

**Oral History of:** Sandy Schwartz  
**Interviewed by:** Esther Mintz  
**Date of Interview:** February 6, 2018  
**Location of Interview:** Max M. Fisher Federation Building  
**Subject Matter:** Women's Philanthropy Dept. of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit

Esther Mintz: 00:01 My name is Esther Mintz and today is February 6th, 2018. I'm interviewing Sandy Schwartz 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. The Women's Philanthropy Department of the Jewish Federation has had several names throughout its history including Women's Division and Women's Campaign and Education Department.

Mintz: 00:47 For the purposes of this interview, we will refer to it by its current name Women's Philanthropy. Do you give permission to 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?

Schwartz: 01:18 I do.

Mintz: 01:18 Oh great.

Schwartz: 01:19 Now ...

Mintz: 01:19 Sandy ...

Schwartz: 01:20 We're married.

Mintz: 01:22 Let's start at the very beginning. When and where were you born?

Schwartz: 01:29 I was born in December 1943 in Norfolk, Virginia.

Mintz: 01:34 Oh great. And, did you stay there? Where you [crosstalk 00:01:40]?

Schwartz: 01:41 I grew up in Norfolk and I still have family who live here. I'm still extremely connected to my roots. I maintain a group of girlfriends, 11 of us, who went to nursery school together.

Mintz: 01:59 Fabulous.

Schwartz: 02:00 So yes, I'm still very much ...

Mintz: 02:03 How fortunate that you'll have those people in your life.

Schwartz: 02:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mintz: 02:07 Tell me, was philanthropy important to your family while you were growing up?

Schwartz: 02:16 I was not aware of philanthropy per se. My parents both worked but before my mother went to work, she was very involved in things like the Denver Home for Asthmatic Children and Hadassah Neither of my parents were involved in Federation, although I know they were donors. And, my family in Norfolk continues to be donors. My father was very busy supporting many people in his family and really didn't have a lot of time for what you would call philanthropy. He was mostly involved and attached to his synagogue.

Mintz: 02:16 Do [inaudible 00:03:00]?

Schwartz: 02:16 I do.

Mintz: 03:00 Uh huh. And, what brought you to Detroit?

Schwartz: 03:13 I met my husband, Alan. He was in school in Boston and I was there working. Mutual friends introduced us.

Mintz: 03:25 How nice.

Schwartz: 03:25 We still speak to them and consider them best friends even still and we will be married 50 years in June. And, I came to Detroit as a bride. Did not know one soul and I had my experiences as a new bride in a new city.

Mintz: 03:52 Okay. What were your impressions of Detroit Jewish communities? Here you come not knowing anybody, whatever, what was your impressions of your Jewish community?

Schwartz: 04:04 In all honesty, I had a lot of trouble when I moved here. As I used to say to Alan, "It isn't that people don't like me, they don't know me." I found the community to be very closed. I would go places where there would be a group of women and they wouldn't include me because I think they just didn't know what to say to somebody that they didn't have that Mumford background with or the elementary school background.

Mintz: 04:36 Growing up background.

Schwartz: 04:38 Exactly. And, I think that was fostered a lot by the fact that most of the young people had gone to school in the Michigan area and had never had to really step out on their own and make their own friendships, so they had no concept of what someone who was trying to do that was feeling.

Mintz: 05:02 In finding your way, what were you active in any organizations beside Federation?

Schwartz: 05:12 Yes. I didn't come to Federation immediately when I started to get involved in community. My first exposure to Federation was I would hear stories about the solicitation process. I waited for someone to ask me for a gift. But, the saddest part of all is that no one asked 'cause no one knew I was here.

Mintz: 05:12 Oh wow.

Schwartz: 05:39 And, I had a sense of loss really. I felt really not part of the community. But aside from that, I began to realize because I didn't have a group of girlfriends here and any kind of support system, I first turned to my synagogue [Shaarey Zedek and got involved with sisterhood and went from there.

Mintz: 06:15 Great. Where was Shaarey Zedek located?

Schwartz: 06:18 It had already moved to Southfield.

