

MARTIN RUDERMAN  
Interviewed at his home in  
Los Angeles, California  
by Maurice J.Ostomel  
on May 22, 1989

ABSTRACT

Martin Ruderman's distinguished career in social work began early in the Depression of the 1930s, when he was employed in various supervisory and administrative capacities through the period when it was protected from political appointments by policies mandated by Harry Hopkins and into its later life when political affiliation became a governing factor. During World War II, Ruderman played an important role in opening USO to black military men. The interview describes some of these experiences as well as his important activities in administering the Jewish Welfare Federation in Los Angeles and his subsequent activities as a volunteer. The interviewer, Maurice Ostomel, at the time of this interview, was director of the Jewish Homes for the Aged.

OSTOMEL: You already have given me a one and one-quarter page outline of your background, but we're going to touch on quite a number of other things in connection with your past experiences.

Have you been the subject of other interviews on the same or related subject? Our subject, basically, is your contribution to social welfare in California. That's the basis for these oral interviews.

RUDERMAN: No, I've never had any specific interview of that kind.

OSTOMEL: All right. Now, you've given me a run-down of your positions in social work, but I would like to ask you how you happened to become a social worker. Informally, you were telling me about that earlier when we were discussing your background.

RUDERMAN: It's a long story. I entered the University of Southern California Dental School in 1925. I finished my first year in dental school and was subject to promotion. I came back the following September and was given the run-around and finally ended up

with my father trying to help me find out why I wasn't being enrolled. I found later that I was one of the few people - 16 altogether - who were asked to transfer to another dental school because I was Jewish. That was one of numerous cases that was a subject of real problems in the '20s, and that affected me. I didn't have the money to go out of the city, because I had to work to pay my tuition for school. I registered at Liberal Arts at USC. The dental school was once privately owned, but the degree came out of USC. Therefore, nothing could be done. I finished, got my degree with an education major and tried to find a job. Unfortunately, I graduated in 1930, and I think one person in the whole class got a job as a teacher. If figured I'd better go back and get additional training, and luckily struck the field of social work and eventually got my degree.

OSTOMEL: So you got your degree from the University of Southern California and a certificate in 1931.

RUDERMAN: That's right. It was a Bachelor of Arts.

OSTOMEL: Okay. Thank you very much. Now, how did you get your first job in social work?

RUDERMAN: Well, no one could get a job at graduation, no matter what you had. The Depression was at its height. I eventually took an examination in 1933 at the County of Los Angeles for a social welfare position, newly created because of the federal monies that came to the communities for the welfare of the people. It was the first welfare program of that kind. I became an intake worker at an unattached men's facility down at 330 South Los Angeles Street, the heart of Skid Row.

OSTOMEL: You said you had a progression of experiences. Give me a little illustration of what happened to you.

RUDERMAN: As I went along?

OSTOMEL: Yes.

RUDERMAN: I was assigned to intake, and I therefore screened people as they applied. It was a single unattached men's program. Strangely enough, I think the same thing goes on today as there was back in 1933. One of my major duties was to wait for the sun to go down so I could pull the awning down and keep the sun out of the office. I was at that moment interviewing a very rough customer who was berating me for everything I had done wrong with him. I had to return to my desk to get the crank to lift the awning down. He saw the crank and got the hell out of there as fast as he could. He never came back.

OSTOMEL: That's one way to ( - - both speaking)

RUDERMAN: .....to get rid of a client. (laughter) But seriously, I worked in that spot for about a year, and unknown to me, my records were being reviewed by Miss O'Conner. I think, Miss O'Conner was employed by the State, because the State Relief Administration was being organized. My work being quite good, she asked me if I was interested in working for the State. I said I was. I was interviewed by Miss Emily Wooley. I told her I thought I was sufficiently confident, and that I should be given a supervisory position. This was after one year of employment with the County. She laughed at that and said that in the long run, if I proved my worth, I would be given such a position.

OSTOMEL: Now, with what organization was that?

RUDERMAN: That was the California State Relief Administration.

OSTOMEL: Thank you.

RUDERMAN: It went into effect in 1934. I was then assigned to the Lynwood office, which is a little South of South Central Los Angeles. I recall that when I came to that office, which was just a storefront, an angular, tall man approached the door at the same time I did, and he introduced himself as the director of the office. We went into the store, which was completely vacant except for a small pile of papers.

OSTOMEL: Do you want to speak up a little? We want to be sure this is recorded well.

RUDERMAN: In the corner was a group of papers – stacks. He approached it and turned to me and asked me what that was. As I was looking at it, I thought they were face sheets. He said, “What do we do with them?” I told him he should stack it, probably in files by street numbers in the area. I asked him how many workers he had, and he told me 35. I said, “Put 35 piles together, and you’ve got your caseload assigned.” As the people walked in – they were just beginning to come – so, the office was immediately organized. After that first day, he turned to me and asked me whether I’d like to be a casework supervisor, something I’d asked for at the time I applied. That’s the way I started in social work.

OSTOMEL: Where did you go from there?

