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*Wayne Feinstein:
Former Executive Director, Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula,
Marin and Sonoma Counties, 1991-2000*

Jewish Community Federation Leadership Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2016

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Wayne Feinstein, 2010, photo courtesy Slava Blazer Photography

Wayne Feinstein was born Albany, New York, in 1952 and raised largely in Columbus, Ohio. He was active in his local Jewish congregation as a teenager and seriously considered the idea of attending seminary. He took an undergraduate degree from Colgate College and after graduation went to work for a series of Jewish community nonprofits, including: the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Welfare Federation in San Francisco, and the Council of Jewish Federations in New York. His first leadership role was as executive director of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, which was followed by years heading up the Los Angeles Jewish Federation and the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation, where he was executive director from 1991 to 2000. In 2000, he switched careers, going into the private sector, eventually becoming a vice president at the Capital Group. In this interview, Feinstein discusses his childhood, education, and experiences formative in the development of his decision to serve the Jewish community for roughly three decades. He surveys the landscape of Jewish communal organizations and describes how the roles played by those organizations changed over the last quarter of the 20th century. Feinstein details, in particular, the three federations for which he served as staff executive, focusing on the fundraising and service functions of those organizations.

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Interview 1: March 1, 2016

01-00:00:07

Meeker: Today is the 1st of March 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. This is interview session number one and we are here at your offices in San Francisco. We begin these interviews the same way with every person, and that is tell me your name and when and where you were born.

01-00:00:38

Feinstein: Wayne Feinstein. I was born in Albany, New York, May 1, 1952.

01-00:00:43

Meeker: Okay. And tell me a little bit about the circumstances into which you were born. Maybe the kind of work that your father did or if your mother worked outside of the home. Some of the circumstances of your family.

01-00:00:58

Feinstein: Well, my parents met at Ohio State University. They met after dad came back from military service. So he had a two-and-a-half year or so break. He had served in the Army Air Force, as it was called at the time, and he was a lieutenant bombardier and decorated, in North Africa and Italy for the most part. I have this wonderful set of mementos of some of his medals and cameos that he bought in Naples, Italy when he was based there for a period of time. He had a fabulous voice. He had a great speaking voice and great singing voice and for a brief while thought he was going to be a radio host and in fact did not use the Feinstein name because he thought it sounded too Jewish. So he was Jack Ferris and the program was the Ferris Wheel. Mom was a language major at Ohio State and she was fluent, in addition to English and Yiddish, in romance languages. So she was fluent in Spanish, French, and Italian. And right after she graduated Ohio State she was a translator at the United Nations. So this was a classic pre-baby boomer parent Second World War experience. They met, they married.

Mom had grown up in Brooklyn, New York, and then her dad, my grandfather, was a dress manufacturer and had come here penniless, typical immigrant experience, in the nineteen teens. I think around 1914. And at five years old, with no education, swept a factory floor and wound up owning that factory with a partner. And to escape rampant unionizing they moved to upstate New York. I never entirely understood that but as a practical matter the AFL-CIO and related unions never went upstate. So he managed running this business, Max Ulman, Incorporated, for a while. They were the biggest manufacturer of ladies housecoats. You're too young to remember this but every mom wore these housecoats around the house in the fifties. And Max Ulman was the major maker and sold them to Montgomery Ward, Sears, and Penney's. They were the largest supplier in the country. So for a while did quite well. And mom just had to get away from home. Went to Ohio State because that was as far west as they would go.

01-00:03:38

Meeker: Ulman was her maiden name?

01-00:03:40

Feinstein: Ulman was actually my grandfather's partner's family name. Her name was Shack, Sheikovicz in Russian, changed it at Ellis Island. Typical story. None of the people checking you in could pronounce your Russian name so they gave you the closest approximation or your village name. It was just that simple.

01-00:04:00

Meeker: Did you learn much about grandparents growing up?

01-00:04:10

Feinstein: Yes.

01-00:04:11

Meeker: Did you know them?

01-00:04:12

Feinstein: Yes.

01-00:04:13

Meeker: Tell me about maybe your mother's side, the grandparents.

01-00:04:15

Feinstein: My father's father died when my dad was fifteen, which we may or may not come back to. So obviously never knew him. But I knew his mother very, very well. As I said, my mother's father, Hyman Shack, was born in the Kiev area. In fact, the village that he and his brothers grew up in, today it would be a suburb of Kiev. In point of fact, it's under Babi Yar. I went there in 1976 or '77 and asked the tourist guide, because in those days you did not go as a private tourist and travel alone, whether I could see this village. "Oh, there's no such village." And I knew where it was and I said, "Well, then, on Saturday when we don't have any other program, could you arrange for someone to take us out to Babi Yar." It's a monument to all the Ukrainians who were killed by the Nazis. It's nothing to do with the Jews who were slaughtered there. But they got out well ahead of that.

01-00:05:27

Meeker: So there was no physical landscape remaining?

01-00:05:29

Feinstein: Oh, no, no, no. No, no. And all the monuments built post-Second World War were Soviet realism. So these gargantuan structures.

01-00:05:41

Meeker: Of workers, of the proletariat.

01-00:05:44
Feinstein:

Yeah. But all that mattered, whether you were of Jewish ancestry or not, is that you are Russian. It's very simple. So he was a very humble quiet man, very smart. He was not degree educated but very smart and very thoughtful. But quiet. And he figured that he had been blessed to come to America and to be a successful immigrant. Mom graduated high school in Kingston, New York, which is where the factory was moved when I said upstate. And Kingston High. She had an older sister, my Aunt Roslyn, who did not go to college, so she was the first one of two to go to college.

Dad – let me think a moment. Yes, I'm sure of this. Of eight sibs my father was the only one to go to college. And dad, when he died, was five-seven. He was probably a little bit taller. I'm five-ten. Always wanted to make it to six feet, just never did. But he was an all-city high school quarterback in football. To think of somebody as small as he was playing football today is not possible. But Ohio's a big football town, so of course. He was a very good looking guy and I think just had a certain degree of blessing at that point. And met mom and fell in love. As I say, it was after the war. There was a period of time he thought he wanted to be a dentist and then decided he didn't. I don't know, because I don't remember ever talking with any of their close friends with whom they had gone to college when I was a kid, but I suspect that time and circumstances and friends saying, "Oh, Jack, you're so presentable," or "You've got such a wonderful voice, you ought to do this." They must have turned his head for a period of time.

So I was born in Albany and so were my two younger sisters. I have younger twin sisters, younger by nearly three years, Jeri and Joyce. And when I was eight and the girls were five, we moved from Albany to Columbus, Ohio, which is where dad had grown up. And I had been there once or twice. I don't think my sisters—maybe they'd been there once. But the reason was that my mother's mother, whom as a kid we all adored, but she was a very difficult, very controlling person, and it could be why my grandfather was so quiet. And it is no doubt why my mother was the way she was. Now, my mother died when she was thirty-nine, so I was only fifteen. But I was much closer to my mom growing up than my dad, at least at that stage of life. And she had this fantastic sarcastic wit. To begin with, she was very bright and a voracious reader. So I think in another era I could have imagined mom a university professor. But, again, that's a child's memory. This fantastic facility in languages, so good that she could be a UN translator. And I have an older cousin who's like my older brother. When we're sitting around and we get to the point of reminiscing about our parents, will always talk about how Aunt Sylvia, she could slice you like Zorro but you wouldn't even know. You'd never see the knife coming, meaning the sarcastic wit. And I have a little bit of that. A geneticist told me that sense of humor can be inherited, which I never realized. Our youngest son just had this same very quiet, very subtle biting wit and I think it came from Grandma Sylvia, whom he never knew. Who knows. So that's the basic story.

01-00:10:16

Meeker:

So it sounds like both sets of grandparents immigrated to the United States in the teens. Is that correct?

01-00:10:22

Feinstein:

Well, my father's father was a Menshevik. And he was on the barricades in 1905, which, of course, aborted. And then he and his brother Harry, my great-uncle Harry, bought steamship tickets out of Hamburg, Germany. And the name on the steamship ticket was Feinstein. So I don't know what the Russian name was. I know my father's mother's name was Legumsky but that wasn't the name that carried. She was from a village just outside of Vilna, Lithuania. But he was from Moscow. His family was from Moscow. So they were early revolutionaries. He had a trade as a cobbler. So when he moved to America he became a shoe man, shoe repairman. He essentially died from kidney stones, from which no one would die today, when my father was a teenager. But that was that side of the story. So that's my father's side.

On my mother's side I told you about her father, my mother's father from Kiev area, Babi Yar. My mother's mother was already first-generation American. Her parents had come via England, from Russia to England, been in England for a while, but she was born actually in Connecticut. I think she always put on airs. I have no idea how they met and my cousin doesn't have any idea how they met. It would actually be very interesting. Because there's no doubt that my grandfather supported her in the style to which she would have liked to have become accustomed. Now, her younger brothers were also successful. She had one brother who became a pharmacist. And, in fact, when I was a teenager it was one of my claims to fame because he owned the Brevoort Pharmacy in Greenwich Village at the foot of Bleeker and Eighth. I used to spend two weeks every summer at my cousin's house on Long Island. We'd go into the city several days, we'd always hang around Uncle Irving's place. They lived on Ninth. My whole life I had an orbit around Greenwich Village and I just thought this is the coolest thing imaginable.

01-00:12:48

Meeker:

Expected Dylan to come walking through the door or something.

01-00:12:50

Feinstein:

Always. Always, always, always. Never happened. [laughter]

01-00:12:55

Meeker:

These stories about grandparents and where they came from, it's interesting to me because they're all quite different in the sense that one was a Menshevik and another one kind of came in Kiev, I imagine, as things were heating up in Europe in a slightly different context. Your maternal grandmother already a first-generation American. How were these stories transmitted to you? Was there kind of like a formal process of you learning about your people, your immediate family?

01-00:13:36
Feinstein:

That's a good question. There certainly was nothing formal on either side. I don't remember whether my father or mother or either or both at various times, for whatever trigger reason, would tell us stories that they knew from their parents or whether, as I got a little bit older and more curious—I know by the time I was a preteen I was interested in this stuff. I know there wasn't anything formal but I suspect that the amount of knowledge I have now is a blend of those two things. And not that ours was an Orthodox Jewish home. To the contrary, I grew up in the conservative movement, fairly traditional, observed most of the Jewish holidays. Did not grow up in a kosher home. But we had the holiday celebrations and had most of the extended family in the vicinity come to us instead of our going to them. I think my dad was just more comfortable or fluent in being able to lead a service, even a little family Passover dinners or Hanukkah prayers or whatever, than any of his sibs. So I suspect around those occasions stories came out, as well. But this stage, unless I thought about it for a while, I'm not sure I could pinpoint this. I think it was just sort of a *mélange*.

01-00:15:23
Meeker:

Well, tell me about your family's participation in Jewish communal life growing up.

01-00:15:31
Feinstein:

Well, in Albany I remember walking to services as a little boy with my father. So he went fairly often and he had grown up in a completely non-practicing home. Communists are not practicing Jews as a rule. So while my father's mother arguably made the best matzah balls in the world, as a practical matter it was just sort of the ethnic trappings and nothing about the religion. So I don't know where he got that but he and mom both really loved their rabbi, Leo Mordcoff. And my middle name, Lewis was for Rabbi Mordcoff, whom I don't remember ever meeting. And by the time I remember walking to services with my dad at—I think it was Temple Sinai in Albany. And it was walking distance from the house. I can't tell you whether that was a primary consideration of buying on that block. It was just a nice post-Second World War ranch house with a piece of property and an ice rink down the block, which was great, and bratty kids on one side and my friend Vincent Quackenbush, my first Catholic friend, down the block. He'd come to us for Hanukkah gift opening and I'd go to him Christmas morning. [laughter] It was always great fun. So I don't know where he got it. But dad was very smart and also a voracious reader. I'm sure that was one of the many qualities that attracted them to each other. And so he learned. And so going to services, holding dad's hand as we'd walk down New Scotland Avenue to the synagogue was just a normal thing for me. It was a progressive conservative synagogue. So a younger rabbi and a good educational program. But by the time I was in third grade we had moved to Columbus.

Now, in Columbus we wound up joining Tifereth Israel, another conservative synagogue, not walking distance from the house. The rabbi was Nathan

Zelizer, who played an important formative role in my life that I'll come to momentarily. And I did go to services often with dad and I got involved with what was called United Synagogue Youth. In Columbus, I don't remember in Albany, dad and mom were active at the Jewish community center. Now, unlike northern California, as I'm sure you know or have heard, if you grew up in upstate New York or Columbus, Ohio, you weren't dealing in a great open society. Neighborhoods were ethnically and racially balkanized and segregated. I think it was high school before there was an African American in my class. It's funny. A number of close friends from my school days, one of whom I had lunch with yesterday, none of us remember ever being invited to a black high school friend's "home" or vice versa. And you just didn't.

So the Jewish center and the synagogue played very central roles in our family life. Dad belonged to B'nai B'rith and he had a bowling league one night and one Sunday. As I got a little bit older there were all kinds of teenage activities and teenage counsel and a group of my buddies and I started a Jewish fraternity and we participated in quiz bowl and those kinds of things. But my Sundays were spent at the JCC and my Saturdays, half of the day was spent at synagogue.

01-00:19:40

Meeker:

So when you attended synagogue, was this a matter of faith for you? Was it centered around belief and/or was it more about learning values?

01-00:19:57

Feinstein:

[laughter] Well, there are two phases to my answer. I'd say prior to my mother's death and then after my mother's death. Prior, I learned a lot. So in terms of quanta of knowledge, I'm fairly fluent in Hebrew. I've always been able to read Hebrew. Or not always but certainly from a young age I was able to read Hebrew. I could lead the services. I could read Torah. In Columbus in particular we were lucky in our congregation. There was a philanthropist named Samuel Melton who had funded an effort to improve the education of young Jewish people in the United States specifically for that. Over a number of years and posthumously, he must have given the Jewish Theological Seminary a couple tens of millions. Today there are vestiges of the things that he brought, because he left a large endowment. And it's mostly focused on Jewish education and culture. So JCCs around the country have Melton fellows and these are adult Jewish learning programs. And have been quite good and quite successful. They get good quality teachers and they attract and allow in on a selective basis people who seem highly motivated, but achievers themselves. So in Silicon Valley there are a lot of people who go to these Melton classes. Peninsula, North Peninsula. A lot of people do this.

So to that point I would have to say that my focus was more social than anything else. I always had a non-Jewish friend or two but my primary orbit was the Jewish community. I think it was for the macro reason that I gave you earlier, that if you grew up in Columbus, Ohio, you stayed to your own.

And then mom died in March of '67 and it was very sudden. She hadn't been sick that we knew of. And my father, because it was in the middle of the night, my father was distraught and I heard him calling her name across the hall in my bedroom and I walked into their bedroom and he was just sort of shaking her. And I heard the death rattle as she was dying. And he looked at me with tears in his eyes and he said, "Call the rabbi." And at 3:00 in the morning I called Rabbi Zelizer and he was at our house in forty-five minutes and he knew exactly what to do. And I just was so impressed. And then we had a traditional shiva and then shloshim. So the first seven days from death and funeral, then the first thirty days, and then the first year. And every morning before I went to school I went with dad to the 7:00 am or 6:30 am minyan and we said Kaddish for mom and then he'd drop me at high school. And on Shabbos, on Saturday, after services I'd walk home with Rabbi Zelizer. And that was a long, long walk. But he realized he had a customer.

01-00:23:35

Meeker:

Because you were looking for some deeper meaning in all this that transpired?

01-00:23:39

Feinstein:

Yes. So I stayed with the Melton program all the way through high school. So in those days that was as close as a young conservative Jew would get to growing up in a Jewish day school environment. So being Jewish, being involved in Jewish concerns, whether it was freeing Soviet Jews or helping Israel became absolutely central to my life. Shaped some of my thinking about college decisions and so on, which will seem moronic when we get there, because I didn't make the decision on that basis. Really prompted me to go through college quickly, thinking I had at least six to nine years ahead of me in terms of graduate education because I wanted to become a rabbi. And I thought I wanted to teach Jewish intellectual history.

I married my high school sweetheart at twenty-one, just as I finished Colgate, which is where I went to college. So I finished school in three years. Dale had gone to Sarah Lawrence. We found each other through a common friend because both of our mothers had died that winter. So you look back at it with armchair psychology and you realized, well, at the time, at sixteen or seventeen, we needed each other and we outgrew each other. It was just that simple. But at the time it was a really important relationship. And she was from an even more traditional family, belonged to an Orthodox synagogue. The idea of being a rabbi's wife was neither for Dale, my first wife, nor for Leslee, for sure. It wasn't something that they could ever imagine. But that's what I thought I wanted to do. And then one day I was home from college, just before I was about to enter the seminary, and the assistant rabbi, Rabbi David Zisenwine, who subsequently moved to Tel Aviv and he was a professor of education at Tel Aviv University. And I stayed in touch with him over the years. He's now semi-retired, maybe completely retired. And he took a walk with us. Maybe it was just with me. But I couldn't have been more than twenty at the time. And I'd already applied to and was accepted at JTS.

And that was a bit of an ordeal because I was applying to the conservative seminary. I didn't keep kosher. So I had to make some adjustments in order to get in. But that's what I thought I wanted to do. And this comes full circle to your question. Looking back on it, and even now, my primary motivation was that I just had a real appetite for Jewish learning and I thought what better way than to steep myself in Tanakh, the Bible, and Talmud, and then maybe go on to Columbia and finish a doctorate in Jewish history and maybe teach intellectual history.

And Rabbi Zisenwine, in the course of that hour, said, "This is a terrible profession to be a pulpit rabbi." He said, "You really don't want to do this." [laughter] We don't have to go into that anymore unless you're really interested in probing. So I dropped out. I had a soon-to-be bride who at the time seemed to be the closest person to me in the world, a rabbi mentor whom I adored who said, "I made this mistake, don't you do it, too." My history mentor, I had a dual major at Colgate in philosophy and history, sort of Jewish intellectual history, made perfect sense, and Briton Cooper Busch, who's long since died, took me aside one night and invited me to his home for dinner. I was a good student. I wrote interesting papers. But it was really interesting to me. He was already in his early forties and didn't have tenure. And he did the same thing with me that night that David Zisenwine had done a few months earlier and he said, "You don't want to do this." He said, "Here I'm forty-two. I've published three books. I am still an associate professor without tenure." Now, a year later he got tenure. But he was almost bitter about it. And he said, "I've got to tell you, unless you go to Harvard there will be no jobs for you." And he said, "You can probably get into Harvard but you haven't done anything to apply." And he says, "And I'll do everything I can to get you in there. That's how narrow the field is." And he says, "If you go to a lesser school you're never going to get on the tenure track for an Ivy or a place like Colgate. Forget about it." So you put all those things together and I had to find an alternative.

01-00:28:51

Meeker:

Did they sense in you maybe an ambition to try to achieve more in life?

01-00:28:57

Feinstein:

Yeah. And I did. In fact, when I took my first job in the UJA Federation System in the summer of '73, Rabbi Brian Lurie, who, of course, was one of my predecessors here, and is one of my closest friends in the world—I don't know whether I gave you Brian as a reference.

01-00:29:21

Meeker:

I spoke with him.

01-00:29:23

Feinstein:

I will always remember this interview because it was typical Brian. It was just unique. I'd interviewed for jobs before but I'd never had anyone invite my girlfriend, let alone my new newlywed bride in and spent forty-five minutes

out of an hour and fifteen talking to Dale. Let's see. Oh, he said, "Why do you think you want to work here?" And I was honest with him. I said, "I need a job while I'm applying to law school." I said, "But I learned over the last several years in college that even if I want to save the world, the most I can do is save a corner. So if I'm going to save a corner I'd just as soon save the Jewish community." [laughter] That was probably his megalomania, too. He looked back and he smiled and from that point forward he asked Dale questions. And we get to the end of the forty-five minutes and it was interesting to me. We were pretty close friends, so she knew me very well, and he knew that intuitively and he just kept asking her questions. I looked at him, said, "Is there anything you'd like to ask me since she's not applying for work here?" He said, "No, I've got what I need. I'd like you to work here." [laughter] So I had a job and I spent the year applying to law school. But yeah, he knew. He knew. And so did the others.

I got to college and went through college—remember the era, the moment. I was too young to have been engaged in it but you had free speech movement here, but elsewhere, as well. You had civil rights, which even as a young teen and involved in the social ethics programs of United Synagogue Youth and our congregation were really important issues for me. I had a fair number, notwithstanding what I said to you earlier about how surface-y the friendship was with African American co-students, that we didn't go to each other's homes. But there were a lot of people that I was friendly with day-to-day on student council, on debate, or in choir or theater programs or intramural sports. These were my buddies. Not my closest buddies but buddies. And I just thought it was terrible what was going on. So I was just very cause oriented. And then I get to college and we're in the heart of the Vietnam movement.

01-00:32:06

Meeker: So you graduate high school in '71, is it?

01-00:32:11

Feinstein: Seventy.

01-00:32:12

Meeker: Seventy. Okay. By that point in time you said that you were already involved in this program. The Melton program. And it sounds like you already had ambitions at that point in time of becoming a rabbi, learning the history of Jewish philosophy. Why Colgate?

01-00:32:44

Feinstein: Such a perfect question. Yeah.

01-00:32:47

Meeker: Maybe describe Colgate and how you got to know this location, this college.

- 01-00:32:55
Feinstein: I never stepped foot on the campus until freshman orientation. It was the only college I applied to and got into that I had not visited.
- 01-00:33:04
Meeker: Wow.
- 01-00:33:06
Feinstein: I love it. I have a very deep affection for Colgate and I'm still connected to it. I've been a significant donor for years.
- 01-00:33:14
Meeker: Where is it?
- 01-00:33:15
Feinstein: Upstate New York. Right dead center. Hamilton, New York. Well, I'll back into it. My closest friends in high school were all over-achievers. Everybody was a four point student. In those days you only took the SATs but everyone did extremely well on SATs and almost of us went east to school. So I had applied to Harvard and Yale, neither of which accepted me; Penn, which I did get into, Brandeis, which I did get into. Colgate. And then Ohio State was my safety school. And so I got into most of the schools. I had been to Brandeis, which reminded me of a Jewish center youth weekend and I said to dad, "Not a chance." And then I went to Philadelphia, which was before the bicentennial. And Philly in the early seventies was a pit, especially where Penn sat in town. And it's ironic because one of my two sisters lives there now and loves it. And since they cleaned it up in '76 it's become again a great city. But at the time blech. So arguably it was a more prestigious school at the time, although Colgate has really risen in the last forty years. But I just said, "Not for me." I had a debate partner who years older than I in high school named Jeff Schneider. Jeff? Yeah, Jeff Schneider, who had gone to Colgate. And by the way, my freshman year, which would have been his junior year, he had transferred out. And we weren't that close but he loved it. He just loved it. Not enough to stay but he loved it. So I went to Colgate.
- My grandparents were in Kingston so that's about a two-and-a-half-hour drive due east from Colgate. And, in fact, they dropped me at school with my suitcase, my record player and a few records, and that was it. I already had a serious girlfriend and I applied for and got the only single room on the second floor of West Hall. And it was just the beginning of a wonderful experience, except that I raced through it. I used to tell my kids, who would say to me, "Dad, do you have any regrets in your whole life?" I'd say, "Only one." "What's that?" "I raced through college." My oldest son, who's a high achiever, finished UCLA a year early just with all the AP credits and so on. And he already had a job at Morgan Stanley and they really didn't want him until the following summer. And I said, "Sam, this is the only time in your life that mom and I are going to give you a gift. Take anything you want, take it pass/fail, but you were so intensely focused. Enjoy your last year." So he

stayed two quarters and took a lot of things, cultural enrichment, philosophy and so on that he had not taken previously, and he called me one day in the middle of the second quarter and he says, “A group of my buddies and I who are going to be done, they’re going to be done a quarter early,” he was done a year early, “decided we’d go to Costa Rica for ten weeks. Do you have any problem?” I said, “No. but don’t rush to work. You’ve got plenty of years to work.” So that’s what he did. That’s my only regret in life. I have made fantastic friends there who are lifelong friends and I had this cluster of guys from growing up in Columbus, Ohio, and then a smaller group of guys from Colgate. It just had a great impact on me.

01-00:37:27

Meeker:

Can you tell me more about why you rejected Brandeis? You kind of said that in passing. I’m not quite sure what that means exactly.

01-00:37:34

Feinstein:

[laughter] Yeah. It’s contradictory. But I’ve always had a contrary streak. So if everybody likes something in my younger days I would just by nature like something else. And so after spending all those years as a teenager as a leader in Jewish youth activity, president of this and president of that and the first president of the teenage council, I was the first teenage chair of the annual campaign—there’s a story there, too—the idea of spending four more years at the Columbus JCC while I worked on my college degree made me want to gag. And that’s how I felt almost within an hour of walking on—now, Brandeis is a fabulous school so I don’t mean any disrespect to Brandeis. And I’ve got a lot of friends who did their undergraduate or graduate work at Brandeis. It wasn’t for me at the time and that was just more a function of where I’d come from.

There were personal things. At the time mom died I did not have a close relationship with my father. It was superficial, in part because it was so close with my mother and in part because he worked all the time. Typical American dad. And then a year after mom died he remarried and they were married twenty years. But I always referred to her, not to him or to her, but as the wicked stepmom of the west. And they just didn’t want me around. So the idea of going far away and doing things that he didn’t particularly care for or support, although I’ll give him credit. He spent my whole senior year before my eighteenth birthday walking me through at dinner whether I was a conscientious objector or a selective objector, and did it gently, as a guy who was a decorated Second World War—I don’t know. He would never have called himself a hero. But if you’ve got decorations you did something extraordinary. But he never banged on my head and said, “You must do your military service, even if it means going to Vietnam. You must.”

01-00:40:08

Meeker:

Did you register as a conscientious objector?

01-00:40:10
Feinstein:

No, no. I got extremely lucky. Two ways: My draft number was 156. The year I would have been called they got as far as 151. But I had had very bad allergies as a kid too. And I had an occasional episode of asthma and the pediatrician wrote the draft board a letter saying that I had asthma and I became a 1-Y. I just got lucky. I do have a very close friend from high school who lives in Boston now who was a conscientious objector and did alternative service and wound up in what was then called the Vista Program in Appalachia. One of Ian's many claims to fame is that he discovered James Taylor [laughter] in the hills of North Carolina, Blue Ridge Mountains.

01-00:41:24
Meeker:

Is that where James Taylor is from?

01-00:41:26
Feinstein:

He's from North Carolina. Yeah. Or southern Virginia but he was playing in small clubs in that area. Because I remember the very first person I knew who had the album, because he bought it at a Friday night—I don't even think you'd call it a concert, but a performance by James Taylor.

01-00:41:47
Meeker:

A hootenanny! [laughter]

01-00:41:47
Feinstein:

Yeah. Well, it wasn't quite a hootenanny because he didn't invite you to sing along with him. Yeah. I thought that was great.

01-00:41:52
Meeker:

In the 1950s, 1960s, when you're in elementary school, high school, this is when there's not just an awareness of what transpired in World War II as far as the Holocaust, but it starts to become part of the popular consciousness. High school students are reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. There are movies that are coming out and other important books, as well. How were you introduced to this knowledge? Was it a communal introduction, family, or more from popular culture?

01-00:42:30
Feinstein:

A little bit of everything. We, to our knowledge, did not lose any first-degree family relations in the Holocaust or in Europe. That made us comparatively unusual. But I think from preadolescence on, probably between the synagogue and United Synagogue Youth, I had exposure to this. And I began reading. I think the first book I read was Elie Wiesel's *Night* and I am pretty sure we read that in Hebrew high school. And it was an introduction to Holocaust literature. We read three books in that class. *Night*. We read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which to this day remains one of the most important books I've read. That's the kind of book I've read six or eight times over fifty years. I just thought it was so unbelievably insightful and written based on a terrible existential experience. And then Andre Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*. I never really believed in the lamed vov-nik, that God put

thirty-six righteous humans on the planet. I sure didn't after the Holocaust. But it was a meaningful story. So it was certainly a primary motivation for my getting involved as a kid in student struggle for Soviet Jewry and getting Jews out of Russia, since my family had come predominantly from Russia and the Ukraine. Was a driving force for me in college and then when I first went to work for UJA. That, coupled with my love of Israel. And it certainly shaped my thinking around the Six-Day War, because that was a moment that any Jew who knew any of the Holocaust stories worried the week preceding Israel's preemptive strike that the Arabs were just going to wipe the Jews off the face of the earth.

Now, during my career, I don't think I ever wrote anything this crass but I used to say on occasion in leadership groups, lay and professional, the next generation is not going to pay the funeral costs for the six million, meaning we'd better get on with something positive as a reason to affiliate and be part of the Jewish community. I tried during most of my professional career in leadership roles to move us in that direction, improving Jewish education and culture and improving the Jewish centers, traveling Jewish theater and Jewish film festival, all different points of access which we can come to later. But those became important in part because as searing as it was even for someone who didn't lose anyone directly, it just shaped my consciousness. You put that together with my already pretty well-formed sense of social ethic and how fundamentally unjust racism was and Nazi racism and anti-Semitism was and the die was cast.

01-00:45:59

Meeker:

I could imagine if I was a parent, particularly at this point in time when the Holocaust was less than a generation removed, I'd question "How do I teach this to my child? Do I do it myself? Do I let it happen in the communal setting?" Obviously it's part of popular culture at this point in time. Do you remember either of your parents or somebody close to you like ever sitting down and saying, "This extreme tragedy befell our people. This is how I've thought about it."

01-00:46:45

Feinstein:

No. I don't remember ever discussing that with mom. And the specific context in which Holocaust came up in conversation with my father was the year between seventeen and eighteen, when he used the Holocaust as the touchstone to help me realize that I opposed the Vietnam War, as did he, but I was a selective objector because I would go fight and kill Nazis. At the time, and he was afraid of this, around my sixteenth birthday I went to Israel for the first time for the summer on a United Synagogue Youth pilgrimage. And he thought for sure I wouldn't come back and the next thing he'd get was a letter that I was matriculating high school in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and joining the army.

01-00:47:49

Meeker:

Yeah. Just could be a photograph of you in fatigues.

01-00:47:50
Feinstein:

Yeah. I came home. But that was his thought. When I was young would I have fought and killed to save my people? You betcha. It was almost in my viscera. I felt that strongly about it. But I don't remember either parents shaping it. Now, there were already, probably fed by our synagogue and how progressive it was in terms of understanding what Fackenheim called the 614th Commandment, that you will not give Hitler a posthumous victory by disappearing into the American melting pot and just assimilating away. So it was palpably important to our family that Jews persist and that we achieve everything we can achieve in the American dream but never for a second deny in any way that you're Jewish. And I told you already, my whole growing up was just interwoven with programmatic responses of the organized Jewish community.

01-00:49:13
Meeker:

Were your parents Zionists?

01-00:49:16
Feinstein:

That's a good question. I don't think so. I think, and I say it hesitantly because it's just something I don't remember ever talking with either of them about, ironically. If they were they were in the category known as Hovevei Zion, lovers of Zion. I tried to take dad to Israel with me a few times. Never went. Mom died too young. My guess is under other circumstances we might have eventually taken a family trip or something because Wayne was so passionate about it. My sisters haven't gone, which I find odd. We were just at a family wedding in Florida—

01-00:50:06
Meeker:

Still?

01-00:50:06
Feinstein:

Still have not. And I've taken my kids a number of times and I've said to my sisters, "I'd consider organizing a family trip if you wanted to," although at this point going on a mission is not very appealing to me. But to go with family is fun.

01-00:50:29
Meeker:

You said maybe they were lovers of Zion. They certainly weren't anti-Zionists?

01-00:50:39
Feinstein:

Oh, no, no. Far from it. And it's probably coming across but I'll just put words to it. That estranged is too strong a term but whatever short of estrangement is the way I felt towards my father after my mother died. So those last three years of high school I was as externally focused as a teenager can be short of joining a youth gang and selling crack and killing people. I spent as much time out of the house as I possibly could, and particularly after Dad married Barbara. And I took every leadership role, I got every chairmanship I ran for, presidency that I ran for. I had the leads in the school

plays. I was the captain of the debate team and we were state champions. Everything was outside. Everything. So what I derived from that, just in terms of my own sources of neurosis, is out of a feeling of rejection from my father on one level—and this was all repaired around my twenty-seventh birthday. We really worked on it, he and I. But for a ten-year period it didn't matter to me. I would have been concerned if he'd gotten sick or injured or lost his business because I wasn't without feeling for my father. But most of my feeling was anger. So I did things that he wouldn't do or didn't do and didn't encourage me or discourage me. He was rather passive. Now, I wasn't a bad kid. If anything, I was a super star kid so he didn't have to worry about me being on the wrong track. And I did have an older cousin who was a bit of a thug and a gangster. Died young of lymphoma but David, he was a tough guy. But I don't think Dad ever worried that I was moving that route. To the contrary. My grades were strong and I had all these accolades. This was for me. This was to get away from him.

01-00:53:08
Meeker:

So all of these extracurricular kind of activities you were involved in, particularly like Jewish community activities, were there any things that you did that were particularly influential later on in your life?

01-00:53:21
Feinstein:

Oh, yeah.

01-00:53:22
Meeker:

Tell me about a couple of those, perhaps.

01-00:53:24
Feinstein:

Well, the Israel trip in the summer of—I want to say the summer of '69 but I'm not sure it was then. It might have been a year earlier.

01-00:53:41
Meeker:

It was after the Six-Day War?

01-00:53:42
Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. I'd say that was really formative. And the Hebrew high school and my interaction with my teachers, and particularly after my mother died. Again, to give you some of the nuance, when I talked about being very externally focused in the US, how did my father and mother shape my thinking, and I'm telling you that it was others. Rabbi Zelizer saw that. He knew our family pretty well. And the joke with Brian, I wanted to save the world but maybe I can save a corner of it, the Jews. All of that was shaped in those years. The Six-Day War. This was my niche. Didn't realize it. Who knew that there was a possible remunerative job out there that would allow me to align my personal strong convictions and passions and still earn a paycheck.

01-00:54:56

Meeker:

Can you walk me through that first trip to Israel? How long were you there and what kind of activities did you participate in while you were there?

01-00:55:07

Feinstein:

I can try. I think in those days the trip was about seven weeks. I don't know why, but forty-nine days sticks in my head. So maybe I once had an itinerary, day-by-day itinerary. Seven weeks. We wound up in Paris, which I'll circle back to, before we came back to the States. The United Synagogue Youth had an avowedly religious focus. So we were formed in Jerusalem, which was where we were most of the trip, probably four out of seven weeks. We were dormed in a building called the Panimiya, which was the overseas students dorm on the Givat Ram campus for Hebrew University. So the one that was in town before the Six-Day War. And from there you could walk anywhere. The Knesset was across the street. Oh, it was fun.

And we had great traveling scholars in residence. In fact, the late Jacob Milgrom, who'd been a Cal professor for many years and quite distinguished, his wife Jo, who may still be alive, and at least two of his kids became conservative rabbis. One of whom lives in Israel and I see once in a while by accident. But Jeremy was on the trip with us. He was younger. And then he had a sister my age, Shira, who's someplace in the United States, I don't know where. And Jo had written books, the wife, Josephine, I'm sure. But Jack Milgrom, he had at the time published one of the definitive interpretive books on one of the five books of Moses. He was considered quite a distinguished scholar.

I remember meeting Robert Alter for the first time. He was already at Cal. He was in and out of Israel all the time. I remember him coming, probably as a favor to Jack Milgrom, and reading poetry to us in Hebrew one night. And it just had all those things. And I already was a bit of an intellectual snob. It had an appeal to me. Remember, this was smack dab in the middle of the period that was shaping my thinking that I wanted to go on in Jewish intellectual history and be a rabbi and so on and so forth. So that summer had a huge impact.

I met David Ben-Gurion, who was already in retirement. But our group stayed at his kibbutz in the Negev called Sde Boker. I took my kids back there about summer of 2007 and it was the first time I'd been there since 19—whenever that was, '68 or '69, and told them stories about David Ben-Gurion and so on.

01-00:58:19

Meeker:

Is that kibbutz still in existence?

01-00:58:21

Feinstein:

Oh, sure. It's actually quite a successful one. And like all the kibbutzim they've left their socialist moorings and they're all wealthy capitalists. But Sde Boker was right on the edge of the Negev Desert and you could do early

morning tours before the sun rose from there. It was great. It was the only time in my life I could imagine living in the desert because it was just so different than anything I knew in Columbus, Ohio, growing up in the Midwest of the United States. To be in this desert and seeing animals that are mentioned in the Bible. Wow. So all of that together left me with a sort of a visual, olfactory, auditory—I can still conjure it on occasion, this complete five-sense view of what Israel is. And that was very important to me. That really shaped my thinking and my love of Israel. That summer trip sort of concretized it for me in a very deep way.

01-00:59:36

Meeker:

There is something about travel to places with ancient sites that you've read about in original texts. Those original texts, because it's so remote both physically and chronologically, seem like works of fiction. Then you see the reality of the place. All the walls of the ancient Jerusalem are not still there but you get a sense of where they were and what the old city looked and felt like.

01-01:00:07

Feinstein:

Well, this is not relevant to the oral history but I'll tell you, I'm writing a novel, or at least I'm trying to, that's set in the first century CE and then the twenty-first century. It's a Dan Brown derivative type. And I'm spending the first week of May under the Temple Mount with an archeologist to try to bring a little verisimilitude to the historic chapters that I'm writing. And I'm thrilled about it. Because I worked on that dig that summer. Have you ever been to Jerusalem?

01-01:00:44

Meeker:

No.

01-01:00:45

Feinstein:

So it's true with any historic site and archeological excavation. They can go on for 120 years, 150 years. The summer I was there we were just scratching the surface of the Turkish era, so we were only back a few hundred years. Now they're down 5,000 years. So I've been in and out many times over the years with groups, with my family, on my own. But the idea of spending a whole week—because my wife looked at me and said, "Have a good time." [laughter] "Would you like to come with me?" "No. And be a mole for a week? No, thank you."

01-01:01:22

Meeker:

Yeah. Are you actually going to go dig?

01-01:01:26

Feinstein:

I think where we're going I won't be permitted to. And it doesn't matter to me anymore. I don't have any ambition to be an archeologist. Hitchcock, I think, called it the MacGuffin. What happened in those days that is going to play some role in the twenty-first century version of my book. So that part's going along swimmingly because you get the Mossad involved and some intrigue in

Jerusalem and lots of people write those stories. We'll see where it goes. But I'm having fun.

01-01:02:00

Meeker:

Well, when you do this original trip in '69 or so, were you able to see this through line of history there? Was that the first time that happened for you?

01-01:02:21

Feinstein:

That's a great question. Yes is the answer. Yeah.

01-01:02:30

Meeker:

I'll admit, I've been reading a lot of these interviews and I've done a handful of them. The intensity that you get even on a printed page of love of Israel, it kind of escapes me. I don't quite get it. And so for someone like you who was not born there, who did have family members there, yet this becomes a lifelong abiding passion. You see it in Brian Lurie's interview. It's intense even on the written page. So I'm trying to get a sense of like what was it about these kinds of experiences that set up a life of devotion and affection.

01-01:03:31

Feinstein:

In a manner of thinking our family was lucky that we escaped the Holocaust. My grandparents got out ahead of the czar and the Russian revolution. I read quite a bit about the Russian revolution. It was not a pleasant time unless you were a party leader and even then you could wind up with an ice pick in your brain. So I nonetheless think that because of the way I was reared to my teen years, where going to synagogue with my father is a very pleasant memory, walking home from temple after my mom died with the rabbi is a very pleasant memory. Very shaping. Because you could talk about all kinds of things and rabbis are by their nature philosophical souls who are eager to hear what you're thinking about and to give you some insight that you never thought of before. And like my parents, I was a voracious reader, still am, so I read a lot of things already. I had great teachers in the Hebrew high school and some good teachers in the public high school. But you put all that stuff together, I was beyond intellectually curious. This was part of my viscera. Being Jewish and caring about Israel and worrying about Jews that I'd never seen or met before in Russia. Those were all central important driving forces for me. I've never tried to dissect it but I think it just propounded year over year over year over year and then when one has an opportunity to work on it, either as a teenage leader or a college leader or a young pup starting out at United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York in 1973. It's funny how life goes full circle.

I already had a girlfriend who became my first wife when I went on this trip. I was a teenager. What are you going to do? But I fell in love with an Israeli girl who was on our trip whose father was a professor at the Technion on Haifa. I never saw her again after that summer. But we had a home weekend and I went to her parents' house in Haifa and hung out for the weekend. Because they were not religious. Hung out for the weekend with her friends, all of

whom spoke English. And I felt this could be me. So I think a lot of Jews, whether they had the career that I did or Brian Lurie did, or just a volunteer who gets involved and becomes chairman of the board, president of the federation, he probably had similar shaping experiences depending on your age and now you have an opportunity to act on it. And in my trips to Israel, and I lost track of how many I've taken over the years—in a week I'd make deep friendships. These people are still my friends. So I have these clusters of friends I've already mentioned to you from college and from school days and I have a cluster of friends in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. My guess is we will be lifelong friends. And when I'm there for the week I'm underground all day and then I'm going to take a shower and go have dinner with one of my friends. And I know it's true for Brian because we talk about this often. He has a number of friends who are in the leadership of the Knesset, if not currently in this government. Most of us have a problem with this particular government. But I'm having Shabbos dinner with a friend who's now a member of Knesset. Okay. Just old friends.

Now, the fact is I've been involved in American politics long enough I could have dinner with my congressman, congresswoman if I want, and have done that on occasion. It's not always fun for them. Well, because they view it as obligatory unless you're already friends. But she's really looking forward to my spending the evening with her family in Tel Aviv, having Shabbos dinner. But we've been friends thirty years. And we stay in touch by phone. And when there are crises you get in touch with one another. It's just what you do.

Again, it's jumping ahead, I remember that Saturday that Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. That night, so ten hours earlier here, and getting a call from the guy who worked for us in Jerusalem. I forget where we'd been. Maybe a bar mitzvah or something. And we came into the house about 2:00 pm our time. There was a call and I picked up the phone and it's Natan Golan calling me from Jerusalem. Of course, it was already after Shabbos given the time difference but he was orthodox. I said, "Natan, you're calling me on Shabbos." He said, "Well, it's no longer Shabbos here but I call with very sad news. Yitzhak Rabin was just assassinated." I said, "What?" He's a very funny man but he would not make a joke about that. It's like I lost an uncle. I think a lot of people felt that way. Even though I don't have that bloodline connection, it's just sort of part of who I am.

01-01:09:36
Meeker:

Well, thank you for explaining that. I appreciate that. You said something in passing that I wanted to follow-up on. You said you were the youth leader of the campaign for the federation in Columbus. What did that entail?

01-01:09:54
Feinstein:

Well, I think it was the first time they tried anything. There was a man. He may still be alive. His younger brother died of cancer but Gordy may still be alive. I stayed in his orbit for many, many years and he became stranger and

stranger as the years went on. His name was Gordon Zacks and his family had a very successful Columbus based, subsequently manufacturing elsewhere, slipper manufacturing company. R. G. Barry. It was named for, I think, his mother's father. And his dad had passed on and he and his brother were very close but Barry decided to do something else so Gordy ran this business very successfully. And he became one of the youngest chairs of United Jewish Appeal nationally. But he was a member of our congregation and he came and talked to our Hebrew high school class one Sunday morning. And this was the year prior to my going to Israel for the first time. And I was just captivated. First off, he was powerfully charismatic. Just a character. Had a crewcut. He looked like he was a Marine. Always looked like he was a Marine. Walked with an aggressive purpose all the time. Big smile. Sparkly eyes. But, boy, was he knowledgeable. We were just mesmerized at how much this person who was a volunteer, he wasn't one of our teachers, knew. And Larry Chambers, who went with me on that trip to Israel, and I went up to him afterwards and said, "Mr. Zack, would you ever have time to talk a little further with us?" He invited us to his home that Thursday night. So we went over and spent three hours. He sort of got acquainted with me and then the Six-Day War broke out. So this must have been prior to that. Prior to the trip to Israel. Maybe two years ahead.

And the director of the federation was a guy named Ben Mandelkorn. I didn't know that there was such a thing as a federation. Even when I chaired the campaign I didn't know there was such a thing as the federation. I didn't know there was a federation until after I went to work in '73. He had a daughter, Judy, with whom I was friendly. She was a year older. And they also belonged to our synagogue. And he had talked his daughter into trying to organize a team campaign. And she said, "I'll do it if I can get a partner." I know I had been president of Taurus, which was our Jewish fraternity. Taurus, of course. And I was on the teenage council and she was on the teenage council. And she just thought that I had exhibited leadership so she persuaded me. And I have to admit that I was attracted to her.

01-01:13:27

Meeker:

That helped.

01-01:13:28

Feinstein:

[laughter] Why do young guys do these things? So we wound up the co-chairs of this teen campaign. The Jewish community in the Midwest generally, the Jewish community in Columbus specifically, which was a relatively small town, maybe fourteen, fifteen thousand Jews, was hyper-organized. Everybody was affiliated. It's the way you lived as a Midwestern Jew. It's why communities like Detroit and Cleveland and Columbus and Chicago still are strong federations and the others are not so much. So it seemed a relatively easy organization job because we just went to the twenty or thirty Jewish youth organizations, told the story and persuaded them that they should ask everybody to give to the best of his or her ability. I don't know what we

raised. A few thousand dollars. But at the time it felt gratifying and very successful.

01-01:14:25

Meeker: Who are you soliciting from? Other youth?

01-01:14:26

Feinstein: Yeah.

01-01:14:26

Meeker: Wow.

01-01:14:27

Feinstein: Yeah. Everybody had an allowance or they had a job or they worked at the Baskin Robbins or something. That's where I was working. So you put ten bucks in the jar. But that's what we did.

01-01:14:46

Meeker: Was there anything about that that you brought with you today? Were there any kind of asks that—

01-01:14:55

Feinstein: No.

01-01:14:56

Meeker: No?

01-01:14:57

Feinstein: It was a very good practical lesson in community organizing. That you find people with who you have some affinity, some point of connection and you can tell a story and you can tell by watching eyes and body language whether you're connected or not. And then you make the pitch.

01-01:15:24

Meeker: You mentioned community organizing. Were you reading Saul Alinsky or anything like that at this point in time?

01-01:15:29

Feinstein: Well, I'd read Saul Alinsky. Not as a teenager. Subsequently. I did most of an MSW at Cal and decided not to finish it. Didn't need it at that point. And I worked with Harry Specht, who was then the dean of the school of social welfare, and Neil Gilbert, who's just retiring. Neil and I are still friends. And their focus was organization, planning, administration. So my interest from the time I started some coursework there was always OPA, which was, in hindsight—

01-01:16:02

Meeker: OPA?

01-01:16:03
Feinstein: Organization, planning, administration. It was always precisely the right knowledge base and skill set for what I wound up doing for thirty years. So to the extent that I learned, arguably from anything I did and paid attention to, that team campaign was just a very basic early exercise in how do you get a disparate community to find that it has more in common than not and then to come to an understanding that everybody has some obligation, to the best of his or her means, to be supportive of the larger community, that we all benefit from it. Yeah. So did I organize a pitch around it? Did I take anything from it? No.

01-01:16:58
Meeker: Well, actually, what you just said I think is extraordinarily helpful.

01-01:17:02
Feinstein: It was.

01-01:17:03
Meeker: In the sense that it's not like, "I'm asking you to give me money," which is, I think, when people first get into this, that's what they don't want to do. They're afraid of asking "you" to give "me" money. But if you think about it in the way in which you described it, it's an entirely different story.

01-01:17:22
Feinstein: And that's always the way I solicited. I am going to give you an opportunity to do what in your heart you want to do and you're struggling with finding a way to do it.

01-01:17:33
Meeker: All right. Let's see. You worked, I guess, the summer between your junior and senior year at Colgate. Wait. No, you actually worked for a full year, United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York?

01-01:17:48
Feinstein: I did. I did.

01-01:17:49
Meeker: So you worked remotely or—

01-01:17:51
Feinstein: No. I still had two or three classes I had to finish. Some fourth level seminars in history and philosophy. So we got married in June of '73 and spent ten or eleven weeks on the Colgate campus. It was a great time. Being upstate in the summer is fun. And then neither of us had a job. Neither of us wanted to go back to the Midwest. And she got a job at Rapid American, whose CEO was a guy named Meshulam Riklis, who was also one of the great characters of American commerce from the sixties and seventies, whose daughter I became friends with. And she and Brian Lurie were very close friends. Mona Riklis Ackerman. Just a fabulous woman. And I told you the story. He interviewed my wife and hired me. Working for Brian. And he got the job out here. I think

he moved in January of '74. So I started in August, late August of '73. And he tasked me with organizing what we called Manhattan Leadership Development Committee. I made great friends. Now, here I was, a twenty-one-year-old new graduate of college. And most of the people I was supposedly organizing were at least five to fifteen years older than I. But with a few exceptions the people who were the organizing committee, who Brian had found, the son of the late Lawrence Tisch, the daughter of the late Meshulam Riklis, one of the daughters of William Rosenwald, who was the founder of United Jewish Appeal. He had created the merger that created the present structure. I'm friends with all these people. Elizabeth Varet is her name, Elizabeth Rosenwald Varet is one of my closest friends forty-two, forty-three years later. And she's the one who got me to get off the stick and start writing. I guess I was successful.

So we organized around these six. Each brought six other couples. And we'd have forty to fifty people at a program and we'd rotate among one another's homes or their parents homes. And their parents were already captains of Manhattan industry and really prominent. So other young people wanted to see dad and mom's homes. And Meshulam Riklis had this phenomenal Picasso collection on the walls of his townhouse across the street from the Met at Five East Eightieth at the time. Boy, was that a house. He lost it all.

I remember going out that summer and being a guest, Dale and I, at Mona's and her then-husband Irwin's place in Quogue on Long Island. And on Saturday afternoon just after lunch, maybe two o'clock, we see a helicopter buzzing us. It's her father, who came to see his grandkids. And I thought, "Who lives like this?" Andrew Tisch, who's the chairman of Loews Corporation's executive committee, is still a friend. And his dad in fact was the chairman of the board of UJA Federation at the time of the merger of the UJA with the federation. So I spent that year working. But the Yom Kippur War experience was searing.

01-01:21:55

Meeker:

And this happens at the time that you were there, correct?

01-01:21:58

Feinstein:

I had just started. I said earlier in passing I did not know there was such a thing as a federation, even when I was the co-chair of the teenage campaign in Columbus, Ohio.

01-01:22:10

Meeker:

The UJA of Greater New York, that's basically the New York federation?

01-01:22:14

Feinstein:

At the time it was independent. There was a United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York and there was a Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of Greater New York. The federation historically, if you think of the contours of American Jewish migration, really belonged to the German Jewish elite.

Reform Jews predominantly, no longer traditional, maybe sixth, seventh generation already. Not particularly pro-Israel. A number of whom were the organizers of Council for Judaism, which was anti-Israel. Elizabeth Rosenwald Varet's uncle was the founder, Lessing Rosenwald, of American Council for Judaism. He stayed in Chicago, which is where Sears was headquartered. His younger brother Bill came to New York and took his wealth out of the Sears fortune and parlayed it. And he was the proto-Zionist. He was one of the main leaders of the Joint Distribution Committee and, well, really created the modern UJA.

