

Oral History of: Nancy Grosfeld
Interviewed by: Susie Pappas
Date of Interview: May 9, 2019
Location of Interview: Max M. Fisher Federation Building, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Subject Matter: Women's Philanthropy Dept. of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit

Susie Pappas: [00:01](#) My name is Susie Pappas and today is May 9th, 2019. I'm interviewing Nancy Grosfeld at the Max M. Fisher Federation 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. Simon Jewish Community Archives to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use this recording for educational purposes, and for use as deemed appropriate by the Archives.

Nancy Grosfeld: [00:40](#) Yes I do.

Susie Pappas: [00:42](#) The Women's Philanthropy Department of the Jewish Federation has had several names throughout its history. But for the purpose of this interview, we will refer to it as its current name, Women's Philanthropy. But you can use whatever name you're comfortable with.

Susie Pappas: [01:01](#) Nancy, when and where were you born?

Nancy Grosfeld: [01:05](#) I was born September 20, 1943 at Harper Hospital in Detroit.

Susie Pappas: [01:13](#) And tell me about your birth order. Do you have siblings, where did you-

Nancy Grosfeld: [01:19](#) I have a brother who lives in Ann Arbor, who's four years younger than I am.

Susie Pappas: [01:24](#) And what did your father do?

Nancy Grosfeld: [01:26](#) My father was in the scrap metal business.

Susie Pappas: [01:30](#) And did your mother work?

Nancy Grosfeld: [01:33](#) My mother started to work when I was in college. She was a substitute teacher.

Susie Pappas: [01:42](#) Okay. So what schools did you go to for elementary, and we'll just say elementary and high school.

Nancy Grosfeld: [01:50](#) I went to Hally School in Detroit and I went to Liggett School for middle school, in Grosse Pointe.

Susie Pappas: [01:58](#) And for high school?

Nancy Grosfeld: [02:00](#) Dondero High School in Royal Oak.

Susie Pappas: [02:04](#) Okay. Yeah that's what I wanted to ask you. Where did you live when you were growing up?

Nancy Grosfeld: [02:11](#) We lived in a flat in Detroit. My grandmother lived upstairs, and we lived downstairs. My mother was the youngest of thirteen, so I really got to know all my aunts and uncles and cousins well, because they were always coming to visit my grandmother.

Susie Pappas: [02:31](#) And then you said you moved out to Huntington Woods at what point.

Nancy Grosfeld: [02:35](#) When I was entering ninth grade.

Susie Pappas: [02:38](#) Okay, so then you went to Dondero. And after Dondero, college?

Nancy Grosfeld: [02:42](#) I went to Michigan State, and I got my degree in social work. And I got a summer job in the emergency room of a hospital in Pontiac, and I loved it, and I was scheduled to go to Michigan, to get my masters in social work, but I decided to continue as a nurse's aide for the year. I went to Sinai, and then I went back to school and got my R.N.

Susie Pappas: [03:09](#) Did you actually work as a nurse?

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:11](#) I did, yes.

Susie Pappas: [03:13](#) Tell us about that.

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:15](#) I combined my social work background with my R.N. and I worked at a place called Fairlawn Center, which was a residential treatment center for children and youth at Pontiac State Hospital.

Susie Pappas: [03:29](#) How long did you do that for?

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:31](#) Five years. I worked until the morning my daughter was born.

Susie Pappas: [03:36](#) Wow. So you really enjoyed that.

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:39](#) I loved it.

Susie Pappas: [03:40](#) That's great. Okay. When you were growing up, did your family belong to a synagogue?

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:47](#) Yes. We belonged to Temple Beth El.

Susie Pappas: [03:49](#) So how would you say religion was observed in your home?

Nancy Grosfeld: [03:54](#) We celebrated Shabbat. We celebrated all of the holidays. I went to Sunday school through eleventh grade. I was consecrated and confirmed. I don't think they did Bat Mitzvas back in that time.

Susie Pappas: [04:08](#) No, they didn't. So when you were growing up, was your family involved in charity work that you remember? Did your mother do any kind of charitable work?

Nancy Grosfeld: [04:23](#) My mother was involved with the Federation, in the area of campaign and archives. And she was also a JCC. board member, and involved with National Council and with our synagogue, she sang in the choir, and I think there was one other place, but I can't remember. And my dad was involved with the JCC also.

Susie Pappas: [04:49](#) So when you were in high school, did you go any kind of charitable work, or were you involved in a youth group, or do anything that had to do with being Jewish?

Nancy Grosfeld: [05:04](#) Aside from going to Sunday school, I didn't.

