

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.

Linda Miller ([00:12](#)):

Now these people live in the United States. They live in Pikesville, they're successful. So it's very meaningful to have that.

Melissa Gerr ([00:24](#)):

Welcome back to Pull Up A Chair, a podcast from The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. These local stories shine 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, a story that illustrates the power of giving back and paying it forward. Linda Miller and her husband, Howard are longtime supporters of and volunteers with The Associated. Linda began her philanthropic involvement with HIAS, serving as a board member, its president and on the national board as well. The work formed her connection to philanthropy and also to her desire to create friendships through volunteering. One thing to note for this story, Linda and her family live on a small sheep farm in Pikesville. I know, what's a nice Jewish girl doing at a farm? That's another story. First, listen to how the family welcomed new immigrants to Baltimore. Here's Linda.

Linda Miller ([01:23](#)):

It was in the '70s and '80s. That was when the biggest influx of, particularly Soviet refugees came in. We also had people come from Egypt, Romania, and so forth. I had actually been in the young leadership class of The Associated and I was invited to observe an agency and I chose HIAS. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. At the time, the HIAS board members went to the airport, picked up the Soviet Russ- or mostly Soviet- refugees and got them settled in Baltimore. We invited them to our house. We helped them get apartments. We furnished them. We showed them where all the food stores, libraries, anything that we thought they would need. One complaint was that they all mostly lived in the city and they didn't get, they didn't get to see the farm life. They didn't get to see greenery enough. No, no, not enough parks. So we live on a farm. So we invited them to our house for a picnic and they enjoyed being outside, seeing the animals in our garden. And over the years we watched the children grow and adapt to Baltimore and they mostly all became successful. Hopefully we can do the same for the Ukrainians. It was a very rewarding experience for all of us.

Melissa Gerr ([02:42](#)):

It was especially rewarding for Karen Singer, Linda and Howard's youngest daughter, who as a girl remembers having visitors from around the world stop by their home.

Karen Singer ([02:52](#)):

My grandparents, my maternal grandparents lived on the farm with us. So it was my sister, my parents, my grandparents, six of us. And then we would have the refugees join us for dinner and their English wasn't really so good. And our Russian was nonexistent. So it, as the dinner would wear on, it was a little bit challenging. And so repeatedly for each of these dinners, my parents would bring out cans from the- from the pantry and cash money. And we would teach them the difference between a penny and nickel, a dime a quarter, which is certainly not intuitive between shaped sizes colors. And I also remember

these picnics, popsicles and watermelon being such a treat. And I don't know if it's true, but my recollection is them wearing a lot of clothes on hot summer days. And they were so happy to be there.

Linda Miller ([03:43](#)):

Could I interrupt one second there? One very nice thing that happened during that time was there were a lot of refugees that came to our house. I would say, I don't know, 60, 80. I did not have chairs for everybody to sit on. So I did call Levinson to see if they, if we could borrow some chairs just for the afternoon. So they'd have something to sit on. And they first said, no. And then when I call- they called me back and they said, who's coming the Russian refugees. And then the next half hour, a hundred chairs arrived at our house for every year we had the picnic.

Karen Singer ([04:16](#)):

But I feel like I remember the people from certain countries sat with each other. And so the Tunisian sat with the Tunisians, the Russian sat with the Russians. And I, I remember that as a little girl because the yard is quite large. And so they were sitting in these little quadrants of groups and I, I didn't really understand that.

Linda Miller ([04:34](#)):

No, that, that was exactly right. I, I was, I also was very young and it was the biggest party we had ever had in our life. And I knew the food had to be kosher, but I, it was very confusing for me. Thank goodness, my mother with her friends came and came in and made sandwiches and surprised and, and had food for everybody. So it was a whole three generation family affair. So I am very, very proud of the work that The Associated Jewish Charities and HIAS has been able to do for, to bring these people here. It's, it's, it's a very meaningful experience for me.

Melissa Gerr ([05:10](#)):

And now some background about why they live on that farm.

Linda Miller ([05:14](#)):

My husband and I had just been married and my father went out shopping for apples out in the country, and he saw the sign and he went in and liked this farm. And he came back and he told my husband, we had only been married, maybe nine months. We had no intention of ever moving from our little apartment and lo, and behold, we ended up buying the farm together with my parents. They had a separate living area and we took over the main area, which was a 200 year old schoolhouse called the Dover Road Schoolhouse. At that time, Greenspring Avenue was called Dover Road. My husband's a lawyer and people in his office had gone to school by horse and buggy to our house. And one of a couple of our neighbors have told us, they came by horse and buggy to our house.

Linda Miller ([06:05](#)):

It was a sheep farm. And the farmer that we bought it from left us some sheep. So lo and behold, knowing nothing about this at all we, we became sheep farmers. My husband went to the university of Maryland sheep shearing school <laugh> to try to learn how to do it. We soon found it was much better to have 4-H kids come and do it. It's a very hard job.

Karen Singer ([06:26](#)):

And when I had show and tell, we took sheep to Beth Tfiloh as our show and tell other people took their favorite dollar blankie. I took a sheep.

Melissa Gerr ([06:37](#)):

When she wasn't busy volunteering, Linda was a social worker in Baltimore city schools. Here's a story about a small serendipitous encounter that led to a big outcome.

Linda Miller ([06:48](#)):

One evening, we were a big gifts dinner for The Associated Jewish Charities and Jack Pechter, who was a friend of ours, asked me what the social workers were working on. At that time, we knew that there were about 1500 students in the city schools that were registered as homeless and probably another 1500 that were not registered. He said, well, let's try and do something about that. So at this big gifts meeting, we went around to some real estate developers and said, would you let us use apartments for a year to house homeless families who had children in the Baltimore city schools till they got their feet on the ground? Got it. Had to stop sleeping in cars and things like that. So lo and behold, all of these realtors said, yes, they would let us use this. And by the way, they got no financial break for this.

Linda Miller ([07:40](#)):

At all. We started out small. Program, grew very quickly. It's called Project Fresh Start. The child needed assistance in school. The child needed help, let's say an arithmetic, we would call that social worker in that school and hopefully get some assistance added assistance for that child. It was more than Jack and I could handle. We went to the Catholic Charities, but we were of course very much involved in it since The Associated Jewish Charities was backing us in this program. I should say, by the way, we're very, very supportive financially and technically. We decided to invite The Associated Black Charities to join us. And I'm happy to say that the program still exists in some form with the Catholic Charities. So we are very proud of, of how, how that has worked out all these years later.

Melissa Gerr ([08:35](#)):

After a lifetime of volunteering, Linda's dedication to giving back has made a great impact on her life.

Linda Miller ([08:44](#)):

Couple years ago, Catholic Charities honored me. I'll never get this out. And, and they brought, they brought a, a woman who was a nurse and she had grown up at Project Fresh Start. And she now worked at univer- She worked at the University of Maryland Hospital, as a nurse. My husband had just finished treatment there for non Hodgkin's lymphoma. And I kept thinking this nurse was probably my husband's nurse at the hospital, and now she was able to take care of him.

Melissa Gerr ([09:35](#)):

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