



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *TWIG Oral History Project*

Title: *Interview with Kathy Hirsch*

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Location of Interview: *Interview conducted via Zoom*

Interviewer: *MaryAnne Beatty*

Transcriber: *Meia Cacho*

Abstract: Kathy Hirsch has lived in Alexandria for thirty-six years. Both her children were born in Alexandria Hospital. She been an active member of Twig for over twenty years and served as president of the organization in 2005-2006. She discusses how she values being a Twig member and how she intends to stay active as long as she can.

Also present at the interview was Janet Hawkins.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

Table of Contents/Index

Minute	Page	Topic
00:00	3	Introductions
00:56	3	Moving to Alexandria
02:52	4	Becoming a Twig Member
04:08	4	Twig Committees
04:48	4	Friendships and Connections in Twig
06:50	5	Memorable Projects
08:28	6	Contributions of Twig to the Hospital
10:17	6	Moving Forward
12:28	7	Alexandria Hospital
15:59	9	Being an Active Twig Member
22:22	10	Staying with Twig

INTRODUCTIONS 00:00	
Janet Hawkins:	We're recording.
Kathy Hirsch:	Okay.
MaryAnne Beatty:	Hello there. I'm MaryAnne Beatty, and I am a Twig member. And I am working on the Oral History Project with my colleague and friend, Janet Hawkins. And we're delighted to be here today with Kathy Hirsch to interview her as part of our Oral History Project. So, Kathy, thank you for taking the time. That was very—.
Kathy Hirsch:	Thank you, MaryAnne. So glad to be here with you and Janet.
MB:	Yes. So let's get started. So tell us a little bit about you and your life here in Alexandria, and how you got here to Alexandria. And I know that you've got two children who were born in Alexandria Hospital.
Kathy Hirsch:	That's correct.
MB:	Yes, so just give us a little bit about you.
MOVING TO ALEXANDRIA 00:56	
Kathy Hirsch:	<p>Okay. Thank you. I am Kathy Blend Hirsch. And I was born on Valentine's Day in 1958. I have been in the City of Alexandria for ten years and Alexandria, Fairfax County [Virginia] for twenty-six years, so all in total, thirty-six years in Alexandria. And I am married to my wonderful husband, Larry. We've been married thirty-eight years. And we—originally, when we first got married in 1982, we lived in [Washington] DC for two years. And then from there, we found a house in Rosemont [neighborhood] on Oak Street and decided to renovate that. My husband's a builder. And we did that and moved in. And both of our kids came home from Alexandria Hospital in that house. We have very fond memories. And then we moved to the Potomac River for twenty-six years.</p> <p>I attended East Tennessee State University where I received my degree in dental hygiene. I was a dental hygienist in Vienna, Virginia at the same dental office for twenty years. I have been a part of Twig for twenty years. I actually joined in the same class as Janet [Hawkins] and Candace Beane. And we've all been in and had been very active, all presidents, so it's been very, very nice to have that camaraderie. What else? Oh, I was the president of Twig 2005-2006 and Janet was my president-elect.</p>

BECOMING A TWIG MEMBER 02:52	
MB:	So how did you decide to become involved in the Twig? How did that all come about?
Kathy Hirsch:	Well, I was invited to a coffee, the same one Janet and Candace attended. And I guess that was our Fall Coffee 1999 because we became active in 2000. Paula Klein was a friend of mine who threw a girls' night out group. We'd go out to dinner once a month. And she said, "Why don't you come to the coffee and see if you like to become a Twig?" And so that's how I got into Twig. I did not know anyone at the time. I just went, and I just found these wonderful women that were so gracious. And I decided it was for me.
MB:	So when you went and then you joined Twig, and I know like when I joined a couple of years ago, you know, my first assignment was Stock, Stocking.
Kathy Hirsch:	Oh, yeah. [laughs]
MB:	Yeah. And then where did your, you know, your path take you? What committees were you on, and what were your, your passions or your most favorite ones?
TWIG COMMITTEES 04:08	
Kathy Hirsch:	Well, we started out on Stock and then we went to Cookbook [publication.] Everybody went through Cookbook, I think, which was fun. I was on, let's see, Entertainment, Fundraising, Membership, Hospital Liaison, et. cetera. I also served as Corresponding. Secretary and Parliamentarian.
MB:	And through all these committees, you've made special friendships, the connections, such as yours with Janet and Candace. Can you talk a little bit about that?
FRIENDSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS IN TWIG 04:48	
Kathy Hirsch:	Well, I will tell you, Twig is very special and unique in my eyes because there are women from all walks of life, all ages, all backgrounds, and they're all there for the purpose of raising money for Alexandria Hospital. And to find that camaraderie with a group like this is really special. And that's why I knew right

