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University of California
Berkeley, California

Adele Corvin

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FEDERATION OF SAN FRANCISCO

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker, PhD
in 2007 and 2008

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[This transcript has been edited by the narrator and portions may be significantly different from the original Audiofile.]

Interview 1: November 5, 2007

Begin Audiofile 1

01-00:00:01

Meeker: Today is the November 5, 2007. This is Martin Meeker, interviewing Adele Corvin, for the Jewish Community Federation oral history project. Let's start at the beginning. I know that we've already had a chance to talk a little bit about your upbringing and where you and your family came from, but let's start with when and where you were born.

01-00:00:40

Corvin: I was born in San Francisco, on May 10, 1922. My parents, Moses and Anna Kleinhaupt, were born here. My grandparents on both sides were married in San Francisco, came from Germany. I lived in the same house from the time I was born until I got married, which is certainly unusual in today's world. I lived at 521 18th Avenue, a pair of flats that my parents had built for my arrival, and lived there with my mother and father and sister. My sister Charlotte was nine years older than I. I attended Argonne Elementary School, Presidio Junior High, and George Washington High School.

01-00:01:36

Meeker: Did any stories about your grandparents and their immigration to the United States circulate within your family? Do you know where in Germany they came from and why it was that they left?

01-00:01:52

Corvin: Unfortunately, in our family, you really didn't discuss the past. It was more the present and the future. I regret that as a youngster, I didn't ask questions. However, I do know, my grandmother on my mother's side was eighteen when she came to the US from Germany, and she came alone, which I found pretty remarkable. She didn't know anyone here. I really don't know what gave her the adventuresome attitude to be able to do it, but she came and married here. My father's folks all came from Germany, also, and most probably a bit prior to my grandmother.

My father's folks were not interested in Judaism, although they recognized themselves as such. They did not belong to a congregation. To my mother's mother, my grandmother, to whom I was quite close, religion was important. My mother and father belonged to Congregation Emanu-El. I started Sunday school when I eight, and went through until I was confirmed.

They were happy days, carefree days. None of us thought too much, most probably, about anything serious. We just grew up, and with many friends, and family being very important. Cousins, at that time, lived in the same area. It was rather expected that went to my grandmother's for lunch every

Saturday. I don't remember ever rebelling about it--you just did it. It was an open house and many cousins and friends would just come. In today's world, I doubt if it would work, nor most probably would I want it to work. There are so many other activities. But it was a happy time.

01-00:05:19

Meeker:

I find it interesting that you said that your family didn't really focus much or talk about the past; it was always about the present or the future. I guess I have two questions about that. When did you get a sense that that was the case, that that was your family's—

01-00:05:37

Corvin:

I guess when I became an adult and all of a sudden, there was a surge of looking back: where did you come from? Of course, through the Holocaust days, if you had family from Europe coming, that created awareness, and you wondered--what had happened? But prior to that, you didn't think too much about it. First of all, there was family around, there were cousins around, and as far as who came before, it probably just didn't cross my mind

01-00:06:27

Meeker:

Historians talk about the 1970s as sort of one of those periods when people—you know, the recognition of Ellis Island as an important place in American history. You know, the series *Roots* drew a lot of attention to family history and oral history.

01-00:06:45

Corvin:

I knew that my grandfather on my dad's side came around the horn. I didn't know what that meant. And I knew they didn't go through Ellis Island, they came before. Many families dwell on family ties and the past, and it suits them and that's fine. We were a middle-class family, but everyone lived as middle class families, other than a larger home or something. People weren't ostentatious during that period. Everyone went to public school in San Francisco which had parochial schools, but you would either go to Catholic school or you went to public school. So that made a difference socially, you weren't aware of anybody's wealth. That was unimportant or just wasn't on the radar. But family and education, music, going to Sunday school--you were expected to do these things, and as a youngster you just did them. You were expected to do well and you did the best you could. It sounds very simple, but as a youngster it was. It was probably not as simple for my parents.

01-00:08:49

Meeker:

Why do you say that?

01-00:08:50

Corvin:

Well, I think you have different responsibilities.

01-00:08:55

Meeker:

So the responsibility of raising children and keeping a job and so forth?

01-00:08:59
Corvin: Yes.

01-00:09:00
Meeker: What kind of work did your father do?

01-00:09:02
Corvin: My dad went to work for the US Post Office in 1899, and worked for fifty dollars a month. One worked until the work was completed--then your day over. He worked there for forty-eight years. He was interested in financial security. He owned property, was saving, and that was the mode of the day. They certainly saw others that had been hit by the Depression, and people just lived modestly. We had clothes, we had food, that wasn't an issue. It was different than today.

01-00:09:52
Meeker: So he had been at the post office for thirty years already when the Depression hit?

01-00:09:57
Corvin: Yes.

01-00:09:48
Meeker: And so, there was never really any concern in the household that he would lose his job because of that?

01-00:10:04
Corvin: No, there was not. There was never the insecurity that next month things would be different.

01-00:10:15
Meeker: Was your mother a homemaker?

01-00:10:16
Corvin: Yes, and that was pretty typical. It was rare for a mother to be working. Family was her main interest.

01-00:10:33
Meeker: Did she participate in any volunteer activities?

01-00:10:36
Corvin: Yes, she did, and I can't recall the name of it. It was preparing layettes for pregnant women.

01-00:10:49
Meeker: What's that?

01-00:10:51
Corvin: Baby clothes, and everything you need for the arrival of a baby.

01-00:10:56
Meeker: A gift package or a care package.

01-00:10:59

Corvin: A care package. But then in addition, there were other things. They were always contributors to Federation, always contributors to the temple, and to the community.

01-00:11:12

Meeker: So financial contributors.

01-00:11:13

Corvin: Yes, their gifts were modest, in keeping with their capacity to give. I guess I felt it was a normal house. How does one know?

01-00:11:35

Meeker: So you said your father was at the post office for forty-eight years?

01-00:11:38

Corvin: Forty-eight years.

01-00:11:41

Meeker: As far as you know, what was his career trajectory there? Did he work his way up through the hierarchy?

01-00:11:48

Corvin: Actually, if you go back in history in San Francisco at that time, it was an Irish Catholic-run community. So as a result, as a Jewish man, you knew you were never going to be the postmaster. That wasn't in the cards, but nevertheless, my dad, as a young man, was also a musician and he supplemented his income that way. He also bought property and stocks, and somehow things worked out.

01-00:12:38

Meeker: Did he ever express any concern about kind of being an outsider in his workplace?

01-00:12:50

Corvin: I don't think so. He had the capacity and the ability to make friends, and to recognize his position. He had made a decision to work there because it was steady, and also because there was a pension at the end of the road, modest as it was. We laugh about it today. My dad lived thirty years beyond his retirement. He lived until he was ninety-eight, so for his generation that was most unusual.

01-00:14:31

Meeker: You said that he was a musician. Can you tell me a little bit about his career as a musician?

01-00:14:36

Corvin: Well, I don't know if one would call it a career, it was a supplement. My uncle was a musician, a clarinetist, and it did serve as his profession, but my dad, it was more of a supplement to his income. When he was young, he most probably enjoyed it. He played the violin and the cornet. It's very interesting,

but when you go back, most families saw to it the children all had the opportunity to take music lessons; that was very important.

01-00:15:49

Meeker: Was it popular or classical music that he played?

01-00:15:54

Corvin: Probably what he did was more of a popular vein.

01-00:16:01

Meeker: When you were growing up and going to public school, I'm wondering the degree to which—I mean, the way that you're describing it is a very conventional childhood. You know, family was important and the weekends were spent with family and going to Sunday school and so forth, and that, I imagine, is a story that is very similar to the Catholic and Protestant kids that also were going to your school.

01-00:16:26

Corvin: Yes.

01-00:16:27

Meeker: Did you ever feel different from them?

01-00:16:29

Corvin: No. Living in San Francisco, I was most fortunate. First of all, you were raised in a community where the leadership in San Francisco had many, many Jewish families, and you were surrounded by evidence of their community interest. You had Stern Grove, you had Fleischhacker pool, you had one of the first high-rise office buildings, done by the Zellerbachs. I mean, you were surrounded by it, so there was no need to feel any different. You were part of a community. At no time did I have any feeling of anti-Semitism or being an outsider. Most probably the first time I was ever even aware of it, was when I couldn't join a non-Jewish sorority when I went to Berkeley. That was the first evidence, really.

01-00:17:43

Meeker: Were you aware that for instance, the Sterns were a Jewish family or the Zellerbachs were a Jewish family?

01-00:17:52

Corvin: Well, it wasn't taught. Those families were part of Sunday school, or you went to high school and they were part of the high school. They weren't out of reach socially. It wasn't taught to you, you kind of just knew. I really can't dig back and rationalize on why I knew it.

01-00:18:33

Meeker: Sure.

01-00:18:34

Corvin:

People were part of the total community. When I got involved, I recognized it was just expected. Most probably we were taught this at Sunday school, community service and all.

01-00:18:57

Meeker:

It's not the easiest thing to remember and it's hard to sort of evoke memories of that, but I think it's a fascinating tale about I guess pluralism in America in which there's definitely a sense of difference, but it's not necessarily coupled with the sense of marginality or inequality.

01-00:19:22

Corvin:

As an adult, my experience has been very different, not with anti-Semitism, but with the opportunity of working in a changing community, whereby I've spent hours and hours attempting to see that committees, for instance, on United Way, were balanced. We had representation from five counties. We had five colors, and I always say, we were looking for the cross-eyed blonde, to make certain we had everybody. So, as a result, I spent many, many hours in a community that had not been sensitive to being inclusive and found it an enrichment in my life, to recognize that our community was changing, and part of the richness was going to be the many ethnic groups that our community held and also their changing role within the community. The change has been far too slow, as far as I'm concerned, but it's still changed a tremendous amount.

01-00:20:49

Meeker:

What do you mean by the changing positions?

01-00:20:51

Corvin:

When my two older children were in junior high school, it was the first time that busing was going to be initiated, and it was the hope that this was going to solve our racial issues. I can recall—we didn't have a PTA, we had a parents club--a meeting being called, explaining what was going to happen. The young man who was the head of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] at that point said. "Well, we're going to have busing and as a result. We may have to lose a generation before we can really integrate." I went home very disturbed, thinking it was terrible we were going to lose a generation.

01-00:21:58

Meeker:

What did that mean, to lose a generation?

01-00:22:01

Corvin:

We were going to lose a generation because integration wouldn't work that quickly, that the Afro American population was going to be able to assimilate with the whites. My concern was, how could we forfeit a generation of children?

01-00:22:21

Meeker:

So in other words, the first generation that would go through this integration process would somehow find it too challenging?

01-00:22:28

Corvin:

The process was going to be challenging, and it would take more time. But in reality, it wasn't just losing one generation, it was losing far more. And even today are we there? I don't think we're there. So, most probably that was the first time that I personally recognized the complexity of how our changing community was going to have to face some of the issues. So it was a tremendous issue. We found, at the junior high level, everybody went to class, everything seemed fine from the outside. But from the outside, in gym class, the white youngsters sat on one side of the room and the Afro Americans sat on the other. It was unfortunate. At the end of the day, the Afro Americans had to go home because their bus was taking them home, and they couldn't participate.

01-00:23:35

Meeker:

Like in after school sports?

01-00:23:37

Corvin:

Or in any clubs or dramatics or anything like that, so it was unfortunate. It was the best we knew at that time, but it certainly wasn't good enough. Here we are years later, we've seen the demise of our public schools in San Francisco, which I find very disturbing. It isn't a pretty picture.

01-00:24:07

Meeker:

One thing. There's a whole lot to talk about here and you just brought up a lot of issues that we'll be talking about throughout the interview process, but one thing that I'm thinking about now, and this is speculative, and you may not have any particular insight into it. I think the conventional wisdom is that—well I mean for instance, you look at the history of San Francisco and the history of civil rights activism in San Francisco, and Jewish Americans have played an extremely important role.

01-00:24:41

Corvin:

Right.

01-00:24:42

Meeker:

And even especially institutions like the Jewish Community Relations Council, going back to the 1950s and 1960s. People like Earl Raab and other people along those lines, who were not just important local figures, they were important national figures. It seems like the conventional wisdom is that Jews like Raab and others, understood a sense of marginality or discrimination in their own lives, so they wanted to help other people who also experienced that. But from your perspective, it seems maybe a little bit different. I mean maybe that wasn't the case.

01-00:25:22

Corvin:

Well, most probably, when you put it that way, in our family we were taught to respect our neighbors who were Christian. Even on Sunday you dressed up to respected. You knew you were Jewish and most probably, you felt you really even had to do a little bit better. I knew Earl Raab and have known him now for a long while. I loved his way of handling things. When issues came up, he would handle them very directly and quietly. He wasn't one who wanted to bring great attention to these issues, but felt, "Let's just get on with the work and do the most we can." We were also aware, at times, that our rabbis were going down South and marching. Did I participate in the marches in the South? No, I did not, but I was certainly aware of people who did and close to people who did. Those were frightening days from the standpoint of the head bashing and the black children finally going to school and being led into the white school. Certainly this discrimination was not acceptable, because maybe in my eyes it was just if it weren't the blacks, maybe it would be the Jews next or whatever. So I don't know if that's being raised with a fear of anti-Semitism or an awareness. Being Jewish was never put on my shoulders as a burden. I've always worn my Jewish hat very squarely on my head and participated in that part of my life through my congregation and all, but not with fear, but rather with great respect for those who stepped up and did something.

You were always very aware, very disturbed with busing, and knew it wasn't going to solve the problem. My husband was a Republican and I was a Democrat. We always laughed. I said I could afford to be a Democrat because he provided for me, but he was among the first who said, "Everybody's going to start running to private schools." He was way ahead of his time. That's what's occurred and that's unfortunate. But it's not just integration, because it's far more complicated than that. It's economics, it's language, it's newcomers, it's a variety of things, and the growth of a community. So I don't know if I'm answering the question that you pose. I'm certainly not trying to evade it, but I think—I never thought of it as anti-Semitism. I rather felt you were Jewish, you were expected to live with the highest standards that you could, and it was very important for you not do to wrong, because you didn't want to bring anguish to your family as well as your religion. So I never identified that as anti-Semitism.

01-00:30:13

Meeker:

Okay, that's helpful. Let's see where we are. Let's talk a little bit about your time at UC Berkeley. You graduated in '43, correct?

01-00:30:34

Corvin:

Right.

01-00:30:35

Meeker:

So does that mean that you enrolled in '39?

- 01-00:30:39
Corvin: I graduated from Washington High School, I was a member of the pioneer class. It had just opened and all of us graduated from Presidio Junior High and were marched across the street to high school.
- 01-00:30:52
Meeker: Where is George Washington High School?
- 01-00:30:53
Corvin: It's around 32nd and Geary.
- 01-00:30:57
Meeker: Is it still called that?
- 01-00:30:58
Corvin: It's still called that. It was a brand new school, so that part was exciting, from the standpoint of selecting school colors, very important.
- 01-00:31:10
Meeker: Who's the mascot, right?
- 01-00:31:12
Corvin: After high school, you went to college. I graduated from UC Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of Commerce. They no longer give that degree from the college; it's business administration. I graduated a bit early because of the war, and my classmates were all going off to war, so that was a different kind of experience than most of us had looked forward to during our college years. I made very good friends at Berkeley and still see them today. It was a happy time.
- 01-00:32:09
Meeker: So you were at the university for three years?
- 01-00:32:12
Corvin: Four years.
- 01-00:32:14
Meeker: Okay.
- 01-00:32:16
Corvin: Just shy of four years. What happened was, due to the war, they speeded up the quarters and gave an extra quarter, so instead of graduating in June, I graduated in February. It took the four years. I was twenty years old. I went to work for Standard Oil and worked there for three years, in the department on organization, which was an efficiency department, and I enjoyed it.
- 01-00:32:53
Meeker: Well that period, '39 to '43, must have been a fairly interesting time to come of age, I guess.

01-00:33:03

Corvin:

Well it was. There was lots going on, needless to say. There was a war impending and lots of rumbles, but you know, communication was different then. You know when you're in college or when we were in college, I don't think we had a brain in our heads. You don't have to include that, but you know what? You were just interested in going to college and where were you going out on the weekend, or what were you doing. It was like that until, of course the draft, and then as soon as the draft came, things tightened up. On campus, we did attempt to do things for the war effort. I can recall picking tomatoes a couple of weekends because there weren't enough farm workers; nothing very dramatic or intellectual I'm afraid, but it was interesting. It was all new. All of a sudden people were being drafted. If they weren't in college, they were drafted right away. If they were in college, some had the opportunity of finishing, others were given their diplomas. After you got out of school, then all of a sudden you realized war was upon us and as a young girl, not being able to get silk stockings was important. Now, on the other hand, were we aware of our friends going off to war? Absolutely, and particularly in San Francisco. I mean, the streets were full of uniforms and none of us had really known too many soldiers or sailors before. That became part of our lives, and we attempted to do things for the service.

01-00:35:22

Meeker:

What, like USO [United Service Organizations] work?

01-00:35:24

Corvin:

Well, I worked full-time for one thing, so that made a difference. You'd go, what did they call it? The Red Cross, you'd wrap bandages, which sounds terrible today, because you wouldn't even consider doing anything like that, for being sterile and all. There were socials, and through your congregation, you were urged to invite any service man to your home for lunch, dinner, whatever.

01-00:36:03

Meeker:

Did your family host any of those?

01-00:36:05

Corvin:

Pardon me?

01-00:36:06

Meeker:

Did your family host any of those?

01-00:36:07

Corvin:

Yes, but in the meantime you were writing to your friends who were overseas, and when you'd hear that someone was lost overseas, as a young person, that was shattering.

01-00:36:27

Meeker:

Do you remember losing some male friends?

01-00:36:29

Corvin:

Oh yes, but another thing is, correspondence was so different. You go away today and you still are able to contact your family by the Internet, even if you're in Iraq. Well, then, you didn't know where soldiers were being sent overseas. If they were going overseas, they'd have all these intricate little ways of saying you know, if I say such and such, this means I'm going to Europe, or if I say something else, it means I'm going to Africa. And so you had all these little schemes, but it would take six weeks before you got a letter, and by that time they'd be someplace else possibly. So communication was very, very, very different, and what we heard was different than what you hear today. Today you see pictures on the screen of what's going on, on the battlefield. Well, it wasn't that way. You saw the horror pictures of death and you knew it was happening. I was single and didn't have responsibility. Many of my friends had gotten married right out of college, or if they were a bit older, they were definitely married, and it was different. They were tooting off with their husbands, to be at whatever army camp they could be, whenever he was there. So it was a time of turmoil, there's no question, and you did what you were supposed to do. It was heavy. The loss of a friend seemed an impossibility. It wasn't happening as far as your consciousness. You couldn't believe it because everybody was away. You always felt they were going to come back.

01-00:39:09

Meeker:

I want to go back a little bit to your college years. You said it was different thing, and you were mostly interested in what you were going to be doing on a weekend night or a Saturday night or something like that. I'm just curious. What would a typical Saturday evening have been like for you in college?

01-00:39:28

Corvin:

A party.

01-00:39:29

Meeker:

A party. So a house party somewhere?

01-00:39:31

Corvin:

A fraternity party or a house party, or going out dancing.

01-00:39:38

Meeker:

And you lived at home still?

01-00:39:40

Corvin:

I did live at home, I commuted.

01-00:39:43

Meeker:

Did you commute by car or--

01-00:39:45

Corvin:

No. By streetcar and the train.

01-00:39:54

Meeker: The Key System.

01-00:39:55

Corvin: Yes.

01-00:39:57

Meeker: And did that take you all the way up to Berkeley?

01-00:40:01

Corvin: Close enough, I got there somehow. When I think of it today, it's a little bit different. There were a few of us who commuted, but most of my friends lived over there. So I always had somebody I could stay with, and so I didn't feel a stranger to the campus at all. I was involved and somehow joined a group when I first came on campus. I was very, very lucky, a group of women who were—I'm calling them women, we were girls—on campus, and we were active on campus in a variety of ways. My career in the extra curriculum activities were not that great but certainly improved my bridge game.

01-00:041:10

Meeker: Was it a formal group or an informal group?

01-00:41:12

Corvin: Yes, it was a formal group. It was called Phrateres. A social group. I still play bridge with some of the gals from that group today.

01-00:41:31

Meeker: So it's almost like a non-Greek system sorority or something?

01-00:41:34

Corvin: Exactly. It was a social group.

Begin Audiofile 2

02-00:00:02

Meeker: So we're going again, and we were talking a little bit about this organization you were involved with at UC Berkeley, as an undergraduate.

02-00:00:28

Corvin: It was a social organization and served as a basis for friendship for lifetime. So that was a very, very important part of going to school.

02-00:00:53

Meeker: The members of this group were from different backgrounds?

02-00:00:56

Corvin: No. Many lived in the East Bay, fact most did. Most of us stayed in the area, married and had children. Our husbands liked each other, so we celebrated big games and New Years Eves all through the years. One group of friends that Bill and I had, all stemmed from UC. I enjoyed my education. I was probably a better student in undergraduate work than I was at college level.

02-00:01:45

Meeker: Do you remember knowing any other undergraduates, who were Japanese American?

02-00:01:53

Corvin: No. I remember a couple from high school, and of course those were troubled days. Japanese families were forced to move to camps. If troubles came, there was a real question of personal safety. So understanding it then is a lot different than trying to fathom what we should have done if we lived then. It's always easier to rewrite history. I shouldn't tell a historian.

02-00:02:28

Meeker: Well, I wonder how you did experience it then.

02-00:02:32

Corvin: Well, you didn't know it firsthand, you knew it secondhand.

02-00:02:40

Meeker: And when you say it you mean?

02-00:02:43

Corvin: The Japanese families moved. We were not directly affected. Emotionally, you felt, gee, that's too bad, but it seemed logical because at the time of the fear of the Japanese. It probably doesn't make any sense to someone who didn't live through period, because they were born here, they had been raised here, they went to school here. Their parents needn't have been born here. Some owned businesses. I'm always impressed, going back to Yori Wada, and others, with families who had to experience that and were able to come back, continue life, maintain an equilibrium, and really succeed. There are many real success stories among them. I'm certain the hurt never was eliminated completely, and of course, when we'd read some of the stories, it seems absolutely impossible that we could not have been more understanding. But at the time, when we were living through it, it seemed logical. Again, communications were very, very different. The many stories that you hear now you didn't hear then, and we didn't know. In our eyes, they were going to be living someplace. We didn't know or realize or most probably didn't question adequately, of how modestly they were going to be living. So again, hindsight makes the story very different.

02-00:04:53

Meeker: I wonder, thinking about either the groups you participated in or the classes that you took, or maybe the professors that you had at UC Berkeley. Did you ever sort of more consciously affiliate with other Jews there?

02-00:05:15

Corvin: No.

