

Ilana Mills

Kalsman Story

When I was working in the hospital, I never really knew what was going to meet me on the other side of the door. Often when I first told people that I was a student rabbi, they were not sure why I was there or what they were “supposed” to say to me. One day I visited Judy for the first of what turned out to be many visits. I walked into her room, introduced myself and asked if she wanted a visit. She said, “sure, rabbi, if you want to stay you can,” but it was clear she said this to be polite. When I walked in, I first noticed the 4 visitors. I learned they were her husband, her sons who moved back to California from New York two years ago when she was first diagnosed with cancer, and two friends. The conversation started off simply and with everyone participating.

After a few minutes, I was able to position myself to talk to her more privately as the visitors talked to each other. Judy and I talked for about half an hour about her experience. She told me of her husband David’s strength and how much she appreciated him. He held her hand through every chemo and never let her sleep alone. In all my visits to her room, he was always there with a smile and a message of hope that she will get through. We spoke of the strength she received from her two sons, watching them grow into the men she always knew they could be. In that first meeting, she told me that just yesterday she felt so sick and hopeless she thought she had no more fight in her.

Towards the end of the visit, I asked if she wanted me to say a blessing. She quietly said yes. I gathered everyone around her bed with her husband holding one hand and me holding the other. I explained that I would say a prayer and would be quiet for a moment so she could add any of her own words. I said a Mi Sheberach in Hebrew and English. At the end, I left silence. After about a minute, Judy started to speak with tears streaming down her face. She spoke to God about her illness, her family, her fear, her anger, and her appreciation for the love and support she received. Those tear filled words to God to honest and truly from the heart. After she was done, we all took a deep breath and said “amen.” Judy turned to me still with tears in her eyes and said, “Thank you, I have never talked to God before. Thank you.”