Mintz: 06:22 Uh huh.

Schwartz: 06:22 It was ...

Mintz: 06:23 What role did you do in the sisterhood?

Schwartz: 06:31 I liked to think of myself as a very good foot soldier. I did whatever was asked and along the way I moved up to this job and that job, some leadership opportunities and chairing the major fundraiser for a couple years, then I was asked to be president.

Mintz: 06:51 Wow. .I did. I did.

Mintz: 06:59 And, when and how did you first become involved with Federation and Women's Philanthropy?

Schwartz: 07:05 It was around the time that I was becoming more and more involved at Shaarey Zedek that for whatever reason I got invited to participate in the Leadership Training Program and I was very honored. It was probably my best and first introduction. However, I think by that time I was being solicited and one of the things I remember and I don't even know whether it came before or after I did the leadership training is I contributed a \$100 to Federation. There was an event for women who donated \$100 for the first time. I recall it being a wonderful stretch for me and I was so excited and thrilled and it was acknowledged. It just stands in my mind as my first philanthropy if you will.

Mintz: 08:20 Uh huh. Who were your mentors in Women's Philanthropy?

Schwartz: 08:31 Marlene Borman was president when I first joined the board and some of the presidents that came after her like Diane Klein, Linda Klein were women I looked up to. There were others as well.

Mintz: 08:55 What was your level of involvement at the beginning?

Schwartz: 09:05 I volunteered to be on a committee and little by little I would be ... I think I was a good volunteer.

Mintz: 09:18 Good. Did you make friends in the meanwhile?

Schwartz: 09:20 In the meantime, it was a wonderful source of friendship.

Mintz: 09:26 Good.

Schwartz: 09:26 If I had not liked what I was doing and didn't feel a passion for it, I wouldn't have continued but the friendship was just a wonderful byproduct.

Mintz: 09:39 What were some of the activities?

Schwartz: 09:41 Well, I just want to say that when I went through the leadership training, having grown up in a small Jewish community that did have resources and was a committed, tight community, I was overwhelmed and amazed by how much Detroit had to offer. It was unbelievable. And so, I became a convert, if you will. I just was in awe of what we did. And, what was the next question?

Mintz: 10:22 What did your family think of your involvement?

Schwartz: 10:26 I don't think they realized, even to this day, the extent of how much volunteering and philanthropy plays into my every day life but they were very proud of me.

Mintz: 10:45 Oh good. It makes you feel better too.

Schwartz: 10:46 Oh, yes.

Mintz: 10:46 And you are comfortable in doing this.

Schwartz: 10:47 And, I have been recognized and had many honors that they have shared with me.

Mintz: 10:53 That's wonderful.

Schwartz: 10:54 Yeah.

Mintz: 10:58 What positions did you hold in Women's Philanthropy and when?

Schwartz: 11:04 Well, what you ask me is what I did when I first got involved?

Mintz: 11:04 Yeah.

Schwartz: 11:08 I just served on committees and little by little would move up.

Mintz: 11:13 Did you become a campaign chair?

Schwartz: 11:14 I was never a campaign chair. I worked on campaign. I chaired some of campaigns committees but I became president of Women's Philanthropy kind of through the back door.

Mintz: 11:30 What year was that?

Schwartz: 11:32 It was 2004.

Mintz: 11:34 Uh huh.

Schwartz: 11:37 And, that occurred because the campaign chair or the associate campaign chair for personal reasons decided not to go on to be the campaign chair but they had already selected another campaign, the associate, and they just felt the parties that be felt at the time that they would want her to stay where she was and just fill the slot of president. So, I like to say I was a very reluctant leader. You know, all of my volunteer endeavors, my involvement, my commitment, enthusiasm didn't come as a moving up a ladder so to speak. I didn't have any aspirations, nor do I now, to be a leader. I love being a foot soldier. So, it was challenging to assume ...

Mintz: 12:46 Sure, very.

Schwartz: 12:47 Yeah, so that's how I got ...

Mintz: 12:47 [crosstalk 00:12:50].