RUDERMAN: Los Angeles was organized in regions. I think there must have been about 16 different regions of the State Relief Organization. Mr. Edwin James Cooley was the director of one of the regions. He had talked with the supervisor who had been supervising me and I had a good recommendation, so he asked me to visit with him. Then he offered me a position with the Central Region. He told me that there was a problem. There were hundreds of complaints and only a team of 13 workers to handle complaints, and he needed someone who knew what he was doing. I told him I would be

pleased to do that, but I would insist that I would have direct access to him – not to anyone else – so that I could get approvals immediately to resolve problems. He agreed, and within six weeks, I think it was, I had reached the point where we only had two workers assigned for complaints. Why? Because I found out that at 5:00 p.m. the recorders went home and put everything under their desk: the changes of status and new addresses, everything, and then forgot them, and the new complaints came in; you never could resolve anything. So, I asked him to put in a policy that people could not go home until they finished what they had started. If that meant more staff, then you get more staff. He got more staff. This was all resolved within a couple of months.

OSTOMEL: That was one of your early achievements.

RUDERMAN: That's true.

OSTOMEL: What was your next major assignment?

RUDERMAN: Cooley told me, when I came to him and said, "Look, I don't have enough to do with two workers and no complaints," he said, "Well, this happens at a very good time." He was being assigned by the central office as the County Case Supervisor and asked if I would come along as his assistant. That was fine with me. So, that's when I came down to the offices at 741 South Flower, a building which was all occupied by the department. I was there for about two years, doing my job. The thing of major importance that occurred was that a man who worked with me in the Lynwood office had gotten somehow into the Governor's office, and he apparently liked me and called and told me that there was going to be a vacancy up in the State office – no, I skipped something that occurred before that. We had been working with the WPA, and many people had been assigned from the State Relief Administration to work on projects, all

kinds, from labor to actors: projects of all kinds. There must have been 30,000 people on those projects. The two years had gone by, and the State got concerned that some of these people might not need relief. So they determined to re-investigate everybody who was working through the WPA. I got the call, asking if I would take on that responsibility.

The first thing I did was to get a good casework supervisor to be put in charge of the special office we set up. We employed 25 people, and arranged for the offices that closed at 5:00, to remain open for 3 hours after closing time, and to interview people who were referred by the WPA. I arranged with Catherine O'Connor, at that time with WPA, that all foremen or department heads working on projects would give a slip to each person to be returned as validated within a period of time – a week, ten days. They were referred to our offices scattered throughout the city, which were open from 5:00 to 8:00. Interestingly enough, about a quarter of the people referred, never showed up at the district offices. Therefore, they were automatically removed from the WPA projects. The others were rated on the basis of “should be investigated in a field visit,” or “further interview,” that sort of thing. By the time we got through, we had eliminated half the workforce of the WPA.

OSTOMEL: I want to interrupt at this point to get your observations. I know you weren't in the middle of the WPA work, because you were basically checking those who were still eligible. From your observations, what did the WPA do that was useful in addition to giving employment to people who were out of work?

RUDERMAN: Well, there were such things as road building, bridge building, music projects, all kinds of things were devised where people would be productive in their

work. I don't know why that hasn't been done in recent years, because it was a very effective thing.

OSTOMEL: Well, it cost money, but for the money, you got something in return of some kind that was beneficial to the County or the State or the nation.

RUDERMAN: Absolutely, but from my observation from what's happened in the welfare field, we seem to forget what's good and repeat it all over again years later. This was one of those things that we forgot was very successful. Another thing that was successful was the Civilian Conservation Corp., where young people, who couldn't find jobs, were signed up to help in the forests and for other work of that sort. That was very effective in learning work habits. That hasn't been done to any extent since. Some states may be doing it, but certainly not here in California.

OSTOMEL: Now let's continue with your experiences in the relief setup.

RUDERMAN: After I had finished with the WPA project, and most of the State had not even started yet, I was called again and asked if I could come up to the State office for a position there. George Nickel, who was a social worker of note at that time, was resigning from his position as county administrator (Kern County), and he was taking the job as SRA (State Department of Social Welfare) Director of Social Services. He needed an assistant. I was the one who got the job as his assistant. That was a really top administrative job in the field of social work in the state at that particular time.

OSTOMEL: You had to go to Sacramento to take this job?

RUDERMAN: No, my State office was located in San Francisco.

OSTOMEL: Oh, you had to go to San Francisco for that particular job.

RUDERMAN: Yes, to take that job. Interestingly enough, the San Francisco County SRA Director was Edward James Cooley. I was beginning to make connections.

OSTOMEL: Is there something notable that you can say about this new assignment that you're talking about now?

RUDERMAN: Well, we were doing a strict administration job. The letter of the law was being followed. I had a team of auditors going around through the State to read record. I don't know that that was notable except that we were influencing the kind of work that was being done throughout the State.

OSTOMEL: You understand that these oral histories will be useful in several ways. For instance, students will be able to use them in connection with referring back to historical material; historians will be able to use them to take a look at what actually happened so they can develop historical statements that will be useful, compiled from several sources. One of the useful objectives is to determine if there are things that happened in the past that would be useful now for our current problems.

RUDERMAN: Which reminds me of my earlier statement.

OSTOMEL: Yes. When we get done with all your experience with the State Relief and other relief organizations, I would like us to spend a few minutes on any observations you want to make in connection with things that happened that might be useful for current problems. But now you went to San Francisco to direct an operation. What happened after that?

RUDERMAN: Harold Pomeroy, who was the State Administrator while I was in San Francisco, came in one day, banged his hand on the desk and said, "Dammit, I couldn't get the organization to be civil service." He was really decimated by that. Of course, I



sympathized with him because it was only a temporary organization, but it never did come under civil service. More about Pomeroy at a later date, because I ran into him some other time.

