the general community. He had a great impact on Atlanta as a whole.

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\textsuperscript{23} Founded in Atlanta in 1953, Greenfield Hebrew Academy (GHA) was the first Jewish day school in the country to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In 2014, GHA merged with Yeshiva Atlanta high school to become what is now Atlanta Jewish Academy.

\textsuperscript{24} The United Palestinian Appeal (UPA) is a 501(c)3 established in 1978 to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

\textsuperscript{25} The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is an organization founded in 1964 with the purpose of the "liberation of Palestine" through armed struggle, with much of its violence aimed at Israeli civilians.
Sandy: Did you know Irving Greenberg’s brother Marvin?
David: Yes, Marvin was an officer . . . no . . . it wasn’t Irving Greenberg’s brother, it was Marvin Goldstein’s brother.
Sandy: That’s right.
David: Marvin Goldstein’s brother, Irving [Goldstein]. He was also a dentist in practice with Marvin. Very sweet guy. He and Marvin practiced orthodonture together, and the two of them had the first integrated dental practice in the city of Atlanta. Among their patients were [Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.’s]²⁶ children. That’s how Marvin developed a close relationship with the King family, subsequently. Irving passed away shortly after I came here, so I didn’t know him well. I knew him briefly, but he and Marvin had this legendary practice, and also worked together involved in the Jewish community.

I don’t know if you’ve got other names . . .
Sandy: I do.
David: Go ahead.
Sandy: Gerald Cohen and Bernard Cohen.
David: Gerald was an officer of the Federation—he was Campaign Chair when I came here—and subsequently became President of the Federation. He and Sidney Feldman, and maybe a couple of others, are really like my heroes. Gerald probably has one of the best senses of humor I’ve ever seen. He never takes himself too seriously, very humble.

I remember a conversation I had with him. Whenever I started with a new president, I’d sit down and talk to them about how they got involved and what their priorities were, et cetera. And I remember, to this day, how Gerald described how he got involved in the community. He basically was raised in a family where he knew he had two primary obligations—one to the family and one to the community. He said, “As I looked around, I saw people who were very engaged with their family but did nothing in the community, and vice

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²⁶ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement from 1954 until his death in 1968.
versa; people in the community who neglected their family. So I thought, and I thought, and I decided the way I was going to get involved in the community was to parallel my children’s development.” So, subsequently, he became a Sunday School teacher, he became a Cub Scout and a Boy Scout master, he got involved with the Hebrew School Board of Education. So whenever he’d come home from a meeting or a function, he had something he could talk to his kids about, that they understood. As they became older and more sophisticated, he broadened his involvement in the community, and he was able to bring them along with him. And I think if you look at his children, you’ll see that the legacy is there. He was just a wonderful guy, still is.

He’s also, unfortunately, an arch Republican\textsuperscript{27}, but it was always with a certain lightness and humor that we could discuss those kinds of issues. I used to like to go to his scrap yard [Central Metals] and meet with him there. Because a change of venue is always nice. [grins] Every once in a while, you’d see him in boots, and you look at him and say, “Oh, this is yard day for Gerald Cohen,” and he’d say, “Yep, been out in the yards.” Every once in a while, whatever smashes cars would explode, because they left gas in the gas tank. It was an exciting thing. [grins] He was just very, very supportive. He also got involved nationally. He was involved with Council of Jewish Federations as a vice president, and I think made a major contribution.

\textbf{Sandy: Did Bernard get involved?}

\textbf{David:} Bernard. [laughs] Bernard . . . as Gerald always said, “He’s the brains behind Central Metals.” Bernard was always extremely supportive and very friendly, but not involved in the community at all.

\textbf{Sandy:} Rae Alice.

\textbf{David:} Rae Alice was involved in her own way, especially in Jewish education.

But Bernard—you never had a sense that he was negative, it’s just that he liked his little office where he ran numbers for Central Metals, and that

\textsuperscript{27} The Republican Party, also referred to as the GOP (Grand Old Party), is one of the two major political parties in the United States. Republican ideology leans more conservative while its historic rival, the Democratic Party, leans more liberal.
was his job. As outgoing and friendly as Gerald was, Bernard was more closed and not as outgoing.

Sandy: Meyer Balser.