02-00:05:15

Meeker: No? So that wasn't something that was in your—

- 02-00:05:18
Corvin: No, I really didn't on campus at all. Most probably I went to Hillel once, and it wasn't for me and that was fine.
- 02-00:05:27
Meeker: Who would it have been for?
- 02-00:05:31
Corvin: I don't know. It wasn't the group I knew.
- 02-00:05:34
Meeker: Okay.
- 02-00:05:36
Corvin: And that most probably goes along with the ages of my children. However, most probably that isn't quite as true today.
- 02-00:05:49
Meeker: I'm wondering, do you think Hillel was more attractive to students maybe who came from the east coast, and a different Jewish American background?
- 02-00:05:56
Corvin: Possibly. I really, I don't know. I don't know. I wasn't close to it at that time. I wasn't that interested, to be truthful.
- 02-00:06:08
Meeker: But you maintained affiliation with Congregation Emanu-El at that point.
- 02-00:06:12
Corvin: Right. That was my link. And being with non-Jewish students, that didn't bother me. That was my background as far as going to school as well.
- 02-00:06:27
Meeker: Yeah. And given what you have to say about limitations of communications, which in interviews with other people, I've heard many, many things about. I mean, the difference between the Internet world today, in essence the pre-television world of World War II.
- 02-00:06:47
Corvin: It's difficult, if you have not lived during this earlier period, to recognize that when you listened to the news it was old news. We didn't realize it because it was the best we had, but it was different then. My dad was a reader and most probably, he was among the few that became concerned about Germany. But none of us knew what was happening. It's hard to believe it today. How could you not know? Where were you? But we had no direct links. We had no family outside the Bay Area, so as a result, it wasn't on a personal basis that we heard. You were far more isolated than you are today, but I'm certain you've heard it from others. I am confident my family wasn't the only one.

02-00:08:05

Meeker:

It's true. You know, from what I've read about it, there were some people who made it their business to be extremely well informed, I think. Particularly some people in New York or people that had close connections, personal connections in Germany.

02-00:08:27

Corvin:

If you had family, there was a link. Or if they left Germany in the 30s, you had kind of an inkling something was going on. We didn't have family that were coming from Germany or from Europe, coming here with nothing, having been successful there and thinking ahead. I wasn't exposed to that at all.

02-00:09:14

Meeker:

When you said your father was one of those who had more of a suspicion than anyone else would have had at the time, perhaps because he read a lot, do you have an idea of what he was reading? I mean, were they like Jewish publications, were they like the *New York Times*?

02-00:09:32

Corvin:

No, I don't know what he read.

02-00:13:07

Meeker:

I wonder then, in the context of Congregation Emanu-El, was there a point at which they would start speaking about what later became known as the Holocaust?

02-00:13:23

Corvin:

You have to realize that Emanu-El has always had a community focus beyond religion. That was part of growing up.

02-00:14:05

Meeker:

When did you get a sense of Zionism being a movement? Was that after the war or was that before the war?

02-00:14:10

Corvin:

It was probably after.

02-00:14:19

Meeker:

Because clearly, the movement had existed for many decades.

02-00:14:21

Corvin:

For many decades. Was I aware of it? Yes. Was I part of it? No. So that made a difference also. But then, we did wake up. I don't want you to think that we've slept through the next thirty years. In my grandmother's home, a woman who had left Germany came to live. She became part of the family, and had come from a prosperous family.

02-00:15:10

Meeker:

So she was a displaced person?

02-00:15:12

Corvin:

Yes, and her family all came, and that of course brought the appreciation of how lucky we were to be in the United States and to be so protected. And I have felt, all my life I've been this protected. Having lived through the Holocaust days, having lived in San Francisco versus any other place. I have felt just very, very fortunate, that if I were destined to live in one place, it would be San Francisco.

02-00:15:50

Meeker:

So this woman and her family who came from Germany or from elsewhere?

02-00:15:54

Corvin:

Germany.

02-00:15:57

Meeker:

Do you remember her name?

02-00:15:58

Corvin:

Oh, sure. Hilda. But she and her family became part of our family.

02-00:16:09

Meeker:

Did she ever talk about her life back in Germany?

02-00:16:12

Corvin:

It's very interesting. You're hearing more stories now than you did then. These were people who escaped. They weren't the people who went through the camps. They weren't the people—they might have lost relatives, but saying you lost relatives is not like telling you the story of what happened in the camps. It was a long time before we really knew what was happening in the camps, but there were the families that came and as I say, that was my only link to them.

02-00:17:03

Meeker:

Do you know when you first started hearing the stories?

02-00:17:06

Corvin:

I'm not good at years, I'm really not. As a young adult, I know she was at the house before I graduated from high school. She was still with my aunt and uncle at the time when I got married.

02-00:17:29

Meeker:

So she escaped Germany prior to the war?

02-00:17:31

Corvin:

Yes.

02-00:17:32

Meeker:

Oh, okay.

02-00:17:33

Corvin:

So it was not through a camp, and so that made an enormous difference. Then you started hearing and reading, and then it was different.

02-00:17:47

Meeker:

There's a few interesting books that have been published, about—I mean, there's plenty that have obviously been published about the experience of the Holocaust and in the camps and in Germany. There have been also, some interesting historical accounts of the way in which the Holocaust has been remembered, particularly in the United States.

02-00:18:10

Corvin:

Right.

02-00:18:11

Meeker:

Some of them talk about actually sort of echoing some of the things that you said, that at the time, there wasn't a whole lot of discussion of it. There was a sort of very removed or cloudy sense of what was actually happening, and it wasn't really until much later, in the context of for instance, some books that were published in the 1950s and then some movies that began to appear in the 1960s, that what we now know of the Holocaust was either one, recovered, or was created to a certain extent. I mean, our memory of it. We take certain pieces of information, assemble those together, and that becomes the basis of our knowledge of what the Holocaust was. Does that resemble your experience?

02-00:19:17

Corvin:

I would say we read *Anne Frank*, *Exodus*, you name them. I mean, we all read them and the ship that was turned back, all this. And then the feeling of where were you? What were you doing? I was at college. Now, I have friends today that did experience the camps, not very many, but a few. And I have others whom I'm close to, who left wherever they were, not necessarily Germany, but Europe, who came before the Holocaust, and as a result, they were spared. Today I appreciate it, but at that time you just went on.

02-00:20:24

Meeker:

It's funny. I find myself here, asking you in essence, a question of well where were you? I don't mean to have that attitude but I'm sure that it kind of brings that up in you, a question that you've probably asked yourself many times. Like you know, "Where was I?"

02-00:20:47

Corvin:

Well I think though, you have to realize, it was such a different period. You were thinking of yourself. The Japanese were going to come to San Francisco. You had black curtains that you put on the windows. It was different. Another thing is you were young, and when you're young, I don't care who you are, unless you're being abused yourself. Life went on. I went to school. I was able to get through college, then I went to work. I mean, that's kind of normal.

My husband and his brother were drafted the same day. There were only two boys in their family. Their being drafted made us realize the war was real. They were just unlucky that their numbers were what they were. Nobody thought of getting out of service. It was a different time. We didn't have Vietnam. We didn't have this ugly war that we have now. Patriotism was a different thing. I can remember saying, "Oh, I could never marry anyone who didn't serve in the service. How would I explain it to my kids?" That much you felt, and I mean, I wasn't in a flag-waving family. It was just part of what you felt. You were protecting your country. We didn't know about what was happening to Jews there. We really did not. Getting to your question, do I feel guilty? No. Maybe it's because I have the nature that believes that you do the very, very best at every period, and hopefully you grow mentally, as well as judgment-wise. Do I feel responsible for this war today? What am I doing about it? I mean, you could ask me that. Here I am today and here we sit today.

02-00:24:05

Meeker: That's a good point.

02-00:24:06

Corvin: So what are you doing? And it's a pretty bad scene in my judgment. So you learn, but there are certain things that are beyond you. I'm of the nature that keeps going. You do the best you can.

02-00:24:36

Meeker: Well, let's move on to a different subject then.

02-00:24:39

Corvin: Good.

02-00:24:44

Meeker: I want to talk about Campfire Girls. Can you tell me what Campfire Girls is and what it meant to you?

02-00:24:53

Corvin: Campfire Girls is a youth organization similar to Girl Scouts. Somehow I joined when I was young, and had two outstanding women as leaders. One was a librarian at the main library. We met on Arguello Boulevard in a wonderful place that was Campfire headquarters at that point, and it just was a wonderful structure. It's now being used as the Rosenberg Daycare Center, a Jewish daycare center. I made friends, learned how to do things, and went to camp. It was my first time being on my own.

02-00:25:56

Meeker: Where did you go to camp?

02-00:25:58

Corvin: Camp Wasibo in Zayante, which was a little tiny train stop in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I went for two weeks at a time. It was just opening up a whole new world. My family went to Tahoe and to Yosemite, and we did different

things, so it wasn't just getting out of town. It was just being with girls, and being on your own.

02-00:26:28

Meeker: Did you actually take the train there?

02-00:26:30

Corvin: Yes, which was an adventure.

02-00:26:34

Meeker: I bet.

02-00:26:35

Corvin: The whole bit. Also, community service was again instilled in you. We sold sugar donuts to raise money for Campfire Girls. My father's car ended up with sugar in it for the rest of the life of that car. He could never get the sugar out of it. I learned what young people learn through the scouting movement today. The friendships were important, and also our families took part. That was kind of a byproduct. You didn't earn badges as you did in scouting, you earned something, but I can't remember what it was. There was a certain mysticism in it as we sat around the campfire. Somehow it affected me, but I think you will find the recognition that camping experiences for young people are very important. My husband also had a camping experience and then was a counselor for years.

02-00:28:09

Meeker: Did he join the Scouts?

02-00:28:11

Corvin: Well, he was an Eagle Scout. My two sons and Bill were all Eagle Scouts, and even as a byproduct, you'll like to hear that my husband's scoutmaster was the same scoutmaster my sons had. They met at Congregation Emanu-El. In my family, I was the first to go to camp. I just found it a very rewarding, fun, different kind of an experience. Then, when I no longer worked at Standard Oil, which of course is Chevron today, I went to Campfire Girls and immediately volunteered. I was going to give back. I played a role there, served on their board and all. But I think it's extremely important to have that experience away from school, away from your religious ties and away from family, of knowing that you are part of something. You don't necessarily realize it at the time, but you learn things that you're not going to learn at home. Learning to get along with people most probably is one of the most important lessons in life, and this is just another stepping stone.

02-00:29:58

Meeker: Do you think that that's one of the things that you learn in the context of camping? I mean, I just know from my personal experience that camping, one, you're out in nature so there is something beautiful about it, but at the same time, you also have the challenges. You don't have the conveniences of your

home and so it requires you to do a little extra work to have the everyday things you need, like food and shelter.

02-00:30:29

Corvin:

Well, at the camp we went to, which was very modest, your food was provided, but the comforts of home certainly weren't there. You learned many things. I can remember that posture was important and if you stood up straight you'd get a symbol of a tree being pinned on you. I was never that fortunate, my posture was never that good, but little things. You became far more attuned to nature, to trees, and getting along with people and enjoying. Being outdoor at night with a campfire and all, this was pretty heavy, great stuff.

02-00:31:28

Meeker:

So there wasn't, I assume, any particular reason why you went in Campfire Girls as opposed to Girl Scouts?

02-00:31:35

Corvin:

No, there wasn't. It was by chance and I liked it better, I liked their philosophy better, I mean as an adult looking back.

02-00:31:48

Meeker:

How would you distinguish the two?

02-00:31:50

Corvin:

I think it wasn't as rigid. There was more flexibility, and I liked that. I admired the leadership, and I certainly admire leadership in Girl Scouts, also. But the Campfire Girls was my exposure. It was just another learning experience, and I think it's extremely important for youngsters to have that opportunity.

02-00:32:18

Meeker:

So when you became involved as a volunteer, this is the first real volunteer work that you did outside of your congregation?

02-00:32:26

Corvin:

Yes.

02-00:32:27

Meeker:

In what capacity did you serve as a volunteer?

02-00:32:30

Corvin:

I volunteered to be a leader, or an assistant leader.

02-00:32:37

Meeker:

Like in a troop or something?

02-00:32:38

Corvin:

Yes, although we didn't call them troops.

02-00:32:40

Meeker:

Yes, I bet. What did you call them?

- 02-00:32:41
Corvin: It was group. Anyway, and so then I was asked to serve on the board a few years later, and that experience just opened up all kinds of things.
- 02-00:32:59
Meeker: And it would have been the board of the local San Francisco chapter or the Northern California?
- 02-00:33:04
Corvin: No, it was San Francisco.
- 02-00:33:08
Meeker: How many groups at that time?
- 02-00:33:10
Corvin: I have no idea. It was a very active community. In those days you really, other than the doughnut sales that turned into candy sales, there was not very much fundraising. I think it cost a dollar to be a member. The fundraising part of the nonprofit world had certainly not set in. So then I saw the other side, the administrative side. Campfire Girls was based on volunteer leadership, and when mothers started working, there was difficulty in getting leadership in all of the youth programs.
- 02-00:34:11
Meeker: So when you say leadership, you mean people actually doing what would be considered the 9:00 to 5:00 work?
- 02-00:34:16
Corvin: No. I consider that the volunteer leadership, as far as leading a group. In the case of the Girls Scouts, it was troop. And then also, we became aware as time went on, that you had youngsters whose parents were never exposed to anything like this. So as a result, how could we involve youngsters from different races new to our community. How could we get them to participate, and that was a more difficult task.
- 02-00:34:59
Meeker: And that was something that would have been taken on in your capacity of serving on the board?
- 02-00:35:05
Corvin: The beginning of an awareness of the need of it.
- 02-00:35:13
Meeker: I obviously looked at the resume that you sent me, and I don't want to challenge you on the years because you said that you don't have the exact memory of it, but I'm kind of wondering when—
- 02-00:35:30
Corvin: When I went on that first board?

02-00:35:31

Meeker: Yeah, when you first—

02-00:35:32

Corvin: Oh, I can tell you. My youngest son is fifty-four. He was three months old, and that was 54 years ago.

02-00:36:12

Meeker: What was the function of the board work at that point in time? I mean as you said, at that point in time, there wasn't much of a fundraising component. What sort of work were you expected to do?

02-00:36:27

Corvin: Typical of any nonprofit board. It was to set the policy of the agency itself and most probably the leadership; where are we going to find future leadership, and maybe even finding money for girls to go to camp. It wasn't that grand or unusual. It was up to the leader to really set the programming for the weekly meetings. We were among the few groups, when I was a Campfire Girl, to meet at the clubhouse, but in most cases groups met at people's homes or in schools. We didn't have grand hopes, other than to include as many girls as we could and to see to it that we not only served, say, the Richmond District, but did our best to go beyond that. That was about it.

02-00:38:08

Meeker: So then, you mentioned one of the things you wanted to do was allow more girls in the San Francisco area to participate in this, and you mentioned also that this was a period of time in which concepts of difference and integration were starting to become more recognized. Can you describe some of the efforts or the challenges, in the context of Campfire Girls, about integration for instance?

02-00:38:35

Corvin: I can't speak directly of Campfire Girls, but I can speak of youth, because at that time, I was part of United Way and different organizations, and it was the same problem that most nonprofits had. How could agencies provide services to a community they were not used to serving: clients of color, people with language barriers, people who had never been exposed to these types of services. As a result, an attempt was made to hire leaders and bring them into different areas when mothers were not available to lead groups. Unfortunately, it never really took off as was hoped, because, number one, it became expensive. Most people wanted to be paid to become a leader, and it was a different time. You didn't have as many volunteers. You didn't have women that were available because they were back to work. The needs were different and different agencies arose to fill a need.

02-00:39:58

Meeker: So, I guess what I'm hearing is that in your effort to reach out into say like you know, I guess what at that time would have been the Fillmore District or maybe—

02-00:40:09

Corvin: Bayview Hunters Point.

02-00:40:11

Meeker: Okay, so I got to Hunters Point, or maybe even to the Mission District, to work with Mexican American families. The organizations tried to develop leaders within those communities, is that what you're saying? Did these efforts happen in the '50s or '60s?

02-00:41:15

Corvin: Most probably 1960s.

02-00:41:20

Meeker: Were there other organizations that had been doing this work prior?

02-00:41:25

Corvin: Well I think Boys Clubs, the Y. The Y was very active. The Y was a professional, staff-oriented, as were Boys Clubs, and as a result, they filled the void and more particularly, YMCAs were strong. They were strong and they were out in the neighborhoods, and they probably filled a need. And then within the Boys Clubs, you had mentoring programs that started for boys who didn't have a dad or a male mentor of any kind. That was important. So were there services for youth? Yes, but different than before.

02-00:43:14

Meeker: So but it sounds like when there was an effort to move out into these previously under or non-served communities, organizations like the YMCA, which had a staff model and thus, needed more money to go ahead, to do its work, that was ultimately more successful than the model of Campfire Girls, which was more of a volunteer run organization?

02-00:43:48

Corvin: Boy Scouts has really held its own through this whole period. I'm not certain percentage wise, they're serving as many boys as they did before, It's still a vibrant agency, as the Y is. I'm exposed to some special programs that Girl Scouts has undertaken; serving girls in shelters, which didn't exist thirty years ago.

02-00:44:27

Meeker: Sure.

02-00:44:28

Corvin: Attempting to reach out, which all has value. I don't know if they play the same role. Young people today are so over programmed, that in my judgment, they have very, very little free time. Children have the pressure of school, where they really have to perform well, and they have the pressure of sports and they have the pressure of being part of a religious training program of some kind possibly, or other activities. There's very little time for them to make choices.

02-00:46:30

Meeker:

One thing I'm trying to get a handle on here, and something that you've been talking about a bit, which I find to be really interesting, which is the transformation of nonprofits, say over the past fifty years. One of the things you mentioned was the increase in the development function of non-profits, that they need to raise funds. This is just sort of a notion that I've gotten from our conversation today and I'm wondering if you can sort of either confirm it or say that I'm totally on the wrong track. It sounds like that in the 1950s and then probably especially in the 1960s, when these organizations like Campfire Girls and maybe the Girl Scouts and other organizations that were serving youth, there was this movement to—at that point in time they were very volunteer run, mothers in particular who were not in the workforce, provided a lot of the labor. Then it sounds to me like simultaneously two things happened. One, a lot of women went into the workforce, and so there were fewer volunteer leaders that could be drawn up, and then also there was sort of a larger societal movement for these organizations to serve populations that were previously under served, so there was a need to really expand the scope of the work that had been done. And I wonder if you see those two things playing a role in this movement to need to raise more funds for these organizations. Are those tied together in your experience or not?

Corvin:

The foundation world has increased tremendously. This also means new opportunities.

Also, people needed help in many ways. Family structure has completely changed since the '50s. The gay community, the foster care community, the immigrants, which I've mentioned now a couple of times. All these things have led to a need for more dollars.

The volunteerism is still going on and it's still flourishing, and I'm impressed, but it's different than what it was. You still have families helping families. You still have people being very supportive and attempting to help in the hospitals. You still see the volunteers throughout that. Are they the same? Do they work for twenty years? That isn't what people do, that isn't what people want to do today.

So there's a change because of the need, there's a change because of women working. So you don't have women with free time to automatically volunteer every week. It wasn't only having a Campfire Girls meeting or a Boy Scout meeting. It was also the need to plan that meeting. So there's been a change and also, there has been a change in the need of the professionals that you have working in your agencies. You have, in addition to the United Ways and Federation as sources of funding, other major sources of funding. The foundation world has grown.

02-00:55:26

Meeker:

Well I think that in subsequent meetings we'll—one, that was extremely helpful and you definitely responded to my question, but it's a very historical question, and what I'd like to plan for a subsequent interview is to talk about some of the specific responses to these needs in the different organizations in which you've been involved. So I'd like to spend then, a little more time talking about the United Way and then you know, certainly the JCF and a couple of the other organizations you've been involved in. Does that sound good for you?

02-00:56:02

Corvin:

It sounds fine.

02-00:56:04

Meeker:

All right, well let's stop then for today, because I think we're just about done.

Interview 2: 12-10-07
 Begin Audiofile 3

03-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is the 10th of December, 2007. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Adele Corvin for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. And let's begin. We covered a lot of territory in our first two-hour meeting, and at the end of that meeting you had mentioned a few issues that you wanted to make sure were covered. And maybe in the first hour today we can focus on one of those—actually some issues within the context of some of your work, particularly with the United Way. And I also would like to cover today a little bit more about your family, because not only is this interview designed for the Jewish Community Federation, but it's also hopefully something that you'll want to pass on to your kids and grandkids, and so I'd like to get a little sense of hearing you talk about what your kids and grandkids were like when they were growing up and your reminiscences of them. So let's start out with the United Way work. This was certainly an organization that you spent a good many years involved with on many different levels and I'm wondering if you can start out just by providing an overview of the scope of your work in general, when you started, and some of the different activities that you participated in.

03-00:01:23

Corvin:

It's difficult to just pinpoint which year I started. But I believe the way I got into United Way was as a representative of San Francisco Volunteer Bureau. I served on their Group Work and Recreational Council. This was a body of representatives from the city departments, namely department of recreation, health, welfare, et cetera, and also heads of all the nonprofit agencies, and as well some volunteers and representatives from those agencies. It was, as many of the activities which I participated in within United Way, really served as my getting my master's in community, because one got to have an overview of the issues of the day, which were a bit simpler than they are today, and also to have some specific interest in a given agency. Most probably I can pinpoint it the beginning of the hippie movement, during which young people were arriving in town without any family ties, without any funds, and being attracted to drugs. And this of course became an overwhelming problem for the city, because we really weren't geared for it. We had our Boy Scouts, we had our Girl Scouts and Campfire Girls, and also our YMCA and Boys Clubs. But truthfully to deal with the problems of drugs and homelessness and all that came with it was beyond our capacity. So that was one of the issues. Some of the recommendations were to send kids back, and that was one option, which actually was followed up on, hopefully reuniting a youngster with the family.

03-00:04:00

Meeker:

And the idea was then to provide bus tickets or something to send them back home.

03-00:04:03

Corvin:

Bus tickets, et cetera. And to see to it that they really went. Overall I don't think that ever really solved the problem, although possibly it did help some families. Particularly it helped the family who was really looking for a child. But basically very often these children were coming out of very troubled homes. And we were seeing—we had always—the community was very aware of divorce and very aware of troubled homes, but nothing to this degree. That was one problem.

03-00:05:19

Meeker:

Was it primarily Spanish language or also Asian languages?

03-00:05:22

Interviewer:

Asian and Spanish. It was probably Spanish at first, and then of course the growing influx of Asians. So that was a factor. Also we were aware the Asian culture had a devotion to family and so we felt pretty secure that those young people would have an easier time as time went on. This wasn't necessarily true, because that culture also changed, and young people found a way of gangs, et cetera. One other area which was new to us was the gay and lesbian community--what do you do, and are you certain that gays and lesbians are being well served in our community in the normal services that we provided. We found that it was not consistent and there was a need for stepping out and supporting some special programs. When I was the incoming U.W. president, a group of young people decided that United Way was a monopoly, and as such they brought this to the court. The reason for them saying it was a monopoly was that solicitation was through the corporate world whereby employees in some cases felt compelled and pressured to give. This was not true throughout the system, but nevertheless was the platform that these young people arrived at. The result of that was the donor option plan being initiated.

