

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Paula Weil - WEM/Fantasyland Hotel

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I was a catering manager so when people had things at the hotel they would come to me and we would go over a menu and the whole event, and sign a contract. Then I would oversee everything being done. Now when the kosher kitchen opened up there, the first event was the *bar mitzvah* of one of Nader's sons I believe. It was an amazing thing -- one of the ovens quit and it was crazy, but somehow we got it all together with **Jeff Shechter**, bless his heart. He was amazing. I would often help in that kitchen with several things that I knew how to give things Yiddish *ta'am*, Jewish flavor. The chefs there, with all due respect, were wonderful chefs but they weren't in tune to that palette. So I helped quite a bit with that. Rabbi Ari [Drelich] would supervise a lot; Lawrence Bliss at that time didn't have the bakery yet, so he was helping out and supervising, being the *mashgiach*. It was very cool actually, helping get that up and running. There were a few hiccups with it, but overall it's been a wonderful uh thing the Ghermezians did to have that in the community. It's important to have those things and so the rest -- having the restaurant at West Edmonton Mall, having the Kollel, and the school, just everything... They did a tremendous amount for this city and I think a lot more than people ever knew. They did a lot behind the scenes that they weren't looking for credit for, but just to support the *yiddishkeit* in the community. They were fantastic and they were great to work for. I really enjoyed working there.

When I left there, I at that point decided that I wanted to go back out on my own. Although I enjoyed working there, I wanted to go back to being entrepreneurial. So that's when I went back to catering and event planning and that was in 2003. I still had been doing small little catering even while I was working there, the little things like *brises*, unveilings, and even the odd funeral. But then I went back to full-time catering and I started doing event planning -- wedding planning, *bar mitzvah* planning, and I really enjoyed working with my customers. The majority of my customers were Jewish, and I loved working with Jewish people. It was the mentality that we shared that was so attractive to me. But, of course, if non-Jewish people came to me I was only too happy to work with them also. I did Ann McClellan's daughter's wedding and several

other high-profile things that were always very successful. I was delighted that they had chosen me and honored me with their trust.