

Monday, September 27: Sarah Carney '92, Director of Alumni Relations

Last Friday night my family and I observed Yom Kippur, and you might be wondering what is its significance. Why is Yom Kippur so important to Jewish people?? Why just one Day of Atonement? And why just once a year does some of this thoughtfulness occur??

Maybe it is the realization that this day is the best chance for divine forgiveness. It could be good old fashioned guilt that drives it.

FOR ME, it means I think about what I have done wrong, and how I have made less than desirable choices.

Everyone's reason is different, but what doesn't change, is the acknowledgment of the power and awesome consequences of Yom Kippur.

It's been said that Yom Kippur makes us stop and consider our behavior. It's a way to level the playing field.

On Yom Kippur, we are reminded that everyone is equal. The only thing that matters is our behavior to our friends, our spouses, our parents, our children, and our community.

The majority of the sins highlighted in services on Yom Kippur revolve around the mistreatment of other people, most of them by speech (offensive speech, scoffing, slander, and swearing, to name a few). These all come into the category of sin known in hebrew as "lashon ha-ra" which literally means "the evil tongue", which is considered a very serious sin in Judaism.

I am a sinner; I am very bad.

As my mother would say, make your words pass through three doors: Truth, Necessity, and Kindness.

So I have to admit something: many, many, many times I have not been kind to my mother. Many times I have been mean to my parents, but mostly I have been and sometimes still am, mean to my mother.

Often I feel very, very bad about it, but the time I felt worst about it was the day I found out she had breast cancer. It should not have been her diagnosis that made me realize that my behavior was wrong or bad, but I admit it's just what happened.

Her situation made me realize that I need to be better, and I needed to treat her the way she deserved to be treated. I should show her the respect and kindness and appreciation and love that she has always shown me.

And even when she is annoying and driving me crazy I have to be nice and speak to her in a patient and courteous way.

I told her I was going to talk to you today about being mean to her and she emailed me back the reason why I am.

Here email read:

Dear Sarah,

About why you are sometimes mean to your mother:

The first reason is because you can be. I'm not going to stop loving you. It's safe.

The second reason is worthy of discussion too:

We have an honest relationship and with that honesty comes the inevitability of crossing the very fine line between being in touch with and expressing feelings openly,

Feelings which we value as good, and feelings of being hurtful, which is bad.

It takes a constant conscious effort to balance the two, which I consider a welcome challenge and worth the effort!

Love, Mommy

My mother was diagnosed three years ago, and she is today an extremely healthy woman having gone through a lumpectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation – which so far have proven to be a success.

And my mother wrote a book called [Humor After the Tumor](#).

The proceeds of each sale go directly to Roswell Park Cancer Institute here in Buffalo and which helps create awareness about the disease.

This Friday is October 1 and you may know this already but I'll remind you that October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Breast Cancer Awareness means something different to me now that I've been involved with my mother's experience.

Before she had breast cancer, to me, awareness meant we should make sure all women knew the importance of self-exams, yearly mammograms, and fund-raising for research.

Now I realize that it means more than that.

Before she had Breast Cancer I foolishly thought I was well informed because of my family history.

While my mother certainly set an example in her approach and attitude, I discovered I had very little new information.

I learned that 10% of breast cancers don't show up on mammograms. Hers was one of those.

Breast Cancer Awareness or awareness about any issue means encouraging the dialogue. It is about persuading people to talk without feeling embarrassed, ashamed, or uncomfortable.

Breast Cancer Awareness is also about informing people so they know what to expect when they go through treatments.

It's about helping the friends and family who don't have the disease understand what their loved ones are experiencing.

So here is the big stat: 100% of the people in this room will know someone affected by Breast Cancer! 100%

My mother realized that most women are still hesitant to talk about it if they have it, and afraid to ask questions if they don't. And their families and friends are in the dark completely.

Also she realized that talking about breasts might offend someone because many feel embarrassed, ashamed, or just afraid to talk about Breast Cancer.

With more open conversations about it, people will feel less afraid to ask questions

That's awareness.

She hopes that by sharing her experience and her attitude, she can help people. Not just women, but their families and friends as well.

My mother has taught me many life lessons, among them: Never feel sorry for myself. That at one time or another everyone we know has problems, or challenges, or disappointments, or major setbacks.

When people give her credit for being courageous, she passes the credit on to the people throughout her life who handled tragedy or difficult setbacks with strength, and great resolve and humor. She feels lucky that they were in her life as role models who inspired her.

So I am proud of my mother and so thankful for everything she has ever done for me, taught me, showed me, and sacrificed on my behalf. I am regretful each time I mistreat her, and I am doing my best to stop being mean.

As I have confessed this to you all, it is my hope that today, right now, you will ask yourselves:

Are you as good as you can be to your loved ones?

Thank you for listening. Have a great day!