Susie Pappas: [05:07](#) Okay. So how did you get involved with Federation?

Nancy Grosfeld: [05:13](#) Reluctantly. I used to get mailings asking me if I was interested in educational programs or getting involved with the Young Adult Division, which it was called then, now, Next Gen. But I really wasn't interested and then I was called a number of times to help on Super Sunday and I finally ran out of excuses. So I started out doing Super Sunday, and prayed that no one would answer the phone. I didn't like asking for money. And then when I got married, my former mother-in-law was Belle Kukes, the blessed memory, and she was very involved with the

Federation, and she talked me into being a Lion of Judah. So I guess that was the beginning. And I came to some meetings, and I liked what I heard, and I got involved.

- Susie Pappas: [06:21](#) So being involved with Lion of Judah was the first time that you remember really being involved with women's department, or women's-
- Nancy Grosfeld: [06:29](#) Yes. Other than Super Sunday.
- Susie Pappas: [06:31](#) So what about it struck your interest?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [06:43](#) I liked the mission of the Federation. I was very interested in at-risk populations, particularly the elderly, and people with special needs. I did not appreciate the importance of Jewish education or Jewish continuity at that point. I enjoyed working with a lot of wonderful women. In fact I really didn't know any of the women in the Women's Department until I got involved and now so many of them are life-long friends. That was really a wonderful experience.
- Susie Pappas: [07:21](#) Well that leads to my next question. Who are the leaders of Women's Philanthropy when you first became involved?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [07:32](#) Like Dulcie and Carolyn Greenberg and Edith Jackier, and then of course, when I finally came on to the board, I think Paula Glazier was president before me, and before her was Beverly, and Sharon Hart, and Penny Blumenstein, and a lot of wonderful women. Edie Slotkin.
- Susie Pappas: [07:59](#) So who would you say were your mentors, or who supported you at the beginning of your involvement?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [08:08](#) I would say, I would probably say Penny. Penny and I became good friends when she was chairing either Lion or Ruby, probably Lion. And I was one of her workers. And we developed a friendship and introduced our husbands, and they became good friends. But Penny was really the one that always pushed me to do more and pushed me beyond my comfort zone. I probably wouldn't have had any of the leadership roles that I've had if it were not for her encouraging me.
- Susie Pappas: [08:48](#) Well, so how would you say she did that, because you know lots of people maybe would push people, but you don't always take it up. But you took it up, so how would you say, can you remember how she might have-

Nancy Grosfeld: [09:04](#) Well, she would tell me I could do it, I should do it, it's important that I do. She sort of came at me from all angles and I'm grateful to her in hindsight for doing that.

Susie Pappas: [09:20](#) Do you feel like she sort of pushed you to do it and you didn't want to let her down, so you kind of did it?

Nancy Grosfeld: [09:28](#) No. No, I don't think that was the case.

Susie Pappas: [09:32](#) Well, you did it quite well, so we'll go on from there. So when you first became involved in Women's Department, Women's Philanthropy, can you remember some of the programs that you were first involved in?

Nancy Grosfeld: [09:48](#) I remember being involved with TOV, I remember being involved with the Women's Seder. And was there a Food For Thought? Yes. And I think those were the initial programs that I got involved with.

Susie Pappas: [10:09](#) So what did your family, your husband, your kids, think about your involvement when you first became involved?

Nancy Grosfeld: [10:19](#) I think when I first became involved, I think they were very pleased that I was involved. My husband, from the very beginning, was always very encouraging and supportive. When I took on leadership roles that took time from all of them, they were very pleased when my role was completed.

Susie Pappas: [10:42](#) Okay. So was your husband involved? Were your kids involved in Federation?

Nancy Grosfeld: [10:51](#) Jimmy was on the Investment Committee, which put him on the board, the Foundation Board. I don't think he ever came to a board meeting. Jimmy is not a process person, and doesn't have a lot of patience for committee meetings. My daughter has not been involved with the Federation.

Susie Pappas: [11:14](#) So when you were first involved in Federation, what were some of the positions that you first held?

Nancy Grosfeld: [11:30](#) I remember chairing Lion and Ruby. And I remember being campaign chair. I don't think I was ever an education chair.

Susie Pappas: [11:45](#) Yeah, I wanted to say that when you first became involved, there was an education side and a campaign side. So you were not involved with both tracks.

Nancy Grosfeld: [11:57](#) Correct.

Susie Pappas: [11:59](#) Okay. Did you see yourself when you first became involved becoming campaign chair?

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:06](#) No.

Susie Pappas: [12:06](#) How did that come about that you became campaign chair.

