

TRANSCRIPT

JEWISH EDMONTON STORIES ONLINE:

Person: Sharilyn Bell

Certainly there was of course the usual, the Talmud Torah. To begin with, I have a sister Jody who is a year older than me, brother Brian who is five years younger, and all of us went to the Talmud Torah. It was that, can't remember what street -not the new one but the one, the Westmount area and not the first one, but the second. I think there's been three and it was the second one, it had that door with the Talmud Torah logo on the- kind of you walk down the long sidewalk and there was the Talmud Torah logo. It was the second one. It was the one where the principal at the time that we started was a man named Goelman and then shortly thereafter Jack Chetner became the principal, and it was kindergarten through grade six, and then they had night school after that. But we went there half a day English, half a day Hebrew -which I don't know if they still do it that way. But even though you know we only got half a day of English whatever, I think everybody who came out of there really was as well prepared as anybody who had full days. The only thing that was missing in that school was a gymnasium. I think later on they added one to next door or somewhere. But at the time we went, there was no physical education programming. It was strictly academics.

There was downstairs a auditorium and part of the day was lunch. Lunch was all served to everybody. You went down into the auditorium. There were long tables and benches set up and you were put at those tables by grade and the lunch was served. Anybody who went to Talmud Torah at that time would remember Mike and Lisa. They were the caretakers, janitors, cooks, jack-of-all trades. Whatever needed to be done, Mike and Lisa and I think I have their last name written down and I want to say it because they were really a big part of it. Their last name was Houchuk and it was Mike and Lisa and they were there for about four decades. They started in 1935 and they were responsible for making all the lunches for all the kids, and every day it was a different meal. But every day of the week it was the same meal. So we would get cold sandwiches on Wednesday, on Thursday it would be salmon patties and mashed potatoes, and so on, and that was just -part of the day was lunch. It was apparently a program started by the Ladies Auxiliary quite early on.

And the other thing that they started was a program for transportation. There were no school buses to go to school. But there was a system of Taxi cabs. And so, which apparently these Ladies Auxiliary organized very early on, and it continued for quite a while. So a cab would come and pick us up in the morning. I remember my mom, you know calling out, "cab's here!" and if you didn't get out to the cab, it would leave without you, and by this time my family, the Bell family, we had originally lived in the Parkdale area where the Sheckters lived, where the bakery was. But by this time we'd moved to an area called Capitol Hill. So we lived on a street called Ravine Drive, and it was very Jewish in its make up. I don't think I thought about it at the time, but this is where just a ton of really, a ton of Jewish people lived next door to us. On one side was a family Leah and Larry Superstein and they had kids. Then next to them was the Podersky family. Next to them was a family called Greens. Then on the other side was a dentist, Doctor Shlain. Next to them was my uncle Joe with his kids. The Samuels live next to that, and the area was just really full of kids. Barry Slawsky and his family was around the corner. The Kleins, the Weinlos family behind us. Lil Siegel and Fran Siegel, all of these people, and so there were lots of kids to get in the cabs with us, and it

was kind of a fun thing, you know, to just get to school that way. I can't remember how long this cab business went on, but it was very interesting.

From there my sister and I went to Westminster Junior High School and then Ross Sheppard High School, which again because of the neighbourhood, had a lot of Jewish kids going there -and so our cronies just moved with us from school to school. Basically that was our education. After that, my sister went away to McGill for her undergraduate work. I moved with my family after high school to Vancouver and my brother was just finishing grade six. So he moved. He started high school in Vancouver.

The other Jewish buildings that we're connected to were the synagogue. We were members of both the Beth Israel and the Beth Shalom. When my dad moved to Edmonton when he married my mom, they became members of the Beth Israel because the whole Sheckter Family went there. But also grandfather was very active in the Jewish community. He was President of the Beth Israel from about 1950 to 1954 and he was also at that time Vice President of a Northwest Conference for Judaism that was responsible for bringing in rabbis that would service all of the small communities in the Alberta area. He also, for a very long time was chairman of the Chevra Kadisha for about 40 years, and he was still active when they broke ground for the new chapel, and I think that was probably in 19 -just before we left in 1960 something, or rather. We actually have a picture of him at the groundbreaking. So and as I said, he had a part in supervising the construction. In this picture I think it's stated this 1963 there's people like Nate Siegel, Abe Estrin, Morris Feldman, and lots of others. And some of my uncles and my cousins have continued the connection to the Chevra Kadisha over the years. So that was kind of a nice legacy for him there.

