

Oral History of: Edie Slotkin
Interviewed by: Susie Pappas
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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

Susie: 00:01 My name is Susie Pappas and today is September 26, 2018. I'm interviewing Edie Slotkin 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 use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

Edie: 00:36 I do.

Susie: 00:37 The Women's Philanthropy department of Jewish Federation has had several names throughout its history. Including women's division, women's campaign and Education Department. But for the purposes of this interview we will refer to it by its current name women's philanthropy. Okay Edie, when and where were you born?

Edie: 01:02 I was born, when, in 1936 in Cincinnati, Ohio at the Cincinnati Jewish hospital.

Susie: 01:10 Okay and where did you go to school?

Edie: 01:13 I went to Avondale school and then to Walnut Hills High School which is a college preparatory high school in Cincinnati.

Susie: 01:21 Was it a private school?

Edie: 01:22 No public school, but it drew citywide it was an interesting school.

Susie: 01:28 So as a child how was religion observed in your home?

Edie: 01:33 My grandparents came from Russia and Romania and one half of the family remained very orthodox, the Romanians. But my Russian grandparents really became, I think to become more American, became sort of reformed. Sort of not completely. My mother was very active in the community and was the president of the Sisterhood of the Isaac Wise chapel. I went to Sunday school for 13 years. In fact my high school years were at the Hebrew Union College so I knew the rabbis. I still know... well most of them probably passed away, but I know rabbis from all over the country. We were reform, but religiously reform.

Susie: 02:16 So what does that mean religiously reform?

Edie: 02:18 Well, we were very active in the temple and we observed all the holidays. Although we weren't really strict...we didn't observe that strictly, but it was very it was very important in our lives because of my mother. My mother was really very involved.

Susie: 02:41 So you mentioned that your mother was involved in the community. So philanthropy was important to your family when you were growing up. In what ways beyond?

Edie: 02:51 My dad was a physician. He was an internist, but my mother really reached out in the whole community. She was the president of the sisterhood as I said. She was the president of the Brandeis chapter. She was involved in the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, which, by the way has really grown. In those days it was not the biggest thing. She was Ruth Lodge, the order of true sisters. My mother won the equivalent of the Butzel award when she was 80. It was a Cincinnati Leadership Award. We went in to hear her speak and it was very thrilling. It really was Wow. So mother led the way.

Susie: 03:33 So when you were a teenager were you involved in any activities?

Edie: 03:41 Judaicly?

Susie: 03:42 Yes.

Edie: 03:43 It's interesting I was not involved in NFTY, the Ohio Valley temple youth but I was very involved in the Sunday school which I loved. The Isaac M. Wise Cincinnati was sort of I guess the seat of Reform Judaism. Wise temple was a beautiful wonderful place and played a very big part in my life. In fact we went to Sunday school on Saturday because the classes were so

big there was a Saturday class and a Sunday class. Wednesday during the week we had a class.

We didn't do, Bat Mitvahs in those days when I was consecrated and I was confirmed at the Plum Street Temple which is this edifice in downtown Cincinnati.

- Susie: 04:23 So we didn't talk about whether you have siblings. Did you have siblings?
- Edie: 04:28 I have one sister who is 6 years younger. She lives still in Cincinnati.
- Susie: 04:33 So did she do. Did she do any community stuff?
- Edie: 04:39 Not really. She works and she and her husband are in the arts in Cincinnati. She was employed by the school for the Performing Arts. Where he was the musical director. At one time it was quite something in Cincinnati and then they left and they started the Cincinnati Children's Theater. Which was something the Junior League of Cincinnati did. They built that into something that was international. So they're retired now.
- Susie: 05:08 You really were the one that carried the philanthropy.
- Edie: 05:12 The more Judaic tradition.
- Susie: 05:16 So after high school where did you go to college?
- Edie: 05:20 I went to Michigan.
- Susie: 05:21 How did you happen to choose Michigan?
- Edie: 05:24 When I was 13 my dad had a friend who was a physician who was an alum. He had been a football player and he gave us three tickets to homecoming. We came and we stayed at the Book Cadillac and we went up to Ann Arbor and I had a mum corsage. We sat in the end zone and I was blown away. My parents were very very big sports fans. My dad was on the faculty of the University of Cincinnati and he was very involved in all their sports teams. He had patients who were Cincinnati Reds and at that time the professional basketball team the Big O Oscar Robertson. His whole family was...I mean Oscar is still a friend of the family and they loved the Big Ten.

