

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Zalmanowitz Brothers

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The first one was Zal's Kosher Market, no longer in operation so it's not an advertisement, but it was the place where I would have first met the Jewish community. It was my dad and my uncle Feivel and our uncle Jack Woodrow's store, and then from there I would say the next one I remember is Beth Israel synagogue, Talmud Torah, the Beth Shalom synagogue. The Talmud Torah was the center of it, where we all went to school. I would go to concerts where my older siblings were in them with Beth Israel shul on 119th Street, and Talmud Torah both for going to school and going to junior congregation Saturday mornings. You know those were all the places that I associated with being Jewish in Edmonton. The Talmud Torah school on 133rd Street 106th Avenue was also a place... when I went there, there was a grade seven for one year that I was there. After I went to Westminster Junior High School during the day, but three days a week we went to evening school at Talmud Torah until grade nine. Another place, the *Chevra Kadisha* and the Jewish Cemetery were also Jewish institutions, purely Jewish institutions that I remember. Later on, you know, as you age, the *Chevra Kadisha* and the Jewish Cemetery are places you visit more and more as people you know get older and pass on.

I just have a couple of memories of two things -- it would be on *Shabbat* afternoon, my dad was *Shomer Shabbat* but in the summer he would always regularly take me for a walk to the fountain on 133rd Street. I still associate that with *Shabbat* afternoon or later in the evening when the days were very long. That fountain is still there today although refurbished. The other thing I do remember is junior congregation. The kiddush, since we were kids, was not alcoholic but there was always these great little ice cream dixie cups and sandwich cookies. That sticks in my memory. One final thing, if Barry brought up the *Chevra Kadisha*, I remember being quite young but being at shul during the week for *Mincha/Mariv* and there was a meeting, a *Chevra Kadisha* meeting and since we are *Kohanim* and we're not allowed to be part of the *Chevra Kadisha*. But a couple of the people that were involved in the *Chevra Kadisha* wanted to have my dad act as an arbitrator. There was a disagreement over that -- the *Chevra Kadisha* was not being kept in

neat and good order, and my father refused to be involved with that, I still remember that well. I forgot to mention about the Beth Shalom, it was also, although I didn't realize it at the time, it was also sort of the Jewish Community Center. I think it was kind of designed, I remember seeing some plans, but we also had our AZA and BBYO meetings there. So it was a very central location for all of Jewish life in Edmonton. The thing was that the institutions that we've mentioned were really the only institutions and the only dichotomy would have been between the rules at the Beth Shalom which was Conservative and at the Beth Israel. There wasn't a very big difference between them -- Beth Shalom you sat together everybody and in the Beth Israel women's and men's seating were separate. But they were like a block apart and there was a free exchange of kids on the high holidays. I knew both buildings equally well. So I would say it was more of a unified community with the Talmud Torah being sort of the most central where almost every child went. We had, I think, at one time 360 kids and every grade had at least two classes of children. It was a very, very vibrant institution as well. Like the Beth Israel had *Oneg Shabbat* on Friday nights. I remember reading the bulletin and seeing who was the convener of it, I didn't ever know what a convener was.

We also had this unique look at the Jewish community because we all worked at the butcher shop at one time or another as “go boys”. We did delivery and just helped out. I had an encyclopedic knowledge of every customer's address that I can still mention even though nobody lives at any of those places anymore.

As Danny mentioned, the Jewish Community Center at the Talmud Torah was really the gym and they had a lounge there. That was it but I remember it being a hub of activity especially on Sunday. There was always something going. With respect to Danny's encyclopedia memory of all the customers, if Barry or I are with him in a car driving in the city he will point out a house, and it might not even be the same house, it could it could have been torn down, but he'd ask us who lived there. We have to answer and usually we get it right.

