

Oral History of: Susie Citrin
Interviewed by: Faye Wolf
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Location of Interview: Max M. Fisher Federation Building
Subject Matter: Women's Philanthropy Dept. of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit

Faye Wolf: 00:01 My name is Faye Wolf, and today is August 1st, 2018. I am interviewing Susie Citrin at the Max M. Fisher Federation Building in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. This interview is being recorded as part of the Women in Leadership Oral History Project. Do you give permission to the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes and for uses deemed appropriate by the archives?

Susie Citrin: 00:28 Yes, I certainly do.

Faye Wolf: 00:30 The Women's Philanthropy Department of the Jewish Federation is had several names throughout its history, including Women's Division and Women's Campaign and Education Department. For the purposes of this interview, the questions will refer to it by its current name, Women's Philanthropy. But you may use whatever name you are comfortable with. When and where were you born?

Susie Citrin: 00:50 I was born here in Detroit in 1944.

Faye Wolf: 00:55 And where did you go to school?

Susie Citrin: 00:57 I went to First McCollough School. That was part of the Detroit system. And then we moved to Oak Park, and I went to the Oak Park School System, Paul Best. And I went to Ferndale High School.

Faye Wolf: 01:10 How was religion observed in your house as a child?

Susie Citrin: 01:14 I would say very modestly. We celebrated Passover. We had a Seder. And Hanukkah, we got some gifts at Hanukkah time. But I came from a very ... I wouldn't say poor, but we had a modest existence, and we couldn't afford to belong to a temple or synagogue. So I can say that I didn't have all the advantages of the Jewish community. Although I have to say, I did take violin

lessons and piano lessons at the Curtis and Meyers, JPM, Jewish anyhow. Later on, I joined BBG and AZA. A friend of mine took me by the hand. In Ferndale, there weren't very many Jewish kids. There were six of us in my graduating class. So she said, "I heard about this group named BBG, B'nai B'rith Girls." And we joined. We had a blast. So I can say I took advantage of a few of the organizations that are part of the federation group of agencies.

Faye Wolf: 02:42 When and how did you first become involved with federation?

Susie Citrin: 02:48 Well, my husband came from a family that were very much involved at federation. They were major donors. And my mother-in-law went to meetings, so I guess I just sort of fell into place after I got married in 1968. And I enjoyed being there. It was very stimulating. And the things that federation did were incredible. And I had the opportunity the first year of our marriage to go on a mission to Israel, which I never thought I would be able to do. I went with my mother-in-law. She tagged along, it was fun, and my husband. And we went first to Israel, which is kind of wonderful. And you're just so in awe of everything that is over there.

And then we went to Austria to see the concentration camp that was there. And I think we should've done the trip the other way around because usually you go to the saddest part, and then you go onto the wonderful things that are happening in Israel. But it really changed who I was, I think, to see what we do not only here locally with all of the different agencies, but when you go overseas, it's just amazing, especially what they do in the former Soviet Union.

Faye Wolf: 04:24 How did you become involved in Women's Philanthropy? I know you started out going on this trip.

Susie Citrin: 04:29 Yes.

Faye Wolf: 04:29 And then you started-

Susie Citrin: 04:30 Well, then I gave a pledge. And my mother-in-law and I went to the event, and there were a number of women who were much older than I was. But I just made so many good friends. I met Carolyn Greenberg and Dulcie Rosenfeld, and Jane Sherman. There were just a whole slew of very interesting, committed women to the Jewish cause, so I was really lucky.

Faye Wolf: 05:02 Was Carolyn Greenberg the president of Women's Philanthropy when you became involved?

Susie Citrin: 05:07 I think Shirley Harris was the first one that I was aware of when I became a little active. And then by the time I met Carolyn, she took me under her wing. In fact, when I was at her house, she invited me over to her house, which was just like I was so amazed that she did that. And I met her family. And oftentimes, I see her son, who's now about 45 or 50. And he said, "Remember when I met you in my mom's kitchen, and she was giving you coffee and little donuts?" And I said, "Absolutely." I still remember it. It was quite something wonderful for me.

Faye Wolf: 05:53 Was your husband involved in Federation?

