

Marcie Greenberg
Interviewed at the Jewish Federation Building
By Dr. Ben Cohen
On November 8, 1995

ABSTRACT:

This interview describes the variety of volunteer tasks performed by Mrs. Greenberg and her long experience as a volunteer in a wide range of public and private non-profit social agencies as well as local and state commissions and committees. The spectrum of roles she played – as board or committee member or chair – was also wide. Her views of the respective roles of staff members and lay volunteers are set forth. She and the interviewer worked closely together on many undertakings, particularly in the Jewish Welfare Federation. Dr. Cohen died before the interview was transcribed. Every care was taken to report their words accurately and, though his voice was not always clear, caution was exercised to avoid any misinterpretation of the words he spoke.

COHEN: Marcie, I'm going to be talking with you today to get an oral history for the Social Welfare Archives of the School of Social Work at USC. I've known you for a long time, Marcie, and I'm very happy to be the one who is going to be talking to you.

Have you ever been interviewed this way in any kind of attempt to get a history?

GREENBERG: Not to get a history, but I have been interviewed based on some of the things I've done but never to get a history.

COHEN: How did you get into the almost full-time job of being a volunteer in the Jewish community?

GREENBERG: For the Jewish community?

COHEN: Don't limit yourself to the Jewish community. It's not just for the Jewish community; it's for the entire community. I knew you in the Jewish community, but I know that you've involved in the general community as well. How did you first get involved in volunteerism

GREENBERG: I was very young, very impressionable, and I ran for the school board in Beverly Hills. At that time, Paul Ziftren's grass roots groups. We became, basically, a campaign, based on people who joined the Beverly Hills Democratic Club, which was formed at our house. We ran the first organized campaign. We had postcards and we had teas. I lost the campaign, but that was my first political activity. As a result of that, I got to know people in politics who worked in various jobs in politics. Ultimately, I was appointed to the State Social Welfare Board. You may be interested to know that I took the place of a guy named Jerry Sampson – I don't know if you know him. He then became the director of the State Social Welfare Board. He had taken Carmen Warshaw's position. So, it's a long line of people whom you know who had that position. I was appointed by Governor Pat Brown, the man who was called the "Real Governor Brown."

COHEN: The real Governor Brown: the original.

GREENBERG: Yes, the original Governor Brown. I had a very interesting experience with that whole field. I was appointed to the State Social Welfare Board even though I had only an academic and clinical background. I had a dual major in sociology and psychology from UCLA. I had an MA from the Harvey Mudd Graduate School of Education, and I had worked at a state child guidance clinic. It was from that experience that I realized that the Beverly Hills school system was really dedicated to people who were very smart, had good support at home, and I had this patient who felt so inadequate, that she performed at a higher level than the standard for her grade. So, I was incensed. I was young enough to be incensed. That's how I happened to run for the school board. When you do that, you get known to people. People in my campaign basically wanted to involve me in the Jewish community. I didn't have a lot of time, then, but my first

contact with the Jewish community was on the Board of Jewish Family Service at the time that Frieda Mohr was the Director. That was a long time ago. Oh, what was your original question? How did I get involved? That's basically how I got involved.

COHEN: Can you give me an idea of some of the involvement you've had in all the years that you've been in this kind of work?

GREENBERG: I spent several years on the State Social Welfare Board. I chaired a state-wide study on abused and neglected children. I was on the Department of Education's Committee for Pre-school Compensatory Education. Those are basically government appointments. I've also served on the LA County Protective Services Committee, and I served on analysis of the state director's program, which was done – I think it's on my resume, I forget the name of the company that did it, but it was a study done by the State. I served on various county committees related mostly to social welfare and mostly to programs for the poor. In the Jewish community, I was in Jewish Family Service and was President. And, because they continue your membership on their executive committee, I've been on their executive committee ever since. I was appointed by Jewish Family Service to a United Way position and ultimately served on a corporate board at the United Way, Region IV, on their board and was chairman of their budget committee.

What happens on all these organizations is that if you're there long enough, you serve on most of the committees. In the Jewish Welfare Federation, I've been on the board of the Federation for many, many years, as you know. I have been an officer of the executive committee for a long time. I just recently was chair of the Personnel Committee and presently co-chair of the Resettlement Committee. I was chair of the Planning and

Allocations Committee. I chaired several studies. I think you worked with me or I worked with you on the Jewish poor. Then we did a population study and we did a study on the aged as I recall. I was co-chair with Dick Gunther on informal education on the Harvey Weinberg futures study, so I've done a lot of that. I was chair of the Research Committee for a while.

