



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California
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Jerry Sudarsky

Wasco Scientist and International Humanitarian

An Interview with Jerry and Milly Sudarsky

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GILBERT GIA [interviewer and transcriber]: Today is June 5, 2008. We are at Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Sudarsky's home in Century City, California. [Pause] Thank you for agreeing to do this interview.

JERRY SUDARSKY: You're welcome. I hope it is helpful.

GILBERT GIA: As I mentioned on the telephone, I'm interested in the early factors that made you successful. Could you tell me something about your early life?

JERRY SUDARSKY: My father was Selig Sudarsky. He was born in 1881 and raised in Lithuania near the border of Germany. ¹ The area was under Russian

¹ Probably East Prussia

control when my father grew up there. He had eight brothers and sisters, and he was the leader or key man of the family. People turned to him for help, but every one in the family was quite competent, and all of them became successful. ² Our family was in the brush business in Lithuania, and in the early 1900s my father's younger brother Leister came to the US to establish a brush factory in Chicago. My father first came to the United States about 1914 or 1915. This was before nylon, so my uncle Leister made trips back to Russia, where he bought hog bristles.

My father and my mother, Sara Ars, were married in 1916, but I don't know where. Right after their marriage my uncle needed some hog bristles for the Chicago factory, and he asked my father to go to Russia to buy them. After my parents got there, they were unable to leave Russian because of World War I, and they stayed there for two or three years. I was born on June 12, 1918 in a Lithuanian hospital at Nizni Novgorod, Russia.³

After the war my father pursued his business interests in Europe, and we moved to Berlin in 1920. We lived in Europe

² Brooklyn eye specialist Mendel I. Sudarsky, MD, (1886-1952) was Selig Sudarsky's brother.

³ From 1932 to 1990, Nizhny Novgorod (Ни́жний Но́вгород) was called Gorky.

until I was ten, and during that time my two sisters were born. When I was young I knew that my father was in business and that he was successful, but I really did not know him all that well. I'll explain later.

I learned German when I was in Berlin, but I went to an American school. My parents understood Russian, but they didn't speak Russian to me, so I spoke German and English while growing up. I remember having friends and being happy. Years later when I had my own family, I took them to Berlin to show them where I lived and how I got to school, but I couldn't show them the school because it had been destroyed.

When I was young I traveled some with my parents, and we visited family. I spent a year in London with my parents, and we also lived in Madrid, where my father had other business interests. So I had a European upbringing until I was ten.

GG: That was when you came to the US?

JS: Yes. In 1928 we came to the States and settled in Brooklyn. We had family living nearby. My father owned some movie theaters in New York City, and he had import-export businesses. He and his younger brother Efraim Sudarsky had an office in the Woolworth Building.

[Mrs. Sudarsky had entered the room a few minutes earlier, and she entered into the conversation.]

MILLY SUDARSKY: Jerry's father was very entrepreneurial. That's where he got it.

JS: The name my parents called me at home was Mila, which in Russian means Sonny. But my given name was from my grandfather, who had the biblical name of the minor prophet Jerahmiel, which is pronounced yeh-roch-MIEL⁴.

I'll tell you a humorous story about that. When I was ten I went into fifth grade at PS 92 in Brooklyn. The teacher's name was Mrs. Sweeny. She said, "Children, we have a new boy in class. Won't you stand up and give us your name, please. " I stood up and said, "My name is Jerahmiel Sudarsky. " She sat down in shock and just about passed out. "Well," she said, "From now your name will be Jerry. " That's how I got my name.

A few years after the crash on Wall Street, my father suffered financially. It was about this same time, 1934 that my parents and I became US citizens, and then he and the rest of the family went back to Europe. I was 16 years old and in high school, and I had decided I didn't want to go back to Europe. I think that decision had more of an influence on me than

⁴ In Hebrew, ירחמיאל

anything else in making me self-reliant. Those were bad economic times, and after my parents and my sisters left, they couldn't send me any money, so I had to make out for myself. I think that's where I got the confidence that I could take care of myself.

