

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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The other place that is really near and dear to my heart is the old JCC, which was torn down. The Hillcrest country club and that was bought by some benefactors of the community in the 70s. It used to be a country club located in Rio Terrace and I worked there for many, many years. I started working there in 1987 and stayed until they sold the building and it was torn down in 2012, I believe it was, when we moved to the offices, which are rented, on 156th Street. We did so much in that building -- there was a pool, my son learned to swim there, there was a gym where we had *Yom HaAtzmaut* celebrations. We had exercise classes, Temple Beth Ora was there, there was a Montessori school in the basement where my kids went to school, there were offices there of every Jewish organization you can imagine, B'nai B'rith had conventions there, BBYO, Hillel students had meetings there. There were Hebrew classes, we had pottery in the basement and sculpture classes, and sketching of the River Valley. There was a workout room with personal trainers, and a weight room, and we spent a lot of time in that building. We used to dance there, the Israeli dancers used to dance there. I mean that was really the hub of the community for me. When I moved here in 1987, that was my home. I worked there, I spent time there, I met my friends there and it was a great place. But it deteriorated like all buildings do. It was an old building, I think it was built in the 50s, and it had outlived its useful life.

There was a curling rink that got torn down at one point, the outdoor pool slid into the ravine at one point, the tennis courts just got overgrown with nature, and it was going to be too expensive to renovate it. So the best thing to do was to sell it. We've been looking into building another JCC for a very long time, the community has, and it's difficult because everybody has different ideas about it and it's very expensive to build buildings nowadays. It's not like it used to be. I think the first synagogue probably cost less than ten thousand dollars to build and was built in a year, well less than a year, it was built in a few months. I mean that's just not the case anymore. There's all kinds of hurdles, rules, and regulations. It's hard to figure out how to do it, who's going to pay for it, where it's going to go. I don't know that that will ever happen again. Plus Edmonton has changed. The population has been kind of steady since the 1950s, it's about 5000 people total. People come and people go, but the kids tend to go to university elsewhere and then stay elsewhere, and then parents move there when they retire. It's not a stable population and it's not a wealthy city, we don't have a lot of wealthy people anymore willing to foot the bill for these kinds of things. I don't know that we'll ever have another community center like that, it's hard to say. That doesn't mean we can't have Jewish life here. We have the synagogues, we have lots of buildings, we have the Drop In Center downtown as well. We have services like Jewish Family Services, we have lots of buildings, but to sustain the population is another thing. We have two Jewish day schools, we have lots of activities. People get together, Hillel gets together, BBYO gets together, we have a camp in Pine Lake that is supported by the Jewish communities of Edmonton and Calgary. There's a lot of things that we have to support and I just don't know that a community center is a priority for us. Plus the fact that there was a reason why there were these community centers built; Jews weren't allowed to join country

clubs and athletic facilities and yoga studios and stuff like that. Whereas now, they are, so we have a lot more choice, so I think that's one of the issues too. I don't know if we'll ever build another building to replace Hillcrest.