

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Eric & Elexis Schloss

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I'm Elexis Schloss and that's a tricky name to say quickly. And I'm Eric Schloss.

I'm a southern girl, I'm from Medicine Hat. [Eric] was born in Camrose and grew up in Camrose. Well I came because we got married and we'd like to live together. I came to Edmonton and honestly it was love at first sight not only for Eric, well you already know Paula how much I love Edmonton. I came here 53 years ago, we've been married 53 years.

Elexis has an interesting story about Medicine Hat. Growing up in Medicine Hat we had a fabulous Jewish community of about 40 families. My grandmother bought the first synagogue there which was a used Model T dealership. When I was a little girl, I knew nothing about any problems or anything -- I wish the world the whole world was that naive. I had a friend over and then the next day I went to her house. Then she came behind the screen door and she said "I'm sorry, you can't come in," and I said "Well why? what did I do?". She said, "No, my grandmother says I can't play with you anymore because you killed Jesus,". So I said "It wasn't me, I don't even know Jesus! It must have been my brother Lionel, he's always in trouble,". So that was my first bit of antisemitism. Not only that, I was so afraid to go to Calgary because I heard Jesus died in Calgary -- but it's actually *Calvary*.

But the community was so interesting that in the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv, I came around the corner and there was a picture of our entire *cheder* class in black and white, with all of the kids and the rabbi. It was an example of Western Jewish communities.

As I said, I grew up in Camrose but I came with my parents and family to all the high holidays in Edmonton and to the seder at my aunt's. My folks belonged to the Beth Shalom and it was on 103rd Street -- the old Talmud Torah at that site, but I had the first Bar Mitzvah in 1951 at the new building on Jasper Avenue, so that's my claim to fame. Other than that, my memories of growing up and coming to Edmonton are based mainly on visiting. We usually went over to my

aunt's [and uncle's], [their] name was Joe and Fanny Samuels. They lived on Connaught Drive at the time, not far from where our house is now. I was very familiar with this area and that's where we had come for high holidays, seders, and everything else. The other place in Edmonton that I was very familiar with, actually was the Macdonald Hotel because my mum and dad were in the clothing business so they came in to see travelers there. They'd take my brother and I with, so we'd spend Sunday afternoons in the Macdonald Hotel running around the hotel as kids. We'd read our comic books and see all the other Jewish men in the clothing business in the halls, so that was fun. I really can't think of any place more than that. Another place very important to us was the old Talmud Torah because our children went there.

As time went on, my other strong relationship was -- I was the Chief of Design for the Beth Israel synagogue when it was being built out in the West End. I was working with Joe Shoctor to get that building up.

You know [the old Talmud Torah building on 135th Street] was a lovely building and just to drive up and the camaraderie of all of the other Jewish mothers picking up their kids carpooling, it was very special.

When I was in university, I lived in the Sammy House, it was the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity on the South Side -- it was on 88th Avenue. Not far, just around the corner, was the tuck shop which was the main place that people had coffee and such on campus. So it was very central and there were there were almost no apartments at that time, this was in the 50s and uh so uh those of us from out of town had lived in the fraternity house and most of the people there were from Calgary because Calgary had hardly any university at the time. A lot of the guys that were there were in engineering at the time, a lot of them were in chemical engineering like Irving Kipnes was, but almost none of them stayed with chemical engineering. Anyways, I was there for about three years. The fellows in Edmonton who were going to university would come over for lunch and I remember there was always an argument about where should we get our kosher food from -- Friedman's or Zal's the butcher. There's always an argument.

Part of my love for Edmonton was when I moved here, I didn't know a single soul. I didn't know anyone and the community of the ladies were so welcoming. Millie Singer took me under her wing, Celia Boltzen and Ceta Margolis were just wonderful to me and immediately brought me into the Jewish organizations. For several years we put on a beautiful ball once a year at the Macdonald Hotel. Just getting to know these ladies -- and they would have me for lunch -- and people like the Weinlos's, who invited us for our first seder. The community was so warm that I just loved it immediately.