David: Meyer was always there. Meyer was President of the [Jewish Community Center] Center\(^{28}\) for, I don’t know how many years. Never was President of the Federation, and was basically really a campaigner. I mean, he loved to campaign. He was an insurance salesman, and if you can sell insurance, you can get a guy to commit to the Campaign. He was also very involved with the elderly, and was President of the [William Breman] Jewish Home\(^{29}\). Again, out of that old stock that grew up here, knew where they came from, and knew where their commitments were. He was very clear and very supportive of what was going on. But he was not as involved in the Federation as he was in the Home, and previously with the Center.

Sandy: Betty Ann Jacobson.

David: Betty Ann, from day one, was an officer. Betty Ann would do anything you would ask her to do. She was the first woman president and did a wonderful job. If anybody deserves a lifetime achievement award, it’s Betty Ann. I think she’s given her whole life to this community. She was involved with Jewish Family Service, she was involved with—you name it—with the Temple, with what have you. Again, very supportive and also got involved nationally, more than some of the others. I think she enjoyed participating on the national level as well.

Sandy: Have I left somebody out that you have a great story or anecdote about, or someone who really affected your time here?

David: Positively or negatively? [laughs]

Sandy: Either way.

David: Well, we’ll leave the negative off.

Sandy: No, no, we like the negatives.

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\(^{28}\) The Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) was located in Midtown Atlanta and offered programs, events, and classes for Jewish families. The AJCC was replaced by the Marcus Jewish Community Center which is currently the primary Jewish community center in Atlanta.

\(^{29}\) The William Breman Jewish Home (WBJH), is a non-profit, 96-bed, five-star certified skilled nursing home and rehabilitation center established in Atlanta in 1951.
David: No, no. [laughs]

Sandy: Researchers like the negatives. [chuckles]

David: I won’t talk about any individual. But I think when you look at—not just Atlanta, I think it’s in general—what’s happening in terms of communal life, things are changing. I talked about Meyer [Balser] knowing where he came from. I think all of that generation came from relatively humble beginnings and knew where they came from, knew where their commitments were. They engaged in community as a function of feeling a certain responsibility they were born with and was ingrained in their soul. I think all of us, all of my colleagues, see a shift in the generation. You’ve got a different kind of leadership—not any worse, but a more challenging one. I don’t think they come with the same sense of where they’ve been, or necessarily the same kind of commitment to community. We talk about the “Me Generation,” and I think we all are part of it. I think current leadership, not just in the Jewish community but in general, are part of that generation that views things in terms of “What’s in it for me?”

For instance, one of the things I’ve seen is how many current community leaders started in the day schools. And basically—I don’t want to be pejorative—but it’s sort of like the PTA [Parent/Teachers Association] which is “What’s in it for my kids? I’m going to watch out and make sure they get a good education.” Then they move from that to the general community. Now the question is, can they make a transition from “What’s in it for me and my family?” to “What’s good for the community?” That sometimes is a very hard transition.

The other issue, and it’s interesting . . . I remember, when I first came down here. Hank Zucher asked me to come meet with the leadership and talk about endowment development. I said to Hank, “Some of these people I deal with are really very difficult and very strong-headed.” And he turned to me and he said, “Look, this generation of leadership (he was referring to the Sidney Feldmans and the Erwin Zabans) built whatever they got because of their strong egos. They have very strong personalities, and that’s how they got to where they were.”
If you look at that now, you’re dealing with the inheritors of that.

It’s one thing to be a risk taker and a builder, because that’s how you got to where you are. You know, how did Erwin [Zaban] build National Service Industries from Zep Chemicals?

Sandy: Right.

David: You take risks, and you’ve got a strong ego and a certain drive. But the guy that inherited this, his main function is to conserve what was there, that’s the first thing. Somebody that has a personality to conserve, approaches community life a lot differently than the person whose goal was to build. There’s something to be said about an entrepreneurial personality that’s transposed into communal work. If you’re going to grow, you’ve got to take risks, you’ve got to change, you’ve got to do new things. And I think the leadership has to be prepared to do that. I don’t think, necessarily, the current leadership has that entrepreneurial sense. They more come out of a conservative mode in their own personal positions in life. It’s not better or worse, it’s just a different kind of challenge.

Sandy: When you first came down here from the North, was there a difference with the Southern mentality? Was it a Southern thing at all that you saw?

David: Not in the Jewish community. I still remember meeting Gerald Cohen and Marvin Goldstein and Sidney Feldman, guys whose names I grew up with my whole life. Hearing them speak with Southern accents was sort of a shock. But I think that their Jewishness mellowed whatever Southernisms they had. My sense is, at least in Atlanta, I don’t think the Jewish leadership were necessarily socialized in the general community.