As I said, I was on my own, but I did have quite a bit of family still living in the States--aunts and uncles and a couple of cousins--one of my father's sister's came from Vistinicz, Lithuania, in 1909.⁵ I saw my relatives quite a bit. They were very decent people with good solid qualities, really wonderful people who I had a lot of respect for. But in high school I roomed with a classmate whose father was in the toy business and was successful. We lived across the street from my uncle Ephraim.

GG: How did you manage to go to college?

JS: I'd played baseball in high school. I was good at it and enjoyed it. My coach knew the coach at the University of Iowa and talked to him. In 1936 I got an athletic scholarship to play with the Hawkeyes. I enrolled in the University chemical engineering program, but the scholarship paid only for the tuition. I didn't have any money coming in from family, so I had to work to eat. The school helped me find jobs--on one job

⁵ Also spelled Wysztynsic or Wishtinez

I worked an hour a day, or something like that, as chief lettuce washer at the hospital. I got thirty cents an hour. Those jobs helped me get through three years of school, and I couldn't have done it without them. I didn't have very much money, but really I managed fine. I enjoyed Iowa City, and I wasn't unhappy at all.

GG: What do you recall about sports?

JS: Like I said, I played baseball. Neil Kinnick, the most famous athlete that Iowa ever had, lived in the same dormitory very close by to where I was. Neil was known for football, but he also played baseball. He did the catching while I did the pitching. I wasn't a real big star, but I did fairly well. In fact, once the coach arranged for me to visit the Boston Red Sox summer training camp, but I was there for only about a week before I could see that I wasn't going to be good enough to make my living in the majors-- and I didn't want to go to the minors. I would have stuck around if I thought I had a future. But I saw that I had better make my living in another way.

GG: I read that you had to leave school early.

JS: In 1939, at the end of my third year, I ran out of money. I quit the University, went back to New York, and took a job in the lab of the Atlantic Yeast Company, where I tested yeast for

bread. I also enrolled at Brooklyn Polytechnic University and went to school at night to finish my chemical engineering degree. I got my Bachelor's Degree in 1939, and then I went to Columbia University for a year. After I got my degree, I just somehow took over at Atlantic Yeast and made progress. I became plant superintendent and worked there until 1943. Just before World War II my parents and my two sisters were living in Latvia and trying to get back to the US. They made it to Norway, and in 1940 they took one of the last ships to the United States before the war started. They couldn't take anything with them when they left, and of course during the Depression my father lost everything he had here. ⁶ So when they got back they needed help to live, and I was glad to have a job so I could support my parents and my sisters. We were not living well, but we were living.

In January 1943 my father died. He was only 62. I told you that I didn't know my father well. Well, I loved him, and we'd gone on vacations together when I was young, but I don't know what special influence he had on me. He was very well respected in the family, and he had a lot of businesses, and I know he was once well to do and made some money. My father

⁶ *New York Times*, June 9, 1931. Bankruptcy Court of New York County, NY, granted a \$4,000 judgment against Selig and Efraim Sudarsky.

had a general influence on me. But as far as closeness...well, he must have had some influence, but I can't put it together.

GG: What about your sisters?

JS: In 1941 my sister Vivian got a State scholarship to Cornell University, so she was doing all right. She was an excellent student and graduated in 1946 or 1947 with a degree in agronomy. In 1950 she went to Israel to help the agricultural industry. My sister Miriam went to Brooklyn College. They both live in Israel now. They were here two weeks ago for our granddaughter's wedding.

GG: I read that you were in the Service.

JS: After I got my chemical engineering degree, I joined the Navy in 1943 and was sent to California where I was trained at Treasure Island as a radar specialist. I remember liking the San Francisco area very much. Then I was sent overseas and was stationed in Guam. Toward the end of the war, the Navy wanted to entertain personnel in the far-off islands, so they sent me and another fellow on a tour to give ping-pong exhibitions. So my main accomplishment in the Navy was winning the Navy's South Pacific ping-pong championship. I'm not proud of my Navy career because I didn't accomplish very much. In 1946 I was discharged in California, and I decided

that I wanted to live in San Francisco instead of going back to New York.

GG: What did you do then?

JS: I decided to start my own business based upon what I could do. I'd read about a product called autolyzed yeast that was being touted as curing ulcers -- it wasn't baker's yeast. I decided that I would build a factory to make it. ⁷ I got together an investment from four or five people that totaled \$30,000. They then had stock in the company. Two or three were relatives, and the rest were business acquaintances.

