

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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So the first one would be Beth Israel synagogue, particularly the second location that Beth Israel had downtown in the Glenora area on 119th Street. My family's always been associated with Beth Israel and I used to attend as a child. I mostly would go on *Simchat Torah* because it was a lot of fun watching the *Torah* being marched around the synagogue. I was a little girl, so I didn't have to sit in the women's section exclusively, I could sit with my brother and my dad and it was a lot of fun. The rabbi would toss candy to the children and I remember the beautiful red velvety seats that were in the pews in the women's section quite vividly. A number of those pews are now in the current Beth Israel. They were brought over and they're in the small chapel that's in the new Beth Israel on the women's side. It was always a little bit of a production to get there because my father is *Shomer Shabbos* and he won't drive on Saturdays. There was a rabbi who was in the community at one point who made a *minhag* that it was acceptable to take the bus if a ticket was used, not cash and the ticket was pre-torn and carried in an appropriate fashion. So it was always a big deal getting ready in the morning to go and having our bus tickets and walking to the bus stop. That was also like the first time I ever took public transit. I went to the bus stop and we took the bus. We got off by some sort of used car dealership and walked the rest of the way to the synagogue. There would be an ice cream party in the basement for the kids -- that was always a lot of fun. Eventually it stopped being so much fun because I became a teenager and I had to sit in the women's section, and I was too old to take part in the ice cream party. Being a typical teenager I sort of lost interest in religion altogether and kind of got interested in other things. Life pulled me in other directions but Beth Israel is part of my life once again. In more recent years after my mother passed away, of course we needed a rabbi to officiate the funeral. So my father, being Orthodox asked for the rabbi at Beth Israel, who is currently Rabbi Zolly Claman. We began attending there again -- my father and my brother are both involved on the Board of Directors there and prior to COVID I attended, I'd say semi-regularly. Occasionally on Shabbat and the High Holidays and special events. So probably once restrictions lift and it's safe to do so, I will probably resume doing that.

Temple Beth Ora has also been a presence in my life here and there over the years. I've attended Bat Mitzvahs there -- I have a friend who never had a Bat Mitzvah when she was a teenager so for her 40th birthday she decided to have the Bat Mitzvah that she never had. She's a part of Temple Beth Ora so that's a memory for me there. That's in the current location, where the Chevra Kadisha also is. During COVID I've been Zooming into a number of services at Temple Beth Ora as well.

Other places of importance to me would be the Jewish Cemetery. Even before my mother's passing I've always found it a really interesting place. I'm very much interested in history and in particular, Jewish history. I used to write for the newsletter for the the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta, and I would occasionally just go to the Jewish Cemetery just to look at the headstones and see the names of all these people who were founders of the community and people who are really important in the community, and also people that I've known over the years. I just find it a really serene and beautiful place and the art on a lot of the headstones is just beautiful. I think it's very interesting to see the different styles of headstones over the years and how they've changed. I just find it a very interesting place. I used to attend the Holocaust remembrance services -- they used to be held in the cemetery until they moved to the Legislature where there is now a Holocaust memorial sculpture built by Susan Owen Kagan.

As well, Bliss Bakery is a place that I tend to frequent because it's the only kosher bakery in Edmonton. As far as I know, it's the only place in Edmonton where you can get kosher prepared food and I love their doughnuts so I'm there quite a bit. Another place would be Andy's IGA. In doing some of these interviews I'm actually surprised Andy's IGA hasn't come up yet, so I wanted to bring it up because Andy's IGA has been one of the only places in the city where you can buy kosher meat. It's mostly frozen, they do have some prepackaged deli now that you can get that is not frozen and quite good. It used to be like **the** place people would go to do their Passover shopping because they always bring in [everything]. I remember the big wall of *matzah* and all of the foods and everything for Passover. There are one or two other groceries in Edmonton that now have a limited Passover and kosher meat selection but to me, Andy's Valleyview IGA has always been the place that my family would do the bulk of its kosher meat

