

GENEROSITY TRANSCRIPT: 9:34 minutes

In October 1954, Max Fisher went to Israel as part of his first United Jewish Appeal study mission.

He met Finance Minister Levi Eshkol who told him, "There has to be an Israel so there can be one place in the whole world where Jews can come in – any Jew, in any condition – as a matter of right. Israel exists so Jews may exist."

It was Max's greatest lesson in Zionism and that visit changed his life. Max was greatly moved by the conditions in Israel and the opportunity to help the Jews who had settled there.

By 1957, Max was a very successful businessman and became the Chairman of the Board of the Aurora Gasoline Company.

While his business life was still hectic, he felt there was more important work for him to do. It was time to give back. Max began his lifelong pursuit of *tikkun olam* the Jewish principle of "world repair" through social action and the pursuit of social justice.

Robert Aronson:

From the time he was a young man, he understood that giving back was fundamental to your responsibilities as a person. And that's a very inspirational quality about him. It's always been with him.

Max agreed to serve as Chairman of Detroit's Jewish Welfare Fund in 1957. During that year he helped raise \$5,841,000 during Detroit's most successful Allied Jewish Campaign of its history.

While Max was not, initially, comfortable speaking to large groups or taking the lead in fund-raising activities, he found he had a unique talent and was very successful in this new role.

Gene Miller:

There's no one better. Max can raise funds. And he can do it very well. He understands what he is raising the funds for. And he knows how to ask. And in this day and age, many times it's the person who asks. And you know when Max Fisher comes to you, it's a worthwhile project. Because he's thought it out. And he never associates a name with something that he feels he is uncomfortable with.

Max served as President of Detroit's Jewish Welfare Federation from 1959 to 1964. This term helped him understand the complexities of leading a service agency with multiple goals for providing support and services at home and throughout the Jewish world.

Max Fisher in a UJA fundraising video:

How wonderful it is to be able bring people to freedom and to save lives. But how wonderful it would be if we had all the funds needed to do the whole job. Can our dollars do anything greater than save a life, or build one? We must back-up those who are devoting their lives to this task of rescue. And we must see to it there are funds enough to bring the immigrants, to receive them, to start them in their new life. Meanwhile, remember, a quarter of a million newcomers have come to Israel in the last four years. They also need our help until they are fully absorbed. Yes, all told nearly three quarters of a million Jews throughout the world—Jews in North Africa, Europe, and in other areas, as well as in Israel—must have our help. Support the United Jewish Appeal generously. Give now. The need is now.

In 1960, one of Max's business colleagues in Detroit noted how generous the Jewish population was for Jewish causes, but somehow, they didn't participate as generously in broader community fund raising efforts. Max said that there simply were not enough Jews invited to serve on the boards of those organizations.

Max was quickly invited to serve as chairman of the 1961 United Foundation Torch Drive – an organization that evolved into the United Way. He responded by raising a record amount - \$19.5 million.

Jane Sherman:

Well, the first thing in fund raising, is that you've got to do it first. And he was always the first. To put up the money. The most amount of money. When he believed in it. And that is.. and then he'd go.. he'd go to people and say, "Look it, John. I've given, whatever the amount is, and I need you to join me and do it." He had a way about it, but I think basically it's because, number one, he believed in what he was doing. Number two, he put his money where his mouth is.

Max was much more than a successful fundraiser. He committed his time to the causes he most believed in. For several decades, he devoted endless hours leading the many Jewish agencies that he felt were critical for the well-being of Israel and the Jewish diaspora.

His commitment brought him honors and awards that he respectfully accepted, though his true reward was achieving the daunting goals he set for himself.

A few examples of the honors he received include:

The Fred M Butzel Memorial Award by the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit in

1964.

The inaugural Jewish Statemanship Award from the United Jewish Appeal, an organization he served as both General Chairman and President in 1981.

The National Distinguished Leadership Award from the American Jewish Committee in 1994.

There are hundreds more honors like these.

For several decades, Max would hold a fundraiser in his home for specific Jewish causes that he held dear.

It was an honor to be invited to the annual “Fisher Meeting” but the invitation came with an expectation.

Of course, Max would make a major donation himself and others were encouraged to follow his lead.

Max was committed to education and educational institutions. He supported many colleges and universities in a variety of ways and was recognized by thirteen different institutions with honorary degrees. Including his alma mater, Ohio State University, Brandeis, Yeshiva, and ten more institutions in the US and Israel.

Max believed that you could not be a leader anywhere else in the world if you were not a leader in your own community.

Max loved Detroit and he worked hard to make the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit an outstanding organization.

In 1992, The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit dedicated a beautiful new building to house the organization’s administrative functions and educational programs.

It is named the Max M. Fisher Building and honors one of the most generous and committed members in the organization’s history.

Robert Aronson:

Max by the way has always resisted putting his name on anything. Which is a measure of the man. He’s not about recognition. He’s about accomplishment. But he’s about doing it quietly. He’s not about self-promotion, ever. And I would guess without knowing the details, that as he was being asked for this money and as he thought about this money. One of the things that probably kept him from making the gift for a while, is his reluctance to see his name on it. We named our building for Max, our Jewish Federation Building in the community. It’s really the only name that fits, um.. is Max’s name. And

we had to.. and I had work like hell to get him to say yes to that. And it wasn't about the money, it was about, "Do I want my name to be up on a building?" so after the Renaissance, I think this is exactly the right kind of project for Max to have his name on. It is a magnificent cultural institution. It is part of the true revival of this city.

Late in his life, Max saw another opportunity to give back to one of his most beloved institutions. Max was always amazed that a son of immigrants could obtain a college education and the incredible opportunities that come with it.

In 1993, Max announced a \$20 million gift to the Ohio State University. The gift was to establish the Max M. Fisher School of Business.

The new campus was dedicated in 1998 and stands as a monumental commitment to the university that gave Max a football scholarship and a great start on his business career.

In 2003, when Max was 96 years old, he made another major impact on life in Detroit. As the result of a large donation, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra opened the innovative Max M. Fisher Music Center.

The Max, as it's called by the locals, is devoted to youth music education combined with a state-of-the-art professional rehearsal space for the Symphony.

Peter Cummings:

It's called the Max Fisher Center because of um.. Max's commitment to this project. But I think as importantly, because of Max's lifetime record of commitment to the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan.

Throughout his life, Max was devoted to his city and the causes he loved and believed in. He felt a lifelong commitment to giving back in order to share his good fortune with others.

Max Fisher's generosity and his impact cannot be overstated. This program could last several hours just to begin to cover how he touched they lives of millions of people.

Max M. Fisher lived an amazing and generous life.