GG: They had faith in you.

JS: Well, before I went to join the Navy I was already running the Atlantic Yeast Company as plant superintendent, and they felt I knew what I was doing. The \$30,000 was not very much for the equipment I needed. One piece was a double drum dryer, and I couldn't afford to buy a new one, so I started looking at ads to see if I could find a used one.⁸

GG: Newspapers?

⁷ Autolyzed yeast extract is produced by disintegrating yeast cells so digestive enzymes in the yeast can break down its proteins into amino acids.

⁸ Operation of a drum dryer: wet material in liquid or paste form is applied to the outer surface of a rotating metal cylinder, which is heated inside. After the wet material dries to a uniform, powdery, or flaky form, it is removed.

JS: Trade publications. I knew that milk plants often had double drum dryers, and then the Wasco creamery came up for sale. ⁹ In 1946 I went to Wasco, and sure enough my dryer was there, but I had a problem. The walls of the creamery were reinforced concrete, and there was no opening big enough to get the dryer out of the building. I didn't want to just give up on the dryer.

When I looked around, I noticed that the creamery also had a boiler, a water well and was next to a railroad siding. I asked, and I found out that I could lease the creamery. Wasco wasn't San Francisco, but Wasco had most of the equipment I needed. That's the way it started.

GG: How did you get the plant up and running?

JS: I couldn't hire a contractor because I didn't have enough money, so I started out building the plant myself, doing the plumbing, welding, and electrical. Then I hired an employee, and then I started making the yeast.

GG: How did you learn to weld and all that?

JS: I learned the hands-on things at the University of Iowa as part of the engineering course. They also taught us soldering and electrical installations. I also learned a lot when I was running the Atlantic Yeast plant in Brooklyn.

GG: Did it take long?

JS: I got it started. [Pause.] We were up there in Wasco a few years ago, and the plant was still up and running and making insecticides. Oh, but I have to tell you a little story. My mother was living in New York, and she told me whenever I should get to Los Angeles I should look up a woman who was a friend of

⁹ At Fifth and G Streets in Wasco. The Wasco creamery closed following a union impasse.

hers. At this time I was still going into Los Angeles buying equipment, and one of the times I was there I did call, and I went over to visit. Just as I came into the living room, I saw a beautiful girl sitting there. The woman who my mother told me to look up had married a fellow named Jack Axelrod, and his sister was visiting them from Chicago. The girl sitting there was Jack's sister. Well, the same beautiful girl is sitting here right next to me, [turns to Mrs. Sudarsky]. I was immediately taken with Milly. I found out she had a good job in Chicago and that she was scheduled to go back in two or three weeks.

So to make a long story short, I kept after her, and after a few weeks I asked her to stay in California and marry me. And she said yes. She may be sorry now...but she stayed. [Laughter]

MS: That was 1947. I quit my job via Western Union, called my parents, and I told them I wasn't coming back.

GG: What did your parents say?

MS: I don't remember. I guess they just accepted it. I was 22 years old at the time. I guess they figured I knew what I was doing. I had held some pretty responsible jobs to that time. As far as getting married, well, Jerry had just started a process for making autolyzed yeast, and we couldn't get married until the process was completed.

JS: Until I finished the first batch. I'd started the first batch before we decided to get married. So Milly stayed in Los Angeles and got herself a job.

MS: I did. I found out it would be at least three months until we could get married, and I couldn't afford not to work all that time. I got a job working as a secretary for a blood processing company. I had a terrible boss, but I knew it would only be for three months. They didn't know that.

GG: The process interfered with the relationship?

JS: No, it postponed our wedding. In a few weeks I finished the batch, and we got married. We went on our honeymoon to San Francisco, and then we moved to Bakersfield.

MS: We checked into the Padre Hotel. That's where we first stopped, but we checked out right away because it was overrun with cockroaches. We moved to the Hotel El Tejon, and we lived there until we found an apartment. They were scarce in Bakersfield in those days. We furnished an apartment on Chester Lane.

JS: I married Milly for her money. She had \$2,000. [Smiles]

GG: So you commuted to the factory.

