

CHARLES KAPLAN

interviewed by Howard Droker
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This is an interview with Dr. Charles Kaplan. The date is November 7, 1982, and the interviewer is Howard Droker.

DROKER Dr. Kaplan, I'd like you to begin by telling me about your early life.

KAPLAN I was born in Toronto, Canada in 1913. I am the fifth of six children. My parents came to Toronto in 1906. They were married in 1904, and they came here during the pogroms in Russia. My father's comment was, "This is no way for a human being to live," and he came to Toronto with one child at that time.


DROKER Do you know what his hometown was?

KAPLAN He came from Novizipkov, which is in Mdgilev Geberny*, in Russia. My mother came from a very small town named Kroula, which was also in that same province. They had lived in Peterburg, which is now Leningrad, right prior to the time they came, because they had a special permit to have his tailoring shop there.

DROKER I see. What were their names?

KAPLAN My father was Nochim, and he used Nathan as his name, and Mother was Golda, and she was Baylia in Yiddish. Her name was Schuster before she was married, and my father's name correctly is Kapelson. His father was Kopel. The immigration officers didn't know how to spell it, so he became Kaplan.

DROKER They immigrated directly to Toronto?

KAPLAN They immigrated directly to Toronto where my mother had an uncle, and the Solomons, who also I guess were Schusters, were there, and they spent the rest of their lives there. My childhood was a very happy one, and we always had a good time. It was a very loving family and very active in the community. Mother was very active in the Jewish hospital Ezrath Noshim there and helped build it, and the  and Hadassah and all the other things, so that those are activities that I was part of all my life.

*Actually he was Peterborg (Russian)/St, Petersburg-Leningrad

DROKER How would you classify them, middle class?

KAPLAN Up and down middle class. They did very well at times, and at other times, oh 1917, 1918, they lost everything, but money wasn't of any great significance. They were always rich, even when they didn't have money. They always lived well. Father's notion always was, as long as you have your health you can earn money, and he always did. If he lost it, he made it back a few years later. Towards the end of his life he was very comfortable. He was still giving us gifts, and he managed very well.

DROKER What was his business in Toronto?

KAPLAN His business was whatever he could make a living at. He came over as a tailor and put falsies in the clothes of the English women, and that led him to success, but then he found out it was much easier to make a living in real estate, and he went into real estate. During the First World War, real estate went kaput, and he said, well the one thing everybody needs is food, and he organized what was known as Dominion Canning and Preserving Company, and he made jams and jellies. Subsequently, he went back into the real estate business. He was in the fur business for a while, whatever it was he could make a living at. Essentially he was always in the real estate business. Even at the end that was where he had his income.

DROKER Did they belong to an Orthodox synagogue?

KAPLAN Yes. They belonged to an Orthodox synagogue, but they were very free in allowing us to choose our own beliefs, and we didn't have to rigidly follow them. My grandfather and grandmother lived with us, after they came to this country, and my grandfather was very religious. He was a real Labavitch and belonged to a Labavitcher shul. My grandmother, on the other hand, who was a very bright woman, who had previously been married to someone she divorced because he was a civil engineer in Russia, and he

had to change his religion in order to practice his profession. As a result she was anything but religious, where my grandfather was very religious.

DROKER Are these maternal or paternal grandparents?

KAPLAN Maternal. My paternal grandparents never did migrate. My paternal relatives--there were several of them in --two of them went to Moscow and had their families there. Two of them went to Harbin and had their families there, and two of them came to Canada. That family that lives in Harbin is scattered now; we meet them in Israel, South Africa, Australia. They are all the children of first cousins, because my father was the youngest in his family, and his brothers and sisters were much older.

DROKER Did you go to Talmud Torah?

KAPLAN No, we lived in the ^{North End} of the town, and we always had a ^{rebbe} come to us. As long as I can remember we had the Geller * Dovid who was also the shochet in the area. He was my ^{rebbe}. His name was Raskin, and his son now works for the New York Times. He is a very bright individual whose children have done very well.

DROKER So you had a fairly traditional upbringing?

KAPLAN Yes. We were kosher at home. In fact, I remained kosher until I went off to college. By what I thought was necessity I became less religious.

DROKER Tell me more about your parents' philanthropic activities.

KAPLAN I mentioned my mother was involved in the Jewish Hospital, which now is the Mount Sinai Hospital, which is a very big and affluent and prestigious institution in the community. At the time she became involved, there were about a dozen women who had to collect money for the hospital. They were very active in it, and my mother was treasurer and vice-president.

I don't know if she were ever president of that organization or not, but,
*David with the red beard

in any case, one of the vivid recollections I have, as a child, is Mother would be home Friday, fixing the Shabbos dinner. When she'd get a call, "Golda, we need you at the hospital," which meant that she had to drop everything and go down to the hospital, and when she'd get to the hospital, all these women would get into bed, if they had time to take their shoes off that would be fine. That was because the inspector was coming to count the number of individuals who were in hospital beds, and then the city would provide them with whatever the fee was for a week, and that was the way the hospital was able to survive economically. She was on the board of trustees of the Mount Sinai hospital much later, and they used to say, "Mrs. Kaplan, tell us the story of how things were in the past." No matter difficult things were at that time, they'd say, "Well, they're a whole lot better now that they were then."

DROKER Since then that hospital has become a major hospital.

KAPLAN Oh yes, it's part of the university system. It was a necessity in Toronto. Toronto was a community where there was a great deal of anti-Semitism at certain levels. For instance, there was not any discrimination as far as getting into medical school. Once you got out of medical school, you couldn't get on the staff of any of the hospitals, and unless there was a Jewish hospital, you wouldn't have any hospital affiliations. That situation does not prevail now, but it prevailed right up until after the second World War. So it was a necessity for the women and also it provided kosher food. There was no kosher food at any of the other hospitals. For an Orthodox individual, to go to a hospital, the food had to be brought in prior to that, and this provided the hospital with kosher food.

DROKER Any other outstanding activities or outstanding philanthropies that either of them did?

KAPLAN They were very strong Zionists. My father was active in the Zionist organization. My mother was active in Hadassah. She was president of that organization. We always used to kid my mother because she had these cups, when they finished their presidency, they would be given a cup, so we would say, "This is the one my mother won for running; this was the one she won for swimming. . ." These were the cups that she acquired as she went through life. There was the Sons of Jacob, and there was the Sons of Jacob Benevolence Society. Those societies were formed not only for social purposes, but also for providing medical care to that community. They would have agreements with various doctors who would take care of the group medically, so that it was more than just a social organization.

DROKER It sounds like the environment that you grew up in was preparing you to take an active role in a Jewish community, wherever you went.

KAPLAN It wasn't just an active role. It was a duty that we recognized was the duty of every individual, to make his contribution to society, other than his own personal needs. This is something that I think we all felt and we all participated in. But you asked about what my parents' religion is, I might say that my sister is, not an agnostic, she's an atheist. My brother belongs to the Reform congregation. My next sister belonged to the Orthodox congregation; next one belongs to the Reform, and I'm the next one, and Sid belongs to a Conservative organization. As far as our religious beliefs, except for my eldest sister, they're not that different, but we've joined organizations that are not only religiously compatible, but socially compatible, whatever community we're in.

DROKER Tell me quickly about your own education and career.

KAPLAN One can go about that very quickly, because I just graduated from public school, high school, in Toronto and college and got my bachelor's from the University of Toronto, as well as my medical degree^{from University of Toronto.} In order to

one had
get a good internship ^ to come to the United States. In 1937
I came to the United States and for the next few years I served as an
intern and then as a resident. I had two years in psychiatry and then
three years in pediatrics. That took us up to the year 1942, and at
that time I was in Pittsburgh, where I met and married Lil, and subsequently
went into the U.S. Army. I was there for four years, as a psychiatrist,
because they didn't care about my pediatric training at that point. I
left as a major and a lieutenant colonel ^ finally, but I served in the
army and not unenjoyably.

DROKER Had you already made a decision to live in the United States, and that was
the reason you joined the army?

KAPLAN Yes, I became a citizen very shortly after ^ I joined the Army.
There was no question
about where I was going to live; I was going to live in the United States.
The last post I was at was in Florida, and at that time Lil and I had the
choice of going anywhere in the world or anywhere in the United States we
wanted to-- we could have gone to England or Australia or New Zealand or
South Africa, because I had a British license, which allowed me to
practice in any British area--but then as I say we concentrated on the United
States. I wrote away to various communities in the United States, like
San Diego, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Detroit, and a few others, and
their Chambers of Commerce
asked ^ for descriptions of their climates and business conditions,
wrote to the medical society as to what the medical situation was, to the
medical schools and a few other points. I had a big chart in my office
and I scored each one on a one to five, and Seattle came up with the
highest score. We had never been to Seattle before, but since it had
the highest score we just came to Seattle and it was a very wise and good
choice for us.