Schwartz: 12:50 You know, like when you do a job ...

Mintz: 12:50 [crosstalk 00:12:53].

Schwartz: 12:53 It's the Peter principle. You do a job well, you get moved to the next one and before you know it, that's what happens.

Mintz: 12:59 What were some of your duties as president?

Schwartz: 13:05 I think ... my feeling is that I was a steward of a wonderful organization that had a strong history and my biggest duty was to preserve our group, keep it viable, build on the strengths that we had and through little steps carry it on to pass on to the next group of leaders.

Mintz: 13:40 Did we have some challenges? Something stand out in your mind?

Schwartz: 13:51 My philosophy ... I think which really stems from my background and growing up in a small town, ex cetera and moving here as an outsider had a lot to do with outreach. So, when I was president we had 14 or more different education programs going. It's something that we don't do now but I saw this as a way to reach out to people in the community who may not have been involved in Federation and to involve them in committees. It was a lot of phone calling and hand holding and whatever. I did have, in thinking about my presidency, some challenges with where Women's Philanthropy fit into the big picture. If you want me to go into more detail I can.

Mintz: 15:02 Yeah, go ahead.

Schwartz: 15:04 For example ...

Mintz: 15:05 Because those would be some of your challenges.

Schwartz: 15:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mintz: 15:09 And, maybe your proudest accomplishments.

Schwartz: 15:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I had a very nice relationship with Federation but what I didn't realize is that there was the Jewish Federation and there was Women's Philanthropy on the other side and there was not that much interaction. So, on the campaign side, not coming to the presidency through campaign and not having experienced the players so to speak, there was not a lot of my involvement.

Mintz: 15:57 Interplay.

Schwartz: 15:58 Uh huh. And, one of our committees was a lunch and learn where we had rabbis and speakers come in to do Torah portion discussions and it went very well. We had a really committed committee who hoped we would study for a year and then conclude our studies with a women's trip to Israel. It was going to be a personal journey, a passport to Israel. So, each of these women and others would be able to see what they had learned which was announced and told to the leaders of Federation a year before when we started it. That was that. And then, as the year progressed and we

started to talk about our plans for the trip, it didn't come at the right time for Federation. They were interested not in an educational trip, they were interested in a campaign trip and that's what they focused on. So, it caused a lot of challenge for me and a lot of disappointment for me as well as for the committee.

- Mintz: 17:25 I can imagine. When you have these high hopes ...
- Schwartz: 17:28 Mm-hmm (affirmative). And, I think it was just really a lack of communication. If they had said to me, they being the Federation leaders, we could have talked and worked through some of this but it was ... it pointed out to me after the fact that there was an over here and then an over there. Had I been a little more astute or a little more sophisticated, I might have picked up on it sooner than I did.
- Mintz: 18:05 I see. What was your proudest accomplishment?
- Schwartz: 18:13 I'm not great at even recognizing accomplishments. I sort of lead by getting into something. But, I will say that the involvement of hundreds of people.
- Mintz: 18:28 Oh, that's quite an accomplishment.
- Schwartz: 18:32 Throughout the community and outreach. Not just with campaign, although we did bring in new donors and there really ... for sure during my presidency, there was the campaign had its primacy and there was no question but that's what we were about. But, I just kind of approached it a little bit differently because that had been my experience. And, certainly I turned ...
- Mintz: 18:32 [crosstalk 00:19:03].
- Schwartz: 19:02 Out to be a good philanthropist starting with little committees and small gifts.
- Mintz: 19:10 Right.
- Schwartz: 19:11 So, I felt that there had been a certain culture within Women's Philanthropy, a certain elite feeling which I was okay with but I didn't feel necessarily that I should feel elite and I wanted to be able to share the good parts and the wonderful opportunities I had with as many people as I could.



Mintz: 19:43 I think that's a great direction. And, which staff members did you work with and what was your relationship with them?