03-00:08:57

Meeker:

Well, how about if we spend some time going through each one of these and getting a closer sense of how the problems were initially—how the organization became aware of the problems initially, and then how the organization attempted to address them?

03-00:09:15

Corvin:

And you recognize this is all through my eyes, a volunteer.

03-00:09:22

Meeker:

Of course. Yes, of course. And hopefully in the future this interview can be combined with other interviews looking at United Way and philanthropy, and they'll have a broader picture of this. Well, let's begin with the introduction, like you said, of the beginning of the hippie movement in San Francisco, where you have a lot of young people moving to the city in larger numbers than before, and then also as you said attracted to the Haight Street scene that involved drugs and probably unwanted pregnancies and all those sorts of things that go along with it. How was it that you and other people involved in the organization first became aware of this new social service need?

03-00:10:11

Corvin:

First of all, when we look at Haight Street, the growth of the problem there, it wasn't overnight. It was a slow progression of numbers, and all of a sudden numbers became really frightening. It became very apparent that this was a real issue. There were always runaways, but not to these numbers. And we were aware of it because just walking the streets you could see young people not having a place to stay overnight, sleeping on the street. But in addition you had social services coming to you, saying we have a new population. We're not sure quite how to handle it. We need new additional funding.

03-00:11:01

Meeker:

And when you say social services, are these city agencies or private social service?

03-00:11:06

Corvin:

Non-profits in most cases. I won't say only, because the health department, of course, became involved. We saw the growth of a clinic out in Haight. In the past, each family just took care of their health needs. It hadn't been a huge issue. It was just you had some kind of coverage, and people were cared for, or they had the funds—there were some clinics. But this was a different population. You were not dealing with someone who was part of a family. You were dealing with someone alone and, in most cases, not sophisticated about living on the streets and what that meant. So you had the beginning of prostitution for the young boys. Most probably Larkin Street was the first agency that stepped up to the plate. Over the years Larkin Street has increased their services, to today picking up a young boy who might arrive in the city, and following through with housing and education and social services. At the beginning it wasn't to that extent. It was really going down Larkin Street, literally, and recognizing young people who most probably had no place to go, and trying to counsel them.

03-00:12:45

Meeker:

Was that the name of the organization at the time? Larkin Street Youth Center? So that was established by this point in time?

03-00:12:54

Corvin:

At the beginning, it was some very creative, very energetic young people, who had the willingness to put themselves on the line and to provide a different kind of service that was not necessarily the norm. And where agencies could be open from three to six or something, you were dealing with young people around the clock. And then health problems arose, and with the health problems you needed additional help. The city followed through as best they could.

03-00:13:44

Meeker:

When you say health problems, do you primarily mean venereal disease or—

03-00:13:47

Corvin:

Venereal disease—and young people just getting sick, and having no place to go, and not going to any school, and not being sheltered properly, and certainly not eating adequately. So they had no contact with any institution in the city. That was a tremendous issue. Some people still felt that the only way to solve the problem was to send everyone home. And as I indicated, home wasn't open for everyone. If you recall, that was also an age where young parents were having their own troubles and getting into drugs for the first time, and not being able to handle responsibilities. In the black families it certainly was very apparent that things weren't going right. Young able men were sitting on doorsteps during the day for lack of work. And so it was a change. Were there always people on the street? Most probably. But not to the numbers and not the type of people that we now saw on the street.

03-00:15:01

Meeker:

To what extent do you think the war and the draft around Vietnam had an impact on the development of this situation?

03-00:15:10

Corvin:

Oh, there's no question that Vietnam changed everything, in my judgment. The anger, the hate, and the feeling of desperation and all. And that was happening at the parent level, and then of course affecting youth. It changed the United States completely, in my judgment. We had never seen such anger in the streets. This was all a new phenomenon. And yet the war wasn't acceptable either for many of us. I think it changed behaviors, and we're living it today as well.

03-00:16:21

Meeker:

Were you ever presented with any evidence of—because some men were being sent off to war leaving young children or families or young people behind, or—do you think that played like I guess a demographic role in this new generation of young people who were runaways or who were on their own?

03-00:16:44

Corvin:

It might have. But you're talking to the wrong generation when you're talking to me. I was of the generation, becoming an adult just as World War II broke out, and I can remember feeling I could never marry anyone who didn't serve in some armed forces, because how could I ever tell our children that he didn't serve. I was not alone. This was the universal feeling, and everybody served. There were some obviously, even some of our friends, who were Four-F or didn't serve. But it was such a different time. Vietnam was different. The draft was the luck of the draw. And therefore if you had—and I can't remember if it was a low number you wanted or a high number—we had both with my sons. And if you got whichever was the one that meant you most probably wouldn't be called, you were freed of that responsibility. Not freed of the anguish of the war, but freed of at least going. That made a difference. Fighting in the Vietnam war was so different than World War II—I don't like any war, but I

mean the idea of loyalty wasn't part of it as it was in World War II. So you have to talk to the next generation. Although I witnessed this as a mother, and neither of my sons served as it happened, these were very angry days. And most probably I had never lived through a period of this much anger. Today, most probably, many of us—and of course I'm at fault as well—feel that there should be marching in the streets. We don't see that. And I don't know why, except nobody's out there. It's true—we have isolated marches. But it's different. I think the whole thing has changed so. With World War II there was no question. With Vietnam it was a draft, which meant a certain number were affected. And World War II, we were affected every day of our lives, while we were here. Every day you were aware of it. There were shortages in the stores. You couldn't always get meat or sugar, for example. I wasn't running a household at this point, so it didn't affect me that much, but we haven't seen that in Vietnam, and we certainly haven't seen it with Iraq. We're living very well. We can buy anything we want. Everybody's traveling as if it's going out of style. And we're really not being affected. Very few are being affected. I think the whole thing would have changed completely if we had had a draft. And if you think I'm advocating that, I'm not, because my heart goes out to the young people and parents and families. But basically that's what's changed the whole thing.

03-00:20:52
Meeker:

So you said that one of your sons had a low draft number or a high probability of being drafted.

03-00:20:58
Corvin:

But he wasn't.

03-00:20:58
Meeker:

He wasn't. Was that simply that they never reached his number?

03-00:21:20
Corvin:

Yes, and then [he went] to dental school.

Meeker:

Well, let's talk a little bit more about the work that was done. And if these questions are too detailed, just let me know. But so I'm thinking about—as it happens, I'm doing a little research on this right now, so some of these questions again may be a little too detailed. But looking at some of the need, the unique need that was happening in the Larkin Street or Tenderloin, what was Central City at that point in time, was the United Way or were you involved in any of the War on Poverty programs that were seeking to organize people in the Tenderloin during this period of time?

03-00:22:43
Corvin:

When you speak of Tenderloin or Central City, I was at one point, on a board in Sacramento where there were block grants that we processed on a state basis for human care services. That was the extent that I did, other than the planning in the city. There were two phases of this planning. United Way had

a planning arm at that time, and then in addition we had an allocation process whereby we specifically allocated funds to meet the greatest need.

03-00:23:50

Meeker:

So Larkin Street and Huckleberry. And then also I guess the Haight Street Free Clinic?

03-00:23:58

Corvin:

Oh well, yes, but I'm speaking of freestanding agencies. The free clinic, you can't say enough about the services they provide, and they still provide, and it is still very needed. Most of us didn't quite have the vision to recognize that was going to be a desperate need. Federal funds began coming in for health projects and all. And as a result, United Way got out of the health field.

03-00:25:14

Meeker:

When you talk about social services, I guess you're talking about things like education and housing and employment? Or just adaptation kind of issues?

03-00:25:21

Corvin:

Well, let me put it this way. I'm not speaking of public education, I'm speaking of supplemental. In other words, for the first time it was recognized you really needed tutoring. Well, when my kids went to school, you didn't have tutoring, after-school tutoring, really, other than for a youngster who was really having trouble in school. That wasn't part of it. We became aware there was now a need. Churches and schools would open an after-school program. We also recognized that with working women you needed someplace for youngsters to go. As a result, the Jewish Community Center in San Francisco and the YMCA were really the largest providers of daycare at the early stages. Today everybody's in that business. It started out by just having a place to go, but then for different ages, different things were provided. Naturally a snack, but in addition, athletics, and some school remedial work was very often provided. So when we speak of education, when we speak of United Way, there are two tracks. There's the city responsible for the public education, and there's the United Way that supplemented what they could. But that was all new. So that's one area. And in social services, there were new needs. There were needs for the working parent dealing with the frustration of not having adequate help and daycare. Preschool was a key. We were not prepared at all. And so it was the beginning of the whole daycare program, which of course we see throughout the country. And today it's so needed, the youngster that goes to regular school without that preschool is not prepared. So have I answered that question?

03-00:27:35

Meeker:

Yeah, I think so. Let me just expand on that a little bit. Thinking about particularly these new populations that you're encountering in San Francisco during this period of time, did the organization, and you and your colleagues and your work, recognize a difference between for instance the youth who were going to Haight and that may be participating in Huckleberry House and

those who were going to Larkin Street and the Tenderloin and then becoming involved in that organization over there?

03-00:28:08

Corvin:

Well, the involvement for us was supporting the creative people with lots of energy and lots of heart and ability who were really at the core of Huckleberry and Larkin Street. I put them in a class of their own. They dealt with these young people who had extreme problems. United Way became aware of these new programs when they applied for funding. They weren't the routine agency that had had funding for fifty years. And so we learned through that and through the people who were really serving what the new problems were.

03-00:30:28

Meeker:

Well, so if you look at the history of the ways in which historians have written about philanthropy and looked at for instance the period of time in the Progressive Era when a lot of these organizations were first established, they talk about this big question in philanthropy about the degree to which these organizations wanted to serve what they termed the deserving versus the undeserving poor. So there tended to be a focus on the impoverished people who were somehow seen as morally upstanding yet fell into difficult circumstances as opposed to poor people who they saw as engaging in immoral behavior and thus weren't deserving of this. And I can imagine looking at the 1960s when there are these what were I think termed young adults, not necessarily youth, but young adults, so people old enough to apparently make decisions for themselves, but might be seen as making the wrong decisions for themselves, such as participating in prostitution or engaging in drugs. Was there much debate within the organization itself about—obviously United Way has limited funds, and the organization wants to use the funds in the most effective way. Was there a debate about which groups were deserving or not deserving? And how was that overcome if it was?

03-00:32:07

Corvin:

In my judgment that wasn't the dividing line. I think that the spirit within United Way was not to select the most deserving to help, but rather to solve problems, and there were loads of new problems that we hadn't had to wrestle with prior to this. So as a result we knew that some of the old ways were not going to solve the problems. From my vantage point there was no time spent on who could be saved and who couldn't be. Through the programs we funded we hoped we could somehow keep young people in school or encourage them to return to school if they hadn't received their high school diploma. We were constantly advising people that without a high school education you're not going to be able to do anything. That was the hope. I think United Way's theory has always been to provide hope for everyone. Now is it possible? No. And some people will accept help, others would like to and don't have the capacity to because of problems. And then there are some who don't want it. So you have the three categories of people, and when you're serving people

you want everyone to come. Hopefully you will touch as many as possible. And we were able to touch some. Did we touch enough? No. Did we try? Yes.

A tremendous amount of money was poured into Bayview Hunters Point, and there were some leaders out there. There was a young man Bob Harris at the time who was the head of a Boys Club. He was superb. He could get young people to talk to him, and he in turn could hopefully lead them. That was early in the game. Did it solve the problem? Not really. Did it help some? Absolutely. Was it worth the funding and the effort? Absolutely. Maybe those young people in many cases did go on to college and are today some of our leaders in the community, but who knows? And who has the skill of recognizing who's going to benefit from being helped? I don't think any of us know.

03-00:35:55

Meeker:

When some of these new problems started coming up—so for instance you mentioned young adult males going into prostitution—was there every a reluctance or reticence among the organization to address this issue that maybe this was beyond the pale?

03-00:36:14

Corvin:

It was a shock because this wasn't norm. For example, prostitution was the way it was forever, but we didn't expect young boys on the street. This was just beyond what we had accepted socially. I think there was a gratitude that there was someone that was willing to help and guide rather than to cast aside.

03-00:36:46

Meeker:

Like Larkin Street.

03-00:36:46

Corvin:

Like Larkin Street or—and I don't want to overdo that by mentioning Huckleberry and Larkin. There were many other individuals that helped. There's no way to measure who helped, why, or how. Haight Street Clinic, you can say they're the number one. Whoever knows? Doesn't matter. But all of them were needed. Every single agency that could extend a hand to a lost young boy was needed. I had a friend that went out a couple of times with a minister and he just walked the streets. And it wasn't that he was trying to get this young man to be a minister in the future, but rather help him find his way. So there were many individuals that also helped.

03-00:37:46

Meeker:

Do you recall who that minister was?

03-00:37:48

Corvin:

No I don't.

03-00:38:20

Meeker:

Did United Way do much work with Glide Church at this point?

03-00:38:25

Corvin:

Not really. I don't quite know how I became involved with Glide. Glide was a force unto itself. Glide was the old kind neighborhood—what were they called?

03-00:38:51

Meeker:

Settlement house.

03-00:38:51

Corvin:

Settlement house. The gathering point. And I can remember working with Cecil on a homeless program in town. I can remember the first meeting I was there, he said in his wonderful voice, "The average church can't handle this problem, they don't know what they're getting into, they want to provide someplace with a place to sleep." He said, "They're not dealing with the disease that comes with it, they're not dealing with the anger, they don't recognize how complex it is." And I don't think it was just that he wanted the whole business for himself. But he—Cecil ran a wonderful show. In fact I just went to his dinner during the week. Maya Angelou spoke, and I'll tell you, what an evening. But there's where one individual—and there was Jan naturally for forty years—have made such a huge difference in a community.

And I look at that choir and there are whites and there are blacks and there are Asians and there are Europeans, there are all kinds. And I'm spared knowing each story, because it would break your heart, but each one has a story. And has he saved every single one? Of course not. But he's saved an awful lot.

And so I can remember going to their early dinners in Mo's Kitchen. I don't know if you've ever been downstairs in the kitchen. The kitchen is this big. And we'd all crowd in, and I'd think oh my God, if there was ever a fire they'd get rid of all of us. It was different. The church was there, but nothing else. And it's interesting—I don't think there's ever been an agency where I had felt so welcomed. Each one was recognized by name. This was also the other side of the coin, of the training. You had to be willing to live with Cecil's rules or you were out. And it didn't bother him to kick anybody out. For those who went through his program, believe me, he gave them life, and in today's world he's got educational programs for the young children, and even in the evening—Unfortunately, there's still a need for it. And that's what's so sad. Not that there's a program, but there's still a need for it. A young woman got up and she said, I've been here since I'm two." Her mother was on drugs, and the young woman had just completed college. What a struggle she had. Well, there's a success. Now how many other young women did you have behind there? Umpteen, and that's okay, but it's sad that we as a community, with all the resources, haven't been able to solve the problem.

03-00:43:30

Meeker:

So when you served on the planning committee for United Way, it sounds to me like you were doing more than simply reading grant proposals.

03-00:43:43
Corvin: That wasn't part of it.

03-00:43:44
Meeker: Okay, well, what was the --

03-00:43:46
Corvin: It was looking at what are the issues in our community.

03-00:43:49
Meeker: So did you actually go out and do research into the community yourself?

03-00:43:52
Corvin: No but we had people who did, there were staff.

03-00:43:55
Meeker: And what kind of study did they produce for you?

03-00:43:58
Corvin: It's been a long time now. The effect—working women on families, the effect on children. Preschool, the need for preschool.

03-00:44:15
Meeker: And so then the result of reading these studies, the planning committee I'm guessing would then make recommendations about different areas in which money should be given?

03-00:44:27
Corvin: And possibly even used for the planning and allocation committee that actually made grants to agencies, that it fit.

03-00:44:38
Meeker: So you were like the research committee of the organization?

03-00:44:42
Corvin: We weren't the—we were just the volunteers, but there were staff who actually did the research.

03-00:44:48
Meeker: You helped make policy then.

03-00:44:49
Corvin: Made recommendations.

03-00:44:56
Meeker: You talk about a couple of these new groups that emerged that needed assistance, and you mentioned the young adults who were getting into drugs and maybe prostitution. You also mentioned the non-English speakers, both the Spanish speakers as well as the speakers of Asian languages. And I'm wondering, it sounds like they were both a similar age group, young adults who needed attention. How was the planning different for each of those groups, I guess?

03-00:45:31

Corvin:

Well, I think I've mentioned this before. One group, they were on their own completely. The other group were embedded in the family. And the families weren't comfortable in our culture. The culture was new. They were very reluctant to speak English because they knew they weren't able to and they didn't understand. So we first, or I first, became aware of this when I visited a junior high school and spoke to one of the teachers and he said it's very difficult. Now this wasn't because they were poor, that they were afraid to go to school. This wasn't because they didn't know where the school was. It was strictly that language was such a barrier, and they didn't want to embarrass their young person. And the thing is we have to recognize that children learn languages like sponges, and it turned around, that the children were teaching the parents. Well, some children are going to be very patient with this and others are going to be very embarrassed that how come my family can't do this. There are all kinds of social inequities in life, and some people can handle it and some can't. So that was primarily one difference, language. Which is huge. Another thing is if we speak of the black population, we were speaking of the family structure being splintered to such an extent that parents—grandparents were starting to raise children, children were being born out of wedlock, all these were new. This was a very busy era.

03-00:47:31

Meeker:

Well, then what sort of programs was United Way funding that were going to help these specific problems?

03-00:47:37

Corvin:

Out in Bayview Hunters Point there were a number of programs. And then Florence Crittenton, that has been around for years, helped and tried to train and guide pregnant girls. There was a school that—in fact, my daughter taught at the school for a bit—oh, I can't recall the name of the school that pregnant girls attended. At one time, in their wisdom, public schools said pregnant girls couldn't continue going to school. Whoever got that idea really meant that they were cutting off a future for a young woman completely. At the special school, the pregnant girl could still continue school, and then there were some programs that attempted to help with the girl to continue her schooling after the birth of the baby. Florence Crittenton for one, but there were a couple of others. Some were not very understanding, I don't have to tell you, and families were of course just as bad as some of the nonprofits in kicking girls out. But this was all new. There were always girls who became pregnant, we know that, but not to the numbers that we were dealing with, and not white girls. I don't like to put it this way, but it was not culturally accepted. And all of a sudden you had numbers that were beyond what we had dealt with.

03-00:49:35

Meeker:

Did United Way ever sponsor, or being on a planning committee, were there ever recommendations put forward about things like birth control or sex education, family planning?

03-00:49:45

Corvin:

The Catholic Church was in the forefront of not approving of these programs. And of course you went through a time when—in fact we're still fighting it, about federal money going to some of these programs. It's an ongoing fight as far as how do you do your best to see that young people are well informed, and also have the capacity to make good judgment.

03-00:50:35

Meeker:

Well, was there a united attempt by the United Way to really think about how they're going to make policy around these controversial issues? So for instance in the face of Catholic Church criticism, how does the United Way determine if they will advocate or make birth control available?

03-00:50:58

Corvin:

Well, let's go to one of the other subjects I think which we'll identify. I mentioned that the gay community came to us and said the services that were being provided by the nonprofits were not really appropriate for us. The budget panel that I chaired at that particular time said okay, we don't know if that's true, let's have a study. We had a modest study done by UC Berkeley. And we had them interviewing professionally various agencies where you would normally find gay individuals asking to be served. And when they did the research they—

03-00:52:02

Meeker:

Can you give an example?

03-00:52:02

Corvin:

I was thinking of social services across the board, adults, these were not your Larkin Street group. We found that the complaint was right. And the services were not geared, and really not presented appropriately for the gay community.

03-00:52:30

Meeker:

What was some of the substance of that? Do you recall?

03-00:52:35

Corvin:

Since we group people all together, when you had gay and lesbian youth come in for services, and you asked them the same questions as you asked heterosexuals, you weren't really recognizing their needs and consequently weren't really able to provide adequate plans for them or referrals for them.

03-00:53:04

Meeker:

So I'm just hypothetically thinking, I'm thinking like there's maybe forms that you would fill out and—

03-00:53:10

Corvin:

Forms, well, it wasn't even that sophisticated, it was just that the staff didn't understand.

03-00:53:21

Meeker:

So the kind of questions that would have been asked in like an intake session would have presumed heterosexuality for instance.

03-00:53:27

Corvin:

An intake—exactly. And absolutely no understanding as to I'm coming from a different place. So when the study came out, there was no question the services provided were not appropriate. And there was a need for greater understanding. So we, in our wisdom, allocated funds for a specific program headed by Carole Migden at, I believe, PPMC Hospital. Some of our donors heard that we had allocated funds to a gay project. As result, they decided that they certainly were not going to contribute to an organization that did that.

03-00:54:45

Meeker:

And your funders in this case would have been?

03-00:54:48

Corvin:

Individuals.

03-00:54:56

Meeker:

You don't want to name names, I'm guessing.

03-00:54:58

Corvin:

Oh, no, I don't even know them. It doesn't matter. But I just cited that for the reason. You asked me the question, "Would United Way take a stand?" I'll tell you another stand. Also in addition to the gay—

03-00:55:13

Meeker:

Well, how did the organization then respond to these funders?

03-00:55:18

Corvin:

We funded it.

03-00:55:19

Meeker:

You funded it, and—

03-00:55:19

Corvin:

We funded it.

03-00:55:21

Meeker:

Did the funders come around? Did they in fact leave?

03-00:55:23

Corvin:

Have no idea. But you questioned the stand. Another stand was in going through the Boy Scout process we became aware that gays could not become leaders. We studied this for a long time. We talked to the leadership from Texas, who came to see us on many occasions. And we finally came out with a recommendation that the United Way would no longer fund the Boy Scouts as long as they continued with their policy, because in the United Way's agreement with agencies, the agency agrees to be nondiscriminatory.

03-00:56:33

Meeker: And were you involved in the organization when sexual orientation became part of that nondiscrimination clause?

03-00:56:45

Corvin: I was part of it for so long. I don't know. It was just a given. Who would ever question? That's what you're all about. You're in a community that has a richness of different ethnic groups, and see, the sexual part was never really key in our minds, frankly, but there was no question that's what was meant.

03-00:57:23

Meeker: So you see the nondiscrimination policy of the organization really in a universal sense.

03-00:57:29

Corvin: Oh absolutely.

03-00:57:29

Meeker: Okay, so it wasn't just that at a certain point then all of a sudden we could no longer discriminate based on this category.

03-00:57:35

Corvin: No.

Begin Audiofile 4

04-00:00:01

Corvin: It's interesting when we see what's happening in the Tenderloin today with all the building, versus other neighborhoods.

04-00:00:12

Meeker: Okay, so how so?

04-00:00:12

Corvin: The high-rises, with the—for of course families living in those, and the hotels, et cetera. It's interesting. You don't have the high-rises in other areas quite to the extent.