So in '73 the war broke out. Because I worked for Brian I was invited into these late afternoon executive committee meetings to be a fly on the wall. I'm so glad I did that. And I knew Larry Tisch but not the way I know his son, Andrew. He had a head I can only describe as a bullet. He was bald as long as I remember knowing him. And when he was angry he would just turn beet red. You could see his blood boiling. And I remember after the third afternoon of the same people advancing the same points—this is what wore me out on community work—him slamming his hand on the table and said, “Goddamn it. Some of the smartest people in American industry are sitting around this table. What the hell did you do, check your seichel,” your wisdom, “at the door? We have to make a decision. There's a war going on.” Boy, did that galvanize people. I had seen Larry Tisch angry more than once, including once much later when I was head of the LA Jewish Federation and I brought him out to do something and Michael Ovitz, whose name you might know, was one of the great—yeah, what a putz. Larry Tisch at that point was probably already sixty. I thought he was going to choke him to death. [laughter] And he was then the chairman of CBS. So they both needed each other. Ovitz, what an awful guy.

01-01:25:14

Meeker:

You were talking about basically the response at the UJA to the Yom Kippur War. So basically it sounds like what you were describing is there are these board meetings and they're trying to figure out the degree or how they're going to support Israel.

01-01:25:30

Feinstein:

Well, no, no, no. We were on the federation's time. The federation could fundraise from the Jewish holidays through December, and then the UJA would start in January.

01-01:25:39

Meeker:

Okay, I didn't know that.

01-01:25:41

Feinstein:

And that way you divided the community appropriately. So if you were going to run a UJA campaign for support of Israel—and some of the federation leadership saw this as a simple transactional negotiation, whereas the UJA Jews were all passionate Russians. “Rome's burning, how can you not?” But

they were all his lantzman, they were all his countrymen and that's why Tisch got so frustrated. Yes, they were all successful but you had to make a decision. And it meant some concessions that the UJA had to make to the federation in order to get the federation to agree. And then we wound up with a joint campaign, during which time I came to the attention of the senior brass at the federation, whom I had not known before. And that's material because Brian then moves out here and I applied to law school, which was always my fallback. And we get to June. So I'd been there now nine months. And I've gotten into law school in New York. And I'm having lunch one day with a guy named Dan Shapiro, who's one of these young leaders, who was a partner already at Schulte Roth & Zabel, a major midtown Manhattan law firm, who said to me, "When you come out of Columbia next June I want you to come clerk for me." I said, "But you have no idea how I'm going—" He said, "I know how you're going to do." He says, "You got a better offer?" This was a big deal. I should have just said thank you. But instead I unloaded a bit, that I had no idea why I was going to law school. So the following weekend he's out here. Dan is out here for an ABA meeting. And in those days Brian was married to Mimi. And Dan and Ellen, and the Luries had dinner Saturday night. Three in the morning, so midnight out here, 3:00 in the morning New York time, phone rings. Never rings at night. So what do you think when your phone rings at 3:00 in the morning. I thought my father was calling, God forbid.

01-01:27:58

Meeker:

Nothing good.

01-01:27:59

Feinstein:

It's Brian. "Did I wake you?" I said, "Yes. Are you okay?" Now, we weren't close friends yet but I really had affection for him. I mean really strong affection for him. So he said, "Dan and Ellen Shapiro just left the house and Dan said that you just saw him and that he had offered you a clerkship in his office next summer and you didn't enthusiastically accept it, which tells me you're not serious about going to law school. Why don't you come out here and work for me?" So I'm listening and I said, "If you're serious call me tomorrow when I'm awake." So he waited until 10:00 am New York time and he called me back. He was serious. And by the way, I had already, because the leadership of the federation saw what I had done with this young leadership in New York and so on, so they thought I should stay in the field. So they persuaded me to also apply for Jewish Communal Service and maybe go to Columbia and JTS. They didn't have a formal joint program. And they would pay for it as long as I agreed to work there for a while. So I was beginning to look at that.

And then there was an executive recruitment and training program that the then Council of Jewish Federations had called Federation Executive Recruitment and Education Program. And someone at the federation had me

meet with the late Phil Bernstein, who was longtime and distinguished CEO of Council of Jewish Federations.

So I always say it was the accidental career for thirty years. Sometimes you make your own accidents or you make your own luck. So I wound up a couple of weeks later flying out to San Francisco, my very first time out here, and spending three days with Brian. Probably the most unusual recruitment he had done. On the other hand, I had come to expect that after my initial interview the preceding summer. And he clinched the deal. He took me to lunch in Sausalito and it was a gorgeous day like today, a little warmer. And after lunch we sat on the dock looking back at San Francisco. And he put his arm around me and he said, "You're a bright guy. You'll probably be a very good lawyer but you'll neglect your practice because you're so passionate about the Jewish community." He said, "You have an alternative where you'll be immediately successful, and that's to come work for me, continue in a leadership role in the Jewish community. You'll advance very quickly and you won't neglect your work because you're passionate about it." And I thought about it. This is like the third day. And I said, "Honestly what you're suggesting appeals to me a lot more than going to law school." He said, "I figured that." I said, "But I want a deal. If I like it you'll pay for my graduate education so I can get the necessary credentials." No brainer. "You'll do something at HUC and you'll do something at Cal." I said, "Great. And if I don't like it in two years you're going to help me get into Cal or one of the other good law schools out here." "Okay." Now, the first I knew he could deliver. The second I just thought he could deliver on. But I never reapplied to law school.

01-01:31:48

Meeker:

Did he tell you much about the situation of what was then called, I guess, the—

01-01:31:56

Feinstein:

Jewish Welfare Federation.

01-01:31:57

Meeker:

Jewish Welfare Federation here in San Francisco.

01-01:31:59

Feinstein:

Sure.

01-01:32:00

Meeker:

He arrives and there's kind of a leadership struggle going on.

01-01:32:04

Feinstein:

He was sold a bill of goods. Actually, he knew what was going on. I think I'm the only person outside of the Bancroft Library who's read his oral history, because I wrote the preamble to it. Because he embargoed it for thirty years, I think, because he was very frank about certain volunteers. Brian would probably tell you I was frequently his tactician. He could have a vision for

where the community should go, where the organization should go, and he could never figure out how to get there. That was my job, to figure out how to get there. So if I wasn't a tactician I was a cartographer. But I was pretty good at that. And so we talked chapter and verse.

Jess Feldman comes across in the biography as—he may or may not have told you, who's passed on quite a few years ago, Jess was like a surrogate father for him. We both had surrogate fathers along the way. And Jess knew that Brian thought of me as a younger brother or nephew, favorite nephew or something. There's ten years difference between us but we became very, very close and still are for thirty-five out of forty years that I've known him, forty-two years that I've known him. So I knew a lot of that intrigue. And it's funny, and this also was a function of youth, because I also got to know Sanford Treguboff, who preceded Lou Weintraub. But Lou was the devil and it wasn't until much later when I came back here in '91 as head of the federation that I understood what a decent man he was. And he was just unfortunately in the wrong place at the wrong time. But you had a changing of the guard at that time. So you had a younger generation who had more of a Jewish upbringing. In one case at least, the late Bill Lowenberg, an Auschwitz survivor—you don't stand in the way of an Auschwitz survivor. Jerry Braun, who's still alive. Larry Myers has passed. These were the young Turks and they were damned if they were going to have somebody inept. Which was very harsh but that's how they perceived Lou. And I think ten years earlier Lou probably did a great job and was a good exec but he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And Brian already had a reputation because he'd been this young, handsome, charismatic rabbi with the gorgeous wife at Temple Emanu-El and most of the leadership, but not all, were active members there and they just thought he was the bees knees. And then he grabs the ring and goes off to United Jewish Appeal, where he works for another extremely charismatic leader, the late Ernie Michel. Actually, Ernie's alive but he has such advanced Alzheimer's you don't see him anywhere. Ernie was also an Auschwitz survivor. Phenomenal stories. So he had everything. And he comes back here. He's passionate about Israel. For the young group he was terrific.

I went through something similar in Detroit when I got there in '82. It was my first executive posting where the younger leadership were adamant they had to have someone young. I'd just turned thirty. I was the youngest CEO of a major Jewish federation in America.

01-01:36:18
Meeker:

Well, when Brian came here he was very, very young, as well.

01-01:36:22
Feinstein:

Yeah, he was thirty-two.

01-01:36:23

Meeker:

Thirty-two. The way that he describes the situation here was—well, to me it actually was a little unclear about what his objection to Weintraub was. But he definitely talked about, particularly when I was speaking about the presidents, a lot of it did have to do with Israel and he was in his interview very critical of people like Steinhardt and I'm trying to remember the other name. Fleishhacker, I believe. People who he thought were not committed to community life in the same way that he would have liked to see them.

01-01:37:04

Feinstein:

Very true.

01-01:37:08

Meeker:

What did you think of all of this kind of stuff?

01-01:37:12

Feinstein:

I just described a very small episode of something similar when I talked about the transactional negotiations, trying to harmonize them between the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of Greater New York with the UJA of Greater New York in the fall of 1973. So you had the last gasp of the German Jewish aristocracy. This community, more than any others, because it was a prominent metropolitan area, San Francisco being what it is, it was always a tourist destination and you already had some big businesses out here. This was the last bulwark of the American Council for Judaism. And there had been a famous rabbi, preceded Brian and his senior rabbi by a couple of decades.

01-01:38:14

Meeker:

Alvin Fine?

01-01:38:15

Feinstein:

No, no. He was a great lover of Israel. No, this was a guy named Irving Reichert. And he was anti-Zionist. So you had a lot of the German Jewish aristocracy, who already leaned that way, and they wanted a rabbi who represented their views and along comes Rabbi Lurie, who the young people think is the pied piper of Hamelin and he wants to take them to the Promised Land and they're having nothing to do with it. Now he comes back as head of the Jewish Federation. And the federation and its antecedents was very much a German Jewish place. And you had the Concordia Argonaut Club, which was very much a German Jewish club, and you had the Jewish Welfare Federation, which certainly until the sixties, maybe even the seventies, late sixties certainly, was not particularly open to an Auschwitz survivor or young Jewish conservative affiliated men, not so much women, who would move here from the Midwestern communities and they thought this was a wasteland. And Jess Feldman was sort of their fulcrum. He made it possible. So Jess had a very good instinct about leadership and he saw it in Brian. Brian's got it. Boy, he's got it.

01-01:39:41

Meeker:

Well, tell me about what you were assigned with by Brian when you arrived here.

01-01:39:47

Feinstein:

When I first got here?

01-01:39:47

Meeker:

Yeah.

01-01:39:48

Feinstein:

I had a dual assignment my first year. I assisted in the planning and allocations process, which had six committees. So I was staffing two of them. A committee called group work and campus, which oversaw the Hillel foundations on the college campuses and what was then called the United Jewish Community Centers, which included a residential Camp Tawonga Meadows, Yosemite, and then at the time five branch JCCs under an umbrella, and then the Jewish Education Committee. Those were my major assignments on the planning side. And I'll tell you why I'm laughing in a second. The other half of my assignment was campaign and I was assigned to the late Marshall Kuhn, who directed the pacesetter division, which were most of the gifts up to the top leadership, whatever we called that at the time. And Marshall was this wonderful avuncular guy, part of the German Jewish extended family, but very much in Brian's sway. And he thought Brian was on the right track and very pro-Israel. And wonderful guy, just wonderful guy. So I had that dual assignment during my first year.

I think Brian had never really run anything before. [laughter] Really. I don't think he'd ever run anything before. I'd run committees. But I seemed to have more practical administrative experience than he did. And we would have weekly management meetings. So however old I was, twenty-three, I was on the management team of the Jewish Welfare Federation of San Francisco. We were over at 220 Bush Street at the time. And he would have an idea and he welcomed vigorous debate. And I would usually wind up within an hour yelling at him because he had some harebrained idea. When I finally left Brian after seven years of working for him, one in New York and six here, I said, "If I don't leave soon I'm going to walk in here one day and kill you." [laughter] He said, "Well, let's find you another job." But he sort of realized that I'd outgrown my older brother or my mentor or whatever. But I said I was the tactician. But what I was laughing about is that we both thought that the head of the Jewish centers was inept, which is probably not true in hindsight. And certainly the head of the Bureau of Jewish Education was inept. That probably was true. I'm twenty-three, twenty-four years old, and it becomes my job to figure out the process to get them out of their jobs and bring new people in. Which I did.

01-01:43:05

Meeker:

These are positions that are not directly under the federation, right?

01-01:43:07
Feinstein:

No. No. In those days the boards interlocked much more than today. He began to free that up about five or six years before I came back here as CEO. And at that point the horse was out of the barn. You couldn't do it anymore. By the way, that's the way most federations were. So we had huge authority and could work the back channels. So it would be like a small 'p' political campaign.

01-01:43:45
Meeker:

Were you the whip?

01-01:43:47
Feinstein:

Yeah. And I'm good at that. Not necessarily proud but I'm very good at those kinds of street fighting tactics. So we achieved both of our objectives. And we did bring in much better leadership in both organizations. It's funny because years later I basically blew up the United Jewish Community centers, the umbrella, and separated them into five JCCs. I'm very glad I did that. It's one of the things I look back on and I say, "Well, that is the right decision. I should have made it twenty years earlier when I was the young staffer." Not easy—

01-01:44:23
Meeker:

So around the Bay Area there was a—

01-01:44:26
Feinstein:

Yeah, there was an umbrella organization.

01-01:44:27
Meeker:

An umbrella organization?

01-01:44:30
Feinstein:

And basically it throttled local community development. Again, being by nature a community organizer, you want people to act autonomously and you have to give them authority and power or you'll wind up with childlike response to big daddy downtown.

01-01:44:50
Meeker:

It's interesting. I just finished an interview with a guy who's an educational reformer and a law professor and he talks about subsidiarity and the idea is that you want to move power to the smallest local group possible. Was this an idea that you are really—maybe not that terminology but this approach?

01-01:45:13
Feinstein:

I'm not sure I would have conceptualized it that way, however analogous in that Jews who chose to live in Palo Alto or Los Altos or Mountain View didn't take direction from 220 Bush Street. In those days, when the Silicon Valley was just beginning to bud, you didn't have highly autonomous communities, and yet we treated them as subsidiaries and in the worst possible way. I wound up doing my master's thesis at HUC on this question of exurban communities, which are not suburban. They really are independent of some

metropolitan hub. Now, one could say thirty-five, forty years later, you look at the entirety of the seven county region of the Bay Area, and say the whole thing is Silicon Valley. And if you think of Cal, UCSF, and Stanford as the three intellectual scientific—

01-01:46:28

Meeker:

Hubs.

01-01:46:29

Feinstein:

—hubs, makes sense. But the valley now runs from Gilroy in the South to Novato in the north and way out east. But that took forty years. Where Leslee and I live in San Mateo is, by the way, two blocks from where Jess Feldman grew up, which I always find ironic. It's sort of the epicenter of Silicon Valley. There are 320 start-ups in San Mateo. When we moved there in '91 I didn't want to live there, I wanted to live in the city. But we had young kids who needed to go to public school and Leslee grew up in Hillsborough so it made perfect sense. Now it's great. It's ethnically diverse, lots of interesting cuisine. Who knew it then. So here you're trying to run these suburban centers and in my view, even in the seventies, we needed to reconceptualize what was going on. So I think I had enough foresight to recognize that there was something major about to spring and that we, the Jewish Federation, either became part of it and a leader of it or we would sooner rather than later be seen as irrelevant. And Brian thought I was conceptually on the right track. He took that after I left into a notion, I had actually written the early paper on it, on confederation, the idea of linking the San Jose, Oakland, and San Francisco communities into one superstructure. I think the way they tried to go about it in the years after I left here, it wasn't as well thought out as it could have been.

01-01:48:26

Meeker:

So this work that you're talking about, this was done under the auspices of your planning and allocations board? No? This was something different? You talked about staff planning allocations, annual campaign, then eventually—

01-01:48:46

Feinstein:

I'm already a few years ahead.

01-01:48:48

Meeker:

Okay. You're talking about the expansion in the peninsula, south peninsula?

01-01:48:51

Feinstein:

Yeah, because these assignments were '74-75, '76-76. By '76 I had persuaded Brian that there was something major happening, no one was calling it Silicon Valley yet, but in Palo Alto and south. And I found a way to meet Andy Grove, who was the second CEO of Intel and he had a senior management team who were all Jewish and introduced them to some key—

01-01:49:19

Meeker:

Grove is not Jewish, is he?

- 01-01:49:20
Feinstein: Yeah, Andy Grove is Hungarian Jewish.
- 01-01:49:22
Meeker: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.
- 01-01:49:26
Feinstein: It's never been a huge part of his identity but he would never deny it. In fact, he tells these terrible stories about being the only circumcised kid in his class. Brilliant man. Brilliant. Does not suffer fools. So there are a whole bunch of these brilliant Jewish engineers, many of whom are immigrants. And there was an Israeli who would come in periodically to help us with this who carried the title Special Emissary of the Prime Minister of Israel. To some extent it was artifice. But if I could get appointments with these people he could find a way to get them connected to the Jewish Federation. So we were a tag team. It was just great fun. That's how I met the late Bill Graham, you know, *Bill Graham Presents*.
- 01-01:50:12
Meeker: Sure.
- 01-01:50:15
Feinstein: That was a very interesting discussion.
- 01-01:50:19
Meeker: Tell me that story.
- 01-01:50:21
Feinstein: Well, Bill Graham never denied that he was Jewish. To the contrary. And he did fall under the spell of the then young Chabad rabbi, because he was the single greatest factor in getting a menorah in Union Square, which the organized community thought was a mistake, Jews don't do that, particularly not in San Francisco. He had a great eye and ear for the path breaking rock and roll groups. San Francisco was it. Think of it. During his career he had all the great groups in America, started here, with a few exceptions. And he was their mentor and he was their promotor and he was their manager and he gave them platforms here and in New York. He set up his support foundation at the Jewish Federation. Actually it was done posthumously. But he left a good sized asset. And I think if he had lived on he probably would have become much more involved. And things are done now in his name posthumously that I think he would actually take some pride in. But like my mother's father, he came here a Holocaust survivor, penniless. And you know how I said earlier, talking about Bill Lowenberg, never stand in the way of a Holocaust survivor, you did not get in Bill Graham's way because if he had an idea he would find a way to make it work. And he did.
- 01-01:52:00
Meeker: In these early years you had some one-on-one interaction with him?

01-01:52:03
Feinstein:

Yeah. Usually two-on-one because I'd bring this Israeli, Aryeh Neshet with me. But I'd find a way, some artifice, to get in the door. Once we got in the door we usually had them. Neshet, he was bigger than life. Again, one of these extraordinarily charismatic people who'd been a partisan during the Second World War. As he said, "I was one of those Jews who would always fight." Got to Israel, got a doctorate in industrial psychology. Wound up briefly in the diplomatic corps. I don't know remember whether it was Golda Meir or Levi Eshkol but one of them grabbed onto him and said, "You could help your country." So they gave him this title and he wound up assigned to break the hard cases in America, the Hollywood people who weren't convinced that the UJA needed money or that Israel needed to sell Israel bonds and so and so forth. My guess is there were very few people as effective as he was, short of actually sitting down with the prime minister who didn't have the time to go do this, knock on doors. But he did. And bright, bright guy, but he could read people in thirty seconds and then deliver what they wanted. You asked me earlier about the pitch. Gordon Zacks was like that, Aryeh Neshet was like that. So that stuff rubbed off on me. So arguably I was a pretty good fundraiser.

01-01:53:39
Meeker:

So when you were meeting with people like Andrew Grove or Bill Graham, what was your agenda? What were you trying to accomplish?

01-01:53:46
Feinstein:

We always had at least two asks. One was that they should support the annual campaign and the federation. Which they all did at some level. And the second, in the case of Grove, was Israel's technological abilities were just becoming manifest at the Technion and at Weizmann. Consider opening a business in Israel. And remember at the time you had pretty widespread compliance with the Arab economic boycott. And Andy Grove assigned Larry Hootnick. I think Larry has passed on. But Larry was CFO of Intel in the foundation days. Big guy, Midwestern Jew. I liked him a lot. Larry and Betty Hootnick. And he said, "Find where we should be and let's open a plant there. Probably research or design." And that's what they did. They opened it in Haifa near the Technion. Technion grads are in Israel what MIT or CalTech or Cal grads are in electrical engineering or Stanford. One of the best in the world. I can tell you a story about that, too. But it turned out to be very profitable for Intel. And because Intel was the pathbreaker, it was the Apple of the day because we were still in the early hardware days, lots of American corporations followed suit and realized there was something they were missing. And then over time you had almost a superhighway between the Valley and Tel Aviv in terms of the number of joint ventures or things set up by Israelis who would come here to do doctorates at Stanford or Cal and wound up staying, wound up starting a business here. But as soon as they got it going here they'd open a plant north or south of Tel Aviv.

01-01:53:53

Meeker:

How were these relationships established between the federation and representatives of the government of Israel? Were these things that were long established or is this very much an artifact of the Lurie years of the federation?

01-01:56:07

Feinstein:

Of the Lurie years? No. No, it was broader than that. Institutionally the mechanism for the agenda of Israel diaspora relations was managed through the Jewish Agency for Israel, with whom Brian had wars. So did I. But the Jewish Agency for Israel was the pre-state of Israel government of the Jewish settlement. If you're familiar with this I won't labor it.

01-01:56:49

Meeker:

No, I am familiar with some of this but I think for the point of recording this it makes sense to explain it somewhat.

01-01:56:56

Feinstein:

Okay. So in '48 when Ben-Gurion declared the Independent State of Israel following the UN vote, the Jewish Agency remained a virtual ministry of the government. And it was tasked with not just maintaining but strengthening relationships with communities outside of Israel. And that, depending on who the prime minister or the leadership or the exigent challenges Israel is facing at the time could mean lots of things. But that became the instrumentality. So that preceded Brian's leadership here or my leadership here by decades. Then what began to happen is the government of Israel got stronger and stronger and as a practical matter, the Jewish Agency became less useful. So who would you rather meet with, the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, who's a third echelon—the derogatory term in Hebrew is pakid, a bureaucrat. Or would you rather meet with Levi Eshkol or Golda Meir or Yitzhak Rabin. Guess what I would prefer. [laughter]

01-01:58:20

Meeker:

The prime minister.

01-01:58:22

Feinstein:

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And over my tenure and his as CEO of major federations, including this one, I had many one-on-one or one-on-three meetings in the prime minister's office. I didn't go to the Jewish Agency. Didn't need to. I had a direct connection with the prime minister. So there was a period in American Jewish history that this was like the College of Cardinals. If you had one of the sixteen major positions you had access in Israel, in Russia. That really was unparalleled. And because you were there for ten years or more you had far more access and connection than your lay chairman. That's a whole other set of potential problems if you're not intelligent about your use of that power or that authority, that access. But that's how it happened.

I can't imagine I would ever write this but if I were writing a monograph now on the evolution over forty, fifty years of Israel diaspora relations with a community or the American Jewish community I would probably look at the points of dysfunction and what happened in the different institutions and the changing of the professional guard and how, as they became less intellectual, less authoritative, less effective, there was a waning. And then some, like Brian or I, thought it's time to give them a proper funeral. And that framed other battles of the eighties and nineties.

01-02:00:09

Meeker: Why don't we wrap up today.

01-02:00:14

Feinstein: Sure. This is fun for me.

01-02:00:15

Meeker: Good. I'm glad to hear that. But I have one last question. So when you and your wife move here in '74, what congregation did you join?

01-02:00:25

Feinstein: Sherith Israel.

01-02:00:26

Meeker: Okay. Conservative congregation?

01-02:00:28

Feinstein: No, Sherith Israel is reform.

01-02:00:33

Meeker: It's reform, okay.

01-02:00:35

Feinstein: It's at California and Webster Street. And it was the breakoff from Temple Emanu-El going back to Gold Rush days. And I didn't join out of protest. Emanu-El at the time felt a little too what we called high reform. Remember I grew up in a fairly traditional congregation and it just felt like I was going to an Episcopal church. So I was never comfortable there. I am much more now. But they've warmed it up over the years. And Brian was perfectly comfortable in that. But I wasn't. Marty Weiner had grown up, who was then the senior rabbi at Sherif, probably was there for thirty years. And, by the way, I lived in Pacific Heights. First I lived in Cow Hollow on Green Street, then I lived on Buchanan near Pacific. So it was a several block walk to Temple, which I still liked from my childhood. And I couldn't walk to Emanu-El.

01-02:01:39

Meeker: You didn't consider seeking out a conservative congregation?

01-02:01:43

Feinstein: I did. And I liked Rabbi White but the only one going really was Beth Shalom. Ironically my wife, Leslee's grandfather on her father's side, was one

of the six founders of that congregation. But even her father had migrated away. So I never joined there.

01-02:02:04

Meeker:

Did you ever, speaking of migrating, migrate to keeping a kosher household and any of that kind of stuff?

01-02:02:11

Feinstein:

I did briefly. I had to go to JTS. So my first marriage, even though Dale grew up in a home that did not observe kashrut, she grew up at Agudas Achim, which was an Orthodox congregation. So she was perfectly comfortable with it. And we did have two sets of dishes. In New York for the year that we lived there together before we moved out here, if we ate out we only ate fish. We were very careful. After we were here about a year we found all of our Jewish friends were going out, the latest Chinese pork dish and so I'd eat out but not at home. And then when our marriage broke up we split the dishes and we each had a set. That was the good thing. We each had a complete set of silver and a complete set of china, only it was no longer kosher.

01-02:03:11

Meeker:

All right. Let's end there for today.

Interview 2: March 15, 2016

02-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is the 15th of March 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. This is session number two and we are here at your office in downtown San Francisco. As I just mentioned off-camera, last time we ended up where you had spent some time talking about your first stint with what becomes known as the Jewish Community Federation. I believe it was the Jewish Welfare Federation at that point in time, 1974 to 1980. And you had talked about some of the work you were doing in the South Bay, developing the community, working with important donors. But we hadn't talked about some of the other activities that you were assigned to at that point in time, actually probably a little bit before this point in time. And that was planning and allocations. And so allocations is probably a very interesting facet of the work for you to talk about in the sense that the federation has many different constituencies, many different nonprofits who look to the federation for their funding stream. Occasionally there will be new nonprofits and service agencies and other interests, oftentimes internationally, appearing on the scene, which means that you have to balance requests with need and I imagine there is some sort of transition.

02-00:01:44

Feinstein:

And resource.

02-00:01:45

Meeker:

And resource, right.

02-00:01:46

Feinstein:

In theory resources are not finite. They should be expandable.

02-00:01:51

Meeker:

Well, what often happens in these kind of circumstances is maybe the size of your pie is increasing but oftentimes there are more slices being taken out of it. So can you tell me a little bit about your job around allocations during this first stint at JCF?

02-00:02:13

Feinstein:

Sure. When I moved out here and started work in September of 1974 the transition between Lou Weintraub and Brian Lurie was not complete and Lou had a classical training. I never worked for him or with him because he'd really been moved off to the side. And, in fact, I interviewed with him because that was a legal and etiquette requirement. Did not know him prior. I knew that Brian had come out here to supplant Lou. He had been hired around Lou. And you could feel the tension around that. But when I was hired the people that I worked with on planning and allocations had been hired by Lou. They were classically trained social workers who'd had some agency experience. And the thought with a new worker, and particularly one who had no specific training for this field at that time, was to do a bifurcated assignment. So

theoretically half of my time I was supervised by Michael Papo, who had become the director of planning and allocations. And that was a unified function. In some very large federations, New York notably, allocations is independent from—and, in fact, at one point before I got there as executive, LA had a separate allocations function from a planning function, on the theory that you could plan without regard to available resources and focus on need and then set priority schemes and in theory your allocations, even if they were scarce, would be then force fit to the priority scheme. I don't know where in the world that happens but that's the theory.

So that became my on-the-job training. And my assignment was to staff two of seven committees of what was the board level planning and allocations committee under Michael Papo's supervision. And Michael was a great supervisor. He was a very good teacher. So I had responsibility for the Jewish Education Committee and it had some interesting tasks. The major agency was the Bureau of Jewish Education, which still exists under some new name today. And at that time, one Jewish day school, which was actually the product of a federation caused merger of Hillel Day School, which was orthodox, and Brandeis Day School, which was liberal. We'll come to that.

02-00:05:12

Meeker:

Was that in San Francisco, the day school?

02-00:05:14

Feinstein:

Yeah, yeah.

02-00:05:16

Meeker:

Was this the one Jewish day school in the Bay Area at that point in time?

02-00:05:21

Feinstein:

At the time. Well, the history of this community is that it was always far more liberal than the eastern or midwestern communities in terms of Jewish practice and observance and there really was almost never anything resembling a modern orthodox or ultra-orthodox community as you find in the Midwestern and eastern communities. So what had happened is that a rabbi who is still working in town, Pinchas Lipner, had moved here from—oh, you've heard about him. Had moved here from Baltimore, Maryland, and one of the most ultra-orthodox yeshiva training in the country. Over time I actually grew to respect and like Rabbi Lipner, not that we were ever social friends by any stretch. But in those days he was not particularly fond of the federation except as a source of funding, and in part because he was publicly vilified regularly by some of the German Jewish aristocracy who basically said, "Why would Jews in California, in 1974, need a parochial education? We support public education." Of course, their kids went to University High School and this and that. "We support public education and we just don't need this." And it was an issue before Brian got here or before I got here with regard to whether people should increase their gifts if some of the money was going to parochial Jewish education.

So one of the ways that I think Lou—it had to happen before Brian—figured he could tamp down some of the antipathy, particularly toward Rabbi Lipner and the orthodox day school, was to effect a merger. That was brilliant because it's like grafting a llama onto a chicken. It had about as much biological integrity as that metaphor would describe.

02-00:07:35

Meeker:

At this point in time were you having conversations with Brian about the Jewish day school movement? Did you have your own thoughts about it?

02-00:07:45

Feinstein:

Yes. Yes. And I sometimes had to park my personal biases. I was always supportive of Jewish day schools but it was to an extent a formality. And then over the years I found myself periodically reading studies that looked at the long-term demographics and long-term, for want of a better term, benefits. I had a friend who actually was a professor of demography at Hebrew Union College and USC named Bruce Phillips. And he made a point, which was kind of ugly, which is Jewish day school does not inoculate Jewish children against assimilation in the American environment. However, he was right. Unless you grew up in an orthodox neighborhood and went to a traditional Jewish day school and you did that right through high school and arguably even college, the chances of your having a 100 percent Jewish social group were slim to nonexistent. And that was the flaw, because American Jewish people who sent their kids to Jewish education thought this would inculcate things that were then not reinforced in home. That was certainly true in northern California because practice had ebbed. So we weren't even talking about Mother Portnoy's American Judaism, where it was okay to eat pork in a Chinese restaurant on Sunday night. You'd never have it in your home. But there was no Shabbat dinner. So you'd go to Jewish nursery school and then Jewish day school and on Friday you'd have a Shabbat ceremony and you'd make a challah and you'd bring it home and your parents would leave you at the babysitter as they went out to the movies or dinner with friends. And we were just becoming normal Americans. So day school wasn't going to do it.

02-00:10:05

Meeker:

Was that the goal with day school though?

02-00:10:05

Feinstein:

Yeah, with a lot of people. However, in San Francisco, and I think in many urban settings, as the public schools were deteriorating there was also a drive for yet another high quality, academically high quality alternative private school. So there were two very vocal opponents to day school funding in Jewish federation. One was the late Jim Abramson, who served actively on the Jewish Education Committee. He was one of the late Richard Goldman's closest childhood friends and friends through life and his wife—I'm not sure that she's still alive either—Lucille Abramson, was a member of the San Francisco Board of Education. In fact, when I worked on this in the seventies she may have been president of the Board of Education. And her concern and

Jim's concern, therefore, as her effective representative at Jewish community activities, was if all the elites, the affluent well-educated Jewish parents put their kids in Jewish parochial school, what's going to happen to San Francisco public schools? So you had this mélange of social political issues playing out in the Jewish Education Committee. It was a great learning experience. And then on top of that you had Rabbi Lipner. Actually, he was creating yet another school, the Hebrew Academy. So what Hillel and Brandeis were was an effort to end run. The orthodox Jewish kids can come to Brandeis Hillel Day School. And by the way, they just separated after a forty-year merger and probably for good reason. I'm not close to these issues anymore. But it was never going to co-opt Rabbi Lipner.

02-00:12:05

Meeker:

Lipner wasn't involved in Hillel. He was involved in the—

02-00:12:09

Feinstein:

Oh, no, no. Hebrew Academy. And he had come de novo to San Francisco and with a modicum of funding. He found a few people who thought that he was the answer. And you know there are a certain number of Jews here. It's probably even true throughout our history. "Rabbi, I'll give you a million dollars to make sure that my grandchildren are Jewish. I'm married to a non-Jewish woman, we have a Christmas tree, but you can make my grandchildren Jewish." There was a debate going way, way back, post-biblical times, between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai. Do you take that kind of money and put it to use in the community? And Rabbi Shammai was an elitist and said, "Oh, no, no, no, no. You never take bad money. Ill-intended money." Rabbi Hillel said, "Sure, I'll take money and I'll put it to good use." So I think that was the view and that was certainly Rabbi Lipner's view. So he had a number of people who were as assimilated Jewish as you could find but they just thought that orthodoxy was the answer. It had preserved us over the centuries and it would in San Francisco, as well.

02-00:13:21

Meeker:

It was like an insurance policy.

02-00:13:22

Feinstein:

That's a good way of putting it. Now, at the Jewish Education Committee, day school was not the only issue. There was also post-Holocaust. So 1974 you're still dealing with that. The first twenty or thirty years after the Second World War I think the world Jewish community was in shock, simply put. And so I grew up in that environment. Brian Lurie grew up in that environment. Many of the lay leaders grew up in that environment. And nobody knew what to do. And by '67, and Marshall Sklare wrote a great book on this, about how important the Six-Day War and Israel's victory in the Six-Day War was to the status of the American Jew. But prior to '67 the American Jewish community was probably still uncertain and there were many who thought and wrote about it, Commentary and elsewhere, because that was the dominant monthly publication at the time. There weren't the plethora of Jewish periodicals that

there are now. So you'd get academics of the stature of Nathan Glaser and Marshall Sklare writing on these topics and saying, "We're not certain of the status of the American Jew and we don't think brown shirts and Hitler could—" We didn't think that till 2016 primary. But we didn't think that could happen in America. And then Six-Day War comes and all of a sudden the world stands up and salutes the strong self-protective Jew, which we didn't see during the Second World War. So in that context the question was how do you shift your curriculum? How do you adjust to these massive profound cultural changes to arguably one of the most important incidents in Jewish life since the destruction of the second temple and the carting of Jewish captives off to Rome? Now, I saw those bookend events as of similar magnitude, only in our generation, the Twentieth Century, far more compelling.

Now come to the constant debate about Jewish education. To an extent, most American Jewish kids were educated in Jewish synagogue schools. The reform movement had already cut back to one-day a week because they weren't going to fight with the parents, their congregants who paid the dues. The conservative movement had cut back to three days a week. So it was like Tuesday, Thursday, and Sundays, with the expectation that the kids are going to be in synagogue at least on Saturday morning. That's how I grew up. If you were extremely lucky you got a good Jewish education that way. I was extremely lucky because the school I went to in Columbus, Ohio, Samuel Melton had funded it on the condition that ours was the experimental school. So I went right through Hebrew High School, as I told you last time, and my Jewish education was very solid. Arguably maybe even better than day school because I was dealing continually with the social forces and did have non-Jewish friends and both times I married Jewish. [laughter]

02-00:17:01

Meeker:

Well, and you also had, as you explained in the previous interview, a real personal motivation to choose that path, to learn.

02-00:17:09

Feinstein:

Very much so. But I knew then I was atypical. And certainly of constituents here. So now you come to the work of the Bureau of Jewish Education, which was the institutional instrument for interacting with communal resources, meaning that which got allocated from the annual federation campaign to the synagogue schools. And in those days the federation allocation was the bulwark for most synagogue schools because they were struggling. They were always struggling. You only had a certain number of members of the congregation who'd pay full dues. You had an even smaller minority who would give supplemental contributions annually. The very, very rare individual who would be like Sam Melton in Columbus, Ohio, or the Whizens in Los Angeles. You could count on probably ten fingers the real big Jewish education benefactors in the sixties and seventies in America. So the federation grant made through the Bureau of Jewish Education to all the

synagogue schools provided they met certain basic standards, and the standards were fairly loose, was not found money. It was needed money. So after a while, to the point you made earlier, that was very modest increments. And one of the bureau's first jobs was to reason with the rabbis and the full-time educators for what was a fair way of distributing it. So it was arm's length.

02-00:18:47

Meeker:

How was that done?

02-00:18:50

Feinstein:

Well, it was really capitation times the number of hours of education. So if you were three hours on a Sunday morning you got X minus one and if you were three days a week, Tuesday, Thursday, or Monday, Wednesday, and Sunday, you got X times three. And so the conservative schools got more money, the reform schools got less. But still, in each institution's respective budget it was not insignificant. And it was always an effort to harmonize what the synagogue's national parent bodies or movement bodies. They didn't mandate but they set standards. Everybody conformed to the standards essentially. Now comes the question: Is any of this doing anything to the earlier problem I posited? Which is: Is it going to have any lasting benefit and impact? And by the mid-1970s there were already lots of questions being raised. And I think part of this was post Six-Day war, a recognition that the American Jewish community's status was rising and it was perceptible and you had sociologists and demographers writing about this and writing pretty often about this and beginning to say, "We're not all migrating to Israel, as important as Israel is. We support Israel but we're going to be here, so what's appropriate in the American context?" And singing Israeli songs at youth group is not sufficient. Maybe it's necessary but it's certainly not sufficient.

So by the mid-seventies you had a vibrant effort to try to figure out what the identify of an American Jew might be and how to influence that. And I, even at that point, was in the camp that thought there's a limit to what you can do to improve synagogue schools after all. I wasn't reasoning alone from my own direct experience when I was younger of going after school when my buddies were playing ball or going to the JCC or whatever. But now I'm tired after a full day at school and now I have to spend two-and-a-half hours before I get to eat dinner or do my homework getting on a bus and going to religious school. And the teachers were generally inadequate, although, again, having the benefit of going to a Melton school, they were at least trained. And then, actually, as I got older it got a lot more interesting because the subject matter was interesting and they dealt with matters of ethics and morality. And the sixties were a very vibrant time in places like Columbus or any place else because you had the Civil Rights Movement and you had the early stages of the Vietnam War and Jewish kids came from homes where our parents talked politics at dinner and so our consciousness was raised and we were all

engaged and we wanted to be engaged. Again, necessary. Probably not sufficient.

So I became enamored of Jewish summer camp and ideally residential camps, trips to Israel, and in fact through most of my career as a federation executive I would find ways and means of promoting and supporting that. That was not unpopular here. Brian felt pretty much the same way and in some respects even more strongly than I about Israel trips and so on. But we could never find the modality for that. A, B. There weren't huge resources. He and I and a few others on the staff at federation and a few laymen were convinced that if we had a Jewish retreat center, Jewish family retreat center that was within an hour's drive of the city, and we fixed on the old Camp Swig, which was down in Saratoga, and they were always looking for a funding partner. And they had no problem with kashering. In fact, the camp actually kept kosher. I don't know how strict the kashrut was. It wasn't under orthodox rabbinic supervision. But that was detail. That could be fixed. If we could get a majority to agree we probably could raise a few million dollars and make a partnership. And certainly when the camp wasn't in session in the summertime we could winterize the cabins and we could use it as a synagogue center and they could build into their curriculum Shabbatonim, weekend Sabbath focused celebrations at all ages. We'd have a wonderful infusion of content and there's nothing like those weekends away because you're not going after school. You're not going Sunday morning when you'd much rather sleep in or whatever. You're spending a weekend with your guy and gal buddies in a really beautiful setting with great exciting music.

02-00:24:36

Meeker:

These were not family events? They were specifically for school-aged kids?

02-00:24:39

Feinstein:

Well, we'd seen this work for school-aged kids but we'd also seen it work for families. And, in fact, we already were doing that. I'd started in my first job in New York City working for Brian in this leadership development program, where you'd do a weekend retreat and you'd bring in a scholar and a music specialist and you'd have these forty-year old adults dancing the hora on Friday night and having a ball. And really studying with a top scholar who was an exciting lecturer. So the concept was "bring that home." What we were doing to stimulate so-called young leadership, men and women in their thirties and forties, why couldn't that be done with families and children and so on? So that was our concept. I certainly had Brian's blessing and encouragement. But that made me a bit of a dreamer or an antagonist to some of the rabbis who were just, "Let me just get to retirement. Let me collect my pension." So you'd see that stuff played out throughout the year on the Jewish Education Committee. And we would periodically try to bring something new and different to bear.

And then I had a second committee responsibility. It was called Group Work and Campus. It was responsible for what was then the umbrella organization that covered five Jewish community centers in the West Bay, all the way down to Palo Alto, as well as the Hillel foundations at Berkeley, SF State, and Stanford.

Now, in both instances, operationally, day-to-day, week-to-week, based on things we would discuss internally as the senior staff—I was a kid but I was part of the senior staff of the Jewish Welfare Federation—we had to improve the caliber of the operating executives at these organizations. I have very few regrets in life but I had a couple that had to do with the fact that I was not completely adequately supervised at the time because if I'd been differently trained I probably never would have had the chutzpah to do what we did. But where in several instances I engineered boards getting upset with their executive and finally letting them go and then bringing in new people. Now, with the Hillel foundations that worked wonderfully because I had a partner in the then head of national Hillel, based in Washington, DC, the late Oscar Groner, and he thought I was right—I was a kid. He was a rabbi and a fifty-some-year old adult and he just thought, "Boy, turn that energy loose." So we wound up bringing in at Stanford and at Berkeley some pied piper Hillel rabbis and they transformed both organizations.

02-00:27:59

Meeker:

So it wasn't necessarily incompetence that existed in those agencies but there was a real kind of generational movement here.

02-00:28:08

Feinstein:

Yeah. And, at best, lethargy that comes of doing things a certain way. The Hillel rabbis that we replaced were, again, old school. Well, if a Jewish boy or girl comes to my office and they're having problems with meeting Jewish men or women, then that's my ken. Chuck Familan, who then went into private psychotherapeutic practice in Palo Alto, and was a clinician, was the standard Hillel history. And my guess is he was a great counselor. But he was a terrible Hillel rabbi. And Hillel had this horrible reputation in general as it's where the nerds went and the losers. So we did our best to transform that. And I tried to bring that same energy everywhere. Well, wasn't much you could do with the rabbis at the synagogues. That was way out of our ken. You might be able to vitalize Jewish education by creating some incentives and so on. And we could do a few things. And they did make some marginal improvements. We could transform the Hillels.

The JCCs were an entirely different matter. And there was a guy I actually grew very fond of, Morrie Levin, who was the executive director of the United Jewish Community Centers. And notwithstanding my fondness for him, the more I spent time in the suburban communities and talked to volunteers and laymen, the more I realized that having this roof organization was stifling because the question that anyone would ask, any self-respecting

person should ask if they're asked to serve on a nonprofit board, is what are our lines of authority? What's our responsibility? So they had lots of responsibility, no authority. And so really good people would not bother to serve on those committees and it took until I got back here in the nineties, but we basically blew apart United Jewish Community Centers. They did it to themselves. Morrie had long since retired. They were piling up debt. There was a real rebellion going on amongst some of the more energetic and creative laymen in the suburbs. Some of the branch directors were more honest than others. The honest ones really wanted to be let go. If you now make a tour from San Rafael down to the southern tip of Palo Alto you see a bunch of really vibrant seven-day-a-week full of activity JCCs. So that was our concept going back to the seventies. It only took twenty years to get there. And that became an issue we'll come to I guess in a later session, because how to allow for raising about a hundred million bucks to build all those JCCs was the issue that was on my plate when I got back here in the nineties. But that wasn't even considered in the seventies. So those were the basic planning responsibilities. Candidly, for the reasons I mentioned a half-hour ago, far more interesting dealing with planning and operating, administration, than allocation. Because allocations, given the context, were essentially lockstep.

02-00:31:56
Meeker:

That's interesting. I appreciate that explanation. That clears things up a lot in my own thinking about this. Back to campus life and Hillel. Did you see any role for the fraternities and sororities?

02-00:32:10
Feinstein:

Well, as late as the mid-seventies there still was a Jewish fraternity house and a Jewish sorority house on the Cal campus. There never was at Stanford. My wife, in fact, belonged to the Jewish sorority and several close friends who were five to eight years older were active members. I think at one point there were actually two Jewish fraternities, which is typical. That's the one I would never go into. [laughter] And I just think over time interest ebbed. But Jewish fraternities were also an answer to rejection. A lot of the Greek houses didn't want Jewish members, so create your own. And I think by the late seventies the need was ebbing. So I don't remember ever any conversation about that.

Now, years later, when my oldest son went to UCLA, he was actively rushed for Sammy House and he wound up joining a non-Jewish house that was at least half-Jewish in its membership. And here was the distinguishing characteristic. Sam happened to be an excellent student but also interested in athletics. He rowed crew. He wanted a house where academic achievement was top flight and that was not typical in the Greek system. It sure wasn't at Colgate. So he picked the house with the highest academic standards. And you didn't fool around when it came to exam time or getting papers done. You got your papers done. So those boys all did well. They're the ones who got the summer internships at Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley and went on to finance careers or good law schools or whatever. But that wasn't universally

true. But by the seventies I think that was changing and changing dramatically.

The fact that you could go to UCLA and reject Sammy for a house that was more academically focused was really telling to me. Because I remember asking Sam at the time, "You're not pledging Sammy?" Now, I didn't belong to a fraternity. But, still, it made sense to me. If my son was going to join a fraternity house, why not Sammy house? He said, "Dad, they're nice guys. But I really want a place that people take academics seriously." And he wasn't a nerdy kid. So I thought, "Well, he's got his head screwed on. It's his odyssey. Let him go."

02-00:34:54

Meeker:

At USC when I was there, I'm pretty sure Sammy House was one of the party houses.

02-00:34:59

Feinstein:

Oh, I'm sure.

02-00:35:01

Meeker:

At least the guys I know who were part of that. I mean, yes, they were Jewish but they also liked to have a good time. [laughter]

02-00:35:07

Feinstein:

Yeah. Well, I know a number of people active in the Jewish community in LA who were Sammies at USC, one of whom is here and a good friend, who was my stockbroker for many years until I came over here. He was a party guy.

02-00:35:22

Meeker:

Did your kids go to day school or did they go to public school or private?

02-00:35:26

Feinstein:

Sam never went to day school. Katy and Ben did. But after a couple of years we took Katy out of the North Peninsula Jewish Day School.

02-00:35:36

Meeker:

Is that what is now Wornick?

02-00:35:40

Feinstein:

It's now Wornick. Because the general education was deeply inferior. I'm sure you know the term balagan. It was a balagan for the federation director to withdraw his kid from the Jewish day school. I have a thick skin but there are people on the board, with whom we were not close friends who asked, "How can you do this?" I said, "Look, I don't have the time to get in here and fix it. And I don't mean to make a big deal about this. We were trying to withdraw quietly." "You can't withdraw quietly." I said, "Well, we are withdrawing. I'm not going to make my kid a guinea pig." And a lot of their Jewish education they can get from Leslee and me or at the synagogue. And as good as that is at the school, it's not an adequate reason to get my kids to high school and have them inadequately prepared for math and science and even

reading and writing. So by the time Katy was in third grade and she was back in public education.

02-00:36:59

Meeker:

Well, I guess we will get there when we're talking about your period of time there. Can you tell me about your work on the campaign. How closely do you work with Brian on fundraising and working with major donors, for instance?

02-00:37:17

Feinstein:

Well, that went in phases. My first campaign assignment, which, again, was half of my week, I worked for the late Marshall Kuhn, who was the head of what was called the pacesetter division. Now, Marshall, there's probably an oral history at Bancroft for Marshall Kuhn. Not because he's a past president of the federation but because he was just into everything and beloved.

02-00:37:53

Meeker:

K-U-H-N?

02-00:37:54

Feinstein:

K-U-H-N. He was a beloved figure. Marshall was the kind of guy that after you developed a friendship with him, he'd wait some time and then he'd ask you a favor and you never turned him down. But I wouldn't say he was the best fundraiser ever but he knew everybody in town. And so I assisted him and through that I learned. And pacesetters, I think, were gifts between one thousand and ten thousand dollars. Now, this was essentially the second half of Brian's first year back here as executive director. So he hadn't yet begun to put his imprint on the campaign. Marshall would have been flexible but I think he had been the campaign chairman some years earlier and this is the way the campaign had run in San Francisco for years. So you had the top gifts. I don't even remember what we called them anymore. But it included Walter Haas, Sr., and Dan Koshland, Sr., and Benjamin Swig and a handful of others. But those three were each million dollar gifts. And then you had half-a-million dollar gifts. Madeleine Haas Russell, again Haas, until you got down to the peanut gallery, hundred thousand dollar gifts. And in theory the campaign lay chairman would solicit those gifts. In practice it was the executive director. I'm not sure I ever actually did a solicitation with Brian Lurie, which is kind of funny to think about. But both of us were born fundraisers.

I didn't know but I told you as a teenager I was asked to co-chair the teenage campaign in '67. I had such a passionate conviction about the righteousness of the cause. I wasn't asking for myself. It's not like I was putting my hand in your wallet for me. It was to save Jewish life. And in the seventies I was just imbued with that and I could tell a story. So I had no problem. I never had a problem asking.

02-00:40:36

Meeker:

Can you walk me through what an ask would be like for you at that point in time? You're a Young Turk in the 1970s.

02-00:40:43

Feinstein:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, let's go beyond the '74-75 to '75-76, '76-77. By '75-76, '76-77, Brian had begun to put his imprint on the campaign. He did two things that were really important. He brought in David Sacks from United Jewish Appeal as the campaign director and David was cut from the same cloth and had spent a year in Israel and his Hebrew was fluent. David is several years older than I am. We had become very close friends over a long period of time. And I just had dinner with him in LA about three, four weeks ago or so and he's the same David Sacks. He's almost seventy. But he's still this idealist at seventy. It's so refreshing that anyone retains that for so long. And David wasn't a great solicitor but he could tell a story and he could pepper it with things.

But the one who really made a difference was Norman Rosenblatt, who's now in his eighties. He had been a businessman in Salt Lake who came from a wealthy family, old German Jewish in Utah. And his family had made a fortune in Utah in various ways. And he and one of his brothers moved here, left the family business and then took whatever their proportionate share was and started over. And Brian and Norman became very close very fast. I'm not sure whether Brian knew him previously or whether they met through Temple Emanu-El. I don't remember. But they were close. And Norm had been in the UJA Young Leadership Cabinet and that was boot camp for young leaders, and particularly in those days. You had some greats, including Gordon Zacks, the guy in Columbus who became my first mentor. So Norm really took responsibility for dramatically increasing the number of and size of mid-range gifts. And after my first year working as Marshall Kuhn's assistant I sort of got transferred to Norm. I insisted on getting transferred to Norm because Norm embodied what I believed in and that was the team. That was the executive team that Brian was trying to create, at least when it came to fundraising. So you had this group, I was the kid, but we were all convinced that what we did really mattered. I think it did at the time.

And Norm came up with an idea that he called the Advanced Sixty. Recruit sixty men in their mid to late thirties to mid-forties who were already well established in their respective professions or businesses, who were seen as leaders by their peers, and train them to solicit. Take them on an all-expense paid trip to Israel, fire them up, bring them back, and have them each conduct twenty face-to-face solicitations over the year. And now I'll come to answer your question. Twenty was too large a burden on somebody who had a medical practice to attend to. But a number of those sixty guys did do it. The late Ken Colvin, who subsequently was one of my first campaign chairs here and who was a character, but I developed a love/hate with him over the years. But Kenny had been in the Army squads that liberated some of the death

camps and he, too, he shared this passion. So I began to go with laymen to give them the courage to actually make the ask. And frequently what would happen is I'd ask.

