

TRANSCRIPT

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE:

Person: Bruce Mintz

I've lived in Edmonton since 1949. Having been born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan in 1946. My mother and father moved here, my dad from Weyburn. My dad was a dentist there and then he continued his practice here. My mother was a social worker there and then when they moved here she, and a few years after she moved to Edmonton, founded the Jewish Family Services.

I think that's a fantastic question to ask me: I highly valued two places in Edmonton. One of course is the Talmud Torah School. I went to Talmud Torah from grade 1 to grade 6 on an all-day basis. Then when I started junior high school at Westminster Junior High, I attended night school at Talmud Torah from 4:30 to 6:00 and I completed 3 years, and graduated out of the grade 9 with you know that that level of education, and the second most important institution that I connect with in Edmonton of course is the Beth Shalom Synagogue, of which our family was a member when we moved to Edmonton in 1949, and we remained there until 1999, and then I moved to the Beth Israel Synagogue since 1999. So I value those two institutions as being the primary institutions that I feel make Edmonton a strong Jewish community.

I first attended Talmud Torah at the Driscoll building, which is located on 103rd Street south of Jasper Avenue. It was at a very interesting place. I remember it was like a rectangular shaped building and we did have the six classes of grade 1 to 6 at that location, and I remember being transported there from our home on 133rd Street by taxi. So there'd be three or four students in the taxi taking a ride to the school, and then after the Talmud Torah was built, which I'm estimating was around 1954, which would have put me in grade 2 or 3, the school moved to 133rd Street and 106th Avenue, and of course that was like within a block where my mom and dad bought their first house in Edmonton. So I never took the buses or cabs to that Talmud Torah. I just walked to the Talmud Torah every day and came home every day for lunch, which was a lot different than the other students. But I do remember having lunch at Talmud Torah, and I remember Mike and Lisa were the two people who ran, the janitors and ran the kitchen, and they made amazing meals for the students. We ate, in fact I think at one point I said I'd rather eat at school than eat at home.

So we would eat down there and then at the Talmud Torah every Saturday we had Junior congregation at the school and it was run by Mr. Jack Chetner and Mr. Yedlin. The two of them let us run the services and I attended the program for years and years and years. It was very interesting, we had a lot of students come out. Many of them who lived close to the school would walk to the Talmud Torah and we would have I think, we had ice cream and cookies after we completed the junior congregation Shabbat service.

Well I will say primarily it was geography, because our home here on 187 Street is within maybe a 5 to 8 minute drive by car to the new one. To Beth Shalom, I still respect the Beth Shalom. I mean it was a place where I grew up in. Just one little thing I do remember very strongly about Beth Shalom is the fact that we had a rabbi called Rabbi Sacks, and when he came into the community, I mean he had a very powerful booming voice, and we would fill

the Shul on Friday night. And on Friday night the first four or five rows on the left side of the synagogue were occupied by the synagogue choir. And this was a big draw for the community. People showed up in droves to the Beth Shalom for that program.

At Beth Israel at the time was about one block north of the Beth Shalom synagogue, and I remember that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, because our class was divided into those that were families were members of Beth Shalom, and those who were families of Beth Israel, we would sort of like switch shuls. And during the middle of a service, we'd go over and see our friends at Beth Israel, or some of the Beth Israel folk, students would come to our shul to see us, and it was a very community kind of interaction between the two synagogues. And the youngsters as we would call ourselves, in participating in those two shuls.

The places, it depends on how old one is when you talk about the places. One place that I think is a very important place in the Jewish community of course is the Jewish cemetery. My parents are buried near there. I have an aunt Sophie Lesk who's buried there. Her husband Ben Lesk is buried there. My grandfather Abraham Abramovitch is buried there. My uncle Irving Abrams is buried there.

So there is that strong connection I have to the Chevra Kadisha, not that I want to be there anytime soon on a physical basis. But to me that is another, as I've gotten older, institution that I highly appreciate being in the community, that we must all support.

Now, another one we ask about, another place. I do remember that the Talmud Torah, at some point on 133rd Street, acted as a sort of a Jewish Community Centre in the community, and we used to go there for I think play basketball. Then when they moved it to 156 Street and south of Whitemud Freeway, and they had the swimming pool, that used to be a drive. I do remember going there and seeing friends there, and participating in some of the activities that were held at the Jewish Community Centre. So I would say those are two important institutions that I would say have a significance to me.