I kept that job for what must have been three years, I believe. Interestingly enough, there was a change in the administration of the State. It moved from the Republican-dominated government to a Democratic. No one had ever asked anybody what their politics was. Strangely enough, for the first time, I was asked what I believed in. I told them I was Democrat. That was their signal to do something about me, because they were replacing all the department heads. All the department heads were replaced except myself. I couldn't figure out why I wasn't replaced. There were 12 departments, if I can recall.

OSTOMEL: Now, they were replaced by Republicans?

RUDERMAN: By Republicans, and I was the only Democrat left. They had to do something about me, and they wanted me to train the woman that they assigned to me as an assistant. I didn't need an assistant, but I trained her.

OSTOMEL: Was she to take your place?

RUDERMAN: Well, obviously. (laughter) But she didn't work out. She didn't have a grasp for what the field was. She had not been trained. Although this was not a casework position, it was still social work in its broader sense. I was then approached by the administrator and asked if I would be willing to take on an assignment in Alameda County, in which was the City of Oakland. He said, "We'll keep your salary the same, we will not demote you." My hometown was Los Angeles, and I was getting further away, but I said, "Okay, I'll take it." The very first week I was on the new job, I was

approached by the office manager. He expressed a desire for me to clear the names of any prospective employees with a person down the street. I asked who that person was. It was a coal dealer, and he had to check the political beliefs, I believe. I said I would not do that. I will employ people who I think are capable. If I think they're capable, I will not ask them what their politics are. I was then threatened with the fact that they would then tell the assistant administrator what I was not doing. I told them they had every right to make a complaint like that, and I immediately, the next day, rushed over to see William Plunkard, Bill Plunkard, who was the Assistant Administrator. I explained to him that I would be very willing to do what he wanted, but I would have to explain to the Oakland Tribune why I was doing this. I was then told that I shouldn't do it and was never bothered again on that. But within a few weeks, I was asked if I wanted to go back to my hometown, which is Los Angeles, because there was a vacancy there. It was a vacancy in the casework area. I said, "Yes, that's great!" They were not going to cut my salary again, and I found myself back in L.A. in the State Relief Administration Auditing Division, with Tony Kay supervising.

I found that a woman who had trained me at school – from the organization that preceded state relief, was still on the job that I was supposed to take. I refused to take it; I could not accept that position. I asked him what he wanted me to do. I fully expected to be laid off, but no, I wasn't.

OSTOMEL: Too valuable....

RUDERMAN: Bea Copeland (Bernice Copeland) was transferred some place else, I don't recall where.

OSTOMEL: Bea Copeland?

RUDERMAN: Yes, it was Bea Copeland. She was transferred someplace else, and that position was now available. That went on for a little while, and eventually, I was asked to come back to the state office again and take my original position. By that time the state office had moved to Los Angeles.

OSTOMEL: Were the Democrats in control then, or were the Republicans?

RUDERMAN: The Democrats. They had infiltrated quite well by that time, because as I said, it was not a civil service organization.

OSTOMEL: How long were you with the State Relief Administration?

RUDERMAN: For seven years all together.

OSTOMEL: Now, was that your last job in Los Angeles, the one that you described?

RUDERMAN: The last job in L.A. was as the County Case Supervisor for the State Administration, under County supervision. It was the same job that I had in San Francisco. It was my last job, because shortly after I got to the State office, I was asked to replace my audit staff with people who would be referred by the individual counties. I asked why that would be so desirable, because that would be a very strange way of employing auditors, having the people that were being audited be the people that they wanted me to hire. I refused to do it.

The discussions I had with the administrator at that time – a man by the name of Wakefield – went on for a couple of months. I have the correspondence; I always responded to him in a letter. I still have them. At one time, when I was in that position, there was a strike of the welfare recipients. They had an organization: the Worker's Alliance of America. They took over the 741 South Flower headquarters. They stopped the elevator, stopped everything, and wouldn't let anybody work. I got a frantic

telephone call from Russell Mather, who was then the Director of Los Angeles SRA, who asked me to come over and see what I could do to help. I got there, and the crowd opened up to let me through to the Director's office, and the crowd surrounded us and wouldn't let us do anything. We couldn't even talk to them. After a couple of hours, the police came and opened up the door and got everybody out of the building. That's the kind of experiences that you would get. The Administrator would be called to Ventura County because there was a strike of the citrus pickers, and they would be evicted from their housing, which was on private land. He would take me along to negotiate. I did that two or three times. As a matter of fact, I recall one time when there was a strike by the gold miners up in Northern California. I was asked by the Governor's office to go. I was driving up, and I had passed through Sacramento, already, and all of a sudden I was stopped by a police officer who said, "Are you Martin Ruderman?" I said, "How did you know my name?" He said, "Well, we had a telegram, asking to stop you and tell you that you should come back and not try to go up there. It's trouble." I turned around and came on back.

We were troubleshooters all over. Another example was that the crop had failed in San Benito County. It was a strange place. I never had been there before. There was no paved road leading to the place. The clients were basically Hispanics who picked the crops, were being shuttled off to Monterey and neighboring counties, because they would not give them welfare. I appeared before the Board of Supervisors in San Benito County who presented me with a petition signed by 1,000 people asking me to get the hell out of the county. (Laughter)

OSTOMEL: Did they do anything to drive you out of the county?

RUDERMAN: No, they didn't drive me out of the county, because I told them I was representing the State of California. They couldn't drive me out of the county.

OSTOMEL: So, what happened?