COHEN: What else were you...?

GREENBERG: I should add that the committee that I chaired that caused the most uproar, was the review of the Jewish Community Bulletin, which resulted in its demise after many years of having been studied and perpetuated. Sometimes I feel that was one of the highlights, because we now have the Jewish community newspaper that people read and value. I don't think I've done anything else that upset so many people.

(laughter)

COHEN: But the outcome was good.

GREENBERG: The outcome was good, yes. In the non-Jewish community, I served on UCLA School of Medicine on the recombinant DNA committee and on their human subjects protection committee. I belonged to a group called American Women for National Understanding. We are invited to many countries in which United States has a hard time establishing relationships. The women of all those countries – most foreign countries have women's committees, and they, basically, invite us to come. We meet with people who are in the same fields as we are in. We are briefed before we go by the United States Information Service. It's been a very exciting, interesting activity. We've been to Egypt and Israel and Iran and Greece and Turkey and Russia and China. We were invited to Russia by Valentina Cheroskova. That was a very interesting experience.

I also served on the AFL/CIO Committee for Health Plan Alternatives. That was another interesting arena, which led me to be a speaker at the County Medical Association, where they practically booed me off the podium, because I really thought people had a right to healthcare. We were describing peer review, which was new at that time, and they didn't much like it. That was another really interesting experience.

COHEN: You had a lot of them.

GREENBERG: I have had a lot of experiences, and all of them have been wonderful. Another really interesting one is, every year, the Army War College invites a small number of people from all over the United States to come and participate in their studies, their seminar. They choose a topic that their Lieutenant Colonels study. The men at the Army War College are people who have the potential to be generals. They are all Lieutenants. Then, they decide that they will invite lay people from all over the country to come for two weeks and see whether the view that the Lieutenant Colonels have of these problems, mesh with the view that people from outside of the military have. For me it was very, very interesting, because I was about to go to Iran, and, at that time, there was a lot of talk about the involvement with Israel, and particularly, there was some discussion about a base for the United States Navy in Haifa. I was the only Jew in our sixteen-person group. The Army's view of its relationship and the United States relationship was that it had to stand by Israel because of its honor. The United States had promised it would do that, but its real interest was in oil. They happened that year to be studying the impact of oil on our economy and on our political world. We had a really interesting discussion. It was interesting to me for two reasons: first, I was about to go to

Iran, so I was talking with the Iranian students here at UCLA, and it was my understanding from them that the Shah was shaky.

In the discussion in our seminar, they had just had an Army Intelligence man return from Iran, and it was his position that the Shah had an army totally devoted to him. I asked the question, why did he think that was true. I had heard that because he was so far ahead of this population in terms of privileges he was giving to women and trying to bring that country into the modern world, he really was in a shaky position. The interesting part for me is they treated me like a woman, like what do you know? To a degree, a year later when the Shah fell, I almost wanted to write back and say, “See? I told you so.” (laughter) But, again, you have a lot of – almost all the things I had done in the government, and outside of the Jewish Federation, I was the only woman on the State Social Welfare Board, the only woman with the AFL/CIO group and various other places. As a woman, living through the women’s rights growth and development in terms of equality, it’s been an interesting many, many years.

COHEN: I’m going to ask you, Marcie, at this time – and this isn’t one of the questions I said I would. It just occurred to me that I ought to ask you about the role of the professional as relating to lay people. What are some of your thoughts about that; the kind of relationships that you have developed with professionals and lay people? Will you talk about that?