So here's what would happen. And it became the way I solicited, whether it was a thousand dollar gift or a million dollar gift or more. You'd have your assignment. Unlike political campaigns or things like that you have a standing inventory. So you knew that last year Wayne gave \$600. Maybe if he could be energized he'd give a thousand. So you'd have a rating. The community would assign a rating. And, actually, you'd have a bunch of guys who knew Wayne and they'd say, "Oh, I know Wayne can do what I'm doing. I'm giving \$1,200. Let's ask him for \$1,200. We'll get a thousand." Okay. Wayne's not part of this. Now you make a date and in the week that you came back from the trip to Israel you'd call up Wayne and you'd say, "What are you doing for lunch next Tuesday?" "Well, I'm free. Love to have lunch with you." Said, "I'd like to come see you. I want to tell you about the trip and I have to tell you, I'm working for the annual campaign." "Oh, well, you don't have to come see me about the annual campaign." "You know, let me tell you about the trip and forget the annual campaign. But just have that in the back of your mind." And then he'd show up at lunch and I'd be along. "Well, who's this?" [laughter] "Who's this kid?" And John would start telling the story about what they saw and how important it was and what a difference our annual campaign dollars make and that's why the community thought this year, just as I move my gift to \$1,500, you would consider moving your gift to 1,200." "What, are you crazy? From \$600? I was thinking maybe I'd give you six and a quarter," something. And then we would begin to wrestle. And Norm and I had written—he might have gotten it originally from the UJA, I don't know. We called it overcoming objections and put-offs. So there'd be classic turndowns, responses, and then five responses to each of them. By the time we were finished with subsequent iterations I think we had thirty-two. Because I used that for several years in training. And at least it got people a little more comfortable, particularly if they've never asked anyone for money.

Well, the results of the Advanced Sixty were very, very good. They were nowhere near what the aggregate rated values might have produced but we probably increased that inventory of donors by 30 percent or 40 percent. I don't remember any more. And I remember we had analyses and write-ups and so on. And it was so successful as a campaign program that suddenly other communities wanted to model it. But it was Brian and Norm's idea. In fact, as we were evaluating that campaign, must have been the '76 campaign. So when we did our evaluation I proposed that we take a smaller cadre on a similar trip the following year and we would focus on upgrading gifts. We'd be more realistic based on what we learned. Twenty was too many, twelve might be right. And we'd select our leadership out of the sixty, the most successful of the sixty. And we recruited Dr. Martin Brotman, I don't know whether you've ever heard his name, but he'd been the president of CPMC and then vice-chair of Sutter Health. Happens to be my personal physician and

friend for many, many, many, many years. And he is a phenomenal fundraiser. Just phenomenal. So Martin was the chair. I was the executive. And we handpicked the men that we took on this trip. And, again, it was all male at the time. And there were twenty of us or so. But we took a trip that included our wives so that they'd know what the experience would be. The group became very tight socially. But to a man they came back and did their jobs. And, again, we had phenomenal success. And I did huge numbers of solicitations. Now, the theory was that the laymen should do this. And my rationale was if I go along with you, and you've heretofore not been comfortable, and I go once or twice, maybe even three times, I'm going to model effective behavior and you'll learn and then you'll do it on your own. It worked. And that was my job. That was half of my job, because I was still doing the two planning allocations committees. But half of my week was focused on preparing for and then conducting this trip and then making a big difference in the annual campaign. And we did. So now San Francisco was on to something. And we'd been the sleepy backwater German Jewish community and all of a sudden we seemed to be on fire. So what we did to train volunteer solicitors became featured at the general assembly, the national meeting. Martin and I were asked to come around the country and do this seminar that we did that included roleplaying and so on. It was great fun. It was really great fun.

02-00:50:58

Meeker:

When you went to these lunches and these successful young men were stepping into the shoes and raising funds and making the ask, what kind of stories were they telling about the recent trip to Israel? What was the narrative that they—

02-00:51:18

Feinstein:

In those days most people that we talked with had not themselves been to Israel. So it was still novel to take a week-long trip to Israel. And even some of the people, not the leadership of Operation Upgrade, but everybody else, this was their first trip to Israel. It just became very, very electric, very exciting. You'd have Shabbat at the Western Wall and all these images you've seen over the years. And it was before anything got highly politicized and before the "who was a Jew?" debate and all that kind of stuff. So they talk in general about having grown up somewhat assimilated in Marin County and they took this trip and all of a sudden they got connected with their roots and they heard from rabbi this and that. But the things that touched me the most were meeting Jews who were just coming out of the Soviet Union and they needed our help and we went to absorption centers and we met people who either were translated for us or they spoke a little bit of English and we could communicate. And I realized if not for my grandfather, "there but for the grace of God go I." And if they were from the western parts of the Soviet Union their villages might have been decimated by the Nazis and yet they survived. We have a responsibility. And that extra \$500 you're going to give this year goes a long way to getting this person through the Hebrew language

training program and getting them into vocational training so they can get on with their lives. “Don’t you want to be part of that?” So that in thirty seconds is the solicitation.

02-00:53:03

Meeker: Well, it’s convincing and it’s—

02-00:53:04

Feinstein: And then you’re just arguing about whether he’s going to give \$1,200 or a thousand dollars.

02-00:53:10

Meeker: Well, just what you presented is convincing in the fact that it hits so many different points. You’re talking about personal experience and fate in many ways. You’re talking about personal responsibility in the sense that this person, that they’re going through an acculturation process, they need to get established in Israel before they can actually support themselves.

02-00:53:35

Feinstein: Yeah. Bingo. And that was, to some extent, deliberate. It’s not like we spent hours and days thinking through.

02-00:53:45

Meeker: Going to focus groups and such. Right. Yeah.

02-00:53:48

Feinstein: What worked for us—and the cadre of us, lay and professional, who were the leaders for this effort just, as I said, were imbued and energized and it was a great experience. Now, I’d been to Israel, Martin had been to Israel. Kenny Colvin in the earlier program had been to Israel. It worked. And, by the way, for a multiyear period, I’d say until I left here in the spring of 1980—so we were in the 1980 campaign when I moved back to New York. The people who had started in the Advanced Sixty or Operation Upgrade, they were the core of the annual campaign leadership. After a while you burn out on things or you tire or the story gets stale. So we’d have to find ways to reenergize people. And I mentioned earlier when we were talking about Jewish education. So we do at least a once annual leadership retreat at Silverado Country Club or some other very nice venue and it would be over the long weekend and you’d have a fire brand of a speaker and educator. Just to sort of rekindle the enthusiasm. Or you’d bring people on yet another trip to Israel but they might pay for it this time. Today so many people have gone. It’s so old hat. The needs are not at all the same. And this also goes to the overall planning allocation. In those days I would guess that 70 percent, I’m not remembering the numbers, but net of whatever the operating proration was, which was maybe ten or twelve percent of the gross annual campaign, probably 70 percent of the net allocable dollar went to the United Jewish Appeal and funded some of what I was just talking about in Israel or funded the Joint Distribution Committee. That shifted dramatically over the decades. In fact, by the time I came back it was

maybe 30 percent of the annual campaign was—and that was pretty typical around the system.

02-00:56:01

Meeker:

Well, we go to United Jewish Appeal but then there was direct funding of projects in Israel.

02-00:56:06

Feinstein:

Yeah, the Jewish Agency for Israel, which was the main behemoth infrastructure and ran the transit camps in Europe to bring Jewish refugees to Israel and then ran the retraining programs and the health clinics. Slowly those aspects were integrated into the state budget. But even in the seventies Israel was not yet economically stable. That started to happen probably by the late nineties, beginning of the 2000s. And now Israel is a dynamic economy.

When I first started here, which is fifteen years ago, I remember first time I went to an investment meeting we were talking about a couple of Israeli companies. And I didn't say anything. But my boss, who had also been active in the annual campaign, we walked out together and I said, "It really gives me great pleasure to know that the Capital Group Companies and the American funds are investing in these Israeli companies." He says, "Oh, yeah, I didn't even think of it. Just great investment opportunities." Today there are dozens of great investment opportunities but that sure wasn't true in the seventies.

02-00:57:25

Meeker:

Right. So I imagine this work is really giving you more of a national profile as you're touring around the country and instructing—

02-00:57:36

Feinstein:

By the time I left here in 1980 I had already started writing because I'd done my master's work at Hebrew Union College and at Berkeley and I'd published a couple of articles.

02-00:57:52

Meeker:

Where did you publish those articles?

02-00:57:54

Feinstein:

The *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*. So it was a trade magazine, trade journal.

02-00:58:05

Meeker:

What was the content of these?

02-00:58:07

Feinstein:

Actually, I think the first time I published was about my work community organizing in what I called a non-place community, which became my master's thesis.

02-00:58:27

Meeker:

Well, tell me then about the process of returning to New York into this position of the Council of Jewish Federations. You said spring of 1980.

02-00:58:36

Feinstein:

Yeah. I had lunch with Brian Lurie last week. I told you we were close friends. And so we always take a walk after lunch. And as we were walking I said, "By the way, I've started my oral history interviews," and I asked him how candid he thought I should be about things. And he said, "Oh, be candid." I said, "But who even reads this stuff?" He says, "You'll be surprised." He said, "I've gotten pinged every now and then by some graduate student who wanted to follow-up on something I'd said." I said, "They're reading your oral histories?" He said, "Yeah, they're online. They read them." And he says, "It tickles me now and then that people actually are interested in this."

02-00:59:25

Meeker:

And I think his might be read because it is more candid. I do feel like reading it I'm actually getting something out of how things operated and the relationships that existed.

02-00:59:35

Feinstein:

Okay. Well, he encouraged me to be candid. So that preface is because we were all kids, Brian's management team. None of us knew what we were doing. Norm at least had run a business. But the rest of us were like the Three Musketeers times two. And I was bright and aggressive. So were they all. And it wasn't that I was the petulant child, but Brian, he had this method of operation that, by the time I'd done this for four or five years, had begun to infuriate me. He'd raise a trial balloon based on something that I had posited. For example, I think we're going to see an explosive growth that's going to bring a lot of Jews in general, engineers, scientists, probably Israelis, certainly Russians, to Palo Alto and south and we ought to be there early and that's how I wound up the director of the South Peninsula region. So he'd had me think about it for a couple of weeks and then write up and present a paper. And I picked that because that's one thing we did. But I must have done this a dozen times over several years. And if my boss gave me an assignment I took it seriously. And then he said, "Well, it was just something I was thinking about." So by the time I had worked for him now six years, time in New York plus here, and we'd had these Friday afternoon meetings. And for a while in good weather, Norm had a sailboat, large sailboat in Sausalito, we'd get on the boat and spend two or three hours with a bottle of white wine tooling around the Bay and we'd have debates about different subjects. It was pretty sweet. I never had a job like that other than that job.

So I got to the point that he'd then say, "Well, it was just something I was thinking about," and the other guy said, "Well, that's really not fair." And I'd yell at him like he's my big brother and I'm about to wrestle him. So I walked into his office the beginning of my sixth year here and I said, "We have to talk." He said, "About what?" I said, "If I'm here beyond this year I am going

to kill you.” We just were laughing about this because he remembered it the same way. He said, “Well, what do you want to do?” I said, “Get out of Dodge.” He said, “Well, you want to stay in community work, don’t you?” I said, “Yeah.” But I said, “I love you, Brian, but I can’t work for you anymore.” He says, “Yeah, I’ve sort of sensed you were outgrowing me. All right, let me think about this and talk to a few people.”

Within a few weeks I had three spectacular job offers that he had engineered. One was to go to Joint Distribution Committee. What was the second? Oh, two were with JDC. And the third was with Council of Jewish Federations and that’s the one I took. I was then married to Dale, my first wife. She was just in her last year at Hastings getting her law degree. No, next to last year. Our marriage, it was beyond attenuation. We were pulling apart. I would not say that this was in any way a cause of it but she looked at me when I said, “We have an opportunity to go overseas but I have to make a four-year commitment,” she looked at me, she said, “Are you nuts? I’m spending three years in an American law school to become an American lawyer and you’re going to ask me to live in Casablanca,” which was one of the options, “or Geneva for four years?”

02-01:03:46

Meeker:

That was the distribution committee?

02-01:03:46

Feinstein:

Yeah. Yeah. That was the road not taken. If I’d been married to Leslee she would have said, “Fine. When do I need to be packed?” Very different between the girls. So as excited as I was about those options, that wasn’t going to happen. If I’d known my marriage was going to end before I left San Francisco I would have grabbed one of them.

02-01:04:12

Meeker:

Just for the adventure?

02-01:04:15

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. And even the early eighties, between the Russian Jews starting to trickle out of the former Soviet Union, and by the mid-eighties it was a huge issue. But between that and still all kinds of residual issues related to Holocaust survivors and their treatment, it was a very exciting time to be a community worker for the Jewish community in Europe. And there was also a dimension to this, because some years later one of the early execs of United Jewish Appeal was a rabbi named Herb Friedman, and he was a chaplain during the Second World War and he liberated Dachau. He was in the first group in. And Herb was this impossibly charismatic guy. Leslee Wexner of Limited Stores, a billionaire based on Columbus, Ohio, whom I knew growing up. He was dating the older sister of a girl I was dating, not that that mattered. Marsha was ten years older. She was a professor at Brown. Two beautiful women. And Les was a perennial bachelor who some years later got married. But in the meantime he’d built this women’s retail dress shop into a huge

national chain and made an enormous success of himself. So now he was a billionaire and he was looking for something meaningful beyond his annual UJA gift. “What could I do?” And he hired Herb Friedman, who conceptualized an adult two-year education program, serious education program that became known as the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

And I brought them in here. It helped transform this community. The current cadre of top leadership at the federation are all graduates of Wexner Heritage Foundation. Even those, myself included, who had pretty solid Jewish educations, or graduate Jewish education who participated in this, it was just a superb program. Herb said to me, “Don’t fool around with any of this stuff. What you need to do is go to Russia. We’ll get you language immersion in Russian and Yiddish and you’ll work behind the scenes.” Even Leslee wasn’t up for that. I’m just finishing *Red Notice* by Jim Browder. This was the guy who eventually—he was an American—whose grandfather was Earl Browder, the head of the American Communist party. So generations later the grandson is an investment banker and he figures out that the next great investment opportunity on the planet in the eighties is going to be Russia once the wall fell and he was right. But he spotted the crooks among the oligarchs. He made huge amounts of money. And then he came a cropper with Putin. It reads like a novel. It’s not scintillating writing but when you realize it’s a true story it’s pretty remarkable. So Herb thought if I had those stories it would just make my career but Leslee wasn’t interested in that. That also probably would have been JDC. And candidly, there was a nexus there going back to the pre-State of Israel days. And there have been country directors for JDC who essentially were Mossad agents, one of whom wound up dead in a river in Damascus because the Syrians figured out that he was working for Israel. That might have been too much excitement.

So I wound up at Council of Jewish Federations and I wound up working for a guy named Bob Hiller. And I would say in my Jewish community career I had two great mentors as pros. One was Brian. And I say this with affection. I became a very good executive by doing correctly all the things I did by the seat of my pants and without a knowledgeable teacher, because Brian wasn’t when it came to the right way of doing things or the best way of doing things. It just wasn’t his training. Visionary, yes. Exciting, charismatic, no doubt. No doubt. And has been for the better part of forty years one of my closest male friends in the world. I say that without equivocation. But I couldn’t work for him again. Bob, he was tall, polished, thoughtful, could see things ahead, years ahead. He was right nine times out of ten. And that became my executive style. I was already cut that way and that was finishing school working for him.

So at the point that I went to work for Bob Hiller, I was hired specifically initially to be the first director of national campaign planning. And the theory that he had was that what we had done to transform the San Francisco Jewish Federation campaign, because we had doubled in five years, and that just

wasn't done anyplace. Now, I would argue in hindsight that was because we came from such a low base. It was relatively easy. And all it took were a few guys with some real enthusiasm to roll up their sleeves and find like-minded laymen and get the job done. Because that's what we did. And you asked me early on about soliciting the million-dollar donors. It's no different than talking to the \$600 donor that you want to give a thousand dollars, except that they're already giving a million dollars. So what's the motivation to give a 1,200,000? And that's not art. That's a matter of compelling. And even people for whom, literally—I mean, it's easy for me to spend somebody else's money when it comes to the annual campaign—an extra hundred or two hundred thousand is not going to matter, I had a few people, like Dick Goldman or Mel Swig would say, "Look, it's a million dollars. How many people do you have giving you a million dollars? But if you've got some special things come back to me." Which I did. But that was easy comparative. Much harder to get a thousand dollar donor to give ten thousand if he or she was financially capable of doing that.

So Hiller hired me, in, put me not in the top management group, although by the time I left there I was going to succeed someone who was going to retire, which meant a very rapid rise. But I was twenty-seven when I went to Council of Jewish Federations and everybody else I was working with was fifteen years or older or older than that and a lot more experience. I had a counterpart at United Jewish Appeal, because that was the campaign operation center at the time, named Mel Bloom, and then Bob had a counterpart named Irving Bernstein. And the four of us became a team to get federations to do a more thorough job of planning, training volunteers and so on. And it was all motivated by the need to raise double what we had been raising in the next few years. And on the theory that if little San Francisco could do it and Wayne had been there and he was the campaign director—was I the architect? No. Was I part of the architectural team? Yes. Was my signature on the drawing at the point that we filed with the planning commission? Yes. So I was the right guy in the right place at the right time.

02-01:12:41

Meeker:

Can I actually ask you to pause for a second?

02-01:12:43

Feinstein:

Sure.

02-01:12:45

Meeker:

This is remedial but can you describe the actual role of the Council in the larger constellation of community organizations?

02-01:12:55

Feinstein:

Yes. The Council of Jewish Federations was the trade association of all the local federations in the US and Canada, simply put. So it had certain assigned functions. It was a central repository for staffing at every level. Would conduct the CEO searches and it would help and had an inventory of people

capable of moving from a smaller place where they were campaign director to a medium-sized city. Everything was ordinary and evolutionary and would grow with them. It was a repository of best practices and planning and allocation or community development and then subsets around Jewish education and culture and ran the domestic lobby for the American Jewish community, the Washington Action Office. So that's what it was.

I said it in passing, the United Jewish Appeal effectively was the annual campaign operation center. It set the march for the annual campaign, it set the national goals. Because the campaign in the seventies and eighties, the needs were still largely driven by what Israel needed or Joint Distribution Committee needed. Again, that changed by the end of the eighties, just because of Israel's growth and development and increasing economic well-being. And in part because the federations were becoming a little more ornery and independent.

Historically, going back to the foundation of the United Jewish Appeal, you also had radically different clusters of founding volunteers. So you had the German Jewish aristocracy who founded the local federations as they did here, and therefore the trade association, some of whom were anti-Israel, or at least they weren't philo-Israel. So that was sometimes a practical issue in terms of how involved they wanted to be with the United Jewish Appeal or the annual campaign. The UJA and its antecedents were founded by Russian Jews and much more passionate, much more focused on overseas Jewish needs.

02-01:16:16

Meeker:

So the Council was more of the German Jewish group, correct?

02-01:16:18

Feinstein:

Council of Jewish Federations grew out of the federations, which grew out of the German Jewish.

02-01:16:24

Meeker:

How was the Council funded?

02-01:16:30

Feinstein:

A dues formula and you either paid your dues or you weren't a member. That, too, ebbed in the eighties and nineties. By the mid-nineties it was a serious issue.

02-01:16:42

Meeker:

Did they do their own ask to individual funders or was it specifically upstream from the federations?

02-01:16:50

Feinstein:

The federations needed to pay dues as part of their operating overhead.

- 02-01:16:53
Meeker: So you come in basically director of national campaign planning. What does that mean? You're not—
- 02-01:17:04
Feinstein: Influential but not directive.
- 02-01:17:07
Meeker: Are you trying to fund the actual activities of the Council?
- 02-01:17:11
Feinstein: No, no, no. No.
- 02-01:17:12
Meeker: Or are you providing assistance to—
- 02-01:17:16
Feinstein: Assistance to the communities. And, actually, under Bob Hiller's tenure, we were setting a leadership standard for what the annual campaign should be and how it should be operated. So we were building on historic best practices, obligation of the CJF to the local federations to say, "Let's go to the next level. We can all do much better. There are more needs. We've got this whole large group of Russian Jews waiting to get out. We can't afford it. Israel can't afford it. Let's figure out how to retool our campaigns to make them better."
- 02-01:17:48
Meeker: So when you talk about the annual campaign you're really talking about scores, if not—
- 02-01:17:53
Feinstein: About 200.
- 02-01:17:55
Meeker: About 200 individual annual campaigns run by each of the federations.
- 02-01:18:00
Feinstein: Correct. So when United Jewish Appeal would announce that this year we raised \$700 million, it was the aggregation of those 200 campaigns, from which in the old days they might get 450 or 500 million. And then they would, when emergent need would arise, they'd run a supplemental campaign or an emergency campaign. And what the Council of Jewish Federations, during Bob's tenure, and subsequently did, was really become a partner. And how do we engage the federations to more effectively work to meet that need? And that was my job. Figure out the mechanics. What's the scaffolding look like and how do you set it up and how do you get people organized to do this and how do you get into an underperforming community and work with their cadre of leadership and their executive staff to redo not an exact replica of what San Francisco did, because those were a set of particular circumstances.

02-01:19:07

Meeker:

Can you maybe take an example of one of those underperforming federation communities and walk me through maybe how it was you brought them along to a higher performance standard?

02-01:19:28

Feinstein:

Take Fort Lauderdale, Florida. So it started essentially as a snowbird community, meaning people who live in Montreal or Quebec or New York or New Jersey or Boston or Vermont, who spent six months, initially four months and then six months, and eventually their children decided to stay in the Sunbelt. They had a large cluster. They had some congregations form. The same classic evolution of community development. So you now have a basic federation structure in place with a population that was just exploding. So you're north of Dade County and as Dade County became far more Hispanic and African/Hispanic, the Jews began to migrate north. So now you had some people with affluence and they really needed help organizing a campaign. So they had the basic rudiments of a communal structure. They had some volunteers who had done this already in places of origin but now they'd migrated permanently to the Fort Lauderdale area, someplace in Broward County. So a former president of the Pittsburgh federation might be living there now and so on. And people who'd been on the boards of those federations. And they naturally gravitated to the federation in addition to joining a synagogue, instead of going to the Jewish Family agency or the JCC. And now the question was, given how rapid the pace of growth is for our community, can we get some help organizing the campaign. So then I walk in with my briefcase and become the diagnosing and prescribing physician and then work with them for a period of time, in some instances a year or two that I'd come in and out, bring volunteer resources as necessary. That was easy to do in South Florida. Harder to do in the Deep South or the Midwest. And I didn't go to every community.

The second piece was our community consultants, because there are a number of people who themselves had been either senior staff at small cities or they'd actually been executive directors in smaller midsize cities and now they were the field team for the Council of Jewish Federations, all good men and women, all with good skill sets, but most of them were community organizer, community development, administrative, social workers and not really imbued with fundraising, so internally my job was to teach and train our field staff to do something similar in smaller communities and then come once for a visit and then the field staff would do the build-up.

How successful were we? Modestly. If we moved this campaign in 1976 from six million dollars to eight million dollars, we never replicated similar growth in another place. But moving from them a 1,200,000 to a million six or a million seven. And that became significant. And now if they had done what we had been preaching, and generally they did, they now had a small cadre of people who were trained as volunteer solicitors. They thought of ways that

they might get a donor to underwrite a twenty men and woman trip to Israel. Same concept as these Advanced Sixty or Operation Upgrade, and then come back with a trained group of solicitors and each take on the responsibility to solicit ten people. And over time Fort Lauderdale became a self-respecting midsize city and so on. So that would be a good example.

02-01:23:39

Meeker:

What were some of the big challenges that you faced when you took the briefcase over to these outposts around the country? Were they eager to have you there and—

02-01:23:52

Feinstein:

It varied. It varied. Sometimes the executive would be eager because he would want to move the community off the dime. And usually the volunteer board chair or president would agree. And then you'd get in to meet with the other officers or some of the past presidents who just said, "Who needs the pro from Dover to parachute in? We know what we're doing." So I think that was true everywhere. It is not dissimilar to what I was telling you earlier about Goldman or Swig saying, "Who needs a Jewish day school? Why would we invest in parochial education in this community? Why do we need Council of Jewish Federations to tell us how to take more money out of my pocket? I'm here in semi-retirement. I don't want to give more than \$10,000 a year." I'm imputing reasons to be less than enthusiastic about somebody coming from New York to tell them what to do.

And then it was a New York based organization. And even though I wasn't a New Yorker I was the representative of a New York based organization. And that, as you know, is a time tested antipathy in American culture. If you come from New York or Washington there's something wrong.

02-01:25:17

Meeker:

How did you overcome those kinds of critiques or those questions about your motivations and your origins?

02-01:25:27

Feinstein:

Well, one of the things I hated about consulting is that all I could do was diagnose and write a prescription. I wasn't in charge. So at first that was terribly unsettling. What am I doing getting on all these planes? Let's see, were Leslee and I married? I think it was before and right after we were married. I must have been gone at least four nights a week. Every day a different city. And it was just the nature of the job. And for a while it was enormously frustrating. And then I talked to my counterpart, who was the head of the community consultants team. Joe Cohen. Great guy. But he'd say, "You have to learn to separate. You have to learn that you are a consultant. You are not the executive director. It is not on you if you go to them and give them some workable ideas that they choose not to implement. You've done what you've been asked to do, what you're paid to do. And for you to personalize it, you're going to wind up by the time you're thirty with an

ulcer.” So I slowly learned to separate. But it’s also why I didn’t want to stay at the national organization. I just found it too frustrating.

02-01:27:10

Meeker: Right. So you were there for two-and-a-half years.

02-01:27:12

Feinstein: Correct.

02-01:27:13

Meeker: Just the explanation you provided leads me to the question of why be an executive at a local federation. It’s almost like you just answered it.

02-01:27:27

Feinstein: I think so. I wanted my own lab. There were lots of other factors, too. Well, I guess everything was ultimately personal. Bob retired because he had just come in as a transitional guy. His handpicked successor had worked as his number two for many, many years in Baltimore, Carmi Schwartz, who was a great honest man, but in my view incompetent. But whatever issues I had with Brian, they never had to do with competence. And Carmi was a lovely human being but he couldn’t be the CEO of Council of Jewish Federations in my view and he was eventually let go. He knew I was frustrated, because I was now reporting to him, and I was already told that I would be the heir apparent to the number three executive there, which was very heady stuff. But Leslee and I had just gotten married. We looked at buying a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment in Manhattan. Things don’t change. It’s all a matter of relative wealth or ability. Beautiful building right across from the Natural History Museum, so Eighty-First and Columbus. And we could get in. We could stretch to do it. But it meant she had to work another couple of years. And she’s three years older than I am. So she was already thinking, “How long do I have to wait before I have a baby?” So she was not enthusiastic. And there was a limit to what I’d be paid, could be paid, would be paid, and I would still be traveling a lot. So we had all of those antagonists to my desire to stay in New York. I’m not sure if I had stayed that I ever would have been considered for one of the top national jobs, and I was later. So I distinguished myself in community work and that was a much smarter launch pad than staying in place and trying to promote up within. In those days that was important to me and then it became unimportant to me. But the idea of being the national head was very appealing.

02-01:29:58

Meeker: Of the UJA or something like that?

02-01:30:00

Feinstein: Yeah, I just was very ambitious and that seemed like the right way to go. From a father’s perspective, from a family perspective, not very smart. And that’s where I credit my wife with getting me to put my feet on the ground and keep them there. [laughter] But that was the thought, that I should make the transition. And the Detroit job was such a fluke and such a blessing. It was a

fluke because now that he was retired as the CEO of Council of Jewish Federations, Bob Hiller, was asked by Carmi Schwartz to handle a few of the most important community searches for CEO. And Detroit was one of the leading four cities in the system, way ahead of San Francisco, and much more successful campaigns, much smaller population even though Detroit at one point had been one of the larger Jewish communities. It had already began shrinking after the '67 race riots and just never came back.

I think I was in Montreal all day. I'd made a day trip to Montreal to do what I do. And I walked into the apartment and Leslee and I, we had just gotten married. Yeah. I'm going to tell you a funny anecdote along the way. We had just gotten married. And she loved Bob. I loved Bob. So I walk in at ten o'clock. She says, "Call Bob Hiller." I said, "Is he okay?" She said, "Just call him. He needed to talk to you tonight up until 11:00." So I get on the phone with Bob who was back living in Baltimore. And he says, "Wayne, my boy, I was talking with Carmi Schwartz and the two of us think that you would make a dandy executive director for the Detroit Jewish Federation." I said, "I thought Dave Sarnat took that job?" He was the Atlanta executive whom they'd recruited. "Well, he did. And he in fact had negotiated his package and went home and he and Sharon talked about it and they decided that they did not want to move to Detroit. And since he was the strongest of six candidates presented we can't go back to numbers five through one. So I have to resume the search. And rather than open a wide search, as I was talking with Carmi, he said you're ready and I know you well enough to know you're ready. I want you to do this." I said, "Bob, I'm twenty-nine years old. Are you serious?" He said, "I want you to go through the search process. Just because you do doesn't mean they'll accept you, they'll hire you. There might be some people who have an issue about you being so young. I have no such issue I think you'll do a great job." The next day I had lunch with Carmi and he said, "You're ready and I know you need to move out of here and this is a great next step for you."

02-01:33:32

Meeker:

Had you ever spent much time in Detroit?

02-01:33:36

Feinstein:

One of my father's sisters lived there. So I had five cousins in Detroit. So through my childhood I'd spent time in Detroit. And Detroit changed a lot. [laughter] Have you ever spent any time there?

02-01:33:54

Meeker:

I've gone to the airport. Well, you mentioned the '67 race riots.

02-01:34:06

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. Never changed. Never came back. The irony is that I'm now in Detroit at least eight times a year because a big chunk of my business is Detroit-based. It started out with top Jewish leaders who knew me, respected

me, were looking for an investment manager and hired me to do it, and that led to other people that I didn't know before, not Jews, and so on.

Now, what was the funny story I was going to tell you? Ah, Leslee. So my wife is a native San Franciscan and we'd met near the end of my tenure here in the seventies. We'd each been married before and we'd started dating maybe two or three months before I moved. And about six months after I moved to New York she had a very close childhood girlfriend who lived in New York, so she thought she'd move to New York and try it out. And within a day of her arriving we started dating again and before you knew it we were living together. And then we got more and more serious, both of us a little gun shy, having had young marriages that failed. And we got around to talking about if we got married. And her reluctance was I had a career that required geographic mobility to achieve upward mobility. And she had a dad who came home every night for dinner and local business and so on.

02-01:35:50
Meeker:

Was she a professional?

02-01:35:53
Feinstein:

No, she was a teacher by training and did teach for a while but always did office administration. And then in New York she worked in *Newsweek* but on the corporate side. So as we got more serious I said, "Well, you know, I'll only live near a large body of water," which I never defined, but she assumed it meant either the Pacific or the Atlantic. So I go in to interview in Detroit, figuring I had to try it, and after two or three meetings they hire me. And I discuss it with Leslee and she sort of reluctantly said okay. And she said, "But you told me we'd live near a large body of water." I said, "Well, Detroit is on Lake Huron." But after four years she wanted out, which is how we wound up in LA. She hated living in the Midwest.

02-01:36:52
Meeker:

It sounds like you had already known the community a little bit through family connections. But—

02-01:36:58
Feinstein:

Detroit very little. I knew some of the very top volunteer leaders because they themselves had become national, international Jewish leaders. This guy figures prominently in Brian's oral history. But Max Fisher, who was for thirty years the dean of the American Jewish community, was a Detroiter, and a very proud Detroiter. And you couldn't be the executive of the Detroit Jewish Federation and not work very closely with Max Fisher. Paul Zuckerman had been one of the great national chairmen of the United Jewish Appeal. Martin Citrin was the head of the Council of Jewish Federations through much of my tenure there and was chair of the national campaign planning committee. So he knew me very well and was a huge champion of me and was very close to Max Fisher and Paul Zuckerman and persuaded them that even though I was a young whippersnapper, that I'd do just fine in

this role. Coupled with the fact that they had confidence in Bob Hiller. I was shoehorned into that job. So I knew those people and through them I knew lots of others.

02-01:38:10

Meeker:

But there must have also been a process of gaining legitimacy for the broader community.

02-01:38:13

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah.

02-01:38:15

Meeker:

How did you go about doing that?

02-01:38:25

Feinstein:

I was by this point a trained community organizer. So any time I tackle a new job like that, it certainly was true in LA, and even when I came back here I approached it the same way, I would ask the people I knew and I had a notebook where I had categories of people and places and institutions that I needed to get to know in my first week, in my first month, in my first three months, in my first six months, in my first year. Nobody would turn me down for a meeting. And I would just progressively work through it. Meanwhile, I was identifying who would be important to my success. The chair of my executive committee, who had been the co-chair of the search committee and probably was not wildly enthusiastic about hiring someone so young for this job, but his co-chair, Tom Klein, with whom I'm still friends, thought that I'd be the right guy.

And I learned in my very first week that Bill could not be trusted with a confidence. Mandell Berman. Great man. This is just the manipulation that a trained community organizer learns. I learned that if I needed to float a trial balloon I told Bill in confidence and within a few days it was all over town. Literally within a few days all over town. And the first time I told him something in confidence he burned me. I know he didn't intend it. And I wrestled with that for a few days and then talked in confidence with a very close childhood friend of his who looked at me and said, "You can use this, you realize." And I did.

02-01:40:33

Meeker:

If you wanted to get a story out very quickly.

02-01:40:37

Feinstein:

So in this job, and it's probably true in lots of similar jobs, there's a practical—I used to define myself as a small city mayor. I've got friends who've been mayors in different sized cities. And it doesn't matter what you did the day before that made you feel so good about achieving something. The next morning you see Mrs. Schwartz down the road who looks at you and says, "Why didn't the sanitation people pick up my trash this morning?" And there was a little of both. So you learned the practical politicians ways of

getting things accomplished. And sometimes you helped yourself by planting a story. So that was the Jewish community. I had these lists.

But the Detroit Jewish community, at different stages in its development, played a disproportionate role in Detroit city, Michigan State, University of Michigan, macro issues. And so if I wanted to play the role I could. And I loved that aspect. I loved being the representative of the organized Jewish community. I did it in all three places that I was executive. I was good at it. I knew how to get the right people from the Jewish community engaged and if we had to raise money for someone—the most notorious was Willie Brown, because if you wanted anything from him when he was Speaker you had to feather his nest. But it was true with everyone. When I was in LA and we were trying to build section eight housing it was—

02-01:42:38

Meeker:

Tom Bradley?

02-01:42:37

Feinstein:

No, no, no. It was Pete, our senator from San Diego.

02-01:42:42

Meeker:

Oh, Pete Wilson.

02-01:42:44

Feinstein:

Pete Wilson. Developed a great working relationship with him. But you needed to help in the campaign. Needed to get some people. With Willie, if you shook his hand, it cost you \$20,000. But we understood each other. So that was just the cost of doing business. Tom Bradley was a gentleman. Willie was a pirate. Well, you're doing his interviews now.

02-01:43:14

Meeker:

Yeah, I am. Interesting.

02-01:43:17

Feinstein:

I have great affection for Willie Brown, but he was a pirate.

02-01:43:20

Meeker:

It's interesting. When you mention Detroit and Michigan and you said—

02-01:43:26

Feinstein:

Coleman Young was a thief. But we can come to that if you're—

02-01:43:29

Meeker:

Coleman Young was in Detroit, correct?

02-01:43:31

Feinstein:

Yeah.

02-01:43:31

Meeker:

Yes. They've had a few thieves, I think, in Detroit.

02-01:43:35
Feinstein:

He was the first. Became a great tradition for forty years. Destroyed the city.

02-01:43:43
Meeker:

You mentioned the outsized role that the Jewish community can play in a town or in a state. How do you manage that? Because that can be both an opportunity but it can also be a challenge around optics. Other communities sort of concern and alarm at an outsized role that any minority group might play in a broader populace. How do you manage those kinds of opportunities and risks?

02-01:44:17
Feinstein:

Well, I probably learned a lot about the practical uses of the belief that we were one-third of the religious composition of North America. Protestant, Christian, Jew {inaudible} from Max Fisher. And he was just a brilliant street level pol. He'd made an enormous success of himself financially but he had huge power. Huge power. Predating Richard Nixon he had already decided that it was important for Jews to be represented in the Republican party. And he was a rising businessman and a rising Republican fundraising star in the state of Michigan. And George Romney was running. He and Max had become friends when Romney was running for governor. And Fisher became a big supporter of his and through that just parlayed it. So I learned by talking with him, by watching him. Same was true in a different way with Paul Zuckerman, a name I mentioned earlier, Martin Citrin, or the guy Bill Berman who was my megaphone for secrets. There were just a lot of people like that and almost anybody you could find of a certain generation. Wouldn't be true necessarily in the cohort who were ten or fifteen years younger than I. But anyone my age and older had guys like Max Fisher to watch and admire and realize that even if their own politics were liberal democrats—and Max was a Rockefeller Republican. He wouldn't recognize today's Republican Party. That he was doing this because there was an easy path for someone who was willing to raise money and was good at it and nothing stood in his way. Post-Second World War nothing stood in your way. So if you were willing to roll up your sleeves and get down in the political muck. I used to have meetings in his office. His office was about three-and-a-half miles from the Federation, so it was a car drive from my office in downtown Detroit. But he lived ten minutes from my house. So he'd say, "Come over Sunday at 9:30." And he'd sit in his bathrobe and we'd talk about the agenda. And it was informal. He wasn't my board chair. But everyone expected the executive to have this intimate relationship with Max. I'd go to Florida a couple times in the winter because he was a snowbird. Had a fabulous place in Palm Beach. I met Henry Ford the Second because he was a close friend of Max's. I joined the Detroit Club, which had been a restricted club. I was the seventh Jewish person allowed into the club. Henry Ford the Second was the chairman of the club. And Max was my sponsor and Alan E. Schwartz, at the time probably the top attorney, business attorney in the state of Michigan, were my two sponsors. Supported strongly by the president of the club, Henry Ford the Second. Where did I meet him? At Max's in Palm Beach in the winter, even though he

was a Detroiter. I was already pretty sure of myself. And even though I'm naturally introverted, which may be hard to believe, it just gave me great confidence.

So I would reach out to, as the head of the Jewish Federation, I would reach—and I remember the Detroit Club, which I joined right after getting to Detroit—to Bill Giles, who was the head of the *Detroit News* and Dave Lawrence, who was the head of the *Detroit Free Press*. Lawrence went on to be the head of Knight-Ridder papers. We remained friends for many, many years. Used to swap books. He was six or ten years older than I. Guest in my house. Very not Jewish. In fact, he came to my house I think for dinner with his wife and it was just the four of us and the babies. And he walks in and we still haven't furnished the living room because we didn't have any money. But we had beige carpet on the floor. And he stops in the foyer and he looks at the beige carpet and he says, "I think I know you well enough to ask you a personal question. Do you mind?" I couldn't imagine. I said, "Go ahead." He said, "This is the second or third Jewish home I've been in in my life and you all have beige carpet on your living room floor and no furniture. Is there some religious meaning to this?" So I didn't miss a beat. I said, "Oh, yes. This reminds Jewish families of the wandering in the desert for forty years." And he looked at me and he said, "Really?" I said, "No. I can't afford furniture." [laughter] We had a great laugh and then a couple of scotches and a great evening. [laughter]

02-01:50:18

Meeker:

That's a brilliant answer. That's very quick. [laughter] I almost wanted to believe it.

02-01:50:25

Feinstein:

He's a really smart guy. Now, when did those personal relationships come in handy? And you read this in political biographies and whatever. And this goes to the heart of your question. There was and is a very substantial American Muslim community centered around Dearborn, Michigan, which you can't miss when you're driving into the northwest suburbs where the Jews live predominantly. And when you're the head of a major city Jewish Federation you get to know the local station head for the FBI and you get to know the chief of police and you get to know the precinct captain. That was really important for me in LA and to a lesser extent here, because LA and San Francisco both have had threats a number of times. Even in Detroit there was concern. It was very early. Because I was there '82 to '86. But there already were signs of anti-Israel groups. I understand it. So you'd reach out to the moderate leadership. Detroit is so ethnically balkanized, even today. Even today. It's very tough to do intergroup work there. Much easier in California. But even then, today you've got people with very hard convictions about hating Jews or hating Israel. I understand it. I do understand it. Different issue with the University of Michigan because you can do it at the Stanford campus, not so much at Cal, although Cal in the last twenty years has changed in terms

of where does the big money come for the new science buildings and engineering and so on.

02-01:52:29

Meeker:

Asia.

02-01:52:30

Feinstein:

A lot of Asia. And that was Chancellor Tien more than anyone else, and Peter Haas in the first Centennial Campaign. You walk around the Stanford campus, its science and engineering, no doubt. You walk around the University of Michigan, it's all the prominent names from the Jewish community because probably 70 percent of them are Michigan grads who then went on to have great success in business and they've given tens of millions of dollars. Whether it's the business school that got a hundred million dollar gift from Ross or the medical school with the Frankel family—it's just phenomenal. And so the access and influence is disproportionate.

I think that is changing and will change. I think it's inevitable. It's happening now. I think the bloom is off the rose. Partly it's antipathy towards the way Netanyahu runs Israel. Partly it's organized and far more effective today than thirty years ago, Arab public relations, that says we are indeed the Davids and Israel is the Goliath and they're crushing it. In part it's a recognition that there never was any reality to the myth, Protestant, Christian, and Jew, that they're a tiny minority. Part of it is the assimilation of the American Jewish community, quite natural and healthy, arguably. We've seen it before in Jewish history. I think America is in the midst of it right now. It's one of the things that was already changing during my tenure and I thought the federation needed to be something different and I didn't want to run it. I really didn't want to run it. I came home from a long board retreat that I'm sure we'll get to in the Santa Cruz Mountains in 1996 or '97. It was just before Alan Rothenberg's presidency. And I said to Leslee, "Take a long walk with me." And I told her what had happened and I said, "I agree. This is where we should be going." By the way, it's taken until Danny to get them on this path. I said, "I can get them there but I don't want to run it." She said, "What are you thinking of?" I said, "I've always thought about business." She said, "If you don't do this before you're fifty, stop yacking at me." And I did. A few years later I retired.

Interview 3: April 6, 2016

03-00:00:07

Meeker:

Today is Wednesday, the 6th of April 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. This is session number three and we are here at the offices of the Capital Group, again in San Francisco. Last time we wrapped up by talking about your term as a director of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. You served there from 1982 to the summer of 1986. I know it was a couple of weeks back, but after leaving that conversation, was there anything else about your time in Detroit that you thought was particularly germane that we didn't get to in the conversation? I know, it's a test. Sorry. We can scrub that question if you want to and simply move on from there.

03-00:01:06

Feinstein:

No, no, that's okay. I did not spend a long time thinking about it, although that evening did talk with Leslee, my wife, about how much fun it was to walk down memory lane. I don't remember whether we talked about intergroup relations but my experience in Detroit impressed upon me that that was an important part of the role that I needed to play and it was also because of that that I began thinking of the job—when you think of metaphors for that type of a job—as a small town mayor. Because there are lots of different constituencies whose interests have to be balanced or you don't succeed. And obviously Jewish/African-American relations were critical in Detroit, and increasingly Jewish/Arab-American relations were critical in Detroit. And I played a role in that from time to time, that informed me when I moved to LA. So I began from day one approaching the LA job differently than I did day one in Detroit because that became an important component. And that has some implications when we talk about LA and some of the things that we did in terms of lobbying and such that I might not have thought of previously. It also began to shape the way that I thought about the fundraising responsibilities of a chief executive of a Jewish federation and I began to think about them far more broadly, in part because of Detroit. So when I look back on those four years, they were really important. It was like finishing school. And to have been given an opportunity to do that job as young as I was, in hindsight, was a blessing because I'm absolutely certain I could not have succeeded in Los Angeles if not for having performed the Detroit job well.

And I was very fond of my predecessor but I was also—this will sound awful. Let me think of the right way to put it. My predecessor in Detroit stepped out of the role under adverse circumstances and he wasn't a manager. He was a great fundraiser. I just had a knack for digging in and figuring out where the problems were and that distinguished me right away. Because I was a pretty good fundraiser and I was a pretty good manager. So all of those things became important and informed the way I did the job subsequently.

I don't know whether there's anything else, other than to say that the relationships I built with key volunteer leadership there have persisted all these decades since. In fact, some of my business as a wealth manager are people that I became friendly with there, and that business keeps growing. So when I'm in town now, which is six to eight times a year, it's like I never left. Part of that is Midwestern. That's just a unique characteristic of Midwestern communities. If you were thought of as part of the community, which apparently I had earned in four years, you're always part of the community, even if you live someplace else. So those would be two parting observations.

03-00:04:43

Meeker:

So I'm glad that you brought up the question around Jewish community relations. We did talk about that a little bit last time, or you brought that up last time. But I had some additional questions about it and my questions are a little inchoate at the moment. But I've been thinking about the longer history of organizations like the JCRC. I interviewed Earl Raab a number of years ago and he was such a stellar figure.

03-00:05:12

Feinstein:

He was the dean.

03-00:05:14

Meeker:

He was the dean of that world.

03-00:05:15

Feinstein:

I learned a lot of what I know from him when I worked for Brian in the seventies.

03-00:05:21

Meeker:

I bet.

03-00:05:21

Feinstein:

Because I got assigned out when I was opening up the Silicon Valley office in Palo Alto. I was an adjunct staff for JCRC in South Peninsula and I reported directly to Earl. I just had some very fortunate opportunities and that was one.

03-00:05:38

Meeker:

And I think about the centrality of that role, say, early in mid-twentieth century Jewish life in the United States in the sense that my understanding is that Jewish communities physically were much closer to African American communities at that point in time. Jews, although still seen as a minority in the United States, were seen more sort of like a quasi-racial minority in the United States I think than they are today.

03-00:06:07

Feinstein:

I think that's true.

03-00:06:09

Meeker:

And then also there was a lot of, as a result of that, I think, sympathy and engagement between like Jewish and African American communities, for

instance. But then fast-forwarding to the 1980s and 1990s, is community relations still such a necessary role? And it was interesting to me that now you've brought it up twice in Detroit, that it was a necessary role. And so I wonder if you can just talk a little bit more about like how it was necessary. Why was it that you were forced or compelled or enticed to really spend time thinking about this and this being a part of the role that you played in Detroit.

03-00:07:03
Feinstein:

Well, I think the observation you just made about the eras is spot-on. And I'm going to be sixty-four at my next birthday, so I grew up at a time that intergroup relations generally, black/Jewish relations particularly, were critically important. I went to an integrated high school in Columbus, Ohio, and I've recently had this conversation with a group of my buddies from high school who are all Jewish men my age. That we all had African-American acquaintances. In hindsight I don't think we can properly characterize them as friends. We never went to one another's homes. We were friends at school. It was situational. It's like making a friend at the office and you'll have lunch occasionally or a cup of coffee or stop at the water cooler or drop into each other's office. And in hindsight that's what it was like. I've gone back for high school reunions and I notice now these men and women my age are sitting by themselves. My group is sitting with ourselves. And at our last reunion, my fortieth reunion, I made a point of walking over and talking to a few people that I was either on debate team with or in course with or in theatrical productions. And it was like we were eighteen again. But I'm not sure we would have interacted if one of us hadn't broken the ice.

Now, to your comment, that has also changed. For my children, race is a non-issue. Literally. It is a non-issue. They went through school with friends of various extractions. When President Obama became president, and from time to time he's been queried on this, are we in a post-racial America and he's such a deep thinker. He'd say, "Well, I don't think so." And in the last few years we've had lots of examples of how we're not. But here's what's changed. The American Jewish community is seen by many, certainly younger people, as just part of the white 1 percent. We're not all the white 1 percent but that's the perception. So we're part of the problem. We're not necessarily part of the solution. And the fact that my grandparents or my parents might have been involved in early days in NAACP and CORE and so on and so forth, irrelevant, because things haven't gotten appreciably better for many. And for me to claim minority status or special consideration is not only false, it's offensive. Now, I watched that evolve over the years that I still was an official of the Jewish community.

So now we come full circle. Why did that become a part of my kit bag, if you will? Well, I was in Detroit at a time that Coleman Young was mayor. He had already been mayor at least one, maybe two terms by the time I moved to Detroit. I think I told you I was invited to join the Detroit Club, which was the key business leaders club. And so I got to know a lot of people of a lot of

ethnicities, although the club was predominantly middle-aged white men and those were the movers and shakers, whether it was General Motors or Ford or Chrysler or the bankers or the key attorneys. That's where they ate lunch. Well, we had a number of issues. As the Jewish community moved farther and farther north and west away from the city of Detroit we needed to consider what was going to happen to the Jewish old age home or the Jewish hospital. And license was a political decision. So to move a healthcare license from Wayne County, Michigan to Oakland County, Michigan required the political authorities to be sanguine. At a minimum they wouldn't oppose you. At a maximum they'd support you. Because no one was going to move left or right in Lansing, Michigan, the capital, if the mayor of Detroit was opposed. So we didn't have a choice. And I was not only young but I wasn't someone who had grown up in Detroit's democratic politics. So I knew what to do, which was to get the people whom he just could not meet with for meetings. And this began on a fairly regular basis. And there were a number of reasons for it.

We were moving more and more of our infrastructure into Oakland County, which is where the Jews lived almost without exception. There were very few Jewish residents left in the city of Detroit. It started with the race riots in '67 and it just continued. This white flight was a never ending—it's only changed in the last two or three years with the effort led by a Jew, by the way, Danny Gilbert, who started Quicken Loans. He moved his entire workforce—his own company, it's a private company—moved 25,000 people, predominantly young, white, Asian, Indian technology-focused people from the western suburbs into the city of Detroit and that started this renaissance of downtown Detroit business. It's not permeated the whole town. It's a big, geographically big city. But I think over time he's either going to be proved visionary and forceful or a fool. I hope it's the former and not the latter.

So I'll give you an example and why it persuaded me that from that moment forward, and as I did that job, community relations had to be a component. And it wasn't the classic issue of anti-Semitism. It was if you didn't have strong relationships with community officials who might be of a different ethnicity or race or national origin, you were going to have difficulty at a point that one needed the other, actually having a dialogue. We went in to move the licensure for the Jewish home on Seven Mile Road to Oakland County. The aging Jewish population, as is true here, was just reaching a point. Their kids would not consider driving into Seven Mile Road for a Sunday visit. And so if they put mom or dad in the old folks home it's because they needed acute round-the-clock nursing. So the question was could we move this licensure for acute round-the-clock nursing up to Fifteen Mile Road, which was where the center of the Jewish community was. We had the space for it. And I went in with the top lay leadership power. You did not say no to Max Fisher or Alan Schwartz with impunity. They were the leaders but there were four or five of us in this meeting. So I was the kid. I just happened to be the CEO of the Jewish Federation. And Coleman Young, when he heard what we were doing, puffed up and said, "I'll be damned if you Jews are

going to move the crown jewels of this city out to the suburbs, out to the lily white suburbs.” And it was a tirade.