and Passover shopping expeditions, particularly after there was no longer a kosher butcher in Edmonton. So speaking of that, places from the past that are of note to me would be the old Zal's kosher butcher and the Edmonton Kosher Deli. I used to go there with my dad all the time as a child and as a teenager to buy meat. I knew the owners -- I would see Mr. Nate Siegel on a regular basis. He was the mashgiach in the community for quite some time, but my favorite person who I'd always see there was Feivel Zalmanowitz who worked at the front counter. He was just a very kind man and when I was a child, sometimes he would have some pareve chocolate or candy or I'd want to buy a chocolate bar and he just gave it to me for free one time. He was just a really warm, friendly person and I'd always enjoy going to the butcher shop. My parents used to order in quite a lot of kosher meat and specialty cuts. Feivel always did what he could to accommodate my parents requests and I remember one time the phone rings and my mother answers and it's not, "Hi it's Feivel here and your order has come in," it was, "I got the veal!" I guess there was some kind of veal order that my parents had made and I remember my brother saying "Oh my gosh it's a good thing he got the right number," because that would have been quite shocking to somebody at the other end who would have no idea what he was talking about. I remember my grandfather visiting, my grandfather was a kosher butcher and he was visiting Edmonton. We took him to Edmonton kosher deli and got to meet the owners and the butchers there, and there's actually a photograph of my grandfather that I'll put on the screen, of him and Nate Siegel and Noach and Feivel Zalmanowitz all together in Edmonton Kosher Meats. That would have been taken in the mid-80s, I think I would have been around 11-ish when it was taken. Other places would be the old Jewish Community Center, I guess it's the Hillcrest Country Club area because that's where the Jewish Archives was located. I was writing for the newsletter for the Jewish Archives so I would always go there to meet with Debby Shoctor, who was then the archivist and to look at files and do research. It was in a very beautiful location. I'd usually ride my bicycle over there and spend some time wandering around the area. Other places would be, I guess the last one would be Bon Ton bakery. As a little girl and even up to now, I take regular trips there. Of course as a child I'd go with my father to pick up bread and treats. I remember the little gingerbread people that I think they still sell and the happy face cookies. There are a lot of things that they sold back then that they don't sell anymore that I miss, like the rum cake and the *hamantaschen*. I remember going there all the time with my dad. I remember meeting Mr. Edelman who was the owner. Mr. Edelman was a Holocaust survivor

so that led my father to tell me, to educate me about the Holocaust and I remember Mr. Edelman just being really friendly. I really enjoyed going to Bon Ton as well, because usually it meant I'd end up with a cookie or a treat or something to take home. When you're a kid, that's a big thing. I would say the one place that is the most similar that's still around and is still the most similar to the way it was when I was a child would be IGA. Especially since Andy himself is still involved in IGA. I would say that that has probably a very similar meaning for me and a feeling for me when I go there. When I think about Beth Israel it's a different location now, Bon Ton over the years has changed owners a couple of times and the vibe has changed a little bit, a lot of the merchandise has changed, a lot of the things that I used to go there for on a regular basis they don't sell anymore -- which is I mean, that's you know just part of change. That's just part of the way things change over time. I'm certainly not complaining about that, but I do feel differently about the place now.

Bliss Bakery wasn't around when I was a kid so that's been something more recent. Temple Beth Ora that's also something that's more recent. I would say that Andy's IGA would have a similar feeling for me as a child and now because it's still around for me to have something to compare it with. It's a place that hasn't changed all that much really.

I probably have to say Beth Israel Synagogue to answer that. As a child it was fun, it was a fun place to go and it was special because I didn't go very often. It was always fun because if you were a kid it was fun and then that changed when I got older. Returning there now as an adult, I have the hindsight to reflect upon how I felt about attending when I was a child but I think looking at myself in a more I guess you'd say "mature way" and wanting to experience services from an Orthodox point of view even though I myself am not what you would call observant in an Orthodox way... it's something that I find I'm getting to know more about the community, but I'm also getting to know more about myself and trying to make connections in my life. For me, today it's a really kind of enlightening experience because somebody with my, shall we say someone... who leans in the political direction in which I lean, which is quite far to the left, people like me are not usually found in Orthodox spaces, at least that's been my experience. So for me to navigate an Orthodox space as the person who I am, I'm finding it very interesting and I'm finding it a learning experience for sure. I would say that a few years ago it's

not even something I would really have given a whole lot of thought to because why would I? Why would I really concentrate about or think about that? I wasn't really involved in any religious community a few years ago and it wasn't something that particularly interested me, but you know cycle of life events happen and those tend to be the times that we connect to our cultures and to our heritage, so that is more when I started thinking about... You know Beth Israel was the choice because that was what my father wanted and that's the synagogue that he's always been affiliated with. Then when he and my brother started attending regularly I figured you know, okay I'll give it a chance. Sometimes it's important for us to step out of our comfort zone and to mingle with people who have different views than we do. I think that if you're always in your own echo chamber you don't have the opportunity to grow that you do if you step out of your comfort zone. It doesn't mean you have to agree with everybody and it doesn't mean that they have to agree with you, but it's important as people to grow and learn over life and to reflect on who you are.

I think that a space, a physical space, might be less important now than it did say even like 20-25 years ago. COVID has really shown us this -- we can be connected in ways without necessarily having a space. I've been zooming in to synagogue services in Vancouver and making new connections and meeting new people. There are things now that simply were impossible even ten years ago, even five years ago, so I'm not sure having a physical space is as much of a need as it was in past generations. Certainly there are spaces now that are Jewish spaces but are used interdenominationally or for special events where Jewish people from different backgrounds come together. We see that happen in all of the synagogues, at the Jewish Drop-In Center. There are Jewish events or Jewish-related events that happen in places that are not even traditionally Jewish like the Heritage Festival in Hawrelak Park, like the Jewish Film Festival which is held in a variety of locations, like the Holocaust memorial event that's held on the Legislature grounds. There are Jewish connections to places now. We're making Jewish connections in places that are not historically Jewish, so to have one overarching space, I don't know, it would almost seem not as necessary now.