

**Oral History of:** Doreen Hermelin

**Interviewed by:** Susie Pappas

**Date of Interview:** June 27, 2019

**Location of Interview:** Max M. Fisher Federation Building

**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 June 27th, 2019. I'm interviewing Doreen Hermelin 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 or for use as deemed appropriate by the archives?

Doreen Hermelin: [00:36](#) I do.

Susie Pappas: [00:37](#) The Women's Philanthropy Department of the Jewish Federation has had several names throughout its history. For the purpose of this interview, the questions will refer to it by its current name, but you can use any name that you're comfortable with. So, Dorian, we're going to start. When and where were you born?

Doreen Hermelin: [00:59](#) I was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1939, and I grew up in Detroit.

Susie Pappas: [01:06](#) So, where did you go to school for elementary school and other schools?

Doreen Hermelin: [01:11](#) Well, I first went to Winterhalter because I lived off of Dexter, and then when my parents moved when I was nine years old, I went to Hampton, and then I went to Hampton, and then I went to Mumford High School, because that went to the eighth grade. It was a school that went all the way to the eighth grade, so we started high school right from elementary school. Then I went to Mumford.

Susie Pappas: [01:35](#) So, how was religion observed in your house when you were growing up?

Doreen Hermelin: [01:41](#) Well, actually it was observed quite nicely. My parents belonged to B'nai Moshe when I was a child, and I went to Sunday School every Sunday, and then later on we had to go a couple days during the week as well. I would sleep at my grandparents' house a lot on Saturday nights because they lived on Lawrence, which was right down the street from B'nai Moshe. So, my father didn't like to drive me in the morning that Sunday morning, so I spent many nights on Saturday nights at their home, then I'd walk down.

Susie Pappas: [02:16](#) Who were your grandparents? What were their names?

Doreen Hermelin: [02:17](#) [Shane 00:02:20], [Manus 00:02:21] Shane and Grandma Shane, [Miriam 00:02:23] Shane.

Susie Pappas: [02:25](#) Okay. Okay. So, you were conservative. Was it called conservative in-

Doreen Hermelin: [02:32](#) Oh, yes. It was called conservative. Although, they sat separately when I first... Yes. When I first went to B'nai Moshe, the men sat downstairs and the women sat upstairs.

Susie Pappas: [02:43](#) Interesting.

Doreen Hermelin: [02:44](#) But then they decided... They finally stopped being quite so orthodox and became more conservative, and the women and the men sat downstairs. But we didn't sit on the same side sometimes. It took a while before we all sat together.

Susie Pappas: [02:59](#) Okay. So, when you were growing up, was philanthropy important to your family?

Doreen Hermelin: [03:07](#) Yes. Actually, it was, I believe, because I was thinking about that when we had the question, because my father... Well, every Sunday the rabbis would come to the house when we lived in Sherwood Forest. The rabbis came every Sunday, and my father always let them in and had good discussions with them. I don't know what they talked about. I didn't go in the room, but I knew they always came on Sundays. So, he did involve himself with philanthropy besides the synagogue, and to the synagogue he was very philanthropic.

Doreen Hermelin: [03:39](#) I mean, there's a statue on the top of B'nai Moshe to this day that my father had donated to the synagogue after he helped

build the education building. The synagogue was a separate building, and then they had an education built later, and my father at that time, it was just two or three families who had money, and my father was one of those families, and they helped build the education building to the right of the synagogue, and there's a sculpture that was on that building that he moved to the one on 10 Mile Road. They had moved to 10 Mile when they built the building on 10 Mile Road.

- Susie Pappas: [04:17](#) Okay. So, when you were growing up, B'nai Moshe was near where you lived, near Sherwood Forest, or no?
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:24](#) No, no, in Dexter.
- Susie Pappas: [04:25](#) Dexter, and then they moved to-
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:25](#) I lived in Dexter.
- Susie Pappas: [04:27](#) ... they moved to Oak Park?
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:31](#) Yes, but I did not. I wasn't a member there anymore, because when I married David I went to Shaarey Zedek with him.
- Susie Pappas: [04:39](#) I see.
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:40](#) But on the high holidays, I always went back to B'nai Moshe to see my parents. We used to walk from B'nai Moshe to Shaarey Zedek at Dexter.
- Susie Pappas: [04:47](#) What's in the B'nai Moshe building now in Oak Park? Do you know?
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:51](#) Oak Park? It's still a synagogue.
- Susie Pappas: [04:53](#) It's still a synagogue?
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:55](#) Yeah.
- Susie Pappas: [04:55](#) Okay, because I know they have one out in West Bloomfield, too, B'nai Moshe.
- Doreen Hermelin: [04:59](#) Well, then I didn't realize they closed the one in Oak Park.
- Susie Pappas: [05:04](#) I think they did anyways.
- Doreen Hermelin: [05:04](#) They might have.