I still remember a conversation with Erwin Zaban about his friends. In business, yes, he had to deal with the non-Jews and the bankers and all that. But after five o’clock, his friends were from the Jewish community. I think you see it today. In general, the Jewish community has not been involved in the general community to the extent that I was used to. When I was up in Chicago or in Cleveland, they’re part and parcel of everything that goes on in that
community. No major effort could take place without the engagement of the Jewish community. Whereas here, it’s as if we were a footnote.

When I came here, for instance, one of the first things I did—because of my history in Cleveland—was try to affect a relationship with United Way. Now, I was the Planning Director in Cleveland, and I had a very close relationship with United Way in Cuyahoga County [Ohio], and Catholic Commission on Community Action, and all of these counterpart organizations. But I remember how frustrated I was [here]. And I remember Lyndon Wade—who was then the Executive of the Urban League [of Greater Atlanta]—we were having lunch one day, and I told him my frustration. He just looked at me and said, “Forget it, just forget it. [grins] It’s not going to work. Don’t even waste your time.” I kept going to meeting after meeting, and he finally said, “I told you.”

Sandy: Why, do you think?

David: I think that the Jewish community may have never felt totally secure, and was never totally accepted, in the general community. I remember Dale Schwartz, who was very involved for a while in the Federation, and grew up in Winder, Georgia. I once asked him, “How did you stay Jewish in a place like Winder, Georgia?” [grins] Because you would have thought that they were the only Jewish family in Winder. He said every Sunday, his family would drive him and his brother to AA [Ahavath Achim Synagogue] to go to Sunday School. I said, “That’s good.” Then he said, “And then, once a year,
the [Ku Klux] Klan\textsuperscript{34} would burn a cross on our lawn. So I didn’t have any problem forgetting who I was.”

So I think, you can talk to some of the old-time leadership here about the kind of fights they were engaged in because they were Jewish, and who the protectors were. Whether it would be Max [Kuniansky] in that generation, or others in another generation, they basically were the protectors of the Jewish kids. I think the South did differentiate much more than the North, in terms of that.

Sandy: One of your other dreams, I know, was to start an archive and a museum here in Atlanta. Tell me a little about that beginning.

David: If you looked at the community and said, “If you’re going to move the community ahead, what are the building blocks that you need?” part of what you’ve got to look at is not just the quantitative side—the Annual Campaign—but also the qualitative side. What are the services that you need to deliver? Fortunately, I have a Bachelor’s degree in history, so I have some interest in that. Also, there was a richness of history here related to Southern Jewish experience which, if it wasn’t somehow captured, would be lost. So my feeling was, let’s start an archive. Then the museum piece was about how to add to the cultural fabric of the community, because the JCC [Jewish Community Center] at that time was not doing it. There were really no significant cultural offerings coming out of the community. So that was my idea, to start an archive and get people to start to participate.

I also had a theory—which I still believe in—that the more entry points you have in a community for people to get involved, the more people you’ll involve in the community. That goes back to the whole question of why do you separate Jewish Family Service, et cetera. Because if it’s a Jewish Federation board, it’s one board that people participate in, as opposed to four boards that people participate in. There’s just more opportunity for engagement. Not everybody wants to get involved in the Federation, or in an agency, or what

\textsuperscript{34} The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), is the oldest and most infamous American hate group. Although Black Americans have typically been the primary target of the Klan’s violence, it also has attacked Jews, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, and Catholics.
have you. Some people come to the table because of an interest in a given area. It’s just a way to engage people.

Sandy: If you could review your years as Director of the Federation, how do you perceive your legacy to the Federation in Atlanta and the Jewish community here?

David: Legacy, what’s a legacy? A legacy implies a certain enduring or ongoing kind of [impact] . . .

Sandy: I think that you have [done that]. . .

David: You have to understand that I really believe the old [General Douglas A.] MacArthur35 adage, “Old soldiers don’t die, they just fade away.” So, as I continue to fade away, my legacy also fades with that. I’m not sure what’s enduring, ongoing, that will stay on. One can look at structures and all that, but that’s not much, because they can come down just as quickly as they went up.

Maybe I brought a little more sophistication, as a community, in how [the Federation in Atlanta] went about doing business. Some structural changes in the organization that I think will continue, because they work. But then, my successors, they’re going to mess with that too, so that’ll change.

