

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.

Inbal:

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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, a story about when the past meets up with the present. Inbal Neun was born in Ashkelon, Israel. She left as a toddler, so she doesn't remember much, but her mother, Diane, has shared stories with her over the years.

Inbal:

In the kibbutz, you stayed with your mother for about - she couldn't remember... She said it was about four to six weeks and then she returned to work. She had a variety of jobs depending on, you know, when she was pregnant. She didn't work in the fields. She ended up at the sewing factory. They had hot houses of roses in the kibbutz, and she also worked in the kitchen too. But she went back to work. And then I was with a - I believe the word is called *metapelet*. And, her name was Sapora. My mother said she was wonderful. She was the baby nurse maid, so she would be allowed to visit. They would intercom her so that she could come and feed even in the middle of the night, and that we went regularly to the Mediterranean Sea and swam there. And, when she came to Baltimore, Maryland, because the kibbutz made everything, including the milk and it wasn't pasteurized, that was the biggest struggle that we had, we would have nothing to do with the milk <laugh>, but, you know, it sounded wonderful that the kibbutz made everything that you ate and drank.

Melissa:

At age two and a half, Inbal was whisked back to Baltimore, her mother's hometown. She spoke about a childhood memory.

Inbal:

My very first memory is being back in Baltimore and being very, very concerned because I didn't know where my sister was. We were all living in my grandmother's apartment. So, my mother just bravely came back to Baltimore, Maryland with two kids and the shirt on her back. And, the family really just helped her get on her feet. But my mother's fussing over me because I'm in a makeshift bed. And, you know, this was all new to me. I'm now in a strange place and I didn't know where my sister was, so I was just being reassured that my sister was in a crib nearby.

Melissa:

The family eventually moved to Carroll County where Inbal attended high school, and then she went to Ohio where she studied music therapy, music education and psychology.

Inbal:

So when I came back, I got a job at Milford Manor Nursing Home and I started as an activity assistant. And it was really interesting because I really wanted to be a music therapist and I told everyone that I would work with pretty much everyone, but I didn't really see myself working with seniors. And, ironically, I just ended up getting that job and I met quite a few people that really pulled on my heartstrings. I met a Holocaust survivor. Her name was Maria, and she had reverted back to her native language, which was German. And I just fell in love with Maria. She was my first love in working with someone with Alzheimer's disease. And, that's kind of how my career really started. And I focused on dementia care for a long time within long-term care.

Melissa:

Fast forward to today, Inbal is the director of the Edward A Myerberg Center, a program of CHAI, an agency of The Associated. Not only is she thriving in an atmosphere where she's engaged with a community of seniors, but her hometown of Ashkelon has popped back into the picture.

Inbal:

Being a senior center director is my dream job. And I love making an impact in the lives of seniors. And we are very focused on volunteering with the message that seniors are assets and they have so much to bring to the table and to bring to their communities. And a perfect example is Israel Connect, and that's kind of where the coincidence and this story really kind of was born because when I met Melanie Waxman, who was our tech hub concierge, I told her where I was born in Ashkelon and she said, ah, that's our sister city. So I learned that The Associated has a wonderful connection with Ashkelon.

Melissa:

Israel Connect helps Israeli teens get better access to higher education and put them on a path to economic mobility.

Inbal:

It's an organization where an English-speaking retiree or senior, again, our members are paired with an Israeli student in Ashkelon who wants to improve their English and their language skills. And so using, the virtual online, they are able to engage in a lively conversation for about 45 minutes every week and really develop that relationship and partnership. And, they have improved the language skills of these teenagers that have to take the university entrance exams. Where one fourth of the exam is weighted towards the English language proficiency. We started with 11 volunteers in 2018, and now the program has grown. We currently have 54 mentors.

Melissa:

Another Baltimore-Ashkelon partnership is Keshet. It's a two year program for adults age 45 plus who are interested in exploring Jewish identity and deepening the understanding between the two communities. Inbal remembers when a group from Ashkelon visited the Myerberg Center.

Inbal:

We had about 30 people, I believe, come here who live in Ashkelon through The Associated and they toured the Myerberg. And I just had a wonderful time talking with them. And as a thank you, they gave,

myself and Melanie Waxman candles that were made in Ashkelon. And it just really touched me. It was the first time that I've seen anything you know, made from Ashkelon <laugh> and I'm just so very excited to just, you know, experience it myself rather than through someone else.

Melissa:

Inbal hasn't returned to Ashkelon since she left at age two and a half, but she has a trip planned soon with her mother.

Inbal:

I think the first thing I want to do is just take it all in and just appreciate that my feet are on the soil of where I was born. And learn more about Ashkelon from a personal experience, learn more from the people and, eventually visit Kibbutz Negba as well. But just being there and being in the moment is really what I look forward to most.

Melissa:

Thanks for listening to The Associated 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.