

Melissa:

You are 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.

Pam:

You know what? I think I'm done with retail. It's been 30 years. I'm looking for a change.

Melissa:

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, how do you know when something is just *bashert*. When something is just truly meant to be? Pam Solomon knew. First, the Long Island Born and New Jersey bred teen knew she wanted to get out of town for college, but she had no idea that desire was the beginning of a trajectory that decades later would lead her to the career she was meant for.

Pam:

When I applied to colleges, I wanted to go somewhere a little bit south, but my parents wouldn't let me go more than a four-hour drive away because they were afraid wherever I went, I would meet somebody and stay. So they wanted to make sure I wasn't too far away. So, University of Maryland was my first choice, and like my parents predicted, I met a wonderful guy there who was from Pikesville, Maryland and told me very early on in our relationship that if we stayed together, he was never leaving Baltimore <laugh>. So, I was okay with that because I knew my parents would eventually wind up in Florida.

Melissa:

Smart, young woman that Pam was, she moved home after college because, well, even though she and her boyfriend were in love, he hadn't put a ring on it. So, they agreed that Pam would forge her career while Richard, the eventual and soon to be husband, focused on law school. That's when she joined the Macy's Junior Executive Program, which groomed employees for a career track. A fast-rising star, she quickly was offered a promotion to the flagship Manhattan store.

Pam:

And I said, actually, could you transfer me to Owings Mills, Maryland? And they looked at me and they said, why would you want to go there? In retail you want to be in New York. And I said, well, my boyfriend's in Baltimore and that's the closest Macy's. I really want to work there. They tried to talk me out of it, but I really wanted to. So they transferred me there, and that's how I wound up at the Macy's in Owings Mills. And this was in 1989. So Macy's in Owings Mills was a beautiful store. The whole mall was beautiful. But shortly after, I wound up transferring to Hunt Valley and that Macy's, unfortunately didn't stay around that long. So I wound up working at Sax Fifth Avenue in Owings Mills Mall because I had loved that mall. And Sax was beautiful. And then unfortunately, Sax closed.

Pam:

So I was looking for a job again, and that's when my mother-in-law said, please don't go work for Nordstroms. We really want them to stay in business. So that became a joke in our family. So I, at that

time, I had just had my first baby, so I took some time off. And my short time off turned into about seven or eight years until my second child went to first grade. And I really had no excuse to stay home anymore while they were in school. So I went back to work and that's when I started working as a merchandiser. I worked for Pandora Jewelry. I worked for Phillips Van Husen. So although I was working, I was able to be at every school event. I was able to be home at three o'clock when my kids got off the bus. And then I was even able to volunteer in my kids' classes, be a P T A President and balance a lot. Then I wound up working, for Stebbins for Her in Kenilworth Mall. And I worked there for seven years until they were going out of business.

Melissa:

And then after more than 30 years in retail, she thought...

Pam:

You know what? I think I'm done with retail. It's been 30 years. I'm looking for a change. And I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And my daughter was teaching at the time, and she said, remember how much you loved volunteering when we were in elementary school? Remember how much you loved being in charge as the PTA president? She said, why don't you try teaching? And I thought, I don't know if I could do that. You know, I loved raising my own kids, but I wasn't sure I wanted to be with other people's kids. But I also teased my children, who were in their late twenties, that I'm really ready to be a grandmother <laugh>. So they said, why don't you go teach in a preschool or somewhere with little kids where you could get your fill? And, that is when, which is why I say all the time, it was beshert.

Pam:

I was scrolling through Facebook, literally after having a conversation with my daughter like that. And Kim Davidson, who is a friend of mine, had posted that the J C C was looking for preschool teachers. And I said, wow, if there ever was a sign, this is it. So I went in literally the next day to meet, Danny Fry, who's the director of the Early Childhood Program at the J C C. And I was very nervous. But, two weeks later I started teaching the two-year-olds and I immediately loved the children. But more importantly than that, I immediately loved the people at the J C C. But the two-year-olds were tough. They were fun. But it was a lot of work. And I was coming home exhausted.

Melissa:

But just months after Pam launched her new career, the Covid 19 pandemic hit and like much of the rest of the world, the JCC temporarily closed. But it's not like Pam to sit around. She used the time to get her teaching certification. So when the JCC called her back, she returned with new tools and better skills to run the classroom.

Pam:

And they put me then with the four year olds and the pre-K, which I think they thought was a better fit for my personality. And I definitely enjoy those children so much. And, it's just been wonderful and I just love it. And now I'm going into my second year, being a pre-K lead teacher.

Melissa:

The jump from a long career in retail to lead pre-K teacher at the Stoler Early Learning Center at the Rosenblum Owings Mills JCC might sound like a big leap, but Pam sees her trajectory as a natural one. She offers this advice to others who may be considering a change.

Pam:

Look at what you've done in your career. What skills you feel strongly about. And I think for me, I think it was the people skills which then transitioned to teaching. So it would be look at what you've done in your career, in your current career, what you think your strongest skills are, and then look out there for something that will utilize those skills and be open to anything, would be my biggest thing.

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/pullupachair. Remember to subscribe and leave a rating or review. It really helps others find us and tell your friends and family you've been listening to *Pull Up A Chair*, stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore. It's part of The Associated Centennial celebration.