MS: In those days it only took 30 minutes to drive to Wasco. Thirty miles, thirty minutes.

JS: Just after we got married an article appeared in a national medical journal that said autolyzed yeast was no damn good for ulcers.

GG: After some under-the-breath swearing, what happened next?

JS: I recently gave a talk to the Chemical Heritage Foundation that I called "Thanks for Perseverance," and I emphasized the fact that I've had many problems to overcome in my life, and it was perseverance that always helped me to succeed, to keep me going. After the journal article, I decided I had to manufacture something else in order to keep going. Of course I still had the drum dryer. There were three brewers in Los Angeles in those days: Lucky Lager, Pabst, and Budweiser. I started buying the spent brewers' yeast that the Los Angeles brewers were throwing down the sewer. That yeast was much

cheaper than making fresh yeast from scratch. I processed it and sold it to the animal feed industry as a nutrition additive.

GG: How did you get the idea to do that?

JS: I knew the feed industry was beginning to look at dried protein material to help with the growth of chickens and cattle and so on. I just knew that. Maybe I'd read it in a technical journal. I looked up some people in that business, and got friendly with one particular feed company man at the Ewing Company, and he told me he would buy all that I could process.¹⁰ Really I just dried it on the drum dryer and sold it.

But I couldn't make a lot of money with that. I had to haul the material from Los Angeles in trucks, dry it, and haul it back. In fact, things were so tight that after I sent a batch to my customer, I made it a point to get to Los Angeles about two hours after the finished product arrived so I could collect the check. I really wasn't making any money doing it, but it was a way to keep me going.

GG: What was the next development?

JS: I got to know more about the feed industry. I found out that the companies that were making antibiotics, that is, the pharmaceutical companies, were selling the leftover molds and bacteria that they'd used to make the antibiotics. The residue wasn't yeast, but it was bacteria and molds. The companies were drying that and selling it to the feed industry. It had something in it that they called an animal-growth factor. They didn't know what was in it, but somebody found out that it was much better than brewer's yeast in helping animals grow.

¹⁰ William Raiford Ewing (1928-2004). In 1963 the Ray Ewing Co. was a division of Hoffman LaRoche, Inc., which was the U. S. pharmaceutical unit of Roche Group.

So I thought I would go into that business. ¹¹ I started looking for microorganisms that might produce residue with greater animal growth factor in it. You understand me so far?

GG: Yes. Generally. Mrs. Sudarsky, you worked in the laboratory with your husband?

MS: For a while, for a couple of years. Then I went to work for the advertising department at Weill's Department Store. You see I didn't have a scientific background. I would go up to the factory during the day and help him, but at night I went back home to Bakersfield. At times he slept at the lab because he didn't want to leave when some of the fermentations were going on. He had to keep an eye on them.

JS: By then I had two or three people, or something like that, but Milly was there as secretary, and I was still doing all the lab work myself. I found one microorganism called bacillus megatherium that produced a fair amount of this animal growth factor, so I started experimenting with this microorganism. This friend of mine, Ewing, had test equipment and a way of testing the product on chickens. He was able to tell me which batches had more growth factor by how the chickens grew. So I was able to make a better product to sell to the feed industry, and I could charge more for it. That kept me going, and I did that for a while, but I didn't make any real money. I could take a small salary, and make ends meet more or less.

¹¹ In the late 1950s George Gelman, biochemist and attorney, was appointed president of the firm. Jerry Sudarsky explained: "He was an associate of one of my investors. The investor wanted Gelman in the business, and I agreed. He had the right background. Gelman was in charge of finances and sales, while I handled the technical things. He was a big help when we sold the company."

Later we found out that this animal growth factor was really vitamin B12. *Bacillus megatherium* still wasn't making enough vitamin B12 to make it worthwhile. By that time I had been able to build up a little bit of a research staff and a few people in to do research work, so I was able to start looking for a better microorganism.

GG: By then did you have a larger research building at Pacific Yeast Products?

