

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Esther Starkman - Talmud Torah's Second and Current Locations

July, 2021

I talked a little bit about the early Talmud Torah and I want to go back to the Talmud Torah. All three buildings; 103rd, 133rd, and now the new Talmud Torah, well relatively new, on 172nd Street played a major role in my life. It started with my father's belief, which he talked about when we were at the table or in the house that if all Jewish children attended Talmud Torah elementary school, there would be less of a divide in the Jewish community. I think he, for a man of his time, looked at it in a broad way. I think that even today, one might think about that a little more.

We know stories of my mother telling me that in the early years of Talmud Torah, she and her friends would go out collecting for milk and things like that for the kids at school. Remember, it was a private school and it was totally supported by the community. Her fundraising, I think, morphed into the famous "Magen David Bridge Club" where 12 ladies met once a week to play cards and raised money for the Talmud Torah. They would raise money to buy a projector, or in those years a copy machine, which we then called a Gestetner. When you used it, you got purple ink all over your hands. That's the kind of thing that those ladies did, and that was, of course, prior to the new school. It was a good thing that the community had something to work toward. They always had something to work toward, but it felt as if they were a part of it.

I was in the school recently, the beautiful school, and I looked up at some of the plaques that were on the wall. As Chief Dan George said, my heart swelled: there was my mother's name as president of Mother's Auxiliary, there was my sister's name, Phyllis Hardin, as president of Mother's Auxiliary, and there was my name as president of Mother's Auxiliary. I think it all came from the dedication of our parents to the school. Although, I have to say, the plaques are a little different at the beginning. If you look at the plaques, all the women go by their husband's name; it was Mrs. Abraham Estrin or Mrs. Tom Hardin. As you go down, it could be Mrs. Esther Starkman. So they changed just as society changed.

We were dedicated to to the Talmud Torah. I guess we were imbued with it and imbued it at home. Our children, Hillary, Georgina, and Daniel, attended the school on 133rd Street. Who can forget those lineups of cars waiting to drop kids off or waiting to pick pick children up. Even though that was our children's school, we were very happy to contribute to, along with our respective families, the building of the new school on 172nd Street.

Again, as Talmud Torah's close to my heart, it was a great honor for me to co-chair the Talmud Torah's 75th anniversary with Daniel Pekarsky, now of Vancouver, whose father was one of the major principals at the Talmud Torah. Later on, I am thrilled and, I have to say, honored again to have been co-chair of the hundredth anniversary with Stacey Wright. So the Talmud Torah has been meaningful to me. As a couple, Howard and I did a lot of things as a couple. I think that we both in our own way were huge supporters of Talmud Torah. He was a two-term president and

on the board during the period when Talmud Torah school became a program under Edmonton Public Schools. I remember well the evening when Howard shared that fateful meeting. The gym on 133rd Street was packed to the rafters and there were a lot of detractors who did not want the Talmud Torah to lose its independence. Ultimately, it led to an acquiescent vote favoring Talmud Torah coming under the umbrella of Edmonton Public Schools. I think great thanks and kudos to the board of the time who were a very strong board, and to the staff under then Superintendent Strembitsky who made it happen. We were the only Hebrew school in North America to receive that kind of per-pupil funding and that kind of educational support that only a very large educational system could give, so it was a major step forward.