

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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Well, we came here in '81 and my husband started by working in Wetaskiwin and I continued working with the Federal Government in the Medical Services Branch. He was hired in 1984 to the Talmud Torah School as a grade four Hebrew teacher. So he worked there for five years, we started our family and we had five children. So Talmud Torah would have to be my number one spot. I was a volunteer there for 20 years. And every Jewish ladies group in the city that looks for fundraising or is involved in doing any kind of activities, not as a member so much as a worker, I came out. Then 18 years ago, I got hired by Jewish Family Services. So I've split my time between JSS and Talmud Torah and I've been quite active. I've helped out in summertime in Heritage Days, I help fundraise in Hadassah and Na'amat, National Council of Jewish Women, or you name it, I've been there fundraising. I was a bingo chairman at the school, I was a casino chairman, anywhere there's money to be made to help Jewish organizations. My husband when he taught there, they were still on 135th, so my children were in the school. That's when they moved to the West End, five minutes from our home. I was there every day in the new school and every day in the old school. So between volunteering when my husband was still teaching, and then going on when my kids attended, I was a daily volunteer there.

Maybe four years ago, we were on 124 Street in my time. Two different locations went over by Stony Plain Road, 103/104 Avenue. Then we moved to 102 Avenue and 124 Street and then we moved to the West End.

When we first came here my mother passed away soon after, and my dad moved in with me. I brought him home from Toronto from the shiva and we were quite involved with Chabad. My children and my dad went on a regular basis and he *schlepped* them behind him every Saturday morning. I think I've volunteered and made thousands of latkes for them over the years, and stuffed every calendar in the September newsletter. You name it, I've done it. Blew enough balloons up for *Purim* and *Lag Ba'omer* and any kind of picnic and cooked and done everything.

And that's Beth Israel as well. In the last few years my son joined Beth Israel. Also through Jewish Family Services over the last 18 years we used to do a Meals on Wheels program before COVID stepped in and said 'Uh uh, no no'. So we would use the Beth Shalom and Beth Israel. I would request the use of their kitchen and we would take out meals to seniors that were in nursing homes or at home alone. Four or five times a year we would take out a meal. I would collect 30-40 volunteers to do the cooking, the cleaning, and the delivery.

Because the position I have as a SMART worker in Jewish Family Services began eighteen years ago this August as a joint effort between the Jewish Drop-In Centre, another place where I hang out a lot, and Jewish Family Services....16 to 18 years later, I'm still here. The Drop-In Centre is a great place for seniors. It's had its ups and downs over the years, and the kinds of seniors that it attracts today are different from the seniors it attracted 15 years ago because the baby boomers are a whole different type of senior. They've been educated and worked all their life, whereas older seniors that are in their 80s and 90s were survivors from the War or housewives in their home and you know, they have different priorities and different things they were looking for and were happy to come out and volunteer and help in the kitchen and do the meals and they would take transportation. I used to be a driver volunteer for people. When my dad was alive, I used to drive one day a month. It was my day to drive six people from the West End. Now these people who come, they're looking for parking -- they don't want to ride there and there is no parking around there. It's very difficult. The programs that you offer, and the interest that people have are not the same that they once had. But they have... I love the lunch program. They draw in lots of people, lots of locals come that can walk there. Then I was on the committee for the seniors for the OPH (Our Parents' Home). So I worked on that committee for at least 10 or 12 years, helping in the hearing, helping provide the statistics during the building time and the fundraising time, that's, that was my end. I could tell how many seniors there were, what was involved, how many were in nursing homes, what level of care they required. All kinds, any kind of information like that, I was a plethora of knowledge.

Like I say the Seniors Drop-In Centre, the needs of the seniors have changed. The type of experience they're looking for has changed. And COVID has really meant... you know, stopped a

lot of people from getting together and being able to fit 60 people in that room and have lunch, celebrating a birthday or a special event or all those things are gone.

At Talmud Torah, when my husband started teaching there, had 325 kids. Now, I don't think they break 100. When Junior High started there, my children attended, all five of them. Their junior high doesn't exist anymore. So you know, everything is changing. Everything as everyday comes along is different from the day before. And what's really sad in our office, too, we used to bring the people together, do a lunch, do a program, we would have a guest speaker come up but those days are gone -- we can't bring people out. And the loneliness and isolation has really, really set in. So we try to phone our clients on a regular basis, but, you know, a phone call is wonderful, but seeing someone up close and personal is way better. And a Jewish Family Services that you know, that's what we thrive on. And that's what our people thrived on. So this year, whereas before we were doing meals, and that we've been providing gift bags for every holiday for every Yom Tov that came along, and trying to just keep people connected. They get a phone call asking if they're interested, a phone call saying someone is coming to their door, their choice to open their door or, someone speaks through the intercom or to have it left outside. It just makes a whole big difference. Like nobody is starving and nobody is desperate for the gift bag, but they are desperate for all the things that come along with it and just thinking that someone cared enough.

Because now our holidays... like what's *Pesach* without 50 people at your table and going to shul? What's *Yontif* without singing and all the rest of the stuff that goes on on a *Shabbat*, on a Friday night? Those things are gone now. And so someone cares enough to send you the little tidbits that were always a part of those holidays in the past, it really means something. We get lots of follow up and lots of phone calls thanking us for what we've brought back into their life.

Well, we're going to be losing the other school, the Menorah School at the end of this year, and that is going to take with it a lot of families. I have two children that were really involved in the kosher community and such. One daughter lives in Israel and one son lives here and he goes to BI (Beth Israel) now, but they're involved with that group of people, with the community, with the Triple Five. All those things that supported this Jewish community are really sadly missed,

and going to be missed even more as the year ends. The kosher restaurant in the mall is gone now again, it's been back and forth, in and out a few times, but it's gone.

I think what we mostly miss is being able to get together at things like *Purim* and *Lag B'omer* and all the community events. Like it was a lost community. I celebrated and have been a part of that every year as long as I can remember, you know, working at the celebration and bringing people together. It was always nice, it was always fun, it was always very *heimishe*, and those things are gone. But that's more because of COVID than because of anything else. You know, if COVID wasn't stopping us from joining together and being a part of a group, I think those things would have been around this year and last year. But three days after *Purim* last year was when everything shut down.