From the mayor of the city of Detroit, an anti-Semitic tirade. Now, I realize, because I went through that a few times with him over three-and-a-half more years, that was his MO. It was part of his intimidation tactic. Max and Alan had heard it before. And these were gentlemen. They were not street fighters. And when we walked out I was stunned because I’d never been excoriated like that. Max Fisher and Alan Schwartz were both very tall men. Max was probably six-four, six-five, Alan probably the same height. I’m five-ten. So they walked out, they each put an arm around me and said, “You look shell-shocked.” And I said, “Well, I’m stunned. I feel like we were just all taken out to the woodshed.” “Oh, don’t make too much of that. That’s the way he operates.” I said, “Really? Well, what does this mean? Is it completely dead?” And Max said, “It might be completely dead but he didn’t want anything more than to browbeat us and my guess is within the next week or two I’ll get a call from him that he needs something and I’ll remind him.” Well, we never could move licensure. He blocked us in Lansing.

So the Detroit Jewish community, and this goes back thirty-plus years, had to rework how it was going to deliver that level of service to its frail, elderly Jews or whether we weren’t. And in the meantime the endowment of the Jewish home had to be spent in larger and larger—in other words we were spending down corpus in order to finance it. Because if you have a diminishing census because younger families would not put mom or dad, you didn’t have current Medicare reimbursement, et cetera, et cetera, and Medicare would cover 70, 80 percent, and then you do fundraising. Well, if your mom and dad aren’t there you feel no obligation to contribute \$10,000 or \$5,000 or \$500. So fundraising was falling off and we reached a point that the lines crossed, where the operating costs were higher than existing revenues and we had to begin to spend down the endowment, which is always a bad thing. And it eventually failed. There is no Jewish home for the aged in Detroit. They found other solutions in the years since I left. Not optimal. And we were even talking about creating something, a health care fund, that would subsidize people in proprietary homes. And I think that is what they did. It started during my tenure but it happened years later. We tried to sell Sinai Hospital of Detroit, Joel Tauber, who was then the board chair, and I, to Hospital Corporation of America. They were just beginning this process of rolling up nonprofit hospitals. And we saw the handwriting and there was no way of making this work over the next decade. And sure enough it didn’t. But as was true here with Mount Zion, which was eventually sold to UCSF, we were able to keep in both instances a net endowment that became the health care fund. So here it’s Mount Zion Health Fund. I don’t think it ever became a component of the federation endowment. There were enough old guard who just didn’t want to do that. In Detroit the Sinai Hospital Fund, or whatever it’s called today, is part of the Federation endowment. But with very specifically

earmarked purposes. It was to subsidize anything that could be broadly defined as healthcare costs for members of the Jewish community.

03-00:19:23

Meeker:

So looking back upon this, what were the lessons learned? Did you all of the sudden realize that as the executive of the federation it was essential for you to establish close relations with different community leaders who then also would have close relations with their political leaders?

03-00:19:42

Feinstein:

Yes. And there were times, because I operated at a different level than the JCRC director, who nominally reported to me. In LA he did directly report to me. The CRC director there or here would not move left or right on a major issue without checking in with the executive of the federation. And here that's Doug Kahn's primary job, build those community relations. But he also knew during my tenure here to make sure I was introduced or there'd be social occasions or whatever and then I'd build on the personal relationship. I began working very, very broadly. So I knew the mayor, I knew his key staff, I knew our senators. I had not done this previously. I knew Dianne Feinstein when I worked here in the seventies and she was president of the board of supes before Moscone's assassination. And that helped years later on Soviet Jewry and other issues because she was and still is a very important member of the senate. Got to know Sandy Levin, who's still the congressman from the Detroit area. And so on. But I also got to know leaders of the Chaldean community, which is the Iraqi Christians. I got to know some of the black leadership. And we began doing things periodically. Had dinner together or whatever. We'd have the younger leadership of the Jewish community meet with the younger leadership of the African American community. And usually what they had in common were business ventures in the city of Detroit. And some of the leadership of Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn, which was the key law firm in town, were always keenly interested in things that might actually do the dual purpose of cementing a personal relationship that one day might be very helpful in tamping down something or starting something and maybe we'll do some business together, too.

I wouldn't even call it a steep learning curve because I think I had an aptitude and interest in that direction. As I said earlier, it became the way I moved into a new job, that I just thought it was important for me to know as broadly as I could people. And, sure enough, there were times that the personal relationship made a big difference in cutting a problem off before it began or in organizing some type of support around something. And it wasn't just me. There were lots of people, volunteers and otherwise. But sometimes it took the executive to actually say, "Here's how I imagine the following may play out over the coming months. Don't you think we ought to reach out to so and so and so and so and so?" That was just trying to be a little more subtle than directive. But important in terms of getting things done.

03-00:22:40

Meeker: Recognizing the political nature of the job.

03-00:22:42

Feinstein:

And there is a major political component. But there was also a key point in LA. I had refined that. That was part of my bag of tricks. I always knew our senators, I always knew our congressmen, I knew our state assembly leaders and senate leaders. I always knew the mayor. Would make a point of meeting them within my first thirty days to three months on the job. In LA and in San Francisco it was the same. We got a lot of section eight housing built in LA because of Senator Pete Wilson. He was a great ally on that kind of thing and a great ally in Israel. In fact, the first time I went to see him he puffed up his AIPAC credentials. And I said, "Well, actually, I'm here on a domestic issue." "Oh, what's that?" But here was something he could deliver for a key constituency. And we reciprocated. Or it happened more in LA than here but when I was LA Federation director at least once or twice a year we'd fly up to Sacramento because a lot of agency support flowed through the state. And Willie Brown was then the speaker. And you knew if you shook his hand it was going to cost you 10k. But he was unabashed about it. Coleman Young was a thief without ever admitting he had his hand in your pocket. Willie, you knew. And I would say that to people who had never been up to Sacramento before, so they couldn't believe I knew the—and you're interviewing him now. He won't remember me specifically but I promise you he did this with everybody. And he was just too subtle. Just so suave. But within twelve hours there'd be a call from his chief of staff or his chief fundraiser. "Speaker's very happy to have met with you yesterday and he can make this happen and he's so glad that you've taken two tables at his next event." I said, "Come again?" [laughter] And I'd hang up the phone and I'd call five or six people and say, "I need your help."

03-00:24:56

Meeker: "You're going to dinner with me and you're paying." [laughter]

03-00:24:58

Feinstein: [laughter] "Need your help."

03-00:25:01

Meeker: Oh, wow. Fascinating. Thank you for that explanation.

03-00:25:05

Feinstein: That's politics.

03-00:25:07

Meeker: That's the definition of it. But let's talk about Los Angeles then. Tell me about the recruitment from Detroit to LA.

03-00:25:18

Feinstein: Well, that came in two steps. I had actually been reached out to two years earlier to consider leaving Detroit to become the chief fundraiser because my predecessor in LA just wasn't a fundraiser. I wasn't even flattered. I thought

that wasn't even a lateral move, it was a step down. And the path as it was presented to me was, "Ted will retire in two years and you'll simply step up and we'll have a contract to that effect." Thank you very much. Not interested.

03-00:25:55

Meeker: Who was, I'm sorry, the previous director?

03-00:25:57

Feinstein: My predecessor in Los Angeles was Ted Kanner.

03-00:26:01

Meeker: With a K, right?

03-00:26:03

Feinstein: K-A-N-N-E-R. He was a great guy. Within six months or so of stepping down, he and his wife were in Rio de Janeiro. I think it was just a vacation but he might have been doing some work for joint distribution committee because a lot of retired execs would get those gigs. They were wonderful boondoggles. And they were coming home from dinner in downtown Rio and waiting for a bus to go back to their hotel and some thief pushed him in front of the bus and he wound up very badly injured and hospitalized. Never walked again. I think it broke his spine at the base. It was terrible. And he lived another ten years or so. Anyway, he was a great guy. Had come up through the Jewish centers.

But he had a very different skill set than I did and very different orientation. And he'd been the associate and promoted up, whereas in each of the jobs—I had worked here earlier but I had been gone twelve years. So I was always brought in, the pro from Dover. I just came in from the outside. So the recruitment process the second time around was they had a formal executive search. There's an informal and then there's a formal. I'm trying to remember who was managing that search process. I think it was Carmi Schwartz. Carmi had been the boss I wanted to leave in New York at Council of Jewish Federations and LA, like New York, those are the two major, in terms of metropolitan areas, two major communities in North America. So he personally handled the search. And I don't remember any more whether he pulled me aside at some national meeting or whether he called me, doesn't matter, but I went home and talked it through with Leslee, who hated living in Detroit. So being a native Californian she looked at me and she said, "You owe me." I said, "Yeah." And she knew I'd gone to graduate school in LA and I knew this organization. And the thought of being the CEO there was anathema to me. [laughter] I just did not want to move back to LA. But I owed her.

03-00:28:39

Meeker: Why was it anathema to you? Was it the community or was it the actual organization?

03-00:28:45

Feinstein: The organization.

03-00:28:53

Meeker: It begs explanation.

03-00:28:57

Feinstein: Yeah. You know how I said to you I didn't know how candid to be but I'm going to be very candid and we'll see where this winds up in the writing. I may wind up embargoing it for a while. [laughter]

03-00:29:09

Meeker: Fair enough. Fair enough.

03-00:29:12

Feinstein: There's something in the culture of Los Angeles that I think is—the dominant ethos is driven by the entertainment industry. I'm not the first to observe this. There have been books written about it.

03-00:29:31

Meeker: *City of Nets*, right?

03-00:29:33

Feinstein: There's something just so awful about that. There's no integrity, there's no honesty. In Detroit, if you shook someone's hand, even if you had had an adversarial discussion, that was it. If he or she had agreed to do something or I agreed to do something you carried it out. It was the old-fashioned way of doing business. You might codify it in a letter of understanding or a memo of understanding but you didn't go back on your word. In LA it was always something else and it took me a while, although I had done this in graduate school, so I knew, even though at that level it wasn't as pernicious as it became when you were actually trying to do big things for the organization you were leading. So the thought of working in that kind of environment left me cold, plain and simple. Just left me cold. And I felt I owed it to my wife to at least interview. And I remember saying to her, "Just because they invite me to interview doesn't mean I'm going to get the job." She said, "You owe me the interview. And don't try to lose this job." And I love my wife. We're coming up on thirty-five years. It's a relationship that gets better with age. Those were rough years.

So I went into the process and I was one of five major executives who was being recruited for this but the fix was in. There were a team of lay leaders in LA who knew me by reputation or they knew me and I was who they wanted. "A hard-charging exec, look what he did at such a young age in Detroit." Detroit had really fallen on hard times and by the time I was interviewed three years later, I really had turned things around and it was very clear and the campaign was growing and the endowment was growing. And I had started to write things and publish them, so I was seen as a thought leader in the system, as well.

So I went into the interview process and the chairman of the search committee was the late Ed Sanders. Ed Sanders was a top lawyer. He had been in the

Carter administration. He'd been president of the Jewish Federation in LA some years earlier and then some years later was recruited to be the president of AIPAC or the chairman of AIPAC and had always been involved in democratic politics and just became enamored of Jimmy Carter when he was still governor of Georgia and agreed to be his—I think he was his national campaign chair. By the way, Ed Sanders is a man I just grew to love. He was like my favorite uncle after a while. If he had not been the chair of the search committee I think I probably would have withdrawn.

03-00:32:40

Meeker:

So here's a man of substance who you had a lot in common with, so was maybe giving you a different perspective on what life in Los Angeles could be like.

03-00:32:48

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. And he was a native Angelino, had gone to UCLA, and just a wonderful man. Just a wonderful mensch and very different than the ethos of Hollywood. So I agreed to interview and I come out for two or three days, two or three days. There were thirty-two members of the search committee. I think the Detroit search committee was six or eight. Thirty-two members of the search committee. And I heard this in advance and Ed said to me, "How would you like to do this?" So this is a telephone conversation. I said, "Well, if you had no choice but to put thirty-two different people on the search committee I'd better meet each of them." He said, "Really?" I said, "Yeah. What I'd prefer to do before I meet with the whole committee is meet them individually." He said, "I'll have the secretary do it. So for two days I think I met sixteen people one day and sixteen people the next and the next morning had the committee meeting and it was very gracious and now at least I was a known face. But I learned in the course of these interviews—I probably still have my notes someplace because I took contemporaneous notes. When I meet people for the first time I say, "Would it bother you if I took some notes?" And I told Ed the morning of the search committee, I said, "I am sure you know this. You realize you have four distinct factions? Not necessarily equal weight." He said, "Really?" He said, "Well, I'm not surprised that you'd get diverse opinions." I said, "Well, more than that. I think there are four diverse factions and I would guess that there is no consensus in the thirty-two of what you want from the new executive director." He said, "Yeah, this tends to be a bit unruly." By the way, in those days the LA Jewish Federation had a board of 230 people.

03-00:35:00

Meeker:

Oh, my God, that sounds like a nightmare. I'm sorry.

03-00:35:01

Feinstein:

An executive committee of forty-five, which is the size of a large federation board, and it was a mess.

03-00:35:14

Meeker:

What were the four factions? Can you remember what general interests they would have represented?

03-00:35:19

Feinstein:

Well, yes. The LA Federation was the product of a really bad merger. In fact, it's called the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles. Now, Jay Sanderson, who's the current incumbent, led by Stanley Gold. This is the fellow who had been Roy Disney's major domo. Really smart attorney, businessman. The two of them managed in three years to break this apart and build a modern organization. But in those days the LA Federation was a product of the Council of Jewish Organizations, whose employees were all Congress of Industrial Organization union members. So that's a Communist union that merged reluctantly into the AFL. We had an AFL-CIO contract and it covered not just the federation but every service organization in town save Sinai Hospital. Was it Sinai? Yeah, right near the Beverly center, on the edge of Beverly Hills—Cedars Sinai. Our youngest son was born there. And that's one of the fun stories about where a little bit of political knowledge went a long way. Cedars-Sinai. If you remember, I'll tell you that story in the course of this.

03-00:37:21

Meeker:

So these CIO union members, right, these are the agencies, right, the social service agencies that they were—

03-00:37:30

Feinstein:

Uh-huh.

03-00:37:30

Meeker:

Okay. And they were actually direct employees of this council? Okay.

03-00:37:34

Feinstein:

Uh-huh, which had all kinds of implications. My predecessor, and I don't mean this disparagingly, had come up through the agency system. So here he was now, the chief executive officer, and he never put forth in contract negotiations management's position and had given up all kinds of work rights. And that was the biggest issue. By the way, I am not anti-union. At a certain point they served a very important role in America. But in this role as the person who was looked to by the top donors and the top lay leadership to run the organization in a businesslike fashion, I had to make changes. I needed the right to move people around the organization and it made no sense to tie my compensation to the union or my senior staff to the—I couldn't recruit good people. California was already becoming a very expensive place. So if I wanted to bring someone from the Midwest to be my chief operating officer, just a few key people, you had to provide housing and so on and so forth. The union hated that kind of stuff. So the factions included two groups of grassroots lay leaders who had a natural antipathy to anyone who would choose to live in Hancock Park where Leslee and I bought a house or Beverly Hills.

03-00:39:06

Meeker: Were they still like the far east side?

03-00:39:07

Feinstein: Yeah, in Boyle Heights and such.

03-00:39:10

Meeker: Boyle Heights. Yeah.

03-00:39:10

Feinstein: Some, the older ones. “Who are you? What do you think you’re doing?” I went into the search process with a wall of prejudice that I did my best to dismantle. At least we could have a civil discussion. And in hindsight it was a brilliant stroke to have met everyone ahead of the meeting. Then you had a group who represented the moneyed elite. And that included the incoming board chair who wanted me as the new executive in the most ardent way because he wanted a hard charger like himself who was going to make these changes unilaterally, as it turned out. And then there was a third group of people who were just the good community doers. I learned over time that—in fact, the metaphor I used for this was sandbox. That I’d come to take some of the debris out of the sandbox and this was the sandbox that these people had played in for decades. Who was I to come from outside and change it? So the biggest issue was that the moneyed elite wanted the same type of executive director that Detroit had. Not the other three. And it was so acutely clear to me.

Well, I was the leading candidate after one or two meetings and then I get the job. So I’m flying out to negotiate my arrangements, which in theory I shouldn’t have had to do, but I needed to do it. The current board chair was a guy name Bruce Hochman, who has since passed on. He was probably one of the top tax defense lawyers for really bad criminal offenses. Brilliant guy. Another one that I really liked. By the way, I had said to Bruce and I had said to Sanders, “Bruce, could you stay on one more year?” “Why would I do that? We have two-year terms.” I said, “Because you’ve got a brand new guy from outside, first time in years.” “We don’t do that here.” Ed said to me, “You’ll do what you need to do and don’t worry. I’ll rally the power elite if this guy gets to be too much for you,” which played a role later.

So I get this draft contract. It’s seven pages, single-spaced, on my duties. It lists every possible function of the LA Jewish Federation Council. So we sit down for the first time and Bruce says, “Do you have any trouble with this?” I said, “Is that a serious question?” He said, “You do.” I said, “Did you look at this?” He said, “I did. What’s your trouble?” I said, “I’ve written a lot of job descriptions. Would you like to see my contract in Detroit?” He said, “Sure, you have a copy?” I said, “With me.” It was like two pages long and it said, “You’ll be the chief executive officer and responsible for and accountable to.” I said, “So that’s what I’d like to have as a contract with you and then if you want to append this as a listing to satisfy the board or the people on the search

committee, I'll acquiesce to that." I said, "But you are setting me up for failure on day one and nobody could come in and do all of these functions equally. So given the factions in the search committee what you're creating is an impossible governance system where at any given time something I'm moving on as your CEO will be in opposition to something that at least a quarter of the board." He said, "You assess this correctly." I said, "Then what are you doing? How can you ask me or anyone else to do this job?" So we wrestled with that for a while and he finally stipulated to most of my conditions. And then he looked at me and he said, "You know, Wayne, if you or I have to pull this contract out in a year you're in trouble, not me." I said, "All the more reason to not create open manhole covers that I can't possibly cover." He says, "No, no, no. I understand that." He said, "But you'll still have issues." I said, "I recognize that and I'm willing to try this." I was not exorbitant in my salary expectations. I basically was prepared to make a lateral move. But I was paid so much more than Ted was. And I said, "Look, I'm coming to a much more expensive city so you're going to have to help me with housing." I think I sold our house in Farmington Hills, that we had bought for \$135,000, for \$169,000 and I thought that's great. In a short period of time I made all that money. And the house we bought in Hancock Park was \$590,000. I said, "So how do I bridge the gap?" And they said, "Well, we'll work out a way," and they did. He said, "Is there anything else you'd like that we haven't discussed?" I said, "Yes. A helicopter and two pilots." He thought I was serious. And I said, "Well, you've got a region here and a region there. I'm going to spend my whole day on the road." He said, "Well, we'll get you a cellphone." [laughter]

So I come into the job. Oh, there was also a long period, because they wanted to have succession resolved six months ahead of Ted stepping down. I said, "Then there's no sense in my coming in ahead." "But he can orient you." I said, "I don't need him to orient me. No disrespect."

03-00:45:38
Meeker:

Did you ever get a sense of how it was that the four factions were in fact able to agree upon you as the successful candidate?

03-00:45:47
Feinstein:

Oh, I think Ed. He was a brilliant business lawyer and a litigator when required. And I've known a number of top litigators over time. It's not that they're Perry Mason in a courtroom. In fact, if anything, they want to keep out of court. They have enormous capability to perceive what you're really after and then to find the common threads. He was just a great arbitrator. He could get people to come to consensus. I don't know what he said in those final sessions. My guess is they were long. My guess is it started with, "Well, he's the least bad alternative," depending on who you were talking with. By the way, I lasted five-and-a-half years there. But by the time I left, boy, was I ready to leave. In fact, jumping ahead, about two years before I moved back up here I was approached by a headhunter, Korn Ferry, about going to Time—

well, at that point it was Warner. It wasn't Time Warner, in a management role, pretty senior. And Leslee and I took a couple of afternoons that we just walked and walked. Kids were in the house with the housekeeper. And she said, "Do you want to do this?" I said, "I can't stand working here. I feel like I'm the original Sisyphus. I move the rock up and it rolls back down my toes." I said, "This is really a shitty job. It's an impossible job." And I knew it was an impossible job but I felt we had to get out of Detroit. So I viewed that headhunter call as an escape hatch. I didn't do it. Obviously.

03-00:47:48

Meeker:

So the reason it was an impossible job is because obviously once you start you have these four constituencies, these four factions?

03-00:47:55

Feinstein:

And I managed in my first year to alienate everyone except the major donors. And I said early on it was a bad merger of two culturally opposite organizations that had never been harmonized. Now, the first person they hired as exec of the merged organization was a man named Isidor Sobeloff, who had been the exec of the Detroit Federation for twenty-eight years. And as I mentioned earlier when we were talking about Earl Raab, he was the dean of the federation system at the time. And I got friendly with Sobie, who was already in his late eighties, early nineties when I moved to LA. I didn't really know him previously other than by reputation. But since he was living in, what was it called, Park La Brea, a big apartment in Park La Brea, I used to go over once every four or five months and just have late afternoon coffee with him. His wife had already died. We had great conversations. And he had a gorgeous cigar box on his coffee table that had been given to him by his last executive committee in Detroit and all the big names of the Detroit Jewish community had their signatures inscribed. So we used to talk about this.

And finally, after two or three visits, I asked him the hard question. Because I knew the man who'd fired him. He'd grown very fond of me and particularly of my wife. And Victor Carter and his wife Adrea and Leslee and I, they'd take us out to dinner like we were their kids. They never had children so I think we just appeared to be an attractive young Jewish couple. I was this hard-charging executive and I was getting myself into trouble left and right. But if you don't break eggs you can't make an omelet. But Victor had fired Sobie and Victor was the kind of lay leader who would walk around and see all the stuff that was undone and then come into the office with a bill of particulars, never raise his voice, and say, "You are just not doing the job that I expect to have done." This goes to seven pages, single-spaced, of job elements. And Sobie said, "When I was recruited to come out here they didn't want anyone else. Phil Bernstein, who had been the exec of Council of Jewish Federations, which handled executive searches, persuaded me that what they needed was someone of my wisdom, experience, and stature to be a consultant to the management and the lay leadership on making this merger work." But that wasn't communicated to the lay leaders. So they had this seven-page

single-spaced job description and he was failing. He just wasn't doing it. He thought he had come as a consultant. Sobie had a reputation of starting his day around 10:00 am and you'd find him at a deli not far from the office, usually between 8:00 and 10:00 and he'd be reading five or six papers. He had started as a journalist. He wasn't a social worker or a trained community worker. Great in Detroit. Just phenomenal in Detroit. A lot of the systems that I inherited and repaired or extended he had created years earlier. He had had two successors before I came to Detroit. So I think he got a very raw deal when he moved there. Here's a man who had never had anything but success. He comes to LA to be the conquering hero and instead he gets fired in a short period of time and they never repaired it. They never made it better.

But I think this goes to what I said at the start. The dominant ethos was without ethic. I don't even think people realized. People who would purport to be your friends. And I think I told you at the last session about a guy who had been the chairman of my executive committee in Detroit. I talked with him the way I figured I could talk with the chairman of my executive committee, in confidence, and then found out within a week it was all over Franklin Hills Country Club. And I began to use that strategically over time. So I would always test that as a result of learning that lesson. People were just more subtle in their perfidy. It's funny. When I confided in a few friends after my forty-fifth birthday but before I gave notice, I'd been thinking two or three years about moving on and I just didn't know how, when, or what I wanted to do next other than it had to be something in business. And I remember a couple of people saying to me, close friends, said, "Your identity is wrapped up with what you've been doing all these years. You have to be prepared for a huge shock when you step out of the role." And I'll tell you something, Martin, it never happened. [laughter] I was pretty clear on who I was and what my strengths were and who my friends were. But this, too, I learned along the way because I really earned my pay in Los Angeles. Now, there were some great things, too. Really fun things.

03-00:53:38

Meeker:

I do want to talk about those great really fun things but I'm still tripping up a little on these four factions.

03-00:53:50

Feinstein:

Ask me because—

03-00:53:50

Meeker:

You provided, I think, a reasonable explanation for how it was that the factions were able to unite around a single candidate more or less. But you as the new executive coming in recognizing that these four factions exist, not to mention the unique and peculiar and challenging geography of Los Angeles, this must play into an agenda that you're bringing to the organization about how you're actually going to be able to move into this organization and strive for success, at the very least. So how did you then utilize this knowledge that

you developed just in those couple of days of meetings to develop an agenda for when you actually arrive there and assume the office?

03-00:54:46
Feinstein:

Good question. The common threads, notwithstanding all of the complaining I just did over the last twenty-five minutes, the common threads were what one would expect to find in a major metropolitan Jewish communal organization. Everyone cared about Jews in trouble. Everyone cared about Israel. Everyone wanted to get the Jews out of Ethiopia and everyone wanted to get the Jews out of the Soviet Union. So those became the unifying strategies. Most, but not all, cared about the synagogues and strengthening the synagogues. Many, but not most, cared about Jewish education as a core component of what we were supporting and ways of improving it. Many, but not most, cared about college students and the Hillel Council. All cared about our relationships with the broader community. So I had a few calling cards, based on my own orientation and vision, that I could trade on, that I knew cut across the factions or got 75 percent of the 100 percent. And by the way, my experience after three or four months was confirmed because the board was similarly riven. And I do think there were then these four different groups. And some had virtual lifetime sinecures. This was my analogy to the sandbox. That I was suddenly removing their favorite toy, their favorite bucket, their favorite spoon, and I was just that SOB. So I had to find something and I wasn't going to manufacture a crisis. I wasn't the president of the United States and we weren't playing wag the dog. Well, life hands the Jewish community those things again and again and again, whether it's some existential challenge to Israel's survival, which happened at least once or twice during my tenure, some opportunity to get Jews out of Russia, and the opportunity to rally the Jewish community around a visit of Sharansky, who had just been released. I had gotten friendly, though not close, to Avital when he was still imprisoned and she'd be in San Francisco a lot. I think you know it was a hotbed of the Union of Councils and so she had patrons here throughout his incarceration. And once she got out of Russia San Francisco became a core part of her support. So I was seen as someone who was very supportive of the Soviet Jewry issue and the vast number of activists on the board, in the Jewish community, were people who were of Russian Jewish extraction. Some were themselves immigrants from Russia, older. So those are the kinds of things that I could mobilize around and they became important thematics in an annual campaign that was lackluster.

There were other challenges related to the contract and such and I had members of the board who were themselves moles for the union. I had listening devices in my office during the first contract negotiation, which, again, I discovered not unlike the way I discovered that the executive committee chair in Detroit can't keep confidences. The CFO and I sat and talked about, because I was not going to be present at the daily negotiations. Mark was going to take the lead. And I had hired Mark to be CFO. He had done this at Owens, Illinois, and he knew exactly what he was doing. He was

smarter than our labor lawyer and smarter than anybody on the other side of the table. So we lay out our three-tiered strategy and he goes into the meeting the next day and they get to a certain point and he presents our card. They knew it. And he comes out of the contract negotiations around 6:00 pm and he said, "Take a walk with me." [laughter] This is a big hulking guy. We go out on Wilshire Boulevard and we walk about four or five blocks and he said, "I think your office is bugged."

03-00:59:24

Meeker:

Did you just think he was paranoid?

03-00:59:27

Feinstein:

Well, I said, "You've got to be kidding me? Why would you bug the office of the executive director of the Jewish Federation?" And he lays this out and he says, "I didn't tell anyone." He said, "Did you tell anyone?" I said, "No." He said, "Wayne, there's only one way they knew that this is what we were going to offer and already had a comeback prepared. So there's got to be a listening device." I said, "Well, what do we do about that?" He said, "Two things. Let's get Tony," I forget this last name, but he was the guy who was nominally in charge of our building security, "to sweep and I'm going to do it tonight. And then if I give you one of these we go for a little walk tomorrow morning." Sure enough, listening device built into the credenza behind my desk. And I said, "You know, I was thinking about this overnight. We can probably use this." He said, "Yeah, I was thinking the same thing." I said, "You and I would make a great pair in poker games, wouldn't we?" So we decide when we meet in my office with the lay leaders we will basically script disinformation and our real strategy we'll decide out on the sidewalk or in my home. Now, this plays a role later, too, because subsequently we had far more sophisticated listening devices planted by scientology and that had to do with a book we were bringing out. We were publishing it. It was the first exposé on Scientology by a young woman named Rachel Andres, who was an executive on our community relations council. I'll tell you more. I had listening devices in my home, in my company rented car. We had my wife's car swept. In my office. Because they figured we must be plotting their demise. Unbelievable.

But a contract negotiation? Well, it affected twelve hundred people so it was not unimportant. And they knew I wanted work rule adjustments. And we had been talking about that the evening before. We got a pretty good contract. And I remember having to fire our labor lawyer, I just thought he was ineffectual, and bringing in someone who was much tougher. But that was actually a stunning learning. But after that experience, which was early in my tenure, between the search committee, then finding out that I was unfortunately right about factions on the board, a president, board chair who just said, "Go get them, Tiger." It's like he thought I was Teddy Roosevelt and I was just going to ride up the hill, and then this listening device situation, I thought, "Holy crap, what am I doing here?" [laughter] "What am I doing here?"

Now, I don't know whether that adequately answers your question. But what you'd find is if you brought a policy to the board, you could even get the executive committee to sign off on it, but you'd get huge blowback from the board. And I just am not cut as a street level pol. I was not going to have to lobby 120 members of my board every time we wanted to do something. In hindsight that might have been a mistake. Or maybe I should have hired someone who was my chief of staff or someone to go do this.

03-01:03:13

Meeker:

Your whip.

03-01:03:14

Feinstein:

I didn't do it. I didn't do it. And that was probably a mistake politically, because I probably could have conquered this. But it just made me sick at heart that this was the game we were playing. So a number of times I'd win and I'd win pyrrhically. And there's a rule of thumb in management theory, and I've sometimes read monographs on this, that you can win these things and then one day you'll do something that is just going to bring back all the viciousness. People don't forget that you crossed them. And what were the stakes? Well, I learned, and it happened around people that I was firing, I learned that the reason why the work rules were as liberal as they were is that on balance we did good things. On balance we raised enough money. On balance there was labor rest, not unrest. And I thought I had a mandate to build on the good things but make it a much more effective organization. As I say, it took thirty years but Jay Sanderson has finally achieved most of that, although a lot of people have just walked away from the LA Jewish Federation. So I think there were lots of people who just enjoyed their lifetime sinecure and they were ticked off mightily. It's like what's going to spring out now with this Panamanian disclosure, all the despots and not so despotic folk who were purloining money. Don't you wonder? First casualty is the prime minister of Iceland.

03-01:05:05

Meeker:

Of Iceland. Who knew?

03-01:05:08

Feinstein:

Much bigger fish to fry. No doubt there are much bigger fish to fry. But it was an ugly place. Honest to God, it was an ugly place. So the fact that we did the nominal things that no other community could do, it was the mirror image of LA being what it was culturally. We had spectacular rallies where we closed Wilshire Boulevard because we had Natan Sharansky just free from Russia. On my stage. Dianne Feinstein was running for governor. We had her in the park at Israel Independence Day. Couldn't pass it by. Tom Bradley was my neighbor. And as awful as Coleman Young was, that was a mensch. Tom Bradley was a good man. And there were a lot of things we could do in black Jewish relations. I bumped into Tavis Smiley, I don't know whether you ever listened to him, at Loews Hotel in NYC about six, eight months ago. Leslee was with me. And I knew Tavis when he was a young man coming up. I was

introduced to him by my CR director, apropos. I didn't realize then what a power he would become in terms of a lightning rod and spokesman for the African American community, but I just saw something in him, and we became not friends but friendly. And I hadn't seen him in twenty-five years. And we greeted each other warmly. So there were a lot of real positive things that were done. I was on the board of United Way. That didn't happen that often. I served on LA 2000, which was a business and civic partnership with city hall to try to chart the future course of Los Angeles. Those kinds of things I could do and I got relatively positive public relations. I became friendly with Tom Friedman, who was then the Israel correspondent for the *New York Times*, because our community decided to be the first American Jewish community to do a major project in an Arab suburb of Tel Aviv.

03-01:07:25

Meeker:

Right. That was covered in the *New York Times*. I was going to ask you about that. The Ajami?

03-01:07:30

Feinstein:

Ajami?.

03-01:07:30

Meeker:

Ajami? in Jaffa, right?

03-01:07:34

Feinstein:

Yeah, yeah. Tom, he wasn't who he is now, but we became quite friendly as a result of that. He called me one day and he said, "Do you have time to talk to me?" And I said, "I'll make time to talk with you. What's it about?" He said, "Well, you know what I do now?" I said, "Yeah, you're the Jerusalem correspondent for the *Times*." He said, "Aren't you running a Jewish organization?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Was it your idea to put money into an Arab neighborhood?" I said, "Well, it was Mayor Lahat of Tel Aviv and I jumped on the idea." He said, "What were you thinking?" I said, "Can I go off the record?" He said, "Of course." "Are you writing a hit piece?" He said, "Oh, no. I think what you're doing is phenomenal. I just want to understand what was in your thinking." So I told him. I said, "As a Zionist I have a strong conviction that these people are citizens of Israel and they are way second-class citizens and if Israel is going to have a future they have to find a way to address this. And if we can make a small contribution in that direction." He said, "Unbelievable." He said, "Aren't you getting opposition in your community?" I said, "A little." He said, "Where's it coming from?" I said, "Well, in simple terms, Hollywood loves it and the orthodox community hates it." And he said, "What are you doing about that?" And I said, "I'm about to do a round of Saturday morning walk to the Orthodox synagogues and take brickbats after services," which I did all through the winter.

03-01:09:15

Meeker:

What were they saying to you?

03-01:09:17
Feinstein:

How can you spend Jewish tzedakah, Jewish charity money, on these people who hate us? [laughter] At the end of the day there was nothing I could say or do that would change their mind. And I learned from that but not as much as I learned when a couple of years later we had the first of the “Who is a Jew?” debates in the Knesset that were spearheaded by the late Menachem Schneerson, and this was corroborated when I read his biography that Telushkin wrote. And friends in Knesset told me that this was coming from the Lubavitch rebbe, who was just worried about the purity of the bloodline. Now, if you know a little bit about Jewish law, it’s evolved over centuries. There were no rules against intermarriage until about 750, 800 years ago or so. So we’re an old religion. But it was really a response to ghettoization and shunning of Jews in Christian Europe. It was not something older than that. Now, I would sometimes talk with rabbis about this because my knowledge is better than the average layman. I remind people that Moses was married to an Ethiopian woman. She wasn’t a Jew. And I can go through a lot more. Solomon, David. The great leaders of Bible legends, they had quite checkered pasts. And Orthodox rabbis would slap me. I’m saying that facetiously. I didn’t know what I was talking about. Of course, I did objectively but I’m sure they’ve been nuanced by centuries of rabbinic debate.

So we have the “Who is a Jew?” issue and this was hugely disruptive. And Chabad. I guess I’ve made my peace with it over the decades. But let me say by way of preface to my critique. There was a guy who was the regional Chabad rabbi in LA. I’d met him when he was at Berkeley. His name was Baruch Shlomo Cunin. I think he’s still alive and I think he runs Chabad’s operations in Russia now. Big, burly, charismatic. I so admired the things that he did where he was literally saving lives and I so hated the lies he told and so on and so forth. Finally one day, it was just the two of us talking, a walk on the street, I said, “Shlomo, I love you and I hate you and let me tell you why.” And he was a big guy. And he smiled a little bit and he said, “So what would you like me to do?” I said, “Be straight with me. And I got to tell you, I’m going to fight you tooth and nail if you go—” I mentioned a few names in particular. When this debate broke out in Israel I had hundred thousand dollar donors in the LA campaign who would call me and tell me that they were canceling their annual campaign contribution. Not for the reason you imagine. So the first two told me this, I said, “Maury, are you around this afternoon after 2:30?” He said, “I’ll be home.” I said, “Can I come by?” He said, “You can come by. You’re not going to dissuade me.” So I go over and I say, “I have to look you in the eye and understand what you’re telling me and why you’re telling me this.” So he proceeds to tell me the story about how his youngest son, who’s already in his forties, had been severely drug addicted and suicidal and took an overdose and somehow Maury already knew Shlomo Cunin and Shlomo dropped everything, went and got this young man, took him to Cedars-Sinai, and then spent days with him, night and day, holding him, hugging him, talking with him when he was lucid, and basically got him into rehab and saved his life. So Maury became a six-figure donor not only to

the annual campaign of the federation but to Chabad because they saved his son's life, which is the thing for which I loved Shlomo, because there was nobody in the organized Jewish community, no fifteen dollar an hour social worker who was ever going to do anything like that.

So the "Who is a Jew?" debacle begins and Maury had not heard that the chief chabad rebbe was behind this. "Oh, no, where did you hear that?" "Oh, blah, blah, blah." He says, "No, no, it's the Jewish federation." So Maury's canceling his gift because his older son has married a non-Jewish woman. So now his grandchildren are going to be delegitimated because of the federation. So I know he's got an emotional connection to Chabad that I can't trump in any way. I said, "I'm not sure how to respond to you, Maury." He said, "Well, is it true?" I said, "It is not true." He said, "Can you prove it's not true?" I said, "Can you give me a week?" He says, "Yeah." I said, "Would you do me the favor, because you and I have a close relationship, of not telling everybody and his uncle that you're not going to give anymore because of this?" He said, "I'll give you a week." So I called the chairman of the UJA, a guy named Martin Stein from Milwaukee, whom I knew from my earlier days. I could have done this anyway but if you're LA or New York, of course they'll drop everything to come here. Marty was also a six-figure giver to Chabad. And an orthodox Jew who just thought that Schneerson was going to save the Jewish future. I tell him the story. He said, "I can be there next Tuesday. You get me a date with this guy Maury Kraine." And this is one of several six-figure donors who had similar life experiences that made them lovers of Chabad and now Chabad was telling them that I was responsible for de-legitimizing their grandchildren.

So Marty Stein and I go over to meet Maury. They know each other. They've actually eaten at the rebbe's tish. And Marty looks at Maury and he says, "Maury, Wayne just told me a story. I want to be sure he told me accurately. That you told Wayne that the reason you can't give to the campaign is because the federation is behind—" He said, "Yeah, isn't that true?" And he looked at me, he said, "No, it's not." "Well, then who is?" He said, "Rabbi Schneerson." He said, "You're telling me it's the chief Chabad rabbi?" "Yes." "Well, what are you doing about that?" He said, "Well, I've gone to Brooklyn to talk to him but for him it's a passionate issue." And he said, "Look, you know how deeply I believe in Chabad. I put my money where my mouth is. But I believe equally strongly in the role the UJA and the federation plays. You can't cut one to do the other." He said, "We, the federations, are going to fight this." And we did. And I'll tell you what I did and what the implications were with the orthodox community and bring it full circle. These are the things I love doing, as you can tell. I couldn't quite get the organization correct but I had a lot of fun while I was their head. Otherwise I might have slit my throat.

03-01:18:01
Feinstein:

Oh, yeah, but this is stuff I was good at, that I loved doing. I don't think it distracted me from my day-to-day, but I'm telling you, Martin, this was a job that you couldn't do. Structurally and governance wise it was impossible to achieve all that I wanted.

03-01:18:19
Meeker:

It's intracommunity relations, in essence.

03-01:18:21
Feinstein:

Yes.

03-01:18:23
Meeker:

That's one of the pictures I'm getting of the work that you were doing, was that was so essential. Lurie, in his interview, talks about maintaining sort of affiliation and widening the circle of the Jewish community. What you're talking about is recognizing a community that is extraordinarily diverse, even amongst those who are very committed and there is so much work that needs to be done in keeping it from fraying and fighting against itself.

03-01:19:00
Feinstein:

Yes. So here was a case in point. I think this was 1987 or '88, I forget exactly when. So just to finish up this anecdote because it is instructive and it goes to the observation you just made. So I won with each of these Chabad donors. What they did with Chabad I don't know. And I take another walk with Shlomo and he looks at me and he says, "You really came after me." I said, "What did you expect me to do?" I said, "Look, I don't know why the rebbe is doing this but I will give you your due. He's a great man. There's no doubt about it. But you can't lie in my community and expect me to sit down and take it. It's destructive. I would never do that to you." So we just had two grown men and we reached an *entente*. I wouldn't say we became friends. He was never in my home. I was never in his home, although I got invited frequently to formal occasions and vice-a-versa. But a year later the Soviet Union, in one of their weird moments, decides to wholesale let Jews out. And this was an issue around which, as I indicated already, I was really passionate and I was one of the leaders nationally, as was Brian. I certainly used this as a way to put the federation front and center. And Chabad, Shlomo, felt he owed me. It had never been done before and I don't think it's ever been done since. He mobilized all kinds of people to help our special campaign. It wasn't the regular campaign. But we raised billions of dollars to pay for the migration of the Russian Jews and Chabad played a mighty role in that. And I think it was just, "I owe you." We never discussed it other than my gratitude. And people said to me afterwards, "Amazing that you could get Chabad to join the federation." And let me think. Simon Wiesenthal Center and the federation were like this. I had a good relationship with Marvin Hier and I knew his key laymen, like Bill Belzberg. We always had mutual respect for each other. I managed to get everyone, left to right, around the table. So yes, there's always that inner group. It dissipates quickly but the good feeling remains. I tamped

down some of the anger that people felt towards Wiesenthal or towards Chabad and they helped when we needed it. But we had to have showdowns before that happened.

I might have said this before. It's come up a few times in particular situations lately but I don't think specifically around the Jewish community, so I may or may not have said this to you. I learned when I was, I think I was twelve years old and in the sixth grade—if I told you this, stop me. I was in Columbus, Ohio and there were two Italian Catholic boys who were always picking on me because I was the only Jewish kid in the class. And they were bigger than I was and stronger than I was. But my father had taught me how to box. And one day everybody else filed out of the classroom and they sort of blocked me from leaving. And I knew what they were going to do was try to beat me up. And they taunted me for a while and they started to throw punches and I blocked their punches and I knocked them both down. I got suspended for a week and my father was proud of me. [laughter] I was in sixth grade. But I learned the most important lesson ever, because it doesn't matter whether you're a physical bully or a verbal bully. A bully you can stare down. Cunin was a bit of a bully. Hier was a bit of a bully. Maybe I was a bit of a bully. But if you're going to throw a punch at me I'm going to throw it back and one of us is going to get bloody.

03-01:23:21

Meeker:

Could you contextualize a little bit for me the issue that spurred this whole conversation, which was the “Who is a Jew?” question as it emerged in Israel? Obviously it has to do with citizenship rights and right to return. Yeah.

03-01:23:37

Feinstein:

Well, yeah.

03-01:23:40

Meeker:

Why does it emerge when it emerges, for instance?

03-01:23:44

Feinstein:

Okay. So we're now thirty to forty years after the Holocaust. Schneerson's a Holocaust survivor and in western countries, including notably the United States, you have more and more post-Holocaust children who are going off to college and meeting a non-Jewish person, falling in love, and marrying. So by the early seventies the intermarriage rate in America was already 25 percent of thereabouts. Now it's probably 60 percent. And as unbelievably intelligent as Menachem Schneerson was, he was probably a genius and in many areas, he was fervent about Jewish law. It was given at Sinai by God and it's not ours to tamper with. And therefore, even though it happened, as I told you, only 700 years earlier, intermarriage was a sin and it would destroy the fabric of our peoplehood and therefore it had to be stopped. And now you had a Jewish state with a chief rabbinate and where laws could be made in the Knesset of Israel that at a minimum would have universal impact in the state of Israel but likely would have broad impact worldwide. Far more power than he,

Menachem Schneerson, had as the head of Chabad. Therefore making it clear that nobody born of a non-Jewish parent was entitled to the right of return would send a very clear and appropriate and necessary signal that these centuries old laws on intermarriage and conversion and the sole right of the orthodox rabbi to arbitrate had to be enshrined. And they started at first subtly and then they pushed the issue and there were a number of Knesset members who were willing to carry the bill.

03-01:26:15
Meeker:

So the goal being here that if you are a Jewish man or a woman and you want your children to be raised in a Jewish household and have the right of return, you damn well better marry another Jew—

03-01:26:32
Feinstein:

Yes. The rabbinical association of the reform movement had adopted a different point of view that allowed for patrilineal descent, not matrilineal descent. And therefore if a Jewish man married a Catholic woman and they had three children and they brought their children up in a reform congregation as Jews and they had Jewish rituals and so on and so forth, those were Jewish children. To Schneerson's point of view this was a dagger in the heart. Had to be stopped. And so since there was no way of influencing the reform movement from Chabad in Brooklyn, do it in Israel. Make it impossible for these children, bastard children, Jewish father, non-Jewish mother—I'm going to tell you a vignette in a second about this that's worth telling. So if I forget remind me I had a vignette to tell you. Now, he had nominal support. Shimon Peres was then the prime minister. It was one of several times. I'm not a Shimon Peres fan. You'll understand why in a second. So I'm on the second flight of American Jewish communal leaders going to Israel. I think on the first flight you had the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations—Malcolm Hoenlein is their executive.

03-01:28:34

Explaining what the community relations would be with intracommunity relations. So we're the first group Federation leaders. It's the New York federation, lay and professional, LA, Chicago. I think just our three communities. Among the three of us we represent three million American Jews. So we have a day and a half of lobbying. I'm the one who flew the furthest. From the West Coast. We get in, we get off the plane. We caucus together and then we start working. And we have eight or ten critical meetings. And the next night I'm on the 1:00 am flight back to LA. We go into this meeting with Shimon Peres and Maynard Wishner, who was then the chairman of the board of the Chicago Jewish Federation, has been president nationally of the American Jewish Committee, was very well known to Peres. Much better than the other five of us in the room, although the three executives all had met him a number of times. So he knew us but he didn't know our lay chairs, except for Maynard. And Maynard, an investment banker, very successful, very articulate, folksy. Says, "Shimon, the reason we're here," explains the reason. "And you need to understand how

destabilizing this will be initially for the support of the rank and file Jewish community for Israel and down the road it's going to cost you on Capitol Hill." So Peres listens politely. He says, "Maynard, my friend," I won't affect his accent. He said, "If I have an opportunity to make peace with the Palestinians," and that's what this was about. This was one of the first peace efforts with Arafat at the time. "I would sell my mother." [laughter] I'm sitting two seats over and I lean forward and I said, "Excuse me, Mr. Prime Minister. Could you say that again?" "If I have an opportunity to negotiate peace with the Palestinians, I would give my mother." [laughter] I lean back. I'm not going to say anything because I'm not going to be that publicly disrespectful and I'm thinking to myself, "What Jewish boy would sell his mother?" I just lost it for Shimon Peres as a result of that trip. He wasn't going to give us any help at all. And now you had these waves.

So my board chair at the time was a top LA litigator, then a partner at Irell Manella, major law firm in West LA named George Caplan. We're still very close friends. And we finished this meeting and before we go back to the airport to fly home George says, "I want you to call Steve Windmueller," head of the SCRC, "and get the following flyer out to every school, day school, et cetera, et cetera, on the truth about who is a Jew." So it was a one-pager. And we wanted kids to take this home to their families. And we got an article in the *LA Jewish Journal* and the *B'nai B'rith Messenger* and so on and so forth. I get back to my office the next morning around 7:30, 8:00 am and my marketing director is in the office. He said, "Boy, you really stepped in it this time." I said, "What?" He said, "That flyer that you insisted be distributed through the bureau to the schools has the orthodox ready to burn down this building." So we arrange a meeting next day, 10:00 am, in the conference room adjacent to my office. George is loaded for bear. And I'm going to temporize. I'm going to be mister diplomatic politician. And he knows it. He knows my MO. We've got all the top leadership of the orthodox communities, plural, in LA, except Shlomo Cunin absented himself. I think this was part of our *entente*, because he knew I was going to fight on this and I was fighting on this. And George makes the opening remark. I then leaned in about what we learned and why this is important and I feel this hand on my elbow, which meant, "Shut up, let me talk." And George looks around the table and he said, "Rabbis, I'm going to speak very directly and some of what I am saying I am sure is going to be offensive. There's nothing personal intended by this." And then he proceeds to say to them, in far less than diplomatic language, "You don't give a penny to the annual campaign. None of your constituents do. Do you know how much money we spent on your schools or through Jewish Family Service on life wife abuse programs because you have so many men in your congregations who beat their wives and their children and they have no place to go but the family service? Last year it was five and a quarter million dollars, for which you paid zero. Now, this is an issue that goes to the heart of our ability to fund your institutions. And you can fight us on this, but I promise you, come July 1 there won't be a red penny going from the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles to any of your institutions. So I

urge you to think long and hard of how deeply you want to fight us on this.” And they sat back stunned and we were just quiet. And Stanley Treitel, who was a lay leader in the orthodox community who had organized this mau-mau session says, “Well, thank you for your bluntness. We have a lot to think about.” So they file out, head down the elevators. I look at George. He says, “You look a little peaked.” I said, “I can’t believe you did that.” He said, “What would you have done?” And I said, “I’m not sure I would have been that blunt.” He said, “But that’s all they understand. Power and money.” I said, “Where do you think this is going to take us tomorrow?” He said, “I don’t know. And shabbes is in two days. Let’s see.” Nowhere. That stopped the problem.

03-01:35:45

Meeker:

Silence.

03-01:35:47

Feinstein:

That stopped the problem. They stopped fighting us. We kept paying. It was Coleman Young. It’s what you learn in different settings. And I said to George, and I’ve said it to him a number of times over the years since. I said, “Boy, did I learn then.” It’s bullying. How do you stand down a bully? You just look him in the eye. And he said, “I didn’t mean to throttle you like that but you were going in the wrong direction. This is what they’ll understand.”

03-01:36:18

Meeker:

As a result of these kinds of interactions, did you ever feel like it was necessary to do more work in intragroup relations, getting the leaders of the reform community, the conservative community, and the orthodox community in Los Angeles together? How was that done and did you have any successes in that? Because if I was a member of the reform community and my brothers in the orthodox community are telling me that my children are illegitimate, are bastards in a sense, that would all of a sudden be no longer an intellectual debate about our different paths around fate and culture, it would feel extraordinarily personal and I would—

03-01:37:12

Feinstein:

You got it. Tried. I can’t claim great success, although things did continue after and George Caplan played an important role. George’s wife, who unfortunately died young from breast cancer. Sandy. She was truly the love his life. Was a non-Jew. And she converted to Judaism, so she was Jewish. And so his kids with Sandy are all Jews. They’ve all married Jews. But George was a member of Valley Beth Shalom, which is probably the most important conservative Jewish congregation. And so Sandy’s conversion classes, mikveh, and so on, were all there. And he came to me and said, “You know, this issue, the ‘Who’s a Jew?’ issue, is not going away.” George Caplan, like Ed Sanders, one of the more deeply thoughtful lay leaders I’ve had the pleasure of working with. There have been a handful there and here and in Detroit. Really thoughtful guys who think ahead decades, not just how do I get through my term. Kind of people I like a lot. So he said, “If I put

some money into a program to organize all three major branches, orthodox, conservative and reform, around a common mikveh and a common conversion ritual, do you think we could get the federation to put some money into this?" I said, "Well, to the last question, yes. But I think the prospect of getting leaders of all three denominations to agree to a common ritual is a fool's errand in this environment." He was no longer president of the federation. And he said, "I'd like to try. Will you support me?" I said, "Of course I'll support you."