There are certain things in place, [though]. When I came here, there was no endowment fund, so there’s now an endowment fund. I don’t think anybody’s going to do away with it, as hard as they may try. [grins] I’m just kidding. The museum is a fact, it’s not going to go away. The archives are there. The agencies are independent.

I think there are some things that hopefully would have continued, but I don’t think [they will]. We did the Community Capital Campaign, which was the first time we brought together all of the agencies to raise capital funds. I had hoped that would become a product line that the Federation would take on. I’m not sure that that’s going to be a legacy. I think it’ll be a flashpoint in history and on to the next thing, and that’s fine. The leadership has the right to

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35 General Douglas A. MacArthur was an American five-star general and Field Marshal of the Philippine Army. He was Chief of Staff of the United States Army during the 1930s and played a prominent role in the Pacific theater during World War II.
make decisions and to relate to new realities. Part of the issue is that times change. We have to have a dynamic Federation rather than something that’s static, that stays at the same point, and then everything changes around it. It won’t work that way.

Sandy: That leads me to my next question, what do you think about the Federation today?

David: I think there’s a need for the Federation. I think a major challenge to the Federation is how—and it was a challenge that I faced, and my leadership faced, and continues to face—how do you become embracing and open and engaging? How do you bring in more people?

One of the challenges nationally, which I think really needs to be looked at, is the decline in the number of participants in the Annual Campaign. There’s only one major community in the United States that’s had growth, and that’s Chicago. Every other major community has seen a decline in numbers, including Atlanta, and there’s no reason for that. So if the Federation is going to be a vital, central organization, it needs to bolster the Annual Campaign. And it’s not just the dollars, it’s the participants. If you look at the demographics nationally, and locally, of the Campaign, the big money is being raised by people that are bald and gray, like me. Are there children, offspring and others, that are younger and have wealth coming into the Federation? I think a quick analysis would say no, and the question is, why? Part of it is a lack of broad commitment to community. If people say they want to follow their dollars, I think that means it’s not that important to them. So the question is, how do you engage people? How do you bring them in in today’s market? Again it goes back to finding many entry points that allow people to feel comfortable in a federated environment.

Sandy: Do you think Federation is on the wrong track today?

David: I don’t know wrong or right. I mean, numbers don’t lie. If you have fewer donors than you did five years ago, then I don’t know whether it’s the wrong track or right track, but it’s not the growth track. [grins] The fact that you’re raising incrementally more money doesn’t really mean growth. I spoke to Howard Rieger—who is the head of UJCF—not long ago. I said, “Nationally,
what we need instead of announcing a dollar goal, is a goal for donors.” I think every Federation should forget about the goal, dollar-wise. There should be a goal for number of donors to the Annual Campaign. If people could start thinking of that as a priority, then I think we’ll be in better shape. It’ll cost us to operate differently and do things differently to get there, because it’s obvious that today’s methodology isn’t increasing the donor base.

I remember when Sidney Vincent was writing the book on the history of the Cleveland Jewish community, one of the hardest things was, how do you deal with people that are still alive, and what do you say? I think he stopped the history at a certain point because he didn’t want to engage with people that were currently involved in the community. So I’ll emulate one of my heroes, Sidney Vincent, and not implicate anybody who isn’t six feet under. [grins]

**Sandy:** Do you miss being in a leadership role of Federation?

**David:** No, not really. Sometimes you wonder, why did I make the change when I did? I don’t think I had to. No one was pushing me out—that I knew of—[grins], so the question is, why did I do it? After twenty-one years, and while there are all kinds of opportunities, why would I leave?

I think it was enough—number one—and number two, that’s probably one of the most difficult jobs in the Jewish community; tremendous pressures. I remember spring was the worst season, because you were wrapping up the Campaign, you were doing allocations, and all of that, and it was just horrendous. Supposedly, flowers came out; I never saw the flowers in the springtime. So the pressure is tremendous, and if you’re proactive, it’s even more so. You have to engage with a lot of the issues that are in the community that may seem tangential, but nothing’s tangential when it comes to Federation.

So I think I had a good run. Sometimes I even think, maybe, I overstayed my welcome. My model was Zucher and Vincent, who were there a long time. I remember some colleagues saying to me, after about ten years or so, that it’s time to move on. They were moving on, they were looking for new challenges, but I kept dismissing it. Because I felt I could create my own
challenges without moving on. But I think there’s something to be said for change of leadership. If we think change of leadership is good for laymen, then why wouldn’t it be for the chief executive? I think it’s good for a community to change, and I think it’s good for the executive to change.