JS: No, it was a small laboratory in the same building where the drum dryer was. Anyway, we finally found a microorganism that really made a lot of vitamin B12, and at that time an assay had been developed so we didn't have to grow chickens to find out how much vitamin B12 we had.¹² There was a big demand for our product, but Merck got a patent on the actual chemical molecule, vitamin B12. They sued us, but we worked out an agreement with them whereby they recognized that we didn't make their crystalline B12, but a B12 concentrate instead, of which they did not have a patent.¹³ That concentrate was exactly what I was drying on my double drum dryer.

[Laughter]. After we got into making B12 concentrate, we changed the name of the company to Bioferm. That was about 1955.

¹² *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, Oct 14, 1953, vol 1, No. 15: "Vitamin Assay..." A rapid and more accurate method than bioassay of determining the concentration of Vitamin B12 in fresh and dried bacteria cells. Robert A. Fisher, Pacific Yeast Products, Inc., Wasco. CA.

¹³ Patent No. 2816856. Filing date: Jul 27, 1954. Improvement in Production of Vitamin B12. Pacific Yeast Products. Patent No. 2956932. Filing date: Apr 2, 1957. Production of vitamin B12 products by procedure which includes cultivation of *Propionibacterium freudenreichii* and effects sharp increases in recoverable vitamin B12 activity. Dale W. Grant, Wasco, California.

GG: Did you compete in the market with Merck?

JS: No, we didn't. But we made a deal with Squib to sell the concentrate. Because our product wasn't crystalline B12, it was cheaper to make, but it was still very expensive. The B12 business really built-up the company.

MS: The location of what later became our big research lab was originally occupied by a Plymouth dealership and a hardware store. ¹⁴ The dryer building was across the street.

JS: As we built the business, we bought land around the dryer building. We had about five acres after a while. We also bought an ice plant nearby, but we bought it mostly for the square footage. ¹⁵

GG: You were hiring. Wasco must have been glad to see you come.

SJ: We were treated nicely in Wasco.

MS: It was a very colorful place, and the people were interesting. Dorothy Hull at the hardware store was raised in China. Her father had owned the creamery, and he was also one of the biggest farmers around. ¹⁶ Every afternoon at 3: 00 their bookkeeper -- and the man who owned the Plymouth dealership -- and Dorothy got together with us at the hardware store for tea, and she and Jerry took out their cigars. Sometimes the police chief, Tiny, joined our table. Remember Tiny? He was as wide as this table.

JS: No.

MS: In Bakersfield the place to go was Maison Jaussauds. They had nightclub acts that rivaled anything in Los Angeles. We

¹⁴ Harry Pollack's DeSoto Dealership

¹⁵ Harry Scaroni's Wasco Ice Plant

¹⁶ Harold G. Hull was manager of Wasco Creamery in the 1930s.

also liked the Basque restaurants. I still make their Basque beans.

JS: [turning to GG] I don't know if you are interested, but we felt good that we contributed to the social and intellectual development of Bakersfield. The scientists we brought in from the bigger cities, New York and Chicago, were very well educated and demanded more music and lectures and things like that.

MS: Bioferm's people were great contributors to the business, but their talents and ambitions effected the community, too.

JS: They were looking for the same things that we were looking for, and more programs developed after that in a cultural way. Milly was active in it and encouraged it.

MS: I also helped in fund raising for the Henrietta Weill Child Guidance Clinic. In the early 1960s The Guild's first building was on Chester Avenue south of California. Up until that time they had yearly theater parties, but that brought in very little money. We felt we needed a full-time project, and Guild House was the result. After my husband and I bought the house on 18th Street for the Guild, they were able to accommodate up to 100 people for lunch.¹⁷ So the Guild had a good fundraiser for the Weill Child Guidance Clinic. I remained very active there as a cook.

With the help of a man named Charles Jones, I was able to get chamber music started. We got people involved like Jack Geiger, the orthopedist, and Dr. Ablin who was a neurosurgeon who lived in a Frank Lloyd Wright house near Bakersfield Country Club.¹⁸ We were directly involved in getting chamber

¹⁷ At 1905 18th Street and acquired in 1966

¹⁸ George and Millie Ablin moved to Bakersfield in 1955.

music, Starlight Opera, and Light Opera started in Bakersfield. I wasn't directly involved in the Bakersfield Museum, but I helped out a lot there, too. Let's get back to Jerry's part of the story.

