

## **JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE**

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Esther Starkman - Talmud Torah's First Location

July, 2021

I did start school at the old Talmud Torah. It was on 103rd Street, just south of Jasper Avenue in the business district of Edmonton. It was a two-story brick building with the classrooms on the main floor and the office on the second floor, as well as a large room which was used as a multi-purpose room. I think as students we used it as a gym as well. In fact, that space was rented out to Jewish families and it was where Beth Shalom first started before they had their own building. As well, it was there where my parents, who had been married in the old [Beth Israel] synagogue, celebrated their 25th anniversary, in the Talmud Torah. They also celebrated the engagement of my sister Phyllis to Dr. Tom Hardin, which would have been in 1950, when I was 10 years old.

The schoolyard had the sidewalk in the middle with shale on either side. We often fell on that shale and scraped our knees. We sort of were worried about the neighbors -- there was actually a house on either side of the Talmud Torah and if our balls or any of our equipment went over the fence, we thought the people were really mean because they kept the equipment. Those were wonderful years and I remember well. Many of the students that I went to school with; Dr. Marvin Weisler, Dr. Marvin Levant, Rona Margolis, Cyril Shapiro, Doreen Pakes, Evelyn Prepas, Florie Rubin now Axler... these were mainstays of the Jewish community and children of the mainstays. I also have a memory in the old Talmud Torah of it having a basement and in the basement there was a suite for Mike and Lisa and their daughter, who were the cooks. They prepared the food for us. As well, there was a small office which was pretty smoke filled and that's where the Young Judeans hung out. Of course, my brother Tevie, Dr. Tevie Estrin, was one of those kids who hung out at the Young Judea office in the basement of that school.

Going home from the school, and mothers didn't drive in those days, so we used the streetcars system and buses when they came along. My friend and I would walk from the Talmud Torah on South of 103rd and Jasper to 104th Street, where this wonderful place called the Palace of

Sweets was. We would walk down the roads looking for things that we would buy and usually it was seafoam. We would take that home with us until the next day. In addition to what I've told you about the Talmud Torah, they also held junior congregation services at that school. My dad was appointed from the board to look after the junior congregation, so the junior congregation had a pretty strong place in my life. We would go in the morning, have the service and then my brothers were responsible for me. So we would walk to a downtown bowling alley where my mother had given us lunch, we'd eat our lunch, I would watch the boys bowl, and then the procedure was to go to a matinee at either the Capitol Theater or the Rialto Theater. That was their duty and it was freedom for my mom.

My mom was sort of a woman ahead of her time. She decided that my musical talent was pretty deficient, so she decided to give me elocution lessons. Those were at the Alberta College which was then, and I think still is, located on 100th Avenue, not far from where the old Talmud Torah was. Those elocution lessons, I think, sort of defined my life. I came to do a lot of public speaking and of course, in my teaching I was always presenting to a class. I have to say that across from the Talmud Torah was the Masonic temple where all the music competitions were held. I remember competing in "speech arts" as they called it and my poem was from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and it began "Ooh eyes so wicked". Of course, I had to learn to roll my eyes to match my speech and there were a couple of interesting incidents from that time that I still remember, but I'm going to move on. I do think that those lessons really affected my life.