DROKER What was the year you came?

KAPLAN 1947. I got out of the army in 1946, but since I had been doing psychiatry for a long time I went back to school for six months at Harvard to get some post-graduate work in pediatrics again.

DROKER You knew that pediatrics was what you wanted?

KAPLAN There was no question about it, at no point. Even in the army my role in the army was not so much as a practicing psychiatrist as we were in a very large psychiatric unit, and I was commanding officer of it, because I was a pretty good manager as compared to what the other psychiatrists were. They were good psychiatrists, so we each accepted our role. That's the reason I got good promotions right along, because that's the emphasis in the army.

DROKER To backtrack just a little bit, Toronto had never been an option because of the anti-Semitism?

KAPLAN Oh, even then it was an option, but not a very viable option, because it was prior to the time that the new hospital was built. The old Mount Sinai Hospital, which was on Yorkville, was not more than 30 beds. It didn't really provide--and I had not been able to get an appointment at the medical school at that time. Seven or eight or ten years later they did open it up to Jewish doctors, but up until that time they didn't. I enjoyed teaching; I had done some teaching during my residencies, and I wanted to continue doing some teaching at the medical school. In Seattle, the medical school was just being organized, and I was able to get some recommendations--from my relationship with Boston and the people there I knew. They sent letters to some of the people here, so I was able to get along fairly quickly here. I was accepted into the medical community very quickly. I had good credentials, so there was no problem. It worked

out very well.

DROKER Here's a question that I haven't asked anybody; I guess I haven't thought about it. Where there many Jewish doctors in Seattle when you got here, and were they Seattle-raised or, like you, did they come after World War II?

KAPLAN Most of them that are here came after World War II. There was a small group, and I think you're familiar with them. There's Dr. Friedman, Minkovi Clein, Jacobs, that I met when I first came here, but I hesitate to give you numbers because I'm not sure. I would say it was less than 20. Most of us came afterwards, but that wasn't true just for Jewish doctors. That was true for all the doctors. That was true for the pediatricians. There were only 18 or 20 pediatricians here when I came to town, and within a period of two to three years, they were more than double that number. When I wrote to Portland, to Dr. Bilderback*, he did then and still does say that Portland is overcrowded as far as pediatricians are concerned. I think they still have maybe 30 or 40 there, whereas the community here said, "Oh, there's plenty of opportunity for pediatricians here," and the community just grew. That was the attitude of the pediatricians here; they welcomed others. It was a friendly, warm, happy association very quickly. They accepted you and helped you get started. It's a very good community, medically. When I refer to that, I'm referring essentially to all the pediatricians. I'm not thinking of just the Jewish doctors in the community. ^

DROKER Tell me what were your first impressions of the Seattle Jewish community, coming from Toronto and whatever other communities; how did Seattle's Jewish community stack up?

KAPLAN Our community was much more cohesive. As children, all of us went down to the Zionist Institute, and we had our Young Judea Clubs and organizations
*head of Pediatrics at University of Oregon in Portland

of that sort. I think I had, from the medical school, approximately one third to one half of my friends were non-Jews, but my close associations on the week-end and things of that sort were Jews. When I came here, the community was spread, so it didn't have that cohesiveness. I, of course, heard about the dichotomy of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim, which was a big joke, because we were still joking in Toronto about the difference between the Polish Jews and the German Jews and Galitzianer the ^ and the rest of them. It was more of a joke than a reality, and here it was a reality. Fortunately, it no longer is, and that is one of the things that I give credit to the Jewish Community Center, as much as any other institution in this community, for bringing all of us together. Passage of time, circumstances, of course, are all major factors, but the vehicle really was the Jewish Community Center.

DROKER Did you sense that there was also some residual separation between the old wealthy German Jewish families and the later immigrants?

KAPLAN I wasn't aware of it, because I didn't know who they were. I met them; it wasn't until long afterwards that I realized they were the old German Jewish families. As a physician, I saw many of them, and as far as I was concerned, they were Jews. I didn't know them well enough to differentiate. I am still learning about whose brother and sister and uncles and aunts and cousins get together. I know these individuals separately, and then I discover that they are related and that is something that a newcomer--and I classify myself as a newcomer as far as the one that were native and born here--couldn't know.

DROKER Did you look for a congregation to join when you came here?

KAPLAN Yes, when we first came here it was the first thing we did. We found out where the Federation was, so we could send in a contribution. At that time we borrowed money, and I remember --it must have been 1947--

it was a very critical time, so I felt as though I had to make my contribution. Even though the money had been borrowed from others to get me started, I felt as though I still had more than they did over there (Israel). I remember trying to get in touch with an organization that I could send money to, and one of the doctors said "How can you afford to give \$100?" Well, \$100 I already knew wasn't very much for that, but the level of giving here was relatively low at the time.

DROKER Did you find a place to give?

KAPLAN Yes, sure. The Federation was organized, and--what was his name-- Holcenberg?^ he has a son here now, he was there. If I'm not mistaken, he was just there part-time. Maybe he was full-time and his secretary was part-time. It was a very small organization. As far as organizations, the Temples were already well-organized, and they'd been going for a long time. We joined Herzl, because we felt that a Conservative Temple. . . we were very satisfied until they kept changing rabbis, and we felt that this was rather unstable.

DROKER Was it Rabbi Penner when you first joined?

KAPLAN Rabbi Penner was the rabbi when we left.

DROKER He was preceded by Franklin Cohn, I believe.

KAPLAN I don't recall who that was. In any case we changed then to Temple DeHirsch. I don't know how long I was there, but I was on the Education Committee and one thing and another. The impression that I had, as a newcomer, was that I wasn't part of a clique, and therefore I was accepted, but I wasn't part of it.^ (the Temple) As far as power structure and also as far as being able to make contributions in whatever way I thought I could make contributions. The other part was it was a very large

Temple, and I didn't ever feel I could become intimate with that large

*Sam Holcenberg- deceased longtime. Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.

a group, nor could my children. It wasn't very long afterwards that we decided that we had to do something about it, those of us who had similar inclinations. We started organizing Temple Beth Am, and there were half a dozen of us who met here in this house. We had various meetings, and then we had a big meeting at Hillel, and before very long we had a Temple where we were supposed to be contributing and participating. Participating was the main word; we had to participate. We had no rabbi. We had our services on 47th^{NE.} and 16th^{NE.},^{University} which was the church that the Unitarian Church had at that time. It was a lovely little church, very rustic looking. We rented facilities from them, and then when they moved, they said, "Would you continue renting?" They needed our income, and we needed them, so it was a very good relationship, and by that time we could afford a rabbi.

The first rabbi we had was sent to us by the good Lord. I can't remember his name; he was taking a masters degree at the University so he used to come up here all the time, here in theology, and working for the government down in Tacoma. The government was paying his salary, so we could afford him. That worked out very well.

DROKER Let me back up on that a little. Before you ever founded Temple Beth Am, did you meet for religious purposes, independent of other congregations?

KAPLAN Yes. As I say, for a while we would have Friday night services in the various homes. We did that for quite a long while.

DROKER With how many people involved?

KAPLAN Anywhere from a dozen to 25. We'd usually have a minyan, but not many more. We were all pretty faithful about coming, so it didn't vary that much.

DROKER Did you have a Torah?

KAPLAN No, we didn't get a Torah until we were in the Unitarian church. My father

came out at the time. The first Torah we had was borrowed from Temple DeHirsch. They provided us with the old books that they had bought--they had bought new ones--and the Torah, which was a big help to us. When my father came out, at the time my mother was alive, he said he wanted to donate a Torah to us, and he did. That was the first Torah that the organization owned. Since then we've acquired a third Torah which was from Czechoslovakia, and I don't know whether you're aware of that story. There were Torahs that were picked out during the Holocaust from the various synagogues and hidden. They were all brought to London and restored. You could purchase one from London. The one that we had came from one of the synagogues in Czechoslovakia, and it was purchased in London. Al Schrieber can tell you the story about how he delivered it to us. It had to be carried; it couldn't be shipped, for some reason or other.

DROKER Did you get other encouragement from Temple DeHirsch?

KAPLAN Essentially, that was the main thing. I think Rabbi Levine came out a after Beth Am was a congregation. few times^ Rabbi Phillips, who was then head of Pulpit in Chicago, and came out here and he participated in some of our services. Those were visiting situations.

DROKER Was there any resentment on the part of the people from Temple DeHirsch, who felt that this was renegade?

KAPLAN We weren't strong enough for anybody to resent, as far I can tell. If there was, we didn't feel it, especially. We were too small; we weren't a threat to anybody.

DROKER I do know--Al said it on the 25th Anniversary--that there were really three major groups of people that made up Beth Am to begin with, Herzl people, Temple DeHirsch people and unaffiliated. Why did Beth Am go Reform?