	<p>away that it was for me because I wanted to give back to the community. And like you had mentioned earlier, both the kids were born at Alexandria Hospital. They're now twenty-nine and thirty-three. [laughter] It was a long time ago. And I remember at Alexandria Hospital, one of the big things then was, oh, you could wear your bathrobe to the special dinner with your husband. They had just started the steak dinner. Burp and Turf [phonetic] I guess it was. And so here I am in my robe and the hospital gown, and sitting there having dinner with Larry.</p> <p>So that was kind of special. And so anyway, yes, just—the idea that it's a community hospital means a lot to me. The idea that people give out of the generosity of their hearts. I've become very involved with Alexandria Hospital on their foundation board over the past, I don't know, 2006, let's see, fourteen, almost fifteen years. I was a member of the board and then I've been on fundraising for the hospital for different campaigns. And I've been on the development committee, the nominating committee there. And Janet and I both serve on the board right now, the foundation board, which is great, even though things are so different now as you can imagine, [due to] COVID, lots of Zooms. [laughs]</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Yeah, yeah. And I think that's our world now.</p>
<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>MEMORABLE PROJECTS 06:50</p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>What—if you had to think about some memorable projects that you worked on and specific projects or special stories during your Twig career, what comes to mind?</p>
<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>I guess one of the nice things about the year I was president, which was 2005-2006, that was the year we started the credit card machines. And everybody was like a wreck about the credit card machines. They just were so hesitant to use them. And, of course, now we just slide in our little chips and everybody's happy with the world, but at the time, oh, my word, you would think we were asking them to perform open heart surgery or something. And people were like, "Oh, no, no. I don't want to do that," you know. [laughs] So that was something kind of memorable. Something very special happened for Twig in 2006. I was able to receive, on behalf of our Twigs, the Julia Johns Award. Twig was written, the recipient that year. And I got to receive it on behalf of the Twigs and stand with my sister Twigs and all be together. It was very</p>

	<p>sweet.</p> <p>And they had given, remember Janet, they had a little corsage for each of us, a little carnation. So that was kind of cool. They just acknowledged how special Twig is to the hospital and how much all of our fundraising means to them. And I was just very proud of our organization.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTIONS OF TWIG TO THE HOSPITAL 08:28</p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>If you had to think about some of the most important contributions that Twig has made to the hospital, you know, in concrete terms, what comes to mind?</p>
<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>Well, all the very many things we've funded. You know, we started out with just the small, I guess it was infant, something to do with infant monitoring or security, and then we've gone to the Twig Pavilion, which is the telemetry floor. And we've done stroke unit, CVICU [Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit], oh, gosh, nursing scholarships, which I'm so proud of, that we do that every year, and we bumped it to \$10,000 a year [scholarship] for the recipient. And, of course, we had the Twig surgical unit. I mean, we just have done a lot. And our name is out there a lot, which is good, because I think it's important to let the nurses and the doctors know that there's a group of women that are working very hard to give money to our community hospital. And I think that matters to them. And I think there's an awareness.</p> <p>Even things like, you know, the Twig flower flash mob. We go in to give, as you know, the flowers to the different nursing stations and speak a little bit to each of the people. And it gets the word out. And it says, "You know what? You're working hard here, but we're working hard for you as well to make sure that our patients are taken care of." So I think it's very important.</p>
<p>MOVING FORWARD 10:17</p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>And you continue to support Twig. And moving forward, why is this, why does this continue to be important to you? And what do you think of the goals of Twig should be as we move forward during—I don't know if the pandemic has caused any kind of shift or just what do you think moving forward the role that Twig will play?</p>
<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>I've always believed since the very beginning that our number one goal is to raise money for our hospital. Usually the hospital</p>