JS: Then we built a big laboratory with a large research organization, and eventually we had 200 people. We made a real company out of it. Robert Fisher, one of those 200 research people, was research director at the beginning. He did very good work for us in those early years.

GG: How did you find people?

JS: Well, by word of mouth from those we knew. And we had people who knew people who wanted to relocate. Some of the scientists had advertised in magazines for work. From those sources we got a very good group of people, most of them were from the east and the mid-west. If I had to attribute my success to any help I got from anybody, it would be to those who helped me find good people.

MS: When the new people came to town I helped them find housing. That was my job. Many of them were not just employees, but became friends. We still see some of them.

JS: But there was a lot of discrimination in Bakersfield in those days. A Chinese scientist who we wanted came to us, but he couldn't rent or buy a house. It was bad in those days. But Milly took care of that. How did you do it?

MS: I threatened the real estate people. I was with the new scientist and Boydston real-estate company when we looked at houses, and our scientist found a house he liked in the same neighborhood we were living in. When I got back home, the real estate guy called me and said, "You know, we can't rent to people like that," and I said, "What do you mean 'people like

that? And he said, "Well, they wouldn't be accepted in the neighborhood." I told him, "Would you care to put that in writing, because if you do I'll report you to the real-estate board." "Well," he said, "why don't you get in touch with somebody you know who is willing to work with you." We found another agent and our scientist got the house.

JS: At that time our scientists were looking for insecticides that were toxic to insects but were not toxic to warm-blooded animals.

GG: What turned your interest in that direction?

JS: I was reading about it in the literature, or somebody suggested it to me. Insecticides at the time were causing problems with their toxicity.

MS: May I interject something?

JS: Go ahead.

MS: On the East Coast at the time there was a scourge of Dutch Elm disease. A certain lepidopter¹⁹ was destroying the trees, and scientists were going crazy looking for a way to counteract the disease. The impetus for our research came from the need to get rid of that disease.

JS: Yes, that was one of the reasons, but there was a general need to find an insecticide that was not toxic. After a year or so of development we finally produced Thuricide that was from a bacteria called *b. thuringiensis*, and it turned out to be a big product.²⁰ It killed worms but didn't hurt people. It is still being manufactured at the plant in Wasco by some other company. After that, we developed monosodium glutamate,

¹⁹ such as moths

²⁰ The active ingredient is the bacterium.

and we were the worldwide distributors for it. So we prospered. ²¹

GG: Did you use the University of California in your investigations?

JS: All of it was in-house. We did ask some help from Stanford in obtaining microorganisms. We asked them for a certain bacteria, but I didn't bring in any technical partners from Stanford.

JS: Most of our product in the early 1960s was made up north at a factory in San Jose. We were involved with International Minerals & Chemical, who sold the monosodium glutamate for us. They owned the plant in San Jose, and we did the research in Wasco and developed the process. We had our own airplane, and I used to fly up there out of Wasco Airport every week.

GG: You were a pilot?

JS: No, we had a pilot. We had become well to do, and things were easier.

MS: The plane wasn't ours. It belonged to the company.

JS: We sold Bioferm to International Minerals & Chemical, but they're out of business now. ²² After I sold Bioferm in 1960, I finally had some money, and we built a home in Bakersfield.

GG: Where did you build?

MS: On the west side of Oleander, a couple of blocks south of Brundage Lane. Whitney Bigger, the architect, designed the house for us. He was a good architect and a good friend. The

²¹ Patent No. 2984601. May 1961. *Process for Preparing Bioflavanoids*. Patent No. 3112248. Nov 1963. *Process using bakers' yeast for the economical production of bioflavanoids derived from citrus molasses byproduct*. Jerry M. Sudarsky, Robert A. Fisher.

²² By the end of the 1990s, International Minerals & Chemical had become IMC Global.

big estate across the street from us was the Tognini property, and the Houchin house was on our right. So there were just three homes on our block. We later found out that this area was the site of an old Chinese graveyard, but when we bought the lot, there were no grave markers. After they started excavating for the foundation, they found human remains.

JS: To finish the story about the company, we'd sold it in 1960 to International Minerals, but I had to agree to stay for five years so management could develop in order to take over successfully. We also received some of the patents, so it turned out fine. I stayed on with the company until 1965, at which time I retired. I enjoyed the Wasco years very much.

