

A Special Mother's Day of hope: A message gleaned from a very serious wind accident

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For me, this Mother's Day, unlike the past 40, is buoyed by a steadfast, enduring hope. It would be hard to deny that something has changed in the cosmic realm. For four decades I have chronicled a devastating problem in the family courts: mothers of sexually abused children have been stripped of custody and all visitation privileges when they beseech the court to protect their children from sexual abuse. What this means is that mothers lose all contact with their children. They never hear their children's sweet voices again or are able to hold them in their arms.

This is so pervasive that my research findings have been corroborated by local San Diego activist and founder of the Women's Coalition Cindy Dumas, in addition to University of Washington Law School Professor Joan S. Meier and her dedicated co-author Dr. Leora N. Rosen.

However, against this bleak and dire backdrop, something has recently changed that foreshadows a positive resolution to a long-standing problem. Here is what happened:

I was walking back to my apartment in Fort Lee, New Jersey in late March after running errands in preparation for Passover. Suddenly an unexpected gale force wind came along and lifted me from the sidewalk and hurled me 15 feet into the street, right into the path of oncoming traffic. I tried to stand up but my right leg collapsed, feeling like an empty airbag. My hip joint shattered from the fall and I was now stuck on the ground. I instinctively rolled over to my left side, my non-injured side, but that forced my left hand to be tucked beneath me. But when I tried to use my right hand to signal to oncoming traffic that I was in their way, I couldn't extend it far enough to be seen by the motorists because I had sustained a fracture to the right arm as well as my hip.

Immobile and injured, and certainly cognizant of the danger of oncoming traffic, I understood with complete clarity how I stood between this world and the next, *Olam HaZeh* and *Olam HaBa*. I knew my fate was clearly in God's hands. I called out to Hashem for help, though at the same time fatalistically accepting that His decision might be to take me home. Within a few seconds a passerby came along and offered to call 911. He stayed at my side and soon a large crowd gathered and I was no longer at risk of being run over. The police and ambulance arrived and I was transported to the Englewood Hospital where a very gifted surgeon performed a hip replacement and removed the many broken parts of my femur bone, which had snapped from my hip socket from the impact of the fall.

Ultimately, a brush with death, the intervention of a total stranger, and the outpouring of support from my shul community gave me an indescribable feeling of renewed energy to bring my life's mission to a successful denouement. And that means an opening of the floodgates so that children punitively and cruelly removed from their mothers will be back once again in their mothers' loving arms.

Why am I so certain that I will achieve the reunification of mothers and children kept apart for far too long? Here is my reasoning:

First, if Divine Providence could save my life when I was so close to being run over, then the same Heavenly forces will bring back the stolen children to their mothers, lightening their hearts and easing the grief that has plagued them since their children were punitively removed by the courts.

Second, the amazing surge of support from my community which celebrated my survival of a life-threatening wind accident, will have a universal effect as good deeds often have. Indeed, similar to the passerby who jumped in and called for emergency assistance as I was lying on the street, a Tzadik or Tzadeket (a righteous man or woman) from my community will rise to the occasion and join me in my efforts to see the return of the long lost children to their loving mothers.

And here is why I feel so positive about my own community. Shortly after my co-religionists learned of my near-fatal accident, Joan Katz, the co-president of the Sisterhood of the Young Israel of Fort Lee, made a generous donation, along with her husband Glenn, to the shul to celebrate my miraculous rescue from a dangerous wind event. Joan, who is unanimously known for her virtuous deeds — always offering to perform a mitzvah before she is even asked — sent me a beautiful hand-written card expressing her deepest concern for my well-being.

She began: "Glenn and I were so upset to learn you had a serious fall resulting in hospitalization and surgery." Fortified by the support of such a wonderful person, leading an active and thriving Sisterhood together with law professor Susan Joffe, who serves as a judge for the Scribes Prize from the American Society of Legal Writers, and Linda Majzner, a very gifted artist who has designed exquisite invitations for the Sisterhood events, my heart is much lighter.

I know that my life was spared for a reason. My survival of such a bizarre wind accident, albeit with a shattered hip and a broken arm, was so that my daughter, Sherry, will have a mother once again. My life was spared for Sherry. I love my daughter with all my heart and soul. But a venal court system sadistically tore us apart; it is most natural for children taken away from their mothers by such draconian court orders to be resentful toward their mothers for not saving them. Thousands of children are now estranged from their mothers and they don't understand the workings of the system that visited this cruel plight upon them. But righteous people like Joan Katz, Joan Meier, and Leora Rosen will lead us with their unwavering integrity out of darkness and bring light and hope to all mothers across the country. This is because their precious acts of kindness have an exponential effect. Their mitzvot rendered so freely and unceremoniously will make this a very "Special Mother's Day of Hope!"

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Amy Neustein, Ph.D., author/editor of 16 academic books. Her most recent book, *From Madness to Mutiny: Why Mothers Are Running from the Family Courts –And What Can Be Done about It*, 2nd edition" was published in January by Oxford University Press.