But as I said we also belonged to the Beth Shalom -the Bell family, and I think part of the reasoning for that was the idea of sitting together as a family. My father really wanted us to sit in the service, listen to it, be a part of it, and I, you know to his credit, I remember sitting next to him listening to him *davening*, and it was really you know, part of our Jewish education -and part of the thing with the Beth Israel, kids would always be outside talking. There was not enough seating inside. You'd sit with your mother or your father. You'd be shuffled around and so the idea that as a family you got to sit together in a conservative setting -it you know wasn't an issue for my mother who grew up Orthodox, same with my father. And so we were members of the Beth Shalom, but they were very close together -the Beth Shalom on Jasper Avenue, the Beth Israel at the time. The one that we went to just a couple of blocks away and on holidays -like on Yom Kippur or whatever. During the break we'd all walk over, sit down, visit with the family at the Beth Israel. There was a lot of back and forth and so it was kind of interesting. The rabbi at the Beth Israel that I remember the most was Rabbi Postone, again a lovely, really lovely man. He actually officiated at my parents' wedding in 1945. So there was a long connection with him. I think when we left [for] Vancouver, the rabbi at Beth Israel was a Rabbi Fink, if I remember correctly. And the rabbi that was at the Beth Shalom when we were there was Louis Sacks and he was there for quite a while. And basically those are my memories of the two synagogues -and those were you know the Jewish connections other than you know the Sheckter home, our home which all were around the same time.

The other interesting thing about my grandparents being so observant and going to Beth Israel was it was quite a distance from their home on 88 [Street], and so they would stay.

There was a little motel very close to the synagogue that they would stay at whenever they had to go to synagogue. They would check into this Motel. They would bring all their food and set up, and it was just year-after-year. I can't remember the name of the hotel. But they were there and I think a few other Jewish families did the same thing, and basically that is my memory of the Jewish buildings there.

My father, when he first moved to Edmonton, he was in business as a cattle buyer for Swifts of Canada. My grandfather in Calgary had been a butcher, and so it was kind of a natural progression. But when he came to Edmonton and got married, he was really a businessman at heart, you know, and ended up in later life being in real estate. But in Edmonton he started out with a variety of businesses. One of the earliest ones that I remember, the building of was called National Produce and it was on the south side of Vancouver -oh sorry of Edmonton. I think it's on the south side of Edmonton, and it sold eggs and poultry and it had frozen storage lockers. In those days people didn't have access to freezers in their homes the way they do now. So they would store their meat somewhere else, and so part of this and I remember that as a building. You know my memories are always connected to kind of things that our family did. We were a close family and we did things together. Later in life, he owned a bowling alley downtown called B&B Bowl. B for Bell. In the second B was Belzberg. He was in partnership for that and other things with Sam Belzberg, and Sam's father and brothers, etcetera. So it was Bell and Bellsburg. But it was B&B bowl and it was the only five pin bowling alley downtown, and it was the first one with automatic pin setters, and so as kids or as teenager whatever we were at the time, we would always go there with our friends for birthday parties, for outings, and it, you know that was a place that we went that he owned, and so that was part of our life.

And with my mother it was always shopping. I spent most of my life in the fashion industry, and I developed this from, I think my mother who liked to take us out, and so we would go to the stores that I remember were places like Walk-rite where as a child, as a young girl she worked. It was owned again by a Jewish family. I think it was started by the Lieberman family and it was run by one of the Bolocans, and it was staffed by just all sorts of Jewish people at the time. Even I had an uncle who ended up being a doctor in Vancouver, Mike Wolochow worked in the shoe department. One of my father's sisters worked there. The staff was just all Jewish and it was an interesting place. It started out as a shoe store and it became a department store for a while. So that was an interesting connection to my mom's past.

But basically I don't remember playgrounds as such. You know in those days kids had a lot more freedom and so you spend more time just outside playing with your friends. We, you know, belong to groups called the Pedal Pusher Club and we would take our bikes. This is just when the areas were opening up in Crestwood and all over, and there was a little bridge between Ravine Drive and the next area over where again a lot of Jewish people live, and we would just be riding back and forth, and laying outside till late at night. But I actually don't remember playgrounds or anything that we went to for some reason. Just, you know, a lot of sort of activities. Just you know, going out and spending time with their friends having them over. Lots of parties in the homes and things like that.