RUDERMAN: Well, I called the Monterey County and other places to send me a couple of workers, and I went to a grocer in the town and prevailed upon him to accept State grocery orders. I told him a payment would be made by the state, and he was willing to do that. So four workers and I sat on the steps of the County Courthouse with grocery orders for these people and they went and got them cashed. That was strange for anything like that.

OSTOMEL: Well, you've had some experiences. Anything else that is unusual besides writing the grocery orders, serving as a strike negotiator and .....

RUDERMAN: Other things were humdrum, just the regular problems of an auditor.

OSTOMEL: What are your views about the people who are the recipients of welfare, organization and striking.

RUDERMAN: I thought that was kind of a silly thing, because they couldn't really support themselves; they had to come to us for help. But this was their feeling. They were called Wobblies. Do you remember that term?

OSTOMEL: Sure.

RUDERMAN: They were just going to be disruptive.

OSTOMEL: Do you think that the – I hate to use this word – Soviets, in a way, stimulated these people to do these things, to be disruptive of the American way of life?

RUDERMAN: No, I don't think it was that organized. I think it was just that people were depressed. When unemployed people want to earn a living, and you think that maybe something can be done by demonstration – look at the Chinese demonstration.

OSTOMEL: Were they, as a result of these activities ever get to work, or was there any change in their well-being as a result of their doing these things?

RUDERMAN: No, nothing at all, because of the law. There was a law, and we were enforcing the law. We just could not give them more than the law permitted us to give them.

OSTOMEL: So, in effect, your hands were tied.

RUDERMAN: We had to do it that way. Of course, they had changes in allowance whenever indicated because of an additional child, or higher rent, or whatever was involved. But, we weren't attempting to do social work in a meaningful way, because there was still about thirty percent unemployment in the State, and you can't very well work with underprivileged people in a mass. It was the beginnings of organized casework.

OSTOMEL: After you'd left the.....

RUDERMAN: I still hadn't left.

OSTOMEL: .....what happened?

RUDERMAN: I want to come back to Wakefield. I was asked, again, to accompany a committee of the State Legislature, throughout the State of California. That committee's responsibility was to investigate welfare in California. The people who were on the committee were well respected: Sheridan Downey, for example. Our current congressman – I forget his name now – he's still in Congress – was on my committee.

Arnie Debbs was the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Committee, and I accompanied him. They held hearings in every county of the state, asking people what they felt about the welfare program. We had all kinds of situation, all the way from well-supported to situations that should not have existed.

As a matter of fact, when that committee came back to Sacramento, they debated what to do about conditions. In the meantime, Wakefield was pressing me to hire auditors and fire my staff.

One day I got a letter from him, saying that my job is terminated on July 1, 1942. That threw me for a loop. I had never been out of a job in my life. What happened was that the committee and the legislators had decided that welfare should be turned back to the counties and not be a state project. The state should not be in the operations business. So, everybody there lost their jobs on July 1<sup>st</sup>. That was the end of the State Relief Administration. I was unemployed now, with two kids.

OSTOMEL: Before we continue with your biographical background, I'd like you to add anything you want to on your experiences in the State Relief Administration, and any bearing it has on solving current problems of people who need assistance.

RUDERMAN: I was pretty radical, myself. I once proposed that where families were actually having a serious family problem, we take the children away and assign these kids somewhere else, away from the parents. I was outvoted, but I thought that was the only solution unless they could do something else to change the whole economic situation of this country. They couldn't do that.

OSTOMEL: Were you suggesting that on the basis of economics or on the basis of the way in which the kids were treated?

RUDERMAN: The way the families raised their children and the deprived, deprivation of the families, the under-class that we have today was there, and I thought that maybe, if we found situations as bad as I thought they were becoming, there should be something drastic. It couldn't be changed, otherwise. Even the best of education doesn't change the situation when we don't have bread on the table and the kids are left on their own and the parents – there's no man in the home anymore.

OSTOMEL: We have bread on the table, now, but we don't have a man in the home now.

RUDERMAN: No, we don't. It's a continuing situation.

OSTOMEL: That's a situation that wasn't as bad in those days in reference to no man in the home as it is now?

RUDERMAN: Pretty much so.

OSTOMEL: Do you believe that it was a very similar pattern?

RUDERMAN: Yes it was. We could say – I don't know. I was just a young whippersnapper. I didn't have the influence to change anything.

OSTOMEL: Do you think that this phenomenon we're talking about is something that existed, historically, a hundred years and two and three hundred years ago, also?

RUDERMAN: To a certain extent. To some extent. But in those days, I think the country was small in terms of the number of people. People knew their neighbors. Today, they don't know their neighbors. They live next door to somebody, and they never have any contact.

OSTOMEL: The anonymity of the present time makes it difficult. If homes were separated by several miles, people wouldn't know their neighbors in those days, either.



RUDERMAN: In a small town, for example, they may be separated by miles, but they knew their neighbors.

OSTOMEL: Yes, that's probably true. Well, let's go on to.....

RUDERMAN: Now I'm unemployed.

OSTOMEL: Yes.

RUDERMAN: Do you remember the name Harold Pomeroy?

OSTOMEL: No, I don't remember that name.

RUDERMAN: He was the director of the State Relief Administration who really understood the problem, someone who really tried to give some service, something which would stabilize the organization. By the way, I managed to get jobs for all my fraternity brothers. Everybody. This was not a man's field, this was strictly a woman's field. I was one of two men in the social work school at USC in those days. The other one was a minister. I don't know what I was doing there, but everybody got a job of some kind. There's still some working, even at our age.

