

TRANSCRIPT

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE:

Person: Karen Hering & Larry Shekter

I was born in Edmonton on December 31st 1945 and lived in Edmonton up till about 25 years ago when we moved to Calgary.

And I was not born in Edmonton. I moved to Edmonton in 1978. Both my sets of grandparents lived in Edmonton and my brother -one of my brothers lived in Edmonton, and I had been living in Israel for four years, and we had decided to leave the kibbutz we were on, and my brother convinced us to come back and live near him. That was my brother Rick Uretsky, z"l.

Well I went to the Talmud Torah from Grade 1 to 6 and besides giving a Jewish background, I still -my best friends are still guys that I went to school with. Matter of fact, we just did a -some of us just did a trip together. I wasn't a big synagogue goer. But there was the synagogues and later on I was involved somewhat at the JCC when it survived, and ended up playing Jewish hockey, and sponsored a team in the baseball league which was just terrific, the one off Groat Road.

(And which of the synagogues would you say you stayed with?) Also the first couple grades were, excuse me, the first couple years were actually at the one downtown. We used to, they had a taxi pick us up and take us there, and I'm sorry, I was involved with the Beth Israel Synagogue.

(Larry, when you said you sponsored a team wasn't that the Alberta Bakery team?) Yeah and there was one *(And when you say Beth Israel, you're talking about the Chevra Kadisha or the Synagogue?)* Synagogue *(In the like about 119th Street?)* That's correct. Yeah my grandfather -our grandfather was President at one time.

(And what was your grandfather's name?) Meyer Shekter. When I arrived here, I had one child and he was just three. But our first home was in Rio Terrace and we spent a lot of time at the Jewish Community Centre. When he was old enough we swam there. There was Jewish hockey, whatever, floor hockey there. There was Kinder Gym or whatever it was called. I can't remember. There was all kinds of different activities there, and we literally spent tons and tons of time there.

I subsequently had three more children. They all went to Talmud Torah, all four of them, and they overlapped with Larry's. Larry's kids are a bit older than ours. So we were at the tail end. But we belong to the Orthodox shul. And my memories, and later on when my girls were bat mitzvahed, we belonged to the other Synagogue. But my memories were it was very common to walk back and forth between the two synagogues during high holidays, and kind of shmooze with the people from the other synagogues and so on. I think at that time Alberta Bakery still existed, and so we got our bread from Alberta Bakery and so on. But those were the main Jewish institutions I think that we were involved in.

Maybe I'll just start off with, it was started by all our grandfather Meyer Sheckter. I think I'm not good on all the dates, but I think probably in the early [19]20s and it was located -I remember the building, it was located down an alley on about 90th Street off 118th Avenue in the north end. Later we moved to a, bought an old Safeway on 95th Street and 114th Avenue. By that time my grandfather was pretty much, he was involved in it, but we had a fairly busy retail store there. It was a residential area, and he took care of it, and talked to people, and loved it. And my father and my uncle Dave Sheckter took over running the bakery.

I started hanging around -my dad would take me to work, and I was just hanging around while I was a young kid, and by the time I was about 15 -well 16, I started working full-time in the Bakery. Mostly Shipping Department, and then all through high school, in the summers I would take over for. When all the drivers went on holidays, I would do all their deliveries. And from there I went on to University out of town and came back. I was going to school in Ottawa, I came back and basically my dad offered me a job full-time. So I started probably in the early 70s working full-time and being part of it. Oh I worked till it closed. (*When did the bakery close? What year, when did it close?*) 1996.

A number of things, I have a Diploma of Bakers' certificate from the American Institute of Baking, and I had a job with the chain of franchise bakeries as a regional manager for about six years, and then I did a number of different things and settled into a job as a private investigator -which I'm still doing.

I well, I have not a lot of memories, but I do know my mother always used to talk about working in the Bakery and she used to work in the Bakery before she went to school. So she used to say that she would get up at 5 in the morning and go to work in the Bakery before school started. And it was interesting because she was a very, apparently, a very good basketball player, and used to practice with the Edmonton Grads, and she wanted to play with them. Her good friends were with them, but supposedly my grandfather said he needed her in the Bakery and he didn't want her occupied with them. So she just used to practice with them.

