

Melissa:

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.

Mark:

Oh, they were my Bubbies and my Zadies that taught me Yiddish, and they would teach me a Yiddish word every day. Oy vey! <laugh>.

Melissa:

Welcome back to *Pull Up A Chair*, a podcast from The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. These 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, did you ever have a job that changed your life? Mark Newton has. Recently retired after working 23 years at the Weinberg Park Heights JCC print job, he still remembers the day he walked in for the first time and met Mirna, the shop manager at the time.

Mark:

I was in between jobs, so I pick up the paper. It was back in the day when you went and got a Sunday newspaper. So the first job that I inquired about was the job at the JCC in the print shop. It must have been *bashert* <laugh>. Anyway, I went, called the number, and I assumed that it was, you know, direct job. I would be going straight to the JCC and interviewing and everything. Well, no, it was a temporary agency, which I really was not interested in at all, but I wasn't doing anything. So it was a temporary assignment for two weeks because the manager, she was going on vacation and they needed someone to run the print shop while she was gone. So I walked in and the place was just in such disarray that I wanted to turn around and leave. Well, 23 years later they had to kick me out, so... <laugh>. But she was a beautiful person. I loved working with her and all that she really needed was, you know, a hand around there. I mean the print shop a lot, and it was a lot for one person.

Melissa:

This was more than just a new job for Mark. As a church-going African American man, it was kind of a whole new world.

Mark:

First of all, I'm Christian, but it was just really amazing to me and really such a very spiritual thing to be able to interact with people who were of the Jewish faith and the more that I interacted with people of the Jewish faith and everything, I found that we had a whole lot more in common than we have different, and, you know, and it was just very enriching for me. And it helped me to understand a whole lot of things about the early parts of Christianity and everything that I didn't understand. I developed relationships with a couple of rabbis and things of that nature who would explain things to me and with whom we would have very in-depth conversations about. Things that were in the Bible or the Torah. And you know, like I say, it was very spiritually enriching.

Melissa:

During his more than two decades at the Weinberg Park Heights JCC print shop, Mark learned a lot about himself and the world around him.

Mark:

It was one of the greatest experiences in my life, and it helped mold me in certain ways as a person that contributed to me being the person that I am today. I learned a lot about how to be a part of an organization that you, or being a part of a culture, because I was welcomed into the culture. I learned a lot of things about different Jewish holidays. The most impactful thing was learning how to navigate through in a totally foreign atmosphere. Number one, I mean, it shows you that we tend to sometimes focus on our differences, but you tend to leave with the feeling that there are more things that we have alike and in common than we have different. You know, I mean, we all have the same worries. We still all have the same concerns. We all love our children. We all worry about our children. We all worry about our children's education. We, I mean, all of these things are the same. They're all, they're all the same.

Melissa:

Mark has made lifelong friendships and mentors because of his time at the Weinberg Park Heights JCC too.

Mark:

Well, one of my closest colleagues was my supervisor, Robin Rose Samuels, who's the Marketing Director at the JCC. And she and I, we still keep in touch with each other and I consider her one of my dearest friends. I also learned a lot from Robin. And, well, I guess one person that I would like to, I guess maybe single out is one of my dearest friends to this day, Rabbi Phil Miller. He was, at the time when I met him, he was one of the associate executive directors at the JCC and he was in charge of the Park Heights building. So, therefore, he and I had a lot of opportunities to work together. Also with Dr. Miller, being a kindred spirit like myself, I mean, we had many opportunities to talk and discuss different issues, current events, things in the Torah and the Bible. And we just developed a very warm friendship with each other. I mean, after Dr. Miller left the JCC, we maintained our friendship.

Melissa:

Mark's daughter, who is now 31 years old, was just a child when he started at the print shop. He says a huge benefit of working at the JCC was that he could send her to camp.

Mark:

And she attended quite a few of the different camps. She attended the karate camp, the tennis camp, and she really enjoyed it. It was really rewarding experience in her life because at the same way that I took the same thing that I took from my time at the JCC as far as being immersed into a totally different culture.

Melissa:

Interacting with all sorts of clients and volunteers, Mark got a front-row education in all things Jewish, including Yiddish.

Mark:

Oh, they were my Bubbies and my Zadies that taught me Yiddush. When I first started there, everything was done manually. I mean, we put things together. We stapled booklets, we folded flyers. We tagged

flyers by hand. And all of this was done by a cadre of loving volunteers that we had. I had two special seniors. One of them I called my Bubbie. One of them I called my Zadie. And they would teach me a Yiddish word every day, *oy vey* <laugh>. That is my absolute favorite. <laugh>. Let's see, \_\_\_\_\_, <laugh>, no patience <laugh>. That's one of my favorites. And I was invited to quite a few different events as well. You know, my coworkers like, I got to attend Bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs. I mean, that was a very rewarding experience as well. I went to weddings. I mean, like I say, I definitely embraced the opportunity to learn as much as I could about the culture.

Melissa:

But the biggest education Mark received, working alongside Jewish employees, volunteers and clergy is kind of intangible.

Mark:

I learned that there are many people out here who are of all different races. If we could just keep an open mind and learn to listen to each other and have empathy with each other, that makes a big difference. And our concerns, our worries, our heartaches are the same. I mean, they just may be wrapped in a different cloth, but when we open the cloth, they're the same.

Melissa:

Thanks for listening to The Associated's podcast. *Pull Up A Chair*, stories from Baltimore's vibrant Jewish community. I'm your host Melissa Gerr. *Pull Up A Chair* is available on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. You can also find us on The Associated website. Look for [associated.org/pull up a chair](https://associated.org/pull-up-a-chair). Remember to subscribe and leave a rating or review. It really helps others find us and tell your friends and family 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.