Susie Citrin: 05:55 Oh, yeah. He was a solicitor. And he was active, not just in Federation, but he has been the president of Hebrew Free Loan, and he was on the Jewish Vocational Service Board, so we've been around.

Faye Wolf: 06:13 What did your immediate family think of your involvement in Women's Philanthropy?

Susie Citrin: 06:18 I think that they were proud. I know my mother was very proud of me that I was able to do this. And as I said, back in the olden days, women didn't usually work. I worked a little bit. But I didn't have to be ... I didn't have a career so to speak. And then I started to have a family. But it was my activity to let everybody know that this was really important to me.

Faye Wolf: 06:53 What type of activities did Women's Philanthropy have when you started?

Susie Citrin: 06:59 Well, they had fundraisers. But they had other things like spring forum. They'd bring in a wonderful moving speaker. They had leadership training. And we'd go to all the different agencies and see what they did. I loved that program because they took you not only to the JCC, but we went to Hebrew Free Loan. And we went to Jewish Family Service. We did a lot of fun things. And then I got actually a chance to meet Jewish people in our community, especially Jewish young women. And I have friends with whom I took the leadership training, Donna Slatkin and Sharon Hart and Linda Lee. They're still friends.

Faye Wolf: 07:51 So you did participate. And why did you feel it was important to be part of the leadership training?

Susie Citrin: 07:57 Well, to tell you the truth, I had very little Jewish training when I was younger. This was like my training, so to speak. And I just loved it. I loved being there and doing stuff with other Jewish people. I got it. I understand that I was very lucky. I was lucky to have married into a family that didn't really have to worry about money, and that I had actually been part of the Jewish community by going to the center and participating there, even though I didn't realize it.

Faye Wolf: 08:39 Okay. Switching gears just a little tiny bit. What positions did you hold with Women's Philanthropy? And when were they? So chronological.

Susie Citrin: 08:49 Oh my goodness. I can't even remember. But I did a lot of solicitation of funds. I really felt it was important that people who were lucky enough to have some funds that they could give to others to make life better for somebody else, that was my task to ask people for money. But ask them in a very personal way, so that's what I did. I was on other committees. Right now I don't recall them all.

Faye Wolf: 09:34 What about your leadership roles? Lets talk about those. What kind of roles did you have in terms of, what inspired you to want to work your way up to the presidency? And talk about that journey.

Susie Citrin: 09:46 Just was, as I mentioned before, it was a very pleasant place to be. People were very nice. They knew why they were there. They gave of their time, of their energy. And also, at that time in 1980, I was president of Jewish Family Service for three years. I just saw the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, people who couldn't make their rent payments or their house payments, people who didn't have a car in the city of Detroit, which is not even imaginable, and people who couldn't put food on the table. I guess that along with Women's Philanthropy, gave me a real place to be.

Faye Wolf: 10:47 When you were campaign chair, describe your duties.

Susie Citrin: 10:53 Oh, we just went to fundraising meetings and planned them and hoped that we got the right speaker. And we had a whole worker training thing. And I remember putting together a whole packet that had a little suitcase on the cover of it, like you were carrying along a little satchel of good information to help people solicit. And we brought in speakers because sometimes I may be enthusiastic, but if you get somebody that other people have never seen before. And also, at the time that I was president, a lot of women didn't handle their own money. So we had a

woman who came in from the local community. Her name is Fulton, and I can't remember her first. Elise, excuse me. She's a wonderful young woman. Elise Fulton, and she was a financial planner and an accountant. And she gave a whole lecture.

And we had Linda Wasserman Aviv, who also did it the second year. People, women liked it. They liked the idea that at least they understood how things happened financially. I know women today are much more savvy than we were back in the olden days. So we had a special program for just learning how you should manage your money, what you should look for, how to establish credit for yourself because many of the women I knew didn't have their own credit. Their husbands had credit, but they did not.