But my recollection, well first of all, my first career was in dance. I have a degree in dance, and so I choreographed and taught and performed in Vancouver and in Israel, and various places, and then I became, I went on after my kids were born, and I couldn't stay in shape that well. I went on and got a degree, a Master's in Library Science, and I worked at the University of Alberta, I worked at King's College, and I worked at, I ended up settling at MacEwan and worked as an academic librarian for 15 years. Then before I had a car accident that pushed me into retirement a bit earlier than I planned. So yeah, that's sort of the trajectory. In between there we lived in Israel. We lived on a kibbutz. I believe Larry came in -well Larry came and visited us actually when I was doing a year program after high school, but that's Jerusalem. Pardon? (*In Jerusalem, I remember that.*) Larry stayed on the floor of my dorm of five women!

The place I miss the most, having moved to Calgary, is the Yardbird Suite -the jazz club. I had a few friends that were also jazzaholics, and we used to go at least once or twice a month to the Yardbird and then when they had the Jazz Festivals we would attend. So I missed the, I certainly missed the Yardbird.

What I was going to say? Actually I'd forgotten. Hello Deli used to be a favourite place to eat, and we, for all of our bar and bat mitzvahs, Paula Weil used to cater for us and I miss her cooking or whatever as she's moved on to Calgary. I enjoy culture in that, so going to the Symphony, going to the Alberta Ballet. I forgot to mention that I was very involved in Israeli folk dance and international folk dance in general. So for a while I had a performing group here, in Edmonton. Previous to that I had a touring international folk dance group that worked throughout the, out of the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre there, and raised a whole generation of avid Israeli folk dancers. My niece here sort of got the bug and continued on the Aviv folk dancers. Here is sort of my niece's project, but came out of our family love of Israeli folk dancing. But so the symphony, the Citadel. I remember there used to be a theatre called the Phoenix Theatre that we always had a subscription to -kind of an alternative theatre. Yeah so those were some of the big things.

My kids were always avid soccer players. So Community League Soccer was big. I think our City is quite unique or special in the way our Community Leagues offer different activities and have different community league buildings, and so on. I don't think that's so common in a lot of other communities from what I've seen. I now volunteer in the several libraries, Jewish community libraries, since I've retired. So the Synagogue Library, JAHSENA Library, the Talmud Torah library. I continue to volunteer there. So I keep myself very busy.

I should add that also reminded me, we were avid attenders of the Citadel Theatres over the years. That was a real blessing to have in Edmonton.

I could maybe talk a bit more about Alberta Bakery: we were kosher. I'm not sure if we're the first kosher bakery in Edmonton. But it's funny that probably in our in-store Bakery we had more Muslim people come in, because at least in those days our bread was considered up to their standard -Halal standards, and we were a wholesale bakery. Primarily we sold to over, you know different times, sold to Woodward's, which was a pretty big grocery chain and retail chain in the day, and Safeway, Costco, Home and Pitfield, Superstore, and we also did a lot of probably, the bulk of the business was food service: restaurants, hotels, that kind of thing.

If I can just add, our grandfather's house has a plaque on it. I guess it's been denoted historical, whatever it's called, a historical site or whatever. But that house on...Larry, is it at 88th Street or? Yeah 88th Street. Yeah, that house, my family, I grew up in St. Catherines Ontario and I should just go back a sec, when my both my parents were born in Edmonton and when my father was an engineer, and when it came time for him to go to university, there was a quota [for Jews] at the U of A in professional schools, and so he never, he was not accepted or didn't meet the quota or whatever. So he actually did his Engineering degree at UBC, but then when he graduated, the first job he was able to get was in St Catherines. So he and my mother, they got married and they moved to St. Catherines where we lived until I was 15.