KAPLAN I ^{don't} differentiate the source of the people, because we were all pretty much alike. If we were too far off, they had to leave, and there were a few that were a little more traditional than what we seemed to develop into. There was a big choice; should we join with the Conservative group, or should we join with the Union of American congregations- UAHC Hebrew [^] Temples. Our final choice came because the Union actually sent us the money. They promised us some money and they promised us some help, whereas the Conservative organization didn't, so that was the reason.

DROKER What do you think distinguishes Beth Am from the other congregations, particularly ^{the} other Reform congregations?

KAPLAN In the early days it was that people that belonged to Temple Beth Am truly participated in all the services. We still don't have a men's club and a women's club; the men and the women all participate equally. That may or may not add to the strength, but that was the attitude that we had. You had to participate, and if you didn't participate we were almost to the point where you couldn't be a member. We talked about it; I don't think we ever said somebody couldn't join, but the pressure was on to become part of it. Our participation was to participate in the services. We conducted our own services, and you had to take a turn. In the financial end of it and all the other aspects, all of us had to be very active; we were very small, and we needed that sort of support. Going on in years, things have changed, but we still now ^{I think} are very much interested in the social community, and the social action committees have been very important within our group.

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KAPLAN [^] A great deal of accent was based on the Sunday school. Our Sunday school, when it started, had the highest percentage of children as compared to members within the Temple. Our membership

was young; we had children, It isn't so anymore. The quality of the Sunday school was something that we all felt was one of the most important things that we could do.

DROKER I'd like to ask about the social action commitment. Was that a consciously stated thing, understood; was it a spoken thing that was understood among the members, that that was something that was going to be an important part of the Temple?

KAPLAN I think it was part of the general philosophy of participation, not only to participate within our own community, but in the general community. I think it was more a result of the people who joined Temple Beth Am, rather than a conscious decision, "We must be involved, or we must have a good social action committee." We had a good social action committee, because that was something everybody was interested in doing.

DROKER Your Rabbi Hirsch obviously has been a leader in that, but this preceded him.

KAPLAN This preceded him, and it was because he had to fit into that picture when he was being hired, and he was selected because it was felt that he would be part of that situation. He had already made certain commitments in that area, and that was a very important part of the decision to hire him. He was interested in that sort of thing.

DROKER That's very interesting. I'd like to go into this in more depth at some time. I think it's one of the keys to understanding your congregation.

KAPLAN The membership itself, I think if you examine them, are individuals who have sometimes greater commitments to the general community than they do possibly to the local Jewish community. That may be something that others may criticize us for justifiably, but generally they are very

much involved in the nuclear freeze and Vietnam before that and whatever else is prevalent^{in terms of social action,}ly important. The rabbi has gone off sometimes ahead of the congregation on this, but he has never been restrained. That's part of our philosophy that under no circumstances is he to be restrained, any more than we ^{want} to be restrained. He has complete freedom of pulpit. We may not like it; some people may not like it to the extent that they may have to leave the congregation, and that's very few, but I'm sure it has occurred. He has ^{that} freedom, and we have the privilege of saying, "How can you say those things?" If it gets done politely, I'm not sure that we ^{in that regard,} change him very quickly, but I'm sure we have some influence^{too.}

DROKER What are the biggest changes that have occurred in Beth Am?

KAPLAN Well, it's grown so big, it's become like other Temples. That's the inevitable occurrence when any religious organization has too much success, in terms of its financial stability. In terms of financial stability, it's done really quite well. The method we have used is, I think, quite unique, too. Each individual sets his own level of giving. He is given certain goals, certain ideas, but he sets his own membership dues and the amount he contributes to the building fund; these are all done voluntarily. With a few exceptions, they've been much more generous than what would be demanded of them. There are a few that don't come up to what it is believed they can afford, but they are talked to separately, and there are very few of those. As a result there was some concern that there would be some shortage this year, but I was just reading the minutes of the last ^{Board} meeting, and the pledges are coming in very satisfactorily, and they will be able to manage very nicely.

DROKER One thing that struck me in the services that I've attended is
 skullcaps- yarmulkes
that a lot of people wear kipahs^and prayer shawls, which, having

been raised in Temple DeHirsch, I found surprising.

KAPLAN This is an interesting development, and it is not unique to Temple Beth Am. I think nearly all the Reform synagogues that I've been attending have been becoming increasingly traditional. I just came back from Toronto, and there's been a struggle there, so much so that the rabbi had to leave. There was a need for greater traditional services, among the older individuals, including some of the members of my family that came from a traditional background and were not comfortable with it. Here, we are not at all uncomfortable with it, and we've accepted it to the point to where each individual wants to accept it. If you want to wear a kippah, fine; if you want to wear a (prayer shawl), talis^ fine. Now that's a change, and I think we're all aware of it. There was a time where the rabbi wouldn't allow anybody to wear a kippah or a talis; he now wears one himself and wears the talis himself. Not only have we changed, but he has changed, and I think the pressure on him has not come just from us, but from all the other synagogues and all the other Temples in the United States. They feel that it is something that we in the Reform movement have lost to some extent. We left behind a lot of our traditions, and our traditions, while they are not necessarily part of our religious dogma--and that's why they were left--they are part of our emotional makeup, and it's important for us to continue to have strong emotional ties with our tradition. Is that a change unique to Temple Beth Am? It's occurring in Temple Beth Am much more readily and comfortably than I'm sure it's likely to occur in some other Temples. It's part of a movement, I think, and I think it's true in many other religious faiths.

DROKER I'd like to shift the emphasis of the interview now to the Jewish Community Center. I guess as a prelude to that I should ask you what other city-wide organizations you were involved in, if any, as early as the Jewish Community Center, and how did you get started in the Jewish Community Center?

KAPLAN Those things were all so long ago, that I'm not sure I can give you an answer. I was always involved with organizations--I guess I'm an organization person. Whether it's the Pediatrics Society, where I was president, or the Community Psychiatric Clinic, and I was president there for a while--I was head of the building committee and helped build the Community Psychiatric Clinic down on Eastlake. We had many meetings in this house to get that done--I can't remember all of them, Little School; I was active in Little School, too; ^but I was always active in the Jewish Community Center. My first recollection of it was after it was a year or two old--I wasn't there at the beginning--I remember going to a meeting at the old Press Club, and the reason I was invited was I was asked to serve on the committee for the children's program, since I was a pediatrician. That was the first involvement I had; I very quickly became interested in seeing something more done, and it wasn't long after that that we moved to the Elks Club, and I was on the Board and became increasingly active there. We sold the Elks Club, and I can remember the great struggle when, in order to sell the Elks Club the Board had to be convinced that the Elks Club wasn't going to be a good place for a community center. It's location was so ideal, we were reluctant to give it up, but as a building it was hopeless. One third of the space was for elevators and stairs going up and down, and with eight or nine stories, you couldn't possibly have a staff to take care of it. It took a long time for Al Schrieber to prepare his report and convince the community that

this was not a feasible building. There was an offer to sell, and there were several offers, and I remember one came in; it was all cash. Of course that perked up my ears: why did this individual want it? I think the offer was for 180,000 dollars, and I said, "Nope, let's not take less than \$220,00," There were some who said, "Let's take it while we can get it," Finally we held out for \$230,000, and SeaFirst needed it to round out their whole block that they needed for the SeaFirst building, so we got a little more than we would have otherwise. Then we moved to the building on Second Avenue, and it was a second floor space which was a relatively large space. Actually, we were able to do more there, than we were in the other big building. Our programs essentially there were for the children, who used to be brought down. There used to be a lot of children there. There was also a Golden Age group. Other than that, we were devoting most of our time towards thinking about a new center. The tendency at that time in all the centers in the country was to put the center out of the center of the city. There was the Kaufmann Center in New York, which was a very important center, one of the finest centers that we had. The YMHA in Pittsburgh and a few others were still downtown, but the one in New York is a good example, because it became surrounded by at that time Blacks and subsequently Puerto Ricans. The Jews moved out of that area, and the Jews couldn't use the center to any great extent. The tendency, then, was for us to move out (of the city center). In order to get adequate space, that was another important thing; we had to move out of the downtown area, we couldn't afford to build or buy anything. Somebody had visions of building another Washington Athletic Club for the Jews down there, because we couldn't belong to the Washington Athletic Club or the College Club or the Rainier

Club then. It became apparent that it was not feasible economically to do that, so we had to move out. A study was done as to where the center of the population of the Jewish community was. We did it by zip codes, and the center of population of the Jewish community at that time was in the center of Lake Washington, about 200 yards north of Mercer Island, between Mercer Island and what is now the Evergreen Floating Bridge. We didn't want to have to build on an island, so we had to look at the north end of Mercer Island or on the other side, in the area where the Evergreen Point Bridge came in. A third point we looked at was Madison Park. We had properties at all those places that we looked at. We couldn't afford the one at Madison Park; it would have been a very good location. The one at Evergreen, again, didn't provide enough flexibility in building, and then the one at Mercer Island became available. It was a choice that has worked out well from my point of view. I think you have to put it in perspective; when we chose that place we had assurances from the city transportation that not only would I-5 be completed, but also Empire Way was going to become a freeway ^{that was,} ^{which} the R.H. Thompson freeway[^] was going to be built, and there was going to be a good connection with the R.H. Thompson freeway and I-90, which was going to be completed in a year and a half to two years from the time we bought our lot. All of this would have prevented the problems that presented themselves from the point of view of transportation and are still problems for us. So, that was the site that was selected, and I say it was a good choice. It was a good choice for several reasons. As a result of that choice the population was moving towards the east. A lot of people moved into Mercer Island. At that time there were very few Jewish families on Mercer Island; now 10 percent of the population of Mercer Island is Jewish.