04-00:00:33

Meeker: Well, then how do high-rises impact the social service scene?

04-00:00:51

Corvin: In many cases they recognize that they need some social services in the building, such as after-school programs and programs for youth. But that's a different problem.

04-00:01:10

Meeker: So a lot of these interesting changes that you're talking about, these new communities of need I guess in San Francisco, to what extent was this a very specific geographic phenomenon within San Francisco? Or to what extent was the United Way confronting these needs nationally?

04-00:01:36

Corvin:

Oh, well first of all, let me clarify something. United Way had an area of six counties, so it's beyond just San Francisco. When I speak of—I've highlighted a couple of agencies in town. But no, we were dealing with six counties.

04-00:02:49

Meeker:

As a structure in the organization, from what I understand, United Way is very—the power is distributed across the country, right? So there's not a really strong national headquarters. Or am I wrong?

04-00:03:01

Corvin:

Each United Way is an individual—you're right. It isn't the same as the Red Cross. American Red Cross is top down. And there's no question about it. But with United Way it's autonomous, except that you're part of a national movement for training and personnel.

04-00:03:43

Meeker:

But I can imagine, San Francisco and the six-county Bay Area being what it is, nationally a bit more on the left than other places, that would probably impact the kind of work that you could do as opposed to the kind of work that United Ways in other parts of the country could do.

04-00:04:04

Corvin:

Yes, that I can't judge, but I can tell you there's no question "donor option," fortunately or unfortunately, which started here, and has grown elsewhere. And truthfully that's the way the philanthropic community wants to give today. They want to give directly to programs in order to see impact. We have found through United Way, to our great surprise, that the major part of the donor option dollars went to the large agencies. Now if that's going to be true in the future, you're not going to have umbrella giving—I'm looking way into the future.

On an individual basis I doubt a donor has enough time to investigate each agency. And when I was part of United Way, we took great pride in visiting agencies and meeting over the years. This makes a huge difference. Individuals do not have that capacity to do it for many agencies. So I'm hoping that we see the survival of umbrella giving, because it's a planning arm for a community to build a stronger community and to recognize issues and be able to respond to those issues. In my judgment, it's not only doling out the dollars, it's the planning.

04-00:06:33

Meeker:

So maybe we can rewind a little bit and talk about this planning issue again in the context of the non-English-speaking populations. How should I say this? Can you think of any examples of new programs or new organizations that were beginning that hadn't previously existed?

04-00:06:58

Corvin:

There were a number of agencies that arose in the Chinatown area, for instance, responding to the very things we've been talking about, particularly for the youth, guiding them so they'll get through school, and if their families see fit they will go on to college. And we've seen in the Asian community, many families want their students to excel, and that's why the enrollment in Lowell High School is so disproportionately Asian, because of that drive.

The same is true—the older person that came here without an ear for language will be out of step. They will stay within their own community. The problem that still appears within the black community is the love of education is not throughout their culture. We certainly have examples of outstanding scholars, there's no question about that. But when you speak of the numbers— So it's what an ethnic group is made up of.

04-00:10:14

Meeker:

I wonder from the vantage point of being on the planning committee or within the United Way overall and in essence being presented with this quandary that you just said, that here is one ethnic immigrant group that after a generation or two they become high academic achievers, and then there's another group that's been in the United States for many generations and as you said there's a more conflicted relationship with formal education I guess, I'm not quite sure how you'd want to put it, but I'm thinking how does the United Way plan for dealing with those disparities, or plan to address the different needs of those different communities.

04-00:11:08

Corvin:

Well, I don't think I know that—you recognize you're not always not going to be in a position to solve all problems, so that's a given. And I do know that the problem, the social problems that we have seen with black families, is unique as a group. And it isn't from lack of investing dollars. Maybe we just weren't wise enough as a community. I'm not saying we've done the best we could. And when I look toward the future I am convinced that education is the step one that one, be it in the Tenderloin, be it at Bayview Hunters Point, it doesn't matter—if you don't have the tools and the willingness and the ability to have the social skills to work, you're not going to be able to take care of yourself, and that's the number one responsibility you have.

04-00:13:03

Meeker:

You did mention this question about donor option as being an important innovation. Can you tell me from your perspective how this new policy on the organization emerged?

04-00:13:13

Corvin:

It emerged through a group of young people who came to United Way and said that they were going to take them to court because they were a monopoly and they had complete control of the corporate world giving program.

04-00:13:30

Meeker:

Do you know where these young people came from? Were they involved in other organizations?

04-00:13:34

Corvin:

They had not been involved to my knowledge. And this was a time of tremendous questioning. The sixties was an era of questioning. I grew up, and in my generation I don't know if we didn't have the intellect or didn't have the curiosity or socially it was not accepted. You just didn't ask a lot of questions. The sixties all of a sudden opened a can. You could question anything and everything. You could question the ability and authority of your parents, you could question the authority of your church, of schools, of colleges, of your employer. Your employer, you were a little more delicate. And so this was all new. And all of a sudden somebody was questioning the very platform of United Way, of combined giving to work in the interest of a community.

04-00:14:58

Meeker:

Pressuring meaning United Way—

04-00:15:00

Corvin:

That corporate world pressuring their employees to give in a certain way, and to give at a certain level. Anyway, the case was taken seriously and went to court and we ended up with donor option.

04-00:15:22

Meeker:

How was donor option deemed a reasonable solution to the problem?

04-00:15:27

Corvin:

It meant that the donor had the authority to direct their gift to an agency of their choice. There were certain guidelines. I mean, no businessman would accept this as a way of doing business.

04-00:16:36

Meeker:

So donor option meant not recommending or preferring areas that the money would go to but rather specifically directing the monies to specific organizations that United Way serviced.

04-00:16:47

Corvin:

Exactly.

04-00:16:50

Meeker:

I assume there was also an option for not taking option?

04-00:16:53

Corvin:

Yes there was. That you could be a donor to United Way as a whole, to their unrestricted fund. It wasn't called that. Community fund.

04-00:17:03

Meeker:

And do you know what percentage roughly?

- 04-00:17:08
Corvin: I don't know now. At one point I was very well versed. But it grew and is still growing.
- 04-00:17:17
Meeker: The general fund?
- 04-00:17:17
Corvin: The donor option piece. And United Way—and I don't want to speak to it because I have not been directly involved in the last few years. Today there's a different approach where donors can respond to a given issue or to the general fund.
- 04-00:17:36
Meeker: So they've moved away from organizations to issues.
- 04-00:17:38
Corvin: They've moved away from an allocation to a given agency. An agency may receive some money because they're part of let's say preschools or whatever.
- 04-00:18:03
Meeker: How did this then impact the planning function of the United Way to be able to—
- 04-00:18:08
Corvin: It changed it completely, dissolved it really. And it's done in a different way now.
- 04-00:18:18
Meeker: Well, how then does the United Way do the planning element? How do they then I guess identify—
- 04-00:18:24
Corvin: I really can't, I'm not close enough today, but all I can say is they've taken these four issues, for instance. I wish I could remember.
- 04-00:18:39
Meeker: Okay, that's fine.
- 04-00:18:42
Corvin: You'll give me a pass.
- 04-00:18:42
Meeker: I'll give you a pass. Let's see. What else was there that we wanted to talk about?
- 04-00:18:49
Corvin: Well, let me just give you one other example. When you're around for so long and you have the opportunity of working with different agencies—and fortunately at a leadership role—you get involved in some issues that are very

complex and sometimes change national. When we had our earthquake I had just finished my presidency of American Red Cross of the Bay Area.

04-00:19:25

Meeker:

And this was in 1989 Loma Prieta?

04-00:19:27

Corvin:

And during my presidency the goal was to combine the six chapters throughout the Bay Area, which we did. When the Loma Prieta earthquake came, I became aware of all these checks coming in marked American Red Cross Bay Area. So I felt that those were checks that individual donors had determined they wanted to provide for the Bay Area. We were extremely fortunate in our fundraising at that time. Red Cross felt that all funds that came in for the earthquake should go to national, which was always their policy. And we fought that. It was not happy days for this chapter and national. And it was after San Francisco Foundation had had their big fight with Marin Community Foundation. Not San Francisco—Marin Community Foundation had had—questioned about distributing money beyond Marin County. You're aware of that.

04-00:21:25

Meeker:

Yeah. But maybe you want to provide a little background into—

04-00:21:32

Corvin:

Well, not really, except that they wanted to distribute beyond Marin County due to the tremendous growth of assets of the Buck Trust and because they felt the needs were greater beyond Marin County. At that particular time it was felt that Mrs. Buck had requested that those funds be within Marin County; the courts held distribution to Marin County. Similarly, we felt that the wishes of Red Cross donors who had said "the Bay Area" should be respected and benefit the Bay Area. The national policy was changed.

04-00:22:08

Meeker:

Was there a lawsuit involved?

04-00:22:10

Corvin:

No there was not.

04-00:22:11

Meeker:

It was a policy change.

04-00:22:15

Corvin:

It was a policy change and it was a very important move. It was a matter of principle as far as we were concerned. On the other hand, as far as American Red Cross was concerned, they have to respond to emergencies throughout the country, and in some cases the emergencies are more costly than what they receive. And we'd received in excess of what we needed. Those funds were designated strictly for emergency. We attempted to set up a process where a family who had been affected by the earthquake could go to one location and get all the different services they needed. And after the earthquake we also

recognized that many families who had had a traumatic experience were in need of counseling over a long period of time, and there was a need in some cases, where there had been injuries, for health care. As a result, those funds were really distributed in a cooperative way. Around the table you had public departments, as well as nonprofits from all religions, Catholic Charities, Federation, et cetera. Red Cross wasn't happy with this.

04-00:24:53

Meeker:

It sounds almost like you were introducing the United Way model of more local control, a weaker national model, into the work of the Red Cross in this particular instance.

04-00:25:10

Corvin:

It was strictly on one basis that we were recognizing what the donor had requested. And we had some huge donations—for example, we had million-dollar contributions from various corporations and from overseas. Japanese respond to an earthquake instantly because of what they've experienced. Anyway it was another unusual incident along the way of my career in the nonprofit world.

04-00:26:18

Meeker:

Do you recall what resources you used or arguments you used to basically win this battle?

04-00:26:25

Corvin:

Strictly the idea of donor—it's a donor's prerogative as to where he or she wishes to direct his money, and it's to be respected. There were a few of us that were able to encourage Red Cross not to have a lawsuit.

04-00:27:33

Meeker:

So was it resolved at this meeting?

04-00:27:36

Corvin:

No, it went beyond that meeting.

04-00:27:38

Meeker:

To what extent did the experience of creating the donor option in the context of the United Way play into your belief in following donor wishes?

04-00:27:54

Corvin:

It is just being honest. Donor option did not have an effect on this. Donor's wishes are to be respected. There's no question about it. If you look at philanthropic funds at JCF, if you look at a contribution to JCF that wants to direct part of their gift to whatever, that's your obligation to carry through. Charitable dollars are very precious. And people for the most part do not give them carelessly. They give them with great thought. I feel if one is to expect or hope to build a relationship, there's no question honesty is the number one factor that's going to be helpful in that process.

04-00:29:02

Meeker:

Before we move on to the next topic, I did want to get your perspective on another one of these changes you mentioned. That was also the entry of women into the workforce and the way that that changed the volunteer component of the United Way.

04-00:29:16

Corvin:

Volunteer opportunities for a young woman became available for the most part as soon as your children went to school. There was PTA or a Mothers Club. And even though they may not have been aware, they were really training you for future community work. Schools had carnivals and food sales and lots of additional activities. They did two things. They made you closer to the school. They built friendships, which are not being built today, and built community. In my experience as a mother, I lived in the neighborhood, and got to know the parents of the youngsters and all. That's not happening today. So that was one factor. So from the very, very beginning, if a mother did go back to work right away or was at work prior to their child going to school, they're not going to be part of the treadmill that we went through.

And then from there, then you had your youth groups. Campfire Girls, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, in which parents were involved with leadership. They too had a place in training how to carry out meetings, how to delegate authority, how to divide up a task. So there was—without you knowing it, you were part of this training, and in the meantime, meeting more parents, being involved in community, and having a broader view beyond your household.

Then if you so chose or really if you were asked, you started being on boards. From there if you went into something like United Way—and I don't know if I'm repeating myself—you got your master's degree in community—you really got a larger view. It wasn't just your school. It wasn't just at junior high level, a larger area, or in high school still broader. It was a whole total community you were living in.

And when women are working, even if they're working part-time, in addition, they still were running their house. With divorce it meant there was more financial pressure in some cases. And so it changed the picture. Also the volunteer support within agencies was no longer there. Corporations became a little more aware of volunteer support and gave employees free time to participate in specific projects. But it just changed the focus completely. Did a woman really want to give her time versus having the opportunity of building a career? When many saw far more divorce occurring, did they want to get stuck at fifty-five without a career? So there were all kinds of all the changes of the social scene. The family structure was changing. And the working opportunities were changing too. Women were better educated, with a career in mind, very often in law or medicine, which was not really available at my age. You just didn't even think in those terms because—or at least most of us didn't. So the number of people, the tasks that were going to be done, the

stuffing of envelopes, which of course don't even have to be done today because of the—I want to say mechanical age we're living in—so it's all different.

04-00:34:41

Meeker:

Well, then how did an organization like the United Way respond to the changing—I guess really the decrease in the number of women who were on the volunteer nonprofit track?

04-00:34:54

Corvin:

Well, United Way was unique because you always had a corporate CEO at the head serving as the chair. And in its history here in San Francisco you've only had two women as chairmen. I don't know when Leslie Luttgens served, but when I was invited to be chair it was because somebody couldn't be chair at the last minute. So United Way, in one way, probably wasn't affected quite as much as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, or a small agency that needed people to fill in, or maybe even hospitals where they had women on the floor bringing things to patients, magazines, or whatever.

04-00:36:26

Meeker:

So what you're saying is that United Way was always a more professional model of staffing as opposed to these other organizations that really—

04-00:36:33

Corvin:

No, not in staffing. I'm talking about volunteer structure. Volunteer structure, really they were made up of more of the corporate world.

04-00:36:41

Meeker:

Whereas these other organizations relied much more on volunteers.

04-00:36:45

Corvin:

Right.

04-00:36:45

Meeker:

Well, then maybe take another one of these organizations that you were involved with for a number of years such as Campfire Girls or another, maybe one of the hospitals, and maybe describe how an organization like that that previously relied immensely on the volunteer work of women changed when that free labor pool to a certain extent started to if not dry up at least decline.

04-00:37:13

Corvin:

Well, let's start with the hospital field. One does not stay in the hospital as long as they used to. And when you're in the hospital you're far sicker. So you don't want volunteers around. As a result, the role of the volunteer has changed within the hospital field. You'll have somebody who will man the desk of the waiting room where family members are waiting for someone to get out of surgery. You'll have possibly a couple in the gift shop. But it's different. We used to serve in a lunchroom for doctors, wait on the doctors. We had a lunchroom which was like who was on—Lucy. Reminded me of one of the Lucy shows—I would be working with another volunteer—we

didn't know what we were doing. And making lunch, serving and making change—it was a disaster. But it was fun, and you built relationships this way, and you also built a very strong allegiance to that agency. It takes a lot of staff time to train and to incorporate a volunteer structure within any agency. So as a result, it's different today. Many agencies still need volunteers and still use volunteers, but to have a volunteer program of any size at all, you have to have a coordinator of volunteers with training and some very fine skills.

04-00:39:26

Meeker:

What about an organization like Campfire Girls? Were you there at the time that they would have experienced that change?

04-00:39:32

Corvin:

Well, there was time of a change. We became very, very aware that there were certain areas that could carry on the same way, or would, because mothers wanted to do this, or saw fit to do it. And we became aware that areas such as let's say Bayview Hunters Point would not have the manpower or womanpower to have leaders. So then what was thought of, we brought the leaders in. That wasn't very successful. Another thing is not only have the mothers changed, but the children have changed. Many children are so over programmed today that they have soccer three days a week and they might have piano another day and another day they might have Sunday school or some kind of religious training or a foreign language. Every day is something.

04-00:42:18

Meeker:

So we'll certainly come back to more of this discussion of foundations and nonprofit work in subsequent interviews. But I want to spend the last fifteen or twenty minutes today getting a sense of you building your family.

04-00:42:32

Corvin:

Okay, my own family?

04-00:42:33

Meeker:

Your own family.

04-00:42:33

Corvin:

My own family.

04-00:42:33

Meeker:

Yeah because this is something else you were doing at the same time that you were doing a lot of this work. So can you tell me when your first child was born and—

04-00:42:43

Corvin:

Yes, we had three children, Dana, Stuart, and Scott. Two years apart. It was a busy household. We were very lucky, all healthy, all good students. Everyone took piano lessons at some time in their life. They had active lives in Campfire Girls for my daughter and Boy Scouts for the boys. Both became Eagle Scouts. Both belonged to Troop 17, as my husband had and when they first became Scouts had the same Scout Master, Pie Myer from my husband's

day. And Pie Myer was a most unusual Boy Scout leader, and my boys were privileged to know him.

04-00:43:50

Meeker: Why do you say that?

04-00:43:50

Corvin: He deemed that every Scout that he had in his troop would become an Eagle. That takes great determination, lots of time, et cetera. Through the war he kept in touch with every boy overseas who had been in his troop. He always found a way of getting the right address. So that kind of an experience is good stuff.

04-00:44:20

Meeker: What do you think your three kids got out of the Scouts and the Campfire Girls?

04-00:44:25

Corvin: Well, I don't think they really particularly cared about becoming Eagles, speaking for my two sons, and that's always dangerous anyway, speaking for your children. But they liked it when it went on college applications. And one son is very active with his son today in Scouts. My other son lives in Mill Valley and they don't seem to be as active in Boy Scouts. It just depends where you live I guess. But Will, my grandson, who's in Scouts, takes it very seriously, and is very proud of it. So who knows? We look forward to him being an Eagle someday. They live in Piedmont. It's an unusual Boy Scout troop. And in fact I was really surprised at high school graduation how they acknowledged graduates who had become Eagles. Campfire Girls was a little different. Part of the time I was a leader, and I tried to do things that my daughter and I wouldn't normally do. And on many occasions got into a little trouble.

04-00:45:51

Meeker: Like?

04-00:45:51

Corvin: Baking. I'm not a baker, unfortunately. And tried to bake pies. Anyway it was a little disastrous, but we all survived.

04-00:46:04

Meeker: And this was in order to get some sort of recognition within the—

04-00:46:08

Corvin: One of the things was baking. If I recall, it was Washington's Birthday, so we baked cherry pies. Somehow, cayenne pepper got into the pie. Did not make the most successful pie that they had ever—but we had fun. And camping in my judgment was very important. Very important to me, very important to my husband. My husband was part of [Camp] Tawonga, had counseled there for a number of years, and went for the whole summer.

04-00:46:55

Meeker:

What do you think it is—did your kids latch on to camping? Did they enjoy it and do they continue to do it?

04-00:47:01

Corvin:

Yes. We have a very close group of friends in Berkeley, and they were campers, and as a family we went camping with them. We were the novices. The trouble we got into! But it was a wonderful experience. We went to Tahoe and Yosemite. Each family had three children, so there were nine kids. Those friendships you can't duplicate, as far as I'm concerned.

04-00:47:56

Meeker:

I wonder. I didn't grow up in a family that went camping, so—but it seems to me the way that people describe it was that oftentimes it was a couple families or a group of families that would go together. And something happens in camping that doesn't happen in everyday life, and that's for lack of a better word a communal sharing of domestic things, like cooking and doing dishes and making tents and building fires.

04-00:48:28

Corvin:

And playing games like crazy and things like that. We really had a good time. We had awards at the end of the camping season for the best camper, the best hiker, the best everything. It's a learning experience. Another thing is you never thought about not being safe. You had to protect your things from the bears—*that* you were aware of. But beyond that you could go and come as you pleased. So those were wonderful days. Growing up, I was never an athlete. I made sure to expose them to more things than I had the opportunity to try. When they were very young, they started swimming lessons out at Fleischhacker Pool at eight o'clock in the morning. So these skinny little bodies would go in that big pool, and I'd bring them home and put them in the hot shower, and they survived. They became excellent swimmers and swam for their school teams.

04-00:49:59

Meeker:

Was that pool heated?

04-00:49:59

Corvin:

Not at that time.

04-00:50:03

Meeker:

Okay, because I've always wondered. It was out there in the freezing outer reaches of San Francisco and it's huge and—

04-00:50:09

Corvin:

I don't know, it was so huge, it could never have been heated. But we lived out that way. So anyway and the kids, they were pretty good athletes all the way around. They're still good skiers. One son is a windsurfer. I keep saying, "I think you're getting too old for this." But he still goes every year with a group of men to Hawaii and they windsurf, and their wives let them go. I can't quite understand it, but they're still doing it. When I finally found out who

goes, I'm very impressed. But it's interesting. So they've enjoyed sports all along. Golf and all, and tennis and all the rest.

04-00:50:59

Meeker:

You said that they did well in school. I wonder, a lot of times parents have trouble motivating their kids to do well in academics. And can you think of anything that you or your husband did, any values you communicated to them, that might have helped them in that regard?

04-00:51:17

Corvin:

When we grew up, you were just supposed to do well. When our children went to school, I think we just expected them to do well. There were three of them at one time in one school, so you couldn't get away with very much, because somebody was somebody's sister or brother. Everybody knew each other. I think we were lucky. The pressure that was put on students at that time was different than today. The pressure today is out of hand.

04-00:52:09

Meeker:

Pressure to achieve or pressure from—

04-00:52:11

Corvin:

To achieve. And all of us aren't the best. Unfortunately we could do better, but we're sometimes not endowed with as much as we might be intellectually.

Our kids did well. At that point another thing is you didn't rush to have your kids go all over the country to school. I don't know if our kids applied anyplace but the University of California. Dana graduated UC Berkeley. Stuart graduated from UC Davis. Scott went to Davis and Berkeley. And then he went to Northwestern Dental School. Dana went to San Francisco State, which was the first place that offered a master's degree in special education for the educationally handicapped. She then taught high school in San Francisco to the educationally handicapped.

04-00:54:30

Meeker:

As adults, have they participated in any philanthropic or nonprofit organizations?

04-00:54:39

Corvin:

My daughter is very involved in volunteer activities. Scott [volunteers with] Boy Scouts now, and a little bit in the Piedmont schools. And Stuart has [volunteered], to a lesser degree. Not of lack of interest. More in his boys' activity of soccer up to this point.

04-00:55:22

Meeker:

There have been a lot of leaders of the JCF involved that are involved as a second or third generation of family member involved in the organization like that. When your kids were growing up was there anything you remember specifically teaching them about philanthropic work or community work? Or more by example I guess.

04-00:55:44

Corvin:

Actually, Bill didn't come home with business, and I didn't come home with my community work. I can remember Stuart saying why are you always on the phone, and why aren't you paid for it if you're on the phone? I don't know how much they were aware or not aware of my involvement. But it worked out for me.

04-00:56:34

Meeker:

Okay, good. Well, we've reached the hour mark again.

