

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Esther Starkman - Jewish Cemetery & Chevra Kadisha

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I'm sure Paula, that many of the people that you've talked to have talked about the cemetery as being important to them, how amazing it was that those early pioneers created the cemetery right in the first years of coming to Edmonton. It's a special place for me in particular, because all my family have that cemetery as their final resting place. Solomon, the man I talked about that was the *shammash* at 95th Street [Beth Israel], his first wife, Mariasha, became ill on the homestead. Many Jewish families homesteaded, they were given land and homesteaded, but it was very hard for them. Most sold their interests and moved to two cities. But she became ill on the homestead and is buried there. Solomon's second wife, Esther Gofsky Estrin for whom I'm named, is buried there. My parents Abraham and Rebecca Estrin are there, and a child that was born to them and died at two years old is there. Of course, my beloved sister, Phyllis Estrin Hardin, was laid to rest there as well.

But the cemetery also has another connection for me. It also represents *Chevra Kadisha* and, as my brother Dr. Teviah Estrin wrote in his book *Travels and Travails*, our father worked six days a week from 8-7 in the store [Standard Exchange]. On Sundays he would pack his *Chevra Kadisha* briefcase and head out the door for a 10 a.m meeting, for either *Chevra Kadisha* or Talmud Torah. Two Sundays a month you could find him at those meetings. Dad was secretary of *Chevra Kadisha* for 40 years and a member of the Talmud Torah board in various capacities, including board chair, for 35 years. The other two Sundays, one might find him at the steam bath on 95th Street, right next to the Flatiron Building, which has been recreated and is still there. I think it's a City of Edmonton building there, but right next to that was a steam bath. Many of the Jewish men went there from time to time and I think on the other two Sundays my dad could be found playing cards and schmoozing with the boys there. I do have a memory that sticks in my mind: my mother, being so proud that my dad was a member of the *Chevra Kadisha* and she so respected that work that when, once a year, they had a *seuda*, it was like one of the highlights of her social calendar, so to speak, to go to that *seuda*. She felt that that work was so important and so honorable.