**Sandy:** When you left, there were also some changes on the staff of Federation. Those changes were, perhaps, not by choice. Do you want to talk about any of those?

**David:** Well, only theoretically. Number one is, I don’t think any executive wants, in any way, to have his hands tied by who works for him. No two people respond or react and deal with others in the same way. So you want to have a free hand in creating your own staff. My feeling is, as an executive, I was only as strong as the staff that I could build. I know all of my weaknesses—which I’m not going to talk about here. [grins] So I hired staff that compensated for things that I didn’t like to do, or couldn’t do. Somebody coming in—theoretically—has a whole different set of strengths and weaknesses, and I think they have the right to make decisions and changes that allow them to grow the Federation. Whether I agree with it or not, is irrelevant. I think the staff I left here was a good staff. The next guy has the right to make the decision as to whether it’s a good staff or a bad staff for them.

**Sandy:** Where did you go when you left Federation?

**David:** I set up the first North American office for the Jewish Agency.

**Sandy:** Explain that a little bit.

**David:** The Jewish Agency for Israel is the largest overseas beneficiary of the Federation movement. They have historically had a presence here, but basically, in the area of direct service. They actually came, and had educational people, et cetera, but they never had any function that dealt with financial resource development or relationship with Federations. So I took the position as the Executive Vice President and did that for five years.

**Sandy:** Did you enjoy it?

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36 The Jewish Agency for Israel is the largest Jewish nonprofit organization in the world. Its mission is to “inspire Jews throughout the world to connect with their people, heritage, and land, and empower them to build a thriving Jewish future and a strong Israel.”
David: Yes . . . luckily, it was a five-year contract, and at the end of five years I chose not to renew. When you have a finite timeline, you can almost make anything bearable. I think I accomplished a great deal. I was the only person that was hired, and we ended with seven staff when I left. We established a presence in the Federation field that we never had before, and we developed some lay leadership.

But it’s very, very, difficult dealing with an Israeli institution, such as the Jewish Agency. You’re looking at an organization that’s handling half a billion dollars a year, and has all kinds of political ties in Israel. It has a hierarchy, and a structure, and a bureaucracy, that would challenge any in the world. So, even though you were able to make some quick changes, working in a bureaucracy like that—and coming from a situation where you were able to call the shots—to now have to answer to two or three people and get them to make decisions, was a little frustrating, to say the least. [grins]

Sandy: What are you doing today, now?

David: I cited MacArthur earlier, but I also changed that, because Federation executives don’t fade away, they become consultants. So I’m now a consultant, whatever that is. [grins]

Sandy: To non-profits?

David: Yes, I have three clients, basically. I had done some work for them up until July 1, with the agency. What I really would like to do—but, this market is very difficult—is to work with donors, helping them be more sophisticated in the way they go about doing their business. So far, that market hasn’t opened, so I’m working with a couple of Israeli not-for-profits, and some others.

Sandy: Do you think you’ll ever get back into Jewish communal work?

David: No. Well, I am . . .

Sandy: . . . a Federation kind of position?

David: No. I’m too old.

Sandy: You’re too old?

David: Yes. It’s enough. I’ve done thirty-one years of Federation work. That’s enough. At some point, hopefully, I can even stop consulting.
Sandy: What have we missed?

David: I don’t know, you tell me, [laughs] you’re the archivist. [edit in tape] We can talk about Arthur Blank and Bernie Marcus. When I first came here, nobody knew who these guys were. Shortly after I was here, they opened the first Home Depot—I think they opened two of them here. Their combined gift to the Annual Campaign was $3,000. I think it’s grown somewhat from there. [grins] I actually was a lot closer to Arthur Blank. Their offices used to be on Paces Ferry [Road], in a shopping center, on the second floor, and I used to go over and meet him for lunch. He used to have an old, beat-up Lincoln [car], and we used to drive over to Boychiks Deli for a corned beef sandwich.

Bernie was more elusive, in those days, because he was always on the road. But subsequently, Bernie got more involved. I remember in 1989, when we had the “Who is a Jew?” issue, and Bernie came to the meeting. (They were giving more than $3,000 combined at that time.) [grins] He got up out of the meeting and said, “Well, I know what we have to do. We’ve got to figure out a way to make Israel more of a democracy.” That started the Israel Democracy Institute, which he developed and helped fund. So those two guys were sort of interesting. Arthur never really engaged significantly with the Federation, [grins] even though he enjoyed a good corned beef sandwich, but I couldn’t get him beyond that.