I contacted Harold Pomeroy, who was, by that time the Director of the National Red Cross in Washington. He invited me to come back to Washington to stay with him, and he would see what he could do. I did not want to do that. I thought that was an imposition. But he suddenly came up with two offers for me. The first one was the head of Red Cross in Great Britain, which was then under siege by the Nazi armies. I said, "Why would you want to send me to Great Britain right in the middle of a war?" I said I was sorry. I couldn't take my family with me, so there was no purpose to it.

His next suggestion to me was that they had an opening in China, and I could be the head of the Red Cross in China. By that point, China had fallen to Japan. I was

willing to consider that if I could have my family moved to some place like India, where I could get away sometime to see them. But they couldn't do that, so that was out.

At that time, then, there was a getting together of the organizations like Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Jewish Welfare Board, all to create an organization known as USO. They were the recreational and, I guess you could call them the only social work component that the boys could have. I was approached, and offered a job, but I had to go to San Francisco to do it. So, there again, I left my family and established USO Clubs in San Francisco, sending entertainment out to the boys in the field. The war activity added a half million members to the West Coast because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I found that a stimulating position to work in. The task was to bring entertainers out to camps on the beaches where the boys were. I had, for example, to bring entertainers out to the Cow Palace in San Francisco.

That reminds me of a situation that occurred there. I made an arrangement with the motion picture people, executives, to give me films that we could bring to some areas, and we would show pictures to the troops stationed at the Cow Palace before they were shipped out west. Hundreds and thousands of men went through there. I noticed that, although there were black troops, no black men ever came to the USO. I went to the commander at the compound and asked them how that happened. He said, "Well, we just don't do that." I said, "Well, we just won't provide pictures unless you permit them to come. They're men like any others." And they did come, and that was the resolution of that.

Interesting things happened. For example, I would get a cable from someplace out in the Pacific. I immediately ordered some matzos to be sent out to the South Pacific,

and they seemed to be very satisfied with that. Interestingly enough, I had occasion to also have recruited a rabbi from the Los Angeles area to go up to Alaska, because there wasn't a rabbi for the armed forces up there. He was to bring a Passover service to the Jewish men stationed up there. I commissioned him to go. He told me this story when he came back. He got to Seattle and found at the time he arrived that the matzos, which I had ordered to accompany him, had not arrived. I got a frantic call from Seattle. What could I do? Call the Pentagon? I called the Pentagon and got a waiver. The rabbi told me that when he got to the plane that was to carry him to Alaska, an Army general had just been bumped off the plane, asking, what the hell was going on. Here was this rabbi with a load of matzos. But the rabbi and matzos got there. They traveled around Alaska to see that the men were served.

OSTOMEL: I made a note here about housing in San Diego. Was there a problem in housing in San Diego.

RUDERMAN: Oh, yes, it was awful.

OSTOMEL: How were you involved in that?

RUDERMAN: It was just my own personal housing, not military housing.

OSTOMEL: Oh, I see. Your USO experience was followed by going where?

RUDERMAN: I traveled to San Diego to take on the new assignment there, I was asked to spot any crisis where troops were stationed, so we could see that they were served like any other troops. I recall one instance south of San Francisco where I had to proceed at night with the lights out in my car. I could see a soldier coming out of a store or a bar or someplace, and I would follow him till I found out where he was stationed. I followed one off the mountain, till I suddenly got stuck. I couldn't go anywhere. I didn't know

what to do. However, all of a sudden, I saw a monstrosity coming down the mountain. It picked me up with my car, carried us back up the mountain, and there, I found out later, was a radar station. It was a fascinating thing to happen.

I got to San Diego and had a clubhouse in Balboa Park, which was a part of the City of San Diego, right next to the major Middleton Hospitals. Boys coming back from the Pacific would stop there. At a certain time of the day, they were released, and I got flooded by them. I had to employ certain service men to keep the coca cola machines full, which was a subject of income to the organization.

At that time I had a woman working for me as an assistant and, unknown to me, her husband was the head of the Jewish Federation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was talking to her husband about me. He was friendly with Dr. Maurice Karpf, who was the Los Angeles Federation Director. I got a telephone call from Los Angeles asking me to come up for an interview. This being my hometown, I was very pleased to do so. I was appointed to a job in the Jewish Welfare Federation, in the LA area, and eventually was moved in as the assistant director for the Jewish Federation of LA by Dr. Karpf. Now I was in the Jewish field, completely. I worked as an assistant for the Federation from 1942 to 1975. We went through a merger between the Federation and the Jewish Community Council. How that happened was an interesting process. These were two similar groups of people.

OSTOMEL: Yes, tell about that. I think that's of interest.

RUDERMAN: Before I tell you that, I want to say that I was called down by the Army Intelligence in downtown Los Angeles. I said, "What have I done?" They told me that I was okay. They checked me out, and I was all right. But who was this rabbi or

somebody, running around in a station wagon in the Mojave Desert? I explained to them that that was the rabbi delivering services to the Jewish boys. The reason why they were concerned was that they were going through hazardous training at that particular time in the Mojave Desert. Rabbi Edgar Magnin was the only rabbi who was willing to risk the penalties, and he did that for me.

Now I was employed by the Federation, and I went through a number of experiences. The first one occurred on my first day on the job. I got a letter of withdrawal from the Jewish Centers. They said they didn't like the organization, they didn't like my predecessor, and they therefore wanted to withdraw. We didn't want them to withdraw, so we negotiated and worked it out to satisfy them.