Now, I have talked already about a couple of the leaders of the orthodox community with whom I had developed through battle some really open dialogue. Not that we became close friends but there was mutual respect, even though there were things that either did that irritated the other, as I indicated. But with the conservative and the reform I could speak their language. I'd grown up in the conservative movement. I almost became a conservative rabbi. I was a member of Wilshire Boulevard Temple and the senior rabbi there and I were very close friends. So I knew there'd be no problem getting the conservative and the reform together. The question was getting orthodox leadership. And there were some modern orthodox. Now, what's happened in the orthodox community in the last thirty years in America is it's moved more and more rightward. It's not unlike what's happened to the Republican party in America. And I don't mean this as a political statement. It's just you get a faction that begins to dominate the policy discussions and it's very tough to have a contrary view. And that's what's happened to orthodoxy. So if you find more modern or liberal thinking or progressive thinking rabbis, and there are two. One was a leading orthodox rabbi who's since passed on. Weiss was his name. At Beth Jacob in West LA. And the other was Irving Greenberg, Yitz Greenberg, in New York City. They had written contemporary responsa, which is how the Talmudic, the law dialogue goes on in the modern era. And they were both close to excommunicated. They lost their academic standing and so on. In other words that kind of radical heresy is not tolerated here. Was it heretical? These were both top Talmud scholars. I'm not a Talmud scholar but they had great reputations. But because they brooked the domain consensus they were tossed out and that's how it happens in movements from time immemorial. In the old says I suppose you'd kill them.

Now you just make it impossible for them to teach their radical heresy. But George did create this and it does exist. I don't think it's universally observed. But reform and conservative and less orthodox rabbis will use the common curriculum and the common mikvah and it has made a difference there. Now, the "Who is a Jew debate?", has tamped down, although I just read something recently that apparently it's recurred. I'm sure I'll hear about it when I'm in Israel. But it was a big deal. But you're absolutely right. My son married a Korean woman who is a philo-semite. They're pregnant with their first child. Would I prefer that she be a Jewish mother? I'd like to have Jewish grandchildren. I admit that. I've told Sam that since before he married Stephanie. I love my daughter-in-law. She is fabulous. But I'm enough old-

school that it's bothersome. My daughter married a boy who is Jewish. No doubt in my mind that Katy will have Jewish kids. No doubt. It's really important to her. Sam is a typical, which I don't mean disparagingly, he's a fabulous person, but like his mother he just doesn't believe in Jewish ritual, doesn't believe in prayer. When his brother died it was like the final blow. "What kind of a God would do something like this?" Which is kind of a juvenile approach to theology but I get it. I love him. I understand it. But it's just, "What does it matter?" And he's not yet ready to have a different kind of conversation. But I think Stephanie is enough respectful of us, and the kids have said they're going to have both. Well, under the "Who is a Jew?" my grandchildren could not go to Israel if they wanted to or needed to and be automatic citizens. So, yeah, it's a very painful thing for people who care. And I think it's also a function of growing up right after the Holocaust and knowing that you could be three or four generations assimilated and the Nuremburg laws still said, well, you had a great-great-great grandfather, grandmother, you're a Jew. You didn't know that. You thought you were a Lutheran or Presbyterian or Episcopalian. Not as far as Hitler was concerned.

03-01:44:23

Meeker:

Well, and the other side of it, too, is a desire for Jewish survival.

03-01:44:30

Feinstein:

Yes. I'd rather have the positive reason.

03-01:44:31

Meeker:

Right. And in the end of Lurie's interview that's what he talks about. Eleanor Glaser says to him, "What is the biggest problem?" and he doesn't hesitate. And he says, "It's assimilation and isolation." But it's really assimilation by which he means the disappearance of Jewish culture. And one way that that happens is demographically, right. That is what you're talking about.

03-01:44:57

Feinstein:

It is. And this is little solace but my reading of Jewish history is that the experience we're having at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the end of the twentieth, is not unique in the long span of Jewish history. There are incredible stories about Jews, highly assimilated Jewish families in Germany from the mid-nineteenth century through the Holocaust, 25,000 of whom survived the war having married Waffen-SS officers, and Hitler allowing them to live in an urban camp in the central park in Berlin. Twenty-five thousand. There's been a scholarly book published on that. Who would have thunk it. And I'll bet you a lot of those women never for a moment thought this could possibly be an issue in Germany. And it was. I drew an analogy to this an hour ago and I said there have been many points until—the laws of intermarriage were created relatively recently in the span of Jewish history. That there was someone highly assimilated out who wound up being the savior of the community. So one of the things I learned from reading Jewish history is that we've got this extraordinary capacity for renovation and renewal. But it still bothers us. Brian remains a close friend and we have lunch

every several weeks. None of his children have married Jews and only one of mine has. And we look at each other as old friends and say, "Could you believe it and what are you going to do?" And you love your daughter-in-law. There's nothing negative there. I've gotten to know her very, very well. Brian actually insisted, because he married Sam and Stephanie because at the time my rabbi wouldn't because it would have been an intermarriage and Sam would not ask Stephanie to convert. And Brian said to me after the fourth two-hour session with the kids, he said, "I probably shouldn't tell you this but your future daughter-in-law would convert if Sam asked her." And he says, "It wouldn't surprise me when they have children if she converts to Judaism." I said, "Well, we'll see." He said, "She would read everything voraciously. She had better questions than your son, who's no slouch." And Brian's known Sam since he was born, as I know his kids. But it's just not the way my son thinks. But it is the way my daughter-in-law thinks. So yeah, I think that's a very central question. But I don't think it's black and white.

Interview 4: August 10, 2016

04-00:00:00

Meeker:

Today is the 10th of August. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. We are at his offices in San Francisco. And this is interview session number four. And we've been going on, it seems like, for about nine months now. But hopefully in the next month or two we'll be able to wrap it all up. So last time we spent, I think most of the time, actually talking about your time down in Los Angeles. And there were a few additional questions I wanted to ask about that time before we wrapped up and moved back up here to San Francisco. One is just really a very broad question. We touched on it a little last time but I'm wondering if you can share with me your philosophy about this kind of work, which was when you were down there what did you see as the most important activities revolving around community development? You can think about it in terms of getting the uninvolved Jew in Los Angeles involved in community life, the idea of identity continuity, those kinds of issues. What did you see as the most important thing that you could do at your perch at the federation in LA?

04-00:01:32

Feinstein:

In general I felt strongly, and even more so by the mid-to-late eighties, and certainly through my tenure at the San Francisco Jewish Federation in the nineties, that the agenda for the American Jewish community was shifting tectonically. In hindsight I was wrong about that. And I'll explain it. I really thought that Israel was becoming increasingly self-sustaining. That's largely true. Far less dependent on diaspora communities generally and the UJA, Council of Jewish Federations, and AIPAC specifically. There's some who'd argue with me, certainly about the AIPAC piece. That the Jews who wanted to leave the Soviet Union were largely out of the Soviet Union or what was left of the Soviet Union. And that the real question for the American Jewish community, and certainly for the LA Jewish community, was continuity, identity. Would there be Jews in my children's or grandchildren's generation? Arguably they're Jewish. And I never subscribed to what some call the lachrymose concept of Jewish history, this is the last generation, let's lament forever, because there always are surprises and sometimes they're negative surprises that cause in reaction very strong identity formation and action and sometimes they're not good surprises or just attenuation or assimilation or whatever. But I thought that was the central challenge.

Now, how you do that from a federation perch, as you put it, was in the eighties and nineties still a big question. I think at the moment, 2016, a few federations have resolved this question. But I'd been out for sixteen years. And at the point I was raising this question, at board retreats and whatever, in the mid-to-late nineties, I don't think laymen were quite ready to deal with the issue. And who knows why. I could imagine a thousand reasons why. And it's always much more comfortable to continue the agenda that got you in the

door to begin with. But I didn't approach it in a traditionally Jewish way because I didn't believe that synagogue was the only point of affiliation that would ensure continuity, even though I'm an active synagogue believer and member. It's good for me. But I know lots and lots of American Jews have migrated not unlike the way European Jews or European Christians have. Twenty-first century religion is an afterthought. It's an artifact of an ancient time. Identity is much more wrapped up with reality TV, I suppose, or the Kardashians, one or the other. So we didn't know that in the eighties in Los Angeles but we knew something wasn't right.

04-00:05:01

Meeker:

Or identity can be perhaps tribal without being religious at all.

04-00:05:06

Feinstein:

Very much so. Very much so.

04-00:05:08

Meeker:

Was that something you had an understanding of at that point?

04-00:05:11

Feinstein:

I think so because I was a bit of a student of this. I might have told you this when we were talking about Detroit. There was a young man on my staff in Detroit, so this is now the beginning of the eighties, named Tom Wexelberg-Clouser. I don't know what happened to his career after I left Detroit. He was just extremely smart. And we were sitting one afternoon talking about the need for the agenda and allocation stream of the federation to broaden out and be different. This was Detroit, which is one of the most highly centralized Jewish communities in the United States. And Tom said, "We really need to take an existential approach." And I said, "Just clarify what you mean by that." And he said, "If a Jew affirms, if he or she says that they're Jewish, they're Jewish." Which is always a question when you get into demographic studies and certainly when you start conversation with rabbis. And therefore whatever they choose to do by way of contact, connection, affiliation, even if it's marginal, even if it's occasional, needs to be encouraged and supported. And so the more flowers bloom in this park, the more who come into the park and pick a flower or smell a flower, the greater the likelihood that eventually you'll have large affinity groups. This was a guy who happened to be a traditional Jew but just was looking at the problem very deeply.

And I adopted that. I thought it was a brilliant insight and that unlike a synagogue, and unlike even a Jewish center, a Jewish federation which was structured historically to embrace the whole could embrace the whole. By the way, that played out when I got up here because Brian Lurie before me had begun in this direction and I really accelerated it to pick up a lot of small cultural arts organizations whose only membership were people who wanted to go to the Jewish Film Festival, which over the years has had some controversial films. But that sparks discussion. That gets people talking. And if they get forty or fifty thousand people to come one or multiple nights, at

least it's a point of connection. And from that you might get them to join the JCC because there are cultural arts events, and from that you might get—so I sort of adopted that. It started in LA. We actually had a division of the federation, a department, called the—oh, this is ancient days. I think it was called the Council on Jewish Life. CJL. And there was a very creative guy who actually had started his Jewish communal career up here, left before I got here the first time in '74. Was shot and killed while he was on my staff. It was at an ATM. It was a horrible thing. But Jerry, he just was imbued with this philosophy and created a lot of interesting points of connection, organizational connections that didn't exist before and the LA Jewish Federation embraced those kinds of things.

So we already had there, unlike Detroit, we had a medium. We had an agency. It was internal, it was a department, but a lot of the LA Federation was highly centralized. And it did reach a lot of people who saw themselves as Jews but didn't have a synagogue affiliation or they didn't have anything but a cultural arts or a gastronomic or literary interest.

04-00:09:01

Meeker:

What were some of these examples that were, you thought, to be particularly effective?

04-00:09:08

Feinstein:

Well, they would do freestanding programs that could then be housed in Jewish centers and synagogues and such on topics. And they could be six session series. And they could be rotated, because it was a huge area geographically, so they could be rotated among all of our regions. And served as a very important outreach. They were the first to tackle intermarriage, which we knew was a challenge in the seventies but very few Jewish federations were doing anything about it, largely out of respect to the rabbis who were saying there's just no way to embrace the intermarried couple. Well, if we'd stuck to our guns the American Jewish population would be less than half of what it was thirty, forty, fifty years ago because two generations or three generations later we're a highly assimilated community and probably more than half of new marriages are a Jewish partner with a non-Jewish partner who may or may not decide to affiliate with the Jewish community. So these were among the things that they did. And also propelled us to do large community wide celebrations.

We had an "Israel in the Park," we called it, around Israel Independence Day. This federation does it, too, episodically. But drew lots of people, starting with the expat Israel community, which is very large in California broadly, very large in southern California and certainly northern California and heavily in the South Bay. And it drew people out who could not connect with the organized Jewish community for most of the year. Why? Because the consul general, and there was one in LA and there was one here, would constantly say, "No, no, no, no. Don't encourage them to settle here. They'll eventually

come back.” Well, two generations later the good news is that there’s a lot of business exchange around technology and Silicon Valley and so on. And they have businesses in Tel Aviv or Haifa and Santa Clara. But they live here. They might have a second home in Tel Aviv or Ra’anana but they live here. So some of us, I certainly felt strongly this way and felt I was strong enough to stand them down, said, “I respect what you’re saying. I don’t agree with you and institutionally I think it’s wrong for us not to welcome them.”

I had that same issue in LA, because here there isn’t much of an Iranian community. We had a very large Persian Jewish community. They had felt protected by the shah. When the shah fell, as many as could got out and came to southern California. Some had been managing to get money out for decades and now they just relocated. By the way, the same is true with the South Africans. A lot of wealthy South Africans in LA and San Diego. Only they tend to be a very traditionally observant community and their kids go to Jewish day school and so on and so forth. Persians were very standoffish. They always had been. They’d lived there for 3,000 years, from the time of the Babylon Exile. That’s 3,200 years ago. And they’d flourished under many regimes over many millennia.

04-00:12:27

Meeker:

Well, and they probably had a strong Persian identity in addition to Jewish identity, as well.

04-00:12:31

Feinstein:

Sure did. Sure did.

04-00:12:34

Meeker:

One longer strain that we’re certainly going to pick up on San Francisco, but I want to ask about it in the context of Los Angeles, is the changing role of a federation as kind of like a community chest like organization. That we’ll act as kind of a bundler and then raise funds throughout the community, then distribute according to need and importance based on the expertise developed in the federation itself. That really begins to change in the eighties and certainly in the nineties.

04-00:13:12

Feinstein:

Yes. Through my tenure.

04-00:13:12

Meeker:

Yeah, through your tenure, both as a result of ambitions of the agencies themselves and also the desires of the donors. But that’s kind of answering the question so I’ll let you talk about it. But what I’m really curious about is the evolving relationship with the Federation of Los Angeles, particularly with some of the larger institutions or agencies that could or maybe even did stand alone and apart from the federation. I’m thinking of like the Simon Wiesenthal Center, later on the Museum of Tolerance, which opens a bit after you, also with the Skirball Center, although Uri Herscher had been raising

funds for that throughout the eighties. Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. And there's probably many more that I'm not referring to, as well. As the executive of the federation, what was your relationship with these organizations?

04-00:14:13
Feinstein:

Well, I had a good working relationship with all of them. I was not of Los Angeles, so I didn't have these longstanding historical antipathies. My predecessor, of whom I thought very highly, did. He'd basically grown up professionally in LA. He had dug trenches and he wasn't going to walk over them. So there were several such. I'll say parenthetically that while I was head of the Jewish Federation I was invited by—it wasn't organized by United Way but I think because I was at that time a member of the United Way Board for Greater LA. And the board chair of United Way was a friend, a neighbor, and an eventual board chair of the Jewish Federation, Irwin Field. He'd also been the head of United Jewish Appeal and he was a Detroit originally. I knew his father, late father well.

So I got onto a panel commissioned by Mayor Tom Bradley called LA 2000. This must have been around 1987. Of course, you had top scholars at UCLA and USC and Cal Tech who were advisors. I don't think they were members. They wrote some interesting pieces. But the one that stuck in my mind, I can't remember who wrote it, referred to Greater Los Angeles as a thousand bedrooms in search of a community. And if that was largely descriptively true of greater LA, it was certainly true of the LA Jewish community. So weave this together with what I was just saying about the existential approach, that a federation of all extant Jewish organizations had unique ability to exercise. And you looked at lots of different points of connection. So remember, I'm coming out of Detroit where my last three years tenure there I was really informed by this young staffer, Tom Wexelberg-Clouser and his concept, which I just thought was so pregnant with possibility, and now I come to LA, where I'd gone to graduate school and I had already very good relationships with Hebrew Union College. I had good relationships with the University of Judaism and, in fact, taught some graduate courses there. Uri Herscher and I had been friends a long time and used to take long walks and talk about the ins and the outs. This is before he left HUC and went full-time to Skirball. I had a working relationship with Marvin Hier. Less so with other members of his staff. But, of course, he created Museum of Tolerance, so it grew out of yeshiva.

I even had a relationship with Baruch Shlomo Cunin, who was the regional chabad rabbi. And I had a lot of intellectual problems with chabad. But at the end of the day I respected that they would do things that no established Jewish communal agency would. A donor or just a Jew in need, happened to be a millionaire, could call him at 2:00 in the morning and say, "My son's had a drug overdose," and he'd come and sit with the boy for three days and get him down from his high and get him treatment with no police involved and so on.

And I used to say to Leslee, my wife, “I have all kinds of issues with them ideologically but these are really righteous people.” He and I had an *entente* about some things. So Marvin Hier and Shlomo Cunin, when we were getting the Jews out of Russia and we had huge numbers who wanted to go both to Israel and the United States, joined us in community-wide fundraising. First time it had ever happened and maybe the only time it ever happened. That would not have happened without relationships. And that’s true of everything, in my view, everything in public life. If you have no relationship you’ll never be able to ask for help on something.

And I would reciprocate, frequently quietly, sometimes publicly. But I just refused to engage in demonizing, which many people did. There’s the old joke about the Jew on the desert island. His plane crashes and he’s the last one surviving. And after years of being alone on that island and surviving okay, finally a ship comes, spots him, and decides to rescue him. The captain of the ship is walking the island with this guy and spots a synagogue and then about a mile away another synagogue. He said, “Excuse me, Martin, aren’t you the only Jew on this?” He says, “Yes.” “Do you know who built these synagogues?” “Well, I did.” “One man, two synagogues?” He said, “Well, this is the one I pray in. That I’d never go into.”

04-00:19:53

Meeker:

I’ve heard it before but it’s too good not to be told again. [laughter]

04-00:19:58

Feinstein:

Well, but in this context. “Chabad. Humph. Never talk to them.”

04-00:20:03

Meeker:

Well, sort of ideological arrangement and everything aside, when some of these organizations become quite big and successful in their fundraising apparatus, in their public outreach, in their persona, is there a point in time that they graduate from needing federation support, for instance, and how are those kinds of decisions made?

04-00:20:30

Feinstein:

We’re still in LA?

04-00:20:35

Meeker:

Yeah.

04-00:20:36

Feinstein:

Well, chabad, to my knowledge, never had anything more than occasional endowment grant support for a program.

04-00:20:45

Meeker:

And those endowments would have been directed by the people who set them up or—

04-00:20:51
Feinstein:

No. Sometimes they'd arrive from just a compelling grant request and the ability to fund. In Marvin Hier's case the community did support the day school on the same equitable basis we supported all orthodox and non-orthodox day schools. I don't think we provided any direct financial support for the first build-out of the Simon Wiesenthal Center or the Museum of Tolerance. There were many donors in common and then there were some who were a little more orthodox and in his orbit and that he was uniquely able to tap. So Bill Belzberg of the Canadian Belzbergs was active. He and his wife were quite active in the federation. But his older brother was the one who sent Rabbi Hier to LA and he was a huge supporter of it. Alan Casden, who was a major real estate developer in LA, was a marginal donor for a guy of his wealth to the federation. Didn't join the Jewish clubs and was a bit of a Duddy Kravitz in the way people thought of him in many circles. But, boy, did he latch on to Marvin Hier. And that, too, I get, because you see a rising star and you want to be part of that. And somehow he'd attracted non-Jews like Jon Voight, who was considered maybe a B-list actor but very popular. And Voight gravitated that way. So the chabad rabbi got him involved. And he'd always show up on the annual chabad telethon around Labor Day. And Marvin Hier grabbed him. We never used him in anything. But it was interesting to me.

The way Uri Herscher raised money, because Uri is also a prodigious fundraiser, very effective fundraiser, much more traditional. Sit down, tell you the story and then say, "And you can make the story come alive if only you'll give ten million dollars." And just very, very good at it. So when he had the break with HUC he was able to stand on his own. He had this magnificent relationship with Audrey Skirball and one thing led to another. So he had already tapped the Skirballs for a lot of support of HUC and I think did a very credible job with creating the Skirball Institution.

04-00:23:39
Meeker:

Was there any kind of hand-wringing about the fact that these kind of entrepreneurial institutions are happening well outside?

04-00:23:50
Feinstein:

Yes. I wasn't. I think the concept in both poli sci and probably social anthropology is challenging the domain consensus. So if the federation for X-decades had represented the domain consensus, these were challenges from the periphery. Again, I didn't see it that way. But when I went to graduate school in LA, if someone had said to me, "One day you'll come back and be the CEO of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles," I would have said, "I don't know what you're smoking but you don't see me clearly." And here I was now for five-and-a-half years the chief executive.

04-00:24:41
Meeker:

And very young, too. You were, what, mid-thirties by that point maybe? Mid, late thirties?

04-00:24:45
Feinstein:

I had just turned thirty when I started in Detroit so I was thirty-four. Yeah. I was thirty-four when I started in LA.

04-00:24:59
Meeker:

Do you think that your youth played in any role in your openness to these other organizations?

04-00:25:05
Feinstein:

No.

04-00:25:10
Meeker:

No?

04-00:25:15
Feinstein:

Not in any way of which I was aware, self-aware. And I was not completely unself-aware. But that never occurred to me. I think I was better Jewishly educated than some of my contemporaries and peers. I had more of a sense of the ebb and flow of Jewish history and Jewish communal institutions over the millennia. I had a sense that things that were perfectly appropriate at the end of the nineteenth century might not be appropriate at the end of the twentieth century. That's where this existential approach. And a respectful but distancing approach to—in that regard I, too, challenged the domain consensus. Because just because the board of rabbis said X when they represented about twenty to twenty-five percent of the organized community didn't mean that we had to do it. And there were battles. But at the end of the day we were a source of financial support. So I'm not aware of anyone, even some of the leading rabbis—and many of the leading rabbis were wholly supportive of what I'm articulating and what I envisioned, either in one-on-one conversation or occasional presentations or writings. So I don't think that was a pushback. The greater pushback were people who just were invested in what had been and very unwilling to consider that there might be something else. And that then goes to individuals.

04-00:26:55
Meeker:

Well, when you were engaging with those people were you using the sort of existential approach? Were you making the argument on those grounds?

04-00:27:03
Feinstein:

Sometimes. Sometimes. Sometimes I'd be far more practical, which is the small "p" politic of moving an organization forward. What's the wrap on President Obama? He is so bright, so well-read, so articulate that he comes across as an eastern elite. America, it's in one of its know-nothing phases so you don't particularly want to be tarred with the brush that says you're an eastern elitist. And Leslee would often remind me of that. She said, "Stop using six syllable words when a one or two syllable word will work." And she was right. She has much more of a common touch than I do. So depending on who your audience was, who your constituency is, who the committee chair is and who the committee composition would be who have to approve this idea,

better communicate in a way that gets across. And I was far from perfect at it. But that was probably my working philosophy. In fact, it was my working philosophy. How we acted on it was a different question because it took a lot of persuasion. Were some very bright, some very intuitive people who just said, “Oh, yeah, we should try that.” And there were others who said, “Well, we can’t do that. The religious sphere is the rabbis. No disrespect.” Then I needed some rabbis to say, “We ought to try this.” And people like Uri Herscher were very supportive. Harvey Fields at Wilshire Boulevard Temple. Steve Robbins at Congregation Emanu-El. Very supportive. Harold Schulweis at Valley Beth Shalom. Very supportive. These were leading lights. So they were worth ten in terms of finding some people who would say, “Makes sense. We need to reach a broader group.”

And then it’s the kind of thing I used to tell the president-elect, because he or she would have anywhere from six months to a year before they had to take over the chairmanship. And I’d always sit down with them. I knew them already, obviously. And I’d say, “In our next few months I think it would be really useful for you to identify the two or three things that by the end of two—” I guess LA were two year terms, Detroit were three—“by the end of your two-year term you can look back with satisfaction, say yes, we accomplished something.” “Only two?” I said, “Practically, yeah.” “Why are you so limiting?” I said, “Because life has a habit of intruding and things will arise every week and you and I will sit every week and I’ll bring you up to speed and a lot of it I or the staff or others will be able to handle and some of it will just flow up to the two of us and you’ve got to drop everything and deal with it.” “Well, like what?” I said, “Oh, like the Soviet Union decides to let the Jews go and then all bets are off. Or we have a chance to get Jews out of Addis Ababa.” “Oh.” I said, “Those take a lot of organization and we will have to do it.”

04-00:30:24
Meeker:

Well, that was actually what I was going to bring up next, was the collapse of the Soviet Union. I mean, 1989 is right in the middle of your term as president. Wow. It felt like the end of history, as one noted scholar talked about it. I was in college at the time and it was very ripe with possibility. How did it feel to you at that point in time, particularly with the angle of getting Jews out of Russia, Soviet Russia?

04-00:31:00
Feinstein:

Yes. Well, you’ll recall that my motivation for going into Jewish community work, more than anything else initially, was getting Jews out of Russia. And then Zionism was a tandem. I made my first trip to the former Soviet Union in the summer of ’76. I was there for three weeks and it was a typical In-tourist trip because you couldn’t be a young person and just go about it on your own. And I remember having read some Russian history in college and other books subsequently and talking to Russian Jews I had met who had migrated to Israel or even, in a few rare cases, America. And my whole family had come

from Russia and Lithuania and the Ukraine. And I remember being very, very, very aware that there was less to it than met the eye. That there were times I thought the whole of the Soviet Union was a Potemkin village. And if you blew hard enough and constantly in that direction the wall would fall. So, on the other hand, they were brutally oppressive. So as long as you had the party apparatus in place, the likelihood of something like that being successful was slim, if not non-existent. So I'm not sure I saw it as the end of history but I saw it as something almost unbelievable and that we probably needed to act fast because chaos is rarely good to Jews. [laughter] I knew already not everyone wanted to go to Israel. Like my grandparents. If Palestine was an option they still chose where the streets are made of gold. And here we are. And who was I to judge? If you preferred to be in America, come to America. If you preferred to be in Israel, God bless you. So I was among the several large city federation execs who just thought we needed to drop everything and mobilize whatever we needed to do to be able to afford—at that point Israel still did need diaspora support for air lifts and so on and so forth. And we raised a lot of money for that to happen in a very quick fashion.

We had a Sunday morning rally. It may have been his first public talk in America, Anatoly Shcharansky. Now, his wife I had met a few times, even when I was in San Francisco in the seventies and he was already in prison. But now he was free and now he was living in Israel and now he came and he spoke at a rally on Wilshire Boulevard in front of 6505 Wilshire, which was and still is the headquarters for the LA Jewish Federation. And there must have been a 120, 130 thousand people at 10:00 am on a Sunday morning. Street blocked off, police everywhere. His English is good but heavily Russian inflected. But first thanking the community for never having forgotten him and then talking about this historic opportunity and reminding us that it's a miserable place if you're an affirming Jew and that anything we could do to help get these people out and to freedom, whether it was in Israel or here, it was a great political speech. It was a stem winder.

Now, I don't remember who proffered Shcharansky to me. I suspect it was the consul general. I honestly don't remember. The consul general at the time was a guy named Eytan Ben-Zur, with whom I became very good friends. When he left LA he went back to Israel and he became director general of the foreign ministry. So he was clearly a climber. He looked and sounded a bit like Henry Kissinger. An extremely deep voice. But he had, like Kissinger, a first-rate mind. And Eytan was the kind of guy that, if you were a chess player, playing with him for a few months would improve your game immensely because he was out thinking you every move. Every move.

04-00:36:03
Meeker:

Did you play chess with him?

04-00:36:05
Feinstein

No. We sparred a little bit. I genuinely liked this man so I don't mean this, but just some people who will engage me or they think they're pulling something over and then I'll figure it out. I once said to him, it was just the two of us, I said, "I like you very much." He said, "I like you, too." And I said, "I don't know whether you ever saw the movie *The Sting*?" He looked at me. I said, "There's one scene in it where the older of the two con men looks at the younger one and says, 'Never play your friends for a mark.' Do you know what that means?" "No, but I can imagine." I said, "You ask me for a lot of favors and I'm happy to do them and I agree with you. But you've got to tell me the truth." We almost came to blows over one of these things, although I'm truly convinced it was not his fault. Ehud Olmert, who subsequently became prime minister and is now in jail, and I used to be good friends. And through Eytan I get a call one day. Olmert was then—I don't think he was yet mayor of Jerusalem. I think he was foreign minister. "Minister Olmert would like to make a trip to LA." I've never entirely understood why this became the protocol, but it was the protocol. The consul general had to reach out to the head of the Jewish federation and as a practical matter they were asking us to foot the bill. And that was fine because he'd make some speeches and I could justify the cost. So Ehud comes to town. He wants half a floor at the new Four Seasons on Doheny, which we're paying for. And I'm sort of shrugging my shoulders. "Oh, God, this guy's got champagne taste." And he's in town and I can't find him anywhere. Can't find him. The courteous thing to do, at a minimum, even if he had some business for the government of the state of Israel, after all, he is the foreign minister, would be to pick up the phone and say, "I'm really tied up with matters of state for a day. Do you have some time early tomorrow morning? Come over to my hotel. We'll have coffee." Not a word.

And then late that first afternoon I start to get calls from six-figure donors whom he's been soliciting for Jerusalem Boys Club. Now, that's a front, or was a front, I don't think it exists anymore, to pass political money to Likud. And I knew it full well and he knew I knew it. He probably raised a million dollars from the very same people who were coming to an event in Holmby Hills the next night for a \$50,000 minimum fundraiser for the federation, which meant he was capping our ability to have a successful event. And sure enough, none of the people who had just given him six figures raised their gifts. And what was I going to say, because the first, who was a friend, said to me, "I know it's not the federation but I just gave an extra hundred grand for Israel. What do you want from me, Wayne?" So when he greeted me at that event I said, "You owe me an apology and more." This is just the two of us. "What are you talking about?" I said, "You know full well what I'm talking about. And I don't want to ruin this evening any more than you've already succeeded in ruining it but tomorrow we need to have a talk." So I went over to see him the next morning. Again, he's the foreign minister of Israel. [laughter] Some of it was just plain chutzpah on my part. But I said, "Ehud, this was just as stinky as anything you could do." "What do you mean?" I

said, “You know what I mean.” And I explained the dynamic. “These people can afford—” I said, “Yeah, they can but they just gave an extra hundred grand to Israel, even if it’s for your political party, for God’s sake, and you told them it was for an orphans’ charity. Would you like me to go back and tell them the truth?” I did this once with a chabad rabbi in LA.

04-00:40:50

Meeker:

So that wasn’t widely known?

04-00:40:54

Feinstein:

No.

04-00:40:54

Meeker:

Interesting.

04-00:40:55

Feinstein:

No, most people don’t look into things. He was offended that I was challenging him and it caused a real rupture. I never repaired the rupture because I just felt he had played a friend for a fool. And then the late Richard Goldman was contemplating extending the Haas Promenade in the Talpiot section of West Jerusalem in memory of Rhoda, and asked me to come along with him. And, of course, Olmert was then the mayor of Jerusalem. And he was stunned to see me traveling. Now, he knew I was the head of the San Francisco Jewish Federation. But we had not had any words positive or negative in five or six years. He laid out his vision, had his staff do something, tried to put a contract in front of Dick. And Dick looked at me and I took the paper and I said, “Well, Ehud, we’ll review this.” He said, “But I gave that to Mr. Goldman.” I said, “I know. And he asked me for advice. And I would never sign a contract without reading it. You’re an attorney. Would you sign a contract someone put in front of you without reading it?” “Well, no, no.” I said, “So let us read it.” So we went off to Dick’s suite to caucus on it. And he knew I had some issues with Olmert. He said, “This is not personal.” I said, “No, it’s not.” I said, “But you have a staff here.” Dick already had a staffer. I said, “Let’s do a little digging on this because, from what I understand, some of the projects built through the Jerusalem Foundation always wind up at cost plus and some of the money never quite gets to the project. He wants ten million dollars. You’re talking about a five to seven million dollar commitment. I assure you this is going to cost you ten or fifteen because once he starts building it are you not going to finish a promenade in Rhoda’s memory?” “Well, no.” I said, “So let’s see whether we can button this down.” And he said, “What do you advise?” I said, “Have your staff look at it more deeply than I can. And I think you ought to retain counsel here,” which is what he did. Olmert, he was so upset with me. But he earned that. Now he’s in jail. Campaign fraud. He was taking money from people everywhere.

04-00:43:28

Meeker:

Right. Successful but flawed.

04-00:43:32
Feinstein:

Yeah.

04-00:43:34
Meeker:

What this brings up is the role of politics and public policy in relation to the work that you were doing as head of the LA Federation. A bit later on, when you were in San Francisco, I know that there was a question from the Congress about what the immigration limits and the number of refugees and so forth that were going to be let in. That was kind of on the tail-end of the Soviet immigration.

04-00:44:08
Feinstein:

Well, that was central to my tenure here. I actually ran point for the American Jewish community on that. That was an area I not only had passion about but I had some expertise on lobbying and public policy.

04-00:44:21
Meeker:

Well, should we hold off on talking about it until we talk about San Francisco?

04-00:44:23
Feinstein:

You may want to. You may want to. And the nexus was that Senator Feinstein was already the most important Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which controlled this matter. And I sparred with her a lot. [laughter]

04-00:44:39
Meeker:

Interesting. Well, in LA during this time, when it was really just '89, '90, '91, what were the political dimensions of assisting Soviet Jews into the United States?

04-00:45:04
Feinstein:

Well, remember, Ronald Reagan was president.

04-00:45:12
Meeker:

Right. Up until '88 or January of '89.

04-00:45:17
Feinstein:

And then he was followed by his lieutenant.

04-00:45:21
Meeker:

Correct.

04-00:45:22
Feinstein:

And George H.W. Bush, I don't think he ever shared Ronald Reagan's convictions. But he did about the Soviet Union. So the difference had to do with the policy establishment. And Richard Haas, who is Jewish and now the head of the Council of Foreign Relations, was probably the principle point person and he was a pain in the butt. [laughter] But President Reagan's convictions were so deep. And many people think that he was singularly responsible for the destruction of the Soviet Union. I don't think it was alone his personal relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev but Gorbachev also saw it

was a Potemkin village and thought that keeping up the façade was long-term not good. So either Mikhail Gorbachev was a brilliant, far-seeing visionary—I suspect history will treat him that way—or he was a lunatic. And I know many of his party comrades felt that way about him. Reagan, I think, just had deep, deep conviction. So the word went out from the State Department on down, if we have a chance to get oppressed people out we need to do so. Bush continued that for a while. And it was interesting to me because it was Republicans more than Democrats who were in favor of freedom of migration to America. And it was Democrats like Di Fi [Dianne Feinstein]—well, we’re waddling here. And I think in hindsight I’ve got it pegged. Because I’ve always been very friendly with her, since she was mayor here in the seventies. And unlike some politicians, she’s absolutely unabashed about telling you what she thinks on a matter, which I’ve always valued. I think if you talk with her, she knows who I am, sort of. But we were never close friends. I’ve never been a major donor. But she’ll remember some of the sparring. And certainly her staff does.

In fact, it’s a parenthesis but I was in Berlin the last few nights of April on my way to Israel because my friend is the US ambassador to Germany right now. John Emerson is the ambassador and he was in Leipzig for the day the day I got in. No, the second day. And had said to me the night before, “Come over to the garage of the embassy,” which is just off the back door of the Adlon Hotel and a hundred feet. “And you’ll see my chief of security and he’ll have you on a list.” And I walk the hundred feet and I hear this booming voice say, “Wayne Feinstein.” And I look and I know this guy’s face. Used to be the chief of security for Dianne Feinstein. See, he remembered me from twenty-five years earlier. I knew his face. I couldn’t remember his name. Now, he also had the benefit that I was on the embassy list. And I was going to drive for the next few nights in the ambassador’s entourage and he would drive the lead car. But it was just so funny. He said, “Yeah, you used to be in senator Feinstein’s all the time.” I said, “Yeah, we were working on getting Soviet Jews into America.” He says, “Yeah, I sort of remember that.” He said, “And I remember there were a couple of times she almost threw you out of her office.” [laughter] She actually once looked at me and she said, “Wayne, I admire your conviction on this. I truly do. But on this we disagree. And unlike you, I am the US senator.” [laughter] I said, “Yes, Ma’am,” shook hands and left. We can come back to this because it’s funny stuff.

04-00:49:24

Meeker:

Well, we’ll come back to it because I do want to keep things in roughly chronological order here.

04-00:49:29

Feinstein:

Yeah. I told you it’s just fun for me to walk down memory lane because there are things I haven’t thought about in a long time.

04-00:49:41

Meeker:

Well, why don’t we move on to San Francisco then.

04-00:49:47
Feinstein:

Sure. Sure, sure, sure.

04-00:49:46
Meeker:

Well, tell me about the recruitment process and your decision to leave Los Angeles. Tell me about the transition.

04-00:50:00
Feinstein:

Well, there were two points in my first career that I thought about going into business. The first was at the beginning of my—

04-00:50:15
Meeker:

Actually, could I ask you to pause for one second?

04-00:50:17
Feinstein:

Sure. So your question is about—

04-00:50:23
Meeker:

Transitioning to San Francisco.

04-00:50:26
Feinstein:

Well, what was then called the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations was actually hosted here in the—let's see, I came back here in '91. So it must have been November of '90. And the then-board chair, the late Donald Seiler, who became a very important mentor to me, decided to also chair the search committee, because Brian Lurie had already indicated that within a year he was going to leave for United Jewish Appeal. And they were going to have a big national search. And San Francisco was smaller than Los Angeles, so it was not typical to ask someone from a larger city to come to a somewhat smaller city. Leslee and I had already looked at, and because she was adamantly opposed to it, passed on the possibility of my heading the national organization. With young kids it would have meant my being on the road both domestically and internationally fifty to sixty percent of the year.

04-00:51:41
Meeker:

And that's the Council of Jewish Federations?

04-00:51:43
Feinstein:

Yeah. Yeah. So I took myself out of the running for that or any other national spot. That meant, realistically, we're staying in California. Don stopped. We were together, so it must have been an evening event. So we were in the big, event, 3,000 delegates, and he spotted us walking up the aisle. He had gone to high school with my mother-in-law. I knew him already very well from my days here in the seventies. And he stopped us, schmoozed a little bit, and then said quietly, "Are you kids ready to come home?" Just that way. And I looked at him and I said, "Are you asking whether I would consider getting into the search in San Francisco?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm willing to talk with you about it but not here." He said, "I understand that. That's all I wanted to know." So that was the beginning.

04-00:52:50
Meeker: Can I actually ask you to pause?

04-00:52:52
Feinstein: Sure.

04-00:52:52
Meeker: I'm curious. You said that LA was bigger than San Francisco. Bigger in what way? Because I know by the late 1990s San Francisco budget-wise was much bigger than Los Angeles, correct?

04-00:53:03
Feinstein: No.

04-00:53:03
Meeker: No?

04-00:53:04
Feinstein: Not quite.

04-00:53:04
Meeker: Not quite?

04-00:53:05
Feinstein: Now we got to do a lot of unpacking. Endowment was becoming one of the bigger ones in the country.

04-00:53:19
Meeker: Here in San Francisco?

04-00:53:22
Feinstein: Yeah.

04-00:53:28
Meeker: Leave it there because we're going to get into endowment more later on.

04-00:53:31
Feinstein: Yeah. And it gets into personalities, too, and these are among the things that I then worry about. Goes to embargoing and so on. I think I said it to you. In fact, I asked Brian's advice, and I might have said this to you once. How candid should I be when it comes to people? He said, "Be very." He said, "You can always lock it up for a while."

If you looked at total financial resources, this community was far more capacious than LA. Some of that had to do with the fact that LA just never quite met anywhere close to its fundraising challenge. We had some good years when I was exec. This is not meant as self-puffery but I am a good fundraiser. I understand the strategy of it and I know who will get the ball rolling and I know how to do it and I'm unabashed about asking. And not every executive sitting in the federation seat is a good fundraiser and some of them hate doing fundraising. And I don't know how you become the

executive of at least the typical federation of the mid-to-late twentieth century without being a fundraiser. Anyway, so LA at the time had a fifty-some-million-dollar campaign. I think my last campaign there raised fifty-two-and-a-half-million and we gave away another twenty million dollars from the endowment and then there were donor advice funds. And it was growing but it was slow. When I came back here I think Brian's last campaign here had raised eighteen million or nineteen million. But we were giving more away from the endowment. And unlike LA, you had very, very wealthy people here who were choosing to set up their—before they actually created family foundations or whatever, they were choosing to do more things here because of the convenience, the administrative effectiveness, the inexpensiveness. And that was a great selling point but it also created the seeds of restriction and problem, dysfunction, which I'm sure we will talk about. So that was the backdrop. So this was a smaller community.

Now, far more innovative and that was largely Brian's leadership, which I built on. Brian very much wanted me to follow him. There were a whole range of reasons, not the least of which is by that point we had become very close personal friends and remained very close personal friends. And we shared the same vision, different tactics. My guess is if you ask him he would say, "Without doubt Wayne's a much better manager than I am. Brian's a visionary leader. I've got some of that but I'm a more effective operating guy." So understood that. And therefore there'd be a continuity. So we wound up effectively with close to thirty years of common vision in the leadership of this community and it really produced a lot in a period of time.

But to go back to where I was, I had become so disenchanted leading the LA Jewish Federation. I found being in LA and being in that job at times very heady and very exciting, just as I did at Detroit, just as I did this one. Here was the difference. Every month I had to deal with a stupid board and an ineffective executive committee. And I tried a couple of times to downsize it and every time I did I made more enemies. Today it's a much smaller streamlined board but it's a very different federation than when I led it. And this goes to something I said in passing earlier. LA had a lot of laymen for whom this was their sandbox. They never wanted to achieve anything. They just wanted to have a place to go every Tuesday. And I just found that crazy making after a while. Let's see. Leslee was pregnant with Ben, our youngest. And I'd come home before an evening meeting and I'd say, "Let's take a walk." And I must have vented four out of seven nights a week. And she said, "Well, what are you going to do?" And then one day I get a call from a headhunter looking for a head of HR at Time Warner and I said, "That's not my background." "No, but someone there, I can't tell you who, thought you would just be perfect for this job. You've been an effective manager and so on and so forth." So it had to be someone I knew through the federation. And I came very close. And then a close friend of mine, one of the board chairs, my immediate past board chair who did a lot in the entertainment industry, said, "I understand how frustrated you are." He said, "But you're making a

mistake.” I said, “They’re talking about doubling my salary, stock options.” And he says, “Yeah. And I’ll read your contract.” He said, “Wayne, Hollywood is without soul, without conscience, without any sense of common decency, let alone morality.” I said, “What are you saying?” He said, “It won’t be worth the paper it’s printed on.”

04-00:59:27

Meeker:

Right. Here you are coming from a lifetime of doing nonprofit work.

04-00:59:30

Feinstein:

Yeah. He said, “And it ain’t noble.” He said, “Stick it out.” So I called the headhunter back and I said, “I’m very flattered. Thank you very much but I thought about it overnight, it’s not something I want to do.” And I don’t know whether anyone else knew. I don’t think George would have said anything to anyone. But probably whoever told the headhunter to reach out to me would have said, “You know, I was arranging a great job in entertainment. He would have been terrific at it.” He must have told someone, because now things started. And so LA was becoming increasingly, on a day-to-day basis, a place I did not want to be. So Don tapped me at just the right time. And I think if he hadn’t, I would have left. I would have left the field ten years earlier and gone into business of some kind. And I’ve demonstrated my satisfaction. I’ve been here fifteen years as of last week. I actually could make a career change quite successfully. I would have preferred to be here and I’m here. I’m very glad he contacted me. But that’s how it started.

We left SF early because we were coming back to LA for a friend’s daughter’s bat mitzvah Saturday morning. So this is Friday night. We go to a dinner hosted by Brian and Caroline for all the execs. We get on a late flight, the last flight to LA. We get to our house in Hancock Park and as I’m taking the bags out of the trunk of my car I feel a tap on my shoulder. I figure it’s my wife and I turn around and there’s a guy with a ski mask with a gun over my nose. First time I’d ever been robbed at gunpoint. And within a couple of minutes his accomplice was bringing Leslee and we were facedown on our garage floor and I thought, “They’re going to shoot us in the back of the head and our kids are going to find us in a pool of blood.” Anyway, we survived that. They took what they could take. I never used to travel with money but I had cash in my pocket and that’s all they wanted. Money for a fix.

04-01:01:53

Meeker:

Your kids weren’t home?

04-01:01:54

Feinstein:

Our kids were home with the housekeeper. But it was late so they were asleep. About 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning, the police sergeant leaves our kitchen and Leslee looks at me. She says, “We have got to get out of here.” I said, “So I guess on Monday I should call Don Seiler.” And she said, “Please.” She said, “I know you’re ambivalent about staying in the field but maybe San Francisco will be a lot better. And it is home.” So I called him on Monday. I didn’t tell

him about being robbed but I said, “I’d be interested but I’ve got some provisos.” He said, “What are they?” I said, “You have to make me whole because I think I’m earning more here than Brian was earning.” And he went through the package and he says, “It’s comparable.” He said, “Would you come first year lateral?” I said, “Yes, if you make me whole.” And I said, “I’m particularly concerned about pension, so I might want something related to that because you’re asking me to leave. I’m just vested here and I’m not getting any younger.” And we worked that out. “And I’m probably going to need help with housing.” “No problem.” He said, “What else?” I said, “I do not want to be a candidate in a search of five people.” He said, “I will engineer that.” So they went through the drill and had a few candidates, all of whom failed, and then I was the *deus ex machina*. That was probably Don because he just was very savvy about these things. He just knew how to, in his own way, small m, very effective manipulator. And I got into the process. I knew everybody. The late Mel Swig was on the search committee, the late Dick Goldman was on the search committee. They thought I walked on water from back when I was campaign director. And I’d never lost touch. And a number of them had gone to school with either my late father-in-law or my mother-in-law. The younger people on the search had sort of come up as lay leaders. So it was as stacked as it could be and the process went very, very quickly. And then the final question was I could not leave LA abruptly. So we agreed that I could come after the fiscal year ended. And I just felt a duty. In hindsight it probably wasn’t necessary. This was more my sense of duty and responsibility than LA’s. But that’s how it happened.

04-01:05:02

Meeker:

Where did you move to?

04-01:05:05

Feinstein:

When we came from LA? We bought a house in San Mateo. Leslee grew up in Hillsborough. I really wanted to live in Hillsborough. I’m not sure we could have financially. And she said to me, “You know, I grew up in Hillsborough. Where you going to teach the kids to ride a bike?” Do you know Hillsborough at all?

04-01:05:25

Meeker:

Hills.

04-01:05:27

Feinstein:

Yeah. And no sidewalks and no streetlights. And she said, “And you’re still going to travel 40 percent of the year.” I said, “Yeah.” “I’d like to be able, if I hear an intruder, to shout out the back window and know that one of my neighbors will hear me. That doesn’t happen in Hillsborough.” She’s a very smart woman. She won. [laughter] And we’re in the same house we bought in ’91.

04-01:05:52

Meeker:

Leslee, was she a homemaker or was she working?

04-01:05:56
Feinstein:

By that point she was a homemaker.

04-01:05:59
Meeker:

With three kids.

04-01:06:01
Feinstein:

Three kids. Fortunately for our children. An older colleague of mine had said to me when we were in New York, and she and I were just getting married, he said, "Excuse me," he said, "you have to be sure in selecting a wife, to do this kind of work effectively, that you have someone who wants to be the mother of your children." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're not going to be around a lot." And several other older colleagues said that to me, that I was too young to be an executive. And at the time I thought it was just ridiculous. I was thirty when I became the exec in Detroit. And they were right. [laughter] It's very demanding. And I didn't entirely realize it until I resigned at the end of my son Sam's junior year of high school. So I was around much of his senior year. Fortunately I've got a great relationship with Sam. I wouldn't have were I Sam's age and my dad had spent so much time away, I would have been very resentful. And I'm not sure I would have been keen on reestablishing a relationship. But I was lucky that way. Much more time therefore with Katy or our late son Ben. And it was also easier to do here. We were ten minutes from my in-laws and five minutes from two of her three brothers, each of whom had three kids. So the kids grew up with cousins. There were all kinds of pluses on a personal level. And at the end of the day it's a more rational place, or at least it was, than LA.

04-01:07:42
Meeker:

How did you find a congregation to join? Did you already know where you wanted to affiliate?

04-01:07:54
Feinstein:

Well, I had grown up more traditionally, as you recall. I'd already compromised on that. So I'd migrated to the reform movement even before we moved to LA and joined Wilshire Boulevard Temple. So we knew it would be a reform synagogue. Leslee had grown up at Temple Sholom, Peninsula Temple Sholom in Millbrae. And I loved the rabbi but could not abide listening to him give a talk. He had this mellifluous singsong that just drove me crazy after five minutes. She hated it even worse. So she said, "I love Rabbi Raiskin but I can't join his synagogue." And the neighborhood synagogue, so to speak, was Peninsula Temple Beth El. And at the time the senior rabbi had just left before we moved here, Peter Rubinstein, who went on to Central Synagogue in New York, which is one of the premiere reform congregations in America. Peter was a pied piper. Well, he had an assistant rabbi, Elka Abrahamson, who now runs the Wexner Foundation in Columbus. She was the pied piper or pipette. She was just phenomenal. And my wife, who doesn't particularly like organized religion, fell in love with her. The school was great. Meanwhile, they did the search for the senior rabbi, Alan

Berg, with whom we did grow close. Ironically, and it was a bitter irony, it was around Daniel Cook's funeral. Having experienced this myself some years later, that's the toughest thing a family goes through, losing a child. I thought Alan's pastoral skills were unparalleled. To try to find a way of putting in perspective how you lose a child in this way. Danny died of the same thing that killed my son, which is also ironic.

04-01:10:02

Meeker:

Who was Daniel Cook?

04-01:10:04

Feinstein:

Phyllis and David's son.

04-01:10:04

Meeker:

Oh, okay.

04-01:10:05

Feinstein:

They had two kids and their oldest was Danny. And he's buried not far from Ben. He died about ten years before my son got sick. I'd never even heard of gastric cancer before. That's what killed both men. Anyway, so Alan just was no pied piper. The guy who is there now, who came from Wilshire Boulevard Temple, we've grown very close with and he's just revolutionized the place. So it's home.

04-01:10:46

Meeker:

What about finding schools for your kids?

04-01:10:49

Feinstein:

That was an interesting challenge. The public schools where we live, which is one of the reasons why we bought in that neighborhood, are very good. Among the best in the state by most of the testing. I'm hesitating because I honestly no longer remember why, but we enrolled Katy in the Jewish day school. [laughter] We had a Shabbat ritual in our home. So there was never any doubt that our children were Jewish. The rabbi who married us, who was a good friend of mine, said, "You're an intermarried couple in the sense that Leslee just never believed in Jewish ritual and I did," and it just sort of dissipated over time. I knew what Paul meant. And so now Leslee agrees to send Katy to Jewish day school. And for a couple of years it was great. And she'd come home with challah and singing all the Jewish songs. And her mind just works well on languages. She tutors Spanish. But her Hebrew is still good and she's got this affinity for dialect and language. She's very funny and she can affect almost any accent. But she got the Hebrew. But the secular track, the general studies, were awful. So after three years we took her out. And boy, was that a balagan, as they say, because I'm the director of the federation. What am I saying if I remove my daughter?

04-01:12:45

Meeker:

Which day school was this?

04-01:12:48
Feinstein:

What was it called? It's now called the Wornick Day School in San Mateo. So whatever it was called before that. And I had breakfast one morning with Mark Abelson, who was one of the founders of the school and with whom I'm still friends. And he was the one who said, "What does it mean if you pull your daughter out?" I said, "How about the general studies is beyond mediocre?" "But look at the statement you're making." I said, "Mark, I'd love to do this quietly. I'm not going to take an ad in the *Bulletin* that says Wayne and Leslee Feinstein have removed their children because the secular studies track is woefully inadequate. But I'm also not going to make an experiment of my kids." Small issue. Compared with some of the crap I dealt with in LA, that was a small issue.

