

## **JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE**

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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March, 2021

In terms of Jewish history, for some reason the University of Alberta, because we had Hillel at that time (we still have it today) but in those days all student organizations had to have the faculty advisor. I was a co-faculty advisor with the late Dr. Norbert Berkowitz. I was working with the Hillel group. We had a lot of fun with the students -- there were speakers coming in and we would arrange for breakfasts at, for example, Beth Shalom. We would have a breakfast there about once a month and it was a very nice time.

Regarding the other aspect is Beth Israel synagogue, as I am Orthodox this was the synagogue I decided I would attend. I got on to the board '68-69 and remained on the board until 1996. During that time, I still remember when I first came onto the board, but board activities were conducted almost entirely in Yiddish at that time. Little by little as the older members passed away, it moved towards English. I still remember quite a few of those "Golden Oldie" old timers, they were really fine people.

During the time I was on the board with Beth Israel, I was a ritual chairman. I was also the chair of the Kashrut Committee for the synagogue as well as, eventually, chair of the Kashrut Committee for the city of Edmonton itself. I was also active with the old Jewish Community Council and I was the chair of "community relations" and it was my job to write to the newspapers anytime something Jewish came up. We had great problems and often it had to do with Israel, defending the State of Israel against statements that some people had made. At one point, I was informed from Jewish Community Council, they had met with the RCMP, that at that time the Black September movement was active among the Palestinians. They were sending letter bombs into Canada and I was considered one of the prime targets because of my defense of the State of Israel. We would occasionally get midnight phone calls from some Palestinian supporters. I would have to hang up on them, it was harassment. Things were put in the mailbox, I won't tell you what. I even had a bit of a tiff with the Talmud Torah. Because of my family's

potential for letter bombs, I asked that our family name and our phone number be deleted from the phone book, which they used to issue in those days. They came around when they understood what the matter was.

There was latent antisemitism, you didn't know it but it was there. For example, for the birth of our second child I had taken my wife right to the hospital. Her water had broken and I was signing her in. In those days, at the University Hospital and in other places they asked you for your religion. I was trying to move faster so they could get her right upstairs to the maternity ward for and the woman writing it all up says "Well, what's your religion?" I said "Jewish". "Oh, Hebrew," she puts down. I said "We're not Hebrews, we're Jews. Hebrews are our ancient ancestors." And she's writing and says "What do you do for a living?" I told her "I'm a professor at the U of A." "What department are you a professor in?" she says to me. I told her Elementary Education. Her answer was "Oh G-d help the children,". I gave her a nasty look. At that time I didn't feel like pursuing the matter because my wife was out there, the birth came before anything. She got the note from my look that she had overstepped the line. At that point, they didn't feel like taking it any further. We also had some incidents of something very strange. At that time, in about 1976-77 Rabbi Kronenberg was the chair, who was the principal at the Talmud Torah. He was in Beth Israel synagogue one Sunday and a Christian class came in, youngsters, I think upper elementary school age. And they wanted to know if they could get some information about the synagogue. They were told the rabbi was there and he would be glad to speak with them. So they brought him into the synagogue, the children sat him down and he was talking to them about various aspects of the synagogue; the windows, how many windows, why there were that many, what they were all about, and then he was talking about the Torah and told them that the ink used for the Torah was very, very durable. He asked if anyone knew why. A kid raised her hand and said "Yes, they use Christian blood to mix in with the ink to write the Torah." He immediately corrected that one, but it goes to show you what was floating around at that time, what might still be to this day. I hope that it's not that way because in general we've been very well accepted here. At the time I came in, the president of the University was Jewish and again, later on Dr. Myer Horowitz was president of the U of A, also Jewish.

The *Kashrut* Committee for the community, I was the last chair and I unfortunately had to disband it. There was some controversy starting between the Conservative rabbi at that time and the Orthodox rabbi at that time, and I felt that the matter was unfortunately something that had to be resolved. I sent a letter to the president of Jewish Federation at the time stating that if this matter was not resolved I would be tendering my resignation. Unfortunately, the matter was not resolved. I tendered, the Kashrut Committee was disbanded, and the late president of *Chevra Kadisha*, a wonderful man, Nate Siegel, took over as a community *mashgiach*. He was a very fine man: he never took any money from the community for the work that he did on the Kashrut Committee.

I'd like to see and to know what's going on with [Hillel and the University] occasionally. I'm still active with Beth Israel after a hiatus pertaining to some disagreements around the building. I'm back on the board again and active with the synagogue with its *minyan*. I'm there virtually every day for the *minyan* and unfortunately during this pandemic, I can't can't get over there on *Shabbos*. It's a little bit disconcerting, but otherwise yes, still with Beth Israel.