DROKER But how much was that a self-fulfilling prophecy?

KAPLAN Oh, I think it was because it was there that they moved there. I don't think there was any question about that. The space was available for them to move there, whereas had we had it elsewhere it might not have been as available, because it was a developing area. Herzl came out there. I have great regrets that we didn't build our offices for Federation out there. I have great regrets that we weren't able to build B'Nai Brith headquarters out there.

DROKER That was an idea that you and Norman Davis and some other people felt very strongly about, that a Jewish community center should house all of the city's Jewish organizations.

KAPLAN I don't think it was unique to myself or to the others; there were many of us that felt that way.

DROKER Why did it not happen?

KAPLAN I think some of the professionals didn't feel as though they wanted to, the professionals who worked for the organizations. In order for something to be accomplished of that sort you have to have an agreement on the part of the professionals, and cooperation in order for it to develop. We had a plan; JCC presented the Federation with a site, the costs and all the rest of it, and it could have worked out. The Talmud Torah could have gone out there, too. The Seattle Hebrew Day School also was thinking about buying an area out there and building out there. This was prior to the time they moved to Forest Ridge.

DROKER Would that have been contiguous with the Jewish Community Center?

KAPLAN Yes. Had they been able to buy one particular lot, it would have given us ample space. There is one particular lot there that has really given us a problem, but that could have been overcome. The Forest Ridge facility was an awfully good buy, and they didn't require as much in the

way of immediate cash, so it became the one of choice. I still am not sure it is the wisest choice for our community. If you could just think of all those organizations being there, how much better off we would all be. For instance, the Hebrew Day School needed athletic facilities. They wouldn't have had to build any ^{athletic} facilities if they were with the JCC, because they were all there; they could have been used very easily during the day. There are many other advantages. They could have had one auditorium for both; it would have been cheaper for the community in the long run, if they were all together. Even now, when Federation has a very large meeting, we go to JCC. I believe the decision that we finally reached--and those that were in favor of it agreed--was that in order for it to function properly, we would have to have some small facility, a meetingroom for boards, downtown, for that was the easiest place for all the people who were on the board to get to. That wouldn't have been a great problem, for there are many places that can be leased at a very reasonable rate.

DROKER I think what I would like to do is to focus in on some of the issues that were involved. One of the key ones, of course, and the most controversial, was location, because people who lived far away from where it was going to be built had some reservations. I found a quote in one of the position papers that was put out at the time, that I thought was very interesting. It says, "Seattle's atypical geography is one factor that makes this decentralization necessary." That was probably about 1965, 1966. They were already planning for Mercer Island, but part of the plan was that there would be satellites. The stationery has a map of Seattle with the Mercer Island site and the satellites. Tell me about that idea and the evolution of it.

KAPLAN That idea was not for Seattle alone. Many community centers at that time

were talking about satellites. We found it absolutely necessary to consider, because we could not possibly serve the Northend, Southend, Magnolia and Queen Anne in any other way, than with satellites. That was cranked into the budget and cranked into our thinking. The Sephardic group in the Southend did respond, and there was a good which continued in the JCC. Golden Age program down there^ The youth did get into the Center, so that they were moderately well-served. The Northend was not served at all, whereas there were many people in the Northend who had been very active in the Community Center, but they lost interest because they couldn't get there. It's still a 25 to 30 minute ride for us in the Northend to get there, through not comfortable traffic or driving. It may be improved now that I-90 will be completed, I hope after all these years. Attempts were made to start a program in the Northend. There was one at Temple Beth Am for the children. For some reason or other--it may not have been financed well enough, but I think that wasn't the problem--there wasn't the interest. The people in the Northend had their own peculiar problems. They are all individuals who have many interests, and they would send their children, when it came to sending them to a nursery school, there were many nursery schools, and they weren't about to change that quickly. A good deal was invested in it; the first year they had an inadequate number; they needed 24, and I think there were 18--these figures may not be completely accurate. Then it dropped to 10 or 12, and when it got down to eight, they figured they couldn't keep the school. ^ The problems were such that whatever attempt at a satellite wasn't successful. They couldn't pour too much money into it--when I say "they" I mean JCC--because they were having their own financial difficulties with their one facility downtown. This is going to be corrected; it took us 10 years longer than we thought it would, but

as you know, the Northend Jewish community is going to have a satellite program, the nature of it I don't know yet, but I've made up my mind that there's going to be one in the next two to three years that's of sufficient magnitude, so it will serve the community well. I feel very strongly that it's most important for the general community to see one here, because it will enrich the general community considerably. When I say enrich, I mean in many ways, not just financially; I mean enrich in terms of intellectual contributions they can make; they have different interests that I think will be of real use to the community generally. It's going to be a good thing for the community. As you know, we're having a real struggle now convincing others, because they feel some other problems are more pressing, but I can't think of any problem much more pressing than to encourage people to become part of the Jewish community and active in the Jewish community. I think we're going to work that out somehow or other. Now, as far as the Magnolia and Queen Anne, no effort has really been made. The communities there have shrunk, as compared to what they were, so that it hasn't been a pressing problem. It is unfortunate ^{that} the people that do live over there have very little opportunity for their children to be part of the Jewish Community Center on Mercer Island.

DROKER Let me ask you about the planning on Mercer Island for facilities which had to take into consideration exactly what they wanted to offer. How was it decided? I was looking through Al's papers, and there was a lot of debate about what they should build first.

KAPLAN We started out with the program, we want a complete facility. A complete facility consisted of: one, administration; two, meeting rooms for various programs, the children; the nursery, the young adults and the senior citizens; and three, an athletic facility consisting of a

swimming pool and athletic facilities. Those are the three main divisions in a community center. Herman ^{Sarkowsky} ^ was head of the building fund, and he did a great job of getting things organized. We started getting bids; he got the person he thought could give us our best and cheapest bid, and that was Jack Benaroya. Herman was in the building business at the time, but he felt as though he would be somewhat of a conflict of interest, and he felt as though he ought to have someone who wasn't on the committee, and that's why he asked Jack to bid ^{there were} ^ and several other bids. ^ We had a hard time selecting the architect. At this time I was very active in the Jewish Community Center, and I felt as though there was only one thing you could do, in terms of a professional. If you get the very top professional in the community, nobody can argue about why didn't he give it to so and so. If everybody recognizes him as a top professional, that's it. We felt we did select the top professional, Paul Thiry, and he was the one who did our planning for us. As far as the builders were concerned, that was strictly financial and competitive and also quality.

(interruption)

Then we started getting the bids in. At that time I think we had \$750,000 pledged. The bids came in well over that. The bids were \$1,200,000--we still owed a little money on the land--so we were still off the beam. We had a difficult decision to make as to what we were going to do. There was one group that felt as though we should build with what we have on hand, and that's it. Another group felt as though let's build the whole thing, and we'll mortgage it and pay it off as we go along. One group said let's build two parts out of the three; we can handle the mortgages with the pledges that ^{were} ^ in hand, and we'd be able to manage. The group that wanted to build one section

felt as though the section that should be built was the athletic wing. I personally was very much opposed to that, because we are not an athletic organization. Unless we had something more than that to offer, we might as well stay home. I couldn't see doing that. We had a real problem, and Leo suggested, Leo Okin,* that we have come out from New York the head of JWB, who was also the head of Jewish Community Centers. He came out, and he talked about how important it was to have more than that; he convinced I would say about 40 percent of the Board. I think had we taken a vote at that particular time, all we would have had was an athletic wing. Then Morris Polik got up, and I will always bless him and thank him, and I can never say enough good about Morris Polik. He got up and very vigorously he said, "What kind of community are we that we're going to be content with what is really third-rate. We are a good community; we will work together. We will support it, and we have to do it." It passed the Board by not a great number, but a sufficient number. In that sort of vote you feel as though it has to be almost unanimous; the whole community has to be behind it, because we have to go out for more money. Fortunately it was passed, and that is what was done, knowing at the time that a third wing would have to be built in the future.