Although I would not have ever gotten over Ohio state that was anathema. Oh no my high school yes. At the time Ohio State

scholastically was not what it is today. Most everybody 99% of my senior class went to college. They mostly went to Eastern schools. In fact I almost went to Wellesley and I almost went to Wheaton. I got into Wheaton and Wellesley and we always laugh Donald and I because he was at Harvard we would have met then and I would say the rest of the funny part. But anyway my cousin who was a graduate of Walnut Hills High School and who was like a brother to me and I decided we wanted to go to Michigan.

So we both got in and not a lot of my classmates applied at that time, but I took college boards anyway just for fun. That's when I got in the two Eastern girls school. But there was never any choice I was going to a big ten school.

- Susie: 07:07 So how did you find Michigan when you got there?
- Edie: 07:10 I loved it. I had a really good time.
- Susie: 07:12 Did you join a sorority.
- Edie: 07:14 I was a sorority I was an Aephi.
- Susie: 07:16 So that was a Jewish sorority. Was anything more Jewishly that you did beyond ...
- Edie: 07:22 Probably not more Jewishly except when I would go home. I know once I gave a sermon at the temple it was called "Hello College Good by God." It was an honor to do that though. It was nice yeah. But Aephi, we had traditions, we had Friday night. We had a good time... it was more frivolous than religion.
- Susie: 07:49 How did you how did you end up in the Detroit area?
- Edie: 07:54 My junior year... Let's see in my junior year. I met Stuart Mittenthal. He was an interesting man and he was he had just graduated he was out of school. He was stationed outside of Cincinnati. So a mutual friend introduced us. I won't go into the whole romance kind of thing. But I married him and when I graduated - I went to Michigan for three and a half years - I graduated early to get married which now I regret that because I really ruined my senior year and I was the Rush chairman of the sorority and I had to commute from Cincinnati for Rush because I was already out of school.

That's how I ended up in Detroit. Also my roommate was Jennie Jones' daughter, was my roommate, was my best friend, at

Michigan. Nancy Smith Kirsch was also my very good friend and we all roomed together. That's the Jones's actually became like my family here. That will lead to the next question of how did I get involved.

- Susie: 09:08 Okay. So tell us about how you got involved in Federation.
- Edie: 09:11 Okay so Jennie Jones who was really a surrogate mother to me at that time. Dragged me. I was a bride and dragged me to leadership training. The next thing I knew I was in charge of the apartments. Huntington Gardens Apartments which we referred to as Rensselaer in Oak Park which is where we lived and we were going door to door soliciting and I was the captain. From then on that was it. I will say that I was very homesick at first. I didn't even realize, I didn't even think how much I would miss Cincinnati, and the family and my mother's activities. My dad is the physician, my doctor. Federation became a family to me.
- Susie: 09:57 So can I ask you what year this was?
- Edie: 10:00 This was 1958, 59
- Susie: 10:00 58, 59. So do you remember some of the roles that you played.
- Edie: 10:10 Well, so captain of the door to door whatever it was called then. I was involved in leadership training. I mean I know I shared Super Sunday relatively early. I became more campaign oriented than anything else, more than the education.
- Susie: 10:29 What are some of the people some of the lay leaders that you remember working with in those days?
- Edie: 10:34 Well, besides Jennie there was Esther Jones and Tillie and Frieda.
- Susie: 10:40 Say their whole names.
- Edie: 10:41 Tillie Brandwine, Frieda Stollman, Barbara Marcuse, Karbel... what was her first name? I know her first name will come to me. Well even Jane Sherman and Ruth Broder certainly has been my mentor for many many years and is still my very good friend Shirley Harris. I can remember the first campaign meeting I went to at Shirley's house and I had my check written and I thought I was being so wonderful and she said to me if you wrote the check you could give more. I was so embarrassed. I learned never to do that again never to come with the money.