Interview 3: 01-31-08
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05-00:00:00

Meeker: Today is the 31st of January, 2008, and this is interview session number three with Adele Corvin for the Jewish Community Federation Project, and I think last time we spent a good deal of the time talking about your involvement in various of the area nonprofits, particularly United Way, but also several other organizations. Camp Fire Girls and so forth. And while you certainly were involved in a number of the other area nonprofits that we have yet to discuss, I think that it makes sense now to move onto your work at the Jewish Community Federation, and we can talk about your participation with that organization, let's say, in the years leading up to your presidency beginning in 2002. So I know that you were involved for many, many years in a whole variety of different capacities, and according to your bio, some of those included, in the '80s, chairperson of the allocations committee, chairperson of the capital planning committee, then in the early '90s, chairperson of the women's endowment committee, then further on, a member of the capital planning endowment fund.

05-00:01:36

Corvin: Let's go back.

05-00:01:37

Meeker: OK, all right.

05-00:01:40

Corvin: Because I think some of those are incorrect.

05-00:01:42

Meeker: OK.

05-00:01:44

Corvin: OK. It goes back so far, I can't even remember.

05-00:01:57

Meeker: Yes.

05-00:01:57

Corvin: It's the allocations committee of endowment fund.

05-00:02:15

Meeker: You know, maybe it makes sense to get your description, sort of objective as possible, of the organizational structure, if you will, of JCF, because it's a little confusing and actually, after reading through previous oral history interviews, there are very few people who try to unravel the complexity of the organization.

05-00:02:39

Corvin: It is complex.

05-00:02:40

Meeker:

And so, you know, if you could maybe just provide a narrative description of the organizational structure, and then from that point in time, then you can go in and talk about the various facets that you participate in.

05-00:02:55

Corvin:

Where I fit in.

05-00:02:56

Meeker:

Yes.

05-00:02:58

Corvin:

JCF geographically covers the area of Sonoma, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties. The Board (of 50-60 members) is responsible for policy setting and all decisions made for the agency. Key responsibilities include the annual campaign, planning, and allocation of funds, serving affiliate groups such as YAD, LBGT, Women's Alliance, Russian Leadership Development, et cetera. The Endowment Committee is responsible for fundraising for restricted endowment funds (allocated for emergency needs and for seed funding of new projects), establishing new donor-advised funds, and supporting foundations and other philanthropic vehicles available through JCF. (Over the last years there has been tremendous growth in JCF restricted funds.) All endowment recommendations must be approved by the overall Board of Directors.

05-00:05:52

Meeker:

Yes. So let's go back to the larger structure. So in essence, when we talk about the Jewish Community Federation, we're talking about two related but separate organizations, one the Jewish Community Endowment and one the Jewish Community Federation?

05-00:06:07

Corvin:

It is one organization.

05-00:06:13

Meeker:

Presided over by one board of directors?

05-00:06:14

Corvin:

Exactly.

05-00:06:26

Meeker:

So the idea with the endowment is that is the arm that focuses on, in essence, raising the endowment for the organization and those are then the unrestricted funds that can then be used in the projects funded by the Jewish Community Federation overall?

05-00:06:42

Corvin:

Yes, and in addition, soliciting funds from donors to establish dono-radvised funds, supporting foundations, et cetera.

- 05-00:06:43
Meeker: Special projects?
- 05-00:06:44
Corvin: Emergency funding and seed funding for new projects.
- 05-00:07:34
Meeker: So these foundations, they are a part of the endowment or they're entirely separate?
- 05-00:07:40
Corvin: The foundations are part of Endowment, thus part of Federation as a whole.
- 05-00:07:44
Meeker: They're hosted by it?
- 05-00:07:46
Corvin: Funds are transferred to JCF.
- 05-00:07:55
Meeker: OK. So these would be different then, for instance, say like one of the Haas Foundations in San Francisco, which is entirely independent from JCF. These foundations that are part of—that, I guess, are hosted by the endowment have a very close affiliation with and...
- 05-00:08:17
Corvin: Each supporting foundation has a Board of Directors including two of three representatives from Federation.
- 05-00:08:46
Meeker: So let's take, for example, like the new Google foundation. They have to hire a rather large staff to determine where the money is going to go and so forth, but with the endowment, the foundations that are somewhat affiliated with that don't necessarily need that staff because that expertise is provided by the Federation.
- 05-00:09:08
Corvin: Right. Today there is a fee charged for administration of donor-advised and supporting foundations.
- 05-00:09:17
Meeker: To administer the—
- 05-00:09:17
Corvin: To cover administration.
- 05-00:09:21
Meeker: So you said this is a facet of the organization that has grown immensely since your involvement with the organization.
- 05-00:09:29
Corvin: The unrestricted funds.

- 05-00:09:32
Meeker: When do you date your involvement to the organization, roughly?
- 05-00:09:36
Corvin: I guess when I was maybe 30.
- 05-00:09:41
Meeker: OK. So back in the '50s.
- 05-00:09:41
Corvin: So it was 55 years ago.
- 05-00:09:43
Meeker: And what capacity did you work with the organization then?
- 05-00:09:47
Corvin: Most probably through the Women's Division, now called the Women's Alliance.
- 05-00:09:57
Meeker: A ladies auxiliary or something?
- 05-00:09:58
Corvin: Yes, but it really was the jumping off point. At that time, they had leadership training. It was an important arm of the Federation, and then from there, I'd been fortunate in being asked to participate at other levels.
- 05-00:10:25
Meeker: So just sort of sitting back and taking the mile high view of the Federation in the 55 years, in essence, that you've been involved in it... And you've mentioned one important change was the growth of the endowments and how that has contributed to the unrestricted funds available for funding projects? Is that right?
- 05-00:10:50
Corvin: It's the other way around. I would say it has increased the importance and capacity of the Federation to respond to philanthropists needs. It's the other way around.
- 05-00:11:12
Meeker: Yes. Figures are available in the board of director minutes.
- 05-00:11:15
Corvin: They're available. They're overwhelming as far as, in the last few years, when you see the amount of money that had been distributed to the Jewish general community from these endowment funds.
- 05-00:11:42
Meeker: So in addition to the growth of the endowment, can you think of maybe three or four big changes in the organization from your perspective?

05-00:11:55

Corvin:

Well, there have been many. First of all, the increase in annual campaign giving has certainly increased. The development and the establishment of Israel has certainly been a tremendous focus through UJC, the National Organization, being able to respond throughout the world to the needs of Jewish populations has been extremely important during the last 50 years. I would say that the recognition of helping refugees who've arrived in our community has been a primary concern of our Federation, and the specific services have been provided by agencies that we have supported.

05-00:13:03

Meeker:

Has there been any change in leadership, in the kind of people leading the organization?

05-00:13:07

Corvin:

Well, first of all, the Federation now covers a larger area. We are very sensitive to have representation from all areas and to be aware of the new needs. And as such, just within the last five years, a study was undertaken for our community to see the changes that have taken place.

05-00:13:41

Meeker:

And that was during your term of presidency?

05-00:13:45

Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:13:43

Meeker:

Yes. We'll talk about that a little bit more later. So those are certainly all topics that we'll cover —perhaps touch on today and probably spend some more time focusing on next time that we meet. So I'm wondering... I know that you don't like to do the chronological thing or dates or that sort of stuff, and that's fine. I'm just hoping that we can...

05-00:14:10

Corvin:

Pin it down.

05-00:14:10

Meeker:

Well, not pin —without the pressure of pinning it down.

05-00:14:15

Corvin:

OK.

05-00:14:15

Meeker:

I'd like to just hear you talk about the extent of your involvement in JCF, let's say in the years prior to your presidency. And we don't necessarily have to go in any chronological order or pin down dates, but, you know, just have you describe for me the different projects that you've worked on, the different positions that you've held in that organization.

- 05-00:14:49
Corvin: My volunteer involvement in JCF began in approximately 1954 as a member of the Women's Division, the JCF Board, chairman of the allocations committee of the Endowment Fund, chairman of various subcommittees, and then President of the Board of Directors from July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2004.
- 05-00:15:30
Meeker: Well, maybe you could explain for me: you said that you worked in the allocation of funds in JCF, but only through endowment, not through another facet?
- 05-00:15:42
Corvin: Not through the campaign. We have an annual campaign. We raise X number of dollars a year.
- 05-00:15:53
Meeker: Yes. So I think during your period it was around \$20 million.
- 05-00:15:55
Corvin: Exactly. The Board of Directors designates a percentage that is allocated to overhead and to UJC and the balance is allocated to local and a few national agencies by a large allocations committee.
- 05-00:16:37
Meeker: So the notion of that 20 million —there's a certain percentage that will annually go to Israel and this is a way in which many people, through the annual campaign, make their donation to Israel.
- 05-00:16:53
Corvin: Yes.
- 05-00:17:47
Meeker: And agencies are domestic service providers?
- 05-00:17:49
Corvin: Local.
- 05-00:17:50
Meeker: Local, OK.
- 05-00:17:50
Corvin: Local for the most part. There are a few national agencies, but the bulk of our dollars go to local agencies, such as Jewish Family Service, Jewish Vocational Services, the Jewish Community Centers, of which there are a number in our area, Marin, San Francisco, Foster City, and Palo Alto. Those are the key ones. And then, in addition, an arm of the Federation is Jewish Community Relations Council. They're working on the relationship with city departments, such as health, police, school, and responding to specific needs in the Jewish community.

05-00:18:55

Meeker:

So to what extent has the annual fund allocation remained fairly constant over the years or changed in reference to who are the beneficiaries and the percentage of the annual campaign funds they're getting?

05-00:19:18

Corvin:

Unfortunately, our campaign has not grown to the extent that it can fulfill all the dollar needs of the agencies. I believe that non-profit agencies found that in order to increase new services for the new societal needs (for example, services needed for immigrants, the gay community, foster youth, the changing family structure), additional funds would be needed. Up to this period, United Way and Jewish Community Federation fulfilled a major portion of agency financial needs.

Non-profit agencies sought new funding through government grants and additional foundation grants. In order to take advantage of these new funding through government grants and additional foundation grants. In order to take advantage of these new funding streams, both staff and board members needed special training. This resulted in non-profit agencies establishing developmental divisions or departments. Their responsibility was to develop the needed skills to become successful in approaching individual donors, city, state, and federal agencies, and foundations for additional support.

In addition, there is a trend in the last number of years that many philanthropists prefer to donate directly to an agency or for a specific program rather than through an umbrella agency such as JCF. Thus this has been a new challenge.

05-00:21:17

Meeker:

You saw that happen with the United Way, as well?

05-00:21:19

Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:21:19

Meeker:

OK. So there's been, in other words, a shift among philanthropists, or just people who give on a regular basis to specific agencies as opposed to Federation's that will then distribute their funds.

05-00:21:31

Corvin:

For some. And it hasn't been across the board. I think some philanthropists are overlooking the value of the community planning and collaboration that the Federation provides, and also the overview of, and impact on, of the total community needs.

05-00:22:19

Meeker:

So as far as the allocations of the annual campaign funds over the long sweep, you know, would you say that in general the organization's that we're

receiving, the bulk of the funds in the '50s and '60s, remained the organizations that receive the bulk of the funds today?

05-00:22:37

Corvin: In recent years we've seen the establishment of Jewish private schools.

05-00:22:46

Meeker: OK. The day schools.

05-00:22:47

Corvin: The day schools. That has been due to, most probably, and I hate to say this because I'm an advocate of public schools, the demise of our public schools, particularly in large cities. It's been a difficult trend. And you see today, in our community, many people who are dedicated to the establishment of Jewish schools, and therefore seeking funds through Federation. That's a whole new field of service, you might say, that's been added. Also, over the past 50 years, we've had the refugee problem I mentioned. In some cases, it's been the established agencies that have extended services. The Jewish Home has provided their needs in that area. Jewish Family Services has broadened their base of programs to have specific programs directed to that population. So it's really the change of the face of our total community that has caused the change with our agencies

05-00:24:01

Meeker: So with the increase, then, of this whole new area, fund Jewish day schools and the increase of need around refugees, have there simultaneously been areas that previously were funded that are no longer funded or are not seen as high a priority, that don't need as much funding as they previously did?

05-00:24:20

Corvin: JCF finds it very difficult to drop any agencies. If we look through the books, we'll find there have been a few instances, but there haven't been too many. In some cases, other agencies have picked up the service, but there hasn't been a major drop of anything, because the very needs of the Jewish community unfortunately have not been resolved. The needs are still there.

05-00:24:53

Meeker: Well, I don't necessarily mean to be devil's advocate, but I think about, you know, the 60 years since the establishment of the State of Israel, for instance, and the end of World War II, and I imagine an organization like JCRC, the community relations council, was immensely important in a period in which, say, discrimination employment against Jewish people in San Francisco perhaps would have been a greater problem than it would be today. Does an organization, for instance, that deals with issues like that, do they have a harder time making their case today than maybe they would have 50 years ago?

05-00:25:40

Corvin:

Unfortunately not. In a JCC in Seattle and [also] in Southern California a few years ago, an individual went on a shooting spree, injuring some children and staff. This brought to our awareness the need for additional security of our Jewish agencies and synagogues. With the leadership and financial support of Federation, funds were allocated to JCRC to determine the need of each institution and to allocate funds accordingly. The federal government also became our partner in supplying funds.

In addition, there are some instances where teachers in our public schools have a bias against Israel. Our interest is that a fair, objective view be presented to every student. So JCRC worked directly with students and superintendents to see if that could be accomplished.

In the last few years, JCRC undertook the Jewish Coalition for Literacy program in our public schools. Today there are more than 500 volunteers throughout our public schools helping students in the fourth grade to read. It is recognized that unless a student reads by fourth grade, he or she will not succeed in school

And unfortunately there has been a need to work with our state college campuses due to incidents involving Israel and Palestine.

JCRC also take stands on specific issues such as employment, et cetera, to make certain that not only the Jewish population but every ethnic group is treated fairly.

In fact, most probably, JCRC plays a broader role in our community today.

05-00:30:04

Meeker:

Yes. That's extremely helpful and I'm going to ask a follow-up question now that you may or may not feel comfortable in answering. But it's interesting to think about this notion of the continuing need of an organization like JCRC, especially vis-à-vis the expansion of JCF and preceded by that, one would presume, a concentrated Jewish community throughout the Bay Area.

05-00:30:35

Corvin:

Well, we the JCRC and the JCF work very, very closely together. Up until last year they raised one hundred percent of all their funds through JCF. In the last two years, maybe three at most, they have sought private contributions and also, for the JCL, the literacy program, they've sought foundation funding. But up to that point, it's been part—you almost can say part of JCF, even though it had a separate board.

05-00:32:01

Meeker:

Well, what I'm getting at is that we look at what the experience is of people growing up, or even adults in other parts of the Bay Area, is that it might be

different than someone who grew up in San Francisco. Over the past 40 years the demographics of the Bay Area has changed remarkably: so the historic nature of anti-Semitism being in one aspect an intra-European import. You see what I'm getting at? I wonder with new immigration not being the sort of age-old conflicts that date back to Europe, but now very modern or global interactions between Jews and people from Southeast Asia or China or Jews and people from South America and Mexico. Has anti-Semitism changed? Or is it the same sort of dynamic going on?

05-00:33:35
Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:33:36
Meeker:

OK. So you had mentioned that your involvement around allocation was not as part of the allocation of annual campaign funds, but allocation dealing with the endowment. Is that correct?

05-00:35:39
Corvin:

Right.

05-00:35:39
Meeker:

We spent some time talking about how allocation happened around the annual campaign. How did it differ in the context of the endowment?

05-00:35:48
Corvin:

The unrestricted endowment funds are far less than allocating campaign funds.

05-00:35:56
Meeker:

You said less?

05-00:35:58
Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:36:11
Meeker:

Sure.

05-00:36:12
Corvin:

If you do not include philanthropic fund allocations, or supporting foundations, and just look at the unrestricted endowment, it's a modest amount by comparison to the campaign. Endowment unrestricted funds are primarily for seed funding of new programs and emergencies.

05-00:37:04
Meeker:

Actually, I think this project is from the unrestricted endowment fund, so...

05-00:37:09
Corvin:

So it's all sorts of projects that do not come within the campaign structure or are really beyond what campaign can respond to.

- 05-00:37:35
Meeker: Is that because the campaign is responding to or trying to serve the continuous needs?
- 05-00:37:44
Corvin: In one way. But, you know, there's never enough money. I mean, no matter how much we would raise in a campaign, unfortunately, it's not enough. But the endowment is really on a smaller scale, and sometimes with the — responding more to emergencies or providing new seed funding to get something off the ground. That funding, only to continue for one to three years, and then to become part of the structure of campaign, if it's appropriate.
- 05-00:38:26
Meeker: So the idea of seed funding is really paramount to what the endowment does?
- 05-00:38:31
Corvin: It's seed and emergency funding.
- 05-00:38:33
Meeker: OK. Are there any particularly memorable projects that you've funded through the Endowment?
- 05-00:38:42
Corvin: Well, many have been exciting. I can't think offhand of anything in particular. The exciting part is you're looking at programs with a creative way to respond to a new need. That, to me, is always worth exploring. The Endowment has also been able to respond to some capital needs. We've certainly seen the many capital projects that have benefited from Endowment over the last few years in our community—the JCCs, some of the schools, to a minor extent, and the Jewish Home and the new Jewish Museum.
- 05-00:39:50
Meeker: Offhand, can you think of any projects that were funded through the Endowment as seed and then later went on to be continuously funded through—
- 05-00:40:02
Corvin: Oh, there are a number.
- 05-00:40:03
Meeker: There are?
- 05-00:40:03
Corvin: There are an endless number, because these projects themselves were recognized as really [meeting] a key need. Whether the agencies themselves chose to modify a program within their normal activity or to seek additional funding outside of Federation or use some of Federation's money, that was their decision.

05-00:40:34

Meeker:

So what was the process by which projects were approved for funding in the context of endowment?

05-00:40:42

Corvin:

Projects would come to endowment, be reviewed by Endowment subcommittees, then the total committee, and then finally be approved by the total JCF board. The process within the last couple of years has been that the projects would also be reviewed by the appropriate Federation allocation committees to see if it really fits within our structure, exemplifying our attempt to have a closer relationship between Endowment and campaign today.

05-00:41:25

Meeker:

Is that the result of perhaps some projects being funded and then later on there was a question about the relationship of them to the mission?

05-00:41:34

Corvin:

People have sensed, just as you indicated, that Endowment was completely separate. What we're attempting to do is that all proposals come through the one door.

05-00:42:04

Meeker:

Again, this may be too specific, but can you think of any instances when you were on the Endowment allocation committee in which maybe there was like a serious debate about the relevance of one project to be funded or not? I guess I'm kind of interested in like what the lines were between what was appropriate and what wasn't.

05-00:42:24

Corvin:

Before proposals were presented to the committee, a great deal of work and thought had already taken place. The committee members might have had a difference of opinion as far as the amount of money, and in some cases, a grant was denied. But much of the work was done before. So overall I think that's been the question of who had the authority to bring those things to the table.

05-00:43:01

Meeker:

OK. So there was a vetting process before it was even reviewed?

05-00:43:04

Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:43:09

Meeker:

I see from your résumé that you participated in a number of like women's committees and so forth in the context of JCF. And I'm wondering if you can help give me a sense of the relative place of women in the organization over the 50 years in which you've been involved. Have women moved from the margin to the center? Is there still a desire to, you know, move into leadership roles, but also keep a separate voice through various committees. You know, I

mean, during that 50 years, we've seen a feminist revolution, and the vast entry of women into the workplace and all sorts of jobs, and I'm kind of wondering how that history played out in the context of JCF from when you started.

05-00:44:03

Corvin:

Well, let's start at the top. As far as JCF is concerned, throughout the country, there has never been a woman exec. So that speaks to one aspect of it. Within our Federation, there have been four women presidents.

05-00:44:24

Meeker:

When you say women exec, you mean like an executive director?

05-00:44:26

Corvin:

Yes.

05-00:44:28

Meeker:

OK. Never across the country?

05-00:44:32

Corvin:

Never across the country. And it's been a concern.

05-00:44:42

Meeker:

How many JCFs are there across the country? Roughly? Dozens?

05-00:44:47

Corvin:

I'm not even going to venture a guess.

05-00:45:01

Meeker:

Well, I mean, that's a very short answer, but...

05-00:45:05

Corvin:

Well, the Women's Division or Alliance is still very active within the Federation.

05-00:48:38

Meeker:

Is that a way of saying that perhaps one result of the vibrancy of the separate women's committee is that —because there is sort of a separateness that doesn't give those people who are active on that an opportunity to be recognized in the larger organization?

05-00:49:02

Corvin:

There are. In some cases, it's a stepping stone. Some people are going to be recognized and others aren't.

05-00:49:26

Meeker:

Yes. Well, let me just think about it historically, and maybe you can respond. Historians talk about, I guess, two traditions of women seeking a measure of power or agency in history. One is the sort of model of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and those folks who, you know, wanted the right of women to vote, the right of women to participate in politics in the public sphere, the right of

women to work alongside men, and then there's —then there's like the —you know, the sort of women's Christian temperance movement, who wanted women to not necessarily participate in politics, but to kind of have their own separate organizations in which they can sort of influence the male sphere through sort of superior morality and those sorts of issues. And so one is kind of like —to a certain extent, a separatist notion by which, you know, women can achieve a measure of power sort of by organizing on their own, and then one is women can achieve a measure of power by seeking to participate on the same level as men. I guess in the history of JCF, it sounds to me like most of the energies of women were in the temperance union way as opposed to let's integrate into the power structure.

05-00:51:03
Corvin:

In our Federation there have always been many women volunteers participating on all the committees and Board. The Women's Division or Alliance has been extremely effective in bringing newcomers into Federation, and has served as a stepping stone to additional appointments throughout the Federation structure.

There are more opportunities for women to serve in leadership roles today because many are professionals (accountants, attorneys, psychologists, teachers, et cetera) in their own right, and therefore have the experience to serve on a complex Board such as the Federation.

So I think there's a new ingredient as far as the experience of women. But I don't think the doors were closed.

05-00:53:32
Meeker:

Not to test you here, but I don't know who the first women president of JCF is. Do you recall?

05-00:53:40
Corvin:

Franny Green was the first and then there was Annette Dobbs, Cissie (Roselyne) Swig, and myself. In United Way, it was Leslie Luttgens and myself.

05-00:53:52
Meeker:

OK. I don't know if you were involved at the point that Ms. Green became president, but do you have any insight into...

05-00:54:06
Corvin:

Franny came from a well-known family in our community, an old San Francisco family, so that was one. Annette Dobbs's husband ran for mayor a few times, and Annette was a devoted volunteer. She's earned her stripes, and so did Franny. And Franny's very involved in the total community, as well as JCF. Cissie Swig is a leader unto herself and a very, very capable woman, also from a prestigious family.

05-00:54:58

Meeker:

And you with your United Way background and so forth.