DROKER That sounds like it was somewhat of a turning point, to make that decision and to have to be in that position of raising that much more funds. You told me in our pre-interview that you thought the fund-raising for the Jewish Community Center was a turning point in this community's history. Would you elaborate on that?

KAPLAN At that time, as I said, there was \$750,000 pledged. No, it was less than that; it was \$450,000. The next stage went to \$750,000. We knew

that still wasn't enough, so we started another drive. Mike Litvak who was head of bonds of Israel, he stepped in and helped us in our fund-raising, and he was really very, very helpful. Mike would tell you, "Go see so and so, and he will tell you so and so, and then you say, 'No, I need this and this,' and he will say this and this. . ."

We'd go back, and I would feel like a puppet, because that would be exactly the conversation. In any case, we finally got to the point where we raised \$1.2 million, and I'm not too sure of the figures again. That was the most that had been raised by far in the community. There isn't any doubt in my mind that as a result of that increased level of giving, subsequent giving was improved within the general community. The same thing, I think, is happening now with the very large amount of money that being demanded for the Community Center this time.

(End of Side Two; resume Tape B, side 1)

This is part two of an interview with Dr. Charles Kaplan. The date is November 11, 1982, and the interviewer is Howard Droker.

DROKER Dr. Kaplan, let's begin by talking more about the building of the actual physical plant on Mercer Island.

KAPLAN I think I mentioned to you before that we selected the architect, Paul Thiry, because at that particular time he was the leading architect we felt in the community and was recognized as such and respected as such. There were other Jewish architects who were very well qualified and who could very well have done it, and it was a difficult choice to have to make, which one to select. In order to avoid that particular choice, we felt as though if we selected the dean of the architects in the community, it would be acceptable to all, and it proved to be so. Paul, at that time, was getting a little older, and assigned Ed Burke to the job, and most of our contact was with Ed Burke, who indeed proved to be a very, very helpful, creative architect. One of the requisites and recommendations that we made to him was that he design a building which would require the least amount of maintenance. We knew that when running a center, operational costs are the things that can kill you so that you don't have any time for program or any money left over for program. A special effort was made to design it so that there wouldn't be very much maintenance. This proved to be a very helpful factor.

DROKER Now was that the practical knowledge of somebody who was involved, or where did you get that information?

KAPLAN I think Leo Okin, and myself and others who had been working on budgets before that recognized the necessity for it. It was just made to the building committee, and the building committee also recognized the merits of it. We only had one problem, and I think you

may be well aware of it. The building itself functioned very, very well, but the one item in the building that didn't function well was the air conditioning and heating. I don't know what went wrong with that, but it required a lot of redoing in order to make it work properly.

DROKER To begin with, you built two of the three sections that you felt the Center needed.

KAPLAN Yes.

DROKER Describe those.

KAPLAN The center section, which wasn't the center section at the time, but now is the center section, was a section for administration and provided meeting rooms. It had the offices for the executive director, the bookkeepers and the library and the Board room and several meeting rooms. We had allowed at that time I think just two rooms for the nursery school. Very quickly we found the nursery school outgrew everything else, and nursery school just moved into some of the other meeting rooms, and they had to be revised. I can remember the time we went through these nursery rooms, with the toilets about half the size, and they still intrigue me, and I still enjoy going through, because they were built especially for the nursery school. One room they adopted, for instance, was the arts and crafts room; it had to be taken over by the nursery. It was difficult, but it was managed. There was a teen room, too, and the teen programs, as are all teen programs, are always difficult. Although we had a separate teen room, we found that it wasn't being used as much as we had hoped that it would be. I think you may know that B'Nai ^{B'Rith} came in and took over. They had all their programs ^{there,} B'Nai ^{B'Rith} Youth and the girl's group. We had to make some changes in that section. The other section was a very beautiful large swimming pool and the gymnasium. The only problem we had with the

gymnasium was that the floors were not built on little rubber tips; it was built right on cement, and that is very hard on knees. When we rented it to the Sonics--the Sonics used it for their practices--Herman Sarkowsky made the contribution of changing the whole floor, so that the Sonics could use it. Other than that there were very few other structural things we had to change. Our big problem was that we were always being accused of building an elitist center. It was this beautiful country club, and whereas it was a beautiful structure, and we agree with that, it was not done for the purpose of just making it beautiful. It was done because it was going to save us a lot of money in operations. That decision we didn't ever regret. It was a very fine structure, but it was not very much more than it would have been had we built it in most any other material, and we would have had a whole lot more painting, had we built it in wood.

DROKER That doesn't completely answer the charge of some that it is essentially a country club and not a true community center. How would you respond to that?

KAPLAN I feel that that charge was not made by individuals who were familiar with the Center. People who are with the Center know that the usage of the building itself was paid for by the members ^{themselves,} except for what we received from Federation and United Way. That just barely covered the 20 percent individuals who are not paying their way. The membership paid its way essentially, and the additional community resources took care of the 20 percent, and I don't think it's ever fallen below 20 percent.

DROKER That's the 20 percent who could not afford to pay?

KAPLAN Yes, and they were brought in, bused in, and utilized the Center, and that number remained about 20 percent; I think it may be a little higher,

now, because the dues have gone up, so it's 25 percent. Another thing about membership that we did, that I think made us almost unique as far as community centers in the country were concerned, we insisted that we retain its Jewish character. We did not succumb as so many other centers did, to just accepting membership from non-Jews in order to balance our budget. Our non-Jewish membership has remained--and I don't know what it is now--we kept it at seven percent for many, many years. That meant we did serve a small segment of the non-Jewish community that were local there. They didn't stay very long. After they had finished with their usage of it, they quit. New ones came in, so that they were never a factor in terms of a problem. This was done, by the way--we had to figure out a way of doing it, and the way we devised was--by deciding that anybody who joined the Center had to make a contribution to the building fund. This was very difficult for non-Jews to accept. The Jews had been doing it for years, and there was no problem, but the non-Jews, to give \$1,000 or \$5,000 to the building fund, over and above your dues kept many non-Jews out. As a result, the Jewish Center did retain its Jewish character.

DROKER What about the content of its programs; how does that reflect the Jewish character?

KAPLAN We were never satisfied that there was sufficient Jewish content. There was rarely a board meeting where Jewish content, the words "Jewish content" were not mentioned. Every effort was made to relate it to Jewish content. Of course we had the criticism what's Jewish about basketball or what's Jewish about swimming? It's a difficult thing to answer, but on the other hand, is it all right for Jews to swim; is it all right for Jews to play basketball? The athletic wing, which was really a very beautiful wing and which was used intensively,

was our way of selling the Center to many individuals. Many individuals -- many Jewish individuals I'm referring to--joined the Center because of the athletic facilities and stayed for the rest of the content. We could not have been a success, in terms of membership, without that particular wing. That was one factor, and the other factor is that when 15 or 20 kids are playing basketball, and they're all Jewish, that's giving them an opportunity to relate to one another as individuals, not necessarily with Jewish content, but they were relating to each other and they were getting to know each other, and this was something that was lacking in the community ^{previously.} ^ There was really no facility where they could get together and get to know each other, other than through the synagogues. The synagogues, by the very nature of their organizations, were limited, whether they were Reform or Orthodox or Sephardic and all the JCC of the rest of them, all of the other divisions that we had. Well, ^ was an institution that crossed over all these lines and brought them in together. Just recently I was talking with a group of individuals, about the relationship between the Sephardic ^{Jews/the rest of the} ^ and ^ Jewish community, and those of us who are old-timers--and I don't consider myself as that, but in 1947 when I came here--there was very little communication. If you went to school or college, there wasn't inter-dating. Inter-dating almost represented crossing the line, between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews. I'm expressing it a little more vigorously than it really was, because there was inter-dating, obviously; there were many inter-marriages. There were inter-marriages then; they were referred to as inter-marriages, whereas now they're not: Jews are marrying Jews. This has taken place over a period of years, not only because of the Jewish Community Center, but I truly believe the Jewish Community Center was a major factor in establishing an opportunity for people to get to know each other and to

communicate with each other and get along with each other.

DROKER So it was a unifying factor in the community.

KAPLAN It was what I used to refer to --I don't know if I mentioned this, but at that time we had a rabbi here who always talked about building bridges to the non-Jewish community, and I always used to talk about building bridges within the Jewish community, and that's what we were attempting to do.

DROKER You mentioned that it also involved Orthodox and Conservative and Reform people getting to know each other, too.

KAPLAN Yes, and this presented problems--should we stay open on Saturday, what a struggle that was. Eventually we could stay open on Saturday, if it was after 12 o'clock, so it didn't interfere with services, and that is still a policy. Why shouldn't we have someplace to go Saturday afternoon, other than to watch t.v.,^{or} go to football games^{or whatever,} and after a great deal of struggle it was accepted by most everyone, although somewhat still frowned upon by some of the Orthodox.