Susie: 11:26 But that's a very interesting thing that they would cut. They would in those days a lot of days they have little sayings like that. [crosstalk 00:11:38]

Edie: 11:38 If you wrote the check today you're going to be able to give more.

Susie: 11:41 So did you.

Edie: 11:42 Oh yes absolutely. It was the beginning.

Susie: 11:46 Were you among the youngest of the women that were involved in those that you remember.

Edie: 11:51 I don't think I was. I mean Jane is younger than I am. I know when I was in a group that maybe I was right at the upper limit of the age I was about 22, 23 at that time.

Susie: 12:06 So do you want to tell us a little more about what you did in those days. Did you go to Israel at all?

Edie: 12:15 Not until...was it This Year in Jerusalem was my first time... was in the 70s. No I didn't. I didn't go to Israel.

Susie: 12:28 When you were growing up was Israel something that they talked about in your home?

Edie: 12:33 We lived with my grandparents the first 11 years of my life and my grandparents were more Israel oriented. Cincinnati was not...it took many years I think for Cincinnati to become like we are and it was not as big a factor. I remember when Roosevelt died and grandma crying. No it really was not.

Susie: 13:00 So when you came here did you find it was more Zionist?

Edie: 13:03 Yes yes yes. I was getting an education through federation. So I finally went on a women's mission. The rest was history. I mean I was absolutely a different person after that.

Susie: 13:16 What year was that? Do you remember?

Edie: 13:18 It was maybe 73. Then I went back many times.

Susie: 13:24 So was that picture that we see all the time from...?

Edie: 13:29 The We Are One picture? That was a couple of years later.

Susie: 13:33 OK so you went on a few missions. They were all missions. So this was something you did separate from your husband.

Edie: 13:39 Absolutely not. He wasn't involved in the community. It was obviously a need I had. It really gave me another family. I mean I became very close with a lot of people in Israel. I remember dragging suitcases with tablecloths and towels and silverware and all kinds of stuff that they would ask me to bring and I stayed Hadera at the bus drivers house with his wife and his two children. I stayed in the Netanya. I mean I became very close with a lot of people there and obviously it was a need I had it filled something in my life.

Susie: 14:19 It also was a way to really be involved.

Edie: 14:22 What happened to me nationally was when I came back from Israel the first time when I was like ...

Susie: 14:32 In the early 70s?

Edie: 14:33 Yes I was like a maniac. I remember I spoke for the women's division. I had this standard speech. If you ever stood on the Mount of Olives and looked at Jerusalem and to this day James still quotes that. So I won the Greenberg Award and I was sent to the GA.

Susie: 14:56 Let's go back a little bit. In the early 70s, when did you win the Greenberg?

Edie: 15:06 It was I don't remember the exact date, but you ought to go look in the hall. But they sent me to Philadelphia and it was the year I remember of Legionnaires disease and we had a stay at the hotel that was it was very funny. Anyway I was at a women's meeting and the speaker didn't come. They had me sub. I did my speech and then I became the National Speakers Bureau.

Susie: 15:35 So did you do a lot of speaking around the country?

Edie: 15:38 All around the country. I didn't have the big cities I had Evansville. I had Toledo. I had Cincinnati.

Susie: 15:43 You would go by yourself to these.

Edie: 15:48 Yeah. It was very uplifting for me. I had really my canned speech about how turned on I was and if you go you'll be turned on. It worked. People identified with me which was nice. So that was so then I went on the national women's board. I was on for

several years, but then as you know I was divorced and I went to work. That did make a big change in my life.

Susie: 16:14 Okay so what year was that?

Edie: 16:16 That was 1982.

Susie: 16:17 So up until ...

Edie: 16:22 1980 I think it

Susie: 16:23 So up until about 1980.

Edie: 16:25 I was very nationally active.

