A Family's Legacy of Giving

In Memory of Dorothy Markoff Nelson (December 28, 1913 - December 13, 2014)

"When you work for something in a community, then you identify with it in a very personal way," says Gloria Winston, a lifelong volunteer and supporter of The Miriam Hospital. Indeed, Gloria and her two older sisters, Bernice Gourse and Dorothy Nelson, share a common devotion to The Miriam in terms of the time they've dedicated as volunteers and the generosity they've shown as donors. *"For us, The Miriam is the one thing we all have in common,"* says Gloria. *"There's no question that all three of us feel strongly about it."*

Gloria Winston, Dorothy Nelson and Bernice Gourse

The three sisters inherited their philanthropic spirit from their parents, Ruth and Samuel Markoff. Their mother, Ruth, was a member of the Women's Association and also helped run the North End Dispensary, which were both integral to the opening of The Miriam Hospital in 1926. *"As a volunteer my mother also purchased the linens for the hospital, which was a big job back then,"* Gloria says. Their father, Samuel, founded Paramount Line in 1906, which became one of the largest greeting card companies in the world.

When Ruth Markoff died in 1978, the three sisters founded the Ruth and Samuel Markoff Foundation as a way to honor their parents. Samuel had already died in 1932. *"We were always very strong believers in The Miriam,"* recalled Dorothy. *"My grandfather was one of the first Jewish doctors in the hospital."* In 2013, the Foundation was closed and the Ruth and Samuel Markoff Fund was created as a donor advised fund through the Rhode Island Foundation so that the family's support could go on in perpetuity. The Foundation has supported The Miriam by providing funds for the creation of the Rosalie and Norman Fain Outpatient Building, the Victor and Gussie Baxt Building, and recently, a patient waiting area. The Ruth and Samuel Markoff Coffee Shop was named in recognition of their generous gift to the Baxt Building.

"Charity is not only giving money, but giving of yourself."

– Bernice Gourse

"The Miriam has always been one of our favorite charities," explains Gloria, who has remained an active member of the Women's Association, where she was honored last May with an award for her commitment to The Miriam. *"I still go in as a volunteer. Now I work in the infusion suite at the Cancer Center. But back in the early days, I had a little cart and I would load it up with magazines and candy and go from room to room. I would see the same people week to week because patients stayed in the hospital much longer in those days. You could develop real relationships,"* she recalls. At one point, Bernice was the director of volunteers at the hospital. *"I loved being director of volunteers,"* she recalls. *"It gave me the opportunity to show the young volunteers that the patients were more than sick people, but real people with a sense of humor."*

The Miriam Hospital has come a long way since it opened in 1926. *"I have been so thrilled to see it grow from a little neighborhood hospital to a hospital of great stature,"* says Gloria. *"It's like seeing your kid grown up."* Now Ruth and Samuel's grandchildren have assumed responsibility for overseeing the Fund. *"Charity is not only giving money, but giving of yourself,"* says Bernice. *"It should be part of our everyday existence. I hope I have and always will set a good example for my children."*