DROKER Relating to this question of unity, was there any segment of the community that opposed the creation of a Jewish Community Center?

KAPLAN I still think there's a segment of the community right now that are opposed to the Community Center.

DROKER But is it just individuals, or is there some way of grouping that?

KAPLAN A community center, generally, by the very nature of it, is a threat to the synagogues. The synagogues would prefer to have all their young people go to their young people programs in the synagogue, so that this is a threat. Our answer to that was, number one, half of our membership didn't have any affiliation with any synagogues. Should we provide for them, and the answer was yes, and they couldn't deny that.

But should we compete with the others? We were competing with the others, not intentionally, but just by the very nature of what we were doing. What's more, we had something to offer that they didn't have, and that was an athletic facility. On the other hand, they (the synagogues) had so much more to offer in terms of religious education. We tried to adjust, so that we weren't a threat to them as much as possible, but some of them still feel as though we are a threat.

DROKER So the adjustment is to try and not compete as far as religious education is concerned?

KAPLAN That's right.

DROKER But you do do certainly Jewish cultural things?

KAPLAN Very definitely, we felt we definitely had to do those kinds of things. Also, the Jewish Community Center is a vehicle to have cross-cultural things; there's something that all of us are interested in, and we could do that at the Jewish Community Center, whereas the Orthodox had their major interest; the Reform had their major interest. A community center--and I'm not sure we exploited this to the extent that it could be--could afford to bring in a speaker, because they're going to have a much larger audience. It requires more money to do it, than any of the synagogues could afford. Mind you, as you know, Temple DeHirsch has done that; the other synagogues have their programs, and they've done a great job, but this has been done since the Community Center. They weren't available to the community before that, so I think that we have enriched each other. I hope they continue it, and I'm sure they will continue with it, and I think Community Center should continue with it and strengthen their program. The whole community is better off for it.

DROKER I'd like you to give me some specific examples of relationships between the Jewish Community Center and the synagogues, not necessarily negative experiences, but just give me an idea of how they work together, how the rivalry has cropped up and how it's been dealt with.

KAPLAN Well, I suppose the first example that comes to my mind is the Purim party that they have at the Community Center. Every synagogue loves to have a Purim party, and they still can have it and should have it and do have it, within their own synagogues. But over and above that, the Purim party at the Center is ^{where} all the children, from all the synagogues come. The ones at the Center, the parking is a problem, just maneuvering around the corridors is a problem. They have all sorts of programs that are real fun, and the children just love, in addition to the food and the dancing and the singing, and the nightclub entertainment they have provided, and all sorts of other things in the program. Some of them, some of the synagogues may disapprove of; there are some of the programs that possibly that I disapprove of, but I can't disapprove of the whole project, because it brings everybody together, the parents, the grandparents, the children and the biggest mob you ever did see, including ^{all} the rabbis and their children and their wives. It's a great program. I think that's as good an example as I can think of..

DROKER Have there been any problems with individual rabbis, where they've complained about the Community Center usurping. . .?

KAPLAN Some more than others. You might think, it's going to be the Orthodox who are going to object, and it wasn't necessarily. The Reform synagogue in fact did object. I think in both Temple DeHirsch and Temple Beth Am the rabbis felt, and still feel as though the Center

takes over and takes the time and energies of some of ^{their} ^ members, energy that they might devote to their synagogues. They haven't been completely accepting of the Center. You would think that would be the Orthodox rabbis, but I don't think it is as much the Orthodox rabbis. Generally, they have come and participated and been part of it and taught the classes and brought their children. It took a while; it took a few years for them to realize that. The business of kashruth* has always been a problem; I don't think we ever did get to use our two kitchens, the kosher kitchen and the non-kosher kitchen that was downstairs in the room. I think they've abandoned them now. New ones have been provided in the new wing. In the downstairs there were two kitchens there, that were, for all practical purposes, just closed off.

DROKER So was the food catered then?

KAPLAN No, there wasn't very much food prepared there; it had to be brought in. There were some vending machines, and they were supervised. But the new wing has better facilities for that.

DROKER So that the logic now is that in order to serve everybody , you must have kosher food.

KAPLAN Yes, but that has always been so. But, what's kosher food for one isn't necessarily kosher for the other, and we've had quarrels between the Mashgachj** and that particularly --it was at camp, of course--was "was it ever kosher enough?" It used to drive us crazy, because we would spend literally thousands of dollars to have double equipment, and then somebody would come in and say, "Oh, but you didn't do this, and you didn't do that" and it was sometimes quite frustrating. You can't please 100 percent, but I think it was well-accepted.

DROKER Let me ask you about the camp. That is another issue, and if my
*observance of Jewish dietary laws.
**those who supervise so that the dietary laws are observed

Ben Bow
chronology is right, Camp ^ was purchased before even the
Mercer Island site was purchased.

KAPLAN Yes.

DROKER How was that a part of the program? How did that fit in to the idea
of a community center?

KAPLAN The camp was purchased at the time, within a year or two of the time,
that the Center was started. While we were still in the Elks Club, we
had a camp. The camp was always fairly busy. I guess it was during
the time that I was active in it, we did a study, as to the site
of the camp, and we brought in people from elsewhere. I'm not sure
this is answering your question, but it is a part of the history that
I think is interesting. The question was, "What should we do with the
camp?" There were three or four acres of a camp, which were swamplands,
which we couldn't use. Had we been able to use it, we could have
expanded our program considerably. We negotiated with a core of
engineers, and they were going to come in and drain it for us and various
other projects, but it all boiled down to the fact that our camp was
too small, and it could never, for a good country camp, have the programs
that we should have. We used Rainier National Park for outdoor camping,
but it was still insufficient in size. The National Camping Association
came in and made a recommendation that we look elsewhere for another
camp. This was a heavy blow to the people who had originally bought it.
The Camping Association bought it; it didn't ever belong to the
community at large; it belonged to a Camping Association. They had
put up the money for it and they supported it.
They used to have their 100 dollar raffle tickets and that sort of thing.

DROKER Who were some of the key people, because I haven't seen any mention of

that association being separate.

KAPLAN Norman Clein, while he was alive, was very active in it. Later on Mondschein it was Max ^ who was head of the Camping Association for that reason, for the raising of funds. He and his group of friends used to raise the money for it. I don't know if you know Max Mondschein he is Faye Sarkowsky's father. He did a great deal of work for it.

DROKER What is the JCC's relationship ^ with the Jewish Federation?

KAPLAN Let me continue as far as the camp is concerned, because when it was it had already been expanded. decided that the camp not be used, ^ Some of the recommendations were that we join the camp down in Portland, the B'Nai Brith Camp or the one up in Vancouver, or we build one for all of them. There were various other propositions, and there are extensive on those recommendations, because it was studied quite intensely. When the decision was not to use it, the Camping Association very reluctant, and I can't recall the details of the negotiations, said that they would give it eventually to the Jewish Community Center. That's what happened, and when it was sold, the Jewish Community Center got all of the money for it, and that was part of our building fund.

DROKER But as far as maintaining a camp, that was lost.

KAPLAN That was lost. It was too close to downtown--it became encroached by residential area all around. It was no longer out in the country.

DROKER You did not decide to go ahead and purchase a new camp?

KAPLAN No. Camping more recently has been done much more successfully by the synagogues than it has been done otherwise. This is national. No matter what we did--we tried to build a ^ kibbutz there, and there were all sorts of programs that we did in order to try to give it

more Jewish content--I never did feel as though we did enough, or that we were successful. We were no where near as successful as the religious camps were. The religious camps have really had an impact on many individuals. I don't think we did anything more than provide recreation for Jewish children, plus they learned about the Shabbat which was very much part of it. ^{too} and things of that sort, ^ I may be a little ^ critical on that, but I do feel that we weren't as successful. We should have possibly had rabbis involved in the direction of it, instead of social workers. Whatever it was, I think the eventual solution of going to various surrounding camps run various religious organizations has satisfied our community sufficiently. We're a poor community for camps, because we live in a camp. All of us have places--it isn't like living in New York, where you have to get out of the heat of the summer and go to You're living in Seattle. a camp. ^ Camping, by the very nature of our climate, was difficult to continue.

DROKER That's a very good point. Now let's go now to the relationship between the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation. What was the interaction?

KAPLAN The Jewish Community Center was originally started as a result of the Federation saying it's time we had a Center. The people who were involved were all Federation people. Once it became a thriving organization we had to go for funds to Federation, they were most cooperative. When we had to go in for building funds, they were very very careful about us reporting to them exactly what we were doing. This was the first time around. The same precautions weren't taken the second time around, but when we were going to increase our goal, we came before a board of the Federation, and the Federation would say,

"No, go out and do this, that and the other thing," and give us all sorts of instructions. I can remember one time coming before the board with the budget for our building, and Sol Esfeld said, "But you don't have enough money for interest during the construction part. You don't have this, that and the other thing; you're going to have to do that. . ." This was the sort of advice, and it was a good relationship. Not all the individuals were supporting it completely. We had to struggle; we had to sell it, but the majority of individuals were very much in favor of it, and all they wanted to do was see that it did work and that it didn't get into difficulties financially.

