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Funding Serious Change**Over Time, She Developed Her Theory of Giving**

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By Lynne Rosenthal  
WeNews commentator

*Lynne Rosenthal's lifetime commitment to supporting women's causes deepened as she read Ms. magazine. It helped direct her focus to a rising women's movement and her ability to give grew over time. Twelfth in a series on women funding serious change.*

(WOMENSENEWS)--My million-dollar gift to the Ms. Foundation for Women is the story of an evolution, including the evolution of a family fortune, the evolution of my own political and social consciousness and, ultimately, my evolution as a donor. It has been quite a journey.



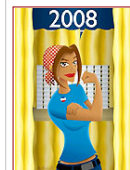
Lynne Rosenthal

The story traces back to my late father, a son of the Great Depression who understood tough times and the importance of family. He was very resourceful, very smart; worked a variety of jobs, including work as a sports commentator, until he settled into a career as a stock analyst.

There he stayed until my mother's grandfather invited him to join the family paint business. Dad went into the paint and varnishes business and used his well-honed resourcefulness to build it into a company that produced industrial coatings. His first patents were in Germany in the 1950s, long before business took on global dimensions.

My family had a long tradition of civic engagement and the seeds had been planted for my future as a donor; it was part of my fabric. We believed in giving back, and we were always aware of the disparity between the haves and the have-nots, possibly because our forbears had been the latter and not the former. My entire K-12 education was progressive, and fully one-third of the students in my high school were on scholarship, which is to say, they were from classes and races other than mine.

The diversity around me during those years gave me a vision and a value that I would hold dear, and want to act on, for the rest of my life. Even as a young person I was learning to become an advocate. I developed a passion for the advancement of economic and social justice, toward a society that provides opportunities for all, which protects human and civil rights, and that engages our nations' citizens in the democratic process.

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### From Corporate Wife to Inspired Woman

My husband worked for IBM and, as a corporate wife, I supported him in his work and took care of our three children, typical for many women of the time. In the early 1970s, the first issue of Ms. was published and I'll never forget the cover: an iconic female image with all those arms, juggling many jobs.

I absolutely wore out that magazine. Reading it, I thought, this is my soul, this is my destiny. The rising public profiles of Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem also helped awaken me to a new order that was asserting itself in our culture. The women's movement joined the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement and the environmental movement to reshape the thinking of so many of us. I was forever changed.

A few years later, the Ms. Foundation was established, and I sent my first check--for \$25--to the first women's foundation. That amount was meaningful to me then. About five years later I increased my support to \$100, a really steep sum for me at the time. I wrote larger checks in the 1990s, my largest being \$500. During these years my husband was the earner in our household. I didn't yet have discretionary funds I could fully call my own.

### Learning the Ropes of Giving

In 1993 my father informed my sister and me that he was forming a family foundation that he would leave to us. He established a donor advised fund at the Chicago Community Trust, and that began my real work as a philanthropist. The people at the trust were very generous with their time and staff. Every year I was given \$5,000 I could grant to organizations involved with the trust. It was a meaningful introduction to giving.

Ten years later my father died, and the full measure of his inheritance came into my life. The first check I wrote, for \$5,000--more than I'd ever given before--was to the Ms. Foundation, and the second was to the Women Donors Network.

I had been introduced to the Women Donors Network, a community of progressive female donors, but I had been unable to join because my giving did not meet their annual \$25,000 threshold. Once I joined I began a process of learning that I call getting my PhD in philanthropy.

The network encouraged me to give larger amounts, and it also helped me understand what it means to give collaboratively. I became part of a community of progressive women who provide energy, nourishment, encouragement and ideas to help women strengthen their leadership potential and their voices.

### Moved to Give by Sense of Power

Through the Women Donors Network I met Helen LaKelly Hunt, who introduced me to Women Moving Millions, the campaign to raise gifts of \$1 million and more for foundations like Ms. I had dinner one night with a friend and with Helen, who talked about how women did not fund the suffrage movement, and how the current financial power of women, and what they can do with that power, is an unprecedented moment in time.

After the dinner, my friend said, "Lynne, you can do this." In fact, I had been scaling up my support of Ms., from \$10,000 soon after my father's death. I decided to give \$50,000 and it felt bold, courageous and powerful.



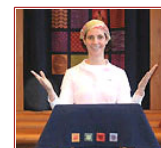
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That Ms. would be the beneficiary of my first million-dollar gift seemed only natural. Over the years, as a donor, I grew to learn the importance of the foundation, not only the people who worked there but also those it helped benefit.

I saw the brilliance of leaders like Sara Gould, its CEO. I saw the genius of the cross-race, cross-class approach to grant-making--characteristic of all women's foundations--that places at the decision-making table not just the women with money but also women who may have little money but who, as grassroots activists, know just how it can be best invested in the community.

I'm talking about a philanthropy that is horizontal and democratic, not vertical and hierarchical. This diverse culture reminds me of the diverse culture of my high school. It is a culture that is just and right and that creates lasting social change.

My gift goes out to others but the truth is, it also comes back to me. I realized that giving enlarges the heart and brings satisfaction that cannot be described. I am one of a growing number of women around the country, and around the world, who are changing the very architecture of the women's movement. We are in a position, as never before, to maximize our advocacy for underserved women and girls. My hope and belief is that I am a catalyst to help women's philanthropy think and act huge.

*Lynne Rosenthal's great passion is the advancement of social justice and working toward a society that protects human and civil rights, engages democracy and protects the environment. She supports programs that develop the leadership of women and girls, ensure election integrity, protect reproductive rights and add to a building movement for progressive social change.*

Women's eNews welcomes your comments. E-mail us at [editors@womensenews.org](mailto:editors@womensenews.org).

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