

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Paula Weil - Hello Deli

April, 2021

Well interesting story -- we moved from Calgary to Edmonton to open up a motorcycle shop. My husband and my brother Josh were in partnership in Calgary and decided that the one shop wasn't enough to support both families so we moved to Edmonton. He opened up just across from Commonwealth Stadium. It was called Accessories Unlimited and they had accessories for all kinds of motorcycles. They built bikes from the ground up and then they also accessorized vehicles by motorbikes. So he was in that for five years and then he sold the interest to my brother because, for Eric, it was a way for him to get into business for himself which he always wanted, but it wasn't a vehicle that he could relate to. So he sold his interest to my brother Josh and we took the kids and we rented a motorhome and went to California for six weeks. Wherever we went we always made a point of searching for the Jewish delis and loved them. Edmonton didn't have one at the time so we came back and made the natural progression from Harley's to corned beef. We rented the spot right next to Eric's uncle, who was the kosher butcher, Jack Woodrow, may he rest in peace, in partnership with his brother-in-law and cousin. So he rented a part of the other half of the building and we started it in 1979. We opened December 1979 and we were bringing in the bread from Winnipeg because we were told Edmonton didn't have good rye bread. We tried and this Winnipeg rye bread was amazing but the first time we brought we had to delay our opening because the first shipment was delayed by a snowstorm in Regina. Until it got to us we couldn't open. So we did that for a while and then it was never as good as fresh baked bread so we decided that good bread fresh was better than the best bread stale. So we started buying from Alberta Bakery and then the Bagel Bin opened up. Bon Ton at that point wasn't doing any commercial sales so we started with Alberta Bakery and then Bagel Bin opened and we started using their rye bread and such. That was December '79 and we closed in June of '97. When we opened it was "kosher style". We did have a Reuben and there was cheese and meat on that and then after a while, we got many many requests for things with *treif* and so we did add a BLT to the menu, we did also add an h.a.m. and cheese to the menu. I can't even say the word, I have to spell it. They were big sellers, what can I tell you.

We added live jazz every Thursday night. We probably added it in something like '82-'85. Every Thursday night we had live jazz and Eric advertised it through the Journal. And they were very, very busy. We had entertainers like Bobby Cairns, may his soul rest in peace, a Juno award winner, a fab and amazing person. He was an unbelievably talented musician and he was just one of the many. Tommy Banks used to come often -- he wouldn't play at the deli, but he loved it, because he wouldn't play on a keyboard he would only play on a piano. There was no way we could get a piano in the door of Hello Deli. But he and his wife Ida, made their souls rest in peace, supported us tremendously. They helped us find people and gave us lots of really good advice. It became a staple, it was known all over and became a very integral part of Hello Deli. It was something that we really loved.

Our son worked every Thursday night when he was in university and then we were one of the founding members of a Taste of Edmonton. When it first opened it was at the Convention Center on the huge patio there. It was a fabulous venue but it became too successful and it outgrew it by the second year. It was like a fire hazard. It was way too crowded so that was when it moved to Winston Churchill Square. We did that for several years and then when our son was in university, he got the idea that he would like to take over and split it with us -- I would do the food production and he would do everything else. We did all the festivals and we did that for several years. Once Eric was out of town with the kids, probably in Kelowna, and I was with a friend. We went to the Saturday night of the Folk Festival because there was a *klezmer* group there. We were walking along and like every five steps I walked into one of our customers and they kept saying "You should have a booth here, why don't you have a booth here?" So the next year we had a booth there. We were always vegetarian, we had latkes and we did falafel with all the accoutrements that went with that. We did very well at all the festivals.

I guess the one thing that I want to mention is that Hello Deli wasn't just me, it was a partnership with my husband. I was the cook, the chef, I did all of that. Eric, he just did everything. He was at the front counter at lunchtime, he did the repairs, he did the accounting, if I needed anything he'd go running and schlepping. He'd pick up anything I needed, no matter where it was. Even in the catering business he supported me completely. He got me the proper vehicle, if I was at an event and realized I forgot a piece of equipment, he'd zip it out there right away. From the

moment we started Hello Deli it was a real partnership it just went through the whole time. Even when I was on my own, he was always there, being my right hand, supporting me, and helping me through everything -- a real partnership.