Susie Pappas: [05:05](#) But anyways, that just shows how the community moves-

Doreen Hermelin: [05:08](#) Yeah, because it has changed, but I have not been into the one. Are you sure they don't have the one in Oak Park anymore?

Susie Pappas: [05:16](#) Pretty sure.

Doreen Hermelin: [05:16](#) They probably don't. They couldn't afford to do that, I don't think.

Susie Pappas: [05:19](#) Yeah, I don't know.

Doreen Hermelin: [05:20](#) But I was-

Susie Pappas: [05:20](#) So, once you were married, you became a Shaarey Zedek member?

Doreen Hermelin: [05:24](#) Right.

Susie Pappas: [05:24](#) Then you raised your children at Shaarey Zedek?

Doreen Hermelin: [05:27](#) Yes, I did.

Susie Pappas: [05:30](#) Yes. Okay.

Doreen Hermelin: [05:30](#) But I went to B'nai Moshe every high holiday. Every Yom Kippur, I walked from B'nai Moshe to Shaarey Zedek to see my parents.

Susie Pappas: [05:39](#) So, I know before you became involved in Women's Department or division, you were involved in some other organizations. Do you remember which ones they were?

Doreen Hermelin: [05:51](#) Well, I was involved with ORT for many years, but I think it's about the same time. I think I was involved in ORT at the same time, but David was involved with ORT, so I was involved with ORT as well, probably before Federation, and then I went up and became the president of ORT nationally.

Susie Pappas: [06:08](#) But didn't you also... I remember the-

Doreen Hermelin: [06:11](#) NCJW was one of the organizations I loved and was involved with.

Susie Pappas: [06:14](#) Did you do stuff with the Orchard's?

Doreen Hermelin: [06:16](#) No. The Orchard's with part of NCJW.

Susie Pappas: [06:18](#) Okay. Can you tell us about that a little bit?

Doreen Hermelin: [06:20](#) Yes. The Orchard's Children's Services was a piece of NCJW. They had a program for boys who couldn't stay in their homes. They had some problems with the whole schooling and in their homes themselves, and we had a home for them, the Orchard's Children's Services. At first, we had a boys' home, and then a few years later I became chairman of that program, and we opened a girls' home as well, and then we opened the camp for the summertime so the kids would have someplace to go and something to do for the summertime. So, I worked with the Orchard's Children's Services for many years, and-

Susie Pappas: [06:56](#) But then you came over to Federation.

Doreen Hermelin: [06:58](#) Then I came over to Federation, yep.

Susie Pappas: [06:59](#) Do you remember who [crosstalk 00:07:01]

Doreen Hermelin: [07:01](#) But I don't think I dropped out of there completely [crosstalk 00:07:03]

Susie Pappas: [07:03](#) Oh, I'm sure you didn't, but do you remember who encouraged you or kind of led your way towards Federation?

Doreen Hermelin: [07:11](#) I think Margie did. I think Margie got involved in Federation.

Susie Pappas: [07:13](#) Margie Krasnick?

Doreen Hermelin: [07:14](#) Yeah. I think she was doing the decorations and stuff for them, and being my best friend, I thought, I think I'll come and work in Federation as well, and David was very involved in Federation, so how could I not? So, I really-

Susie Pappas: [07:28](#) It was kind of natural.

Doreen Hermelin: [07:29](#) It was sort of a natural thing to start working in Federation, and I don't think we... I started pretty much behind him or with him, whenever we started the Women Division.

Susie Pappas: [07:37](#) Well, were you surprised or not surprised when they asked you to become campaign chair?

Doreen Hermelin: [07:47](#) I wasn't surprised. I think I had been working for a long time, and I had been fundraising for a lot of stuff, so that they asked me to be campaign chairman didn't really surprise me. I was flattered, and I was very happy to do it because I loved the

organization. I mean, being in a lot of organizations as I was, Federation became my favorite, and I was very pleased when they asked me to be the chair.

Susie Pappas: [08:09](#) So, do you remember any of the programs that you were involved in through Women's Division or some things that you maybe led the way or you were involved in?

Doreen Hermelin: [08:24](#) I'm trying to think. We didn't have that on the list before, so I hadn't thought about it. I was thinking about some other programs we'd done, but I know our trips to Israel-

Susie Pappas: [08:37](#) I'm trying to remember back then.