05-00:55:00

Corvin:

Well, in the general community. I think that more important than my presidency in United Way was the development of an Adult Day Health Program in our community, but that's a different story. I've been fortunate. But my career, you might say, has been in the volunteer world.

05-00:55:20

Meeker:

OK. So when, for instance, Ms. Green became president, it...

05-00:55:28

Corvin:

I don't really remember.

05-00:55:29

Meeker:

You don't remember it being a big deal that now JCF has its first women president?

05-00:55:37

Corvin:

Maybe because my mind doesn't go that way.

05-00:55:39

Meeker:

OK, all right.

05-00:55:41

Corvin:

And knowing Franny, it certainly was appropriate that she become president. Her family background, her involvement in the community, her interest in Judaism—there was no question.

05-00:55:49

Meeker:

So from your memory, there was no sense about this being, you know, like a feminist victory?

05-00:55:53

Corvin:

Not to my knowledge.

Begin Audiofile 6

06-00:00:00

Meeker:

Well, of those projects, are there any that you feel like have had a lasting impact or would be, perhaps, helpful for people learning about the history of the organization to understand how those changes were initiated, how they came to pass? So, you know, say the restructuring of JCF, for instance.

06-00:00:24

Corvin:

Well, I think that it's important to recognize that any organization has to constantly be looking at what they're doing; looking at their mission, at the needs of their community, the changes in the community, and also the willingness to change. I think in a large organization such as JCF, and most large organizations that I've been affiliated with, change is most difficult. On

the staff side there is concern for a job after a change, for the volunteer—will there still be a role to play in the future—and for the agencies, there are questions—where and how will Federation allocate funds in the future?

06-00:03:55

Meeker: So studying communities, strategic planning for the needs of the community presently and in the future?

06-00:04:01

Corvin: Right.

06-00:04:29

Meeker: So these community studies, from what I understand, there was obviously one done during your term of presidency. There had previously been community studies, as well.

06-00:04:39

Corvin: Right.

06-00:04:39

Meeker: Were you involved in any of those?

06-00:04:42

Corvin: Most probably, but not a key role. As I mentioned before, there was a study completed shortly after my presidency and the prior study was approximately eight years before. Agencies also worked with Federation to develop a study, thus building a close relationship. This had great value for our community.

06-00:05:19

Meeker: You had mentioned that in advance of being selected as president for JCF, there was an organization that helped identify you as a qualified candidate to be president of JCF. Was that the Adult Day Health?

06-00:05:51

Corvin: I have to speak to the other side of the fence as to why. Undoubtedly, having been president of United Way and American Red Cross and developing Adult Day Health Program certainly was a factor. They knew I was part of the community. My experience within the Federation also played a role.

06-00:06:12

Meeker: Well, we haven't, I guess, discussed your role in developing Adult Day Health. So can you tell me what that organization was?

06-00:06:18

Corvin: Adult Day Health Network was established to develop a system whereby seniors could remain in their own homes rather than living in nursing homes. In 1982 I was approached to help five agencies raise funds to enable each to open a new Adult Day Health Center, strategically located in neighborhoods so seniors could be served in their own neighborhood. I was attracted to the concept because it was the first time that five agencies ranging in size from

Laguna Honda Hospital to Bay View Hunter's Point were willing to work together to accomplish their funding. I was able to approach various foundations (because I had been part of Northern California Grantmakers) and United Way to present this new undertaking. Funders were attracted to the program because it also meant, in addition to seniors receiving rehab and speech and physical therapies, caregivers would be able to go to work three to five days a week while seniors attended a center. Fortunately the project was very successful and is still in existence today. Most probably I am most proud of the development of the Network because it brought new services to seniors. The Network was recognized by the Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, DC, and I had the privilege of working with the dedicated staff who provided the services.

This experience opened a new world for me. I had not been part of the health field. Within my family I had seen aging the way it should be. You just grew older remaining mentally sharp but gradually wearing out physically. Being able to bring services to seniors with no family or no outside support was gratifying. I must acknowledge the support from the foundations and United Way was overwhelming. The reason the Network had been a success is due to a superb staff who chose to work together at the beginning. Most important has been the impact of an improved quality of life for participants who have been able to live in their own homes during the aging process. This is why it has been so exciting to me even after 25 years.

I was able to approach the various foundations, because I had been part of Northern California Grantmakers and was able to bring them all together at United Way. and [United Way] gave us the room to start a project where we would raise funds to establish these centers. The concept was to have a center in every neighborhood, so a senior could be picked up from their home, taken to the center three to five days a week, and be able to [continue to] live at home. I liked the concept of the fundraising part. Service in your own community, meaning that caregivers could go to work and have their loved ones taken care of at the center. So I got involved. We were very successful. On Lok and Mount Zion, who already had day centers, were extremely helpful.

06-00:08:24
Meeker:

Helpful in helping to establish the process and...?

06-00:08:26
Corvin:

In order to open an Adult Day Center one must adhere to strict regulations for facilities and staffing. I am happy to report that we raised funds and opened the centers. Today, 25 years later, there are additional centers with seniors still being served on a daily basis. Cost of services for Med.Cal patients is covered by the state. Unfortunately, Medicare patients are not covered. We raised the money, we opened the centers—this is 25 years later. The centers not only

remain open, but today there are more than 38 additional centers, and people are being served on a daily basis.

06-00:13:14

Meeker: Has this network model been repeated elsewhere?

06-00:13:17

Corvin: We've tried. We went around the country being proponents for it. I'm confident in some areas they have. We were fortunate. United Way gave us staff for the first few years, and that was very helpful. And today, actually, we're even housed in their offices. We pay rent, but we're housed there, which is helpful.

06-00:14:02

Meeker: OK. So we've got about 40 minutes or so left for today and I'd like to actually start talking about your term as president, if you don't mind.

06-00:14:13

Corvin: Fine.

06-00:14:15

Meeker: Obviously, the circumstances under which you became president were not typical. But I wonder when you were asked to become president if you had any trepidation. Because after all, you know, early 2002 was a very difficult time for a whole variety of reasons. It's only a few months after the attacks on 9/11, the Intifada is still going on in Israel, the war in Afghanistan has begun, there's some rumblings about a war in Iraq, there's a recession, there's a beginning of a real estate slump which affects 131 Steuart Street. It's certainly a time of challenge for the Jewish Community Federation, and one might think that any sane person would say, "Thanks but no thanks."

06-00:15:17

Corvin: I think you've answered it.

06-00:15:19

Meeker: Yes.

06-00:15:23

Corvin: It was a very serious decision, one with responsibility, which I recognized. I questioned the judgment of those who asked me, really questioned whether this was such a great decision. And then I decided to do it. There's never a period that's smooth sailing for any organization. I felt I would do my best and beyond that, that was it. I knew the players, you might say. I had the great support of John Goldman, who was the outgoing president, and also I had the support of Dick Rosenberg.

06-00:16:34

Meeker: When you say the great support of someone like John Goldman, do you mean moral support or was he making himself available more substantively?

06-00:16:42

Corvin:

Oh, yes. On both sides. Making himself available, recognizing that each of us have limitations and he would be helpful. I have great respect for the past leadership in Federation and felt a little overawed at what I was doing, and if I should do it, and then, on the other hand, of why not. I mean, they could always get rid of me and I could always resign if it became appropriate. So I did it. I had never worked with Sam Salkin before. I really didn't know him that well. I had not been that close to Federation in that period, other than special short-term assignments and endowment.

06-00:17:37

Meeker:

You hadn't been serving on a committee for a number of years?

06-00:17:40

Corvin:

I'd been off of the Federation board for a long while, although I had been on Endowment on a regular basis.

06-00:17:54

Meeker:

How did they prepare you to be president? What were some of the things that they did?

06-00:17:58

Corvin:

Well, you know, things don't change that much, to be very honest. Whether the campaign be 17 million, or 18 or 25 million. Hopefully, the mechanics don't change. The thing that concerned me was that the Federation hadn't changed, and I was probably not as patient as I might have been, because I saw that times had changed completely in the broader philanthropic world.

06-00:18:40

Meeker:

Well, when you say that you were concerned that it hadn't changed, what were some of the changes you would have —had hoped to have seen?

06-00:18:48

Corvin:

If this is going to be in the history, I don't want this to be a negative for people who were really doing the very, very best. I viewed campaign as being the same campaign as 20 years ago. Where it was successful, I recognized that endowment had opened the door to how people wanted to give today. I discovered that Federation worked in silos, separate silos, and this concerned me because I wasn't certain that the Federation was really working as a whole.

06-00:19:43

Meeker:

What do you mean by working in silos?

06-00:19:45

Corvin:

Each group, whether it be a division or a department, was working in isolation, in my judgment. And I recognized or felt that hopefully in the future, that could be modified.

06-00:20:25

Meeker:

So when you accept the presidency, you do come in with somewhat of an agenda?

06-00:20:32

Corvin:

No. Unfortunately not as much an agenda as I might have had if I had had more time to prepare. The observations that I made before were observations I made when I came in. There was a lot of work to be done.

There was still good leadership, but there was need for new leadership. It's so helpful if you're going to be a president of an organization, particularly one as large as the Federation, but I would say any organization, if you've had a good period to prepare. Then you really know what your agenda has to be. I really didn't know what the agenda should be, and that was a disadvantage for my leadership, and a shortcoming of my leadership. I think it was somewhat unfortunate for Federation.

06-00:21:58

Meeker:

Over the two years, did you develop an agenda?

06-00:22:05

Corvin:

More or less, but then we ran into different problems. There was need for a staff change, which is disruptive. Disruptive at every level.

06-00:22:18

Meeker:

You mean on the executive level?

06-00:22:20

Corvin:

Yes.

06-00:22:26

Meeker:

Can we talk about that? You know, recall that you can seal portions of this interview if you wish to.

06-00:22:33

Corvin:

Well, it was a very painful period. It was painful for everyone. We're talking of a very fine man, very dedicated to his Judaism, a family man with family responsibility. And making a major change is a tremendous responsibility. It was very painful, not only for me, but for others. And then when it occurred, it was painful for staff. It was painful for everybody.

06-00:23:14

Meeker:

I wonder if you can perhaps describe, as objectively as possible, why the board decided it wasn't a good fit.

06-00:23:22

Corvin:

Well, you know, no matter how good you are, sometimes you're not a good fit or the time is such that different talent is needed.

- 06-00:23:37
Meeker: Maybe in a positive sense, what are some of the attributes that the board was thinking were needed by the organization at that point in time?
- 06-00:23:50
Corvin: Real leadership.
- 06-00:23:53
Meeker: OK. When you say real leadership, like a personality who can sort of rally the troops, so to speak?
- 06-00:24:01
Corvin: Well, a combination of having the vision, having the energy, and having the ability to lead. Those are, you know, unusual qualities, and key for any organization.
- 06-00:24:28
Meeker: Well, it makes sense when you talk about the need for leadership at this point to sort of rally the troops, because there was also some layoffs going on, and I imagine that they were probably...
- 06-00:24:46
Corvin: Well, there were budget restraints. There was a need to keep a balanced budget. You can't do everything and yet you're responsible for everything. How do you adjust or how do you modify and get the very, very best results you can? It's an impossible task.
- 06-00:25:36
Meeker: Well, if it's an impossible task, then how can you expect one individual to fulfill that?
- 06-00:25:45
Corvin: Well, let's say the executive director is responsible for hiring a team that's going to be able to be supportive of the vision that is set forth by the agency and is going to have the capacity to carry it out. That's a very important quality. It is not one person's responsibility, nor is it, on the lay side, the president's. It is the responsibility to develop a team of leadership that can help staff in the best way they can with the talents they have to carry this out. It is not one person's responsibility. But you have to have the leadership skills to surround yourself and to use your time in such a way to be the most productive.
- 06-00:26:50
Meeker: You know, this notion of leadership, I think, is really important. It's also a really kind of amorphous concept.
- 06-00:27:01
Corvin: It really is.

06-00:27:02

Meeker:

You know, we're in a presidential election right now and, you know, I'm just kind of wondering if you would wildly speculate for me, assuming you were on a search committee for a position like this. How is it possible to identify leadership qualities?

06-00:27:26

Corvin:

Well, you do it in a number of ways. You do it from past experience. You do it from talking to people that have worked with this individual. You do it with your gut feeling, and that can be as good and as valuable, and you can be as wrong as can be. You know, Federation is going through this again today. So the very qualities that I see as very key are the very qualities that most of us feel are needed. It's disruptive for an agency to lose their exec. By the time anybody is there for any length of time, be it short or long, you have a constituency. There's no question about it. The way it worked out was the list of what needed to be done kept getting longer and longer and longer, and very few things got off the list. Whether the things on my list were the most important, I don't know. On a personal basis, I thought they were pretty important.

06-00:29:58

Meeker:

Well, what are some of the things that were on the list, then?

06-00:30:00

Corvin:

Just not getting things done that needed to be addressed.

06-00:30:06

Meeker:

So kind of checking things off the to do list, right?

06-00:30:10

Corvin:

Yes.

06-00:30:11

Meeker:

Yes.

06-00:30:11

Corvin:

Certain problems continuing beyond its appropriate timeframe. Anyway, I think that's enough said.

06-00:30:26

Meeker:

This question about organizational culture is very interesting and I don't know that JCF has ever hired an executive from within. Was there ever a thought about elevating someone who really already knew the culture?

06-00:30:43

Corvin:

Well, oh. Oh, of course. Phyllis, of course, was always considered.

06-00:30:52

Meeker:

Sure. Well, I know that she was interim for a while.

06-00:30:56
Corvin: Oh, yes, but she would not assume the role of CEO.

06-00:30:59
Meeker: Oh, OK.

06-00:31:00
Corvin: She absolutely would not do it, and she was really the only candidate within the organization that had the capacity.

06-00:31:36
Meeker: Well, I know early on in your presidency, you took a mission to Eastern Europe, to Budapest and Prague?

06-00:31:45
Corvin: Yes.

06-00:31:50
Meeker: Had you done these before or was this...?

06-00:31:52
Corvin: I had not done them.

06-00:31:53
Meeker: OK.

06-00:31:53
Corvin: And it's one of the extra opportunities that Federation has offered to donors. I hadn't been to Budapest and Prague. Susan Mall headed these trips. She was absolutely superb in doing such. Not only did you learn, but what these trips did was build relationships which then strengthened ties to JCF. You built a respect for fellow travelers, and because the trip itself was superb as far as every detail, and you were given opportunities that you would not have been given going on your own, it was a tremendous experience.

06-00:33:13
Meeker: So you mean just from a basic tourist experience?

06-00:33:15
Corvin: Just from a basic tour. Being exposed to specific people you would not have met otherwise, be they part of the government or be they whatever. And then also, in every tour, the highlight, of course, was always Judaism. What the community looked like, who they were, what their history was. Having the opportunity of visiting Jewish schools, which you might have just walked through and instead had more of a history of how it started and what it meant that the children were teaching the parents. It's kind of heartwarming, and at the same time lets you realize how important this all is. Then seeing situations such as the extremes of the detainment camps and recognizing how you were spared that. And Federation really provided you that vehicle, which I think is a very worthwhile one.

And as I said, it also builds leadership. And from those trips, we have gained lots of leadership.

06-00:35:30

Meeker:

It sounds like it's a great experience for someone from San Francisco to go there to learn, to be more integrated into JCF, for instance, and to feel, I guess, part of the larger Jewish Diaspora. I wonder, is there a sense about these trips, that they're also contributing something to the communities in which you're going to?

06-00:35:51

Corvin:

No question at all. Some of the schools, for instance, had been established by Americans, and there's no question that that encourages others, that it encourages philanthropy. And the world is just smaller today, and as such, this gives you the opportunity to touch different areas. It really just enriches the individual and opens up opportunities that possibly they wouldn't see and yet they may have the capacity to get involved. Does that answer it?

06-00:36:36

Meeker:

Yes. Did you go on any others aside from these two?

06-00:36:39

Corvin:

No, I went to Israel. I've been to Israel.

06-00:36:41

Meeker:

Well, what is the history of your visits to Israel?

06-00:36:46

Corvin:

I first went with my husband and my daughter many years ago. Had very, very close friends that were living there part time.

06-00:37:06

Meeker:

Had they moved to Israel from the United States?

06-00:37:07

Corvin:

No, they had an apartment there and lived part time in Israel. And so on that trip, I had many opportunities, most probably not the depth of a JCF tour. But that was a great experience.

06-00:37:26

Meeker:

Does the idea that it's supposed to sort of feel like a return to a homeland. Did you experience it like that?

06-00:37:33

Corvin:

No. The establishment of Israel was important to me. I wasn't raised in a house with deep allegiance to Zionism—I wasn't raised with that deep passion for the need of the establishment of Israel. I didn't go with the deep passion. Was I impressed with what I saw? You couldn't go without being. Was I exposed to things that I had never seen before? Absolutely.

06-00:39:30

Meeker:

Well, what are you —how were you impressed and what were some of these things that you were exposed to?

06-00:39:33

Corvin:

I was impressed with the vision and the ability and the energy of the people, and the responsibility people took in building out of nothing a democratic country.

06-00:39:56

Meeker:

You lived on a kibbutz for a period of time, then?

06-00:39:59

Corvin:

No. But the concept of living on a kibbutz, of combined sharing, of the common good, that was impressive. I was aware of it before I went, but I was impressed by it. And then the idea of trees being planted. The concept of that being important was key. Then also, you couldn't go to Hadassah Hospital without being impressed with how important it was to see that quality of health care. And the establishment of universities, education being so important. During all kinds of trouble, music was still the under girding of good, healthy living. You couldn't help but be impressed with that. And you had a focus and the focus was establishing Israel. I hadn't had that. I respect it completely and am in awe of people that have done that.

My most recent trip was for a UJC biannual. To go back and see it as a vibrant community—checking in to the hotel in Tel Aviv, it was impossible to even register that we were in the same Israel, with a brand new hotel, and marble floors. The water in front of your room, a modern bathroom, modern everything. And I had stayed at the King David before, so I don't want you to think it was shabby. But there was growth and there were cranes everywhere.

At the same time, you recognized that the country was still in turmoil, that the whole concept of the future and building for the future was an issue. You knew how important it was. I've never been tested—none of us here. We've been very, very protected. To see it in action was pretty overwhelming. The need for day-to-day living and being exposed to families there, being able to see what they face everyday, letting their youngster ride the bus to school, or whatever, knowing the uncertainties—these are things that take fortitude and a resiliency that most of us here have been protected from. You can't help but respect that.

What the future holds, I don't think any of us know. I think that many students on campus use Israel as an anti-Semitic tool, and that, to my mind, is why we've seen a rise of anti-Semitism on the campuses. It's been the turmoil within the Palestinian community and Israel.

I think you can see by my history, where I am, that doesn't lessen my fervor for support of Israel or what Federation is doing. I think until we establish

healthy communities for everybody within Israel, we're not going to succeed. Arab children need to be educated so that they can find jobs. And I think our local JCF, in their modest way, has done some very creative and very exciting things to make the lives of both Jews and Arabs better on a day-to-day basis. There's still loads to be done.

06-00:45:44

Meeker:

Well, we can talk a little bit more about that probably next time that we meet. How many times have you been to Israel, roughly?

06-00:45:51

Corvin:

I've only been twice.

06-00:45:53

Meeker:

Oh, you've only been twice. So once early on and then once during your term as presidency.

06-00:45:55

Corvin:

Right.

06-00:45:57

Meeker:

Or as president. So during that first visit, you know, in general terms, how was your visit to Israel say, different than, you know, a tourist trip to Paris or something everyday?

06-00:46:11

Corvin:

You can't help but feel an allegiance. You can't help but be overwhelmed. Any group of people that could establish a country and have it be a democracy and not have it top down is impressive. And you can't help but feel a tie and a link. How lucky I am, how protected on a personal basis I am, and how understanding I should be and am, of recognizing what the last 50 years has meant. I'm pleased that there's a way to give direct help. I'm mindful and respectful of what the US government does, recognizing how important their funding to Israel has been over the years, and I'm also very impressed with the dedication and the support that the Jewish community in the United States has been in a position to give.

06-00:47:45

Meeker:

I'm interested in how a trip to Israel differs from trips to elsewhere.

06-00:47:57

Corvin:

Well, for instance, museums weren't the mainstay. Theater wasn't the mainstay, as it might be in London. People were the main thing: what they were able to do, how they structured things, how day-to-day living was the same to them as it is to me, even with the hardships and the unknowns; how you still plan for your kids.

06-00:48:43

Meeker:

So it sounds like observing everyday life more than anything else?

06-00:48:47

Corvin:

Well, everyday life and all the accomplishments made in establishing the country—always reminding people of the history, Yad Vashem, You can never forget it once you have been there. The whole concept of never forgetting. The very fact that the Israelis have done it. Then my going back so many years later and seeing Jerusalem and Tel Aviv as modern vibrant cities. Witnessing huge cranes building new high rises, even during a time of unrest, seemed remarkable. Visiting families living normal lives as we but under the threat of war within their borders is also remarkable. So a visit to Israel is indeed different than visiting any other place. Your interest in Israel is the history, the people, then dedication to history, dedication to the future and their willingness to not only live there but raise their families with that same strength and determination is truly remarkable.

Interview 4: March 4, 2008
Begin Audiofile 7

07-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is March 4, 2008, and this is Martin Meeker, interviewing Adele Corvin for the Jewish Community Federation Leadership Series. And this is our fourth interview. So I think we're on tape seven right now. So, as I mentioned, what I'd like to do is go through the minutes chronologically. And so, hopefully that's not a jarring experience because it might be some non sequitur questions, and then we might also return to some issues if they come up again and I don't feel like they were fully explored the first time around. And, as always, if there is something that you feel like I'm missing in the question, or something like that, please respond.

So early on in your term, in the notes, in July of 2002, there was a reference to a security consultant being moved to full-time in the organization. And to me, that brings up questions, both specific questions about security and access in the institution of the Jewish Community Federation, but some also larger questions about access and the need to provide security for institutions in the larger community. You know, I know from going to do research at JCF that there's as much security to get into JCF, if not more, than there is to go through an airport. And I'm thinking about, you know, new institutions like the Contemporary Jewish Museum, and if there were conversations about how to balance the need for security, but also how to allow openness that makes people sort of feel welcome and want to come in. Which, you know, going back to the story of the tent, you know, in the Old Testament, openness and hospitality is a sort of a foundational Jewish value. So, do you remember there being conversations like this?

07-00:02:17

Corvin:

Actually, this was the added security. We've always had someone at the door, not the double doors that you now witnessing, and not the special badges. We always had somebody who knew you or would stop you and question who you were going to see inside. This was the outgrowth of the Seattle incident.

07-00:02:46

Meeker:

Yeah.

07-00:02:46

Corvin:

After the shooting spree that occurred in Seattle JCC a few years ago, Federation in its wisdom felt it important to increase security in all Jewish agencies and synagogues. An allocation of Endowment funds was made to JCRC to hire a specialist to carry out a security program for our community. This included seminars on security, recommendations for needed changes in facilities and security staffing. Funds were allocated to agencies to fulfill their needs. Government also made funds available.