Susie: 16:28 You were involved and here

Edie: 16:30 And here.

Susie: 16:32 Do you remember some of the roles you played before 1980?

Edie: 16:36 I chaired Super Sunday I chaired leadership training. I don't think anything in education. I don't think Spring Forum or what Was the other one fall.

Susie: 16:48 Fall Institute.

Edie: 16:50 I didn't ...

Susie: 16:51 Were you chair of some of the divisions because in those we had a lot of division.

Edie: 16:56 Probably almost all of them working up. As my gift increased I was able to chair.

Susie: 17:04 So then in 1980 your life changed.

Edie: 17:05 My life changed.

Susie: 17:06 So what direction did it go.

Edie: 17:08 Well, I went to work, but I worked first for a state senator, for Doug Ross. I was his fundraiser. Interestingly enough my background in the Federation gave me the credential to be a development officer because I had a B.A. in English Lit, so I could cook and read books. I mean that was it. I worked for a short time for Doug, but it was a very small salary. I worked with

Zina Kramer and Gilda Jacobs and it was wonderful. I have great respect for him, but I knew at that point I really needed to have a job that made some money. So first I worked in the house for Hebrew University.

Susie: 17:50

What did that entail?

Edie: 17:52

I was raising funds for Hebrew University, but it was the organization at that time locally was not so... I guess after that I got a job for Wayne State. I ran the Anthony Wayne society for several years. It had been Catherine Gribbs the mayor's wife. It had been her baby and it was fascinating to me because who gave to Wayne State were the doctors who graduated and the lawyers who graduated. But it was really like pulling teeth to get money for Wayne State. I think it's gotten a lot better since then. But during that time, I had an interview with the field director for the Weizmann Institute of Science, the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science.

I was hired and that was a terrific job. I worked for them for 10 years.

Susie: 18:51

So what was your position for Weizmann?

Edie: 18:53

I was the executive director of the Detroit chapter of the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science.

Susie: 18:59

So what were your responsibilities?

Edie: 19:02

Well, we had what we did really was have a major dinner and honorees and we raised a lot of money on the honorees. They were Federation people. They were Bormans and Irwin green and Florine and the Berrys.

Susie: 19:20

So your background and all your contacts with Federation...

Edie: 19:26

Absolutely and I never liked asking for money ever. It was always painful, but I did and I did it in a way where I sort of became the friends of who I was speaking to. I commiserated with them somewhat there probably was a pushover. I was probably too easy, but Weizmann had these spectacular dinners every year with great entertainment and the format that a lot of organizations... It was 10 years. Actually when I remarried I stayed on with Weizmann for several years and the ideal is working because you want to not because you have to. That was really neat.

Susie: 20:03 So you worked for Weizmann for nine years.

Edie: 20:07 Ten years, but the last few years I was married. I really enjoyed my job and actually I worked part time which was interesting because I did as much work part time as I did full time. But it was still a wonderful job. At the same time I was still involved in the women's division. I was the chair of... what do we call it? The working women...

Susie: 20:34 Working Women's Network.

Edie: 20:36 Yeah. I chaired that, as a working woman.

Susie: 20:40 Do you remember some of it in those days when you were working at Weizmann and you were still involved in Federation. Who were some of the presidents and people that you worked with at that time? Diane? Linda Klein?

Edie: 21:00 Maybe Linda. No Linda and I were around the same time.

Susie: 21:05 But you were the campaign chair for who?

Edie: 21:12 Wait a minute.

Susie: 21:13 Was it.

Edie: 21:13 It might have been Linda.

Susie: 21:16 Linda or Beverly?

Edie: 21:17 No. Beverly was my associate. We'll have to look on the wall. I think it was Linda.

Susie: 21:23 So anyway. You're working and you're still doing Federation.

Edie: 21:28 Right. This truly was my family in Detroit. I mean Stuart's family had left Detroit and Donald's family really wasn't here either. So this was this was home for me. It really was.

Susie: 21:45 So you were close with the Shermans.

Edie: 21:47 Right. Jane was always very very good to me and stood by me always.