GREENBERG: I remember Jerry Rubin had a couple of programs where I spoke. The relationship of a lay person to a staff person varies, depending on their personalities. As a lay person, you know that you’re a temporary figure. As a staff person has to spend some time getting used to your style, so there’s a period when you start a relationship in which

you need to set some ground rules. Neither of us, when you first begin – and I’m talking about if I’m chairing a committee – have an idea of what the other’s expectation is. There are some lay people who don’t want to do anything. They want to arrive at a meeting, have an agenda presented to them and just call the names of the people who then make a presentation. They have no role in setting the agenda, and as far as their staff person is concerned, he or she is in charge and basically makes all the contacts with all of the people. That really isn’t my style, as you know. (laughter) I think my style came out of the State Social Welfare Board, because we were a hands-on group of people. We were a court of last resort; we did grants, we lived through the welfare rights movement in which was really led by social workers. It was a fascinating experience. You got the feeling that you were responsible for what was going to happen. I don’t know that all lay people really feel that they are responsible for what’s going to happen. I think a staff person is in a very difficult position. That staff person has to relate to the supervisor, the director of the agency or the director of the entire Jewish Federation or United Way or School of Medicine or whomever. So they have two taskmasters: they want to help you do a good job, they want to please you, but nonetheless, they are accountable for their job to a person who is in a staff position. If you are a lay person – and I know this is more true of men than women – and you expect to have your word be the law, that what you want to do is the thing that’s going to happen, you’re in for a rude awakening.

Staff control lay people in two ways: one, they withhold information. They basically don’t give you the fact such as what the budget is, or who the players are in this particular program or problem. They use you, sometimes.

This isn't true of all staff, but they basically use you as a puppet. You run the meeting, you make the arguments for a budget committee or you make the arguments of a big meeting, but you aren't part of their team. Their team is all staff. The best relationships in my experience, is a joint one with staff and lay people. In starting out a project, you put your heads together and decide where you want to go and how you can get there. If you are the staff person, you are accountable to your chief and the lay person can carry the ball. A lay person can go outside of channels. If I want to talk to the President of the Federation or the Executive Vice President, I don't have to go through channels. I just pick up the telephone, and I make an appointment. Usually, the staff person has to go through channels. That slows up the project. We have to talk about my doing that, or in other words, I'm not going to act without informing my staff person of what I'm up to. I can take the position at a meeting that is contrary to what the executive Vice President or the President of the Federation believes or wants to happen, and it doesn't reflect on my staff person. My staff person can't take that position. My staff person has to go along with what the director says. So, in order for all that play to occur, you have to have an honest relationship and it takes a while to establish that. I get challenged if there's a staff person who doesn't know me from some other arena, if they don't know who I am They don't know my style. They don't know whether I'm a nice person or am not a nice person. They don't know if I'm demanding or reasonable. They just don't know. They don't know what my background is. Nobody ever asks me what my background is. That's really interesting. If I had to describe a good staff/lay relationship, it starts with the understanding that you need to be honest with each other and have confidence in one another's ability to use good judgment, particularly in talking

about what you're up to. One of the things that Howard Jarvis did with me, which I thought was a genius thing to do with a lay person – I was Chair of the Budget Committee at that time, and he was the Director of Planning. To preserve his time, and again, he doesn't know me. I don't call you a lot, right? That's your experience with me?

COHEN: Right.

GREENBERG: We set up a regular meeting. It was his idea to set up a regular meeting once a week, and each of us would have an agenda. During that period of time, we would get our business out of the way. Then he is free, for the rest of his week, to run his shop. He doesn't have me calling him five times a week. One of the problems that I see in lots of the lay-staff relationships is that the lay person is on the back of the staff person so much of the time, asking for so many things that the staff person doesn't do or has to spend a lot of time getting the information for, and so can't do his job. There has to be a lot of consideration and understanding of the staff person's needs. There isn't a lot of understanding. I have heard stories that people don't behave well, which surprises me. I've not heard stories of staff not behaving well. I've only heard stories of lay people who don't behave well, and they're all men, Ben. (laughter)

How do you train your lay people? If I had to make a suggestion to staff, I would certainly have an orientation meeting with my chairperson. I might have lunch with him, I might describe how I work, who I have to please, what my constraints are, what my time is, who I have at my disposal, what things my secretary can handle, what things I should know. That way the groundwork is laid for how you relate and work together. The best programs come out of a joint working together. I think it's called "we're a team."

COHEN: Right. That's excellent. I really appreciated your contribution to that, and it is a contribution. What did you find most gratifying personally, and what obstacles did you encounter, and what successes or nonsuccesses?

GREENBERG: I have a lot of them, Ben. You want to hear the first one? (laughter) Did you know Frieda Mohr?

COHEN: Oh, sure.