Faye Wolf:	12:36	Educating women was a very important part of it all.
Susie Citrin:	12:40	Yeah. Absolutely.
Faye Wolf:	12:43	Okay. And describe your duties as president.
Susie Citrin:	12:46	Well, before you become president, you have to be campaign chair. It's rare in the women's department or women's philanthropy that women don't go through the process of being first the associate chair, and then the chair of the campaign. I was ready for it. I had been chair of the big campaign.
Faye Wolf:	13:11	What time period were you campaign chair?
Susie Citrin:	13:14	I don't remember the exact years, but it's got to be at least 15 years ago.
Faye Wolf:	13:21	For one year?
Susie Citrin:	13:22	No, two years.
Faye Wolf:	13:22	For two years.
Susie Citrin:	13:24	And I was associate chair too.
Faye Wolf:	13:25	Okay.
Susie Citrin:	13:28	And Susie Pappas was the president.
Faye Wolf:	13:31	Speaking as a previous president, tell me about your mentors through campaign chair and presidency.

Susie Citrin: 13:45 I have to just underscore Carolyn Greenberg because she was just so ... We're still good friends. I go and see her when she's in Florida. She's just a wonderful person. Dulcie Rosenfeld also, and Shirley Harris of Blessed Memories, she was an interesting person because she sold insurance. That was her job. But she was the one that sort of suggested we have a program where we taught women how to invest and how to manage their money and how to get credit for themselves. And I took her idea. I have to give her credit. And she said, "I went to buy a car for myself." And they said, "We're sorry. We can't sell you a car because you don't have any credit. All the credit is in your husband's name." From that I just took it, and we used to talk about it. And then we had this wonderful seminar, which women wanted us to repeat.

Faye Wolf: 14:57 Okay. What were some of the challenges you faced as campaign chair and as president?

Susie Citrin: 15:04 Challenges. Well, we had a \$5 million goal for women's department.

Faye Wolf: 15:14 Lofty goal.

Susie Citrin: 15:15 Yeah. It is. I thought, "Now, how are we going to do this?" So we had a \$100 first time donor division. And I chaired it with Judy Frankel. And we had a lot of fun doing it, and we attracted quite a number of women who sort of just put their toe in the water and wanted to figure out if this was the place for them. I think that hopefully we increased the donor list by a couple of hundred, I would say. And then I look back and also, one of the things that I did as chairman, actually I was president at the time, not chairman of the campaign, was to take a whole group, the First Mosaic Group, to Israel. And many of the women who were on the trip were first time visitors to Israel. But we had a blast. And we still continue that program today and take women who want to go and see what's happening in Israel. And we take them on a wonderful tour. I've been to Israel now 18 times. And I feel really proud of it. Yeah. It's great. It's really great.

Faye Wolf: 16:46 What do you think? You've mentioned ... I'm sorry. Let me rephrase that. You mentioned a few times about women's education. Would you say that would be your proudest accomplishment, or the trip, or both even?

Susie Citrin: 17:03 I don't know. I just had one wild and wonderful time. I know that sounds kind of loony tunes, but it was good. I really met new people. Maybe I was starved in my early childhood by not having any Jewish friends, but I suddenly felt like there was a

place for me. And darn it, I was going to let every woman I knew who was Jewish that there was a place for them too. And-

- Faye Wolf: 17:37 What kind of ... I'm sorry. Go ahead.
- Susie Citrin: 17:38 Well, I'm just amazed today, the presidents today are even more creative and more thoughtful and more educated about just Jewish text. I learn from them all the time, seriously.
- Faye Wolf: 17:58 What are the skills that you think made you a good leader?
- Susie Citrin: 18:04 Well, I don't know. I was the chairman of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, so I sort of had an idea how organizations run. And I was president of Jewish Family Service, so I knew why we did things like this in the Jewish community. We really take care of each other. And I was very active at Yad Ezra. And you see people in this community who do not ... It's a kosher food bank, and some people just can't put food on their table, so if you go there, you see people lined up with their shopping carts that are there. And they can pick anything they want, and there's fresh fruits and vegetables and chicken if they'd like it. I guess I sort of jumped right in and said, "Just show me everything."
- Faye Wolf: 19:10 How were you affected by transition in staff and lay leadership, if you were affected?
- Susie Citrin: 19:20 I don't think I was. I think right now I know upstairs in Federation, we're sitting at the Federation Building, that sometimes we'll have somebody from a different department come and supervise a lecture series. There's a lot of movement up there among staff. There's a Women's Philanthropy department. And Amy Neistein is exceptional. Marion... I'm blanking on her last name. I can see her. I see her all the time. Freedman. I'm sorry. Marion Freedman was the executive director when I was there. And then before that, Lois Brown was. But I must say that people seem to adapt to who we are. And I think that they know about who we are. I'm going to brag a little bit and say we're probably the finest federation in all of the United States. And we raise the most money from the fewer than most communities.
- Faye Wolf: 20:34 I think we sort of covered this, but I want to give you the opportunity to fill in any blanks. Why is Women's Philanthropy important to you? And how does it rank among your other activities?