	<p>will give us a choice of three areas which need funding. Twig will vote on which project to fund. Our number one goal is to support the hospital. I think we should not waiver on our goals. Some years, maybe we can give more money than others as far as our pledge. And, you know, these are very precarious times right now. And we just have to not be concerned.</p> <p>I remember that I was talking with one of the CEOs at the hospital and I said, “Our goal is such and such. And I don’t know if we’re going to be able to meet our pledge this year,” because we had kind of a rough year one year. And the CEO said, “Don’t worry.” He said “We know Twig’s good for it. Whenever it works out that you can,” you know, “donate, then that’s the way it is.” And I really appreciated that, and I’ve always thought about that. And I know people get concerned, but I think that, you know, we just do the best we can every day. Especially in this year, we’re just going to do what we can. And I think we should move forward like, you know, we’re the strong group of women that we are, and we’re just going to continue to give back to the hospital.</p>
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ALEXANDRIA HOSPITAL 12:28

MB:	And then I guess the final thing, what is it about the Alexandria Hospital that makes it so special to the Alexandria community?
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Kathy Hirsch:	<p>Oh, I think you said the word right there. It’s a community hospital and I like it, it has a small town feeling. And it’s accessible, and I think the group of people that supports this hospital are all, they really care about the hospital. I know my husband and I have donated separately to the hospital. We have a couple of rooms that we have funded. I know, Janet, you have as well. And I’ve gotten other people to, some very, very dear people that have paid a lot of money out of pocket much more than we have to give like a nursing station. And one of our friends and neighbors gave to Mount Vernon Hospital [in Fairfax, Virginia] actually, the emergency room.</p> <p>So I mean, there’s—I feel like through me, maybe I’ve helped in other ways, not completely out of pocket but just help connect more people to the hospital. One of the things is through the <i>1872 Society</i> [1872 was the year the hospital was founded], which is now called <i>Visionaries</i>. A lot of really good friends had joined that. It’s a giving circle that we have an annual gift. I’m very</p>
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	proud to be a part of it.
MB:	Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us, any other stories or anything before we sign off?
Kathy Hirsch:	Well, gosh, this is good. [laughs] I will say just for the record, in 2014, me, personally, was awarded the Julia Johnson Award. And that meant so much to me. I was so honored. And even to be slightly compared to somebody that had such courage and such a strong, giving spirit, if you will, to organize this group of women who started the hospital. I mean, to receive this award just meant so much to me.
MB:	Thank you. Thank you, Kathy, for taking the time. It was nice chatting with you and for participating.
Kathy Hirsch:	Thank you. It was so nice chatting with you.
MB:	Yeah, all right.
Kathy Hirsch:	Well, I'm very proud to be a Twig.
Janet Hawkins	So I have a couple of other follow-up questions—.
Kathy Hirsch:	Yes.
JH	—to ask you, my dear. This is Janet Hawkins.
Kathy Hirsch:	As you know, you know me well. [laughs]
JH	Well, I'm so glad you said, you've described your Julia Johns Award because that was going to be my first thing. I hope you would tell us about that. I couldn't remember the year, but I think, I know—.
Kathy Hirsch:	I know. I had to go back. And here I was at my mom's and I didn't know what to use. I'm like, "Okay, so what was happening at that time?" [laughs]
JH	So it was really important. The other two things I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, one is that you've been active over the years in the Homes Tour.
Kathy Hirsch:	Oh, yeah, I forgot that.
BEING AN ACTIVE TWIG MEMBER 15:59	
JH	And why don't you talk a little bit about what you have done because that's something I think a lot of people would be interested in knowing.