DROKER So you think that you benefitted by the experience of those people?

KAPLAN No question about it. We depended upon Federation. We were well aware of the fact that without Federation we couldn't survive, so we worked hand in glove with Federation on all the things that we did. As far as operating subvention, we received a fair share. I don't think we ever received any more than the average community center did in any other community, but it was always with understanding. We always had to sell our program; we always had to convince them that this was money that was well-spent; we had to convince them that this was something that we were using discreetly and wisely and not wasting. Of course they would always give us less than what we asked for, and we'd have to go back and revise our budget. It was a good relationship, and all the time that I was involved with the Jewish Community Center, I was also involved with Federation. Most of us were wearing two hats at that time. Many of us were on both boards. At that time, much less so subsequently, people on the Jewish Community Center boards do not represent as it did at the time. As you go down the list of the individuals who were president of the Jewish Community Center,

they were also president of Federation at ^{some} ^ time or another, so that there was a great interchange. I personally feel as though I received my training in community leadership in Jewish Community Center and also in organizational work, which I felt made me a much better individual when I became more active in Federation.

DROKER Talk about the evolution of the Jewish Community Center, the change in the board, kind of leading up to more recent times.

KAPLAN I think during the early 70's there was a real effort on the part of the Jewish Community Center to bring in younger people.

(End of Side 1; resume Side 2)

KAPLAN These younger people, we felt had to serve some sort of an apprenticeship, and they were put on various committees and then eventually came on the board. I think as the 70's went along, many of us who might, who got older, went on to Federation and other community activities, American Jewish Committee and ^{a lot} ^ of other committees, and younger groups took over, and that's how it should be. There weren't enough "gray beards" left behind to keep the place from going ahead without sufficient responsibility. That's one of the criticisms that I would make of our leadership, in terms of not foreseeing this. We were so anxious to see younger people become active in it, that it was loaded too much, in terms of individuals, that were interested. This may be unfair, but the younger people were more interested in the athletic part, whereas we came from a different generation, and we were much more interested in ^{Jewish} ^ cultural activities. That may not be fair; that may be my interpretation of things. There was some of that, I know.

. . . They wanted tennis courts, though that was the big gripe "If only we had tennis courts," but they did go in for raquet ball and things of that sort. That had a relatively high priority, as

compared to meeting rooms. But all in all, they tried to do everything when they built the second time, and I think they really built a complete center.

DROKER Do you think they tried too much, they bit off too much?

KAPLAN Well it turned out they tried too much, in terms of how much money they had. I think that's another story.

DROKER You suggested that the Federation had withdrawn a bit of its control that they had exercised earlier.

KAPLAN The controls should have been exercised by Federation and weren't.

DROKER Why was that?

KAPLAN I don't know. It was after my presidency in Federation. The people involved at that time would have to answer that question. I can't imagine that they weren't aware of it. Another factor that came into it was that all the agencies have always talked about "We are autonomous; our board rules itself," and Federation has always allowed that, but that has to go with responsibility, too, because Federation is the umbrella organization for the whole community. All these organizations can't go wild. The answer is that it was resolved finally when it was paid off this spring.

DROKER Do you have any more insights into the recent crisis?

KAPLAN No, the recent crisis was resolved as a result of . . . the committee who ran it had their meetings Monday nights. I'm on call Monday nights, so I could never attend, so I never was very much a part of that, other than peripherally. I would talk to Marty Rind and individuals who were involved and Barry ^{Hantman} and ^{Lenny} Robinson. I was involved in that, but I'm not directly involved in what happened there. Marty Rind knows the most about it, because he was the one who rang the bell of alarm.

DROKER Before we move away from JCC, do you have any summary statements you would like to say, or any insights you might have into the meaning of the role of the Jewish Community Center in this city?

KAPLAN Well, it would be repetitious but I do feel as though the Community Center has made a great contribution in terms of unifying the community, not only unifying the community as far as individuals are concerned, but enriching the community, in terms of what has been accomplished. By the geographical location of it, it has alienated, from itself, certain segments, because they can't get to it. The Northend is a good example, and that is the sort of thing (not just the Center, because the Center is doing its part) that I feel now that the whole community[^] by that I mean Federation-- has to see that that situation is corrected. It can lead to a great strengthening of the community, or it can lead to a weakening of the community, where a certain segment of the population isn't serviced and is lost as far as being of assistance to the community. I feel ^{strongly}[^] that that is the job that has to be done for the next few years.

DROKER Let's talk now about your involvement in the Jewish Federation. How long have you served on Federation, and what have been your major focuses, what have you dealt with?

KAPLAN I was allowed ^{to serve}[^] on Federation and become a member of the board back, I guess in the late '50s, and remained a member of the board for many many years, and I think I was chairman of every committee in Federation at one time or another. There are a lot of interesting things that happened there that I'm sure you're going to become aware of. When I was head of the budget committee I felt that we talked about planning and we didn't ever get anywhere. We devised various ways of trying to accomplish planning. We broke the organization up into different sections, and now we've done that successfully. It wasn't particularly

successful at that time. I've always felt that unless we do good planning for the community--and long range planning is a very difficult. . .

DROKER Would you explain further what you just said about breaking the committee up?

KAPLAN Right now, as you know, there are various segments to planning the budget. One is the social group ^{where} ^{Family} the [^] Society, Jewish Community Center and then the national group, the Israeli group, that sort of thing, and we would then appoint chairmen to these various groups. They would interview--education is, of course, is a very strong one--say, individuals from the Hebrew Day School, and it was merely an exercise in talking, because we didn't have any power in those committees. So, nothing was accomplished; when it finally came to the board, when it finally came to the final allocations for funds, what preceded ^{it} didn't have the influence that it should have.

DROKER The Board made the decision. . .?

KAPLAN No, the Planning and Budget did, and then the Board could change the decision.

DROKER But Planning and Budget didn't rely on the committees that had reviewed the requests of the various groups?

KAPLAN No, it didn't rely on their subcommittees. They spoke up for them, and someone would say, "But we need it more than you do," and it was a free for all. One of the first steps that was taken was that the Board could not alter the recommendations of the Planning and Budget. Planning could present it to the Board, and the Board could accept it or reject. If they rejected it, it would have to go back to Planning and Budget, and they would have to revise it again and resubmit it. This, of course, gave Planning and Budget a good deal

more strength. The people on the Board felt as if they had lost some of their authority. On the other hand, it was being vested in other individuals who were very responsible, and the final say was still with the Board.

DROKER Are the chairmen of all the committees taken from the Board?

KAPLAN The Constitution spells out how it's appointed. Some from the Board, some from the general community. So, subsequent to that, the power was given to the Budget committee. That made things a lot simpler when it finally came to passing the budget by the Board.

DROKER When approximately was that?

KAPLAN I would say middle '70s. The next step was that when I was president, I decided that in order to strengthen planning, we had to have two co-chairmen on the Planning and Budget, one for planning and one for budget. We had it all set up, and it was really working very, very well until the individual who was to do the budgeting had to be appointed to some other job. That left only the one again; I lost the co-chairman. I think it was Frankie Loeb, who was at that time head of the planning, she had to take over and be both planning and budget. I can't recall who the budget was, whether it was Sol ^{Halfon} at that time. or somebody of that sort, who had to assume another role. We decided we had to have a proper planning process, and we hired somebody to come in and do it, and I requested Sam ~~Stroum~~ ^{the} to be chairman of that particular planning thing. After a great deal of persuasion, he accepted the role, and a result, of course, was the large volume of recommendations. This was back about four or five years, and it's available. There are still copies of it. From that there were many, many changes developed in the Federation and in the structure of Federation. The planning and

budget process we've talked about was really set up properly, so that each group had its strength. The chairman of each subgroup then became part of the steering committee. It was a steering committee that then finally resolved the allocations and they presented them to Planning and Budget. As I say, that worked out fine. There was a study done on personnel, and at that time I think we had one and a half, possibly two and one half individuals, and it was recommended that we have four individuals, and the structure was to be changed. There were many, many recommendations that were implemented during the subsequent year

DROKER Stroum was chairman of that committee that put out this recommendation?

KAPLAN Yes. He chaired the complete Planning process or study program process.

DROKER Was that a turning point in the whole Federation history?

KAPLAN Yes, because that has made a tremendous difference. We now have four full-time professionals. At that time we had one and a half sometimes, two and one half. It would be back and forth. I remember the struggle we had; we wanted to get somebody to spend half time on public relations, to coordinate our defense agencies. This was a threat to AJC and a threat to ADL, and what a struggle that was. Finally it was accomplished, and the three agencies now work together hand in glove. They are much stronger and much more effective than they were individually. That was after a real difficult struggle.