It is difficult. In the SF Jewish Community Centers, over 3000 people of all ages walk through the doors every day, so it is difficult to maintain a welcoming openness while still being concerned with security. Another example: Congregation Emanu-El now only has one entrance open versus three before this. Throughout our Bay Area agencies have taken advantage of the advice and funds available. The security specialist is still on JCRC staff.

07-00:07:48

Meeker:

So, in these discussions, particularly sort of training sessions in which the agencies were brought into the discussion, was there a sense that some agencies perhaps didn't need much security because they didn't have much visibility, or they weren't perhaps tied to or linked as closely to support of the state of Israel, or did it seem like the concern at hand was violent anti-Jewish sentiment in general?

07-00:08:24

Corvin:

I think it was, our hope was to keep it as low-key as possible. Our hope was to give people confidence that it was safe to go, and today I don't think we even think of it. It's automatic. It's there, and it's part of the structure of the facility.

07-00:08:58

Meeker:

Okay. Also during this same meeting in July of 2002, there was a fairly sustained discussion, according to the minutes, about the question of reaffirming the policy on funding of Israel, and there was some question about what should be the stipulations provided for the funds that were going from JCF to UJC [United Jewish Communities] and funding Israel. And there was this one statement that said, "To any Jew in need without regard to geographic or any other consideration." And that seemed to be a reference to funding Jewish settlements inside or outside of the Green Line.

07-00:09:55

Corvin:

Over the Green Line.

07-00:09:58

Meeker:

Yeah. And various people in the meeting weighed in on this, and I'm wondering from your vantage point if you can kind of reconstruct the tenor of the conversation and then your opinion on the question.

07-00:10:14

Corvin:

The policy that had been approved by our Federation was that funds only be distributed within the Green Line. UJC in their judgment felt it would be appropriate to distribute funds beyond the Green Line due to unusual circumstances. Thus this became an issue within our Federation.

Some on our board felt we should be willing to adopt the UJC action, which was helping the settlements beyond the Green Line, and also that our final decision should not be based on an arbitrary line. Others felt just as strongly

on the opposing side. After much discussion, the board came to a resolution that funds should be used to aid Jews with needs wherever they may live.

07-00:12:06

Meeker: What was the resolution?

07-00:12:09

Corvin: Funds could be given over the Green Line only for basic needs of Jews.

07-00:12:13

Meeker: Okay. Well, so, in my notes here, it says continuation of funds to UJC, but that no funds will be given to institutions outside the 1948 boundaries, but that funds can be used to help victims of terror outside of those boundaries.

07-00:12:53

Corvin: Right, in other words, families who were struck by a specific incident can be helped. Thus our policy that we do our best to respond to Jews with basic needs wherever they live was recognized.

07-00:13:26

Meeker: So again, this sort of reflects the principle that the monies from JCF are not going to support any particular political regime in Israel, but rather Jews in need.

07-00:13:39

Corvin: Yes, the truth of the matter is, that the Green Line policy was still upheld, except for helping individuals in need.

07-00:13:48

Meeker: Well, this seems to me an interesting compromise, if you will. And in compromise, that means that there are different factions, or people of different opinions, that need to kind of come to the middle.

07-00:14:04

Corvin: And there were strong feelings.

07-00:14:06

Meeker: So does this point to a persistent difference of opinion, perhaps, within the organization or on the board, about the question of Israel around the 1948 boundaries?

07-00:14:25

Corvin: No. We looked at the issue, did the best we could in resolving it with our best judgment, and then moved on. It was not something that went on for months.

07-00:15:30

Meeker: Well, how might that question or that issue then be different today? Do people hold different opinions about that question?

07-00:15:40

Corvin: We moved on.

07-15:42:

Meeker: Okay.

07-00:15:43

Corvin:

I don't want to sound as if things are simple. People hold some very strong opinions. Jewish schools are new. Some people don't necessarily feel that that's important. Other people feel it's extremely important. There's been a move—and we've discussed this before—in Judaism, but other religions, going back to more formal status. This is just the changing of times, and things change faster today.

And also, you have to realize—which you do, I'm certain—the world is small. We have some employees in Israel, and we're looking at special programs that we are supporting. Some feel you should not distribute any funds to aid Arabs. Others feel, wait a minute, they're part of the Israeli community, and if we're going to build a healthy community, we should see to it that they have the opportunity for education as well as other opportunities, so that we can build a strong country. Where you have Arabs living in Israel, they'd better be able to have a decent life. I could find a better word, but a wholesome life. Without some of these benefits, they can't. Am I getting preachy?

07-00:17:57

Meeker:

No, no. I think this is great because I think this really points to one of the most interesting questions about JCF, which is, it's an organization that somehow manages to accommodate widely divergent viewpoints, sometimes with a great emotional attachment to various sides of those viewpoints. And I'm wondering, as someone who has been involved in the organization as a member and a leader for many years—I mean, this is just a personal opinion and not a final answer—how does the organization manage to continue to accommodate those various viewpoints, and still survive? [laughter]

07-00:18:43

Corvin:

Let's begin and say that we have specific standards. We're not going to give up our basic beliefs. But there are changing times. There's changing times in public education. There's a changing time in family structure. And it has come so quickly in the last number of years.

07-00:20:43

Meeker:

But your point, I guess, is that at some point, those questions might have been raised, and there could have been opposing viewpoints about it.

07-00:20:51

Corvin:

Exactly.

07-00:20:52

Meeker:

So, you're pointing to sort of a continuation of core values, if you will, that, as long as those are agreed upon, these other things that come up in the course of, you know, historical change, as long as those core values remain the same, there is an organizational continuity—or stability maybe is a better word.

07-00:21:22

Corvin:

Well, our main thought, our number one thought isn't accommodation to everybody. Our main thought is, what is our mission? What are we really hoping to do? What can we do? Many years ago, our JCF stepped away from the normal UJC policy, and we started funding programs directly in Israel, which was diametrically against normal policy. Let me emphasize that most dollars still go through UJC. The amount of dollars we do on our own is very small compared to our contribution to UJC. And the role of UJC is worldwide, and I don't want to underestimate that. We hold that very important.

07-00:22:37

Meeker:

What sort of programs was the JCF interested in sponsoring in Israel, above and beyond what they supported the UJC to do?

07-00:22:49

Corvin:

Okay. I can't go back to the beginning, other than say, we took a sum of money and designated it for some special programs. And at that time, we had a sister city. It was Kyriat Shmona, in Northern Israel. That's where our emphasis was, and we did our best to fund needed services. And today, we not only have Kyriat Shmona, which we still are interested in, but we look at Israel as a whole. What can we do? How can we build leadership within their community? How can we see to it that preschool is brought to youngsters? How can we see to it that standards in schools are upheld or improved? What can we do to help families get through the trauma of having missiles shot in their community constantly? So we're looking at some of the immediate things, which in some cases might seem minor, in other cases major. If you look over a span of years, the development of leadership there has been extremely important. We have an overseas committee here, and we have a committee in Israel made up of comparable leaders. They work together. It brings it to life when you have an interchange of this kind. When I was president, it wasn't necessary to worry about shelters to the extent that we did, say, a couple of years ago. The shelters had not been used for a number of years.

Well, all of a sudden, with the war with Hezbollah, families were spending a great deal of time in shelters. There was no equipment for youngsters. We were able to immediately send what they needed for day-to-day living, a tremendous help to families. It helped them to get through those very difficult days.

07-00:25:38

Meeker:

Onto a question of fundraising, and this comes from September 2002. And this, again, is an overall question about fundraising, and that is, it seems during the years in which you were president, there was a basic continuity of level of funding. The goals were basically met, even considering the economic recession that was happening, and just coming out of that point in time. But they also noted that there was a net loss in the number of donors, although the

amount of funds being raised was the same. I'm wondering if you can comment on that.

07-00:26:14

Corvin:

This is a great concern, one that we've been aware of it over the last number of years. If you were in business, and have a store, and you recognize this was going on, you would attempt to adjust and modify what you were selling. There are two reasons for this, in my judgment now. One is that one campaign, an overall campaign, such as United Way and such as JCF has done historically, has lost its flavor for some donors. Donors want to have the opportunity to give their contribution directly to specific programs. During this time, we have seen the further development of our endowment.

07-00:28:30

Meeker:

But that doesn't necessarily address the question of fewer donors.

07-00:28:34

Corvin:

No. Fewer donors is a big issue. It's a big issue today, particularly with younger donors preferring to give more directly. They're not as tied to the concept of "Federation" as some past generations. There's another big factor. Our agencies have become very large, and have their own fundraising capacity, so in addition to being asked by Federation, an individual is also being asked by each agency at the same time.

07-00:29:10

Meeker:

Was there, then, some study of, let's say, these 1,800 former donors to see if they basically switched their giving, specifically to the agencies?

07-00:29:25

Corvin:

I'm not certain you can say the older, those who had been traditional Federation donors, did not necessarily switch what they were doing, but your new donors were not coming into the system as we knew it before. And this is nationally. It's a very deep concern. But through our endowment, we're reaching people that probably we would not have reached if we had not had that type of service.

07-00:30:06

Meeker:

And the endowment, as you mentioned before, is more specific, more earmarked giving?

07-00:30:11

Corvin:

Well, there are two things. You have funds that philanthropists still control in their donor-advised funds and through supporting foundations. And then there is some funding that is unrestricted. Those funds are distributed to the community through the Endowment Committee.

07-00:30:45

Meeker:

And the endowment committee, that's where a lot of the seed funding for new projects, and so forth, comes along.

07-00:30:49

Corvin: Right.

07-00:30:51

Meeker: So, if one was to follow this trend out and project to the future, can you imagine a time in which the endowment, both the individual foundations as well as the unrestricted funds going to seed funding, for as of yet unidentified or minimally identified needs, becomes the main function of the organization, as opposed to sort of the United Way model that has traditionally persisted?

07-00:31:27

Corvin: Well, United Way model has changed particularly here in San Francisco, where they no longer fund 200 agencies, as they did in the past. Rather, they have recognized certain key issues in our community, and they are funding those, attempting to resolve those issues. In Federation, do I see a move? Most probably. It's a trend, and I think in the future, endowment and the overall allocation system, although it's not called that now, will be working closer together.

07-00:32:16

Meeker: I mean, maybe a similar move will happen in the Federation as happened in United Way, a move toward funding specific projects as opposed to many agencies?

07-00:32:29

Corvin: It's possible.

07-00:32:30

Meeker: Have there been conversations about that?

07-00:32:31

Corvin: Yeah, the question of what the biggest issues in our community are. This was recognized, but it was not the key focus during my presidency.

07-00:32:50

Meeker: Okay. This question may be something that's too operationally oriented, but it brings up sort of questions, I guess, not unrelated to some of the issues that we were just talking about, and that is, the administrative expenses incurred by the Federation, which became a big issue, especially around the scandals with United Way, and what percentage from dollars goes—And that's thinking about staff and expenses of staff at the Federation, and particularly things like increase in expenses of retirement, of healthcare, of all that kind of stuff that it takes to run an organization. I guess I'm trying to figure out how to turn this into a question. I'm wondering how the increase in cost influenced the work being done by the Federation.

07-00:33:59

Corvin: We're very sensitive, and every year we go through the same exercise as to what our overhead figure is? It's very hard to determine because, in addition to running a campaign and distributing dollars, we also do special services for

certain populations. As such, where do you put those costs? Are those part of your overhead, looking at the campaign, or are they pulled out?

Just to give you some examples, what are those programs? We were very sensitive to the fact that many Russians, when they came, needed support. The next generation has been able, in some cases, to do extremely well. We wanted to be very, very certain that we were making room for the Russian population, and the Israelis, who also were in business in Silicon Valley. How were we being inclusive to those populations? In addition, we wanted to be very, very certain that we continued to open our doors to young adults. That program has to be staffed in order to be effective, and so how do we calculate overhead? That's a constant, constant dialog. Is that part of the overhead of the campaign, or do we look at campaign strictly as campaign, collecting dollars, distributing dollars, and looking at these other expenses as service to the community?

To give you another big example, how do we allocate the cost of the community study? Do you include that in your overhead? How do you evaluate that? This is something that goes on constantly.

07-00:36:05
Meeker:

Well, with the study, how was that accounted for?

07-00:36:08
Corvin:

A lot of dollars came out of endowment, which means it's not part of campaign dollars directly, so that made that possible. In other instances, part of these other programs sometimes were subsidized through other contributions. We're very sensitive to the overhead figure because that's what donors want.

07-00:36:35
Meeker:

Yeah. I think that's what I was getting at, which is this sort of key question, and you know, I'm sure that the board really wants to hold the line on a certain percentage of overhead. But then, you know, in the world in which we live, there are certain expenses, especially healthcare and retirement expenses, pension, that expand well beyond, you know, the expansion of income coming into the organizations.

07-00:37:05
Corvin:

There's a balance.

07-00:37:06
Meeker:

Yeah. I mean, is there a point at which the board says, oh, well, we can't hold the line on this because we need to provide healthcare, or is there a point at which they say, the line is so important that we're going to have to—

07-00:37:18
Corvin:

It's a balance, and there's no set rule. Another thing is, you know, people used to think that staff should be willing to work for a nonprofit for almost no

money. Those days are gone. First of all, the staff we have is a very well educated and extremely capable. If you want that capacity, one has to be willing to step up to the plate and pay for it. That's why it's so important for our campaign to be a success, and to recognize that Endowment has to carry its own weight. It's a question that we wrestle with all the time, much as business corporations do at a different level. It's complicated.

07-00:38:26

Meeker:

Well, there's also the added dimension of—and I don't know the degree to which this influenced, or continues to influence, the organization or not, but—the notion that, in previous decades, a lot of philanthropic or nonprofit organizations relied a lot upon volunteer labor of women, or women who, you know, could get paid a little bit because they had the support of the breadwinner of the family. I mean, I think actually about the work that was done at the Regional Oral History Office at Berkeley, you know, as sort of typical of this, in that most of the people conducting interviews prior to the 1990s were women whose husbands some of whom had high paying jobs, and so the interviews could be done for a lot less. You know, this was sort of side labor for most people, and the paycheck didn't need to pay for their own expenses.

07-00:39:31

Corvin:

You're recognizing another social change that hits the Federation, the same as it hits any nonprofit. Another thing that people don't recognize is that it takes time to train and supervise volunteers. The Federation uses loads of volunteers, as it happens. Their committees are manned and womanned, [laughter] by—I can't even venture a guess at this point, but you have volunteers in that building every single day. And volunteers are really making decisions, with the support of staff. The volunteers are very key to Federation. Our campaign is very dependent on volunteers. Our strategic planning, our allocation process, is all dependent on volunteers. We have committees and commissions working directly with agencies.

07-00:41:07

Meeker:

There's a constant discussion, and this, I think, relates to core functions of the Federation and touches on some of the issues that we've already brought up, in that there's constant discussion of this question of Jewish identity building as an important function of the organization. I guess I wonder if you can just talk about this, and my questions center on, what goes into building Jewish identity amongst a population? I guess, what does that mean? What is part of it? What's not part of it? Is this primarily a secular task, or is it a mostly religious task? To what extent does Jewish identity building relate to developing a sense of allegiance to the state of Israel among populations that don't have it? What goes into the building of Jewish identity?

07-00:42:30

Corvin:

I think there's a combination of things. Philanthropy and helping people are part of very basic Judaism, that we are to repair the world, and we are to work

on that for our lifetime. You learn this from your parents. You learn these things at Sunday school. You learn this being part of Girl Scouts, or Campfire Girls, or Boy Scouts, as you're growing up. You see the use of volunteers, volunteer leadership, and participation, and it becomes part of you.

How does Federation highlight and bring deeper thought? I think that, many years ago, when Israel was established, going to Israel was a link, and a very important one. You could see and take pride in the establishment of a country. So that's been a link to Israel, an extremely important link, and we have confirmation classes going to Israel every year. And we encourage people to go to Israel, this year particularly, for its 60th anniversary. So that's one way.

We start our board meetings with the Devar Torah, which is a layperson, a volunteer, giving a brief commentary about, and an interpretation of that week's Torah portion. These are small things.

Also, you're building community, which is very important, people coming together who most probably would not come together or know each other, through groups such as the Women's Alliance and through our board, because we're made up of the four counties—you know, Sonoma, and Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo. I think the building of community, and having some common interest, and building friendships all help. I don't think there's any one answer.

07-00:45:27
Meeker:

Well, one of the things that I was thinking about when I saw this continued discussion of Jewish identity building, which I think also came up in the community study, was the notion that there was a concern of an increasing number of Jews in the Bay Area not really identifying as such, kind of moving away from the fold, and that if the community—not to mention the Federation itself—wanted to maintain its viability, it was important to think about instilling a sense of Jewish identity with these people who may be kind of drifting from the fold.

07-00:46:13
Corvin:

I think within the Jewish community, there was very deep concern because of the percentage of intermarriage. It's interesting to see in some communities how so many of the intermarriage couples are raising their children Jewish. I think that this has been a deep concern and raises the question of: how do you enter into the Jewish community? I think San Francisco is difficult, if you were to move here, to get plugged in. Many people who have come from families who have been affiliated with Federation in their home cities will go to Federation and say, I'm new in town. How do I get involved? They might be referred to YAD. And then they become part of that, and they build a circle of friends. Other people feel comfortable going into a temple. So our hope is to provide as many entry points or welcoming points as we possibly can.

And through agencies such as Family Service, and our Jewish Home, through not only their services, but the fundraising arm, and the social part of it, you can broaden the base as far as possible. Is it possible to include everyone? It wasn't possible when I was growing up. Lots of people were not temple members. They were not part of anything. And that's life. It is our hope, though, that we can include as many as possible. Is it a concern? Yes, it's a concern. Our numbers in Federation are decreasing, which is a very serious issue. We do worry about participation.

But I can tell you, in my lifetime, living in this community, I have never seen so much programming, so many opportunities of becoming involved, as we have today. Some of them cost money, others don't. But the activities are there, and for those who can't afford it, there are scholarships available at all levels. There should never be someone who can't belong to a congregation because of money, or their youngster can't become part of some kind of a program, if there's need. But I see far more involvement today than I have ever seen. This is on a personal basis. But when we see the success of our JCCs that we've just opened, namely San Francisco and Foster City, and what we hope to do in Palo Alto, we're providing a vehicle by which it is possible for people to take pride in being Jewish, as well as participating in Jewish programs. And it's for the general community, as well.

There's no set answer. You know, it's a continuing issue. Most probably, it was an issue way before I was born, and it's going to be an issue way after I am not here.

07-00:51:10
Meeker:

Okay. At various points in the minutes, there are references to leadership, either within the Federation or in Jewish community overall, meeting with politicians in the United States, the senators from California, the candidates for mayor in San Francisco. I'm wondering what are the reasons that leaders of Federation feel the need to meet with politicians?

07-00:51:51
Corvin:

This is something we do through JCRC, primarily. People are interested in politics. Because we're interested, the people are sensitive to some of the issues that come up. We are interested in our political leaders who are responsible for legislation. And as such, it's a lot different if you have an ongoing relationship. So as a result, we have very good relationships with our local department, and our political representative. We feel it's very, very important, when issues come up, to have a link.

07-00:52:40
Meeker:

Can you describe some of the issues?

07-00:52:42
Corvin:

Sometimes in the case of schools, there have been certain programs within our high schools which were inappropriate, focusing on Israel in some cases and

having a very anti-view of Israel, which is certainly inappropriate for a school to be a proponent against a democratic country.

07-00:53:12

Meeker: I'm not familiar with what these programs might entail.

07-00:53:15

Corvin: There was a rally at Washington High, I think, that was anti-Israel. And on some college campuses we're very sensitive to the fact of anti-Israel sentiment. It's been more anti-Israel in the last few years than anti-Semitic, per se. For instance, I met, as a representative of Federation, with representatives of JCRC, with the head of SF public schools. JCRC knew the superintendent of schools well. There were some instances that happened at X, Y, Z school—this is now five years ago—that seemed inappropriate. That's an example of trying to curb or to work together to avoid a serious problem. We feel it's important for people to be well informed as to who the Jewish population is in San Francisco, for instance, or in our community, and to be certain that they're represented throughout the system.

07-00:55:16

Meeker: So, maybe just to take a devil's advocate thought on this around schools, you know, high schools, and certainly universities, should be, perhaps, places where there is critical dialog. And I'm just kind of wondering if—

07-00:55:34

Corvin: Does this curtail that? That's not—

07-00:55:36

Meeker: Yeah. I mean, what is the line between—

07-00:55:40

Corvin: I think if you're teaching Middle East history, for instance, the hope is that you are presenting a fair picture of history, and when a professor does not do that, and students find themselves being taught what isn't a fair picture, that's when issues come up.

07-00:56:17

Meeker: So when you have conversations with the superintendent, or meet with the chancellor at Berkeley, the question is more about balanced representation—

07-00:56:30

Corvin: And recognizing that people are going to have different opinions, but to make sure that the platform presents the full picture, and not such a narrow one that portrays as something that isn't valid.

07-00:56:51

Meeker: I'm wondering if there's ever been any efforts, in the context of the Federation, to gather scholars, some of whom may have different opinions and come from different backgrounds, to try to hash out what might be a balanced perspective, and what—I don't know. I mean, you know, to try to, not

necessarily come to a consensus about the history that should be taught, but come to some sort of agreement about how to teach the conflicts.

07-00:57:26

Corvin:

Well, I think that this is an ongoing issue. It's not going to change today or tomorrow. Groups have met for years—Arab groups meeting with Jewish groups—getting together so there'd be greater understanding. The United Religious Initiative has been meeting with all the various religions. How do we have a greater understanding? This is hope for the future, and we keep working for it. When I was young, you certainly didn't have different departments in universities such as Jewish studies—and today, you do. I'm not here to say it's good or bad, but it's with the hope of greater understanding. Within the Jewish community, as well as with those who are not Jews.

07-00:58:51

Meeker:

It's interesting, just from an editorial perspective, looking at universities. There is certainly a way in which the different studies programs can nurture indigenous thought within those groups. But then there's also a way in which those programs end up preaching to the choir and don't get to actually engage with the people that really they need to engage with.

07-00:59:23

Corvin:

That's the dilemma. How do you reach out and touch those people who could benefit? Any of us could benefit from it. I don't know the answer.

Begin Audiofile 8

08-00:00:04

Meeker:

I'm going to try to combine a couple of questions here. I don't know if I can do this. Well, so, in 2003, there was a question about the various alliances, and this notion of above and beyond funding, so [laughter] I don't know if this is too particular, and I may not have a complete understanding of what's going on here, but it seems to me that the LGBT, the Women's Alliance, and a couple others, there were established programs for those, but the idea was that those programs would only become funded if they were in fact funded by—

08-00:01:06

Corvin:

Outside funding.

08-00:01:07

Meeker:

Well, funded by the Alliance, by the members, like, you know, by the people themselves—

08-00:01:15

Corvin:

No. It was also outside funding, possibly through philanthropic funds, et cetera. I think that's another example of the issue of overhead. We're looking at the most valuable way for Federation to use its resources. It was felt that these subgroups, you might call them, are extremely important. They capture

new donors and they capture an awareness of what Federation is doing. That's our future. So therefore, we felt they were very important. But there was a period there, when our campaign could not support these groups at the level that they needed. Through endowment, additional funding was sought.