Sandy: What are some of those other kinds of issues, like the “Who’s a Jew?” issue? Were you Director when they had the controversy about opening the Jewish Community Center?

David: No, that was prior to my time.

37 In 1978, Arthur M. Blank and Bernard Marcus became co-founders of The Home Depot, a national chain of home improvement stores in the U.S. Bernie Marcus served as the company’s first CEO for 19 years and as chairman of the board until his retirement in 2002. Arthur Blank retired from the company in 2001 and currently owns the Atlanta Falcons football team and Atlanta United soccer team. Both men are billionaires.

38 Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism follow Jewish law (Halakha), deeming a person to be Jewish if their mother is Jewish or they underwent a halakhic conversion. Reform Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism accept both matrilineal and patrilineal descent as signifying a person is Jewish.

39 Israel Democracy Institute, established in 1991, is an independent center of research and action dedicated to strengthening the foundations of Israeli democracy. It is located in Jerusalem, Israel, and Bernie Marcus is co-founder and International Chairman.
Sandy: What were some of those kinds of controversies within the community?

David: “Who is a Jew” was probably the major one, which got me in a little hot water, because the leadership here decided to basically escrow our allocation until that was resolved. It got interpreted as, we weren’t going to allocate the money, and I think what they basically said was, “No, we’ll allocate it, we just don’t know to whom, in Israel, until this gets resolved.”

Sandy: For the purposes of the tape, explain what that issue was.

David: The issue basically came down to the rabbinic leadership in Israel trying to push through legislation that defined a Jew as one who has a Jewish mother, but also excluded certain kinds of conversions: Conservative, Reform, et cetera.

You can imagine that, since the majority of the Jews in North America are either Reform or Conservative, it caused a lot of consternation. So we were involved in that. It came up again, later on, so there was the possibility of engagement. As a matter of fact, with our Partnership 2000 Committee – Yoqne’am [Yoqne’am Illit, Israel] I remember specifically meeting with the mayor, Simon Alfassi, and going with him to the Knesset to talk with Knesset members about that. It was very supportive to have the mayor of Yoqne’am there, being supportive of that issue. So that was a major controversy.

Other than that, there were controversies that related to giving to agencies, but that was sort of the name of the game. I used to tell my colleagues, when they’d ask, “What’s a Federation executive job like?” I’d say, “You come into the office and you know that sometime during the day, at least

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40 Orthodox Judaism refers to the traditionalist branches of contemporary Judaism which view the Torah as literally revealed by God on Mount Sinai. The Conservative movement maintains that Jewish law remains binding on modern Jews, but affords far greater leeway than Orthodoxy in adapting those laws to modern realities. Reform Judaism has reformed or abandoned aspects of Orthodoxy to adapt to modern changes in social, political, and cultural life.

41 The Knesset is the national legislature of the Israeli government. It passes all laws, elects the President and Prime Minister, approves the cabinet, supervises the work of the government, and elects the State Comptroller.
once—more often than once—someone is going to kick you in the *kishkes*\(^2\).”

The question of who and when always was unanswered, but you knew it was going to come. There were days that you just feared answering the telephone because you knew someone was going to yell about something, and something had gone wrong. Because basically, that job was to be a problem solver, so whatever couldn’t get solved down below, somehow got kicked upstairs.

**Sandy:** Was it difficult to engage the Orthodox community? Did you have Orthodox [Jews]. . .

**David:** Well, you had one or two, but they’ve never been engaged. I remember having discussions with the old Rabbi [Emanuel] Feldman, the senior Feldman. He used to talk about “the community,” and I used to ask him, “Are you referring to the [Congregation] Beth Jacob community, or the broader Jewish community?” and invariably, it was the Beth Jacob community. I understand where they’re coming from, but I have a hard time accepting their more narrow approach to communal life. There’s a willingness to participate, in terms of allocations. I’m not sure that they’re as supportive as they should be, when it comes to other aspects of the community. I think that detracts from the richness of the overall community. I think the Orthodox community could have a much greater impact than it does, if they were more engaged.

**Sandy:** Do you think there was a resentment—when it came time for allocating—to not give them as much because of that involvement?

