

Eulogy - Martha Fialkow - passed away October 6, 1998

When I hear the stories of the lives of the pioneer members of our Jewish community like Martha Fialkow, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the contributions they made to the institutions and organizations that we take for granted today.

It is a sign of our modern times that today we hold fundraising campaigns to build new schools and synagogues convenient to our homes, while for many of our parents and grandparents, the distance from their home to the city meant that the synagogue was visited only for the High Holidays and their Jewish education came from their parents.

Yet somehow the devotion to their faith remained strong and if anything made them more committed to ensure a Jewish upbringing for their children.

Distance from the city did not mean that your home could not be kosher, or that Shabbat candles could not be lit, or that new branches of communal organizations could not be formed.

This was the way Martha Fialkow lived, and this is the way she ensured that our community would continue to grow.

It is interesting to note that the one of the main symbols of the holiday of Sukkot that we are currently celebrating is the Sukkah, a temporary dwelling that should be large enough for a family to eat and live in. Rabbis have commented that the sukkah also reminds us not to become overly attached to one piece of land. It instructs Jews not become overly rooted, particularly not in exile. For thousands of years Jews built homes in the diaspora, and civilizations of extraordinary richness were created. But outside of Israel, all such Jewish homes and civilizations have proven thus far to be temporary ones, blown away when a new regime came to power. This is what lead Martha's parents to find a new home, and a promise of freedom and safety in Canada.

Martha was born on September 5th, 1910, in Hardisty , Alberta near the farm that her parents homesteaded after their long journey from Europe. In fact she may have been one of the first Jewish babies born in Alberta. Her father passed away when Martha and her sister Bessie were still young so they

moved with their mother to Edmonton to complete their education. After graduating from McDougall High School Martha took commercial training at McTavish Business College and then worked for Sun Life Insurance. In 1933 she left Sun Life to marry Harry Fialkow who would be her partner for 47 years until his passing in 1981.

In 1944, Martha again found herself in small town Alberta as Harry operated a grocery and dry goods store and cattle feed lot in Sedgewick. They worked together in the store, raised their young family and made many life-long friends from the area. Harry and Martha would travel to many nearby towns to visit Jewish families and celebrate holidays together. Shim and Naomi remember their father's big truck that would transport them and other families to Banff or to nearby lakes for an afternoon of fishing. Martha was an active member of the Hadassah chapter in nearby Camrose. By maintaining a kosher home and keeping strong connections to the Jewish community, Martha instilled a sense of Jewish pride that still exists today through her children and grandchildren.

In the late 1950's Harry and Martha moved back to Edmonton and she quickly resumed her activities within the Jewish community. Following in the footsteps of her mother, Fanny Hacker, Martha was active in Pioneer Women. In fact she was a member of that organization, now called Na'amat for over 70 years. In 1997 her devotion to that organization was recognized as she was named Na'amat's Mother of the Year and was honoured at a special brunch. She helped form a new Na'amat chapter, Chanita, and used her extraordinary typing skills as she served as secretary of the chapter for 25 years until she was well into her 80's.

She enjoyed traveling and made two trips to Israel where Harry had a sister as well as other excursions to Alaska and Mexico. Synagogue life was important to her and she has been active as a member of Beth Israel, Beth Shalom and Beth Tzedec congregations. Martha took full advantage of Edmonton's cultural activities, attending the Symphony, Opera and ballet on a regular basis. Of course she was devoted to her children, taking an active interest in their academic achievements and beaming with pride at their accomplishments in life.

While she spent many years without her beloved Harry, Martha continued to live life to the fullest. She made the best of every situation, rarely complaining

about health problems or loneliness. She lived in her north Glenora home, surrounded by wonderful neighbors, for 50 years, only deciding to take a suite in Canterbury Court last year. The home holds fond memories for her children as their friends became Martha's friends and were always welcome for food that seemed to come out of the kitchen in enormous quantities. Martha shared her love with each of them and her children's friends thought of Martha as a second mother, an honour she took to heart.

Martha loved to walk. She visited Westmount Mall often and when walking became harder she took the bus, wanting to maintain the freedom she felt to get out whenever she wanted. She was a frequent visitor at the Jewish Seniors Drop-in centre, but she didn't consider herself to be one of the old timers, and those who knew her never thought of her as old.

She was an important part of the lives of her three granddaughters, Sonya, Fia and Sarah, who all came back to Edmonton to visit with Martha this past August when her health began to fail. They were able to spend precious moments together, and the memories that they will always have of their last visit with their grandmother will reflect the strong, proud woman that she was.

Her sudden decision to move to Canterbury did not mean that all activities would suddenly stop. In fact Shim recalls that if he didn't call her before 8:00 am then chances are it would be after 8:00 pm when he could reach her in her room again as she spent the entire day taking advantage of the social and recreational activities that Canterbury offers.

In return she was treated very well by the nursing staff at Canterbury and later by health professionals at the Misericordia and Royal Alex as the illnesses that she had fought quietly throughout her life began to overwhelm her. While we mourn her loss, we are also thankful that her suffering was not prolonged and that our memories will be of a vibrant, loving and dedicated woman who devoted her life to family, friends and community. Our world would be so much poorer had she not been among us, and she leaves us a rich legacy to uphold.