Now you've started a good one with this question and I can tell you a number of things. When I joined AZA: B'nai B'rith Youth Organization in grade 9, I remember we had our first convention that I went to was in Regina, and I remember we had to take a train from Edington to Calgary and then from Calgary to Regina, and that convention is a place where I met some, you know, many people that later on -like for example Lewis Wasel. He, I remember he was one of the first people I met from outside of Edmonton in Regina, and not to forget Regina was a central place to our family, the Mintz family, because my father was raised in Regina and my mother was raised in Bethune, Saskatchewan, just outside Regina. So that convention was a big highlight to me in Regina. My first time going on the train and then they had the kids from Lethbridge. We went to Medicine Hat and they jumped on the train about maybe 11:00 at night or whatever the time was. It was kind of late, and off we went to Regina for that first convention.

When we came back to Edmonton in 1970 because, first of all, I have to just go back a little bit and brag. I was very lucky to meet Susan at University of Toronto. She was taking her arts degree with a French Major and I met her in a library in Toronto. That's really how it all started. Ultimately, so when I finished, I articulated at the law firm of Freeman Lieber and

Newson, and that was the original Jewish law firm in Edmonton that was started around 1917. So when I came back, I articulated there, and then I became a lawyer in that firm, and when that firm merged with another firm, I joined them, and then I left the firm in 2000, sorry 1976. And I started my own law firm with a fellow that I grew up with in the west end, Richard Fraser, and we started a firm called Fraser Mintz and up to that point in time I became active with the Canadian Bar Association. I even helped chair a program for the legal profession, when they have their annual -they've called it like a convention and I shared a program and researched on the topic of hijacking of airplanes, and the legal implications of that, and then I was invited by former Justice David McDonald to chair a program for the Canadian Bar Association in the mid 70s on the topic of delivery of legal services in Alberta, and I was able to bring in different people from different places in the United States to talk about different types of delivery of legal services.

After I started the firm with Richard Fraser, like at that time the first 10 years of my career, I was basically doing criminal law, family law, and a mixture of other things and I practised in all courts in Alberta. I mean I have never gone to the Supreme Court of Canada. I came very close on two leave applications, which we didn't succeed on. But I've been in the court of appeal a number of times and I've done numbers of trials over the years, and then at one point I became an instructor for the Bar admission course on clear writing and on creditors' rights. In addition to that, I've also served on one Committee of the Law Society of Alberta. I can't remember which one it was, but I was there for two or three years.

So after I became partners with Richard Fraser we grew the firm a bit. We merged with another firm in 1985 and then what happened is that the firm that merger did not continue after 1987. So I joined another firm, and then in 1990 I joined the firm that ultimately became Mintz Law, which I've been running until lately, till last year when I decided to close the office and join the Biamonte LLP Law Firm to sort of finish out my career. But it looks like my career is just expanding.

Other things I've done, well basically raising a family. We have three daughters: Alisa Singer who's now Lisa Singer, married to Matt Singer. We have three grandchildren by them. They live in Edmonton: Rachel Mintz married Corey Choma who is a physiotherapist. Rachel works for Environment Canada. She's got a Master's Degree in chemical engineering, and they have two daughters that both go to Talmud Torah. Our third daughter Leslie lives in Montreal, has two sons, and she's got a Master's Degree in business administration, and her husband Michael Solomon is actually a movie producer. So I'm very lucky to have a great number of people, and one of my pleasures of life is spending time with these grandchildren doing different things, like with Lisa's oldest son Asher Singer who happens to go to Ross Shepard, he's the third generation of her family. My three daughters went there. I've been involved in coaching soccer basically as a goalkeeper coach for the team. Although he doesn't play net, I coach the kids that do play net and I've been doing that for the last five or six years on top of everything else I'm doing.