Susie Citrin: 20:47 Number one. It does. I can't help it. I mean, this is kind of a home away from home. When you walk into a room here, you know all the people. And I think that they respond here to so many of the problems that the Jewish community had. I mean now I just went to a meeting where they were talking about, Dr. Jacobson was talking about the opioids that young people are taking, and how our society is plagued by this same problem that the general society is. And federation is doing something about it. I've known her. I call her Dr. Jacobson, but it's Lily Jacobson. I've known her since she was a kid. Suddenly, here she is in front of federation. And I thought, "Wow." After she gave her speech in front of the board of governors of federation, I was proud of her because she was so thorough in her study and solutions as to how to help kids in the Jewish community. And I learned a lot, so I think I'm constantly learning while I'm here.

Faye Wolf: 22:17 Do you feel that women solicit different than men?

Susie Citrin: 22:20 Oh, definitely. Oh my goodness, yes.

Faye Wolf: 22:22 How so?

Susie Citrin: 22:23 Well, men don't solicit. They think they know everything. But women, we have trainings. People learn, the women learn things about what's newest in our community. I read a study once where they said that the women are the one that carry the idea of tzedakah and especially to their children and helping other people, to their families. They're the ones that really, or usually I should say, do that. And so if we didn't have women sort of nudging their spouses and their kids along, maybe we wouldn't have the kind of community we have.

Faye Wolf: 23:13 How do you feel that women's philanthropy interacted with the general campaign when you were president?

Susie Citrin: 23:18 Well, we have a telethon and everybody ... That's where the gifts under a certain amount to campaign. We have huge telethons. And we always had a good time. And there were bagels. That's for sure. And they had a mini training before people went to the phone. And we used to have big huge place mats in front of people with all the facts, so they would call their person that they were going to solicit and say, "What agency really are you interested in, the Jewish Center, or the Jewish Family Service, or Hebrew Free Loan, and JVS?" And so they would have facts about those specific agencies, so that they could talk to the person in an intelligent way and show them how their money really made a difference.

Faye Wolf: 24:21 Do you feel that Federation values Women's Philanthropy?

Susie Citrin: 24:24 Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, I have to say that years ago when Federation was founded about 100 years ago, it was the men who were really in charge. But we know that we're always in charge. But I think that women ... I was campaign chair for the big campaign before I was campaign chair in women's department. So I think more and more we have women participating.

Faye Wolf: 24:57 How do you think Women's Philanthropy has changed throughout your involvement? Of course, it's been a lot of changes because it's been such a long period of time.

Susie Citrin: 25:07 Yeah.

Faye Wolf: 25:08 What do you think are some of the most significant changes?

Susie Citrin: 25:11 Wow. I don't know. When I was first starting out, I was very young, so I learned from my older friends that I had, like Carolyn. She's not that much older than I am. But anyhow, now I learn from the younger people. And I think that it's surprising to me. Our current president, who just stepped down, Leah Trosch, is a phenomenal woman. And she's a great speaker. They have more skills than I know I ever had. But I think we learn from the younger people, if that sounds crazy. The women decided to have a business and professional group, which we tried to start out in my era, but it didn't quite go. Now everybody wants to be part of that particular group. They're changing. And as I said, the women are very well educated. They speak well. It's a different group, but it's a group that I love to be with.

Faye Wolf: 26:27 How about transitioning from president to past president? How did that go? Tell me about that.

Susie Citrin: 26:34 It was great. Well, as I said, because I think there's no difference. Actually, the past presidents, when Leah Trosch stepped down about a month ago, we had a luncheon for her, all the past presidents. And she didn't know about it. It's a big secret that we honor the people who served their time because usually the past president has served several years as ... One year as associate campaign chair, then two years as campaign chair, and then she becomes president, so it's a five year stint. It's not just becoming president. And so we have this secret lunch, which you won't tell anybody about. Will you?