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:09](#) Someone asked me. It never entered my mind.

Susie Pappas: [12:13](#) And when they asked you, how did you feel about it?

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:18](#) Well I would assume I was very flattered, but I was also very surprised, and knowing me, I probably thought, why are they asking me? I can't do this. But I ended up doing it.

Susie Pappas: [12:31](#) And you said Paula Glazier was the person you worked with?

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:35](#) Paula was president before me. I was her campaign chair.

Susie Pappas: [12:40](#) You were the associate campaign chair and then the campaign chair to Paula?

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:44](#) Yes. Yes.

Susie Pappas: [12:45](#) Okay. So do you remember some of your duties as campaign chair?

Nancy Grosfeld: [12:52](#) I remember I had to do a lot of speaking and I was always such a nervous wreck having to speak in public. When I would sit down, I didn't remember one word I had said.

Susie Pappas: [13:01](#) So how did you go about that, that you'd have to get up and do these speeches, how did you kind of fortify yourself?

Nancy Grosfeld: [13:11](#) Well you know for many years, I didn't take on leadership positions with any organizations, because I did not want to speak in public. But I finally decided that I wasn't going to let my fear cripple me. And if Doreen Hermelin could do it, who was also a nervous wreck, I could do it. So that's how I fortified myself.

Susie Pappas: [13:32](#) So did you find it got easier as you went along, or do you still today feel nervous?

Nancy Grosfeld: [13:40](#) It's certainly easier now. It is not my favorite thing to do. Especially if it involved speaking extemporaneously at all. I feel much more comfortable if I have something written down.

Susie Pappas: [13:56](#) So I'm going to deviate a little bit here. I remember that you had certain processes when you were campaign chair and then president that made it, you did things a little, maybe a little differently than other people. Do you remember any of that?

Nancy Grosfeld: [14:17](#) No.

Susie Pappas: [14:18](#) Okay. Well one of the things that you were very specific about, sure you were going to do is that you were going to learn about all of everything there was to learn about the Federation.

Nancy Grosfeld: [14:30](#) Oh that's true. You're reminding me. When I became campaign chair, I visited all of our agencies, and our day schools, because since I had to speak about them, I really wanted to understand them. And I remember when I went to JVS that really excited me. And my interest in Federation deepened. That's right. I forgot all about that.

Susie Pappas: [15:05](#) I remember that. And so, let me go back to this. Do you remember the staff that you worked with at the time, and did you find them supportive, or did, how did you find the staff that you worked with, who did you work with?

Nancy Grosfeld: [15:26](#) Helen Katz was head of Women's Department during my tenure. And Esther Weitzman was a support staff person, and Tony Hayes was a support staff person, and then Heidi Hesse was one of the associates. And there was one Margo something, was an associate, and I found them all very helpful and I enjoyed working with all of them.

Susie Pappas: [16:00](#) So you went from campaign chair of Women's to president. How would you talk about the differences between the two positions? And how did you, did you like one more than the other, or how did you find those two positions?

Nancy Grosfeld: [16:17](#) I loved being campaign chair.

Susie Pappas: [16:19](#) Because?

Nancy Grosfeld: [16:23](#) I was very excited about Federation and our agencies and it was very important to me that we raise money, because of course, without money you can't do anything. And I loved the people I worked with. I met a lot of wonderful women that I would never

have met otherwise. And it was very collegial and it was fun. We had a great time.

- Nancy Grosfeld: [16:52](#) Being president was a bigger responsibility, but yet it was more creative, and introduced me to a whole other side of Women's Department, which I enjoyed. And again, it expanded my friendships with women who became involved in the educational side of the program.
- Susie Pappas: [17:21](#) So when we started this interview, and you talked about Super Sunday and how you were hoping that people wouldn't answer the phone because you didn't want to ask for money, did that feeling change as you progressed in the leadership roles of Women's Department?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [17:42](#) Well, I became much more comfortable asking for money. And most of the people I asked for money, were people who were already giving to Federation, so I was either asking them to continue at their level, or increase, depending on the individual, and their abilities. So it became much more comfortable. Actually, I like fundraising.
- Susie Pappas: [18:06](#) So talk a little bit. Tell me how you feel about fundraising, because you're very good at it and I think it's interesting that you started off uncomfortable and now you are good at it.
- Nancy Grosfeld: [18:21](#) Well I have a greater understanding of the things I'm fundraising for. I know the people much better, because they're people I have been talking to about their gifts for years and years. Now that I got involved with the General Federation, I spoke to both men and women, but I always try to speak to them as a couple, because I always felt it was very important for the woman to understand what was going on, and what Federation is all about.
- Susie Pappas: [19:02](#) Tell me. What do you think about a woman's gift? Why is that important?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [19:07](#) I think a woman's gift is very important, because I think when a woman makes a gift, it really engages and it empowers her. Most women are interested in where their money is going and what it is being spent on. Many women are very influential with their husbands in supporting them in making gifts to the campaign. I know my husband certainly wouldn't be giving what he's giving if it were not for me. And I think it's very important also because I know when I first got involved with Women's Department I remember going to my first Fisher meeting. I went

there because I was campaign chair and Jimmy couldn't go, so they asked me to go. There was only one other woman there, and certainly that has changed now, and there are lots of women there.