In terms of memories of Edmonton I will say on a frank basis that the only thing that I'm disappointed about is the falling population of Jewish people in the community, and it seems the way you operate unfortunately is that you have your kids and the kids leave and then pretty soon the parents start to leave to follow them, and I would wish that, there's only from the statistics that I've heard of these days it sounds like there's only about 5,000 Jewish

people in Edmonton. Although there's some stories that may be even more. But they don't identify, the hidden Yidden, yeah. And that's a sad thing because I remember growing up one of the big hot topics in the Jewish community was the issue, the question of assimilation, and my mom of course was a social worker you know. She was very in tune with what is going on in the community. In fact she always said to me, you know I can't tell you names, can't tell you anything because I'm sworn to secrecy. She kept the secrets better than anybody and she was concerned about that as well in her role as the you know, running the Jewish Family Services.

I was on the Jewish Community Council as I mentioned before for about four or five years. I think I ended up becoming the secretary, and the Federation was founded I believe in 1979 or 1980. I didn't get involved in the Federation at all. I don't know why, I think maybe I was occupied with some of the other stuff in my legal practice. I always was willing to if I was approached, if input was asked for, I would give it because I feel that since I've grown up in this community, I have a fairly good knowledge of the workings of this community over the years and following what has happened. I mean I give a lot of respect to all the people that volunteered in various positions in Federation over the years. It's a, I would think, it's a partially a thankless job because I think people don't appreciate totally what Federation is doing. But I think Federation is improving right now and making it a better place. But what's lacking is the Jewish population, and keeping Jews here, and attracting Jews to come into the community, and that to me is an unfortunate you know thing because I don't want to see Edmonton sort of die out, as we've seen in other communities. For example Regina has basically died out and that used to be a very strong Jewish community. I mean it's still there, but it's not the same as it was say 20 or 30 years ago. Calgary has grown. It's an amazing community and they've got almost 8,000 to 9,000 Jewish people there. Some of whom came from Edmonton to move to Calgary. Medicine Hat and the Lethbridge communities basically have died out totally. Saskatoon is maintaining itself to a degree.

Interestingly enough, I know some of the people that went there were people that I went to Camp B'nai B'rith, and I should have mentioned that's another institution that I think is a very vital and important institution to serve Alberta and Saskatchewan Jews. I was at the Camp. It's funny because I didn't want to go to Camp as a camper. I was too scared to go to the Camp as a camper. But I went as an observing counselor, and then became a counselor in the Camp, and it's an amazing place. I do remember the blood suckers that would catch on your body when you went into Pine Lake. But you know over the years the Camp has basically built and improved itself and I think it's important for these communities to support that camp for the kids and get the kids to mingle together from different communities, so they can grow together and become friends and maintain friendships for life.

See my mom and dad were very active in the community. My mom was mainly the Jewish Family Services person and although she was involved in other things, I think she was one of the founders of the home. The Talmud Torah had like a women's group that doesn't operate anymore. But she was one of the founders of that. She was also one of the founders of the Alberta Association of Social Workers. She was also the first president of John Howard Society who was a female, and she had an impact in the community in a quiet way. She wasn't like a rich person. She wasn't a big contributor, a donor of money. But she was a donor of services in many many respects and my father was very active in B'nai B'rith, and he was the President of the Chapter in B'nai B'rith. He also involved in Camp B'nai B'rith as

well through the regional side of it. So my parents like I say, I think have been good examples of people that were very loyal and strong supporters of this community in the way they did it. Some more memories: Talmud Torah. I remember we had like a hierarchy system going to the Talmud Torah at 133rd Street. If you're in a certain grade you played this part of the playground. If you're in another grade you played in a different part of the program - playground. When you're in grade 6 you get to play in the baseball diamond and that's how it was. The playground was set up and it was set up by the kids, not by the school.

I mean I think those are some of the memories. I don't think I've included everything. I do know that what I did do for JAHSENA is I did write a biography about my mother and it's in their records over there. The one thing that I will sort of brag about myself is that I'm very very health conscious. I try to stay young, although every year I'm just getting one year older, which is unfortunate. But that's what happens in life and one of the things that I'm very active in right now is track and field, and I compete in meets across the United States. I go every year. I'm going to either the US Master Indoor or US Master Outdoor championships and I'm running in my age cohort right now, which is 75 to 79. So today, I'm 77 years old, will be 78 on November 19th, and I feel that's one thing that is important for people to do is to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and if anybody asked me to brag about one thing that I could be modest about is the fact that I take care of myself the best I can and I wish that on everybody so we should live long lives.