Schwartz: 19:54 Well, when I was just working on committees or involved at the committee level, I knew the staff people but I wasn't on a day-to-day involvement with any of them. When I was going into my presidency and Susie Pappas was the campaign chair, we started to work with Marion Freedman who was just coming in as the director of Women's Philanthropy. And so, we were all three in new positions and we worked really as a trio. We worked together very, very well. Some of the other past chairs like Sally Krugel I'm still good friends with to this day. And, in addition to Sally, there was Michelle Passon who I worked with for a number of years in a program called Cancer Thrivers Network for Jewish Women. We co-founded this group with Patti Nemer who has since passed away from breast cancer. So, I kind of knew the players but didn't have close friendships with them unless it was through whatever I was doing at the time and then went on to make friends with these people on a closer level later.

Mintz: 21:35 Do you feel women solicit differently than men?

Schwartz: 21:37 Listen or ...

Mintz: 21:39 Solicit.

Schwartz: 21:39 Oh, solicit. I do. I think that we approach donors with a softer side. We approach donors with a passion, not for raising the money but for what the money does. Early in my experiences with Federation, I saw a video. It was about does your pocketbook reflect your values? And, it spoke to me. From that point always tried to make my checkbook reflect what it was that was meaningful to me. When we all look back at the end of the year at where we have put our philanthropic dollars and I do try and be mindful that it will reflect who I am, what my values are, and where I want the money to go.

Mintz: 22:56 Yes. Do you feel Federation has valued Women's Philanthropy?

Schwartz: 23:05 I think that it has valued Women's Philanthropy and I think it does more and more as time passes. There was a time

when in all organizations that included men and women that the women were the entry point. That's no longer the case in any of these organizations. So, women can start within the Federation family and bypass the Women's Philanthropy Department all together. But, I think that there is now an appreciation, not just of the little few dollars that were ... extra dollars coming to the campaign but value women as real players.

- Mintz: 23:58 Okay, so you think that women ... it's important for women to have their own money?
- Schwartz: 24:05 I think as many opportunities as we can find to bring new people into the fold and have them learn what our community does is a wonderful thing. And, what I see now is that there aren't as many opportunities. So, women who do leadership training now come out and there are no places to put all these women in terms of leadership roles. So, anything that we can create or have that expands on involving more people I think is good.
- Mintz: 24:47 Oh, that's great because they can educate and train them where they need them in some place. What are your hopes for Women's Philanthropy in the future?
- Schwartz: 24:58 Well, I do hope that we can continue to involve new people in leadership, that we are not seen as elitist and that we outreach as much as we can and involve as many people as we can. I think that it's to me very reassuring when I go to board meeting and don't know half the people there. There is constantly a turnover and it's one of the few groups where they don't rely on past leadership necessarily to keep the group going. And, I think that we should continue along those lines and understand that we are now working with the Federation leadership as an equal partner.
- Mintz: 26:01 I'm going to change a little bit. Let's talk about Jewish Women's Foundation.
- Schwartz: 26:06 Okay.
- Mintz: 26:07 It is a separate department from Women's Philanthropy as I understand.
- Schwartz: 26:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mintz: 26:13 What is Jewish Women's Foundation and how is it different from Women's Philanthropy?

Schwartz: 26:23 When Jewish Women's Philanthropy was being created there were three women who or four who put it together and ...

Mintz: 26:36 Who were the three?

Schwartz: 26:38 There was Beverly Liss, I think Penny Blumenstein, and ...

Mintz: 26:46 It will come to you.

Schwartz: 26:50 Yeah, it'll come to me. Yeah. Someone who was really less involved, I think, in Federation Women's Department or Philanthropy structure but certainly involved in Federation and I'm having a senior moment. But anyway, I was one of maybe seven or eight or nine women who joined right away because having been a volunteer for as many years and I had and being interested in all of these women's issues, I knew it was all about the money and that getting money to these groups did a whole lot better than just volunteering your time. So, this was, for me a natural. And so, I became involved from the inception of the group.

Mintz: 27:46 And, how did you first learn about it?

Schwartz: 27:49 Well, I was sort of on the scene and it was a group of women, most of whom were involved in Federation already and as was I, and so I just knew about it. And, it was not any kind of an outreach if you will.