- Nancy Grosfeld: [20:17](#) But a lot of women did not make their own gifts, they made a family gift. So they really, the husband really decided most likely what their gift was going to be, and the woman really had no idea what Federation did. And then, so often we'd have these major donors, and they would pass away. And we would want their spouses to be involved, engaged, and continue the family gift. But they've been busy with the DIA or the symphony the last 20, 30 or 40 years. So I think it's very important to get women involved at a young age, and to educate them and to empower them, and get them engaged and active.
- Susie Pappas: [21:15](#) So what do you see the role of Women's Philanthropy to be? Do you think it's important to have that as a separate department or division in Federation?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [21:28](#) I think it is important. First of all, I have to say, Women's Philanthropy was a fabulous training ground. I learned so much there. I don't think I would have ever done the things I did if I hadn't started in Women's Department. I think too, knowing me, I might have been a little intimidated with the men at that point in my life, when I was young, and there was a whole different generation of men, who were involved. I think that it's a good place for women to find their voice, and to educate themselves and become knowledgeable and become comfortable and feel passionate about what they're doing. And I know, when I got involved with General Campaign, it was a whole different experience. I mean, so many men at our major gifts meetings do not know the depth and breadth of what we do. But the women in Women's Department, they knew.
- Susie Pappas: [22:41](#) So why do you think it's important for women to give their own gift, as opposed to family giving?
- Nancy Grosfeld: [22:53](#) Well, I think I explained that earlier, but I'll repeat it. I think when a woman makes the gift in her own name, it engages her, it empowers her, it hopefully makes her feel more impassioned about where her money is going. Oftentimes it's the woman who helps propel the husband in his giving. And down the road so often, the woman is the one who ends up surviving her spouse, and you want the woman to stay engaged and involved.

Susie Pappas: [23:46](#) So when you were involved with Women's Department, how did it interact with General Campaign?

Nancy Grosfeld: [23:58](#) I think that we were not as valued as we could have been at that time. And I think we weren't brought into the mix the way we should have been. However, when I became campaign chair, because we were major donors, I think that I probably got a little more attention because of that. And so we did start doing more with the General Campaign and with the Young Adult Division, now Next Gen. And we, I remember when Netanyahu came to town. We did something and then there was a main event which involved all three departments, and so we started to get more involved. And now, as I say, you go to a major gifts meeting on different levels and you see women there.

Susie Pappas: [25:17](#) Right. So what do you hope to see for the future of Women's Department?

Nancy Grosfeld: [25:27](#) I hope to see women engaged. I hope to see women in leadership roles. I think that women tend to be especially good at process, at listening, in attending meetings, and I am happy to see, as I say, women at all levels of fund-raising events.

Susie Pappas: [26:07](#) So you've had an interesting trajectory. So you finished as Women's Department president. And then you went into General Campaign. Was it right away, was there some time off there?

Nancy Grosfeld: [26:25](#) For one year, I worked on a strategic plan for Women's Department after I completed my presidency. And then I became a coach here of the King David Society. And then I became General Campaign Co-Chair with Larry Lazarus, a wonderful man, love Larry. And I really didn't expect to be as to do that either.

Susie Pappas: [26:58](#) And then you were president of-

Nancy Grosfeld: [26:59](#) And then I became president. I didn't expect to do that either.

Susie Pappas: [27:03](#) Did you enjoy those roles in General Campaign?

Nancy Grosfeld: [27:08](#) I did. I did. But I don't think I could have done either of those roles without the training I got in Women's Department and the mentoring and the exposure.

Susie Pappas: [27:18](#) Well thank you, Nancy. I think we've covered everything. And I appreciate that you're spending time with us. Is there anything else before we end that you'd like to add?

Nancy Grosfeld: [27:30](#) Nothing that comes to mind.

Susie Pappas: [27:32](#) Well we're very fortunate to have you in our community and I'm thankful that you took the time.

Nancy Grosfeld: [27:41](#) Thank you.