<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>Okay. Yes, for years, I've been on the Home Tour Committee and served mainly as the 1872 Society/Twig donor reception. And that was mainly, I started actually with Julie Lineberry at the time. I was her co-chair of the reception, if you will. And so I kind of learned from her what was done. And it's usually a catered event at someone's home. And the home has to be chosen after the six to eight homes were chosen for the [homes] tour because she didn't want to step on anyone's toes. [laughs]</p> <p>The home basically, had to accommodate about seventy-five people. Usually, we were out in the garden area. And it's usually always been in Old Town [neighborhood]. It was a lovely event, and it honored the homeowners, the sponsors, the benefactors, donors or patrons rather. And I usually was the nametag person. Janet's helped me on that. Thank you.</p> <p>It is really a job as far as contacting a corporate sponsor to see who the two people they're sending from their company. And it does take some work, stuffing in the invitations which were separate from the Homes Tour invitations, as well as preparing guest name tags. I've enjoyed doing it. I didn't have to do it this year, but hopefully, next year, we can. But I think it's been lovely working with the different committees and chairs. And I've enjoyed it a lot.</p>
<p>JH</p>	<p>Okay. And then the other question I wanted to ask you about is membership. Kathy, I don't know how many, but over the years, Kathy and I, and Candace all joined around the same time, have been responsible for a number of women to join Twig. She's been very good about that. That's one of the reasons why she's a wonderful foundation member because she's really an ambassador to the hospital. But you also are on the membership committee and I think, I don't want to give an opinion because this is an oral history, but why don't you talk a little bit about, just sort of address how the Membership Committee operates and its purpose because I think a lot of people may not understand that. That's a little bit unique about Twig. And, again, we'll take that part out, but that's something I wish you can talk about.</p>
<p>Kathy Hirsch:</p>	<p>Well, the Membership Committee in the past was always like a place to send past presidents. Because when you become past president, all of a sudden, you just kind of don't know what your</p>

	<p>role is. But it has evolved to much more of a representation of our Twig community. You don't have to be a past president. Basically, we are trying to take care of our membership needs. Whether someone needs to be on a leave of absence, that's something that our chair, who is Mary Schoen this year, sends an email to the Membership Committee saying, "This person has requested a leave of absence," or, "This is going on with this person. They may need a meal." What we'd done recently is reaching out. Each of us took or not each of us, some of us took ten names of our active members and had reached out to them via email or phone calls, cards, whatever, especially during COVID to try to stay in touch with each other.</p> <p>The Membership Committee, of course not this year but in the past, has been responsible for the coffees and to invite women that are going to be prospective Twigs, inviting them to come and to get to know us. The coffees have always been very, if you will, old school but charming and gracious, and coffee and tea service. And we used to solely have recipes from the Twig cookbooks. And people or the Membership Committee would get together and they would spend hours talking about who's going to do which recipe. And then I make little place cards with the name of the dish or the appetizer, or the muffin, or whatever, and then what page number in the cookbook it was.</p> <p>So that was kind of nice. And we'd use our Twig green napkins at the event. Once again, I make sure everybody has their name tags. And I have been the keeper of the name tags right now, the green name tags. And Ann Sparks hosted it for many years. And she was so organized, and I'm so grateful to follow on her footsteps. And greeting people at the door when they come in just to make people feel really special, which is something that really speaks to my heart. And it makes my heart full to be in this organization and see so many just really amazing women.</p>
STAYING WITH TWIG 22:22	
JH	And then the final question is, why are you still an active Twig? You've been a member as long as I have, and you are still in the active status rather than moving on to Sustainer.
Kathy Hirsch:	I am in for the long haul because I want my silver tray. [laughs] I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. I'm just teasing you. Just as long as I'm able, I am still going in there, I'll be in there on Saturday. This will be my third time this month, but I'll do it as

	long as I'm able, really. And it's so special to me to be able to interact with our customers and just to be with my sister Twigs. So, yeah, as long as I'm able, I'm going to stay in.
JH	That's fair. That sounds good.
MB:	Yeah.
Kathy Hirsch:	Okay.
JH	Are we done then? I'll stop recording?
MB:	I think we are. I think we are.
Kathy Hirsch:	Thank you.
MB:	Thank you. That was good. Thank you.