**David:** There may have been, there may have been. But you’ve got to remember that up until relatively recently, there weren’t Orthodox institutions. The Hebrew Academy was started as a broad communal school, even though Rabbi Feldman was central to the development. There was no real Orthodox institution in this community. Then Yeshiva High School [Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael of Atlanta] was set up. Those were always allocated based on almost a per capita basis, a formula in terms of scholarships, et cetera. There may have been some resentment on the part of some individuals, but I didn’t feel that was strong from the non-Orthodox community. Then you had Torah Day School

\(^2\) The stomach or gut, as in “Something’s wrong—I feel it in my *kishkes*.”
[of Atlanta] that came in, and others. I don’t think that it went that way—as much as the other way—just a reluctance to participate.

I think there’s a propensity among the Orthodox community to want to isolate itself, for their own reasons. Basically, they think that’s the way they’re going to be able to maintain their flock. I question that. If the way you protect your beliefs is by isolating yourself from the rest of the world, you might better start looking at your beliefs. But I won’t tell that to anybody. [grins]

Sandy: Except the tape.

David: Right, which no one will see, so that’s okay. [smiles]

Sandy: Just briefly, about the allocations process, did it always work on formula or was it a committee that decided?

David: It’s a committee. I was Planning Director in Cleveland before coming here, and I think I understand that process. It’s a political process, and to try to objectify the allocations process, and make it scientific, is a major mistake. You never have enough money to make everybody happy, or everybody totally happy. So you’ve got to figure out how to keep everybody on the ranch. What will keep everybody minimally satisfied, so that they don’t break ranks? I think that’s the delicate balance. To try to come up with a scientific formula for allocations just doesn’t work, especially when you’re dealing with individual priorities and perceptions of what’s important in a community. Somebody might favor the elderly; another person, Jewish education; another person, Israel, et cetera. Those are very different kinds of needs.

So, how do you keep all of those people working together? I think it goes back to the earlier comments about the federated system. I think, somehow, we’ve got to show that we keep everybody here. I remember one of the issues I used to encounter always—or at least in the later years—was when we allocated about $100,000 a year to the Israel Democracy Institute. A number of the leadership used to challenge me on that because I, many times, personally took on that battle. I used to say, “If someone offered you a million dollars for $100,000, would you take it?” So it’s a very pragmatic kind of
thing. I think what you wanted to demonstrate to supporters of given institutions, was that you were sensitive to their needs. Theoretically, if you did that, they would then be generous with the communal pot. If you weren’t, what’s their reason to give to the communal pot? You might as well direct the money. I think you’re seeing more and more of that, in terms of self-direction outside of the communal pot. It’s a problem.

That also relates to the initial thing I said, that if you don’t grow the Campaign enough, you don’t have enough money. Again, the whole “keeping everybody on the ranch” is a major, major, thing that a Federation has to do. And you do that by raising resources and allocating in a way that makes sense, so that everybody thinks there’s fairness and people are sensitive to their needs.

**Sandy:** Was it up to the Executive Director to choose members for the board?

**David:** We had a nominating process that was informed by staff and the Executive Director, but it wasn’t my prerogative.

**Sandy:** Did you try to keep it diverse with those kinds of people, with these kinds of concerns—people who would reach some kind of balance?

**David:** Yes, and you were always fighting against, “I really want to be with people I know and feel comfortable with.” My goal was to make people feel uncomfortable, with people they don’t know. [grins] So there was this tension, this dynamic tension, that took place.

On the back of comic books there used to be an ad for Charles Atlas\(^ {43}\), saying that he built muscles with dynamic tension. If you sent him a quarter, he’d send you a book. Basically, he told you how to push on a door frame, and if the door frame wasn’t rotten, you built your muscles. Well, it was the same thing here. It was a matter of a series of dynamic tensions that took place in a community, where Federation pushed on agencies, which pushed on individuals. They, in turn, pushed on Federation. If it was done constructively,

\(^ {43}\) Charles Atlas was a famous Italian-American bodybuilder most popular in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.
the community grew. So you had to make sure that there weren’t “rotten door posts” in the community, because otherwise you’d have no muscles developed.

Sandy: How many presidents were under your leadership?


Sandy: Did you like them all?

David: No. [grins]

Sandy: Do you want to talk about that?

David: No. [smiles]

Sandy: [laughs]

David: I’m sure they didn’t all like me. You were dealing with eight or nine diverse personalities, and since I’m not one that shirks from mouthing my opinion . . .