GG: So that was your first retirement.

JS: When I sold the company, I realized that I didn't have to work to make a living any more, and I wanted to do something that was worthwhile. The United Nations had an agency called UNIDO that helped underdeveloped countries develop their industry. I joined to do voluntary work.²³

JS: My father had always been interested in a Jewish state, and for many years I was active with the Hebrew University at Jerusalem--I'd given them a few million for building facilities.²⁴ They heard that I was with UNIDO, and they asked for my services. Israel invited me to come over and organize their chemical industries. I talked Milly into going, which she didn't

²³ United Nations Industrial Development Organization

²⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 18, 1965. "J.M. Sudarsky and others plan a drive to raise \$7M for construction of a Life Science Compound at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Sudarsky makes contribution in memory of his father." [During the interview Jerry Sudarsky recalled, "I gave most of the funds. I don't remember anyone else who did."]

want to do, but she went along. One daughter had just graduated from elementary school, and the other one...

MS: She was in her last year of high school.

JS: Yes, 1966 was a bad time as far as the kids were concerned, but we decided to try it for one year. Things were a real mess in Israel. Politics made life difficult as far as getting anything done, and after one year I hadn't accomplished much. Somehow I didn't want to give up. It was hard on Milly, but she decided to stay on with me. To make a long story short, it took five years to get Israel Chemicals going. For the next five years I was the Chairman and ran it. It became very successful, the largest company in Israel.

GG: Did you consolidate companies?

JS: Five Israeli chemical companies were run by three different ministries, one by the Treasury, one by the Ministry of Development, another one by some other ministry, and those ministries were run by ministers from three different political parties. They couldn't cooperate, and for a long time I couldn't get them together. They saw me as the ugly American telling them what to do, which they resented. Milly and I had our names in the newspapers about once a week. They complained about the clothes that Milly wore, the restaurants we went to, the friends we had, and everything we did. People wanted to get rid of me.

MS: You have to remember that Israel wasn't enjoying the economy they have now, and the only thing some of them had was the struggle for power.

JS: The people I was dealing with were former generals. That's what happens to people that get out of the Army there. They go into government service, and they keep the military

attitude of running things. It was very, very difficult to bring them together, and it took a long time.

GG: Sounds more like a job for a politician than for a chemical engineer.

JS: Yes. I was finally able to transform the five companies and make them into one company, Israel Chemicals, and I had a good group of people running it. The central research organization and the central marketing organization were single, major systems, and they made it possible for products to be developed that were meaningful. Instead of just handling raw materials, we enhanced products and made them more valuable. The reorganization took the first five years. For the next five years Milly and I commuted back and forth, alternating two weeks in Israel with two weeks in the US. In 1972 I left Israel and joined the board of Daylin Corporation in California as Vice Chairman.



Jerry Sudarsky, right, upon award of Honorary Doctorate, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002.
<http://www.hunews.huji.ac.il/articles.asp?cat=2&artID=964>

GG: What are your feelings about your time in Israel?

JS: In those days living in Israel was very difficult, and it was difficult for the family. The job wasn't in my field of expertise

because it was more political than technical. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. When I look back, why, I'm happy I did it. It was a major accomplishment. I've enjoyed my business life, but I'm more proud of what I did in Israel than of anything else I've done.

GG: Thank you very much for sharing your story.

JS: You're welcome. I hope it helps your project.

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Mr. and Mrs. Sudarsky reviewed and clarified the text. Thank you to Jerry Ludeke of Bakersfield College for her valuable editorial suggestions and proofreading. Any errors and shortcomings are mine.

In 2008 Jerry Sudarsky retired as Chairman of the Board of Alexandria Real Estate Equities. He stated it was his seventh retirement. Jerry Sudarsky died in 2009.



DVD cover of May 15, 2008 designed by Jerry M. Sudarsky for Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc. and featured on a video produced to honor its founder's life and legacy. "Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc. (ARE: NYSE), Landlord of Choice to the Life Science Industry®, is the largest owner and pre-eminent first-in-class real estate investment trust focused principally on science-driven cluster formation." <http://www.rulis.net/>