GREENBERG: Well, you know Frieda is a very strong person.

COHEN: Yes, she is.

GREENBERG: I was very young – I'm not going to tell you how young I was – I was very young when I became President of the agency. We had several fights. The two big fights we had were about my wanting students in the agency. I wanted them to come as interns in the agency. Frieda did not want them in the agency. I wanted them there for two reasons: first, they're spies. The truth is they know what's going on. Second, they bring to an agency what is new in the field. They're on the cutting edge of new techniques. They would be the first to tell you "we do family counseling" at a time when all family service agencies were doing one-to-one counseling. I believe that strongly. That's because I came out of that Harvard education thing where they like that process. We fought about that over and over. But I won. (laughter) I loved it; I won!

The other thing we fought about was starting a fundraising group, because the handwriting was already on the wall. What happened in Jewish Family Service – we're talking now about the '60s – was that if we wanted to get a kid a Bar Mitzvah suit, we had to somehow get a hold of some friendly housewife group, a club that met on Fridays, or something, and see if they would pony up five bucks a piece so we could buy a suit.

That's no way to run a business. So, we started out having a very small fundraiser. That was another fight, because in those days, agencies were deficit-funded, the theory being that Big Daddy – Jewish Federation – would supply them with all their needs. But it didn't work that way. Those were the two big issues, and I won them both. I don't remember the ones I lost. (laughter)

COHEN: I want you to know that I did a history of Jewish Family Service as my dissertation for my doctorate program.

GREENBERG: I didn't know that.

COHEN: Frieda was still alive, and I interviewed her.

GREENBERG: You did?

COHEN: Yes, and she surprised me. The first ever professional director of Jewish Family Service was a friend of hers. She surprised me once when I came over with a tape recorder to talk with her, and she had the vice president there. That was quite an experience. I can't remember her name.

GREENBERG: That's interesting. Well, Frieda was a very interesting staff person. When I talk about withholding and manipulating lay people, she was a master at that. I had one other time with her: I used to say to her, because she was really getting on in years – that she needed to develop somebody as an assistant who could replace her if anything happened to her. I had a conversation with her brother, George, if you remember George. He was a psychiatrist. He said she'll never let you do it. She had, at that time, a woman whose name now escapes me, who was her best social worker. You probably remember her, but I can't think of her. At that time, we had just begun to develop programs for the aging, and I didn't know whether it would be a better

organizational structure to have it as one large committee within Family Service, or if it should be a freestanding committee, or a freestanding, almost, agency, because there was money for it. Frieda wouldn't hear of it being freestanding; she didn't want this woman to have that much power. I was a neophyte; I hadn't had any experience with any staff person before. When you say what do I remember, boy, do I remember. It was a bath by fire. But it was good. She was a good fighter.

COHEN: Yes, she was.

GREENBERG: She was a very good fighter. I grew a lot and learned a lot. You asked me what other things I did that I liked. I made presentations to the legislature to get protective services developed at the county level. As a matter of fact, we lost the first two bills. The next year, with a different Governor – Reagan was the next Governor – the bill passed; the very same bill. Then one of the legislators, whom I had convinced that we really needed to protect abused and abandoned kids, carried the ball for me. Do you remember Mary Ripley, by any chance? Mary Ripley was at the Child Welfare League. She's a Republican. She was invited to the signing of that bill. She suggested it would really be a nice gesture to invite me since I had been the person who had done the study and had done all this arguing and lobbying for the bill. Reagan sent back the message that, "No damn Democratic is going to get any credit for this." (laughter) So she brought me back a pen that was used to sign the bill. I felt very good about that.

The other things I felt good about was our study on the Jewish poor, because until then, the Jewish community didn't accept that there were poor people who were Jewish. Also, while all this activity was going on, women's movement was beginning to grow. One of the things the campaign had me doing all the time was talking about budgeting to

women who were on women's committees and various places. I used to tell them that budgeting was nothing to be afraid of. In those days, there were very few women on that committee. I was the first woman chair of that committee. I told them that budgeting is what they did every day with their household stuff. It's no big mystery. I spent most of my time convincing them that they were comfortable with numbers and should be on those committees. They should volunteer to be on those committees and should lobby to be on those committees. Ultimately, they did, so I felt that was a good thing.