DROKER Was there a major change when the Jewish Federation was created out of had been the Federated Fund? Was that a big change?

KAPLAN Those were names that changed over back and forth all the time. It didn't mean anything. It wasn't until we actually did the complete planning process, or study program process, I should say, that we

actually became a Federation and Council. Prior to that, the name was there all the time. The only thing we've changed is the change from "greater Seattle" to "Seattle" things of that sort, but nothing significant has changed.

DROKER Somebody has suggested to me that in 1966, when they became the Jewish Federation, was a turning point.

KAPLAN At that particular time, we decided ^{this is} ^ what we wanted. It was never implemented to the extent that it should have been. Every effort was made to do it, but we couldn't ever accomplish it, until actually we did the study, and the study set forth what we should be doing. When that was put into effect, I think we became much more of a planning group. We did planning, but it wasn't effective. I shouldn't say it wasn't effective; it wasn't ^{as} ^ effective as it should have been and as it is now.

DROKER The last set of questions I have to ask you are kind of funny, and I feel kind of strange asking them, but I want to know about power in the community. Who are leaders in the Seattle community and why are they leaders? Not necessarily specific individuals, but what makes ^{a community leader} ^

KAPLAN Number one, to be a leader in the community, all you have to do is be prepared to work and put in a lot of time. I would say that the individuals who . . . whenever I sit down at an executive board meeting, I take a look around, and I say, "These are nice people. They are all good people who have worked very, very hard for the community" So, time and people who can work and know how to work and enjoy work. It's the old saying, that if you want to get a job, ^{done} ^ go to somebody who is busy; don't go to somebody who isn't.

DROKER There is also an ability.

KAPLAN Yes, and when I say "nice people" I mean they're smart, they're bright, they're willing, they don't shirk jobs, they're good people, and it's a pleasure to work with people of that sort. I think you take a look at the Board generally, and you would say "I'd like to have these people as my friends," because they are individuals that have a community interest and want to see the community grow. I'm not spelling it out in terms of what they need to do, but just in terms of how I view them.

DROKER What are some of the underneath motivations for this dedication?

KAPLAN I don't care what the dedication is. Often times people are accused that the reason they are doing it is for self-glory, because of ego needs. I don't care what ego needs they have, if they do the job, as far as I'm concerned, the community is better off, and everybody else is better off, and I don't listen to talks about ego needs as the motivation. People who say that are just individuals who have the same ego needs and aren't doing anything about it or who don't recognize how much effort it is. As an officer, oftentimes, you'd see your picture, and people would tease you about that. Right at the very beginning, I was trained, that you don't have your picture because you're in, you do it because it's a means of accomplishing a goal for that particular agency. This is the sort of exercise or publicity that you have to go through. There's only one other factor that I think should be mentioned and that is for a long time a real effort was made to have people who did have something to offer, in terms of special skills, to be on the Board without looking at their pocketbook. I think there's a little more^{now} of looking at their pocketbooks for people on the Board.

DROKER Why?

KAPLAN Because we could raise more money that way. If you want to raise more money, you have to take that into consideration. So, it has its definitely positive aspects, but some of these same individuals, maybe have a different point of view than a social worker who doesn't have very much money, who again also has certain skills. That's the dichotomy; I'm trying to indicate that whereas there was a tendency to have a social worker, now the tendency is to see that the individual can make a contribution in terms of raising funds. The amount of funds that have been raised has increased quite markedly. And you can do more, and the social workers are better off, because you can do more. It's a tough choice to make when you're thinking about it. The strength of any of it is who controls the nominating committee, if you really want to get right down to it. Because they are the ones who are going to determine whose going to continue having the power on the Board. I think enough said about that.

DROKER There's one obvious motivation, and I don't know if we should talk about it or not, that's the Jewish motivation. There has been so much written about Jewish charity. Do you think that that plays an important part?

KAPLAN I don't have any doubt that that is operating. I take that as a sine qua non, and I don't think it needs any discussion. I think everybody has that. If you don't have that motivation, you're not going to be involved.

DROKER That brings me to another question, and that is, why was the Seattle Jewish community, before, say, the mid-60s, known as not being a giving community?

KAPLAN It was a divided community. The community was divided, and certain of the community (it was per capita that it was judged by), segments that is essentially the Sephardic community, that didn't feel part of the total community, and they weren't particular givers

of the community. The Orthodox were very anxious to support their synagogues, own institutions, their Hebrew Day School, their ^ etcetera. There were some Sepahrdics who were givers, but ^ generally, they reduced the per capita giving. It left it to the Conservative group and a large number of the Reform. But there were a few of the Reform who were not strong for Israel, so that segment would reduce the per capita giving. All those things have changed. The community now is so much more a single community, than it was then, and responsibility for its giving has included most of these groups and more and more of them. There are still lots of fertile fields that have to be tapped. I'll come back to the Northend again. These are individuals, many of them part of the University, and they don't feel part of the community. They have to be included in the community. I think those are the major factors that reduced our giving. We had some very generous givers all along, throughout those times. The level of giving has increased because the affluence of the Jewish community has changed, too. We have individuals who are very much more wealthy than what we ever had in the '50s, so that there is a lot of new wealth in the community that didn't exist then.

(Tape interruption)

KAPLAN I hinted about this before when we talked about struggle among the defense agencies. We in the community have had a branch of ADL and a branch of AJC for a long, long time.

DROKER Since the late 40's.

KAPLAN Yes, and in addition to that, whenever a problem arose, say, vis a vis Israel, it was the Federation that was called. This is the situation; this is the interpretation we give on it. We would like to know what your group thinks about it. So, the Federation often times was asked as a spokesman, both by the newspapers and by national groups, as to

what attitudes they should take. The relationship between ADL, AJC and Federation was not close. It was not antagonistic. It varied, actually, because each time there was a different executive director as compared to who was in the Federation. with each one of the groups,[^] There were times when there was some cooperation.^{But} [^]there was no organized way of being able to handle it as a community. We couldn't say, "The community feels this way or the majority of the community feels this way about something." Always we would hear, "Well, they can't speak for me. I don't feel that way at all about it." About, I can't remember how long ago it was. . .

DROKER I think 1966 the Community Relations Council was formed.

KAPLAN Was it that far back? About that time, it was recommended that we have a Jewish Community Relations Council. We very quickly recognized that in order to do that, it required somebody's time, a professional's time, just to even call the meetings. The two individuals, at that time, who were with the other two defense agencies, didn't get along too well. They were threatened by this. Was Federation going to take over their job? They objected to it violently. When I say violently, I mean meetings until 12 o'clock, one o'clock at night. We would come home, and we would be wrung out.

DROKER This was Sy Kaplan?

KAPLAN Not Sy Kaplan. He was there, and when I referred to those not getting along too well he'd be one of the parties, but this was at Federation level. This was the chairman, Merle Cohn, myself, and Al Franco. Al Franco at that time, I think he had just become active in AJC, and I had been active in AJC. . .

DROKER He had been in ADL for a long time.

KAPLAN All of us were in ADL. I don't know if you're aware of the fact,

but ADL Board consists of everybody in the Jewish community, practically. It's a very large board; I think there were 100 people on the board. Sy would call and ask if you would be on the board and you'd say yes and once a year you met. Whereas AJC was a very small group.

DROKER The fighting was not the professionals, but the. . .

KAPLAN That's right. The professionals fought, but they didn't engage in these battles. These battles were conducted by lay people, as to what was best for the community. ADL did actually feel really threatened, but there was a question as to whether the person who was working at AJC would become a part-time employee for Federation, and his salary would be paid half by Federation and half by AJC. However, as a result of all these struggles, eventually the Community Relations Council was started. I think Al was the first chairman.

DROKER Yes. Al talked about his part in that on one of his tapes.

KAPLAN As I recall, I followed him. As a result of that, all of them learned to talk together. When an emergency comes through now, they are Federation, called by ^ or any one of the three and told, "Let's get together at 7:30 in the morning." I haven't ever attended any of those meetings, because they are too early in the morning for me, but they would start early in the morning, and by 8:30, 9 o'clock, they were all back to their own offices, with an opinion as to how they should handle it here locally, which was much wiser and much more comfortable for everyone to live with, than we ever had before. All three organizations have benefitted by that. But the CRC, in the Federation itself, has made a real contribution. We're never quite satisfied that our public relations are sufficient, or are good enough, but they are so much superior to what we ever had before,

in terms of our relationship with newspapers, with the Catholic community, with all the other segments of the community, getting our story out is done so much more skillfully and so much more professionally than we ever did before. Mind you, we used to work hard; it wasn't lack of hard work, but it wasn't coordinated sufficiently, so they couldn't speak with as loud a voice as they are able to speak now.

(End of Interview)