

## **JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE**

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Francie Nobleman (Part 1)

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I think when I first came, my first connections were with the Jewish Community Centre, the one down 156 Street. And basically, myself and my husband and kids lived there. Not literally, but there was a pool there, which we would go to every Sunday. There was a lot of volunteering, of course, Temple Beth Ora, the synagogue that I joined when I came here, was also housed out of the Jewish Community Centre. It was such a wonderful facility, I have lots of good memories, but that Talmud Torah, both the old one which my kids attended up 'til our oldest was in grade three, and then the school which moved to the West End. I spent many, many hours there volunteering and being there for the kids. Menorah Academy, actually, the year it started, one of our kids attended kindergarten there. So I had volunteer connections with that. Beth Shalom for a period of about 10 years, we were members of both Temple Beth Ora and Beth Shalom and I worked with a lot of people at Beth Shalom in a volunteer capacity.

Probably the most memorable involvement was in something called *Mitzvah Day*. We gathered thousands, if not more, of items for about 22 different charities. It happens once a year, the third Sunday in November. And that physically -- all the items were gathered at the Jewish Community Centre. So I spent a lot of time there and have lots of stories about volunteers. I can't actually pull out one single memory, except the vision of that gym being packed full of about 150 people and each department, if you would call it that. So there was a department with food, department with clothing, departments with furniture, that sort of stuff. Each department was housed by volunteers, and we had streams of the charities coming in to pick up their own gift boxes. We also had other streams of people pulling up in cars to deliver to families. So I have that vision of the activity at the Jewish Community Centre that revolved around that event every year.

So I think when the kids were younger, I was very closely tied in with the Talmud Torah and more involved with that then. As they evolved, I got more involved, probably in the synagogue.

So my connections were more intense for certain segments of years with different places. The projects that we were doing, the fundraisers, the chess club at the Talmud Torah, whatever was happening sort of depended on the stage that my family was at. Our middle kid loved playing chess and so I thought, well, I'll start a chess club at noon, maybe we'll get Josh and his best friend, Max. We'll get two kids and they'll play each other and we'll see, maybe other kids will be interested. On the first day that we "launched", it was lunchtime, and we'd announced it in the announcements. We had 75 kids show and at that time, I'm not sure there were even 200 kids in the school. It was remarkable. These kids were passionate about learning chess, playing chess. There was a fellow named Jonathan Schaeffer, I don't know if that's a name that's come up, he's a university professor. I'm not even sure if they're still in Edmonton. He's a brilliant guy. He created the checkers program called Deep Blue, the computerized program that beat the world checkers champion. He was a genius at chess. So he coached the kids after school in chess, and this group of kids was just interested in this game. We ended up going to the City Finals, then the Provincial Finals, ironically held in Red Deer at a hotel called the Black Knight Inn. So that was remarkable to see these kids so focused and so interested. Who might otherwise have had other learning challenges, but they were so passionate about this game and playing, watching the ladder and observing who was playing who. That was a wonderful, wonderful thing that I recall from Talmud Torah.

So when the Talmud Torah moved from the old building to the new building, I believe our daughter, who's now 35, was in grade three. So the other two would have been, like, grade one and maybe just preschool when they moved to the new building. It was quite an interesting adventure, you'll probably have somebody else talk about that. But I certainly have a lot of memories in both buildings. We did something called Sephardi Days when we were in the old building. I worked with a couple of other volunteers, Ruth Coppens and Leah Goldford. Leah you would know from Beth Israel. It was a really interesting thing, because most of us are Ashkenazi Jews, right? Our parents came, or grandparents came, from Eastern Europe. So Leah had said, "You know, we're woefully ignorant of this whole other branch of Judaism, we need to let people know about it." So people like Odette Masliyah and others who came from different backgrounds. We had stations and the whole entire school, every classroom, every teacher was

involved. They moved from station to station and learned about Sephardic Jews. So that certainly was an image that stands out.

Oh, the pool, the JCC pool. I loved that place. We had such great memories there with family, friends, and kids... It's a very expensive proposition to run a facility like that and there are lots of other facilities. But yeah, I do miss that. The gym, our kids used to play there after [synagogue] services. They'd run and play basketball and have a great old time. So yeah, that was quite remarkable singing and carrying the Torahs all the way from the old location of the Jewish Community Centre to the *Chevra Kadisha* Building, just off 123rd [Street] and 105th [Avenue], and settling in there.

That is what we call "the house that Marshall built". The new home for Temple Beth Ora, Marshall Hundert was instrumental in acting as a liaison between the *Chevra Kadisha* and Temple Beth Ora. He made sure that we found a new home and that it worked for all the parties. I've enjoyed being a volunteer and aspects of being a volunteer coordinator. If you can match the right people with the right job, then everybody has a good time and everything moves forward. So I guess that's sort of what sticks with me from those years of volunteering, no matter what the organization or the location. What I do miss is the energy of all these people coming together for various projects that may have been months and months in the making. But when they actually happened, there's just a magic about it, wherever the place was. Whether it was at the JCC as I remember it with that gorgeous view of the River Valley and the Temple Beth Ora. As you know, Karen sings, sang, in the choir that was associated with Temple Beth Ora called *Chavurat Hashir*. So the image of them singing and us looking down at the River Valley in the fall with the colours changing, that's a strong image of the place, I guess.

But it's more of the energy of the people. As well as the number of different Mitzvah Days that were also in that place, the energy of all these people who normally would not be mixing. We had people from Beth Israel who had never met people from Beth Ora or people who really had nothing to do with Jewish community, but they wanted to volunteer for this because they felt that it was a way of giving back. So you had all these people working side by side for a full day of high energy, something that everybody could walk away from and feel good. And that's more

than the facts, I guess. The sense that stays with me, and it happened in a place, but it was that energy and that connection of people and I really personally enjoyed that.