I could go on, but that's enough, already.

COHEN: You mentioned some obstacles that you had, being a Democrat (laughter) in the wrong place. What were some of the obstacles that you found in trying to achieve things?

GREENBERG: Well, there are several. In terms of programs, trying to meet needs, the obstacle is always money. Also, the people who have a vested interest in what is presently going on and are willing to add on to what is going on, but not willing to give up what is going on. I served on the Governor's Blue Ribbon Committee for the Family, which ended up recommending today's present divorce law. A judge and I were really the only ones against that law which was a no-fault divorce; but it divided everything evenly and gave no regard for what a woman's ability was to live at the same level as when she was married. One of the things at that time was the mood of the time. Basically the general public's belief was that the problem with that divorce law was that at that time there was this myth that women were equivalent to men and, therefore, you didn't have to protect them by giving them more money or giving them anything special. Everything should be divided in half. This judge from Sacramento said, "That's

ridiculous!” But no one would listen, because there was this groundswell about the equality of the sexes. In addition to that, there was a mood prevailing among men that they were abused in the divorce realm. They gave the money and didn’t get to see the kids and the women were exploiting them. That was a very popular theme at that time. That law reflects it. It hasn’t changed. One of the reasons the welfare roles went up so precipitously after that law was passed was because you had people who had no training, who had no previous work experience, suddenly thrown into the work world, and they couldn’t support themselves or get enough support. So, how you describe their obstacle, the political mood of the moment, I don’t know, but it is very effective.

Other obstacles have to do with not knowing how to carry out what you want to do. A classic example is this; I have some friends who wanted some advice about how you get the school system to change. They had some program they wanted to do, so who were they picketing? They were picketing the Los Angeles school system. They were picketing the State Board of Education. They had the wrong target. One of the obstacles to success is not knowing the target and not knowing your political system, even in this building (the Jewish Federation Building). If you don’t know the political system in this building, you’re also not going to get things done. An obstacle to getting anything done is being too naive.

Am I telling you more than you want to know?

COHEN: No, no, no. This is fine. You talked a little bit about ways in which programs might be developed. What’s your view of measures that you, as a volunteer and lay person, can undertake to affect programs and policies by recruiting and discussing proper volunteers and inviting legislators and so on?

GREENBERG: What you can do?

COHEN: That can affect workers.

GREENBERG: You're talking about developing programs? Well, when you lobby, if you lobby politically, you have to deal with people who give money to a particular candidate. Hopefully, it is the candidate who has some power. One of the things the Jewish community here in Los Angeles does not do well is that. As you remember, my son-in-law was in Congress. The Federations do not know how to lobby. Wiesenthal knows how to lobby. The Council of Federations had lobbyists in Washington effective on some issues, but not effective on a lot of others. I don't see this community ever coming up with the dollars to hire a lobbyist in Sacramento or in Washington. I think that they rely on CJF to do that, but the way you get legislation passed is by lobbying, and the way you lobby successfully is to have the backing of contributors. Everybody knows it's called "special interest lobbying."

In my experience in non-profits in both United Ways and the Federation, there's a hundred ways to get programmed. If you remember, we had experience with this. Before I agreed to chair the Study on the Jewish Poor, I got Ted Cantor to agree that he would fund the programs that we recommended before we did the study; not after we did the study. When I was personnel chair, I said I wouldn't take the chair unless we got some money for staff development, because that's the money that got cut out in previous budgets. They finally promised me – we negotiated – I started out with asking for \$25,000, they came back, and we finally settled on \$10,000. I was not going to take that chairmanship unless there was money to do this program. The method, basically, is get

your money up front. Get your promise and commitment up front. Otherwise, you're wasting your time. We have a lot of studies to show that.

Other ways, of course, with non-profits is to have good allies. There are those people who want to give money or can get money. There are people who have positions in your organization. If you really did your job right, you would lobby the entire executive committee. It's exhausting, but that's what you would do. In order to do it well, you want to get the facts first. You have to know what you're doing. You can't just give a bunch of generalities and say, "We should do this; it's a nice thing to do. People need it and we know they need it." You have to know how many people need it, you have to know the cost, you have to know who is going to do it. You have to be a person that they have some confidence in. Then you have to risk. You have to present your story and be prepared to lose. I always feel that if you're going to do something new, you're going to lose a couple of times. You have to convince your staff person to take the risk. Staff people, if they lose, feel that they lose prestige. One of the problems I have with all non-profits is that there is a lack of risk-taking. A man and his business always take risks, but in non-profits, the staff people don't take risks. A risk is not something you do aggressively. It's something you do in a good fashion that is new to people. They don't understand it; you have to talk and talk. You have to present it and fail, then present it again and fail. Ultimately, it passes. You may not get credit for it; somebody else will get the credit. But what you've done in failing is to educate. That's how you get it done.

