

Hospice Volunteer Enlightens World for Patient, Self

Her diminutive frame appeared at the doorway without a sound. Slightly bent over and very pale, her hair covering the metastasis poking through her skull, she looks into my eyes. Though only a resident for three days, her ambivalence about being in an end-of-life facility resulted in a reputation of being difficult. Ambulatory and articulate, she doesn't fit the mold of a patient, and as I soon learn, didn't feel quite at home in many circumstances, including her Catholicism.

"It is by the grace of God I am able to walk." I didn't know breast cancer can grow outside of the body. I had been a volunteer working with the terminally ill for less than a year, and that morning prior to meeting her, I was having qualms about whether I could continue. I struggle with the physical care-taking that a bedridden person requires, and I am in awe of people who do this care with confidence. I felt ashamed at my relief that she uses the bathroom on her own.

"You remind me of my psychiatrist, she was Jewish (too)." At some point in our conversation it had become evident that I was not only Jewish but had strong opinions. Within a short time, we are having a deeply personal interaction. In the same way that she was disconnected from the religion of her heritage, for reasons that had little to do with the faith itself, so had I been. I returned; she hasn't.

She confides that she was always attracted to the Jewish boys and relates a family tradition that she is a descendant of Jews who converted to Catholicism to avoid persecution. Perhaps, even at this late stage, she wants to explore her roots?

I mention that I am possibly the only Jewish volunteer. Hanukkah was to begin the next week, she wasn't sure exactly when, as our eyes noted the Christmas tree in the common room. The sun was shining through the windows and I reported when the first day of Hanukkah would occur. Then in an instant, her aura changed to a soft plea. "Do you have an extra Menorah?" In those few seconds, I reflect on my decades of being non-practicing. I have one menorah, and it was purchased 14 years ago at the urging of my Episcopalian spouse, who likes candlelight. The menorah may not be a family heirloom but it was purchased at the gift shop in my cousin's shul, a lifelong practicing Jew, and for that reason it has become a vital link to my ancestry.

I offer to put out the word for an extra. It is not unusual for a family to have more than one Menorah, though I hesitate to assure her that one will materialize on that first day, only a few days away. I also fail to mention to her that I am relatively new to the Jewish community in the sense that I have not been a member of any congregation, as an adult, until about five years ago. I feel

inadequate to the job of bolstering someone else's practice.

I posted on my Facebook page and spread to my congregation the need for an extra menorah. With no idea whether this would actually happen, I called the hospice volunteer coordinator, to let her know what I did. Within a day, I received several offers from the congregation.

On my next week's visit, I noted that she had candles and an English translation of the prayer, along with two menorahs. She made a point of letting me know that she lit the candles nightly; her spirit was visibly lightened by the

Hanukkah observance and support from the facility.

With inner pride, I offer to do the lighting for Day 7 with her. One of the remnants of Jewish parochial school education is the lifelong ability to read Hebrew. After the candles are lit, I open my Siddur Sim Shalom, to show her where I am reading, "Barukh atah Adonai...."

With the same plea that brought us to this moment, she asks, "Will you teach me Hebrew and discuss Torah with me?" I reluctantly admit that I never actually took the time to understand everything that I was reading.



And inside, I mentally squirm in my chair and accept that the Universe may have just kicked my butt. I also realize that I am not alone on this circuitous path of re-discovery. And a dying stranger learned that neither is she. ☆

The author has requested anonymity.

Purim Feast at Ohr HaTorah on March 5

A magnificent Purim feast will be hosted by Ohr HaTorah on Purim Day which falls on Thursday, March 5 this year. The feast will feature delicious Israeli cuisine and a full Kosher wine bar.

Purim is the annual celebration for Jews as a day of thanksgiving, joy and out of the ordinary cheer. The story of Purim recorded in the Scroll of Esther, which is one of the 24 Books of the Bible. The story is documented in remarkable detail and takes the reader through a dazzling journey of suspense and adventure. At the end of the book is the request from Mordechai and Esther to Jews of all generations, that they should celebrate this festive day of Purim by giving gifts to the poor and

sending food gifts to friends. Listening to the reading of the scroll of Esther and enjoying a festive feast at the end of the day is also included in their request.

The Purim feast will also feature a Purim play and Purim music. The feast begins at 6 PM at Congregation Ohr HaTorah. Celebrants are encouraged to come dressed in costume, but it is not mandatory.

The festivities will begin with the reading of the Megillah – Scroll of Esther on Wednesday night, March 4, at 6:45 PM. Traditional Purim treats like Hamantaschen will be served after the Megillah reading.

Thursday, March 5, the Megillah will be read as part of

the morning service which begins at 6:30 AM (the reading of the Megillah will be at about 7 AM). The Megillah will be read once more at 5 o'clock in the afternoon for those who cannot attend the morning reading.

The Purim feast is open to the entire community. The fee to attend the Purim Feast: \$18 per person and \$10 per child. The services and Grand Purim feast will be held at Congregation Ohr HaTorah, 6619 Sardis Road in Charlotte. For more information and for reservations please visit our website at www.chabadnc.org or call our office at 704-366-3984. ☆

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