Susie: 21:52 So you did. Let's hear about Hadracha because you were the first to do that.

Edie: 22:02 That was really exciting and that was just when I had started to date Donald at the same time. Susie and I had the best time and we had a wonderful ...

Susie: 22:11 Talk about what it was.

Edie: 22:13 We took young women who had never been to Israel, who had potential to be leadership in the community. They were somewhat handpicked, I guess. We in the meetings ahead of time were always very uplifting and wonderful. To this day most of those women remain very active and became the leaders and so forth. At the time socially, Donald was in my life my life was getting really back on track and I was still working and my kids were fine. It was a very uplifting time, but Hadracha was really very special mission really was.

Susie: 22:55 So how soon after that did you take on the major leadership roles?

Edie: 23:03 Well, because I stayed working... I'm trying to think what I did during those few years that I stayed working. As soon as I retired, which was... oh boy, I'm trying to think of a date the year. Well, regardless...

Susie: 23:24 It was in the 80s.

Edie: 23:27 I was the associate campaign chair. I guess for Linda. I have to really go in the hall and look at the wall and then I became the campaign chair which was the best job. I think I liked that more than the presidency. It was really a very fulfilling job and I was campaign chair for two years. Then, as many of us, I went on to be president. I only took it for one year and because my husband wanted to live in Florida in the winter. His mother was in Palm Beach and I kept saying I'm not ready to do that. But we did it. I commuted at first. I remember we went to Florida and bought a house and I was there one week and I had to fly home because I was the president.

He looked at 14 houses in the neighborhood and he said we're going to buy a house in this neighborhood. We've been there 22 years now.

Susie: 24:27 So what inspired you to work your way up to the presidency?

Edie: 24:35 Well as I said the Federation was my home away from home. I think knowing how fulfilling my mother's life was because of her activities, not being a Detroitter and you can probably identify

with that too. From the beginning I didn't know everybody. I hadn't gone to grade school with all these girls who are still friends to this day. It was a way to know the community and the cause was paramount. Not just the local cause but because I was really in love with Israel.

- Susie: 25:12 So can you describe some of your duties as campaign chair and then also your duties as president?
- Edie: 25:21 It was so long ago. Let's think about what you used to do...we went to many many many many meetings. We probably all knew this, that the kids...I don't say they suffered because of it, but they knew where mom was a lot. I think in a way it was maybe hard for me hard for my children although they never really seem embittered by it at all.
- Susie: 25:47 Well, in those days we had a lot of divisions and each division would have a meeting.
- Edie: 25:55 I went to all the meetings.
- Susie: 25:57 We had to have chairs for all the divisions and associate chairs. So you were interacting with a lot of women.
- Edie: 26:02 Absolutely.
- Susie: 26:07 You said that you like being campaign chair almost better than the president. How would you describe being president?
- Edie: 26:15 Well, I enjoyed the meetings. I tried to make them fun and interesting and not too long. I didn't love going to every committee meeting, but we did. I mean we had to I was still somewhat...not a new bride, but I still had that pull. So it was a little more difficult than it might have been had we been old married couple. But I'm kind of a ham and I loved it. If you forgive that expression I liked being in front of everybody. I enjoyed running the meetings. I really did enjoy that, and I tried to make them interesting.
- Susie: 26:55 Did you go on missions? Do you remember going on the missions as campaign chair or president?
- Edie: 27:01 I went really more when I was involved nationally. I went to the Lion of Judah meetings in Israel. I took Donald with me. We went also on a mission to...oh this was actually before we were married. We went to Russia with Jane and Larry [Sherman] and then on to Israel and that was Donald's first trip to Israel. It was

fascinating at the caucus watching what happened to him. As you see people get turned on. I was blown away because he had lived in Chicago for many years but for some reason he was always overlooked. This time he wasn't. But he was really turned on.

He went to Israel twice, twice with me.