One of my jobs as Federation Director was to appear at every agency of the Federation that got monies from our campaign: the United Jewish Fund. I would appear with these organizations at the Community Chest, which later became the United Way. I recall one day, sitting on the bench, waiting for the committee to call, and sat next to an elderly gentleman. We introduced ourselves. He was a man by the name of Goldman, Sam Goldman. He was the president of the Hebrew Free Loan Association. It was not one of our Federation agencies; it was independent. Our organization didn't like the Jewish Free Loan Association. Previously, we were of different, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I kept telling him, while we were waiting, "I'm of your background. Russian parents. You don't like the others because they're German. I'm working for that other organization. They're more mixed in background than you think – not so different. You think they're charging for help. You believe it's not free loan. Why don't we sit down and talk about the constitutional by-laws of each, and see if there are really basic

differences.” He was willing to do that. So we looked the by-laws over, and found that they were identical. I suggested that the Free Loan Association, having lost its executive director and looking for one at that moment, ought to sit down with us and talk. He agreed. I found at other times that the best time to approach an organization is when they’ve lost their executive director. Or when the president has finished his term, basically was ready to retire. That’s the time when you don’t have the fixed points of view which block mergers. So we got the judge – what was his name? – well, a Superior Court Judge to be the new president of the merged organization. And they lived together and were the most successful Free Loan agency in the country.

That was the first merger I was involved with. I subsequently helped merge the Federation of the Council, itself. two principle organizations.

OSTOMEL: Why was there difficulty? Give the listeners a little background of why it started and why there were two organizations.

RUDERMAN: In 1954 – it was a very important year. No, 1854 was a very important year. That’s when the Jewish Family Service (originally the Hebrew Benevolent Society) was created in Los Angeles. Its function was serving the Jewish community and people who were transient or needed help. There were very few Jews at that point.

Subsequently, as time went on, there was the Children’s Agency, which in some communities have merged, but in this community, it ran separately. It’s Vista Del Mar today.

The Committee for Personal Service worked for prisoners. The Cedars-Sinai, earlier the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, served the people of Casper Kahn Hospital. There were 14 agencies.

OSTOMEL: In which organization?

RUDERMAN: In the Federation.

OSTOMEL: Now in the Council; what did they call the Federation?

RUDERMAN: At that point?

OSTOMEL: Yes.

RUDERMAN: The Federation of Jewish Charities.

OSTOMEL: Okay.

RUDERMAN: As the years went on, it changed its name. It became the Jewish Welfare Federation. Now, here we have the development of the Community Council. Hitler had come on the scene. The Jews were scared. They had community education, which was not considered a charity, as such. They had community relations, which was trying to keep the community from having the brown shirts marching in the streets. That was a real threat in those days. In Inglewood, the brown shirts were marching, and in Glendale, they were marching. The Community Council had an effective program, too. But it was a politically-oriented organization that was composed of the people who belonged to B'Nai Brith or Hadassah, or the organizations that were made up of Jewish war veterans. All the organizations that were in the public field, such as the Federation, were founded on the charities. How do you get the two together when you have to go to the Jewish communities for support? Well, you had to. They were competing with each other and therefore there was hostility. The German Jews were not accepted by the Eastern European Jews.

OSTOMEL: What organization had been developed by the German Jews?

RUDERMAN: That was the Federation. They started with the people – the Hellmans, who were the original bankers in the city. They had the leading businessmen in the community. The Council started with a political base. The Federation had a board of 39. The Council had a board of 60. The Council kept pushing for recognition of the merger. The Federation kept turning it down. They wouldn't do it. The discussions went on for 25 years. It started with two bases that would end up with Council elections being held, and the President of the Federation being defeated because he wasn't of that group. They had 1,000 people coming to the elections from the mass organizations. The Federation had a nominating committee, which would nominate the replacements for the Board. So, it was self-nominating. How can you get those two ideas together? I finally came up with an idea, which I presented to our committee. The only way they could resolve this problem was for them to get Steve Brody, who was the president of one of the movie studios, as President of the Federation. He said, "Martin, I'll take it only if you go along with me about merging." I said, "I'd like to see it happen. I think it would resolve a lot of problems in the community." He said, "Well, come up with something." I ran it by the committees, and I came up with this idea. There's one group of people not represented by anybody. The charitable group of people was over here, and the political group was over there, but the givers were givers, and they were not involved in either one as *the* official group. Well, I said, "Let's make it a tri-partite board. They would merge, and then the election process would start after the next year. One-third of the people would be elected by contributors to the community of five dollars or more. One-third would be elected by the agencies, which make up the Federation, and one-third would be made up by the political organizations which would have their own annual meeting and



select their own representatives. That became the basis upon which there was a merger by agreement. That's my best merger, because I .....

OSTOMEL: At that time, you were the executive.....

RUDERMAN: I was the executive of the Federation.

OSTOMEL: Yes, and did they have an executive of the Council?

RUDERMAN: Oh, yes, they had Leo Cowan. They had Julius Bisno. Sure they had executives.

OSTOMEL: So, what happened to the executives?

RUDERMAN: Well, that would be a problem. I figured out that the only thing to do to not start a fight was that one of us would have to lose. I didn't want to lose. Therefore, I thought the best part of valor was to make us co-associate directors. That filled the executive positions. They finally accepted that, and continued in that for 15 years.