Let me give you a good example of what I'm talking about, because I feel that I'm in the midst of it, but I'm going to be off the scene, soon. In the resettlement committee and the acculturation committee, because of the lack of money, we have cut

back to the bone the entire cultururation program. While that's going on, so the Federation doesn't have to give a large contribution to the program, we have this new, very general goal of Jewish identity and Jewish continuity. We have here a mass of people, Ukrainians, Russians, South Africans – large numbers. We're not talking a small group; we're talking a large group of people. We have their names, we have their addresses, we have the number of kids they have, we know what their skills are – if we want them to be Jews, put our money there. Why should we cast a broad net to try and make an unknown group of people into people who identify as Jews? I said that to several people in the campaign, that they have Russians who have been here ten, fifteen years, they're living very well. Cultivate them. It goes on deaf ears. I've said it often enough that it got raised in yesterday's budget hearing. I guarantee that within three years, there's going to be a focus on this group of people. People will finally realize that it's short-sighted to not do the acculturation; to not make Jews out of Russians who are very aggressive, who are very good at feathering their own nests, who want to be successful, who want to make money, and eventually, they'll want the prestige. You have to nurture them. So, that's what I'm talking about.

Somebody has to sell it. Somebody has to say it to them. Somebody has to say it to the chairman of the campaign. I'm not in campaign, but Ron Caprons is.

COHEN: He's with you?

GREENBERG: Oh, yes. It gives people a different view of what they're doing. Jewish continuity, to me, is a vague topic and so is Jewish identity. Scholarships for schools, camping, community events – they're not vague. That's how it happens. Trips to Israel – some people believe in them.

COHEN: Is there anything else that you wanted to add to what we've been talking about?

GREENBERG: One last thing, I think the nature of who you serve, when you're a health and welfare agency, is changing. I think that there is a reluctance to accept the change. We saw it when we began to use government money to do programming, because the uproar was, "Why aren't you serving Jews?" The truth is, you can't serve Jews these days, unless you can serve others as well. The government has provided support for the elderly and the poor. It has not provided anything for the middle class, lower middle class or middle, middle class. Gradually, Jewish Family Service – a good example – their service has begun to be directed more to the middle class and less to the poor. First of all, you can't do much for the poor with the amount of money we have, to begin with. With the middle class, you can do groups, you can do vocational training, you can do a lot of things and get a fee. There is a work – what's the program? – IBM and various other organizations – work family programs are being developed in the private sector. The most honest givers of service are Jewish agencies and other non-profits as well. Pretty soon, the profit world is going to wake up and say, "Jesus, we can provide those services." If you want to exist with the lack of funds that's going on in United Way and in the UGA, then you have to find a way to keep your programs alive and still provide service. I think that the coming trend – and there's a lot of heels dug in to not really consider it – it's time for Jewish Family and Children's Services to begin to develop networks which will serve insurance companies, which will serve hospitals, which will serve big businesses that offer these programs to their employees. That's all I have to say.

COHEN: Marcie, thank you very much. Oh, I think you have a P.S.

GREENBERG: Yes. I was an example of an agency that could basically plug into services which will pay for themselves, and which are the future of the centers who, if they would further develop their after-school care for children and their nursery school programs and their adult day care programs – companies, big companies will pay for those services. Parents will pay for those services. Children who have the burden of trying to find something for their elderly parents to do in a safe place for them to be, will buy those services, but they have to give up the sporting activities that are classic to them. They have to give up the son's swimming programs. The things that, in the past, were culturally, acceptable, especially in California, where anyone who wants to play handball, soccer, go to the beach, go skiing, does not go with the centers. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. The future does not lie with those old programs of sporting activities or even health clubs, frankly.

COHEN: Okay, thank you.