The first butcher shop -- there were two butcher shops that went under the name Zal's Kosher. The first one was on 124th Street about 109th Avenue, it was there from, I would say, 1955 to maybe 1958. Then they built a building on 107th Avenue between 107th and 108th on the east

side, I don't have the exact address. Now Woodshed Burgers is where it is, and that lasted from 1958 to about 1981/82. Everyone retired and about five years later they decided to come out of retirement with Nate Siegel and his wife Lil. They opened up a butcher shop called Edmonton Kosher Meats and Deli. It was my uncle Feivel, my father, Noach Zalmanowitz, and Nate Siegel and his wife Lil on 127th Street and again between 109th and 110th Avenue. The building is still there and they operated that while they were all in their late 70s, maybe even to their 80s. It operated for five or six years. It was quite a funny place, quite a social place but certainly served a need in the community. It was funny being there -- we were older by then, we were adults and being there and watching someone who was new who came in who thought this was a regular commercial enterprise and couldn't believe how slow it was. I used to enjoy watching them sort of adjust to the fact that this was a hobby kosher butcher shop, but it was sort of operated as a kind of a hobby for senior citizens. It was quite a social place for people who liked to come in, people came in just to talk, not to buy anything.

If I could add to the butcher shop, the Edmonton Kosher Deli that I gave rise to, which Barry was saying that it was a slow-motion butcher shop. My friend Dr. Jonathan Tankel who's from South Africa, when he moved here he would buy huge orders of frozen meat because he was working in Valleyview. When he would be ready to pick up one of the boxes my uncle Feivel, he was in his late 70s or earlier 80s, would not allow Jonathan to carry it out to the car, he would have to carry it out to the car because it was always service first at that little *kosher* deli.

Well the old Beth Israel synagogue on 119th Street is still there, but it's somebody's bachelor pad. It's on 119th Street 102nd Avenue and it was purchased by someone who converted it into quite an elaborate residence. I live in that area now, in a condominium on Jasper Avenue 123rd Street. I walk to work and I walk past it every day and it always evokes memories. That whole area I associated with being Jewish in Edmonton, because that's where the synagogue was, so it still means something. My wife and I were members [at Beth Shalom] as well as the Beth Israel because she preferred it, and we actually got married in Beth Shalom. At least some of my children had their Bat Mitzvah... one of them had their Bat Mitzvah at Beth Shalom. Both of them are still very meaningful places and I always associate them with Jewish Edmonton.

There was Alberta Bakery that was owned by the Schechter family on 95th Street. It had a retail in the front and then the bakery in the back. My dad and uncles actually sold Alberta Bakery bread -- they made challahs. There wasn't a widespread kosher certification with markings on all of the packages, but that was the place where you went for your bread. Then down the street about 10 blocks was the first Beth Israel synagogue. It still stands at 95th Street at the top of Cameron Avenue and it's a lovely location. It was sold and it's been a church for many, many years. It's now clad in maybe aluminum or plastic siding, but underneath it, I remember my dad would drive by and he'd show me that on the corners there were these round balls as an architectural feature with Stars of David on them. That really made me wonder about it and as I've worked downtown for my entire adult life it has an historical plaque so I can see what it looked like. Which reminds me, my parents got married in that building. We have a very short film of them getting married inside and of them on the balcony for the reception. The first Beth Israel synagogue, which has the plaque on it now for pinpoint location, is owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. It's called Saint Boniface Church, it's actually a German-speaking Catholic community. I was involved with the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta on the project of trying to acquire that building when the Archdiocese no longer needed it for church, which at the time they thought would be pretty soon. We actually had a feasibility study done with an architect with experience in historical restoration. An engineering firm did it and the brick is still underneath the vinyl siding. The Archdiocese said yes, they would certainly want to see the building restored at the point in time that they no longer need it, but it's not really an active project anymore. We followed up every year and I don't think anybody actively pursues it, but I used to send a letter once a year indicating that we're still interested in acquiring it and that it's a historic resource even though it's not designated and that we would want to be able to restore it. So who knows if that will ever happen.

Danny I think or Barry mentioned that the community was not, as it was, a very unified community and that was also seen through *kashrut*. The Jewish Federation or whatever it was called -- the Jewish Community Council at that time had an actual *kashrut* committee and *kashrut*, it was just a given that the Orthodox rabbi would be the supervisor, the *mashgiach* for the bakery and the butcher shop. And as I say, there were no EK stamps, there was nothing as

Danny said, but the Federation made it a priority to have a *kashrut* committee. Paula, I think your father was chair of that committee along with Dr. Joe Bugis and Justice Ron Berger at times. And they ensured that there was a proper *kashrut* in the committee, there was custody in the community. There was made sure there was meat, there was baked goods, which I think goes to Danny's point that we were much more unified at that point. Such an animal no longer exists with the Jewish Federation.