Doreen Hermelin: [08:37](#) I can't remember.

Susie Pappas: [08:38](#) Well, we did those call-a-thons.

Doreen Hermelin: [08:41](#) I remember... Yes, we did the call-a-thons. We started call-a-thons, but I don't think we started when I was there. We could have. I think we did. I think we did start around that time. I remember going to Israel Federation.

Susie Pappas: [08:52](#) And we had different divisions.

Doreen Hermelin: [08:52](#) I think Federation was my first trip to Israel, with the women's campaign.

Susie Pappas: [08:56](#) Oh, yeah.

Doreen Hermelin: [08:57](#) We went to Israel the first time, and that was very, very special for me.

Susie Pappas: [09:02](#) It really was.

Doreen Hermelin: [09:03](#) It was a very, very special trip, and...

Susie Pappas: [09:04](#) So, how did your family feel about your involvement in Women's Department?

Doreen Hermelin: [09:09](#) They were fine. Whatever I did, they never complained. I mean, David never... He encouraged me. He never discouraged me, and my family was fine with it. I had never had a problem, really. They knew they went to school, and I went to organizations.

Susie Pappas: [09:23](#) So, many women have referred to you... This is something that I'm adding now, so [crosstalk 00:09:30]

Doreen Hermelin: [09:30](#) Okay.

Susie Pappas: [09:31](#) Many women refer to you as their mentor. Who were your mentors?

Doreen Hermelin: [09:37](#) Well, I think Carolyn Greenberg was one of them. I'm trying to think. Carolyn was for sure one of them, and I'm trying to... I'm so bad. Ruth Broder. Ruthie was the campaign chair before me.

Susie Pappas: [09:53](#) She was a campaign chair. Yes.

Doreen Hermelin: [09:55](#) I'm trying to think of it.

Susie Pappas: [09:58](#) Well, what does-

Doreen Hermelin: [09:59](#) Dulcie was a chairman before me, too.

Susie Pappas: [10:00](#) Yes, she was. Sure.

Doreen Hermelin: [10:01](#) She was the chairman before, and... Well, there were so many. There were many before me because I was-

Susie Pappas: [10:08](#) So, what does it mean to you to be called a mentor? What do you think? What do you think that means when people say, "Doreen Hermelin was my mentor"?

Doreen Hermelin: [10:17](#) Well, I appreciate that tremendously because I hated to speak. That was my hardest thing in the world, to stand up as... When my knees were straight, my mouth stopped working. So, for them to say I was a mentor, I'm very pleased because that was agony for me. I mean, really agony, and I'm glad I'm sitting because otherwise I might be quiet. It's really funny, but I had to learn to be able to speak with my knees straight. It was very hard for me. I was not happy. As good as David was on his feet, that's when I shut up.

Susie Pappas: [10:50](#) So, I guess that would be a major challenge you've faced as campaign chair and as president.

Doreen Hermelin: [10:56](#) Yes. That was the hardest thing I faced as campaign chair. I could solicit, no problem, but having to make a speech was very difficult. But I did a lot of them, but of course, I had David there. I would write a speech, and then I'd sit at the computer. He'd sit

at the computer because he was a computer whiz, and I would read him my speech, and he would smooth it out-

- Susie Pappas: [11:18](#) Tweak it?
- Doreen Hermelin: [11:18](#) ... and tweak it for me, and then it was perfect. Then I was happy.
- Susie Pappas: [11:21](#) Oh, that's great. So, when you think back to your time as campaign chair and president, could you think back of any of your proudest accomplishments?
- Doreen Hermelin: [11:35](#) Well, I think we really encouraged people to do face-to-face solicitation. That was something I remember doing more than finding that that was the best way, because I started in Federation when I used to push my kids in a stroller and go door-to-door, because that was a memory I was thinking of... But Marcie was in a stroller, and I was pushing her when we were doing campaign. That long ago. Then when we started soliciting people in, I remember when I was Campaign Chair we said, "Please sit down with your prospect and talk to them face-to-face, because it's much better to give the information to somebody in person."
- Susie Pappas: [12:13](#) We did a lot of training, helping people to learn how to do that face-to-face.
- Doreen Hermelin: [12:17](#) Right. Right.
- Susie Pappas: [12:19](#) That was a very important-
- Doreen Hermelin: [12:21](#) Thing for everybody.
- Susie Pappas: [12:21](#) Yes. Yes.
- Doreen Hermelin: [12:22](#) It was excellent.
- Susie Pappas: [12:23](#) Yes. So, do you remember of the staff members that you worked with who was the head of Women's then?
- Doreen Hermelin: [12:34](#) You know what? I can't remember the names from yesterday.
- Susie Pappas: [12:36](#) Yeah. No, I can't remember-
- Doreen Hermelin: [12:37](#) I'm so bad.
- Susie Pappas: [12:37](#) I'm trying to remember-



Doreen Hermelin: [12:38](#) I remember so well the gal who was here, and I became very close to her, and we really were very-

Susie Pappas: [12:47](#) Barbara Satinsky.