04-01:13:39
Meeker:

Well, yeah, sure. One of the reasons I asked about what congregation you joined, I don't know, but I would guess there's a long tradition of federation executives wanting to join Emanu-El or something like that, even though that would have been in San Francisco.

04-01:13:56
Feinstein:

Well, I did in LA. I went to Wilshire Boulevard Temple and in Detroit I joined Beth El. So these were the power centers. Here it's Emanu-El. But we lived twenty miles south. And even though I was close to Emanu-El's rabbis, and I'm sure if I wanted an honorary membership, that was fine. We get invited to Cissie Swig's break the fast every year. I'm still very fond and close to Cissie. I'm not driving up after 6:30, the services end, to be a supernumerary at a dinner. It's just not going to happen. So we wanted to join a local congregation. And I wasn't going to do that to my kids. That's the other thing that comes from a relatively long career, a near thirty-year career. By the time we got back here, and knowing that Caroline Lurie did very little. She sure wasn't the rabbi's wife. And Leslee was even less the rabbi's wife. And I just did not impose on her. A few times a year. So that also went to our personal Jewish observance. Just wasn't going to happen. If I'd been a newbie, if I'd just come from being the JCC director or I'd come from Columbus, Ohio, and now I finally get my first big city posting I might have handled it differently. I might have insisted on going where the power elite did. But I was pretty well established and already had a national reputation so I didn't need to do that.

04-01:15:32
Meeker:

Tell me about the Jewish Community Federation, how it was upon your arrival. Yeah. There's any number of ways you can talk about that. You can talk about that financially, staffing, programmatically, the offices. I know eventually the one in Santa Rosa was closed down. So you're covering a huge geographic area. Yeah. I mean, maybe just sort of walk through some of those main categories and describe how it was upon your arrival and how that then shaped your agenda.

04-01:16:14
Feinstein:

Well, Brian was leaving June 30 and I wasn't starting the job until after September 1, so there'd be a two-month interim. This goes to something I said ten minutes ago. In hindsight I probably could have left LA on June 30. I just felt guilty about leaving prematurely. I did the same thing when I exited here. I stayed an extra two months. Probably wasn't necessary. But then the lay leadership said, "Use the office. You've got the car, you've got your secretary. Just want you around to advise for a while. But do whatever you're doing in terms of finding a business." So I came up for two days in early to mid-June and literally stayed with Brian in Ross and we started at 8:00 in the morning and finished at dinner and then went out and had a good dinner. And, remember, we'd summer vacationed with our families together. So it was an unusual transition because we were very close and he could talk shorthand with me because I'd worked for him for six years. So to his credit, because he wasn't always so well organized, we went through all the main categories of what the job entails and he told me where there were some open manholes.

So one of the things he told me was about five years earlier he'd basically said to the agencies, "We can't meet 100 percent of your annual requirements. You'd better start learning how to fundraise." And he said, "Whether that was right or wrong, it was necessary at the time." And he said, "I would have apologized to anyone following me, but as a practical matter I don't think you can put those horses back in the barn." Which, of course, was true. [A portion of the text has been sealed until 2042.] But clearly that was a big motif that had to be thought through and where policy and practice had to change over a reasonable period of time or over time there would be no reason for this organization that was founded a hundred years earlier with the idea of centralizing fundraising among the major donors to prevent them from being dunned by a dozen different agencies. And now we had thirty agencies. So that was big challenge number one.

Big challenge number two is that the community was far more dispersed.

04-01:19:36
Meeker:

So, I'm sorry, challenge number one is really dealing with now—

04-01:19:39
Feinstein:

Centrality of fundraising.

04-01:19:41
Meeker:

Centrality of fundraising. Competition with twenty-plus agencies seeking funding on their own.

04-01:19:46
Feinstein:

Yeah. I'll tell you what I tried to do in that regard when we get there.

04-01:19:53
Meeker:

Okay. So number two?

04-01:19:55
Feinstein:

How dispersed the community was. And not because Jews had moved out of the urban core in San Francisco. To the contrary, there probably are more Jews living in San Francisco now than when I was federation director or when I came back in '91. But that's because this has been a magnet, economic magnet for the country and for the world. But dispersion brings with it, as LA is the case, as greater New York is the case, this attenuation. So my philosophy was well set. My communal philosophy was well set for this community. Which Brian knew and Don knew and a few other people knew. And we did talk about it during the search. What would be your vision for—? And it seemed to resonate with people. And unlike LA, I didn't get a pushback every time I suggested that we take on some new agencies that would get small amounts of money but that would bring us access to parts of the community we didn't have. So those were all positive things.

Number three is I had come to believe in what was called at the time total financial resource development. So that was looking at the federation as a fundraising apparatus that went well beyond the annual campaign. Embraced the endowment, embraced specialized grants, embraced capital fundraising and delivery, embraced public funding. I had come to that conclusion over my two prior postings. That was new here. And it was interesting because the very top laymen at the time, the late Peter Haas, the late Dick Goldman, they're all gone, the late Mel Swig, the late Dick Swig, the late Bob Sinton, they all thought I had the right vision and they always came up short of supporting. But I was persistent on this one. I told Danny when he got it done, I said, "Some good ideas only take twenty years." [laughter] He said, "You know, we wouldn't be here if you hadn't started the ball rolling then." I said, "Yeah, I know how it works. I just didn't expect it to take as long as it did." So I didn't get a lot of pushback on that. But if you began presenting at least to your board and your lay leadership, you really were the money center, then you might be able to leap beyond the annual campaign fundraising and allocation process and begin updating policy, practices, and procedures to account for the value add.

Now, two very large federations, New York, which was highly centripetal, and Chicago, which was far more centralized, I knew. And I actually took a team of eight top lay leaders, a number of whom became my lead officers during my tenure and so on, to those two communities for a week and we talked with their top lay leadership, their top donors, their key staff, agency people, and came back. I don't know whether you've ever met John Friedenrich. But he was chairman of the board of Stanford. He's currently the chairman at Stanford Medical. Major donor in the federation. Came from a very assimilated family in Palo Alto and his late father had started one of the premiere boutique business law firms in Palo Alto that today is DLA Piper. And John was one of the early VCs and ultimately left his law practice and capitalized a number of the top companies. He's a billionaire now. And he was exactly who I wanted to lead. But the distance between Palo Alto or Santa

Clara or Cupertino, where his office was at the time, is so great. And unlike Don Seiler, who told his partners, “I’m going to be working half-time while I’m president of the federation,” John was not prepared to do that. And then he took on Stanford for four years. And during that time Kennedy was the president of Stanford, and they had this terrible conflict with the audit from the Defense Department and it turned out they’d been overcharging. Stanford had been overcharging on some government contract. John was a friend of Bill Clinton’s and made it go away. The guy is very special.

Anyway, I mention John because John chaired our one and only effort at this total financial resource development. It was basically what universities do for fundraising. So thought I had exactly the right concept and helped me push it through the board. And I got most of what I wanted, the most important of which was the updated capital planning policy and practice. I came back in ’91. Let’s see. We went from Don to Cissie to Doug Heller. So it must have been about ’95. So I’d been back about four years. By ’95 we had great pent-up demand from a number of agencies wanting to build buildings, some desperately needing to build buildings. And every agency now had at least one angel. They had a Haas or a Goldman or a Swig or someone who would give the lead gift. So they all thought they could do what they wanted to do. As an administrator I don’t know how much involvement you’ve had with fundraising but it rarely works out the way—and I knew that better than anyone.

So I said in an executive committee meeting one day, after letting this blather go on for a while—I forget who the board chair was. It might have been Doug Heller. “Well, Wayne, you’ve been very quiet through this. What do you think?” I said, “Well, I’ve been listening to this discussion and I have a graphic image.” “Well, what’s that?” I said, “You all remember when we used to play with trains and they’d eventually come to the roundhouse. But you’d time them so that they’d arrive at different times, because if they all arrived at the same time they’d crash. We’re dealing with this right now, because we’ve got at least twelve projects. And if we don’t sort out and define a communal policy they will all fail. Because the fact that agency X or agency Y or agency Z can raise the first 8 percent of what they need doesn’t mean they’ll get anywhere near 100 percent.” “Well, what would you do?” And I said, “What I propose to do is take a fact-finding group—”, this was the Friedenrich committee, “to a couple of the communities that are probably ten years ahead of us, both in terms of the centrifugal force and sorting it out, and seeing where we can add value as a federation to our agencies. And it might be central purchasing, central services. We already provide employee benefits and insurance and so on. What if we could do this in other ways, as well? Expertise around buildings.” “Great idea. Let’s look at it.” So six months later we reported, the board adopted it. The agencies had a bit of an issue with this. Actually, Cissie was still the president. So we did the policy change during Cissie’s term and then we began to implement it during Doug Heller’s term.

04-01:28:36

Meeker:

So when you say a policy change, you're talking about this total financial resource management?

04-01:28:41

Feinstein:

Well, we had a capital planning or building policy. That was now antiquated. There was something we had done in Detroit that I probably talked about when we were talking about Detroit. It was too late for us to do that here. Where the late Max Fisher, he was then treasurer of the federation, came up with the idea of a sinking fund that was elastic. Did I talk about this?

04-01:29:00

Meeker:

No.

04-01:29:02

Feinstein:

Okay. So in the annual campaign allocation, starting in 1954 or '55, the Detroit Federation, they must have had a surplus campaign year that year, and they put aside much of the surplus in this capital needs fund. And it would build up year over year over year. And then if agencies had deferred maintenance they could apply to the capital needs fund. So if they needed a new roof, that was the source, not their annual budget. They didn't have to run a capital campaign to do it. And sometimes that fund had as much as eight million dollars in it and sometimes it had a million dollars in it, but it was always funded. And the federation in Detroit owned 100 percent of the buildings. Owned the buildings. No lease, no monthly charge to the agencies. But as the owner we wanted to maintain our buildings. So we would fund it from the annual campaign. And if an agency needed a new building we'd go through the process. And if it was agreed we'd provide the down stroke, not to mention we'd eventually sell or repurpose the old building and use those proceeds for the new building. So it's a very well-oiled machine. San Francisco never adopted anything like that. But Chicago and New York had done an update of that. And New York had the most sophisticated because they had the most attenuated relationship with their agencies and it really brought the agencies back in.

So my thought was, since Brian was right, there was no way of shutting the barn door and getting the horses back in the barns, every agency, including the Jewish Family Service, was going to want to build a building. Family Service had Rhoda Goldman Plaza, for example, and subsequently other buildings, as well. During Doug's term we broke apart what used to be the umbrella for the Jewish centers. We had coffee with some people on Saturday and one of the two of them looked at me and said—this is twenty years later—“If you hadn't fought for us, meaning the Peninsula Jewish Center, we wouldn't exist.” But this goes to my vision that you had to have these regional centers that were open to everyone that would be a programmatic resource and then you could bicycle programming around the region. That's what we've done, whether it's Jewish film festival or traveling Jewish theater or lecture series and so on. So it was a good concept. But we also have these great facilities in each of the

regions now and they're magnets. If we had tried to build them simultaneously they all would have failed. So this capital planning policy was not meant to be punitive.

But we brought back some terrible examples from New York, where agencies, without telling the community, had hypothecated their buildings. They'd gone out to take loans. By the way, this is one of the reasons why banks hate lending to churches, synagogues, or non-profit organizations, because if they're a community bank how can they foreclose? How can they foreclose? So if you're a banker, what do you do? You can't give them the money. You might be in a position to make a capital gift but they need ten million dollars. You can't give them ten million dollars. So we knew this. And New York had these horror stories, their lay leadership told us, about waking up one Monday morning and here it was, front page of the *New York Times* that the JCC in Yonkers had defaulted on a loan, a \$3.5 million loan and now the egg was on the face of the federation. The top business people in New York are members of the board or officers of the New York Federation. They were angry. We didn't want that.

So with a few exceptions, and I'll tell you what those are in a second—one of which, it's really amusing in hindsight. The agency executives began to kick and scream but finally their lay leadership said—which is what you need in a federated community—“This is ultimately going to be better for us, even if we have to wait an extra year or two.”

04-01:33:35

Meeker:

What was the detail on the change of the policy?

04-01:33:43

Feinstein:

Now you're really testing my memory. In so many words we acknowledged that the community needed effective, efficient facilities, that from time-to-time they needed to be replaced or new ones needed to be built. That to do so in an orderly fashion meant concerning ourselves not only with adequacy of the funds to actually build the building but an operating endowment, a maintenance endowment, as well. And that without it, as we learned from other communities, agencies can sometimes, without any negative thought, could wind up in terrible problems. And, again, you'd have agency execs who said, “Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Not us.” And the boards finally saying, “That's probably the wise way to go.” [A portion of the text has been sealed until 2042.]

Okay, so here were the two exceptions. Anita Friedman comes in to Dick Goldman's office, and in the course of an hour, which he subsequently told me, with tears in his eyes, she started weeping to him about how important this vision of Rhoda Goldman Plaza was. And he looks at me and he said, “What could I do? I had to give her the gift.” I said, “Dick, I'm just going to remind you that you are one of the two or three people who persuaded me that

we needed to establish this new policy that you endorsed heartily at board level. You came to a board meeting and endorsed it. And you have just single-handedly undermined it.” “Okay, I’ll tell her that I’m not going to pay her right away.” [laughter] I said, “Well, you’ve got to buy me time because either Rhoda Goldman Plaza follows the policy or there’s no policy for anyone and then we’re going to have a lot of egg on our face.” He said, “You’re right, you’re right, you’re right, you’re right. I was weak.” All right. So he helped us sort out the problem he had created. [A portion of the text has been sealed until 2042.]

So Brian comes back from United Jewish Appeal as the president of the Contemporary Jewish Museum and even though he and I have talked at length about how I’m trying to make up for the mistake he made in letting the agencies fundraise, and we had this new policy, and I believe very strongly in building the museum but in an orderly fashion. Without telling me, without asking me, he goes to Peter and he solicits a five million dollar gift from Peter, just as Anita Friedman did. And Peter Haas can’t say no to him. [laughter]

04-01:38:34
Meeker:

Were Peter and Mimi still married at that point?

04-01:38:37
Feinstein:

Oh, yes. It’s a four billion dollar foundation, the Miriam and Peter Haas Fund. Brian and Mimi’s children from the first marriage, Ari and Daniel, are two of the three directors. It’s just so funny. So Brian didn’t tell me this. I happened to be having lunch with Peter at the Concordia Club at the time. And he looks at me and he says, “I have something to confess to you.” I didn’t know this yet. And I’d just had this brouha with Dick Goldman, his brother-in-law. He says, “In a weak moment I committed five million dollars to Brian’s vision of a museum. And I know it goes against the policy.” Unlike Dick Goldman he said, “I know it goes against the policy. But I couldn’t say no.” So literally, the day before I had had the conversation with Dick. So now I’m having it with Peter. I didn’t reference it because they didn’t really like each other. And I said, “You’re one of the two or three people who wanted me to get this new policy in place.” Same *schtick* I gave Goldman. He said, “I know. I feel terrible about it.” He said, “But I can’t renege on the gift.” I said, “I don’t want you to renege on the gift. But you’ve got to tell Brian that he’s got to follow the policy.” And he knows that he’s got this gift. So he calls Brian that afternoon, after our lunch. And Peter used to drink at lunch. And he was not good for anything until about 3:00 or 4:00. But he called Brian that day. And that night I get a call from Brian. “What are you doing to me?” I said, “What are you doing to me?” So we talked it through. And I said, “Look, I will help you build this museum to the extent that you need my help. But Brian, I can’t have everyone making his own Shabbats.” He said, “Oh, you’re right, you’re right, you’re right. You’re right.” I said, “If our positions were reversed, don’t you know me well enough to know I would have discussed this with you

first?” “You're right, you're right, you're right.” At least we were friends. Anita and I were friendly. We were never friends.

04-01:41:00

Meeker:

The story about how the Contemporary Jewish Museum gets created, there was the failed marriage with Magnus and all these visions, has always sort of exceeded my ability to understand.

04-01:41:16

Feinstein:

I could tell you most of the chapter and verse because most of that happened on my watch.

04-01:41:23

Meeker:

Maybe we should hold off on that because that might be a longer story.

04-01:41:30

Feinstein:

Sure. And I'm not sure how interesting it is, ultimately. Here was something very new. I don't think it's quite living up to the vision Brian had for it or that Daniel Libeskind had for it, but I think on balance it's a very good thing given this notion of thousand of points of connection and that there are a certain number of people, and particularly younger people, whose first point of reconnection might be Jewish culture, and high levels of Jewish culture.

04-01:42:07

Meeker:

And plenty of non-Jews, I think, going to that museum, too.

04-01:42:10

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. It's just up the street. We've been charter members. We gave a big gift when they were building. And there are days I don't have anything to do at lunch and I run up there because I can go round-trip in an hour and ten minutes, have a sandwich at Wise Sons and see one thing. When the Bill Graham exhibit was there, which was started at the Skirball—I don't know whether you saw it.

04-01:42:33

Meeker:

I didn't see it.

04-01:42:34

Feinstein:

I loved Bill Graham. I solicited Bill Graham's first gifts to the Jewish community, so I knew him. And he left his endowment to the federation, which in part was something I helped to sow the seeds for. That was my music. So Leslee hadn't gone and I said, “It's closing in a week. You have got to come up.” So I took an afternoon and the two of us went up. Every time I was there there were people who were our contemporaries. Not our kids. Our contemporaries, I think many of whom were not involved in the Jewish community. But doesn't matter the age. It was just one of those things that drew you in. I have about ten minutes before we have to break.

04-01:43:19

Meeker:

Okay. Well, let's wrap-up kind of this beginning overarching discussion about these kinds of broader issues that you recognized you were going to have to address.

04-01:43:31

Feinstein:

Yes. But that was really central. Wasn't a 100 percent effective but it was a way of standing over what was a far more challenged annual campaign fundraising. There were other things that we can talk about related to immigration and the use of public monies.

04-01:43:51

Meeker:

Let me ask you about staffing and I don't know if that's a huge question.

04-01:43:58

Feinstein:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Huge.

04-01:43:59

Meeker:

Okay. Well, I don't know if we can cover it in ten minutes. But you come in and it's a fairly big operation. I don't know how many direct reports or how many FTEs were at the federation at this point in time. But given that you saw this overlap between you and Brian Lurie, how did you approach bringing your people in to the operation and did you feel like it was necessary to do that?

04-01:44:35

Feinstein:

Well, Phyllis Cook was already on the staff and Nate Levine was still on the staff. And I asked Nate to stay at least one campaign, which he did. Then he left us. I'm still very friendly with Nate. I don't see him socially but I just think the world of him. I don't know that you've ever run across him. For more than ten years he has an independent fundraising advisory, strategic advice for non-profits and does a great job. He's my go-to guy whenever I'm on a nonprofit that's looking for some serious help in getting reorganized. Great intuitive fundraiser, fabulous personality. He was a hard act. But he was a candidate in the search. So getting him to stay was a bit of an art. Brian encouraged him and I encouraged him. We got along well enough that he was willing to do it. And Brian had a marketing/communications director, Mike Welch, who's now fully retired. When Nate left he went to Stanford and was the chief development officer for the law school. When Mike left some years later he went to Stanford and he was a development officer in the medical school. Let's see, who was planning director? I'm not sure. I did not need to weed out and bring in a bunch of people. I did upgrade finance. That was arguably always a strength of mine. And, by the way, this is another thing that only Brian would have done this to me. There's a measured approach both to revenue coming in and allocations being paid. As Brian was leaving for United Jewish Appeal he pushed the last six months of the year allocation to UJA. To the UJA. And then he had the temerity to call me from Kona Village between Christmas and New Year's, when he knew I'd be at my desk because Phyllis would be in Kona. And he'd say, "I'm dialing for dollars." I said,

“And you’re calling me?” He said, “Well, of course I’m calling you.” I said, “Do you remember that shortly after I spent two days with you at your house you told the controller to send all the money payable to UJA through December 31 to UJA?” “Did I do that?” I said, “Brian, I know you have problem with short-term memory but you’ve got to be kidding me? And you’re calling me from the beach in Hawaii to ask me for money?” I said, “You’re lucky I love you or I would just slam the phone down.” [laughter] Anyway, we got through it. Those cash flow problems can be very problematic. I think I told you in LA when I got there we were using annual campaign cash flow to pay the contractor for a building that had an entirely different budget and authorization, so on. Got to be careful with that. So I needed to sort those things out and I brought in a higher caliber finance person. I left Phyllis alone, I left Nate alone.

I had a vision that we could achieve here that I wasn’t sure ever of doing effectively in LA. LA had the advantage of having University of Judaism and Hebrew Union College and their schools of Jewish Communal Service in its backyard. And a lot of the kids who went to those schools wanted to stay in LA. So I never had trouble finding really good talent. I wanted San Francisco in my tenure to be known as a teaching federation, where you came out of graduate school and you spent five or six or ten years and then you went on to lead your own federation. And we did develop people of that caliber. They never quite reached that potential. A few did. But Lisa Tabak is still at the East Bay Federation and she’s now endowment director, doing a great job. Joe Levine has come, gone, come, is doing a fine job. But the people like this who came out of those schools. Katherine Tick had come, left, come back. That’s not her name now but that was her name when I hired her. Out of Brandeis, out of HUC and so on. So that’s where we began trying to fill our ranks. And those people not only had a very good grounding in Jewish communal service and social welfare and community organizing and so on, they also had great personalities and very strong Jewish ability to talk about Jewish history and Jewish culture and so on. That’s what I wanted, because I knew those people would be charismatic and would draw in laymen that we needed. So that was the core.

It wasn’t a hugely problematic staff. And then arguably, in hindsight—in fact, this was one of the compliments Don Seiler paid me when I left. He said, “You know, I have served on a lot of public boards and boards of businesses and if an exec got staffing right 65 percent of the time I thought he deserved an A.” I said, “Okay. So where do I fit in your grading scale?” “You got it right 65 to 70 percent of the time.” I said, “So I get an A?” He said, “You get an A.” He said, “We all make mistakes.”

04-01:50:36
Meeker:

Apropos of what you just said, and then I’ll let you go, in the interview Brian Lurie talks about the main qualification he’s looking for is somebody who’s a

committed Jew. Is that kind of what you were talking about, is somebody who could speak the language, who knows the history?

04-01:50:53

Feinstein:

Yes. Made a big difference in the authenticity, in the ability to do the work.

04-01:51:00

Meeker:

In particular job categories or throughout the organization?

04-01:51:03

Feinstein:

Well, I don't think you need that to be on the finance side. But I think anything public facing, it helps. Not essential but it helps. The *sine quo non* is authenticity. So how do I persuade you of the righteous and place of what I'm arguing for, whether I'm asking you to stretch your financial commitment to something that innately you know would be valuable, a new JCC in Palo Alto or whatever, if I can't tug at your heartstrings? So how do I do that if we don't speak that language or if I can't kindle it in some way? The best rabbis do that and arguably the best Jewish communal workers do that.

Interview 5: August 24, 2016

05-00:00:02

Meeker: Today is August 24, 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. We are now in session number five. I suspect this will be the penultimate session.

05-00:00:19

Feinstein: You think there'll be one more.

05-00:00:19

Meeker: I think that we'll probably have one more, because I'm not sure we'll cover everything today that I want to about your term as director, and I would like to talk a bit about your development of your foundation, and I think that that probably won't quite fit into our schedule today. So if you'll grant me one more interview after today—

05-00:00:39

Feinstein: I told you, it's fun to walk down memory lane.

05-00:00:41

Meeker: Great. So last time we did spend some time talking about your return to JCF, and some, a bit of what your agenda was, and how you found it upon your arrival. There were a few bits of following up, and maybe we just start with what your agenda was. There was some discussion of you following Brian Lurie, and you had common vision, but were there elements that you knew that, based on experiences in Detroit and Los Angeles, that you thought you could bring about some productive change here in San Francisco?

05-00:01:33

Feinstein: Yes. I knew at the first that Brian was generally very popular, and seen as visionary, and, as we've already established, I was by then a close friend of his, and then even a closer friend now. So he certainly influenced me in my earliest formative days, but right through my tenure in Los Angeles we remained very close allies on national, international activity. And so I really did share the agenda when it came to overseas Jewish strategies and foci. And so that I figured I'd extend and perhaps elaborate, and we can talk about that if there's interest. Brian was not a great operations manager. That was probably always one of my greater strengths. I suspected that there were things that needed updating, reorganizing, cleaning up.

05-00:02:40

Meeker: Are you talking about systems and technology and that kind of stuff?

05-00:02:43

Feinstein: Yeah, and I joked with him over the years that I know why he wanted me to follow him; it was so that I'd keep the legacy pristine. I'd obviously been shaped a lot in my thinking about the role, and the possible additive functions that a fully effective Jewish Community Federation should perform, and after nine years of doing it elsewhere I felt quite strongly about that. So, for

example, I had a very strong interest in community affairs broadly, community relations specifically, public affairs broadly, political engagement, with a very clear nonprofit slant. LA funded a huge portion of its health and social welfare agenda through its domestic agencies, its Jewish family service, its vocational service, and on and on, with public moneys. And our agencies were doing that, and some had, in the vacuum that the federation allowed, went and did it themselves, and some were enormously effective at that. I'd say that Anita Friedman and Abby Snay were two of the leaders in the state, maybe not by '91—certainly today they are—at Jewish Family Service and Jewish Vocational Service of San Francisco, long-tenured executives, very thoughtful, influenced themselves by others, but very effective executives. I thought there was an added value the federation could offer.

And then, as I think we discussed already, I did that two-day transition briefing at Brian's home, and he had said to me in the summer of '86, he basically opened the barn door, and I knew five years later there was no chance of getting the agencies to go back to the status quo ante. So the question was—and this was something I had learned, really, in Detroit more than LA, but even in LA—that if we could add value as the roof organization, as the central address, around business functions, around more effectively garnering more public revenues, if we saw financial resource development not only as the annual campaign on one hand and the endowment effort on the other hand, but as a comprehensive approach, if we could start reporting total revenues garnered, either directly or indirectly, through the efforts of the Jewish Federation, and total revenues distributed, where we didn't take a dime of public moneys that had to flow directly to the service organization, but where we might have influenced the legislature, we might have changed the legislation. And by the way, LA was already quite effective at this, so it was just a matter of my having been the leader there, of having put the two together. And Brian never had a strong interest in that. So we did some of that, and then finally—

05-00:05:56

Meeker:

Can you explain that a little more? I'm kind of unclear what you're talking about, as far as redirecting and combining—

05-00:06:02

Feinstein:

Well, it was a matter of any social welfare agency in the state of California that provides service on a nonsectarian basis, no matter what its original auspice—so it could be Catholic Charities, or it could be Jewish Family Service Agency—is able—I won't say entitled, but able—to either present classifications of service that fall under state titles, to which they are entitled on a capitated basis funding on an annual basis. We had been doing it for years at the Jewish Home for Aged. There was no alternative, because that Medi-Cal funding was essential to the operating budget. Well, what if we did that for Russian refugees? And that was a big issue in 1991, and even though the campaigns around bringing Russian refugees to America and getting them

settled were relatively successful, that's at a moment of high emotionality. The question is would that extra four or five million dollars be raised in the out years, and that's what you needed to fund. So what if we could offset what had been raised in an emotional campaign year specifically to bring Russian Jews here, and focus the Jewish philanthropic dollars on the Jewish education of the kids, and provide the social service dollars through the state budget or the federal budget? And I was already adept at that, and I thought that was an area that we could and should garner more money, and that we did talk with the agencies about that, and some already had modest inroads, or, going way back to the first Russian refugee flow, when I was here the first time in the seventies—again, Jewish Family and Children Services, Anita Friedman was then the head of the Resettlement Division of Jewish Family Service, and the Federation's then planning director, Mike Pappo, who subsequently went on to San Jose and then Indianapolis, Mike was quite knowledgeable about this and believed in it. But a lot of the agencies didn't, so it took some education of their lay leadership, even of the executive directors, that an effort to join with what LA was doing, to see whether this would work in a year or two of fits and starts. So that's what that means. And all in all, it could bring a lot more money in, and money being fungible, as I said a moment ago, with the example of Russian–Jewish refugee kids, if you had net an extra million and a half dollars, that might cover your additive costs in the Jewish education infrastructure, but it wouldn't come anywhere near close to covering the health and welfare services.

Also, I suspect if Brian had stayed, he would have done this, or he would have tasked someone to do this, but it was second nature for me. Mount Zion had been an agency of the Federation, and it was failing economically, and a blue ribbon group of laymen, led by Dave Melnick, very prominent lawyer, much older—he's close to eighty now, but still wits about him—Dave was already involved with Julie Krevans, who was then chancellor of UCSF, and they began a negotiation that resulted in the federation keeping a \$43 million net endowment that was called Mount Zion Health Systems. And one of the prime purposes of that would be to defray the healthcare costs of indigent Jews, and that could include refugees. But Martin Diamond, who subsequently went on to be the CEO of John Muir in the East Bay, Marty was then the CEO of Mount Zion when it was freestanding. He then went into UCSF before he left. But he was there for two or three years, and Marty and I had a very good relationship, and on his own authority managed to provide free healthcare screening, which was a fundamental and antecedent step before you could qualify a refugee for certain federal programs.

So these are the kinds of things that this federation had not thought about in terms of the health and welfare agenda that was second nature to me, and that was additive. So that's what I meant there. And then the last priority wasn't fully formed in my mind, but I knew there had been a long pent-up demand for building repair and replacement. I got here in '91, so by the end of Cissie

Swig's term—because she followed Don Seiler, when Doug Heller was the president elect—

05-00:11:17

Meeker: Ninety-two to '94 would've been Swig.

05-00:11:19

Feinstein: Yes, so this would've been '94 to '95, or maybe we even started it in '94. Doug and I were having a drink after work one day, and he was really fearful that on his watch as the lay Board Chair we were going to have all these trains crashing at the roundhouse. And I said, "What if we can figure out a system that allows everyone to do this, but on a slower pace?" And this we might have talked about, so I took a blue ribbon group back East. We looked at two federations, we learned from them, and we adopted policy, and we put a guy that I had hoped would one day be the board chair, but who was still a widely—still is—a widely respected lay leader, John Freidenrich, who had chaired Stanford University, and currently is the chair of the Medical Center at Stanford, and huge donor there. But John lives in Atherton. His business at the time was in Cupertino. The idea of being the head of a nonprofit based in San Francisco just did not appeal to him. But he did this, and it was very, very helpful. And basically, we adopted a university model, which is why I was smiling to myself through this discussion right now, because you walk to Haviland Hall, and around it are buildings that weren't there the last time I was on campus, so it's probably been ten years or more, and I know because I've been to other buildings. I have clients who were professors of science of one kind or another, and I know the science infrastructure from Chancellor Ten forward has really been built out. But arts and sciences and social service, mm—

05-00:12:54

Meeker: Haviland Hall needs some work.

05-00:12:55

Feinstein: Oh, man. [laughter] So that's what I meant.

05-00:12:59

Meeker: Okay, so that's great. That's a very good summary, and I think that we'll touch on some of those as we go along. You know, shortly after you started there was a report published, and I think it was commissioned still when Lurie was a director, but Gary Tobin did a couple of those reports, but the one that I'm referring to—

05-00:13:31

Feinstein: He was a publications machine, actually.

05-00:13:32

Meeker: He was a publications machine. It seemed like it. He was looking at the donor landscape in this report, and his conclusion was that donors were moving

away from an interest in it was called Jewish continuity toward more specific giving, or donor-directed giving, and there was some—

05-00:14:01
Feinstein:

Away from communal giving.

05-00:14:03
Meeker:

Communal giving. Okay, well, can you explain what the report said and how, if at all, it impacted your work?

05-00:14:09
Feinstein:

Well, it's been a long time since I've looked at it, but— I would say by the mid-eighties, in the coastal North American communities—so this one and LA, certainly, Seattle, Portland, the smaller communities south of LA, Boston, DC, New York, to a great extent, maybe Philadelphia, maybe Miami, certainly Atlanta, not Baltimore—you had a real centripetal force that was, when we put it in sociological terms, and this was in part what Gary focused on, you no longer had barriers to Jewish largesse. And when I moved to LA, there had been a similar report done in LA, around the same time, and I thought the conclusions were understandably similar, LA much more than here. Here, there never really was any type of a large scale anti-Semitic backlash from the power elite, the non-Jewish business establishment. LA, as you know, from the late seventies, 1870s, well into the twentieth century did have a fifty-year backlash. That's when I.W. Hellman moved Wells Fargo Bank to San Francisco from downtown LA, where it started, among many other things, but that's the most celebrated, because here's an Alsatian Jewish or Bavarian Jewish prominent family scion of the late Warren Hellman, and his great-granddaughter wrote the book, founder of Temple Emanu-El, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and he just said, I can't thrive in this environment, so we'll go north. And Wells Fargo is still one of the great banks in America, which you can't say for any of the banks that survived into the twentieth century in LA. They all wound up merging with B of A or Wells Fargo. So he knew what he was doing.

Well, the same was true with Jewish largesse when big public cultural projects like the music center were built. Jewish money wasn't welcome. One would've thought in LA that there therefore would've been a much richer efflorescence of Jewish communal agencies and organizations, and the really smart rabbis or leaders did manage to carve out a niche. So Stephen S. Wise Synagogue in West LA is just a powerhouse, with something like twelve or fourteen thousand family members, and a huge campus up at the top of Mulholland, and Isaiah Zeldin knew what he was doing. Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, likewise. Rabbi Schulweis was a pied piper, and he could build the set. So you had examples. Didn't happen here. On the other hand, you did have some beautiful synagogue buildings, and you had a community whose German Jewish aristocracy, who were beginning to die off by the seventies, so by the eighties it was becoming a different community, but the German-Jewish aristocracy of the earlier generations—and these were now their

children or even grandchildren—they were imbued with this sense of noblesse oblige. And so they'd build things. So if the head of the Jewish Federation, lay or professional, said, "We really need this, Martin," you'd be hard pressed not to get something, and, depending on who you were, if you were a Swig or a Hass or a Goldman, you'd get the lead gift. LA never had that. So what Gary was focused on was now your five generations or six—

05-00:18:11

Meeker:

So in the sense what you're talking about is that to the extent that that kind of largesse existed in Los Angeles, it would've gone to these large congregations in a place like San Francisco, when you have this—

05-00:18:25

Feinstein:

Communal institutions.

05-00:18:26

Meeker:

Communal institutions, okay.

05-00:18:27

Feinstein:

Yeah, yeah, largely. But what was happening is with a few exceptions, and that also relates to how Jewishly did the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren of those leading families grow up. So the Goldman kids are all still vitally involved in Jewish life: Susie in DC, and John and Doug here in the Bay Area. But the Swigs have really drifted away, and the Koshlands only came back in the last ten or fifteen years, and not all of them. So Jimmy has stepped forward, and he is a very effective leader. And he's actually done a lot to tutor himself. And that, to some extent, was Warren Hellman's influence, you know.

05-00:19:15

Meeker:

Well, there was this pretty well-known study group, right?

05-00:19:18

Feinstein:

I'm in that study group, yeah, and you know how that began—I don't remember whether Brian talked about that in his oral history. When Warren came back from London to set up what became Hellman & Friedman, Brian didn't know him, so he went to meet him. And Warren, he was one of the smarter human beings I've ever met, and he had a wicked sense of humor, and he could be playful, in a teasing fashion, and if you didn't know him well, you didn't know whether he was giving you a knife in the gut or playing with you. So I've heard this story both from Brian and from Warren. So in the course of the discussion Brian said, "Well, I'm looking forward to you taking your family's role in the Jewish community." And he looked at Brian—you know, Chris was not Jewish; his children were not brought up as Jews—and he said, "You have me mistaken for someone who cares." And Brian looked at him and said, "How could you not care? You're Warren Hellman." And Warren said something to him—I don't remember anymore—and Brian looked at him and said, "Well, for a smart man, that's one of the most ignorant things I've ever heard," [laughs] which took Warren back. And apparently he sat there

quietly for a bit, and he looked at him and he said, “Well, rabbi, if you would teach me, I wouldn’t be so ignorant.” So Brian said, “Are you serious? Because I’ll set up one-hour study sessions with you once a month if you’re serious.” And Brian did this himself for about six months, and then it got to be too much, and Warren enjoyed it so much that he said, “Would you mind if I invited some of my cousins?” So his cousins were Haases and Koshlands, and some of the then wealthy generation began to come, so I think Sissy Geballe did for a while, and Phyllis Friedman did for a while. They loved it so much they invited some of their kids. Then, let’s see, Madeline Hass-Russell came for a while. They drifted off, but this had been going on for more than a year, and Brian eventually tasked Phyllis Cook with this, which was, on one hand, politically probably a mistake, but a smart thing to do in terms of Warren’s ongoing education. He loved it.

So when I came back, I had never met him, and I came back and met him my first week. He said, “Sure, come over this afternoon at three.” We spent a delightful ninety minutes. And he said, “By the way, I’ve got this Torah study,” which Brian had told me about. He said, “Why don’t you join us?” He says, “I’ve read your credentials. I know you have a master’s in Jewish studies, but I think you’d really love the discussion.” And I said, “I’m flattered.” And so this day I go, and I learn. [laughs] That’s the thing about Jewish learning: there are always new interpretations. And over the years, we’ve had different scholars who would teach for a year or two or three, and we’d pay for it. In the old days, Warren paid a hundred percent. Now we all chip in a thousand bucks, and it’s well worth it, as far as I’m concerned. And the group has morphed.

Well, along the line, his daughter, Trish Hellman-Gibbs, who’s a very smart woman, and an MD, and started the Free Clinic, I think Warren invited her in. That propelled her to go on and get a—she got a master’s in Jewish studies at Cal. She’s learned Hebrew. This is an MD in her late fifties now. She’s taken a role in the leadership of the community, and she’s kept the study group going after her father passed on. So you never can tell. Now, how did we get to Warren Hellman?

05-00:23:17

Meeker:

You were talking about Jewish continuity, and how it moves perhaps away from that in San Francisco.

05-00:23:22

Feinstein:

Yeah, well, when I was here in the seventies, and even when I came back in ’91, there were people, like the late Richard Goldman, who were opposed to our spending lots of money on Jewish day schools or Jewish education, who thought it was a fanciful waste.

05-00:23:37

Meeker:

What was his agenda? What did he think money should be spent on?

05-00:23:41
Feinstein:

Health and welfare, and Israel.

05-00:23:44
Meeker:

Health and welfare that benefited the community at large.

05-00:23:46
Feinstein:

The poor members of the Jewish community, and the general community, but when he was giving a million dollars for Jewish community support—and he did that for many, many years, he and Rhoda. I mean, he never got angry, never said, “I’m not giving my gift if you do this and that.” He did later, but I was already [laughter] out of the seat. I always had a very good relationship with Dick, and I could reason with him. And by the way, I probably gave you my rule of thumb learned when I was twelve years old about bullies: the best way to stand a bully down is to push back the first time; otherwise, he’ll just keep pushing. Dick was a bully. Tad Taube is a bully, you know, and you just have to stand up to them and say, “I respect you, but I disagree, and here’s why.” And generally speaking, I couldn’t turn him around a hundred percent, because his convictions were so emotion-based. But there was a whole generation of German–Jewish aristocracy, and Dick was part of that, that just thought we have the blessings of America, we should assimilate to a great extent, and we’ll keep our religion available for Yom Kippur, and a beautiful synagogue. His family put the lion’s share into renovating Temple Emanu-El twenty-five years ago, so hard to argue.

05-00:25:03
Meeker:

Well, then what was the change that this report was pointing out, and how did you interpret it based on—?

05-00:25:12
Feinstein:

Well, if you thread the needle of what we’ve been talking about from the time I became a Federation executive to this moment, I’d already been sort of responding to that. I’m sure it was you, because I don’t know who else would’ve asked me about Tom Wexeberg-Closer, you know, the young staffer on my planning staff who said, “We need to take an existential approach to the definition of Jewish life and not an Orthodox Jewish.” So Tom really—I should seek him out, because he should know how influential he was on my thinking about that agenda. I mean, he really, really was. And it was sort of out of the mouths of babes, but I thought that was such a spot-on insight that I practiced it for years. So I was already leaning toward the belief that the Jews living in the United States and in these coastal communities were already so highly integrated into the general population that intermarriage was on a steady rise, and if there weren’t new and creative ways of enabling an intermarried young couple to feel comfortable in the Jewish community, they were simply going to spin off.

So we needed to make a thousand flowers bloom, to steal a page from Chairman Mao. And again, the kernel of the insight was something he had

said to me in Detroit years earlier, but I thought that was true. And I thought that the Federation needed to encourage organizations and agencies that would enable us to do that, and that our genius, meaning the Jewish Federation, was to be an organization of organizations. So if we could provide seed funding, if we could provide executive coaching and counsel, if we could provide ancillary services, business services, if we could provide central banking and insurance and so on, which we were doing for our historic agencies, why couldn't we do it for others? Then we could create other organizations. So there were nascent Jewish cultural organizations that arguably—I mean, they had very small memberships, but they had tens of thousands of users: the Jewish Film Festival, which is still ongoing; A Traveling Jewish Theater, which was much smaller and never quite caught on. I brought them in as agencies. We started them with endowment grants, and modest endowment grants, and got to the point that we would fund a portion of their core budgets. And my reason—and I just took those two—it was the same thing that motivated me around breaking apart the United Jewish Community Centers, and allowing five freestanding suburban—well, the City of San Francisco SFJCC and then the four suburban centers—to flourish, because they could become ports of entry.

And between a theory and a practice there's a gap, because it doesn't always work exactly as I envisioned or fantasized, you know, where a grateful board of the SFJCC does everything it can to get everybody at the JCC to become a donor to the Jewish Federation. However, in terms of the base agenda of getting people to re-affiliate in ways that their parents hadn't—their parents might have been synagogue members, or if they were socialists they might not have been synagogue members, but at least they had a core affiliation for which they paid something, and that brought them into interaction with the larger community. And so at moments of crisis, which, fortunately, we had fewer and fewer of, or opportunity, you could rally people, and you could get, in what might've been a crowd of five or seven thousand who were churched, if you will, you might get twenty-five thousand to come out and hear Natan Sharansky, or this one or that one, about the challenge ahead, or come to Congregation Emanuel and hear Prime Minister Rabin speak, or, you know, this kind of thing. And that served lots of additional values.

Brian and I were instrumental in creating the regional infrastructure for AIPAC, which very few people know, but Tom Dine was a good friend of ours. Tom briefly succeeded me. That was a mistake on his part. [laughs] Both Brian and I told him that. This just was not the job for him. But a wonderful guy, just a wonderful guy, and he was killing himself at a young age, and the two of us sat him down one night at a general assembly someplace and said, "You need to start thinking about creating a regional infrastructure, and we will help you in San Francisco"—I was already the Detroit executive—"and Detroit, we will build an infrastructure for you." Because who are the most Zionist volunteer leaders in the community? They're our top leadership. Let us help you. So, starting in those two communities, Detroit and San Francisco.

This was long one of the best AIPAC chapters. Today, the present leadership of AIPAC don't even know there's a federation, but that's a whole other question.

But I felt, again, going back to the very first conversations you and I had, that's why I was in this business. So if it didn't have an immediate inurement or bottom line at Jewish Federation, as far as I was concerned it was still a good thing, because if they weren't today maybe in ten years they'd become donors, which was always my thought as a fundraiser. It's why you run a telethon to get hundred-dollar donors, because some will stick out, and you go visit them, and next year they'll be a thousand-dollar donor, and maybe in three years they'll be \$100,000 donors. That was always my motivation. I had taken sort of a studied approach to communal organization, and I had this particular communal philosophy, and it was informed by my practice experience, and then it was really given focus by that genius of an idea: twenty-first century, you better think about existential affiliation and not just synagogue affiliation.

05-00:31:40
Meeker:

So there are a number of avenues that could be followed here, but I think what I'd like to ask you about is something you kind of referred to, and that is moving from these ideas to practice. And I know from studying the history of philanthropic organizations during this era, and educational organizations for that matter, there's a real move toward wanting metrics, you know, wanting to get evidence for the funds that are being spent. Did this impact your work at the federation? And if so, what kind of metrics were you achieving to justify the new work that you were doing and the increased investment in Jewish communal organizations?

05-00:32:24
Feinstein:

The simple answer is not yet. Not through 2000. I honestly don't recall any time, any discussion, at officer or executive committee level, that that came up. Now, there would be not an organized approach, but there would be an individual philanthropist, meaning a lay leader, at an endowment grant committee or whatever, who would want to know how we measure success. This was before "impact philanthropy" was so prevalent. And going back to your opening question, which was about the Tobin study and what it was saying about the attenuation of communal motivation for giving, and the need to let a thousand flowers bloom, we were able to show that a lot of money was coming in, because of perceived strength of the Jewish community, and a lot of money was flowing out to our beneficiary agencies. So I don't think we had a huge pushback on that. Now, the annual campaign was not succeeding as well, but in part that was because what allowed the campaign to succeed for so many decades—literally so many decades—were two things: one, the leadership were unified that they wanted to give once a year and then they'd allow themselves to be pushed to give more every year, or to give a really significant gift, and set a standard that others would follow, because they

weren't being dunned by every other organization and agency. By 1991, '92, that had really begun to dissipate, by 2000—because the barn door was open—and the second was Israel as a reason to give a thousand dollars more was vitally important from '48 through maybe 1990, '91, '92, '93, and then began to ebb. We'd even begun to create carve-outs on the Israel case, this community in particular, started by Brian but really amplified by yours truly, creating our own foundation in Israel that could receive gifts and then could earmark them. And we talked, I think, when I was in LA about being the first federation to do things in the Arab sector. We continued that here, doing partnership arrangements with New Israel Fund, which had really had its birth in that office, and with Ellie Friedman, Ellie and Jonathan Cohn, her husband, because this was Phyllis and Howard Friedman's daughter, and Koshland money. And that was their passion: the progressive view of Israel's future. It was ours, too.

So we were able to do these things. And, again, part of the thought was that maybe we'd get some of these scions of old wealth to join us. Now, David Friedman did, and Ellie and Jonathan did give in Boston. Bob, the oldest brother, who's a friend, would give two or three thousand bucks a year. You know, here's a guy who could easily give twenty-five thousand. Just being close to the Jewish community was just never Bob's thing, so that's the case. Same is true with the Swig kids. You know, here their grandfather had been a million-dollar donor, Mel and Dick had kept it at that level, and then when Dick died all three of the Ben Swig children, siblings, were gone, and the family fortune had to be broken apart. It's interesting, because Don Seiler was their outside consigliere, and he helped right the ship with the Swigs and he helped right the ship with the Goldmans and the Haases. He was a very special guy, Don Seiler, from a business perspective, just great practical wisdom and advice. I haven't read his oral history. He was a very wise man.

Anyway, so what Gary was looking at was what I think is now very common. Universities latched on to it decades ago, decades. I remember the first time I was here in the seventies, and Brian invited Phyllis, who was then the endowment director for him, and me, so this must have been '78, when I came back up from Palo Alto to become campaign director here in San Francisco, to meet with the director of development, the VP for development for Stanford, and he had such a different concept, but he wanted to learn from us how did you have such loyalty in the annual campaign. By '91, it had completely reversed. I wanted to go sit at his feet and figure out how do you do this. Part of it is you have to do your accounting differently. And this is where John Freidenrich was hugely important. What I mean by that is it must not matter where the revenue comes from, meaning your board, unless you have a designated gift, which was given for the med school, must go to the med school, was given for the amuta in Israel must go to the amuta in Israel, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, unless you have a designated gift. Put it in the total package, and then let your accounting staff figure out, as you make your annual campaign or your annual allocations, what dollars count first against

this allocation. Now, if a donor was giving you an extra hundred thousand bucks specifically for X, Y, or Z, and wanted it, and said explicitly, “And that needs to be above your annual campaign allocation,” then you get into some problematics. But if you’re raising enough additional revenue, it shouldn’t matter. So the fact that we had Martin, who wanted to give an extra hundred thousand dollars, designated for the Jewish Family Service, was something we’d stand up and applaud. And, “Any particular program?” “Yeah, I want to help Russian refugee kids go to Jewish day school.” Thank you very much. But I got a lot of pushback during my tenure on that.

05-00:39:24

Meeker:

Well, it’s interesting: in preparing for this interview, I was reading through—was it the *Jewish Weekly*? Is that what it was called at the time?

05-00:39:36

Feinstein:

What was it called?

05-00:39:36

Meeker:

What’s now *J*. I can’t remember.

05-00:39:37

Feinstein:

Yes.

05-00:39:38

Meeker:

Jewish Community News, maybe.

05-00:39:40

Feinstein:

Yeah, probably. [laughter] Oh, The *SF Jewish Bulletin*.

05-00:39:42

Meeker:

But there was, particularly in the ’95, ’96 period of time—and think about what was happening in Congress then; that was in advance of the Newt Gingrich revolution, and “ending welfare as we know it”—there were massive federal budget cuts that had impact on the services, both within the Jewish community and elsewhere.

05-00:40:07

Feinstein:

This is the flipside of what we talked about twenty minutes ago.

05-00:40:09

Meeker:

Okay. Well, but is it also related to new strategies for, you know, fundraising within the community to try to augment?

05-00:40:19

Feinstein:

No, not tied directly.

05-00:40:20

Meeker:

Okay. Well, talk about, then, the flipside of what we were talking about before, because I’d like to understand, you know, the impact of it, and how you responded.

05-00:40:29
Feinstein:

The federal budget flows through the states. The states make their priorities. So we were very influential with the state legislature around health and welfare services. There were budget reductions, because California would receive less money from the federal budget, but California also had, in the mid-nineties, a robust— You know, Jerry Brown has made us finally realize we have boom years and bust years, and it's been true since 1849, but understand that for two, three, four years you might have this surplus of revenue that comes from IPOs and capital gains taxes. It doesn't sustain, so create a rainy-day fund. I applaud him for that, because we were just blowing through everything. Well, those were the days that we were still blowing through everything, and so the fact of the matter is the federal cuts were largely, but not completely, made up by state monies. So, interestingly, it didn't have a huge negative impact on us. We were, by '95, '96, quite successful in influencing the way dollars flowed out of Sacramento. We weren't the only ones. And we had natural allies. I mean, Catholic Social Services is the biggest denominational delivery system in the state of California, other than the county social welfare departments. We worked hand in glove with that.

Subsequently, it didn't surprise me when all the problems in the Catholic Church came out about pedophile priests, and so on and so forth. The cardinal of LA, Roger Mahoney, I wouldn't call him a close friend, but he had been a friend, and Monsignor Dave Cousineau ran Catholic Social Services for all of LA County. It was a big job. He was a frequent guest in my home, and really became friends. And then you'd hear these little whispers of things every now and then, and, of course, it was never anyone I knew, thank God, but it wasn't politically correct to spend a lot of time talking about it in social conservation. But that was the deeper issue, and it turned out Mahoney, who, he was a social worker by training, had done wonderful things for Catholic Social Services, but he also covered a lot of priests' asses—it's an unfortunate metaphor—in this, and it was very disappointing. I don't think we ever had that up here, but maybe, maybe. I don't know. But the point is I already had allies, natural allies, and we saw things the same way. In Sacramento we could be effective at getting the regs written so that the moneys would flow to organizations like ours. In some states, they had problems with religious-denominated— But we were able to document that we would provide service on a nonsectarian basis. It just happened to be offered by a Jewish agency. So it was not a huge problem.

05-00:43:35
Meeker:

How did you distinguish between sectarian and nonsectarian recipients of aid in the community, or in the geographic area maybe is a better way to put it?