Sandy: It must have been difficult, at times, if you didn’t have a cordial or nice relationship.

David: It didn’t mean that it wasn’t cordial. You asked me if I liked them. No, I didn’t like them all [laughs], but it didn’t mean it wasn’t cordial. There were times when it was less cordial than others. Part of it depended on their personality and how it interacted with mine. I’m sure I could drive a number of them crazy, which I did, and they did likewise with me.

Sandy: What about Marvin Goldstein, you spoke about him.

David: No, I talked about Irving [Goldstein]. Marvin was his younger brother, who [laughs] was a bit of a character himself. Probably one of the kindest, sweetest, people you ever wanted to meet, but as Erwin Zaban once described him, “He has an “I” problem.” I said, “What do you mean, he has an “I” problem?” He said, “He keeps saying, ‘I did this, and I did that.’” [laughs] So Marvin, for some reason, had this “I” problem.

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44 Additional Federation Presidents during Sarnat’s tenure were Dr. William Schatten, Stephen Selig, and Eliot Arnowitz.
But there was nothing he wouldn’t do for you or the community, that’s the kind of person he was. He always dressed very nicely, but was somewhat of a slob, so he’d have food on his tie or shirt. [laughs] You had to say, “Marvin, you got to clean up your act here.” Or he would come in one day, and he’d say, “I just met with Moshe Dayan.” I remember, once he came back from Israel—from an Israel bonds tour—and he said, “I just met with Moshe Dayan.” I said, “Okay.” He said, “You’re not impressed?” I said, “Marvin, if Moshe Dayan called me and said, ‘I met with Marvin Goldstein,’ I’d be impressed, [laughs] but the other way around, it doesn’t impress me.”

Sandy:  Who was your favorite president in all those years—the one you had the closest working relationship with?

David:  I think Gerald Cohen—intellectually and personality-wise, he was the best. The only weak spot with Gerald was, as opposed to me, he did not particularly enjoy confrontation. When there were issues and individuals that needed to be finally confronted, he was that Southern gentleman who would only go so far. But an unbelievable intellectual. I think he was the best.

Oh, [Dr. William] Bill Schatten was another president, we forgot him.

Sandy:  What about Bill Schatten?

David:  Bill was a wonderful guy. He was probably, intellectually, the brightest of all of them—some of them come pretty close—with a tremendous diversity of interests. When he was sixteen, he graduated high school and had to make a choice between being a concert pianist and going to university. He finished his medical school at the age of twenty, and finished his residency at twenty-one. [grins] He was just brilliant, and had very deep Jewish knowledge, a very deep Jewish commitment. He also was involved in things like oil exploration in Zambia [East Africa]. [laughs] You just never knew what kind of thing he was interested in. He was a wonderful person, a wonderful guy.

Sandy:  Just one final thing. We talked earlier, a little bit, about Betty [Ann] Jacobson. Who were some of the other women who were instrumental . . .

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45 Moshe Dayan was Minister of Defense and Foreign Minister of Israel in the 1970s.
David: Phyllis Friedman was very involved and very committed when I first started. You had—oh, what’s her name—Sidney Feldman’s sister-in-law, I can’t remember her name. Marvin Goldstein’s wife, Rita, was very good. People like Lois Frank—who always represented liberal causes in the hallways of the Federation [grins]—was involved.

Sandy: Well, that’s about it for my questions, unless you’d like to leave us with some final words of wisdom.

David: No, I have no words of wisdom. [laughs]

Sandy: You don’t want to say that your most memorable hiree was moi?

David: Well, I got you at the right price. So of course, anytime I could get something for nothing—especially with your credentials—that was [great]. I remember you even worked in a closet . . .

Sandy: Yes, me and Mike Gettinger. [laughs]

David: But you didn’t resent it as much as Mike Gettinger did. [laughs]

Sandy: He really did, he was so funny.

David: The interesting thing is that when I came in, [grins] I was very magnanimous. I said to Mike, “You can have an office here as long as you want.” I figured, okay, for a few years he’ll take an office, and I had space. As the Federation staff grew, I had no space, and I kept moving him around, and he kept resenting it more and more, [grins] After about ten years of that, I figured he should have been long gone, but he wasn’t. [laughs]

Sandy: Well thank you, David.

David: Okay. [smiles]

Sandy: This was a lot of fun. I really appreciate it.

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INTERVIEW ENDS