We remember that house particularly because it's off Ravine Drive. I was by the other day and the house, of course, is still there, but it was famous because it was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was one of the few Edmonton houses that was really well known. Actually, an American author did a pictorial of all of the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings and their house was in it. As well, he actually influenced us too because when Elexis did the design for the new Beth Israel synagogue we had just been to Chicago. We went over to the neighboring community where Frank Lloyd Wright lived. We saw the houses, and the type of brick that was in many of them we used, or Elexis used, for the design of the exterior of the new Beth Israel synagogue. I was very influenced by that type of design. I was involved with the architect from the beginning and they did all of the work with designing the exterior and I did all of the interior. I think it stood up for itself over time, it still looks very contemporary but warm. That was the look I was going for -- it was about 20 years ago, I can't believe.

Are there any places that meant something to you but are no longer in existence? If so, what do you miss about them?

Well I was thinking of the Sammy House and the houses that my aunt and uncle lived in, first on Connaught Drive. The houses are still there but of course *they're* not there. I have lots of memories about them and also my uncle's brother was also Samuel, Ralph Samuels, Dr. Harold Samuel's father. I was always over at their house too, I called them Aunt Rose and Uncle Ralph. So the families were very close at the time. With me Paula, you know I was the Chief of Design for Maclab for 18 years so I've done a lot of housing. I try, I make an effort not to remember

everything or I'd be so sentimental all the time. But any and everything in Edmonton I think is beautiful.

We've been in our house for 42 years, but about 30 years ago there's a well-known film director Anne Wheeler who was well known in Edmonton. They asked us whether they could use our house for a film called *Angel Square* which was being shot mainly on the South Side. So they went and they put snow in front of our house, it was a Christmas scene supposed to be in the 1940s. So there was a scene in the front, they put actually a Christmas tree in our front window, and then they were shooting it and the girl who was directing it, actually her name was Wolch, she was a cousin to Ron Wolch, I think she was from Winnipeg. Anyways, they were filming it and all of a sudden she said "Halt! Hold! Cut, cut, cut!" Everybody said "What's the matter?" She said "We've got to remove the mezuzah from the door!" With Santa coming, this was Christmas. So anyway, it was a funny incident. I have a picture, actually, from it. I don't know if you can see this, we started the movie and Elexis said that she looked like Joan Crawford and I was Humphrey Bogart. We're with our son JJ who was a teenager at the time. Anyway we all dressed up for that, I took time off for work, and we had a lot of fun. So the next scene was in the Corbett Hall. They turned the basement into an old Woolworth's store and there were Christmas decorations. JJ and I were supposed to be shopping. We wound up on the cutting room floor, but Elexis was in the filming. The star of the film was Ned Beatty, he was Santa Claus. I remember we brought a whole bunch of people over for the premiere, to watch Elexis premiere as a star. Then we offered an award to anyone who could find Eric and JJ. We never ended up in the film, but this house that we live in has been used for other movies, for commercials.

This house has a really interesting history Paula, because in the 30s when Aberhart was the Premier, he was a pretty mean guy. The Lieutenant Governor and his wife were living over in Government House, behind the old museum. So Aberhart went one night to the Lieutenant Governor and he said "I want passage on two orders, I want royal assent on two things: the first one is complete censorship over the Edmonton Journal," and the Lieutenant Governor said "No chance,". The second ask was he wanted to print Alberta money and the Lieutenant Governor said, "Again, sorry,". Aberhart was very vindictive and didn't know that the beautiful building was not owned federally, it was owned provincially. So he sent in packers and evicted them from

the house the very next morning. There's a wonderful picture of them out on 102nd Avenue with the dog, the nanny, the prams, the children, and their luggage all out on 2nd Avenue. Our house was actually built by Alberta's first Supreme Court Justice and he said to them, "Look, I've been dying to move into that brand new Macdonald Hotel, why don't you move and take my house?" So this house, actually, for 11 years was Government House. When I was first looking at it, there were two of those little Birks picture frames on the mantle. And in childish handwriting said "thank you for letting us stay with you, Princess Margaret and Princess Elizabeth." So the house has a wonderful history. When our daughter was young and if she wasn't behaving, I would say to her, "Queen Elizabeth stayed in that room, you better go hang up your clothes." It didn't work.