05-00:43:46
Feinstein:

That's something I actually learned from a guy named Al Asher, who'd been the director of the Jewish Vocational Service in Detroit, because when I got to Detroit I just had this very closed-minded attitude that Jewish community

dollars should be going for Jewish services, and so on and so forth, and in Detroit the one agency that was taking ample amounts of public money was the JVS. So we had lunch one day, and I was challenging him on it, and he said, “You’re a smart guy, but I have the impression you know nothing about this.” And I said, “So educate me.” So he then gave me five or six categorical programs that they were funding services obtained through Lansing, the state capital. And he said, “We had eighteen Jewish families that were impacted by this problem, closed-head injuries, and we had thirty-nine families that were impacted by this one,” and so on and so forth. And all in all, he was talking about daily service delivery clients, of the Jewish Vocational Service, who were Jews and families involved in the community, but poor, or certainly lower-middle income, who would not be receiving any of the services they required if not for the JVS, and the JVS could not deliver that on campaign money. So he said, “Now, the concomitant is I’m serving two hundred people in this program that’s serving eighteen Jews, and I’m serving three hundred people in this program that I’m serving thirty-nine Jews, but don’t you want me to provide service to these people who really need it if the cost of my doing so, which is no additive cost to you, is that I must serve non-Jews, as well?” And then he gave me the added—this was the coup de grace—and he said, “And when we provide that service, we’re your arm.” So he said, “Coleman Young is a very difficult guy, right?” Right. “Well, as far as Coleman Young’s concerned, the Jewish community is providing all these services to his constituents who need the service that wouldn’t exist if I weren’t doing it.” I said, “Bravo, you made your case.” And I then made that case in LA, and I made that case here, because people didn’t think that way naturally.

05-00:46:13

Meeker:

What did it actually look like in San Francisco, or in the peninsula regions part of JCF here?

05-00:46:22

Feinstein:

Well, if you walk into any of the service agencies, not so much until recently the Jewish Home [for the Aged], but certainly the assisted living facilities, like the one behind the JCC Menorah Park, certain programs run in JCCs, like nutrition and so on. Certain programs of the family service, if you walked into one of their facilities, and many programs at the vocational service, you will find many, many, many Asian and Hispanic and African American clients being served. That’s what it looks like. It looks like San Francisco, or it looks like Redwood City. But frequently you’d lease a facility because of whatever service they were delivering—they weren’t going to deliver in their headquarters, but there was enough money in that public budget to be able to lease a facility and hire an administrator, if not the person actually operating that program, that sheltered workshop, whatever it happened to be, if he or she was not himself or herself Jewish, I guarantee you the supervisor was, because they were at an executive staffing level at the Jewish Family Service, or the Jewish Vocational Service, or the JCC. But LA now has a couple of their

Jewish Communal Service Agency executives who are not Jewish, but they're hyper-competent, and they were the number two, and their predecessor retired, and the laymen had been working with them for years and years and years and said let's give them a bid. So for eight or ten years they went on to succeed and be the director. You wouldn't find that at the Bureau of Jewish Education, or the Brandeis Day School or the San Francisco JCC, but in a social service or health delivery program, it was perfectly fine.

05-00:48:23

Meeker:

Imagine post-1989, and the Russian emigres, the need for services in the Jewish community changes drastically, at least for ten or fifteen years or so, but has there been much discussion about declining need in the community itself, and is there really need for Jewish Vocational Services? Does it justify the continued support of Jewish communal dollars? Should that be wholly supported by public monies instead?

05-00:48:58

Feinstein:

Well, probably by 2005, certainly by 2010, for agencies like the Jewish Family and Children's Services, or Jewish Vocational Service—let's just stay with those two—the minority revenue source in their total budgets was the Jewish Community Federation. They might get several categorical six-figure endowment grants and some dedicated moneys that came from permanent endowments that were intended to serve those kind of things, but so factor one is the dollars haven't grown in terms of communal funding. Now, Danny has completed a process that began in an erstwhile fashion during that long interregnum when there just wasn't clarity of who's in charge here, or who the exec is. And he was an active layman during that time. He knows what the unfinished business was. I applaud him. There are things I tried to do. We joked about it recently, because I said, "I first tried to do this thirty years," and he said, "Well, sometimes things have to get really bad before people are ready to make a change." And that included how they fund their budget, because we had a hundred percent of the budget, including the endowment operation, being funded by the annual campaign, ridiculous. Ridiculous. We may or may not get to that, and it doesn't matter. It's a fly spec, finally. But he's also re-engineered their annual allocation process, and it looks much closer to what I first wrote about in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* about total financial resource development, and what we talked about in the early part of today's discussion.

Think about it holistically. You've got all these sources of revenue that you're responsible for, and you've got this added value function that the top donors want to know that the diligence has been done, not unlike a startup company where you're getting ready to go public, and the public investment firm, like Capital Group or Fidelity or Vanguard, wants to know, "Now, who is your VC?" Well, if it was Kleiner Perkins or Sequoia or Benchmark or August, we have a much higher level of confidence going in than if it's Fly By Night, you know? Because we know those guys, and they are rigorous, and they didn't

just throw money at it, they also provided a lot of expertise. Then you want to know the management team. Then you want to know how good your numbers are, and we'll back test them, and so on and so forth. And once in a while you back away from an IPO. We backed away here—I'm talking about not Federation, obviously—from the Facebook IPO. Why? Their CFO is a very bright guy. I know him personally. He had been the CFO at Genentech. And he just bungled it at the end, you know, where they come out one day, it's going to be \$18 a share, then it's going to be \$36, and we said adios. And if you're going public in a company like that, you want the American funds to be a big buyer. [laughs] Said, "Thank you, we'll wait our turn," and I remember it went up, and then— [slaps table] So—

05-00:52:20

Meeker:

Well, now it's at \$124. [laughter]

05-00:52:21

Feinstein:

Well, now we do own a lot of Facebook. We just didn't want to own it at IPO. So the one thing I have to say about my colleagues is they're really smart buyers. So I'm just drawing an analogy to what we're talking about. And by the way, you had more and more lay leaders of this current generation, who were themselves entrepreneurial in building their own businesses. They didn't inherit this from the Goldmans or the Swigs or the Haases or the Hellmans. They needed to do it themselves. Now, sometimes a self-made entrepreneur is highly arrogant because they figure nobody else was as smart as they were to do this. Sometimes they're just really smart and they figured out something that everyone was going to need one day, and they made billions of dollars on it: Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, the Google boys. You can't take it away from them. So the ethos in this area, now this goes full circle. Was I beginning to hear some things in the nineties? I didn't hear it so much in the nineties, but I guarantee you there were those discussions going on. And it's just that those folks were not in the lay leadership until after 2000, so I didn't interact with them. Some of them I brought in to committees and so on, so forth, so five years later they could move up and become officers or chairs of committees and so on. Danny was part of that group. Have a very different way of thinking about the business of the Jewish community.

05-00:53:59

Meeker:

How would you characterize that?

05-00:54:10

Feinstein:

Well, I told you my motivation—I mean, I told you my motivation, so we don't have to go back over that. I am certain that's different than his, certain of it. I think I was a fairly thoughtful and well-educated executive by the time I was the executive in Detroit, and certainly by the time I was the executive in LA, so by the time I came back here, as we've been talking today, there were a lot of things that I brought in, learnings from practice, learnings from subordinates, learnings from lay leadership, so I think I was the right answer at the time I did the job. So when Tom Kasten, who was the last president,

came to me—I call it the Old Jewish Men’s Book Club—Tom came over to me before we started one night, and they were just searching, beginning the search for Danny, and he said, “I know you’re happy with what you’re doing. Do you ever think about coming back?” I said, “Are you asking me what I think you’re—?” [laughter] We’re good friends, so I said, “Are you asking me what I think you’re asking me?” He said, “Would you consider interviewing?” I said, “No, and if you weren’t such a good friend I wouldn’t tell you I’m not even flattered.” [laughter] I said, “I feel for you, I’ll help you however I can, but no, that’s a closed chapter. I’m not going back.” Now, subsequently I saw him, because I didn’t want him to think I was just slapping his cheek. I said, “I have to tell you, Tom, I think I was a pretty good”—he did, too—“a pretty good manager, pretty good executive. I’m not sure I could do the job now. Leaving aside that I don’t want to do the job now,” I’d been out eleven, twelve years at the time he asked me, thirteen years, “sorry, that chapter is closed.”

So I think Danny—I’m just using him as an example, because, by the way, in many of the large cities now there are people who come from very nontraditional roots, which was not true in my day. In my day we were trying assiduously to identify young people, recruit them, get them started, get them a master’s or double master’s degree, steep them in Jewish culture, and that really was the focus of the generation of the Richard Goldmans and the Don Seilers and the Dick Swigs. It’s very different now. So I don’t think Boston has started a search yet. New York just took someone from out of the field completely. Washington, DC has taken someone from out of the field. Detroit took a layman like Danny, who’s doing a good job, but very different than any of his predecessors that I know. LA took someone who had been tangentially involved in Jewish community but really was more a business man. So you have this generation of entrepreneurial business leaders, some of whom have Stanford or Harvard MBAs or Kellogg or Cal or Haas School or whatever. But they want something different. And this goes to your question about metrics. It was not commonplace then, but now the mantra is impact investing, and particularly among the Silicon Valley wealthy. After all, they created a disruptive technology that has transformed the world. I should be able to do that with philanthropy, shouldn’t I? And they either will or they won’t. I don’t know. I don’t want to deal with that, but it’s different.

[break in audio]

05-00:58:17

Meeker:

What I’d like to talk about now is the Jewish Community Endowment Fund, and I think that as I’ve learned about the Jewish Community Federation, it took me a while to kind of understand the relationship of the Fund to the larger Federation, and I think for anyone who reads this it might help to have your explanation of it. So can we just start out by kind of describing what the fund is and what the fund’s relationship to the Jewish Community Federation

more broadly is, particularly as you found it when you started as director, or as executive vice president, I think, at the time it was.

05-00:59:02
Feinstein:

Well, let's start at the mouth of the funnel, so generically and then come down to any particular questions about my tenure. By the early to mid-1970s, the major city Jewish federations were being encouraged by what was then the national organization, Council of Jewish Federations, to look to permanent legacy gifts as a vitally important source of permanent revenues that over time could supplement what could be raised in the annual campaign, or in years of down markets or bad campaigns could tide over the community. The guy who had been hired had been an entertainment industry executive, Lou Novins, worked out of the New York office of Council of Jewish Federations, had a very simple concept, and was not a young man, but he came around from community to community and talked to the top donor leaders of the federation. So Brian was already executive here. I was invited to that meeting because I was already campaign director, and assistant director of the Federation. Very interesting. Planned giving was just becoming a concept, not just in Jewish federations, in general, but we had a group of wealthy and sophisticated philanthropists who just thought it was the right idea. Brian hired a woman named Carol Breen who was there six or eight years. So I had left. I left in 1980 to go back to the Council of Jewish Federations. She made some progress. She was not part of the establishment power elite, and when she either was asked to leave or resigned—I never asked Brian about this, so I don't know the background; it doesn't matter that much—Brian was very close to Phyllis Cook as a lay leader. Phyllis could've been and would've been president of the Federation, and he asked her whether she'd consider stepping in.

Now, Phyllis, even though she and David were never as wealthy as many of the elite, vacationed with them and so on, and she always worked herself into those kinds of things. I just, as we talked about already, I never had an interest in that, and if I had little interest, my wife had none, so I just wasn't going to subject my family to living, eating, breathing with the elite of the Jewish community. I found it boring after a while. But Phyllis would go two weeks every Christmas to the Mauna Kea; that's where all the elite were. And there's no doubt, it's like belonging to the Pacific Union Club, or Bohemian Grove. If you're in this kind of business, or the Burlingame Country Club, it helps your business. It just will help your business. I know you. So there's no doubt about that. Now we come to particulars. Phyllis is very, very bright, extremely energetic. I mean, even now she's in her late seventies, and you've been interviewing her, or you just finished, so you know her. She talks a mile a minute. Notwithstanding what I'm about to tell you, I like her. When her son Danny died of the same disease that killed my son Ben, and I'd never even heard of stomach cancer, and so she worked for me at the time. I covered for her for the better part of a year and a half, although, like me, she found it vital distraction to have this work to do. What I never saw until I stepped out of the

role, I'd hear a complaint every now and then, once in a while from a lay leader, but often from agency executives, is how controlling she was. And it was laid out in a whole range of ways. She would not keep contemporaneous notes of meetings. She would write the minutes months after an event, and however she saw the meeting was the way the minutes ran. Once in a while I'd correct something. I'd do it quietly, because I considered her a friend and a loyal associate.

What I didn't know until I stepped out of role is how she would twist the tail of outstanding executives, like Anita Friedman or Abby Snay or others. If she liked you, she'd help you every way she could, including sometimes not telling the whole truth to me or to lay leaders or others. But again—and I'm almost embarrassed to say it, but I probably have a weak spot for some executives that I think are just so effective that I look the other way, and that's probably what I did during her tenure. In the year after I stepped out of that role I began hearing this regularly, even though I did my best to keep my nose dry. I mean, I was trying to start a startup company. But I was in the city, and I did make friends with the people who were my presidents, or past presidents, or the emerging officers. So I'd hear these things. And I heard these complaints for a good decade until she was finally asked to leave. And it took a very strong lay leader to ask her to leave, John Pritzker. It would not have happened otherwise. And he was supported by Warren Hellman. And what she had done every time in the past—and I'll give you a couple of examples—is she'd line up her allies. The only other female executive I know who would do this is Anita Friedman, and because I cannot imagine myself doing this, or any male executive doing this, it just deeply offends me, [laughter] where you sit in someone's office and you play to their masculinity, tears come to the eyes, "I don't know what I've done," to the point that if you had their support on something that had to be done, they'd flip. And I had that two or three times where Phyllis told me—and this I didn't realize until I'd been out of role for a number of months, but she'd really undercut me.

I said to you about twenty minutes ago some of the things I started to do that Danny has finally gotten done while she's not there. I had actually spent a lot of time and money having a cost accounting analysis done on where the cost centers were. Again, I always had a businessman's instincts, and I learned from the best of them. And it came back and said, "Oh my God, what are you doing?" And I showed this to people like Tom Kasten, who'd been the number three executive at Levi Strauss, and other top laymen—Don, Peter Haas—and they said, "Well, this is not right." In fact, Don had challenged me. He said, "If you can prove to me that the costs are misappropriated, I will support you a hundred percent."

05-01:06:51
Meeker:

The endowment fund came out as a high cost center.

05-01:06:55
Feinstein:

High cost center that the campaign was subsidizing. And concomitant with that, I was now getting criticized that when you fully applied overhead charges, no matter how I called it, how artfully I called it in the campaign, that I was taking the campaign overhead up to 25 percent, which I deeply resented. So you know what I said to you earlier about bullies? So I showed them it wasn't the case. We get to the Executive Committee discussion, and the staffers were asked to leave the room, so of course I recused myself. So did Phyllis. And I come back in. I forget who was presiding. Might've been still during Doug Heller's term. And I could tell as soon as I walked in, his face was red, and he looked up at me kind of sheepishly and then did this, and I had counted the votes before I walked in. Well, she'd basically done what I just told you. And Don and Peter both told me subsequently. This was the second time Peter apologized to me for— [laughter] The first time I think I'd told you about. It's when he gave a \$10 million gift to the Contemporary Jewish Museum because Brian had asked him and he still had this guilt, and I said, "You of all people."

05-01:08:23
Meeker:

Well, I'm curious about, you know, certainly Phyllis is a force of nature, and very skilled at what she does, but I'm curious about the actual position of the Endowment Fund—

05-01:08:37
Feinstein:

Oh, now, let's talk about that.

05-01:08:39
Meeker:

—within the Federation, because was it set up so that it could be so semi-autonomous?

05-01:08:45
Feinstein:

No, no. And I didn't let it operate as semi-autonomous. I did not let it operate. I went to all meetings. It was one of the great liberations, I realized, when I left that job. Did I ever tell you this? I remember I'd been at Capital Group maybe three months. I started in July of 2001. [laughter] And I started realizing that by one or two o'clock I was done, because I'd gotten in at 6:30 or 7:00. I'd done all my reading. I'd made whatever calls I could make. I was done. And I'd come home. Leslee said, "Everything okay?", and I'd say, "Yeah, it's fine. I have nothing to do." I could sit there and make work. And then I thought about it. Sometimes I'd go for a run or something, and I said, you know, I must have spent half of my life in Jewish Communal Service as a supernumerary in somebody else's meeting. I think that's what it was. But you had to, because otherwise you devalued people and their good work. So I went to everything.

LA was set up as a quasi-autonomous entity, but the sole member of the sub-corporation was the Jewish Federation Council of Greater LA, and I exercised that role. I got a corporate counsel to support me, because I needed to take

charge of it. We actually had a defalcation audit in LA, which is a very serious thing in nonprofit, and I kept it as quiet as I could. There were several really big mismanagement red flags that Arthur Anderson was still in business as a consulting firm. They were our auditors at the time. I might've told you this. The third or fourth day on the job, they came to see me at three o'clock, four o'clock, and laid out all the issues, and they were surprised I took it with aplomb. And they said, "We're really sorry." And I said, "No, no, no, no, no, I'm the new kid." "Well, how do you want the management letter to read?" "What you just told me. Put it in writing and get it to me tomorrow, and I'm going to start using that." Same is true here. It's actually very useful. You can be afraid of it, but you can also dig into it and say, "Okay, this is my license to change things before we get in trouble." So there never was an autonomous corporation. LA had one. That was never an issue. There was only one corporate entity. What had happened was simply because of the strength of personal relationships. And again, not on my watch, and not on Brian's watch. If you ask Brian—and again, I'm sure—well, I don't know whether he would've said anything in his oral history about this, but he said he urged Phyllis to resign when he resigned so that the new executive, whoever he was, would bring his own person in. On the one hand, she was enormously valuable in terms of building up the number of not so much the philanthropic funds but the supporting organizations, and they've changed that in the intervening years. Those are the seven- and eight-figure donor-advised endowments where the Federation appoints the majority of the directors but the family donor—the Sandler had one, Barney [Osher] had one. In both cases, they put two or three million dollars in and gift it all out within a few months, but it was a convenient thing to have. But there were other families who allowed them to build up over time, and today, because they're very cumbersome to manage, the Federation has collapsed all but the very biggest of them, and it's as it should be.

So I was more interested in the endowment, to the earlier question you asked, flowing from the Tobin study, to create opportunities for so-minded Jewish philanthropists to create permanent funds that would fund something they really wanted to do. And we had a thousand flowers blooming, so why not create a number of dedicated funds? Phyllis was less enthusiastic about that than the virtual power it represented to have a Herb and Marion Sandler support foundation, or Bernard Osher. Now, I had a great relationship with Barney—he loved Phyllis, but he knew her weakness, and she never would've pulled these shenanigans with me, but she did with the agency execs. And, again, I did not realize this until after. [A portion of the text has been sealed until 2042.]

So my relationship with her has cooled over the years, but it's mostly after I left the Federation. And I don't go around badmouthing her, never did. When agency execs would complain to me subsequently, I never did. But to your question, what was the result? Well, I went through my last three-year tenure at Jewish Federation having to go through progressive cost-cutting because I

didn't have a legitimate resource, because I was denied that resource. So we're running more and more successful annual campaigns, and more and more money was under-riding the cost of the endowment, and the things that were high priorities were being trimmed or cut because we didn't have adequate revenue, or because I couldn't stomach taking that much of an attributed proration out of the annual campaign. Eventually, it would kill the annual campaign. Again, my understanding from the last budget is this has now been cured, but other major federations—Chicago, New York, Boston, Baltimore, Cleveland—most of the peers of this federation had shifted already. You do proper cost accounting, and you charge the revenue sources for the cost they incur, and maybe you also get a cost plus. Cal, or UCSF, if I give a ten-thousand-dollar gift for something, do you know how much actually gets down? Yes you do, because you're at the Bancroft Library.

05-01:16:35

Meeker:

Yeah, I do. [laughter] I know really well.

05-01:16:37

Feinstein:

So you know exactly what I'm talking about.

05-01:16:39

Meeker:

Right, and it's shrinking, from my perspective, all the time. But, well, I'm curious: how was it that the costs associated with the endowment were so expensive? What was getting charged back to—

05-01:16:58

Feinstein:

The staff kept growing.

05-01:17:00

Meeker:

Okay. And that wasn't something that you could tamp down, or—?

05-01:17:02

Feinstein:

Yes, I did, because there was no way of allowing that to grow when other things were being cut. But it was also a growing revenue source, so we needed more people doing donor advised funds. We needed more accounting. The support foundations were a huge consumer of accounting resources. For me, it was always a push me/pull me, and here's what I mean by that in practical terms. I gave you already my long-term conception of what a federation should have been in the late-twentieth century, and I tried to act on that, letting a thousand flowers bloom, if you will, even if it did not have any immediate remunerative impact on the revenue sources of the federation, it might eventually. It probably will eventually. I felt even more strongly about something that was a decidedly revenue source. And notwithstanding what I told you, and I might not be able to properly cost account and charge off pieces of the operating budget at the Jewish Community Federation, any new project I wanted to do—now, we never had a devil's bargain on this. Generally speaking, Phyllis agreed with my vision of what should happen. What I think she couldn't get beyond is her need to have absolute control over things. And I think that's why—because there were a number of people who

would try it for a year and then they'd back off. David Freidman, who's a Koshland heir, very involved in Cal—David's a good friend, as I mentioned earlier—I think Phyllis always over-estimated her relationship with the Howie and Phyllis Freidman family and their kids. He agreed to go on the Endowment Committee for a year, and then he said, "There are no lay decisions. They're all made by Phyllis." Which was true by that point, and Jim Koshland had a problem with that. So a number of very good, very thoughtful, very capable people said, "I'm not playing in that arena." That should've been a red flag for me, but she was so protected by her generation of lay leaders, most of whom are gone now.

05-01:19:22

Meeker:

What was the nature of the decisions that she was making? What did she actually have control over that she was so protective of?

05-01:19:31

Feinstein:

[laughter] If I say "everything," it's not very helpful, but everything. She had a particular view of what agencies deserved, special grant support, and which agencies didn't. And she had the same issue with Anita Freidman that I did. That makes sense. I learned this subsequently, that strong women executives tend not to mentor and encourage younger strong women executives; they tend to combat with them, and sometimes they do it in a disingenuous fashion. So I think Anita just challenged the domain consensus, and Phyllis basically cut off funding, and Anita started her own endowment program, and quite successfully, which only aggravated her more. But if you could control all these supplemental funds, it was like having control over the annual campaign. I wasn't in it to be punitive. It's a matter of if these are good things and it's a supplement to what we're no longer able to deliver from the annual campaign, then federation needs the credit of doing these things that are going to benefit the community.

05-01:20:44

Meeker:

Was she sort of the main contact, then, that the donors who were setting up these different endowment funds would have been in contact with, so she would have kind of steered them in directions that—?

05-01:20:55

Feinstein:

Yes. And certainly top donors. And to her credit, she made a point of targeting the top one hundred donors, and there were people, like Marion and Herb [Sandler], who had never been annual campaign donors. They were still, at the time, living in East Bay, and I don't know whether they ever gave anything to the East Bay Federation. Barney can be very stubborn, but there was no one like his sister when it came to this stuff. But she managed, between Barney's encouraging, and she had a couple of people like Susan Folkman that she, Marion Sandler, was very fond of and respected highly, who were employed in the effort to bring it in. And then, as I said, they eventually did create a large support foundation.

05-01:21:44

Meeker:

Okay, I think that that's a pretty useful description. I understand after your term, that was when successful efforts to get the fund to contribute to overhead transpired.

05-01:21:57

Feinstein:

Yes, much later.

05-01:21:58

Meeker:

Much later, okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the endowment fund and its contribution to the work?

05-01:22:06

Feinstein:

Very important. I said earlier that—which is why I'm saying the positive to be the tonic to my poison here—I told you I asked Brian how candid I should be, and he said, "Be candid." And I don't know until I see it in print what you keep and what you don't, whether I need to embargo this or what. I don't want to hurt her, I really don't. And I don't talk about this much, and I know she felt—because I took her to lunch right after John Pritzker lowered the boom, and I was as consoling as I could be, but she thought that she had done nothing wrong, and I wasn't going to argue with her, because she was grieving at the moment, and that she just didn't deserve it. There's probably a reason why at a certain point long tenures are not a good thing, particularly one that thinks it's a lifetime tenure. [laughter] But the positive aspect of this I talked about earlier: there wasn't anything I wanted to do by way of creative and innovative, bringing on new organizations like A Traveling Jewish Theater and Jewish Film Festival, that didn't start out as controversial as they became subsequently, but I could always get an endowment grant. I could get endowment grants for other things that I wanted to do. So it's not like I felt personally challenged, this if my fiefdom. By the way, that was true in LA, too. I didn't have that problem. But part of that, as I said, at the time, I was naïve about the undercutting, and the worst of it is what I described to you. I don't think I was routinely undercut on a regular basis, and I don't know what this was, other than she and I did have a couple of arguments in my office when we would talk about this, that she was convinced that charging a fee to donors would chill new development efforts, and I was convinced that she was out of date, because there wasn't a similar program anyplace in Northern California or around the country that still gave it away.

05-01:24:23

Meeker:

Do you recall what percentage you were seeking?

05-01:24:27

Feinstein:

Less than 1 percent—you know, as the assets grew, much lower. It's the way investment firms charge. It's assets under management. So we weren't talking about prohibitive amounts of money, but she just thought it had to be free. And by the way, that was what I was coupling it with. Let us charge. We'll grandfather anyone who wants to be— By the way, I was asked this, because Leslee and I have two funds over there—because mine predated the rule

change—did I mind paying 1 percent a year. No. I think I'm getting valuable service for my 1 percent, and I'm not setting up a private foundation. I've got a donor-advised fund or two. I thought it was a bargain. It was also a matter of principle. I couldn't argue for it. But if the endowment had to cover, in those days, 650 or 700,000 dollars of additional cost, I even had a revenue source. Let's charge the donors of donor-advised funds what other endowments do. So it really put the federation in a box, leaving me aside for a second. My personal upset I've expressed, but it put them in a box. It wasn't good. It wasn't good. You needed to strengthen the central approach, and other self-respecting federations had done it. We were late. And the fact that they only got it recently, they're really late. And colleagues elsewhere said they couldn't believe that I couldn't get this done. Lay leaders didn't want to do it.

05-01:26:09

Meeker:

Interesting. Well, we've still got a few minutes left, and I think there's one more topic we can knock off before we wrap up today, and that is some of the larger communal organizations nationwide. I know that the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations merged in 1999, created at the time it was called the United Jewish Communities. I guess it's now called the Jewish Federations of North America. I believe you endorsed the merger fairly early on.

05-01:26:43

Feinstein:

Oh yeah, I was an advocate for the merger, yeah.

05-01:26:45

Meeker:

You were an advocate.

05-01:26:47

Feinstein:

I was probably wrong.

05-01:26:49

Meeker:

Okay. Well, let's talk about the merger, and there's another side bit of this, that in advocating for the merger I know that didn't JCF reduce funding to it in the mid-1990s, kind of looking forward to its end?

05-01:27:10

Feinstein:

Not quite.

05-01:27:11

Meeker:

Okay. Maybe walk me through this process, and it sounds like you have maybe a different feeling about it now than you did then.

05-01:27:19

Feinstein:

Yeah. The Council of Jewish Federations was, for want of a better term, a trade association, plus, and if you were going to be part of the trade association you paid your dues, and the dues were on a formula that blended capitation and revenues. And the revenues were determined solely by the annual campaign. The United Jewish Appeal was a beneficiary agency, and federations voluntarily allocated to them. There was a hope or expectation that

in the early days, when I started my career, that 70 percent of gross—gross—would go to the United Jewish Appeal, but then certainly by the time I was a federation director in the mid-eighties and early eighties, in Detroit, that had begun to shift. But again, Detroit had other ways of covering its budgets, including its endowment proration. So, going back to Brian's tenure, but throughout mine, we seem to be in a constant struggle with the United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish Agency for Israel, because we were so damned independent. And this was not a matter of communal pride, per se, that prompted us to do it. It's that we stayed in the process, we stayed major allocators, but we felt that any shift in allocation priorities was lost in the voting at the annual assembly. This is a highly assimilated, predominantly Reform Jewish community. We went through two waves of the Orthodox leadership of the Jewish Agency conforming to the Chabad effort to de-legitimate Reform Jews. If you were the sitting head of the campaign, not an easy subject to deal with. And so our purpose was not to be punitive, but since we thought we were being ignored, by the mid-nineties we began to shift our allocation, so more and more money went through the amuta. We began co-funding things with the New Israel Fund and others, as we've discussed in other contexts.

05-01:30:02

Meeker:

United Jewish Appeal provided funding to charities in Israel, is that correct?

05-01:30:06

Feinstein:

To the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the Joint Distribution Committee, through which monies flowed out to other charities. But there were a number—this is a longer tutorial than we have time for—the Jewish Agency was the government of the Jewish population during mandatory Palestine under the British, what was called in Hebrew the Yishuv, the community in situ, and the leadership, the first cabinet under David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir and so on, had actually been Jewish Agency executives. So when the government was established in May of '48, they all moved down the hall or across the street and became the first government of Israel, and the World Zionist Organization remained intact, representing Jews outside of Israel, and then affinity groups within Israel that then expressed themselves in the political parties of Israel, and the Jewish Agency became the face of the State of Israel to diaspora Jewry, including relief and rescue of diaspora Jewry. So the UJA had begun after Kristallnacht a merger of the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel, and continued in that mode long after the state developed. In the early decades of my tenure, vitally important, because it was a huge proportion of free currency coming into Israel before her economy was stable. By the late 1990s, Israel had become startup nation, and certainly now everyone reads the book and they know it, and it's true, it's true. But that was not during my tenure.

So our reason for reducing the UJA allocation was not because we wanted to keep more money in San Francisco, per se. It was that we had other priorities

for overseas Jewish needs. So we were doing a few things. We helped the Jewish community in Buenos Aires after the AMIA bombing. We built out a community center in St. Petersburg, Russia, because they became a sister city for San Francisco. We did some special projects in Haifa and vicinity, and in Beit She-an and vicinity, right under the Syrian border. People here felt great about it. We'd take every Israel mission to those regions to see hands on what we were doing with their dollars in the annual campaign that was a boon for our annual campaign dollars. We would support organizations like—I'm blanking on it—World Union for Progressive Judaism, which was advocating for legitimating Reform Jews instead of taking their status away, very important to our constituency. And we were slowly but surely becoming the *bête noire* of United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish Agency for Israel. So they'd see us at national meetings, and they'd take us out to the woodshed, and we'd usually stand them down, and finish the meeting shaking hands and agreeing to disagree. They had some very effective lay leaders who were after that.

By the way, the then chairman of the campaign for United Jewish Appeal was Joel Tauber, who had been my last president in Detroit, and with whom I was and am close friends, and I learned a huge amount about the management of a federation sitting at Joel's knees when I was the Detroit exec. So he and I had some private meetings where we just were sure that none of this was personal on either side, but it put him in an awkward position, because everyone said, "Well, you can get Wayne to—" And he couldn't, because I was now representing this community and not Detroit. Joel then moved up, which is typical, and became the Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, and he was convinced that there was something archaic about the infrastructure, given all the changes going on globally, and Joel was also a very smart, strategic thinker, and Brian was the exec. So as we've established, I had a—

05-01:34:28

Meeker:

Brian was the exec at the—

05-01:34:29

Feinstein:

Of United Jewish Appeal. At that point I might have actually shaped some of Brian's thinking, because I was a clearer strategic thinker when it came to these things. So I was one of the first execs of the major cities to be advocating that we should put the two together.

05-01:34:53

Meeker:

So you were leading Brian's opinion on this, or were you guys of the same thinking?

05-01:34:58

Feinstein:

We were of pretty much the same thinking. He was at first a little bit reluctant, and then realized that this is where we had to go. I think I was instrumental in helping him get to that point, and he had a few officers who agreed. Joel came

around. I never tried to influence Joel at the time. I pushed back when Joel pushed on me.

05-01:35:16

Meeker:

What were your main points advocating for this merger?

05-01:35:18

Feinstein:

Well, it's sort of my general view of what's evolving in Jewish history. Number one, we're getting closer to the nineties. Israel is becoming more and more self-sufficient. Number two, the attenuation or assimilation of the American Jewish Community, and what will likely be a great challenge if we don't invest more in what I call the existential approach to Jewish involvement, Jewish belonging to a large Jewish community, that—

05-01:35:53

Meeker:

And Israel is key to that.

05-01:35:54

Feinstein:

Had been, and how important it might be to actually spend more money, and we can do some of it from endowment, but a lot of it was eventually going to have to come from a reprogramming of the annual campaign, that we had theoretically accomplished the last great migration of Jews out of the former Soviet Union to Israel, it would be hard to call on that in the future, and that it was time to just put some institutions out of business that were appropriately structured to meet the needs of World Jewry in the twentieth century but likely would not continue to meet the needs of Jews in the twenty-first century. Now you had the state of Israel strong and powerful. I might've told you this when we first started: it was among the reasons why I thought, time for me to hang up my spurs, because I remember saying to you I could get them there but I didn't want to lead it at that point. You know, the things that motivated me—getting Jews out of Russia, and being an ardent Zionist, to try to build a vibrant state of Israel—did it. [laughter] It was naïve on my part, and this brings me to why my thinking has changed: because the only macro North American Jewish organization worth its salt today is AIPAC, and AIPAC has become the political captive of the Republican Jewish coalition. So the fact that they were so foursquare supportive of the Netanyahu agenda against the Iran nuclear pact and against the president deeply offended me. Brian and I have talked about this. He won't even give them a dime, and here we helped create their regional structure. I said, I am a nominal member. I send them a hundred dollars a year. I won't go to their events, and it doesn't matter. I'm just a citizen out there. But I don't want the people who look at the rolls to see that Wayne and Leslee Feinstein aren't even nominal members of AIPAC. It's just not worth it to me to have to explain this.

05-01:37:53

Meeker:

So your regret is that United Jewish Appeal doesn't exist any longer as perhaps a counterpoint to AIPAC, as an alternative or—

05-01:38:02
Feinstein:

No, more than I think—as an alternative, and something that actually gave motive for us to the local federations, and really for decades had effectively represented overseas Jewish needs, and could've probably, with effective leadership, could've probably adjusted to the times, because there still are overseas Jewish needs. Look, anti-Semitism in Europe is at its high point, as an example. Israel is hardly out of the woods in the neighborhood, although, thanks to Assad, seems to be left alone more or less these days, but the Iranians are stirring up Hamas and Hezbollah, so my guess is won't be long before there's another war of some kind. These are sad things. But in terms of the philanthropic infrastructure, that had to change. You had a state that after fifty years had grown into what you had hoped it would be, and the state is not going to be kept alive by a few hundred millions of dollars of Jewish philanthropy. What are you thinking? It can make that in taxes on a checkpoint.

05-01:39:07
Meeker:

So Jewish Federations of North America, in essence, has retained more of the Council of Jewish Federation's profile, as opposed to United Jewish—

05-01:39:17
Feinstein:

It's once again a trade association. [laughter] As best I can tell, they don't get the first tier leadership from communities, because communities—leave this aside; I'm talking about the Detroits and Clevelands and Chicagos that are still powerhouse federations that still get 70 percent of the community to affiliate, and 70 percent to donate. I mean, they're still as strong as they once were, but those Midwestern communities remain largely homogenous. They don't have the level of assimilation that we have, or intermarriage, and so on and so forth. These are all, I thought, potentially soluble problems. They did not have to become intractably vexing, but easier said than done. So I think that UJA gave some important flavor to the national infrastructure. Interestingly, when you get Brian and Joel in a room over a Scotch to talk about this, they both think it was the biggest mistake of their communal careers. I think it was a mistake. It's yesterday's news.

05-01:40:30
Meeker:

Well, let's end on that. We will meet one more time, in that there is a lot that I'd like to discuss about Israel, particularly, you know, the context of what's happening in Israel politically during your time as director. The Oslo Accords, Rabin's assassination, Netanyahu's first election, and a couple of times that you've alluded to—for instance, the exclusive power of Orthodox rabbis over conversions in Israel—and criticism in Reform congregations here about not funding Reform congregations in Israel. So those kinds of issues, I think, we'd like to discuss, and then also the loss of your son Ben and the establishment of the foundation in his name. So if there are other ideas that you'd like to cover—

05-01:41:28
Feinstein:

We did establish a donor-advised fund and federation in Ben's name, but the foundation I'm most involved with is Gastric Cancer Foundation. Yeah, okay.

05-01:41:38
Meeker:

Well, I mean in his memory, maybe.

05-01:41:40
Feinstein:

Yes, yeah. I got involved thinking we could find a cure before too late, but it wasn't really in his memory. And I'm just telling my board—I think I've told you this—that June 30 is it for me, so we have a board meeting in two weeks, and things go out on a high. [laughter]

05-01:42:00
Meeker:

Good, all right.

Interview 6: September 2, 2016

06-00:00:01

Meeker:

Today is the second of September, 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Wayne Feinstein for the Jewish Community Federation Oral History Project. This is interview session number six. We covered your term as the executive of JCF in good detail last time, but there's still some strands that I want to follow up on, and the most important one is the relationship of the work that you were doing at JCF here in San Francisco to the broader international context, particularly what's going on in Israel, both the work that JCF is sponsoring in Israel, but also the social, political context of what happens in Israel during your term as Chief Executive. And so maybe we should start out with those broader contextual questions, and certainly there's a lot that I don't have down here, but amongst the three main topics are the Oslo Accords in '93, '95, Rabin's assassination in November of '95, and then the first election of Netanyahu shortly after, in June '96. That's just a small sampling of some of the really transformative things that happened in Israel during this period of time. You know, as leader of the federation here in San Francisco, maybe walk me through these various events and describe for me the impact that they had on your own work here.

06-00:01:57

Feinstein:

Sure. And in fairness to you, you did give me a heads up. [laughter] But I've read the questions a few times over the last couple weeks, but I have not thought deeply about the period, so I'm struggling because I'm going to have to bring it back. I think we'd already established my personal philosophical focus on Israel, and this federation, through Brian Lurie's time and through mine, continued on a pretty common agenda of thirty years, and that had to do with trying to create linkages between the Jewish community of the Bay Area and the Jewish community of Israel—not always easy. And we'd created at the tail of Brian's term an institutional structure to help with that that bypassed the national and international institutional structures of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the government and the Consul General and so on. So there were, by the early- to mid-1990s, a lot of channels, number one. Number two, the Jewish Community Relations Council, whose executive was already Doug Kahn, and I worked hand in glove. As we probably established, I really enjoy the community relations and public affairs agenda, and arguably had something to add strategically, or just in terms of thinking through something. And third, the Northern California Jewish community, while it does have a significant pocket of Israel-firsters, people who just believe that whatever AIPAC spouts or whatever Ariel Sharon, who was then Prime Minister, or subsequently Netanyahu, would argue had to be followed—after all, it was a democracy; that's who they elected; we had to fall in step—versus a majority of the population, both those involved in organized Jewish communal life, and certainly the large number who had no even nominal affiliation. And so you'd rarely see a protest demonstration in Justin Herman Plaza that there weren't identifiable Jewish faces, names, or otherwise, or more, signs, frequently

people who'd come over from Berkeley or SF State. And, of course, you'd always have your smattering of whatever the local affiliations are for the Palestinian organization at the time, and so on.

So, on the one hand, there was a deep view, although it was not as profound as it became by the end of the nineties, and certainly in the last decade and a half, that the Palestinians were hapless. They had a corrupt leadership. We heard about that chapter and verse once Arafat died. I mean, he purloined \$2 billion, and his wife was just going to show up in Geneva and pick it up, and then his successor leadership said, "Ah-ah-ah, not so quickly, that's our money." It's funny, I just went to a ballgame with Doug Kahn the other day, and he's now fully retired, so we were actually reminiscing a little bit about this, and I said something like I'm now saying to you—this is just a few days ago or so—and I said, "You know, I have a theory about much of the third world's elected leadership. They started out as warriors or combatants of some kind. They get ensconced in power. They're there for a long period of time. And then their natural venality, their need to use the position they finally attained to line their pockets, gets in the way." And I said, "Sometimes when I think about the failure of the Oslo Accords or the Camp David II meeting, where Arafat had 95 percent of what he wanted, Clinton had done a skillful job of pushing Rabin, whose instinct, I think correctly"—you know, here was one of Israel's great warriors, but he must've thought—I never discussed it with him; he didn't live long enough to write a detailed memoir, but I knew him reasonably well as an American Jewish communal leader could know the prime minister, or former foreign minister, and so on. He was a very strong, thoughtful man, and I think he had enough sense of history that he just knew we have to make this deal. It's better than what we're dealing with now. And that was twenty years ago or so. And if Clinton had been as effective at nudging Arafat to the finish line— So I said to Doug, "I think he just couldn't help himself. The guy was a kleptocrat. So if there was peace with Israel, if he survived peace with Israel—and he was no Anwar Sadat—if he had survived peace with Israel, and wasn't assassinated by someone in his own cabinet, he probably would lose his post." And at that point he probably only had a billion dollars collected, so he had to go on. Now, that's a very cynical view, but over decades I have developed a very cynical view of the people who pass for the leadership of the Palestinians. I mean, the current guy's a joke.

06-00:07:42

Meeker:

How closely were you following the lead-up to the Accords and the negotiations, and—

06-00:07:47

Feinstein:

Very. Very.

06-00:07:48

Meeker:

Yeah. What did you think of—I know it's a ways in the distance to think about some of the details, but as you were learning about what was transpiring there, what were your, I guess, personal thoughts on what was happening?

06-00:08:04
Feinstein:

Well, in sequence it went Oslo Accords first, and then Camp David II second, so as a practical matter there were press blankets over both events. The Oslo Accord negotiation took far longer than the Camp David negotiation, number one. Number two, I'm sure you know, when you have an event that brings heads of state together, there's been a lot of groundwork done. So I knew a number of the people who were doing the groundwork. I know Denny Ross, and I knew Martin Indyk. I knew people on the Israeli side in the Foreign Ministry. And it's funny, the people who have been my friends—most of them are retired now—in the Foreign Ministry, like Eytan Ben-Zur, with whom I became friends when he was the Consul General in Los Angeles, consummate inside player, and good mind, and very good strategic thinker. I would say that to a person, they had, at least through the early nineties, they had a bias towards the labor view of Israel's Zionist philosophy, and therefore they were more naturally inclined to try to find some accommodation with their neighbor. So through the Oslo Accords, and really at the Camp David Accord, you had people—and Rabin at that point was the leader of that point of view—who just said, "Wouldn't we be better off, provided we could get back to what Yigal Allon had argued in 1968 would be a security belt on the hilltops on the West Bank, just so we can keep an eye on what's down below?" Now, how that would've worked in practice, I don't know, but the Israelis are pretty good about security measures. And I think Rabin always felt that—

Now, by the way, he opposed Allon in the late 1960s, but I think he just realized this is year after year after year of sacrificing young boys and girls on both sides for some implacable, entrenched, impossible position that doesn't allow either side to flourish. And remember, by the mid-1990s you still did not have the startup nation. It was building already, and arguably the thing that gave that the motive push, like a snowball that becomes an avalanche in a snowy mountain region, was probably the Russian migration, because you had so many people who had advanced degrees in engineering and science and math, and it was a brain drain for the Soviet Union, and a boon for Israel, no doubt about it. In fact, I may have told you this story already about lobbying the Japanese ambassador when I was the head of the LA Jewish Federation. I didn't?

06-00:11:16
Meeker:

I don't think I heard that story, yeah.

06-00:11:16
Feinstein:

It's a cute story. I don't want to take this much time now, but if you're interested we could circle back to it. And part of the argument was Israel just has a surfeit of brain power now, and you've got a paucity. And they, Japan, were following the Arab economic boycott. Well, here's a great opportunity that's a win-win for Japan. There's much more to the story, but—

06-00:11:44

Meeker:

You were advocating that Japan opens its doors to the Russian Jewish immigrants?

06-00:11:48

Feinstein:

No, that they do direct trade with Israel, which to that point they weren't. So that's the end of the eighties, so here we are six, seven years later. So to answer your question directly, I don't think I knew or most of us knew much, unless you got briefed by the Consul General, but that presumed that he got briefed by someone close to the negotiations. I do know Yossi Beilin, and he is a close, personal friend of Brian Lurie's, and we're close friends, so Brian was getting snippets of this. Brian was then head of the UJA, so he was getting little pieces of what was going on, and Brian and I, unfortunately or fortunately, share the same very progressive cast of mind and philosophy, so we just thought for years that there had to— I mean, as a young Zionist, I thought Yigal Allon was exactly right, that to end the Six-Day War and wind up with a permanent occupation of a large, exclusively in '67, Arab population was folly.

06-00:13:08

Meeker:

Is that Sinai that you're talking about?

06-00:13:11

Feinstein:

No, '67 would've been the Six-Day War, and that's when Yigal Allon was the—let's see, he might've been Foreign Minister, but he was arguing for these ten hilltop—

06-00:13:26

Meeker:

Along the West Bank.

06-00:13:27

Feinstein:

Yeah, in the West Bank—yeah, that's what I was talking about. Sinai was denuded of population. You had some Bedouins, but you didn't have Egyptians living there. You didn't have Israelis living there. Over the coming years, between '67 and the first Camp David Accords, when Begin gave back Sinai, you had several tens of thousands of Israelis who had moved there with all kinds of government incentives, and then one of the things Begin had to do was move them out again and rebuild. But it was certainly worthwhile. And you've had generally a very cold peace until now. And interestingly—because Hosni Mubarak, whatever you say about him as a leader of his people—again, a kleptocrat, et cetera, et cetera—he's really been a friend to Israel in terms of back channels. But now you have a whole realignment going on in the Arab world, which is fascinating to watch, and led by Saudis, and the new regime in Saudi Arabia just saying, "This hasn't worked for seventy years. Maybe we need to do something different." And Sisi, who was trained with Israeli officers, has close relationships with the Israeli chiefs of staff and senior generals, and vice versa. There are many Israelis currently in the operational leadership of the IDF who trained with these Egyptian officers, and there probably have been some Saudis who've co-trained with Israelis, because

America runs these special ops camps, and so on and so forth. Now we jump to the Camp David Accords, and it was more porous. The Clinton people wanted support among the more progressives in the Jewish community, so we would get a daily briefing, and, of course, it was a shorter conclave than the Oslo Accords entailed.

06-00:15:26

Meeker:

Was Albright Secretary of State at this point, or was it still Christopher? Do you recall? But was it on that level that it was the State Department that was engaged?

06-00:15:36

Feinstein:

I think by the time of Camp David II it was Madeleine Albright. And there was a sidebar, because that was also about the time she discovered her Jewish heritage, and then the naysayers would say, “Oh, then she can’t be unbiased.” [laughter] But this is why I find some of the attacks on Hillary Clinton so interesting. Of course, it was largely because she served Obama, who Netanyahu had just decided was the devil incarnate, but she was Secretary of State, and she served that president, and if she disagreed with him that avidly she could’ve stepped down. But the underlying facts, jumping ahead twenty years, are that during the first Obama term, Israel delivered more in material assistance than in any prior four-year term of any president, but it got lost. AIPAC purposely lost it, because they had a pro-Netanyahu bias, and they had essentially a Republican–Jewish coalition-led officer group, and Howard Kohr, who’s got no backbone, except with regard to supporting a rightwing government of Israel. In other words, the view that eventually they were going to have to kill every Arab, and for me that’s always been a nonstarter. So we were hearing that great progress was being made, and then all of a sudden there wasn’t.

06-00:17:08

Meeker:

How were they seeking to bring the Progressive Jewish population, leadership into support? What was the nature of the exchange?

06-00:17:23

Feinstein:

I don’t know whether there was someone in the president’s inner circle, or whether it was the president himself, or whether—I can’t imagine Rabin doing this, because he was always very good about keeping things very close to the vest. But there were friends in the Israel Foreign Ministry who made a point of letting their friends in the West know. So we had this very active chatter going on. And what’s the logical outcome of that? Well, if I know, I’m going to tell at least ten or twenty people. So I’d always talk to my officers. If there was a public meeting, we’d have a closed session, and this is what I hear, and Doug Kahn and I would talk about it, and others. And again, San Francisco is sui generis among the North American Jewish community for all the obvious reasons, so I don’t think there needed to be any positive reinforcement here. We had a very tiny cadre of people who were opposed.

06-00:18:22

Meeker:

Well, from your perch as Executive of the Federation, was there a role for you to explicitly advocate and—? No.

06-00:18:33

Feinstein:

No, and that theoretically would've been a no-no.

06-00:18:37

Meeker:

Well, because of tax laws, 501(c)(3), that sort of stuff.

06-00:18:40

Feinstein:

Yeah. But at the end of the day, there wasn't an accord, and I don't think the fault ever went to Israel. That's one time that the European and Western media broadly said he succeeded—he, Arafat—in snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

06-00:19:01

Meeker:

So what did you think when that happened? Was it, oh, once Arafat passes away, which is not too far down the road—I can't remember where Sharon was in all of this at this point, but we can revisit this again. "Our generation will be the leadership. We can take over. Cooler heads will prevail, and then we'll have a better chance." Or was it that was the last great chance to do something?

06-00:19:30

Feinstein:

Well, first off, no matter what American Jewish leaders, however defined, think, we don't vote in those elections in Israel, and so we can be the pom-pom squad, but it's up to the sitting cabinet and the sitting prime minister to say, "Let's try this again." And what happened after Rabin's assassination, just jumping ahead, is you then had a brief interregnum with Ehud Barak, and then you had Sharon. And Sharon was the architect. Now, Sharon was a deep thinker. Like Rabin, my guess is, in time, he might've finally said, "We have to do something." Whether he would've been willing to go as far as Rabin is another matter, but it didn't happen. And I think after the assassination of Rabin the sides were hardened in Israel, not unlike what we see in American politics right now, where—and this was a Jew killing a Jew, because the rabbi, his rabbi, his yeshiva rabbi said, with a completely twisted misinterpretation of Talmudic ethic, that since he's capitulating to the enemy it is your duty as a proud Jew to stop him. What does that mean? I mean, that's code for "it's okay to assassinate the guy." And so this is nineteen eighty—no, ninety—

06-00:21:26

Meeker:

Rabin was assassinated November of '95, I believe.

06-00:21:29

Feinstein:

Was it? Okay. Yeah. My son Sam was born in '83, so he would've been twelve, and we went that summer. The summer before his bar mitzvah we went to Israel, so this was already behind us. It was a wonderful three-week family trip. My in-laws went, and so on, so forth. But I remember what happened. I had actually been at synagogue for some reason, because I'm not

a weekly temple-goer, and I came home, and my phone was ringing, and it was Natan Golan, who worked for us in Jerusalem, who is Orthodox, and—now, it was already ten hours later—telling me horrible news, Yitzhak Rabin was just shot to death at a peace rally in Tel Aviv, what’s now called Rabin Square, and he just wanted to tell me immediately. And I hung up the phone. Leslee said, “What’s wrong?” And I said, “Prime Minister Rabin was just shot by a Jew and killed.” “Oh my God.” And so my weekend disappeared, because my next call was to Doug Kahn, and my third call was to whoever the Federation president was, probably Doug Heller at the time. And I think by Sunday we had organized some type of a communal rally, and in consultation with the Israelis, and so on, so forth. Whatever your politics were, this had never happened before. And I don’t think there was ever any palpable fear in either the Israeli community or the American Jewish community that this would mean chaos in Israel. It was a strong enough, vibrant enough democracy, and, in point of fact, Ehud Barak was one of Yitzhak Rabin’s fair-haired boys. He was a brilliant military leader, very, very tough man. So it’s a natural move from Defense Ministry to Prime Minister. I think he was, in many ways, a tone-deaf politician, Ehud Barak. Rabin, I think, not only had more gravitas, but he also had more respect, because he was from the founding generation.

