

Melissa Gerr ([00:01](#)):

You're listening to Pull Up A Chair: Stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore, a podcast created by The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Alyson Friedman ([00:12](#)):

I feel like at this point in my life, it's really important to be surrounded with people who have very similar values.

Elise Rubenstein ([00:19](#)):

It's to be a part of something like that. I can't even describe to you how it changed my life.

Melissa Gerr ([00:34](#)):

Welcome back to Pull Up a Chair. Each month, The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore shines a light on your neighbors and friends, illustrating what it means to build, and be a part of, a strong Jewish community. I'm your host Melissa Gerr. In this episode — What makes a best friend? Baltimore native, Alyson Friedman and New Jersey transplant, Elise Rubenstein are dedicated to giving back to the community through many programs of The Associated. For nearly two decades, they've been dear friends, confidants and have shared adventures across the globe. But how did it all begin? Here's Elise.

Elise Rubenstein ([01:14](#)):

When I had just gotten into Baltimore and I wanted to get involved in the community and I joined Dor Tikvah and this was a young women's leadership group. And I met Alyson there and met a lot of other incredible women. The thing that struck me the most about that experience was that there was many like-minded women around the table.

Alyson Friedman ([01:41](#)):

One of the things that struck me right away with Elise, we were engaged in an activity where we were doing what's called a pace palette. The pace palette actually looks at different personality traits and different colors that correspond to personality traits. So I remember at the time, Elise was the only person in our group that had the color red and red actually stood for adventure. So I knew right away, this was a woman that I wanted to get, get to know. So adventure actually stood for, you know, being free to do things her way and she wanted to explore. She was all about, you know, "where's the action or the problem, I'm there." My color was blue and blue actually stands for, you know, seeing the possibilities and others in themselves. And blue signifies being devoted to friends. They love to talk, share and help and someone who's caring, intuitive and a good listener. So I really think that she and I bonded right from the beginning. And and this is 19 years later and and Elise and I are still very, very dear friends.

Melissa Gerr ([02:50](#)):

19 years later and still going strong, both in their friendship and at The Associated. Alyson, and Elise have held, and still hold, multiple leadership positions and serve on multiple boards. They bond over their involvement and dedication to the community and beyond.

Elise Rubenstein ([03:07](#)):

We've spent a lot of time together. Alyson and I have very similar interests, which is really amazing. We both love art. We both love the beach. We both love to travel. And we have done a lot of that together. Alyson loves the sun and she has visited us when we were in Florida. She visits us when we are in in Fenwick island. And when summer would come, Alyson would always come and stay with us. And we would go to these beautiful house tours in Bethany Beach and she would stay overnight and we would go see these house tours together. And and I always had a scheduled time for Alyson to be on the beach. Sj=He was upset if we didn't have time to sit in the sun.

Alyson Friedman ([03:56](#)):

Elise certainly illustrates the sun part, but she, she left out the exercise part because as much as I love the sun, my friend Elise loves to exercise. So I might drag her to the beach a little bit, but she always makes sure that I go on walks with her and make sure that we get the exercise in. But in addition to that, I like to go away with a diversity of my girlfriends for special birthdays. So when I was 40 I went away with, I think, 10 women to Las Vegas, of course, Elise was with me. And that was quite a fun time in Vegas. And then when I turned 50, a bunch of my girlfriends, of course, including Elise, we went to Austin, Texas. So so time away with girlfriends is, is so much fun.

Melissa Gerr ([04:45](#)):

What happens in Austin and Vegas stays in Austin and Vegas, but the two friends have also shared a special trip abroad.

Elise Rubenstein ([04:53](#)):

The most amazing trip that Alison and I took together, which was the, it was a women's mission to Israel. It was their 70th anniversary and there was 70 women on this trip and it was really something incredible that we shared, again, getting to know other women in our community who shared a love of Israel. And the most amazing thing that happened on the trip was that everyone came together. Everyone was kind to each other. You didn't feel weird sitting at a table with women you never met. Everyone was welcoming and open.

Alyson Friedman ([05:33](#)):

I remember just all of us sharing the joy of Israel's 70th birthday and all she has accomplished. And I remember in particular I was asked during that trip to plan an activity. And what I did was I asked everyone's either significant other or, or children or parents or a dear friend to write a letter to their person. And no one knew that this was going on. And then what we did was right before Shabbat we were going to walk to the Western Wall and we had this wonderful moment where there was like some singing and we were all very excited to go. And we told everyone that we had a letter for each person to read prior to going to the Kotel. And I think everybody was so excited and didn't know what to expect.

Elise Rubenstein ([06:30](#)):

And she literally blew everyone's mind with these letters. Because what was so amazing about the letters was that here you are, a million miles away from home, going through this immersive experience — We had been to so many intense ceremonies together — And yet you open this letter and you felt this connection to home, to your loved ones. It was just such an emotional connection to be with these women and know that, that your loved ones at home were thinking of you in that moment. I can't even describe what that felt like, but we were all basically hysterical, crying, because it was so emotional.

Melissa Gerr ([07:14](#)):

Spanning two decades of Associated involvement, sharing, similar interests and even leadership positions. You might imagine a rivalry could erupt, but that is not how Alyson and Elise roll.

Elise Rubenstein ([07:27](#)):

I would describe it more as, as a mentor. You know, Alison was chaired of the Giving Foundation and chair of Associated Women's Campaign before me. So even just in taking on those roles and considering those roles, she was the person I picked up the phone and talk to.

Alyson Friedman ([07:47](#)):

To talk things through and look at both sides and, and really just and honor each other's opinions about things. So really just above anything to support one another. And rivalry is really not something I would ever even think about between the two of us and a common thread with us is that with our values, you know, for both of us, our family comes first. And in terms of education, both of us are so interested in Jewish learning and immersing ourselves in, in Jewish life and, and giving back and be role models for our next generation, for our children. And and we both want to just encourage each other and encourage others to help make the world a better place.

Melissa Gerr ([08:43](#)):

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