

REMEMBERING MEL

A few weeks ago, after taking care of several items on my “to-do” list and eating a quick supper, I prepared to go to Minyan for Mel as usual. I started feeling somewhat ill and felt that by sitting down in the corner of the sofa, this feeling would pass; however, it didn’t and I began to feel an annoying pressure in the center of my chest. By 7:15 I knew that I couldn’t make Minyan tonight and called my son Michael to let him know why he wouldn’t see me. He asked if I wanted to go to the hospital—I thought not—not yet, anyhow. He said he would check in later and I found my attention going to the TV as the program Chronicle was featuring a piece on the Charles River: how it was cleaned up after being so polluted that if one fell in a tetanus shot was advised, that now it was possibly one of the cleanest rivers in the country. Many people and groups can take credit for this (in fact, one of my former clients Mitch Lunin of Newton was cited several times). I was caught up in the beautiful videography of the Charles when suddenly, waves of emotion came over me and tears came and came. This passed but then I noticed that the pressure in my chest was gone; I felt better. I have found that tears come very swiftly and sometimes it’s just a phrase in a prayer or a melody and the connection to my loss is made. I really believe that tears are

G-d's gift to us.

As I watched different aspects of the river meandering amongst various cities and towns, I remembered how Mel and I would eat our lunches together by the Charles (before Storrow Drive was even constructed) in our used 1937 \$75 Plymouth (with no heater) as he was finishing up at BU and I was starting my new career as a lab technician with Dr. Harry Savitz. Then I remembered the picnics we took with our new baby daughter, Debbie, and my parents along the Charles in Newton near the old Norumbega amusement park and how Mel almost drowned when we rented a canoe and he had one foot on the dock and the other in the canoe which started to drift away from the pier. At the time, all I could do was laugh at the situation because rescue services were close at hand. Then, I remembered going out on the Charles with Mel and Bea and Eric Gibbs in their new boat and we listened as Boston welcomed Nelson Mandela at the Hatch Shell. I remembered the beautiful concerts we attended at the same shell when the Boston Pops played during the summer. I remembered my mother taking me as a little girl to those same concerts when Arthur Fiedler conducted so many years ago. Finally, I remembered the times I looked out on the river during Mel's hospitalizations at Mount Auburn Hospital through the windows of the various rooms for his many illnesses.

Then, as the program ended, the phone rang, aha, it's Michael checking on me, but no, it was Rabbi Lerner calling to ask how I was and if I would like to talk about Mel at Yizkor services on Shemini Atzereth along with others who would share their thoughts about their loss. Would I like to talk about Mel—for a few minutes! I could talk for hours. Mel always put family first, that was his main interest. Vacations were spent together. We were campers for many years. He enjoyed fishing and boating, but would engage in these interests as long as one or more of us went along also. Later, he would take up golf after the children were all grown and on their own. He joined a group of men his age and went during the week while I was at work. We were so much a part of each other that his death was like an amputation for me. A part of me is gone, so final and the pain (just like after amputation) is so real. Yet, I can stand apart from myself and watch me talk with other people, console my children and our grandchildren, take care of details that require thought and planning. All without him. I hoped from time to time that it was a bad dream—then I knew I had to be grateful for the doctors and G-d for having him for so long; we were married for 63+ years and he was so very ill. Fortunately, our children, their spouses and grandchildren were there to bolster me and I know I drew on my own strength to help them through this also.

Many people have reached out to me, to us, and I gratefully accepted everything that they offered in such good faith. I knew that the Temple Emunah community was there for us and from past experience I knew how helpful Minyan would be. And I was not wrong. So many kind, sweet, generous people. However, the one, the rock, the provider, the doer, the source for so much information and discussion has gone from us, from me and I am now on a different path, which at 85 “ain’t easy”. One of Mel’s final thoughts he expressed to me was that he felt so badly that in dying before me now, he wouldn’t be there to help me when I needed him as I had been there for him. He always urged me on, to try new and challenging things. Also, before he died, one evening, he asked me if I had any thoughts on how a person such as he could one day meet a girl and know instantly such a feeling of love that he would want to spend the rest of his life with her. How could it be? What was the process? Here he was an old, sick man of 85 and still professing his love for me. He was the brother I never had, the father figure (my own father was a sick man throughout his life), the son my mother never had, as well as my sweet, sweetheart and I miss him.

I must add that my reaching out brought me to “Emunah-Talks” and a book suggested by Lois Bruss by Rabbi Alan Lew “This is Real and You are Totally Unprepared.” With all the reading material that has been helpful to me, this

stands out especially during the Holidays and I can't praise it enough. The title tells it all, we are not prepared, no matter what. But we try, try, try. As I mentioned earlier, tears come easily and frequently and two songs, (both by nice Jewish boys) work their magic. "Somewhere" from West Side Story and "Hello Young Lovers" from the King and I. The poetic words fit my mood and echo my sentiments. I am not afraid to cry. Thank you for listening to an old lady.