Doreen Hermelin: [12:48](#) Oh, Barbie was wonderful.

Susie Pappas: [12:49](#) Lois Brown.

Doreen Hermelin: [12:50](#) Lois was wonderful, too, but Barbara, I was closer to Barbara, and Lois was very good, and then there was somebody else that... Dark hair.

Susie Pappas: [12:59](#) Well, I remember Sally Krugel did it for a while.

Doreen Hermelin: [13:00](#) Well, Sally did... She was later. Sally was like-

Susie Pappas: [13:03](#) Okay. I couldn't remember.

Doreen Hermelin: [13:04](#) I worked with Sally. Sally, I worked in other organizations with her, but then there was somebody else that we worked with that I became close to, and I was trying to remember her name when I was thinking about it, and I couldn't. We could look at the archives and find some of those names.

Susie Pappas: [13:18](#) For sure. Okay. So, why is women's philanthropy important to you, and how does it rank among the other philanthropic activities that you do, which are so many?

Doreen Hermelin: [13:30](#) Well, I think that from the very beginning I thought it was really, really important for a woman to get involved in philanthropy, and this helps the Jewish people here and all over the world, and that's why I feel it's so important for us to take that on as our responsibility, not just our husbands, but ours or whatever, how we're living. But it think it's really important for women to realize that the Jewish world is our world as well, as far as it goes as wherever people live, that it was really important that we should be the ones to take on that as well. I think it's been incredible. I've met women from all over the world, older women who've we've taken care of still, which is such... makes you so proud and so pleased that we don't forget anybody, and the women do that because we're women.

Susie Pappas: [14:20](#) Well, then the next question is, do you feel women solicit differently than men?

Doreen Hermelin: [14:27](#) Probably. I think we're less... We're not quite so harsh. I think we're a little softer.

Susie Pappas: [14:32](#) A little more heart to heart.

Doreen Hermelin: [14:34](#) A little more heart to heart. They're more heart to heart. That's exactly what we do. I think we sit down and we talk about the things, really talk about them, and don't say, "Oh, you should be getting this much money now." We don't do that. We talk about the issues and what's important.

Susie Pappas: [14:49](#) Exactly.

Doreen Hermelin: [14:50](#) Then we do it as women, and to women, it's important to give besides her husband. Even if her husband's a good giver, a woman should have some claim in what she does. for her community.

Susie Pappas: [15:02](#) Absolutely. Right.

Doreen Hermelin: [15:03](#) I think that's really important.

Susie Pappas: [15:04](#) Everybody should have their own gift, should give their own gift. So, do you remember, when you were campaign chair and president, was there much interaction between the women's campaign and the general campaign, or did we basically just do our own thing, and-

Doreen Hermelin: [15:25](#) I think we basically did our own thing. I think we did our own thing. I mean, the general campaign did the general campaign. We helped on the phone-a-thons and stuff, too, but we did our own thing. We had our own cards. We covered all of our cards, all the women's cards, but we might have done phone-a-thons with them as well, but I think we pretty much did our own thing.

Susie Pappas: [15:47](#) Well, did you feel that Federation valued women's philanthropy, Women's Department? Did you feel that Federation thought we were an important part of their-

Doreen Hermelin: [15:58](#) I never felt that we weren't valued, because I think we turned in very good results at the end of the year. So, they never didn't value us. I think we were valued.

Susie Pappas: [16:08](#) I think so, too. Do you have any specific hopes for women's philanthropy for the future?

Doreen Hermelin: [16:24](#) I think we've gone to the top of the... We've got a president now who's president of the campaign in general, so we don't need to go much taller or higher than that unless we get to national president, but we've gone as far as we can go in locally, and I think the fact that we involve ourselves with the whole country, we really have made friends. I mean, I made friends in various cities from Federation, from missions we've taken together, and it's been one... It's enlarged my world as far as my personal world, and I'm sure you have, too.

Susie Pappas: [16:59](#) Well, since you were campaign chairman and president, you've taken on many different roles in the Jewish world. Before we even come to the end, I don't know if you want to talk about how maybe that was a stepping stone to some other things that you did afterwards.