OSTOMEL: As long as that?

RUDERMAN: That's right, 15 years, to 1957, '58. It wasn't until Henry Zucker came out and made a study and said, "We're weak in fundraising, and we have to hire a top CEO." That's when Soboloit came. I said, "But my job is not failing. I'm doing a fine job. Why are you saying that you have to put somebody over me?" I couldn't fight for the top job, because I had a Bisno as an associate. I was willing to stay. But then Bisno was pushed up into another foundation. He couldn't handle it. He had a heart attack. He never admitted to it, but it eventually killed him.

I didn't make any move to try to step in to his job. What's his name? Forgive me. Charlie Zobell was the assistant to Bisno. I never crossed him as long as we were working together. His chief campaign director, (name indistinct), complimented me for

not trying to run the campaign. I said, “No, you’re the expert, you should carry on while Bisno is sick.” But, when they got all through, they realized that the campaign was not strong. They figured they had to hire the best guy they could find, and that, in their opinion, turned out to be Soboloit, who turned out not to be that good. They depended upon myself and an associate director. Charlie Zobell remained – he was not an associate director; he was an assistant director.

My next merger was Cedars and Sinai Hospital. I think I told you the story.

OSTOMEL: You say that one of your claims to fame came from a sense of putting things together, and this is one more illustration.

RUDERMAN: This is one more illustration. There was a hospital called Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on Fountain Street. It was a very good institution, very well respected. There was also a Mount Sinai Hospital. That was not that well respected, but it did an important job in the community. They both decided to become medical centers at the same time. The way they were going to raise the funds, was to go to the Jewish Community. Therefore, they would be approaching the leadership of the Jewish Community: the big givers. That would be a miserable thing to have happen.

OSTOMEL: That would be a miserable thing to have happen.

RUDERMAN: The big givers were concerned about it. They didn’t want to have to give to two hospitals. There was urgency to sit down and talk. Well, we did; we sat down and talked. I recall they had a B’nai Brith woman sitting on my right saying, “Don’t say a word. Let them fight it out.” The person in the chair on my other side was saying, “We will now hear from Martin Ruderman on the problems we are going to have to face.” I spoke, and as a result of those discussions, the merger was accomplished of

the two major hospitals in the community. It is the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, which is an excellent, excellent organization.

Now I'm beginning to approach my older years.

OSTOMEL: What else stands in your mind that historians might want to know about that you had a role in?

RUDERMAN: I was very active in the Community Welfare Council. Do you remember those days?

OSTOMEL: Sure I do.

RUDERMAN: I played my role in that. I also was active on the special committee established by the regents of the University of California to determine whether there was need for an additional social work school in California. The head of the Catholic Charities - can't think of his name - recognized that I needed to be on that committee.

OSTOMEL: Oh, O' Flaherty, was his name.

RUDERMAN: No, it wasn't O' Flaherty.

OSTOMEL: Prior to O' Flaherty? After O' Flaherty? Bell? Johnson?

RUDERMAN: Johnson. He became a Bishop with Orange County. I got cards from him every year, saying a prayer for us. He was a wonderful man.

OSTOMEL: Oh, yes, he certainly was.

RUDERMAN: And a good poker player, too.

OSTOMEL: Yes, I know. (Laughter) Did your committee have some result?

RUDERMAN: When I came on, I pushed them to make a result. Johnson told me they had been talking for six months and not getting anywhere. I'm innocent: "I don't know

from nothing.” I asked questions, I kept pushing, and in three or four months, we recommended the creation of the Fresno State College, the social work school.

OSTOMEL: That was after the UCLA school was established.

RUDERMAN: Yes, this was the .....

OSTOMEL: This was the third one in California.

RUDERMAN: The third one, the one in Fresno. So, I was very active in that.

OSTOMEL: Anything else you remember?

RUDERMAN: I don't know. I think I've bored you with a lot of .....

OSTOMEL: No, it is interesting. For example, there are a few things that you and I had – well, our paths crossed.

RUDERMAN: Yes, we crossed paths. For instance, the matter of the Safardic Jewish Community, which wanted to establish a home for the aged. We prevailed. Bishop Berg and I prevailed upon them that they would be wasting their time. They were actually buying a piece of land, and we told them, “Don't do it, because you're not going to have a large enough community.” We convinced them of that. And then, we convinced the Jewish Club of 1933, to do the same thing. They thought they would have a home for immigrants who came here. I said, “Don't do it. You're not going to have enough people.” Finally, they agreed, and the Home, today, has a facility, which is part of the Home, but is really considered to be the contribution of the Jewish Club of 1933.

OSTOMEL: Well, I had a small role in that, but I had a very significant role in helping them get connected with the Jewish Home for the Aged, and I became the director of that

RUDERMAN: That's right. It was a ploy we used once before you became the director for the Home for the Aged, which was a result of the firing of the executive director of the Home.

OSTOMEL: I didn't know about that.

RUDERMAN: You didn't know about that, but it's true.

OSTOMEL: You had something to do with trying to establish low-cost housing.

RUDERMAN: Oh, yes.

OSTOMEL: What about your role in that?

RUDERMAN: Well .....

OSTOMEL: It's a good thing. I have some notes from the last time we talked about this.

