

My husband and I were most privileged recently when we joined Rhoda and Jack Freidin of Moose Jaw, in their special trek to Kelowna, B.C.

To fully appreciate the significance of this journey, one needs a bit of Moose Jaw history. In May, of this year, the Beth Israel Synagogue was sold by the Jewish community here, to the Denee School of Dance, after sixty-two (62) years of service to its people.

It was a sad group who faced a new reality this year. The Jewish community of Moose Jaw had numbered up to fifty-two (52) families during the years since 1925. It was then that a few devoted men had worked diligently to build a house of Jewish worship. The Synagogue became the centre of Jewish life here. It was the place of worship, a school for the children, a meeting hall to discuss common concerns, a locale for funerals, weddings and celebrations of all sorts.

The Synagogue served the Jewish community well, and when St. Andrew's Church was so unfortunately struck by fire, the people of Beth Israel were happy to make their synagogue available to their Christian friends.

However, by 1989, the Jewish population of Moose Jaw had dwindled to a small group of five (5) families. Jewish ritual demands a minimum of ten (10) men to hold a religious service. This had not been possible for several years, as family after family, retired from work, had relocated to other communities, or had joined their children who pursued their education in larger centres.

The difficult decision to decide the future of the Synagogue was entrusted to three men, Mel Stern, Lou Glassman and Jack Freidin. Their concern was to ensure that this building, so meaningful to them, should continue with some dignity, even though its function would be changed. A dance studio, associated as it is with the arts, seemed appropriate and the decision to sell was made.

This small <sup>COMMITTEE</sup> community was also responsible for the disposition of the Synagogue contents - the religious artifacts, the Holy Scrolls, the prayer books, text books and library, as well as the dishes and furniture. It was decided to donate tables, chairs and dishes to the new seniors' centre being developed on Main Street. When Jack Freidin learned that a new congregation of Jews was coming to life in Kelowna, B.C., the proposal to donate all the other contents to this community was agreed to. The Jewish people of Kelowna were eager to have whatever would help them get established. They had already taken steps toward building a synagogue and they were fortunate to have a Rabbi involved in their endeavour. A gift of



this proportion would, indeed, give their efforts a significant boost.

So the transfer was made and the contents of the Synagogue were sent to Kelowna by van. It did not seem appropriate, however, to send the precious writings and teachings of the Hebrew religion in this way and it fell to Jack Freidin to deliver the Holy Scrolls in person.

On Sunday morning, September 9, 1990, the Okanagan Jewish Community held a religious service in Kelowna, conducted by Rabbi Klein. Following the service, the two Torahs (Holy Scrolls) were formally presented by Jack Freidin, assisted by Ed Sirota, a new resident of Moose Jaw.

This was a most moving ceremony, marking as it did the closing of a beloved Synagogue. For Jack, it also signified the end of a part of his life that had helped form his identity as a Jew and as a man. Born and bred in Moose Jaw, Jack had always been very close to the Synagogue. He was able to fulfil his task with dignity and pride, however, recognizing that there was ~~not~~<sup>now</sup> continuity for the spirit of Beth Israel Synagogue, as the members of the Okanagan Jewish Community received this gift with love and appreciation. He knew, too, that the Jewish people of Moose Jaw now had a spiritual home in this lovely city across the mountains.

DOROTHY SIROTA,  
In collaboration with Rhoda and Jack Freidin.

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