Doreen Hermelin: [17:20](#) Well, I haven't done a lot more things. I mean, the fact that I went to become the national chairman of ORT-

Susie Pappas: [17:26](#) That's a big thing.

Doreen Hermelin: [17:26](#) ... was a biggie. I mean, David was involved in the ORT, and then I stepped into his shoes and took over that for him, and then I became national chairman, and it meant a lot to me, and Federation taught me so much about it. That's what, I learned so much at Federation about how to raise money from different people, and how to-

Susie Pappas: [17:49](#) That's what women say. That's what the women I've interviewed have said a lot, that being involved in Women's Department, women's philanthropy was such a great leadership development course for them.

Doreen Hermelin: [18:04](#) Right, and I agree. I didn't know anybody said it, too, but I'm sure they would because we learned so much. We learned soliciting here. We learned how to talk to people and to raise money from them, and doing it in a nice way and able to make a difference. We made a difference here, and wherever we've gone, I think the women have made differences in the things they've done.

Susie Pappas: [18:24](#) Absolutely.

Doreen Hermelin: [18:25](#) I've made wonderful friendships here, too, which is great.

Susie Pappas: [18:27](#) Very important.

Doreen Hermelin: [18:28](#) Because that was... The ages between the younger and the older, it's really great.

Susie Pappas: [18:34](#) So, is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to cover about your involvement through Women's Department?

Doreen Hermelin: [18:44](#) Oh, I'm very proud of the fact that my daughter has followed me. That's made me very, very proud, that she's come about, and she's done what she's done. I mean, it's been beautiful.

Susie Pappas: [18:53](#) Marcie? Marcie Orley?

Doreen Hermelin: [18:55](#) Yeah, Marcie. Marcie Orley has done what she's done at Federation and the community because-

Susie Pappas: [19:00](#) Yes, that is wonderful.

Doreen Hermelin: [19:01](#) ... she followed in my footsteps, which I followed David's footsteps, really. It's really, really nice. If more of my kids lived here, I'm sure they'd be doing more of it as well. They live away, but they're also involved with philanthropy. My kids are involved in philanthropy all over the country because they live all over the country.

Susie Pappas: [19:18](#) I think Marcie really learned a lot from you and has done a lot for Women's Department, so that certainly is something that you can feel very proud of.

Doreen Hermelin: [19:30](#) Yes. It was very cute. I don't know if this is... but Marcie and Matthew and Matt Lester became chairmen together, and at the time that was my significant other-

Susie Pappas: [19:41](#) Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Doreen Hermelin: [19:42](#) ... or his father, so the two of them became very good friends, and they can chairmen together.

Susie Pappas: [19:47](#) You didn't talk about the fact that you also were general campaign chair for a little while.

Doreen Hermelin: [19:53](#) Yes. For a little while, I was.

Susie Pappas: [19:53](#) I don't know if you remember who was your campaign chair with you.

Doreen Hermelin: [19:58](#) Yes. Yes, I remember who it was. It was Norman.

Susie Pappas: [20:02](#) Norm Pappas.

Doreen Hermelin: [20:03](#) Yeah, Norman was my... We were chairmen together. Right. I remember, he was. Yes. He tolerated having a woman as his co-chair.

Susie Pappas: [20:11](#) Now, he liked working with you a lot.

Doreen Hermelin: [20:13](#) He's a terrific person.

Susie Pappas: [20:14](#) So, you were able to transition from Women's to general, and then to national leadership. So, Women's did do a lot for you.

Doreen Hermelin: [20:24](#) It did a lot.

Susie Pappas: [20:24](#) Well, before we end, is there anything else that you'd like to cover?

Doreen Hermelin: [20:28](#) To cover? I think that probably I could just thank Federation because they helped me grow as a person, a person who was able to do these things I would never think I would have done as a young woman. I didn't have a job. I didn't work. I started raising my kids as soon as I got married and had them, so I never worked, but this was to me an incredible growth, to be able to do the things I did, and it gave me tremendous confidence to go out into the world and do what I had to do and wanted to do, and that was really another... It was a job for me. It really was, because it meant a great deal, and nobody gave me a paycheck, but the check they gave me was very good emotionally.

Susie Pappas: [21:12](#) Well, you did a great job.

Doreen Hermelin: [21:14](#) Emotionally, it was great for me. I loved the connections to the people because I'm a people person, and I love what I was able to do, so it gave me a great deal of sense of pride.

Susie Pappas: [21:24](#) Well, thank you. Thank you so much for coming in and talking with us today.

Doreen Hermelin: [21:28](#) Oh, you're very welcome. Thank you.