Faye Wolf:	27:22	It's our secret.
Susie Citrin:	27:23	They're always surprised that we ... And they get a president's pin, and it's nice. It's like a fun sorority, but underneath it all we do really important things in the community and abroad too.
Faye Wolf:	27:44	Tell me about what you're doing now, because you still are currently involved. Correct?
Susie Citrin:	27:49	Yes.
Faye Wolf:	27:50	Tell me what you're involved in now.
Susie Citrin:	27:52	<p>Currently, oh my goodness. Well, let's see. I'm involved, and that's what I was here in the archives. I've been the archives chair for about seven years, a while ago when we were just starting out before Robbie Terman, wonderful Robbie, came. But I'm gathering the records for the Jewish Ensemble Theater, which has been celebrating its 30th anniversary. And it's been for 30 years in the Jewish Community Center at Maple and Drake. And so now it's moving to its own theater because the Jewish Center can no longer accommodate them.</p> <p>So I'm gathering all the old plays. One of the first plays was Man in the Glass Booth. And it's very moving. So I collected all of the playbills, all of the minutes, all of the photos, the reviews for all the plays they've done, about 125 plays over the 30 years that they've been in existence. It's really quite impressive, so I'm helping out. I feel, thank goodness, federation taught me archival skills so I could do it. And yesterday I delivered four big boxes of stuff, paper that they're going to preserve. And so everyone will remember that.</p>
Faye Wolf:	29:32	Why, to you, and you've touched on this on almost every single question I've asked, but why in a nice big package, why is philanthropy important to you?
Susie Citrin:	29:44	Well, I also sat on a budget committee, and was co-chair with Ben Rosenthal on a budget committee for about three years. And that's where you really get to see the agencies come to the federation and make a very succinct, complete budget for their agency. And you see where the dollars go. And you realize that there are a lot of people out there who really need our help. As I said, I'll still be hanging around. They won't get rid of me that easily. What's nice, as I said, I go back to Carolyn Greenberg and Dulcie, they're still hanging around here too. I don't know why.

We must like it a lot to solicit people and ask for money. But we know that it goes to a good cause.

- Faye Wolf: 30:43 What are your hopes for Women's Philanthropy in the future?
- Susie Citrin: 30:47 Oh my goodness. They have so many young people. I went to an event the other night. And they had a comedienne, but the best part of the whole evening was there were some people, especially there's a person who works here at this Federation, and she said, "I was left to care for my younger siblings, my sisters and brothers. And my mother died, and our father left us." And she said, "I was in my early 20s." And she said, "I came." I can't give her whole story like she did it. We were all sobbing because now she works for Federation. She's upstairs. And it's amazing that we can do those sort of things. And people know there's a place for them.
- Faye Wolf: 31:43 Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you'd like to tell me about, tell everyone about?
- Susie Citrin: 31:49 I have five grandchildren, one granddaughter and four grandsons. And I have three children. And I have a wonderful husband. And so we have a good time. It's interesting because they are involved in some way in the community as well, so I guess maybe a little bit of it rubbed off on me, not in this community, but in other communities they do things. Anyhow, I'm glad for that. I think the old adage is that the woman, as I said before, brings in some of the tasks that we're responsible for into her household. And I think it rubbed off a little bit. But I'm glad.
- Faye Wolf: 32:37 That's wonderful. Anything else you'd like to add?
- Susie Citrin: 32:41 No. I'm just having a good time here. I wish more people would know about it. But the group of young women who are involved are just so spectacular. They're really well educated and good speakers. And nothing seems to daunt them. They're willing to sign up for trips to Israel. I have to say I was a little nervous going on my first women's department trip to Israel because I never traveled by myself before. I did travel with my husband, but this was like the big time. I was a big girl. Anyhow.
- Faye Wolf: 33:30 Thank you very much.
- Susie Citrin: 33:31 Thank you. This is like therapy. I had a good time.
- Faye Wolf: 33:37 So did I, so did I. Thank you very much.

Susie Citrin:

33:41

Thank you.