Another place that I do remember and I think Danny and Barry will remember because, again Saturday nights in the winter, *Motzei Shabbat*, my father would take me to Rubin's Grocery. That was Florie Axler's mother and father, Farrel Shadlyn's grandparents. They owned a little convenience grocery store on about 95th Street and 115th Avenue, somewhere in there. They were both regular customers of the butcher shop so we would do reciprocity and Saturday we would go there and pick up a few groceries. I think that was also known as a bit of a Jewish landmark. There was a funny story about the Rubin's grocery store because it was a rough area of the city eventually and I recall reading in the newspaper one day, I probably would have been, maybe in university, by that time early university, and there had been an attempted robbery that was not successful. The story was that when the robber came in and asked for money and Mr. Rubin had a big knife because he also sold meat. He picks up the knife and chases the robber away and the newspaper reporter said "Gee, that was fairly impressive, that was risky to do,". And he said "Well, the robbery would have worked but there was one thing that the robber failed to take into account -- that in 1932 I was a military policeman in the Polish army,".

We haven't mentioned the newer buildings in the community and I think that speaks to something, because all three of us would have contributed substantially with both time and money into the building of the Beth Israel synagogue in Wolf Willow and the new Talmud Torah which is on about 173rd Street and about 68th Avenue. Our kids all went to the new Talmud Torah -- the new Talmud Torah was central in terms of activities surrounding the Talmud Torah but not the community at large anymore. The neighborhood that it's in is not as... I would say not as nice in terms of residential surroundings. But we never mentioned them, even though those were the ones that we would have contributed to the most and those were the ones that our children would have in their memories. For that the Beth Israel synagogue remained important

because that was the continuity that we had. We were honored as brothers for something to do with the Beth Israel and I'm going to just bring a picture of the three of us that they took for the brochure because looking back on it, it's interesting.

So while he's doing that, Barry mentioned he went to grade seven at the Talmud Torah on 133rd Street, I think it was the first grade seven class. Two years later it wasn't in operation for me, but for my children there was a junior high school that went all the way to grade nine as a day school. That lasted for quite a number of years and I think in the past few years the classes have gotten so that they've had to split classes. It's not that there's fewer Jewish people in the city, it's that there is more choice, more diversity, and I think less of a connectivity to one central institution.

There was also the Jewish Community Center on 156th Street that was very important in my children's life. There was a swimming pool there, that's where the cub scouts met, and the youth groups, and that's where the Beth Ora Reform synagogue had its premises. So it was a community hub for a variety of reasons and it was sustained for about 25 years maybe, from inception. It was also just a beautiful piece of property with wonderful views, not unlike your virtual view behind you, Paula. But just the whole River Valley, with floor to ceiling windows. So it was there, but it was then decided to have a sort of a non-communal Jewish Community Center where all of the offices were central. The only truly universal organization is the *Chevre Kadisha*. When you talk about the importance of things, if I'm driving anywhere near there I will always make it a point to drive by the cemetery, even though I don't stop and go there. That is also a real anchor for me -- our parents are both there and as are our maternal grandparents buried there. We have not seen the graves because we're *Kohanim* and we don't go in except for the funeral of the immediate family. It has been an interesting observation watching the graveyard fill up. Over our lives, we're all in our 60s, and just to see that and we know that there is a new piece of land for cemetery and that monies are being raised right now (there was an add-on to the United Jewish Appeal)... but it makes me wonder. I always thought that I would be buried at the cemetery here.

A good Jewish community in terms of providing us with education and feelings of social and Jewish responsibility, as well as responsibility to the greater community. I wish I could turn back the clock and have a similar life for next generations, but that's just the musings of a recent senior citizen.

I have a strong identity to the past community, but I do feel that the community that exists today, and maybe it's always that you look back at the good old days, I see quite a difference in the community. But still, very fond memories. I do have fond memories growing up with my brothers and getting beaten up on a regular basis too. I'm the baby so I just thought I'd throw that in.