- Susie: 27:59 Do you remember some of the challenges you might have faced as campaign chair or as president?
- Edie: 28:05 Well, as campaign chair we were trying to have our first million dollar Campaign, I think. We were really trying to get to that mark. I think just overseeing, making sure everybody did their job.
- Susie: 28:24 So you can you look back and point to any of the achievements during your time that you're particularly proud of.
- Edie: 28:37 Well, I was very proud to get the Greenberg award that was...oh as campaign chair?
- Susie: 28:44 How when you become campaign chair president you have certain goals.
- Edie: 28:49 Well, we did make the monetary goal. Everybody reacted nicely to me because I guess I'm a little bit soft with a lot of the women. I understand. I commiserated with them and everybody seemed to respond very nicely to me. I was I was proud of that. I really wish I could have done it two years. I really think that it was very fulfilling for me. But I had this pull from the Slotkin guy. So I let it go. I messed up the secession in that year. It straightened out.
- Susie: 29:31 You know what. It's good that you were able at least to have served in those positions.
- Edie: 29:37 I'm thrilled that I have that...I almost wore the gavel today. You wouldn't know where to put it. Well Jane only was President for one year. There were some of us who only took it for a year.
- Susie: 29:50 So now I'm going to ask you a couple more generic questions. What skills do you think make a good leader?
- Edie: 30:00 I think compassion, warm and friendly to whoever you are dealing with. I really had good luck. I really did. At the meeting just last week, a woman who I solicited for years, who I really

didn't know. She lived in the winter in the west coast of Florida. She came up to me at the meeting and I mean we were like best friends and we had never met face to face before. That was the very ...

- Susie: 30:33 That was the first time you met her?
- Edie: 30:37 Yes. But we were buddies on the phone. I think I have a good phone way with myself. So I was I was proud of that. I was proud that I made friends and no enemies soliciting. It was a good feeling.
- Susie: 30:56 So do you remember the staff that you worked with when you were campaign chair or as president?
- Edie: 31:05 So I think in the early years as associate campaign I think Barbara Satinsky was still a staff. But I think Michelle Passon followed her and that's who I work very closely with and Sandy Jaffe. I think those two were really were my people and we are still buddies to this day which is very nice too.
- Susie: 31:30 So you do think you were affected with the transition of staff? It sounds like you went through a few.
- Edie: 31:38 I think Sally was in there too at that time. Sally Krugel.
- Susie: 31:42 She was before.
- Edie: 31:43 She was before.
- Susie: 31:44 Were you affected by that transition?
- Edie: 31:48 Well, it's always disconcerting, but they've always pretty much managed to find spectacular women to take the place of the previous one. I mean, to this day it's a tradition. The staff has always been wonderful really.
- Susie: 32:08 Do feel that women solicit differently than men and how so?
- Edie: 32:12 I hope so. I think so. I think the men maybe don't get as personal as we do. I think we certainly understand the restrictions of having children and making a home and being a volunteer is not always easy. If you have other obligations. Although the men they work too obviously. But I think the women are not a staff driven as the men are, so we're more hands on.

Susie: 32:46 How did women's philanthropy interact with the general campaign? Did you feel that Federation valued the women?

Edie: 32:55 Not for a long time. We saw the progression. I think we finally have come into our own as well as the women took more leadership roles., as we had women presidents. That was a big breakthrough a huge breakthrough. They've been terrific. I think all of them have been terrific. Was Penny the first one?

Susie: 33:20 Well we've only had three: Penny, Nancy and now Beverly. So what are your hopes for the women's philanthropy in the future.

Edie: 33:31 Well, you know I haven't been because we live in Florida for so long I haven't been to too many meetings but the annual meeting I was so thrilled. Because we have terrific young women. I mean it is in such good hands that I don't worry about women's philanthropy. The hardest thing for us is calling it women's philanthropy. We still call it women's division.

Susie: 34:02 I think we can end this right there. Thank you so much. I think that's true. We love our women's department.

Edie: 34:11 In my calendar I write W.D. instead of WP. I can't help, that WD to me is still it

Susie: 34:18 Edie thank you.

Edie: 34:19 Thank you Susie.

Susie: 34:20 This was fun.