Mintz: 28:07 When did you become a trustee?

Schwartz: 28:09 Right from the inception of the group.

Mintz: 28:12 Okay.

Schwartz: 28:13 You know, I'm one of those founding trustees.

Mintz: 28:16 Oh great. And, what year was that?

Schwartz: 28:21 I can't remember.

Mintz: 28:21 [crosstalk 00:28:22].

Schwartz: 28:22 Yeah.

Mintz: 28:23 Was it quite a bit after your presidency or just sort of ...

Schwartz: 28:31 It was after my presidency but not that long after.

Mintz: 28:35 Tell me, describe how the grant making process works?

Schwartz: 28:40 Well, one of the big differences between Women's Philanthropy and Jewish Women's Foundation is that the Women's Philanthropy raises the money and Women's Philanthropy gives it away. They exist to make grants to causes that support women and girls.

Mintz: 29:10 I see.

Schwartz: 29:11 And so, it's very targeted, very selective.

Mintz: 29:17 Do you think it's very important to have a specifically targeted to women?

Schwartz: 29:21 Yes, because in the world that I grew up in, we often were on a back burner because we didn't have those opportunities to speak up and to speak out. And, this also in my mind gave women who were not really involved in Women's Philanthropy an access to what Jewish Federation is all about. It brought them in the door and they got to learn about all the things that their campaign dollars were supporting. And, these are just excess funds that go specifically to women's needs.

Mintz: 30:11 How many grants are given?

Schwartz: 30:14 Oh, there can be as many, I would say, as 12, maybe 15. It depends from year to year.

Mintz: 30:21 Is it once a year?

Schwartz: 30:23 Once a year.

Mintz: 30:23 I see. Is there a limited amount of money given?

Schwartz: 30:28 Yes. The foundation raises money by ... to join the foundation, you have to donate a certain amount and then you have to donate a certain amount for a period of years and they build on that little pot of money and invest it.

They take a percentage, like all foundations do, that they use for grants. It varies from year to year depending upon the market. Today would not be a good day.

- Mintz: 31:03 Yeah. Tell me, who makes the decision who gets the grants?
- Schwartz: 31:09 There is one trustee, one vote. Every trustee has equal ...
- Mintz: 31:14 How many trustees are there?
- Schwartz: 31:17 I think that there are, I don't know, 60, 80. I am not ... I no longer, while I was involved in the beginning on a leadership involvement, because of other activities and other interests ...
- Mintz: 31:38 Yeah, right.
- Schwartz: 31:39 Personalities and politics, ex cetera, I'm not as involved day-to-day in how the Jewish Women's Foundation governs itself. I think its had its challenges and it's dealing with them.
- Mintz: 32:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative). What's your message to young women about why they should participate in programs like Women's Philanthropy and the Jewish Foundation ... Women's Foundation?
- Schwartz: 32:19 For me, people who go to these programs have an opportunity to hear things that are outside of their little worlds and they can learn so much from what they're exposed to. The more things that they participate in and the more involved they are, I think the more they feel that they are part of a community larger than themselves. I'm sold. It was a wonderful career path for me actually. I was blessed that I personally didn't have to work every day and I had hours that I was able to give. And, for those women who can't do that, they're doing other things but for women who do have the leisure time so to speak and ...
- Mintz: 33:27 The desire.
- Schwartz: 33:29 Well, you know a lot of ... I have come to realize not everybody is cut out to be a volunteer. I see some people who try really hard. It doesn't come naturally. But, if you

can make it work for you, you will get more out of it than anything you give.

- Mintz: 33:47 That sounds great. Thank you Sandy so much for sharing your time and thoughts with me.
- Schwartz: 33:55 And, I would just conclude by saying in terms of young people today that my participation in Women's Philanthropy has just been a gift I gave myself. It was the gift of friendship, the gift of working to make our community a better place, and also to have the opportunity to work with women who are passionate and committed and it has really been a labor of love for me.
- Mintz: 34:34 That's wonderful. Your talents really show and I thank you again.
- Schwartz: 34:39 You're welcome.