So those were major events. To sum it up, there is a limit to what even the most passionate American Jewish leader, in quotes, is able to do. We did what we could. We would be supportive. I don’t know whether you have more—

06-00:24:16

Meeker:

Well, I guess what about does this have any impact whatsoever on the actual work of the Federation?

06-00:24:27

Feinstein:

Well, the one question that got debated both in the Israel and Overseas Committee, and then by the amuta, or members of the amuta. And some of this happened telephonically. I went over to Israel shortly thereafter for a few days. I don’t remember why anymore. It might’ve been ostensibly a Project Renewal consultation, but talked with many members of the amuta. And the amuta was predominantly Progressive Israeli Jews, but not exclusively. And even the people who tended to vote for Likud were horrified that this had happened in their democracy, and horrified that you would have these ultra-Orthodox rabbis of yeshivas that would argue such a thing. And I’m sure you saw after Trump was saying certain people need to be killed, in so many words, saying, you know, that kind of sloppy language is what caused the death of Yitzhak Rabin. In fact, that’s how Tom Friedman’s piece that concludes with, “You are a disgusting man; I hope you lose ignominiously in fifty states and your children should be ashamed of you,” which—and I’ve been reading Tom Friedman for thirty years; [laughter] I’ve never seen him excoriate someone like that. And it couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy. So it was just remarkable that something like this had happened. So I think for a

very, very long time there were many of us who had a different political philosophy who were just deeply saddened that it had come to this, just as lots of us are deeply saddened that American politics are where they are right now. And wackos come out in the absence. In highly populist periods in history—not just American—you find this kind of nuttiness that springs up where the extremes are given license, and sometimes they act out in very destructive ways. So the question was how to channel that. And we did a few things as a result. We increased our support in the Arab sector through the amuta. And that was quite deliberate and purposeful. You had to find projects that made some sense, but we had many. And particularly in the North, which is where this federation had chosen to concentrate, not in Tel Aviv, not in Jerusalem, but in the North, and, of course, that's on the border with Lebanon and Syria.

06-00:26:56

Meeker:

Which is where the Federation had their main project town.

06-00:27:00

Feinstein:

Yeah, Kiryat Shmona and other places around there. And so that was number one. Through the endowment we funded a project to have discussion groups around the region, led by the JCRC and rabbis, on tolerance, and proper interpretations of Jewish ethics, and the Talmud, and so on and so forth. I don't remember the rabbi's name who licensed this hit on Yitzhak Rabin. It was just a terrible misreading.

06-00:27:43

Meeker:

Did you ever attend any of these discussion groups?

06-00:27:49

Feinstein:

Not here. I did in Israel, but not here.

06-00:27:51

Meeker:

Yeah. Do you recall what the sort of tenor and approach was?

06-00:27:56

Feinstein:

Well, except on the college campuses, they were not well attended, so you had certain rabbis who would have study groups and so on in the weeks immediately following the Rabin assassination, and there were some who had a more outspokenly progressive cast than others who were railing against the ultra-Orthodox. And that only sharpened up the differences between the average San Francisco Jew, who was assimilated, acculturated or, in any case, not traditionally observant, versus the traditional. But I don't remember anyone trying to defend that malicious interpretation, that it was okay to kill the rodef, the person who was pursuing a bad path. And that's how the ultra-Orthodox, in some quarters, were defining Rabin. These are the same people who like a provocation on the Temple Mount. Sharon stooped to that at some point. Having just been there, the Israelis are hyper vigilant about preventing that kind of nuttiness to occur, because they know it's the match and dry tinder. They really do. They've seen it before. When Sharon went up there, it

was intended to be prevocational, and it succeeded, because the intifada sprang from that step.

06-00:29:33

Meeker: That was after your time here, though, correct? That was just right after it, or—

06-00:29:39

Feinstein: Yeah, I finished in the summer of 2000.

06-00:29:42

Meeker: I think that we talked about this a little bit last time—you alluded to it, rather, and maybe we could talk about it, and that was the increasing power of the Orthodox in Israel, and their increasing reluctance to recognize other strains, and particularly their power over conversions that, I guess, Conservative or Reform traditions were not authorized to preside over conversions, which rankled a lot of people in the United States, because it was seen as part of the delegitimizing of their own traditions. How do you manage that in—

06-00:30:38

Feinstein: In a highly assimilated community?

06-00:30:40

Meeker: Well, in a highly assimilated community, and also representing that community through the Federation, but also wanting to engage with Israel and maintain the close relationships.

06-00:31:00

Feinstein: Well, there are lots of different layers. The issue, writ large, began while I was LA Federation Director, and we may have talked about that. And by that point, I was squarely a West Coast Federation executive in LA and San Francisco, and so we had constituencies, so to speak, that were heavily assimilated, and heavily intermarried, and that seemed to be an irreversible, inexorable trend. And so you had people who were six figure or better donors to the annual campaign, and to all things Jewish and Zionist and so on, who, at best, were deeply offended that the official position of the State of Israel—because you have a state-recognized rabbinate—I may have said it previously, but I think it was David Ben-Gurion's most significant bad decision. Now there are two, although he was probably right about this. I wouldn't have expected you to read Ari Shavit's book, *My Promised Land*, but he details, as a careful journalist, the decision by the Zionist leadership, led by David Ben-Gurion, to push the Arabs out of the coastal plain in 1948. So the Israelis did not fire the first shot, but once the Arabs came in from all sides to deny the UN mandate that there should be a Jewish state in Israel, and as soon as Israel declared itself an independent nation, in May of '48, you had this Anschluss from every side, and the Israelis succeeded in batting it back. But one of the concomitants to that was that they pushed the Arab populations, who had been there, they say, for millennia, but let's say at least multiple generations, out of the coastal plain, knowing that that was going to be the prime area of Jewish

settlement, and that it would not work long-term to have traditional Arab villages surrounded by modern Tel Aviv, and so on and so forth.

So those two big decisions, first legitimating an Orthodox rabbinate—and all Ben-Gurion wanted was to neutralize a possible political issue for a few years, not knowing it would be enshrined over time. So here we come up to the eighties, and an effort that I think was a power grab on the part of the Orthodox to say, “Only we are the authorities on this subject,” have had terrible, divisive, lasting effects. Now, particularly when you understand that Jewish laws against intermarriage are, relative to the span of Jewish history, a relatively recent phenomenon—they really were promulgated in the late Middle Ages, and not in the Arab countries, where there were significant populations—in Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and the reason is one of those peculiarities when you study the sociopolitical context of how laws are created in religions that, after generations of being ghettoized and pushed to the side and marginalized and told “I don’t want to do business with you, your son may not walk with my daughter, let alone marry her, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah,” and it’s like the Groucho Marx joke: any club that would have someone like me I would never join. Okay, they don’t want us? Well, to hell with them! They can’t marry our daughters, either. And here you are centuries later where it is a cardinal tenet, and the average Jew has no notion whatsoever of the origin of Jewish law, so they assume it was given at Sinai by God, “You can only marry a Jew,” and now you have the Orthodox rabbinate, many of whom are, on a practical basis, completely ignorant. I mean, they may have a rabbinical ordination, but they’re idiots. And I have been involved in arguments. They’re nonstarters. It’s like some of the nuttiness right now going on with this country. No-nothing-ism has been a very powerful episodic trend in American democracy. So here’s the Jewish version of no-nothing-ism. “Well, I’m the rabbi.” [laughter] You’re lucky you wear slip-on shoes, because you’d never be able to tie your laces. But they’re in charge! They’re in charge.

So when we moved to Detroit, I came home Friday afternoon—it might’ve been my first week on the job—and in those days we lit Shabbos candles. Let’s see, Sam wasn’t born yet, but we were already lighting Shabbos candles and had a small ritual. Leslee had grown up with that periodically. She grew up in a very Reform Jewish family. Her father’s father was an Orthodox Jew, and my late father-in-law just rejected all of that. And Burt’s father was one of the founders of Beth Shalom, the primary Conservative synagogue in town. He wanted nothing to do with it, so they belonged to a very Reform congregation, and they were Jewish ritual-light, as in practice are we today. So I see on the kitchen island a blue pushka, and I pick it up, and it’s a Chabad pushka. And without saying anything to Leslee, I just threw it in the trash. She looked at me. She said, “I can’t believe you’re doing that.” I said, “It’s from Chabad.” She said, “What do you have against Chabad? It was such a nice, young rabbi.” And then I told her my issue with Chabad. I said, “They’ll tell the ignorant anything to get you to support them, and so on, but they’re

deceitful.” It’s not a term I use a lot, even though I did use it about someone last session. So I use it advisedly, but that’s been my experience. I think I did tell you this, because we were talking about Rabbi Cunin in LA, and that I had a love/hate with him.

06-00:38:04

Meeker:

Right, we talked about that.

06-00:38:04

Feinstein:

And I did confront him on more than one occasion, and he always demurred, because he was never going to contradict Rabbi Schneerson. I understand it. So we found the ways that we could cooperate, but I wasn’t going to be a personal support of Chabad, not then, not now, not ever. So they were largely from an office in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, determining what the Chief Rabbinate of Israel would say about who was a Jew. And that was, episodically, an explosive issue in West Coast communities, and maybe the whole country, but boy, it was in LA and it was here, where major donors would say, “If the State of Israel thinks that my son’s wife is not Jewish and that my grandchildren are not Jewish, well, to hell with them. I’m not donating a dime anymore.” So it was a simplification in response to an emotional outrage, and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out the psychodynamic here. And I had to go systematically explain what was going on, and I think I told you this, that I wound up bringing in the head of the UJA, who was himself a six-figure donor to Chabad—he was an Orthodox Jew who just thought Rabbi Schneerson, on balance, was doing far more good than bad—to say, “Look, I am a supporter of Chabad, but Wayne is right: this came from Rabbi Schneerson, dear Rabbi Schneerson. And they’re different issues. This is not the government of the State of Israel.” But it’s very hard to explain, unless you understand how politics work in Israel. So I think that is still an issue that raises its head from time to time. It’s just come up again very recently, because there was an edict from the Chief Rabbinate saying that only a handful of recognized Orthodox rabbis practicing in North America can give a kosher conversion.

And here’s the beautiful footnote. One of the de-legitimated Orthodox rabbis was one of the most distinguished modern Orthodox rabbis in America today—he’s now about eighty years old—is Haskel Lookstein of Kehilath Jeshurun in Manhattan, who happened to be Ivanka Trump’s conversion rabbi. Now, I haven’t heard the candidate pound on his chest and say, “God damn the rabbinate in Israel.” [laughter]

06-00:40:50

Meeker:

Oh, man! So to bring things back a little bit to San Francisco, one of the things that was reported on at the time was that as this was happening, you know, there was consternation in the Reform and Conservative Jewish community in San Francisco saying that the Federation needs to do more, not only to promote dialogue and religious pluralism, but they should be supporting

actual Reform congregations in Israel, so direct funding to religious organization, which, from what I understand, previously—

06-00:41:31

Feinstein: Had not been done.

06-00:41:32

Meeker: —had not been done. So tell me about hearing this critique. You know, what was your thought on it and the response to it?

06-00:41:40

Feinstein: Well, as you might gather, I was very sympathetic to that. It was a way of saying “up yours” to the Orthodox. We didn’t support any individual Reform congregation in Israel, but we did support the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. And you’d asked a broader question, and I narrowed the focus: what were the institutional ways, or how could we influence institutional ways to respond to this topic? Now that I’m removed for so many years, I think it was a very high-level effort to channel our anger and manage us. It was a way of handling us. But the official body that allowed Reform or Conservative Jews in America to express their views to the government of Israel was the World Zionist Organization. So there was an existing infrastructure from that, and, of course, they were the component, they were the political body, the congress, if you will, that guided the policy of the Jewish Agency for Israel. This is one of the reasons why this community first, but many in time, progressively reduced their support of the UJA that went to the Jewish Agency for Israel and found other channels. And once we got away with it, which began in Brian’s term, and then I took it up to a different level—I’d already done it in LA; I never would have done it in Detroit, but here we needed a relief valve, and this became the relief valve. So you’d trumpet that in your public relations. You put it in your campaign publicity. And unlike LA, which has a substantial traditional population—we had a marginal traditional population, so I didn’t worry about the counter-political consequences in Northern California. What I was worried about was our core constituency. And you didn’t know these people. Some of them have oral histories on file over there, but the late Bill Lowenberg, for example, an Auschwitz survivor who was a Reform Jew, and very successful in America, was just—and he became a Jewish Agency board member, but outraged that they could do something like this.

So we used our bully pulpit and our allocations to make a statement, which is: unh-uh. These are proud members of our community, supportive members. And, again, there are Orthodox rabbinical scholars, and non-Orthodox rabbinical scholars, who would say that I’m making a point that deserves a lot of commentary at best, or is illegitimate at worst, but the way Jewish law evolved on these matters of social content and communal cohesiveness, and so on, was very slow, and very progressive. And as I indicated five minutes ago, it was a relatively late event to put up these barriers between Jews and non-Jews, and this is the point that I sometimes get criticized by an Orthodox

scholar. You look at all of our core stories as a Jewish people in the five books of Moses, and I defy you to find families that did not have a significant intermarriage. Why? The historical context. You want intertribal peace. So how about we arrange your daughter marries my son? And pagan heritage. But Judaism was nascent. I mean, it was brand new. What were our barriers? Only that a man had to be circumcised. So we found lots of accommodation for centuries. Had to. We were new. We were embryonic. We were like a Bay Area startup in biotech. You have to get through the critical ten years—so read that ten generations—before you start putting in more normative or institutionalizing laws, regulations, codes of conduct, and so on.

So, when I make that comment on occasion, as I did on occasion, as I did publicly on occasion, either for the press or in a public speech, or in a board meeting, I rarely got set back. If I did it in a non-San Francisco or a non-LA setting, a national meeting, a congress or something like that, there'd be ten people at the microphones to challenge me on it. And some were smart, but I made the point—I was conscious and aware of what I was doing, because on some subjects, again, because I had political instincts anyway, I would run point on some of the more controversial matters at a Jewish Agency assembly and so on, where we'd find the compromise points, and we'd figure out who should talk. I did the same thing about refugee resettlement, which I think we talked about, and it was a topic I knew very, very well, and I remember telling you that one of my prime motivations was movement of Soviet Jews out of Russia, and it didn't matter to me whether they went to Israel or came here. I understood the Zionist argument they should all go to Israel, but my grandparents came here, and I wasn't going to say it was okay for my family but not okay for you; you have to go to Jerusalem or Tel Aviv or Holon or wherever you're going to go. So on those kinds of subjects, I was having fun. I don't think I was making fun, but I took that role seriously. It was really one of the fun things I did.

06-00:48:15

Meeker:

Do you feel like you had any impact, or—?

06-00:48:18

Feinstein:

Yes. Yeah, because a lot of the governing rules from assembly to assembly, either I was involved for a period of years in writing what became the agreed-upon policy, or in finding the compromise, and finding the votes necessary to achieve that compromise.

06-00:48:39

Meeker:

What was the disposition?

06-00:48:40

Feinstein:

Depended on the subject, yeah. You'd get this periodic pushback, because we were just seen as Peck's bad boys out here in San Francisco. And our UJA, therefore, Jewish Agency allocation was steadily declining. And yet, we were still exercising a disproportionate voice on these subjects. And when we'd be

confronted, as we were at almost every one of these meetings—we'd wind up in a late-night or early morning meeting in our suite, or somebody else's, you know, one of the leader's suites. I used to call these taking us out to the woodshed sessions, and they happened regularly. [laughter] And it wasn't normal for an executive director to be as aggressively assertive, but I would be, because it was like being—I wasn't an attorney by training, but it was like being the retained counsel. After all, I was the guy—and Brian played the same role, and so he was sort of my role model in that respect. But laymen that I like a lot personally—Norm Lipoff was then one of the top leaders of the Jewish Agency board, and of the UJA, and a very elegant, polished, articulate debater, top lawyer in south Florida. And really, he used diplomatic words, but it was as mean as you could get. And no one in my delegation would challenge him, and I'd known him a long time. And I was a trained debater. I came back with the same amount of aggression, and said, "There are going to be matters on which we're going to agree to disagree, so at a certain point you're going to have to decide, have we violated some code sufficient that you're going to ostracize us, in which case we'll take our allocation and run the whole thing through the amuta, or are you going to try to work with us? And we believe that there should be more movement in our direction. We've seen none, only this effort to try to put the horse back in the barn," words to that effect.

So that woodshed session ended like so many of them did, where we'd get no agreement, no move in our direction from the leadership, and then we'd have to take the fight to the assembly. And the last half day of the general assembly would be when policy would be made, and they'd put forward proposals that we then managed—not always; we didn't succeed every time—to get either a compromise in the language, or set aside, or a deferral on the motion. They weren't designed to chastise San Francisco, per se, but they were reinforcing the things that offended us, and offended our constituencies. And then in a private hallway conversation, as I'd walk down the hall with Norm, I'd say, "I really don't enjoy that." He said, "Well, neither do I." He said, "I've known you and respected you a long time, but we have these official roles." I said, "I recognize that, but that's the reason I wanted to have a private one-on-one with you." I said, "It would be awfully helpful if you'd get—You're a wise man. If you could get your compatriots to agree, if there were just a little move in our direction it would be very helpful." He said, "I don't think so." He said, "It comes from the government on down. They don't want any issue with the rabbi." And so they had their own political reasons to do what they were doing. And at the end of the day—and this comes to the text, and some of the questions you were asking me about the nineties and these diplomatic efforts getting lost, or the assassination of Rabin—we're a nonprofit organization. We're an NGO. That's the government of a sovereign state. They got all kinds of political horses to trade. We're the pimple on the elephant's ass. [laughter]

06-00:52:39

Meeker:

Well, okay, I appreciate that. We can end that particular chapter. I guess the last bit to follow up on Israel is talking about the amuta; that is, the direct support of Israel from the Federation. What is your evaluation of the work that was done through that when you were the executive? You know, I'd like actually to hear some of what you would consider success stories, or the impact funding.

06-00:53:16

Feinstein:

It was one of several reasons why coming back to San Francisco in the fall of '91 was so enticing to me, because here was one, and at that point the only community that actually had created a formal structure for challenging the domain consensus, and I don't think that the allocation philosophy was at all worked out when I came back in '91, but we did that progressively over the coming years, and it was one aspect of our operation that I took a very active hand in shaping over time. So I mentioned earlier that one of our responses was support for Progressive religious expression in Israel. Another had to do with funding in the Arab sector, which I'd already had experience with in Los Angeles. We had a very different construct, because the Galilee region is still replete with small Arab villages, and the big issue for us is that these were citizens—not naturalized citizens—these were citizens of the State of Israel who were treated at best the way America treated blacks prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*. At best, they were second-class citizens. Now, it's not that I had a passionate love affair with an Arab community. I personally had no friends in the Arab sector. I mean, I had people that I knew and that I respected, but we hadn't gone to each other's homes for dinners and so on, so it wasn't that at all. For me, it was a principle. And I think for many of the leadership, when I came back, that was the case, as well. And a pragmatic view that, if Israel would ever have peace at some point in the future, she had to have internal peace. There had to be a recognition that these are Arabs who chose to stay. They didn't flee. They aren't in refugee camps. Presumably, at least in 1991 or '93, their children were not running off to join the PLO and strap C-4 to their chests and blow up buses, and so on and so forth. Those kids were coming in from the West Bank.

So the amuta became our institutional means for achieving that, and early in my tenure what we did, because so much of our focus was on the Galil, the Galilee region, I caused a slight change. The amuta would come north when we were there once a year, and stay overnight, and we'd have at least a two-day session. We'd review all of our grants. But I wanted us to start making grants that had national impact, and not just regional impact. And so we began supporting things like World Union for Progressive Judaism, and so on and so forth. The Yerushalmis and Tel Avivis who were on the amuta were very high-profile Israelis, and some I had met through the so-called Moriah Conference, and the emerging leadership of Israel. Some had gone on to become members of Knesset, and very prominent members of Knesset. Some were captains of businesses, very successful. And they were affiliating with

us, because they wanted a textured and layered relationship with Jews in America, not just TVs talking to TVs. And we were very, very proud of that. And it also helped shape us. We had a woman who was the Deputy Attorney General for the State of Israel who was a member of the amuta. She only served two years. She'd argue before the Israeli Supreme Court, and said to me on more than one occasion the ongoing engagement with us, both in meetings and letter exchanges and visits to America and our visits there, helped shape her thinking about the things that she advocated for in terms of the progressive development of the state, and that sometimes could not get through the Knesset, but a lawyer will always have a reason why something has to be argued in the court system, and finally after the Supreme Court, which, as it does here, makes the law of the land. So I felt great about that, and we were able to do those kinds of things, and it did figure prominently in our campaign publicity and otherwise. We wouldn't say, "Give to the Federation so that money will go to the amuta so that your desire to see a more progressive Israel will evolve." It was textured, nuanced. But that was our—I mean, we didn't hide it, because when you'd see our statement of allocations— But if at that time there were twenty thousand annual campaign donors, I'll bet you there might've been a few hundred who understood the institutional way. They didn't care. They just wanted to know that they were supporting things that they cared about.

Now, if they were synagogue affiliated and they belonged to a Reform synagogue, their rabbis cared that we were being responsive. So it was also reinforcing to our constituency, which were the Jews in this region, or the people who were their leaders, because they were the rabbis, they were the lay leaders in the Reform movement who were active in the World Union or this or that, and they knew that this federation was trying to be responsive. And so there were a cadre of Israelis who came to see us as a constructive voice. Some of what we supported did get quite brutally attacked by some on the right in Israel; I get that. But, again, a lot of this was for domestic consumption, as the saying goes, because we were de facto making a political statement, and they were responding with a political statement. But it worked for us.

06-01:00:19
Meeker:

Evaluating that work, can you identify any examples of investments that were particularly successful? Particular organizations, or something along those lines?

06-01:00:33
Feinstein:

Yeah. Well— There were a couple that I think have actually had long-term beneficial impact, one of which we did not originate. This was a grassroots Israeli organization that had started with New Israel Fund funding and then realized that we might be responsive to them, and we were, so we were co-funders. And New Israel Fund and San Francisco amuta were the two big

fundress. You're going to ask me the name of this organization and I am not going to remember, but their—

06-01:01:05

Meeker:

We'll write it in.

06-01:01:06

Feinstein:

Their focus was to work with grassroots leadership and empower them to either develop local helping organizations or associations of organizations, and the motivation was entirely progressive, and we just felt great about that. And then there was a corollary to that, which is—and we encouraged the few other communities that had similar regional counterpart structures. They didn't all create foundations the way we did, which is really what an amuta is, under Israeli law. So our view was that you could take these—it's just classic community development—you could take an emergent leader, man or woman. They might have started—think more the American context. Think of the public school in your town in Sonoma, and parents get involved, because there's something that has to change—teacher tenure, this or that. Before you know it, they're on the school board, and then they go from the school board, they've got the bug, now they want to serve on the town council, and maybe eventually they become a member of the House of Representatives.

So we were looking at something similar: people who were local leaders, often women, often very bright women who had served in the Army, had gone to college, and for quality of life reasons had left the big cities, or they had grown up, because they were probably dumped there with the Jewish Agency, with the best of intentions. And remember, there was a state need to fill out Jewish villages in the Galilee region, which was sparsely Jewish in 1948, coupled with this influx of Jews from Arab countries who didn't belong in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. Let's put them up there, or in the Deep South, and that will solve our population deficits. And yet, once they were ensconced in the Israeli body politic, they finished school, they went to the service, they then went to college. It might not have been Hebrew University or Tel Aviv University but they had college degrees. They were school teachers. They were social workers. And a lot of these people just had innate talent, made them no different than somebody who might've been a graduate of the School of Social Welfare at Cal or Columbia University, and very capable of giving leadership, and we empowered them to do that. Sometimes these are people who would themselves say, "Look, the next village over from my kibbutz is one of the larger Arab settlements, or communities in this region. We need to do something together." And they'd find things about which they could have inner-communal dinner or this, just so that people would get to know one another. It wasn't that they were encouraging Jewish-Arab intermarriage; they just wanted to be good neighbors.

Now, our view—and Brian and I talked about this; he was already at UJA, and it was before he came back here, and he has subsequently done something

with this as a citizen during his New Israel Fund chairmanship and then subsequently, and I told him I'd help him with it, again, just as a Jewish layman at this point, that some of these people eventually ran for, on party lists, the Knesset, and if they were high enough up the list wound up with seats in Knesset. We had a couple of close friends in the amuta who actually served in Knesset and wound up in the last government, like Ruth Calderon. I just had dinner with her in May, and she had a whole range of reasons why she didn't find that a very satisfying—now, she was a Tel Avivi, but very prominent educator in Israel, with a PhD in Talmud, one of the first women in Israel, from a secular family, and a lot of the Orthodox had a problem with that, but they don't have the same purchase in Tel Aviv that they would in Jerusalem, and she becomes a member of Knesset, and arguing on the progressive side for things. But she said to me at dinner if not for her stint on the amuta she never would've considered.

06-01:05:53

Meeker:

What was the nature of that support that they received, you know, and the idea of developing new community leaders, for instance?

06-01:06:00

Feinstein:

Well, we had a very modest staff in Jerusalem, led by Natan Golan at the time, and then we would sometimes pay a stipend for people locally who already had the experience. We would engage people as our counterparties. They were our representatives, the amuta's representative on local municipal councils. This organization that we co-supported with New Israel Fund actually did sort of a—I'm using these terms advisedly—like a graduate-level course in community organization, politics, and administration, so that—call it finishing school—to actually give a theoretical focus, and to have someone who's experienced, with whom you could talk through the impasses you were facing as you tried to persuade the Kiryat Shmona municipal council that they really should take this neighborhood and build a bunch of children's gymnasias and so on and so forth. And then we'd also be a source of grant support, potentially. If the city said, "We can come up with 50 percent of the cost, if you can find the other money," not necessarily assuming that San Francisco Federation, through the amuta, would fund it, but we did, on more than one occasion. And by the way—and this is also practical politics—if you're a community activist, leader, who's arguing for this, and then you can also deliver the budget that makes the project go forward, all of a sudden your stature rises. So it's basic town politics. But those are both related to the same point, motivated by the view that over time you could take locals who felt very disenfranchised and neglected and enable them to become true community leaders who might rise above that.

06-01:08:03

Meeker:

That's helpful. I don't think I've ever really heard that whole ecology, if you will, explained in that way before.

06-01:08:11
Feinstein:

I don't want to make too great a claim, because clearly Israel is rife with problems, but we were conceptually committed to that, and believed that if we did this— Now, imagine if we'd gotten a hundred communities to join us; it might be that Israel would be quite different. Just to say one postscript, this is what Brian and I were focused on when we were talking a few years ago about overtime, because we were having lunch one day and despairing that Israel was so right wing, and that nobody could successfully contest Bibi Netanyahu. And there were even some people who were considered the princes of Likud back in the Begin days, including Menachem Begin's son, who, while a principled conservative and very far to my right politically, was a mensch, just a very good, decent human being with whom I had some political disagreements. He and Brian Lurie became very good friends, Benny Begin. But he's essentially been marginalized by Netanyahu, because Netanyahu did everything he could to gut the political base for the princes in order that he could rise. So our thought was if we could get more and more from around the country, not just the Galil region, people who had first shown promise as leaders of the local project renewal or amuta experience to actually think about running for Knesset, it might be possible to rejuvenate the progressive movement, what used to be called the labor movement. So far, it's not been organized sufficiently. But I rarely will do this, because I don't like writing political checks, but I was willing to put some personal money into it, as were a number of friends, and there was nobody leading it was the problem.

06-01:10:12
Meeker:

And it's important to distinguish for the record that you're talking about your own personal work, as opposed to—

06-01:10:16
Feinstein:

Yes, this is much later.

06-01:10:17
Meeker:

Yeah. Why don't we wrap up the Federation story? Of course, we can follow up later if there's something in the transcript that you're still interested in discussing.

06-01:10:31
Feinstein:

Okay. I need to see it first.

06-01:10:33
Meeker:

Yes, of course. You know, so you leave in August of 2000, right?

06-01:10:43
Feinstein:

Yeah, I resigned to my officers on my birthday in 2000—May 1, 2000—and they asked me to stay through the summer, but by the end of June and the new fiscal year, I was just there as secretary of the corporation to sign things and so on, and to give advice. I was already working on what I was going to do next.

06-01:11:07

Meeker:

Well, at the time—I know in San Francisco—I was a young man living here at the time—this was when we have the sort of dotcom collapse, and I know that it affects the local economy. Is that something that you experienced at all from your perch here at the Federation? Is it something that hurried along your departure?

06-01:11:31

Feinstein:

Well, the answer to the first question is no, it didn't affect us, because I don't think anyone knew that the dotcom era was collapsing until months after it had collapsed. It's like the National Bureau of Statistics or whatever it's called, NBER. That is the group of economists who actually declare a recession—starting date, finish date, and so on—and they don't publish until two years after the recession, or probably already winding down. So I didn't know it. When I left, as you may know, I left to be the CEO of a startup company.

06-01:12:18

Meeker:

You've mentioned this in passing, so I don't know much about that.

06-01:12:20

Feinstein:

I don't think the investor exit was ever going to be an IPO. I thought we were going to create a good cash flow business, and maybe I'd run it for an indefinite future, or maybe I'd sell it to someone else who had a bigger company that served the nonprofit sector. In any case, that was affected by the collapse of the system.

06-01:12:47

Meeker:

What was the company?

06-01:12:49

Feinstein:

We called it Grant Connect, and it was actually conceptualized by two young executives from Oracle and VerticalNet—Oracle obviously still a powerhouse; VerticalNet went the way of most startup business. And I was the essential grey-hair. [laughter] I knew how to raise money. I knew something about management. I knew the nonprofit sector. But we couldn't get out of the startup phase. We didn't talk about this?

06-01:13:24

Meeker:

No.

06-01:13:25

Feinstein:

Okay, so May 1, 2000, I was turning forty-eight, and around my forty-fifth birthday I had taken the Federation board and a larger group to the Santa Cruz Mountains for a two-and-a-half-day retreat we called a future search conference. And I think Alan Rothenberg was the president designate. This I think we did talk about. Alan had a theory, but Alan is a very, very bright person with a very creative mind, and during the six-month designation period, when we were preparing for his assuming the role, we would have this ongoing debate—I don't want to call it an argument; it was a debate. He

thought that what we should do was collapse the Federation and become an operating foundation, give up the annual campaign and other things, take big projects, two or three at a time, and dedicate five to ten million dollars per year for a five-to-ten-year period and actually solve some problems. Danny is now moving them in that direction. I thought it was premature. Now, remember this had to be about 1997, 1998. So we agreed to have this strategic planning conference. We find a good consultant who can manage these things. There was a hole for ten years. It was one of the many methods of strategic planning called a future search, and Barry Grossman was his name, very skilled at taking corporations and nonprofits and healthcare organizations through this broader planning, so you have your board—that's your core constituency—and then discrete clusters of other invitees who represent core constituencies, either involved in the organized community or not involved. They needed a lot of persuasion to come spend two and a half days with us.

And the whole purpose was to try to revision the Federation. And it did, and actually, increasingly, twenty years later it's beginning to look like that. But I came home from that two-and-a-half-day conference, and I said to Leslee, "Take a walk with me." And we walked for a couple of miles, and I told her about it, and I said, "You know, I can get them there. I don't want to lead it." And she said, "Well, you've talked for years about doing something in business. What do you think it'll take you?" I said, "Sometime in the next five years, maybe a little longer." And she looked at me and she said—at that point she really hated the imposition on our family that my leadership role in the Federation entailed—and she said, "Well, know this: you don't have to discuss this with me again. The day you resign will be the happiest day of my life." I said, "Are you serious?" She said, "Look at me. I am serious." And she was serious.

06-01:16:59

Meeker:

Was it because of all the nighttime events, and the—

06-01:17:01

Feinstein:

Nighttime, the amount of travel I did, and our kids were now teenagers, and I didn't realize until the year after I quit how little time I had spent with my oldest son. And then I had lots of time. I'm very fortunate that he and I have a fabulous relationship, because when we'd talk we'd have real, serious talks, and I traveled with him a few times. That was sort of the makeup—you know, it's the old quality time. I'm not sure how well that works for anyone, but fortunately for Sam and for me it did work. But I just didn't know what I wanted to do next, but I knew that sometime in the next three to five years I needed to step away. And John Goldman was president designate. He clearly wanted to move in a different direction, and we had talked about it. And I said, "Look, I'll stay through the middle of your term to allow you an orderly chance to find my successor, unless you want me to leave now." And that's what we agreed to: that we would leave. And I signed a consulting contract, so I was completely available. They called on me three times in the year, but I

had my income, which was very generous. And by the way, as you know—I think you know—I mean, they went through almost ten years or more without any constant leadership, so it was a mess. I don't feel at all guilty about that, because I needed to go, and organizations have a bigger life. You also had a generational change, and even though John and I are the same age, he sort of represented it. The group were ten to twenty years younger. Danny Grossman was a lay leader at the time. I brought him in, because he'd done a great job. He and Mike Jacobs had done a great job as chairman of the JCRC, and I said, "Why didn't we know about this person previously?"

So you had this whole group of people, coupled with our commitment as a federation to fund these progressive groups of Wexner Heritage Foundation, lay students, and it really potentially made a big, big difference in terms of the leadership cadre. So there were fabulous, energized, much more knowledgeable Jewishly people now engaged, but it took a while to get there.

06-01:19:33
Meeker:

How did John Goldman discuss his vision for a changed Federation to you?

06-01:19:38
Feinstein:

He was never entirely clear. [laughter] But it was clear to him that the focus on Israel as the motive force was ebbing, and that we needed to be more locally focused. He was very, very close to Anita Friedman, who was running the Jewish Family and Children's Service. I had a good relationship with John. Unlike Alan Rothenberg, with whom I argued for a while, I wasn't prepared anymore to argue with John. I just thought, if you want new leadership I support that. And it worked for me. And then I got the gift of a year consultation agreement, because I was prepared to quit and go find work. In hindsight, I'm very glad I had a year's pay, because it was before I'd built up any substantial savings. So I was asked the question a hundred times, if I had it to do again would I do it the same way, and in hindsight I would've had something I was going to. But even that summer I hadn't made up my decision on the day I gave notice, May 1, 2000. I didn't know what I was going to do next. And I made no money at Grant Connect. In fact, under my contract I had a commitment to pay me \$10,000 a month, which was pretty standard for pre-IPO startups in those days, and I refused to take a salary, because I didn't want to spend any money on— This foolishness has been repeated with the Gastric Cancer Foundation, which we may or may not talk about. But I felt as a matter of principle. And, in fact, I had negotiated with the founders that I wanted 25 percent of the pre-money equity. I was that convinced that if we could get out of beta we would have something that could, over five, six years, become a very cash-generative business. And I said, "I'd rather have more on the"—I could not have done that without the Federation consultation contract. I had a year's savings, so this effectively gave me two years, because I had a year on salary and benefits, and then I had the year's savings. When we got to the end of the first year, and I'd already closed Grant Connect because it was clear the dotcom bubble had burst,

couldn't raise another dime to save my life, and I hadn't yet figured out what I was going to do—I got headhunter calls constantly about foundation presidencies, mostly out of town, a few here, only one here that I was even interested in considering and that was Irvine Foundation. And then I thought, you know, it is really not what I want to do. And I really wanted to do something in business, and that was the business I grabbed.

And then when that happened, one of the headhunters at Heidrick Struggles one day finally called me. It was like the fifth time for the fifth different—because they got a lot of the premier foundation presidencies that they were searching for. So it was flattering. Betty Ormsley, I think was her name. And she said, “My partners and I were talking about you last night, and we'd like you to consider looking at finance.” And I said, “What résumé do you have open on your desk?” [laughter] I said, “I'm not a finance person.” “No, no, no, just talk to Sally Carlson.” And I spent two hours with this headhunter who was looking for someone for—it was a trust bank that had just been bought by Bank of America, and they were looking for a grey hair with a good rolodex who could lead teams, and I got deeply into it. And then Dick Rosenberg, who was just finishing up his tenure as CEO, said, “Don't do that.” Because I called six guys on the investment committee of the Federation. “What do you think? Could you see me doing this?” And Dick said, “Yes, you'd be great at wealth management, but don't go to a bank.” And I said, “You of all people.” He said, “Hey, my tenure's going to be finished here. If I were coming in fresh and looking at this really de novo, I'd redline this. We'd get rid of this.” And he said, “You're going to be forty-nine at your next birthday. You're too old to move around in wealth management, so don't go to a bank.” And I wound up talking with Shelby Notkin near the end. I had offers from Goldman Sachs and Bear Stearns of blessed memory—and Merrill Lynch. It was very flattering.

In hindsight, I shouldn't have been flattered. This was just about their figuring I had a gold-plated rolodex, and I will tell you from experience my first two to three years, nobody would turn me down for a request for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and they were happy to talk with me. And one prominent person in town, Gerson Bakar, said to me maybe six, eight months in, he said, “You joined a great firm. I know because I first invested in emerging markets through your firm.” He said, “But if you're asking me would I consider having you manage some of my portfolio,” he said, “Wayne, you're the first guy I think of when I have a question about Israel or the JCC, but managing my money?” And that was edifying. [laughter] Took me more than three years to get my first Bay Area client, which is why I started developing non-SF clients and I think it was just I was a pretty prominent public person, and I get it. People make career switches. But is this the last stop of the carousel, or am I going someplace else? And if you're a very wealthy person, you want continuity. You don't want to be moving your money every few years, because you wind up losing some. And so it took a while for people to accept that I really had made this career move, and it was a serious one.

06-01:25:53

Meeker:

Well, there's different kinds of investments, too, when somebody is making a career move: an investment by hiring them, right? And you can determine whether, again, they're going to do the job or not. And then there's the investment of I'm going to let this person manage my money, which is a totally different thing, so—

06-01:26:09

Feinstein:

And that's probably more scary. [laughter]

06-01:26:10

Meeker:

Right, absolutely. Well, we've got about another twenty minutes. I do want to talk about the Gastric Cancer Foundation. Of course, that has to do directly with your son Benjamin. And he was born in 1990, passed away in 2010, at about the age of twenty, I guess?

06-01:26:33

Feinstein:

He had just turned twenty.

06-01:26:34

Meeker:

Just turned twenty. And I know that you started the foundation in 2009, so a year or so before he passed away.

06-01:26:43

Feinstein:

Ben was in remission at that point, and—

06-01:26:49

Meeker:

Can you tell me a little about how you learned, when he came down with this? And how did it impact the family?

06-01:26:56

Feinstein:

Oh my God. I'll try. It's a long time, but it still is sometimes difficult.

06-01:27:05

Meeker:

Well, that's not surprising, so talk about it to the extent that you'd like, and—

06-01:27:08

Feinstein:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. His oncologist is a world-famous guy at Stanford named Jim Ford, and we've actually become friends, and Ben was in remission, and, in fact, the whole tumor board at Stanford was surprised, overwhelmingly surprised, at how he had what was called a complete response to treatment when it presented itself. But the backstory to solid tumor cancers broadly, and stomach or esophageal cancer, gastric cancer specifically, is that, as with a few other solid tumor cancers in this region of the body, are rarely detected in the early stage, rarely. I mentioned to you once before Phyllis Cook's late son, Danny, only discovered that he had the same disease because his tumor had grown this way, so it was protruding out of his abdomen. He wasn't feeling any symptoms. He wasn't feeling fatigue or anything like that. But he went to his doctor, who said, "Well, this isn't right," and they did an ultrasound and realized there was a massive tumor. And as was true with Ben, it was already

fourth stage. And you know what that means: fourth stage means it's metastasized to more than one site, and metastatic solid tumor cancer, it's never a matter of cure, it's a matter of can you get this beast under control, and can you get it to the point that you can treat this periodically as a chronic disease. So that was the goal in 2008 and '09.

In Ben's case, he was a really bright kid, and he was also a very good athlete, and so he was on the basketball team, and was a point guard on the basketball team at his high school, and he had played every year from middle school forward, and this was the beginning of his senior year of high school. And by October, he was—so, let's see— Sam and Katie were already out of the house, so it was just Mom, Dad, and Ben. And on Saturdays, when he didn't have anything else to do, we'd go to his favorite burger place and we'd have lunch together. And it got to the point he couldn't eat a whole hamburger, which was so unlike him. We didn't think much about it. And then he began to show some swallowing problems, but not a lot, and then during Christmas vacation—I think it was the day after Christmas—he called me into the bathroom, and his urine was the color of dark tea. And I said, “Well, that doesn't look right.” And so we got him in to see his ped, who assumed, because he was seventeen, assumed maybe it was hepatitis. I never so much wished for something terrible.

And it took a few weeks to get a gastroenterological consult, but we did, and while they had him in for an ultrasound they realized there was a mass, and, like a spider, it had tentacles everywhere. And that led to a CT, and then his pediatrician called us. It was taking a very, very long time, so something wasn't right. And the pediatrician got on the line and asked for Leslee, because she would typically bring the kids in to see him, and she couldn't talk to him. She put him on the phone with me. And he said, “I'm afraid your son seems to have a mass. It is almost certainly cancer, and your next stop is an oncology consult, either UCSF or Stanford. Where would you prefer?” And we picked Stanford, because Leslee was a volunteer at the Children's Hospital at Stanford, and it was just more pleasant, easier to get to. It's before Mt. Zion had been converted to the Cancer Center. And at first he was on the Packard side, which is children—and children don't get gastric cancer. At the time, the demography was preponderantly, in North America—because it's the fourth largest killer worldwide, but not in North America—in North America it was a small uptake disease, about twenty thousand new cases a year, and about half of those died in the year of discovery.

One thing led to another, and Les did not go with me, which this is maybe the darkest day of my life. I went to get the prognosis from the pediatric oncologist, who was a lovely guy, and he said, “Fourth stage gastric adenocarcinoma, but we don't treat that here.” And I said, “You don't treat that at Stanford?” He said, “We don't do it at Packard, at the Children's Hospital.” I said, “Is there anyone at Stanford who's an expert in this disease?” “Well, actually, one of the leaders is Jim Ford, and I've already

arranged for a consult, and in the next couple of weeks you'll see Dr. Ford," during which time Ben got really, really sick, because the nature of solid tumor is it grows undetected, and then it grows exponentially. Now, there's just more cells, so they're just growing that much faster, which is why usually—the average at that time was six months from diagnosis to death, because you usually didn't discover it until it was metastasized, and you didn't live long after metastasis. And he lived twenty-six months from discovery and detection until he died, but Jim thought, just on the staging, that it had grown undetected roughly from his sixteenth birthday.

Could not figure out the causation. There was no history of this on either side of our family. I had two grandmothers on either side die with colon cancer in their mid to late eighties, but that's not the same disease, and Leslee's parents had breast cancer. In fact, her father had breast cancer, but caught it early, and— So Jim is a geneticist, and there was some correlation between Ashkenazic male breast cancer in an ancestor and pancreatic cancer in a descendent. And there are all these weird correlations that the deeper they get in the genome application to cancers the more they discover these things. Nothing like that. In fact, Leslee's whole family was screened for BRCA and so on, so forth. Actually has saved a couple of her cousins, as a practical matter, because they wouldn't have known this until they were with the disease, and at least they now have options. But Ben was treated very aggressively, and, as I said, had a complete response. Weak as a kitten, but during that period of time—and then he had an unusual radiation treatment to mop up what was left.

And during that remission his oncologist, Jim Ford, said, "Would you talk to another patient of mine who's interested in starting an organization? Because you've got all this nonprofit experience." And I met JP Gallagher, was his name, delightful guy. He was educated in Jesuit schools, and at one point thought he wanted to be a priest. I mean, we just hit it off instantly. We wound up with two sessions, at the end of which he said, "Would you help me build this organization?" And I said, "Provided we do research." And I told him, very selfishly, "One day your cancer may come back, and Ben's certainly will, and I'd like by that point to have something that will help him." So that was the reason. And we plunged in. And then J. died. His cancer came back about a year and a half later, by which point Ben's cancer had come back and had killed him. And when this disease comes back, it's just brutal, because the nature of solid tumor is that it evolves. Molecular structure evolves. And so whatever got you to remission the first time never works the second time. And they used progressively other drugs, but they wind up destroying other parts of your body. So he got to the point in February of 2010 that Jim told us his liver was shot. He said, "If I gave you another blast of chemo I'd kill you, and I'm not going to do that." And we said, "Well, what do we do?" And he said, "Well, hospice, because this disease will eventually take you." And it did. It took about four weeks.

We had a great hospice nurse. He was home. He begged us not to go back to the hospital, and we never did. So he died at home. And Sam took a month's leave of absence from Apollo and came home, and they were wonderful about it. The partner to whom he was assigned had lost a younger brother to cancer, and always regretted that he hadn't been there at the end, and Sam has been a star there so they just let him go. Katy came home from Spain. She was teaching English as a second language after college, and loved it, but she realized what was going on, so she came home. And there are lots of families that it's just a centripetal force. I think it drew us together, in a way.

About two weeks before he died, he and I were sitting alone in the family room. He was on the couch. And he said, "Dad, you're still active in the Gastric Cancer Foundation?" I said, "I am." He said, "Would you do me a favor?" And I said, "Sure." He said, "Stay with it. People shouldn't have to deal with this." So I felt I'd made sort of a deathbed commitment. But I'm now in my fifth year as board chair, and I have a board meeting next Friday, and I've now told everyone that this is it. I'm finished next June. I'll stay on the board, but I can't do this. It didn't bother me until about this year, but I now know so many people who've gotten the disease, and they're advanced, and their caregiver or husband or wife—I just had a friend who lost his forty-nine-year-old wife to this—and I know too much. So when I ask them what the prognosis or what the diagnosis was, as soon as they say fourth stage I try never to react, because you can't take hope away, but you're not going to survive this disease, at least not yet. And we've made real progress in the years that we've been doing this, but it's still in very small increments—an extra three months, an extra four months. Some of the new treatments which are still not completely tested are showing not just efficacy but they're less injurious to the healthy tissue. But the reality is even if you can use biologics, which don't break down tissues, successfully, you rarely can do it for advanced cancer without chemo, and the chemo is just brutal. Chemo and radiation are just brutal.

So I think we've made great progress. There are a whole range of blood-based cancers, including multiple myeloma, that ten years ago were a death sentence. Now more than half the patients with that initial diagnosis will survive and live— Did you do Nancy Grand's oral history? Probably not yet, because she was just recently board chair over there. Her husband Steve about eight years ago was diagnosed with myeloma, and you wouldn't know that he was ever sick. Treated very, very aggressively. Took a year and a half out of his life, but six years later he's in complete remission. And that disease, the doctors will now say after five years you're cured, which they don't say about solid tumor. And most breast cancers are now manageable. If you catch colon cancer, it can be manageable. Lung is intractable. Pancreas is intractable. Gastric is intractable. And then there are a bunch of much smaller uptake cancers. But that's it.

Now, it's been like a second job, and I brought unique background training and skill to the job, which could be what Jim Ford and JP Gallagher had in mind. I mean, I'd built nonprofits. I'd changed them. I'm a good fundraiser. So it's not that stuff, although five years is too long to be the top lay leader, but I made the decision because of my nonprofit experience that I didn't want full-time staff. And the board agreed, but I was just concerned that we'd wind up feeding an administrative engine and not doing what we were in business for. And even after Ben died, I was committed to advancing research, and we have advanced research, but scientific research is much slower than writing a doctoral dissertation in intellectual history.

06-01:41:48

Meeker:

So it's not a staff-driven foundation?

06-01:41:52

Feinstein:

No, it's been lay-driven. And we actually hired, when JP was in his last year—because I was the cofounder, and ostensibly the vice chairman of the foundation, but I had not yet accepted any greater responsibility, other than to meet with J. periodically, but I just watched him get sicker and sicker, and I knew how it was going to end. So I said, “Maybe it would be helpful to you if we hired a part-time consultant.” And we hired Stacy Hirschman, who used to work for me at Federation, and she's been a godsend. But we have about thirty hours a month—she works much more than that, which is typical of part-timers, but it's not the same as being an executive director. And we actually did a study three years ago, and we looked at PanCAN, the Pancreatic Cancer Network, which made a decision the exact opposite of ours. A really bright, energetic young woman, whose father she had just gotten out of a joint business in law degree program at UCLA, her father died of pancreatic cancer, she threw herself into this. There was no organization around. There were four or five people who became her first board. They paid her a six-figure salary and said, “Just build this out.” And for the first six years or so she just built local networks, but 100 percent of the dollars they raised went to building out staffing of these organizations, and building systems, and so on. And so it really wasn't until about their tenth year that they began raising a few million dollars a year. They weren't even making grants until their tenth year, but today they raise \$30 million a year, they've got a nationwide organization, same woman is in charge of it. It was a course we could've considered, and because of my stubbornness we didn't, and that's why I said it's the same mistake. [laughter] Don't take a salary, and—

06-01:43:54

Meeker:

Well, so the idea is then that this foundation attempts to raise money through individual donors, and those—

06-01:44:02

Feinstein:

And events, and—yeah.

06-01:44:03

Meeker:

And those checks are then directed—?

06-01:44:07

Feinstein:

About 90 percent of what we raise each year gets allocated to basic research. We have a joint post-doc fellow with the American Gastroenterological Association. Now, they had millions of dollars, and we had peanuts, and so they agreed—bless them—to give us five years to pay it off, but it's \$225,000 a year, so we write that check every December. We're almost done paying for it. The first scholar is just about finished. We're in process of selecting a second. These men and women are doing fantastic baseline stuff. There was no HIPAA-compliant registry for gastric cancer. There is now, and it's five years old, and there are hundreds of samples, blood and tissue, that it is the resource for oncologists wanting to do basic research in GC, and it didn't exist before. Stanford's one of the three centers of excellence in genomics. We're doing it at Stanford, but we could've just as readily done it at Dana Farber, at Harvard, or at Wash U in St. Louis—those are the three places—and we've been funding that. We've also funded specific genetic research. So this was all basic research. Nothing was being done that was specific.

Now, the genome, and the knowledge in the last six, seven years—so really, since Ben died—has really shifted the whole focus of oncology, because now they realize it's not where a tumor originates, it's what's the molecular structure of the tumor, and that means there are many more chemical agents that can be brought to bear, and if you know specifically the nature of a tumor, which you can discover now genetically, you can target more carefully. But still, with all the experiments being done, if you are advanced at the point you present yourself, there's almost no chance you'll survive, other than you might get an extra year or two. And I think they'll eventually secure this. I'll stay marginally involved. I mean, I've promised everyone I'll stay on the board at least a year after my chairmanship, and I'll remain a donor, but at the point that I stop working full-time. I'm not going to give what I give right now, but that's okay. You know, in the life of organizations you realize that where we are right now at eight years is really—I've gotten them through the critical hurdle, but it's up to someone else to take them to the next step. I just can't do it.

06-01:46:51

Meeker:

So I think that we should wrap up. Do you have any final thoughts or—?

06-01:46:57

Feinstein:

No, this was fun. I'm sure there are thousands of things we didn't talk about. Most of them were probably unimportant. I will read the transcript, carefully. There are some things that—I was actually bothered after our last interview because I was so candid about one person in particular, and I don't know—if I think there's something that is glaring in its omission, I'll come back to you and say, "Could we do one more session? Because here are two or three things

I think are worth—” But I’ve enjoyed this, so thank you, and I’ve enjoyed meeting you.

06-01:47:54

Meeker: I’ve enjoyed it, too. Thank you, Wayne.

06-01:47:56

Feinstein: Thanks.

[End of Interview]