08-00:02:25

Meeker:

So funding them at the level that they needed. How were they using the funds, and what were their needs?

08-00:02:31

Corvin:

Through staffing.

08-00:02:33

Meeker:

Okay. All right. Well, really, I kind of brought this up because I was just interested in the role of the alliances. I don't know if we need to go into a long history of how they came to be, but in the context of the larger organization, how did the board view the function of these alliances?

08-00:03:04

Corvin:

They were and are an attempt by the Federation to reach out to segments of our community that are extremely important. Young adults, the Women's Alliance, LGBT—these groups link to the Jewish community.

There was an early awareness that it was important to open the door and be inclusive. That was our hope. We found leadership who took off and did some planning and programming. As a result, it's part of the structure of Federation.

08-00:04:30

Meeker:

Okay. So, really, what I'm hearing is that these alliances are key for—

08-00:04:36

Corvin:

Well, there's only one that's called an alliance, the Women's Alliance. The others have different titles, like YAD.

08-00:04:44

Meeker:

And YAD is the young adult?

08-00:04:48

Corvin:

Yes, Young Adult. And their programming is geared to what they're interested in. Such groups determine programming.

08-00:05:19

Meeker:

So, the question that you were just bringing up in the break was about this Wexner program, and I'm wondering if we can talk about that, but let's also talk about the larger issue of leadership development in the context of the Federation. And maybe we can start out with the specific question of the recruitment and election of new board members to the Federation. What is your perspective on the best way for that to be done?

08-00:05:53

Corvin:

Well, I don't want to call them subgroups, because that doesn't sound very complimentary, but these smaller groups are extremely important because, they feed into the campaign, and their talent rises to the top,. We're then able to pick new people to join committees. So in my judgment, this is just an entry point for people to become involved in Federation. It's a training ground for people.

We also have Federation fellows, where young people are placed on boards of other agencies. It's almost like an observer. It gives them a view of how a board works and what a board member does.

08-00:07:21

Meeker:

So, it sounds like there is a variety of different processes by which new leadership is identified.

08-00:07:29

Corvin:

Right. You have presidents of your agencies. You have board members of agencies. All should be feeders to a Federation board.

08-00:07:48

Meeker:

Are there certain qualities—I mean, this is probably general in every sort of thing, but that are regularly sought within the organization for—

08-00:08:00

Corvin:

That's the three Ws. You work, wealth, and wisdom—a willingness to support at the level that's appropriate for you, and a willingness also to be an advocate in the community. That's true of any board.

08-00:08:27

Meeker:

Does the Federation find that it's difficult to find those ideal people, or does it feel like they have a big bench of people waiting to be named to the board? Some organizations have tons of people that they can pick from. Some have a difficult time finding the right people to actually—

08-00:08:52

Corvin:

Well, some agencies work very hard in developing their leadership, and seeking outstanding people who have served in other capacities. I think Federation is looking for the same thing. They certainly need people who are in a position to ask other people for large sums of money. Should that be the main thing? It isn't the main criteria. But if you don't have people who have that capacity to ask others to join them to be major donors, then you're not going to be able to function as a Federation. Federation's key role, unfortunately, has to be fundraising.

08-00:09:58

Meeker:

The board is fairly large, yes?

08-00:10:00

Corvin:

Yes, it is.

08-00:10:01

Meeker: How many people?

08-00:10:02

Corvin: Fifty-sixty.

08-00:10:03

Meeker: And you've been on a variety of different boards, I imagine some of which are quite a bit smaller than that. Can you just tell me a little bit about the positives and negatives vis-à—

08-00:10:17

Corvin: A large board like this really gets most difficult from the standpoint of in-depth participation, so a great deal of the work, most of the work, has to be done at committee level. But that's true of most boards. Within our board we also have representatives who represent some of our key agencies.

08-00:11:15

Meeker: With board work, it's always great to have the very motivated person who can fulfill the three Ws, but invariably there will be people who think that they want to join the board, and once they get on, they just don't do much work. How does the organization approach that situation?

08-00:11:37

Corvin: Well, actually, you know, it's something that all boards used to be concerned about. If you are absent three times in a row, you get that phone call saying, maybe this isn't for you; that sort of thing. But you know, even as recently as last month, I looked around the table at Federation, and I was very, very proud because you had a vibrant group around that table who were interested in the issues, and we still having fun—which, I think, when you're participating on a nonprofit, should be part of it. You have to enjoy it to a certain level because otherwise, you shouldn't be there. There should also be a great deal of pride as to the accomplishments.

08-00:12:56

Meeker: I mean, I've done some board service myself, and this question comes up on much smaller boards, so it's probably more—

08-00:13:03

Corvin: Well, it's more difficult. I'm on a small board, and all of a sudden the board [meeting] is cancelled because four people are out of town. And if we have too many people who travel all the time, then maybe we have to look for people who don't travel all the time. You know, I'm being facetious, but we really never have trouble with it at Federation.

08-00:13:35

Meeker: I mean, it could be difficult because you don't want to develop negative relations with people who had agreed to serve on the board, and—I don't know. We're probably getting too deeply [laughter] into this.

08-00:13:45

Corvin:

I think that's an issue which really is not a real issue. Selection of a board member, under normal conditions, is someone who has participated in the committee structure, who has been a campaign chair, who has shown evidence of interest in Israel, and who has been a donor at a leadership level because it's extremely important. We need volunteers to work in the campaign at all levels, but if you don't have people who can work with the top donors, you're going to start losing those top donors. And you have to have the top donors recognize that there are some younger people coming up who are stepping into their shoes. It's very exciting to see.

08-00:15:10

Meeker:

On a lot of boards on nonprofits these days, you know, perhaps second to the ability to give, there's a desire to have boards, particularly of agencies, represent the diversity of the community. In different agencies—I imagine in the Federation, that presents an interesting quandary because there's probably, and I guess this is a question, a different conception of what diversity means within the Jewish community, in contrast to, say, the San Francisco or Bay Area community overall.

08-00:15:58

Corvin:

Right. But, you know, even within Federation, we have five counties. You've got 120 miles. So, if you had people only from San Francisco, or only from Hillsborough, or only from Marin County, that wouldn't work. You have to have a balance there.

08-00:16:21

Meeker:

So geographic diversity is important.

08-00:16:22

Corvin:

Geographic diversity is important.

08-00:16:49

Meeker:

Well, I'm thinking about board membership in general.

08-00:16:53

Corvin:

Board membership in general is determined by need. Do you represent one of our communities, do you have certain talents, leadership skills, involvement within the community?

08-00:16:58

Meeker:

Well, okay. I guess what I'm trying to get at is that, is there a conception that the board should achieve some sort of diversity?

08-00:17:07

Corvin:

Oh, yes.

08-00:17:09

Meeker:

And I guess, you know, if you look at, let's say United Way or something, I imagine that diversity has a lot to do with racial diversity, and immigration

status, or something like that, and gender. I'm kind of wondering, what is the conception of diversity in the context of the Federation?

08-00:17:30

Corvin: Most probably geographic.

08-00:17:31

Meeker: So geographic is the most—

08-00:17:32

Corvin: And really, to do your best to have representation from Reformed, Conservative, and Orthodox branches of Judaism.

08-00:17:47

Meeker: OK. Is there also a movement to have greater representation among, say, Israelis, Russians, gays and lesbians—

08-00:17:58

Corvin: There's certainly awareness of that. I picked up some notes that I had done many years ago, and one of the things I said was that we should have the head of each county on our board. Now it's just come to pass, so if you wait long enough, things happen.

08-00:18:34

Meeker: Has there ever been any discussion about grooming non-Jews for the board, or has there been a sense that there's no interest?

08-00:18:43

Corvin: There hasn't been on Federation board because basically, our donors—I don't know this for a fact, but I would say—are 99.9% Jewish. That's one thing. On other boards, you could find a mixture.

08-00:19:05

Meeker: So on the agencies?

08-00:19:07

Corvin: On the agencies. It depends. Not on the Jewish Home because the Jewish Home just serves Jewish residents.

08-00:19:16

Meeker: What about the JCC?

08-00:19:20

Corvin: JCC, I can't answer, but I know they're discussing it. There are discussions about it, serious discussions.

08-00:19:29

Meeker: This question comes up to a certain extent from my long conversations I've had with Uri Herscher about the Skirball Cultural Center in L.A. It has some similarities to the JCC here, but it also has a different mission. And he always

makes it clear to me that it's important for him to have some diversity of religious background.

08-00:20:01

Corvin: When he speaks of diversity, what does he speak of?

08-00:20:04

Meeker: Well, I think that he's talking about having non-Jews on the board.

08-00:20:08

Corvin: Does he?

08-00:20:09

Meeker: He does, and also having people who can't necessarily donate a large amount.

08-00:20:18

Corvin: Our board is not made up of only large donors. Far from it. First of all, presidents of agencies very often are not, you know. It has not been an issue at Federation because of our focus—any more than you'd find it on a congregation board.

08-00:20:48

Meeker: OK. Fair enough. So, what were some of the other issues? [pause] In 2004, which is becoming late in your term, there was—and I don't know if you had any involvement in this or not, but there was—a change in the marketing department. I'm not really interested in asking you about the change in the marketing department itself, but I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about the marketing function within the Federation. And that also points to something that I found another reference to earlier, about six months before that. This is when Salkin is talking about the McKinsey report and suggested there was a need for a brand overhaul for the Federation. He was in reference—this goes back to the youth question, in which, somehow, a brand overhaul would decrease reliance upon the older generation and somehow entice the younger generation in. I guess it's like, how important is the management of the image of the Federation, and what sort of resources are devoted to that, and what are some of the strategies that are developed?

08-00:22:32

Corvin: I don't think I can answer, other than to say that, our marketing had not been as successful as it could have been. And how do you measure that? I think the ways that you reach out to various communities. Also, we've seen a change in marketing in the last number of years. When you're not the only guy in town, you're not the only one sending out flyers or information, but you also have competition from your member agencies, you need a different kind of marketing, I think. And you have to be aware that you have a changing community. [pause]

I think marketing is something that every agency wrestles with. You no longer can get print in the daily paper, which you used to be able to, years ago. And

people aren't reading papers as much. So, I don't have any answer to that. Was there a need for change? Yes. What were we looking for? Hopefully having a marketing plan that would awaken people's interest in Federation, and have people recognize how important it is.

08-00:24:32

Meeker:

It sounds like, then, there wasn't any discussion at the board level of different marketing strategies, or was there?

08-00:24:40

Corvin:

I don't believe we had an active marketing committee at that time.

08-00:24:46

Meeker:

Is there now, do you know?

08-00:24:48

Corvin:

More now.

08-00:24:51

Meeker:

So it's recognized as a need.

08-00:24:52

Corvin:

Yes, it's recognized. There's no question.

08-00:25:11

Meeker:

[pause] I mean, actually, I have another question on here about, you know, very late in your term—well, at some time in your term, what was the publication, the *Jewish Community News*?

08-00:25:25

Corvin:

Yes. It changed to *J*.

08-00:25:26

Meeker:

Turned to *J*. And that was on their part a marketing move, it sounds like.

08-00:25:32

Corvin:

Yes, it was.

08-00:25:32

Meeker:

But also, this sounds like that happened in response to financial difficulties on their part, and so they're kind of trying to reposition themselves, you know, in their own market.

08-00:25:48

Corvin:

The *J* is separate from Federation. That was strictly their decision. Again, it goes right back to the marketing. Who's reading magazines today? Are people reading it? What's needed? They really changed the format as well as content.

08-00:26:37

Meeker:

I'm actually getting fairly close to the end of my questions here. We've talked a lot about issues that came up in the community report, and I'm wondering if there's anything in general that you'd like to say about the report and its

findings. Here are some of the questions that I brought up. Do we anticipate a significant growth or decline in the Jewish population as a whole, or by the region? What are the implications for the Federation and the agency's service delivery? Will the community need deepen the geographic dimension of our planning, delivery, participation, fund raising? I mean, these are just some of the questions. And the answers that the report provided mentioned there's going to be growth in Sonoma, the peninsula, growth in subpopulations, such as Russians and Israelis. The impact of the new campuses is going to be important. Given these new dimensions, how then does the Federation approach the future? It seems like the implication here is that there is going to need to be a realignment of funding at the very base. And what is the planning that goes into accomplishing that?

08-00:28:27
Corvin:

I think the planning that's gone into it, number one, has been the success of the fundraising for the Campus for Jewish Life down in Palo Alto. We've seen that, and hopefully the study itself has helped philanthropists recognize that this was important, due to the growth in the southern part of our region. We've just added the head of each county to our board, as a permanent seat on the board, which recognizes that one can't direct everything from a San Francisco base.

Also, a recognition of deployment of staff is important. These are questions that they're still discussing today. You asked me earlier, why is it important for Federation to work with city departments and elected officials. I'll give you a concrete example in Foster City. The Foster City JCC has worked directly with the city fathers of Foster City on a financial arrangement to get the land they needed. It really made a difference as far as getting the large area needed for the JCC and the Wornick School. In building those relationships, it has meant a great deal for the success and the recognition of Foster City. The JCC in Foster City was not only for the Jewish Community, but for the total community. This is another example of why it's important when you are developing a large project.

Another thing, our family service agencies work in Sacramento, and work at the city level with the health commissions for funding. Now, as far as our community study, I think in my role as president, it was just about to come out when I was finished, so it was really during my period that a great deal of study was done. I would dare say that what I heard from the large agencies was tremendous gratitude on their part that Federation undertook the study because it gave them the opportunity to use it as the basis for their future planning for their agency. It was very key. As far as what's coming, I'm really not as involved in that as I think your question might imply, but it certainly is being used as the basis for future and strategic planning.

08-00:33:34

Meeker:

Can you maybe expand a little bit on what you said about the Campus for Jewish Life, and how and why the fundraising for that was successful? Because you've described it kind of as a model—

08-00:33:51

Corvin:

I was not directly involved in it, so it would really be unfair for me to give you an observation, other than to say, it took a lot of people, a lot of work, and a lot of commitment, dollar-wise and time-wise, planning the project and also working with the city fathers down there to see that we could complete this project. Federation was at the backbone of this, and if you look at the leadership of Federation, and you look at the leadership of that board, you'll see that they're interchangeable. I don't know what else to say.

08-00:34:44

Meeker:

Also within your term—and I know it began before this, but—there was the de-merging of the Jewish Museum and the Magnes [Museum]. Do you have anything to say about why they weren't able to continue to move on together?

08-00:35:02

Corvin:

Again, I was not directly involved, so maybe I shouldn't even mention.

08-00:35:09

Meeker:

OK. Have you had any role in the construction, then, of the Contemporary Museum?

08-00:35:15

Corvin:

No. Let me just say that, from the outside, it appeared that it would be appropriate for our community to have one Jewish museum. Each of the museums sees its role very, very differently. One is a collector of Jewish history. The other will be more of a cultural center. We'll see the opening of the Jewish Contemporary Museum in San Francisco on June 8 of this year [2008]. And we are seeing the planning of a new Jewish Magnus Museum in Berkeley, a new whole facility.

08-00:36:31

Meeker:

This maybe brings up the question of the geographic organization of the Jewish community in the Bay Area, with the Federation focusing on West Bay communities and then a very different organization in the East Bay. Is there, from your experience, a vast difference between the East and the West, or is there too much made of that divide?

08-00:37:02

Corvin:

Many, many years ago—way before I was president, it dates back to Brian Lurie—we spent a great deal of time looking to see if possibly it would be a wise move for Federation of the East Bay and West Bay to merge. Nothing came out of those discussions.

08-00:37:27

Meeker: Why do you suppose that? Were you involved in them in any way as a board member?

08-00:37:31

Corvin: Yes. We met, but nothing was ever finalized. No recommendation was brought forth.

08-00:37:45

Meeker: Were there different agendas? Were there different political sympathies?

08-00:37:49

Corvin: I really can't say.

08-00:37:50

Meeker: OK. But it was a non-starter, it sounds like.

08-00:37:53

Corvin: Sometimes things that seem so logical, such as the joining together of the two Federations, just don't work. When you have two different objectives, it's difficult. In Federation, it would appear as if it would have more of a similar drive, but not necessarily. I don't know. Leadership has changed. There's a new director in Oakland for the last few years, and there will be a new director here, so one never knows what will happen. Another question is, is it wise to get too big? The area really is so large now.

08-00:39:92

Meeker: [pause] I think we've covered, actually, most of these issues. Well, now is probably a good time to ask you what you think has been omitted thus far, and what you'd like to be sure that we discuss.

08-00:39:47

Corvin: I'm not certain we've noted the Israel Center or the Israel Overseas Committee. I think most probably it's one of the most, and has been one of the most, dedicated groups within Federation. They have deep love for Israel. This does not infer that others don't, but their commitment to Israel is very strong. The Israel Center itself developed in San Francisco, and its role is to bring more of an awareness of what's going on in Israel to us and as well as to bring an awareness to the Israelis as what goes on in our community. I think the lay leadership has been outstanding, and I think our staff leadership has been excellent. I think we can be proud as to what we've done, as far as our allocation process within Israel, the development of their Israeli Committee itself, their Amuta, and also some of the very special programs that we've developed such as the Ashalim and the Leadership Committee, as well as our development of leadership in Israel. That's one area I think that possibly we have not given enough time to.

One other thing that has occurred in the last few years has been the development of our Jewish schools. We've had Brandeis Hillel Day School here in San Francisco for, I guess, it's almost twenty-five, thirty years.

However, in the last few years, we've seen the number of Jewish schools increase, and we've seen the dedicated leadership of our younger population, seeing how important this development has been. And in so doing, it's interesting to also note that in many cases, they've been working with city departments. The use of some public school facilities, but also, when you're developing new schools, it's so important—going back to the very first question—of being able to work with city officials to see to it that it can be done. We've seen this.

One other thing we've seen—I mentioned programming, but I think within our community, one could really stay very busy and involved, and I'm speaking of all ages, the very young as well as the old, through programs that JCCs and the synagogues and agencies are offering. They're offering all kinds of activities throughout the week. I can remember when I was concerned that the Jewish Center was going to take over the role of the synagogue, and now we see so many activities within some of our synagogues, we wonder who's role is which. I think we've also seen, which I find exciting, the development of a campus. Marin was our first experience of it, where we saw the synagogue, the JCC, the Brandeis School, as well as preschool, all within close proximity. It's really being a hub where families can participate, and can become involved. I think our preschool programs have been outstanding, and there's certainly an entry point for our families if we're concerned about Jewish continuity. I think our senior education programs that we see sponsored by all these various agencies, of enormous importance, encouraging people to learn more about their Judaism and to feel comfortable with it.

I think one other thing. I've been fortunate in the long years of my volunteering to have had quite a few good teachers within the community. I'll go back to Florette Pomeroy, Martin Paley, Joe Valentine, Peter Haas, Bob Sinton, Robert Levinson, and Ruth Chance.

08-00:45:10
Meeker:

Is there something about that group as a whole, the qualities that they shared? I know they're all very distinct individuals, but are there—

08-00:45:20
Corvin:

I think that I was just fortunate to be able to work directly with them, and learn from them, and leave the importance of building community.

08-00:46:1
Meeker:

How was it that they exemplified or taught to you the importance of community?

08-00:46:20
Corvin:

They all had a vision of the whole. They weren't narrow in their scope, and, how can I say it, they reveled in the success of others. You never realized they were teaching along the way. They're a pretty unusual group. [pause]

08-00:47:02

Meeker:

Well, some of the things you just brought up, I'm wondering if there's anything else you would like to say. You had mentioned you were particularly pleased with the way that leadership development is happening vis-à-vis the Israel Center, and I'm wondering if you have anything to say about that leadership development program.

08-00:47:25

Corvin:

Well, actually, when I see the young people within Federation, I have great hope. And when I see volunteers who have stepped up to leadership positions in the last few years, I think we can be very proud. Federation is a huge agency, and in order to move it, as somebody once said of Red Cross, it's like moving a whale. It moves slowly. In order to change it, or to change our direction, it's going to take more time. I think that we're going to see in the next few years some changes, and I'm very excited. I think the success of the JCCs has demonstrated that, if you have the right product, people come, use it, admire you, and find that it's a part of their life. And it would be my hope that Federation can find the link to engender that commitment for the building of a stronger Jewish community.

08-00:49:09

Meeker:

You said that you envision some changes in the next few years. What are some of those changes you envision?

08-00:49:14

Corvin:

I think the way we allocate funds may change. Also, a closer relationship with Federation departments.

08-00:49:56

Meeker:

You know, about allocation, and the level at which projects in Israel are funded, I actually don't know the history of it. When the Federation started to fund projects in Israel, was it as early as 1948, or I don't know that you—

08-00:50:19

Corvin:

It was during Brian Lurie's time.

08-00:50:23

Meeker:

And that was—?

08-00:50:24

Corvin:

I'm not good at years, so you can find that out. And I think it was \$60,000, and you can find out what we do today.

08-00:50:36

Meeker:

But I guess the question I'm getting at was that I wonder if the sense has always been that the state of Israel is a young state, and it needs to get on its feet, and there's a lot of institution building that needs to happen, but then once it becomes adult and robust, is there a sense that at some point the funding will no longer be necessary, or is it—

08-00:51:00

Corvin:

I don't think you'll find that. Through UJC, there's funding, for instance, for old Russian Jewish citizens who don't have enough food. There are always going to be needs in Israel and elsewhere. First of all, until you reach the level of peace, which I don't think I'm going to see, you don't have much hope that there won't be need. So I don't think that's even in the thoughts of people, or not that I'm aware of. People like to feel as if they're involved in something whereby they're investing their energy and dollars in something that makes a difference. I think people feel that when they're working on Israel.

08-00:51:48

Meeker:

You mentioned there will be change, but it sounds like there will also be some continuities in the Federation.

08-00:51:57

Corvin:

Yes, but I think in change in allocation, I wasn't thinking of Israel. I was thinking of how we allocate funds, and if we do it by issues, or if we do it by agencies, as we've always done. Or, in working together with agencies, together do we supply funding to resolve or, hopefully, to help an issue?

08-00:52:25

Meeker:

Any other changes you see?

08-00:52:28

Corvin:

That's one. You mentioned marketing. It's been a sore point for me for a long time, but I had the same problem at Red Cross. I think it's just a difficult area for nonprofits these days. I think it can be done, but I think you do have to invest resources in order to really see results, which you don't see immediately. It takes a long while. Do you want me to get the figure, what we're allocating?

08-00:53:34

Meeker:

Well, it's in the notes, so sure.

08-00:53:36

Corvin:

You can get it. I'll tell you what. There's a flyer that gives how much we actually distributed. There's lots more to do, and I don't think our job will ever be finished.

08-00:53:59

Meeker:

OK. Well, on that note, shall we end?

08-00:54:00

Corvin:

Perfect.

08-00:54:02

Meeker:

All right.

[End of Interview]