RUDERMAN: Yes, there are so many things, and I can't remember them all. That was something which was necessary, but the builders of the city didn't want to be involved. They looked upon it as a drag on building. We convinced the Board of the Federation that we had to have housing for poor people under a Section 8 passed by Congress. As a result of that, we created the Menorah Housing Foundation. We now have seven or eight facilities in the city that were created by the actions of that committee of that Foundation. They purchased the land with Federation money, then worked to get it approved to provide housing. That's the one right here off Pico and Robertson. I was also negotiating one out in the Beverly Hills area

OSTOMEL: Well, that's good. When did you retire from the Federation?

RUDERMAN: December, 1975.

OSTOMEL: Okay. What did you do afterwards that connected you in a way with your previous employment?

RUDERMAN: I volunteered my time – at full pay, because I was getting paid for my accrued vacations, which I hadn't taken for years, and they were paying me. I said I had to volunteer my time. I arranged to move the Federation headquarters as one of my projects. I moved them out of Melrose and Vermont to 6505 Wilshire. That meant finding a building, getting the tenants out, and moving the Charities in. That was one of the things I did.

I sat around for about a year, not knowing what to do, until one day I was contacted by Abraham Spiegel, Chairman of Columbia Savings and Loan. He said to me, as we were coming out of a meeting, "Martin, I want you to go to work for the University in Israel." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Elan University." I said, "I never heard of it." (Laughter) It was a university he was connected with, which was founded by the Orthodox Community in Israel, and it was a very fine institution. After I visited, I found out how good it was, and I became the West Coast Regional Director on a temporary basis. They needed to have a director, and I didn't want to work full time, anymore. I told him I would only consider this if I would be allowed to put in three days a week: Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays, and I would help them find a director. It took seven years.

OSTOMEL: Seven years to find a director (laughter).

RUDERMAN: I ran the fundraising program from the West Coast.

OSTOMEL: How much did they collect?

RUDERMAN: Oh, three or four million a year. They had raised about a million when I came in, and I got them three more. I don't know, I left them about four years ago, so I don't know what they've done since.

OSTOMEL: What do you do with your time now?

RUDERMAN: I'm on the board of the Federation, now, so I'm active there. Also, I'm on the board of Gateways Hospital, and I put in an awful lot of time there. They've gone through difficult times.

OSTOMEL: What do you see as the future for social work, and what do you see as the future for the whole social welfare picture in our country?

RUDERMAN: What I would like to see or what's going to hell?

OSTOMEL: Something of each.

RUDERMAN: All right. I would like to see a federal program integrated into every area so that people are treated the same; like social security.

OSTOMEL: Do you want it to be an insurance program?

RUDERMAN: I want it to be a program where people are trained to complete their education and jobs are found for them. That's what I would love to see. I don't think that will happen, but there will be some work projects programs.

OSTOMEL: There is a push on the part of states, including California, a thorough push towards work fairs or something like that.

RUDERMAN: That's something along the lines of what I would like to see.

OSTOMEL: What about those who are reluctant or unwilling to really move themselves?

RUDERMAN: Well, you can't let them starve. They have to have some kind of a program, which would give them something. If they're mentally not up to holding a job, there's a reason why they can't do that.

OSTOMEL: What if they're just not willing to? I'm not saying they're mentally not capable. Why don't they want to do it? They haven't learned a work ethic?

RUDERMAN: That's it. There are people like that. It seems to be growing in numbers. It's hard to know.

OSTOMEL: We're having a little dialog here, and it's supposed to be an interview with Martin Ruderman (laughter) to get his ideas. What about the social work profession? What do you think about the profession: where it is, where it's going and where it might go?

RUDERMAN: I think the social work profession should not limit itself to just agency work. I think they should go into industry on a contract basis. They could help people with problems that come from their industry. Agencies and organizations of any size could employ social workers.

OSTOMEL: There is a development that way that is being stimulated by various schools, such as industrial social work. USC, I know, has a very prominent program, and other schools either have, or are developing, that approach. What do you think about private practice? Do you think that's a good idea, and if so, yes or no, why?

RUDERMAN: I suppose if the person is a really good person, private practice might be a good idea: could be. Some people aren't that good. I think it could develop, also. There's no question about that.



OSTOMEL: Do you think all social workers should be licensed before with an agency, or just the educational requirements?

RUDERMAN: I think they should be licensed.

OSTOMEL: All should be licensed?

RUDERMAN: Yes, they should take an examination and be licensed.

OSTOMEL: In order to practice in an agency? Anyplace?

RUDERMAN: Anyplace. Industry, or anywhere, if they want to call themselves social workers.

OSTOMEL: All right, Martin. Do you have any other observations you'd like to make in connection with your old history or in connection with the process of social work or in connection with the broader social work field? Here's your chance. You have a soap box now for a few minutes.

RUDERMAN: I haven't thought too much about that. I've been too far removed these last few years to keep up with the latest developments.

OSTOMEL: I'll ask you one final question. If you had to live your life over again, professionally, would you do anything differently?

RUDERMAN: I don't think I would.

OSTOMEL: You feel very comfortable about the way in which you've operated?

RUDERMAN: I think so. I was fortunate that I got thrown out of dental school. I was fortunate that the actual Depression hit at the time I graduated from the School of Education, and I was, therefore, not going to get a teacher's job. I would not have done as well as I've done now for the health of our people.

OSTOMEL: Then, on behalf of the School of Social Work and the California Social Welfare Archives and all the organizations, I want to thank you for this interview.

Historians will be glad to have a little insight into many of the things that you have talked a in our discussions. Thank you, again.

RUDERMAN: Thank you very much.