

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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First would be the Beth Shalom Synagogue because I grew up going there as a child. We were there a lot of course and through both my brother's Bar Mitzvahs and Sunday school, so that might be the most significant place for me. I was married there, our children had their Bar Mitzvahs there. Our family goes there regularly, it's our synagogue and it's our go-to synagogue for any religious needs. I can't even walk by or drive by without memories because I did spend a lot of time there as a child. So of course, those kinds of memories... and obviously they must have all been pretty positive, except that I got booted out several times, but even that's a positive memory.

There was actually a call for submissions and I put together a proposal with a maquette and my proposal was accepted. [Kagan's father was a] refugee from Germany, he escaped from Germany just after Kristallnacht. That connection had a great deal to do with the construction and concept, but the actual reason I was chosen was because... I think what happened was the Federation put out a call to different artists in the city and I was one of them. So I was invited to submit a proposal -- I had in my mind I wanted to create a sculpture that had a universal concept. Actually at the time I was working on small sculptures based on the ideas of vessels. So I was putting bowls and such into my sculptures and imagining them as vessels that had a human connection. So when I went to work on the concept for the memorial I immediately thought of a vessel concept. The first thing I was thinking about was doing some sort of a well that would be a sunken vessel. But that then evolved into the idea of a cup, specifically a *Kiddush* cup because I imagined it symbolizing an object that would be passed around and drunk from. That was a very universal idea of community, so I was connecting the idea of vessel to community. Because it was important to me that this was an object that people inherently would appreciate and connect to, that's how the idea of having a *Kiddush* cup as the base for the idea for the sculpture came about. The *Kiddush* cup is cracked and broken, and the concept is that it's this universal object of community that's been battered and bashed but it still stands strong. The entwining metal bits

that surround it represent oppression and fire, and the base of it is sitting on the prayer for the deceased and the quotations beneath it to lift people to have hope and hope in humanity. All of those things... there are little details in the base that I built that represent images on tombstones of people that died in the Holocaust. So one image is of a branch that's broken. That is often seen on a child's tombstone, not now but a hundred years ago where it symbolized a branch that was broken too soon. Another image is of a butterfly which we would see on Jewish tombstones, which symbolizes a metamorphosis or arising from the earthly soul to the heavenly soul. The third is of a *Menorah* which is often seen on a tombstone which symbolizes eternal light. So I put all these little details into the memorial. All I can say is that when I have done tours of the memorial these are some of the things I talk about and people are very interested.

I was absolutely concerned with connecting with the Jewish community. It was of foremost important to me not just with the community, but to survivors of the Holocaust. It was the most important thing to me when I was building this structure that I connected with the community, that the structure connected, and so a hundred percent that's what it was all about. When the memorial was first unveiled and then the years after... I would say that was number one, was that that connection was created, so a hundred percent, absolutely it's hugely important that the memorial meant something, and is significant, that there is a connection, and that the memorial succeeded, really, to satisfy what the community needed in order to mourn and to pay tribute to the Holocaust.