But what I was going to say is every second summer or so we would come to Edmonton to see all the family because our grandfather had 10 children and mostly all of the aunts and uncles and grandchildren, with the exception of one family at that time lived in Edmonton. So we'd come to see all of our cousins and I distinctly remember I would always stay at the top of the stairs on the second floor with my mother, in the bedroom that was, when she was

growing up Bertha Feldman -Bertha Sheckter Feldman and her bedroom and so we were at that house every summer. Every summer that we came -alternate summers, and some summers my grandfather would rent, we used to go to Radium to the Ledo Motel and several of the Sheckter families, we would meet there and we'd hang out at the Radium Hot Springs pools and all of that.

But the other thing I was going to say is the other half of my family was Uretsky and my grandmother Sarah and Alec -or my grandparents Sarah and Alec Uretsky, lived here and they had grocery stores and bakeries. They had a bakery at various times. They immigrated here when they were 13 or 14 years old separately. My grandmother was brought here to take care of the children of the Rabbi Pinsky who was her uncle. At one point Rabbi Pinsky was here. There was a Rabbi Pinsky here and she came to take care of his -help take care of his six children. But she started or my grandfather had a grocery store that was called Shamrock Grocery Store for a while. But I have no idea where it was. It was long before my time of course. My grandmother had two children: my father Abe Uretsky, but also she had another son: Harry Uretsky, who's on the Cenotaph of the Jewish Cemetery here.

He was one of the five or six boys on the Cenotaph who were lost during the Second World War. He was a bombardier and the first graduate of the Bombardier school that was, I forgotten, just outside of Edmonton somewhere. Anyhow he went over to Europe to fight in the War, and his plane was shot down, and his body was never found. But so he's on the Cenotaph and I'm reminded of that every Remembrance Day, which just happened. But that was the only, that was the other side of my family.

Yes they only accepted a certain amount of dentists, a certain amount or I mean, students into, Jewish students into Dentistry, I believe into Medicine, definitely into Engineering, and so that's why he ended up at UBC, yeah. And I actually remember a story. Larry, I don't know if you know the story: our uncle Sam was a dentist, and I remember him telling us stories that the head of the Dentistry Department at that time was very anti-Semitic. And he started Dentistry and then he dropped out because the Dean wanted him to go into the army. He threatened him and if he didn't go into the Army he'd fail him or something. Larry, are you familiar with that story? Yeah more or less. I know he had problems that because of anti-Semitism at the time and a particular administrator, I believe yeah. He talked about it for a bit towards the end. There was another uncle of ours who also used to actually talk about being beat up. Frank used to talk about being beat up and for being Jewish and so on.

But yeah, so in my grandfather's family, just to kind of clarify, they had 10 children. Larry was I think the son of I think about number 6 in the family. My mother was I think the fourth oldest, if I'm not mistaken. But yeah, we have I think 32 cousins -something like that, from that family. My dad was the third youngest, okay seventh - so he was the eighth. Yeah I think Bertha was younger than him. So he was this, and then there was my dad Sam, my dad. Bertha, I believe Frank and Dave, yeah those were the younger ones. Eva was oldest. Then Joe, then Jack, then my mother. Yeah. And then Sam down there, yeah. And from what I heard, they all worked at the Bakery. I remember Jack telling me for his bar mitzvah, so he was doing his bread route, ran in, did his Haftorah, and then finished his bread route. Joe told me that story as well that he had a horse and wagon, was doing the bread route, stopped, went into the basement of the Synagogue, changed clothes, did his maftir, got back, went back downstairs, got into his work clothes again, and continued on the route.

Yeah Meyer was our grandfather -was very involved in the Chevra Kadisha. He was instrumental in helping to build the whatever it's called, the Chevra Kadisha building. He borrowed money from the bank on his name.

And he apparently was head of Chevra Kadisha for 40 years. According to some notes that an aunt of ours wrote, and then it went down through generations. There was pretty much somebody on the Chevra Kadisha from our extended family throughout the years.

Yeah, my dad was for a long time and my brother is now.

And Dave was, yeah.