

Joshua Samuels

I'll never forget Saul. From the first time I stepped into his home, his wife Eileen embraced me as though I were a long lost relative. Eileen would walk me around their apartment each time showing me pictures of their family. It was in only the last ten minutes of my visits that I actually spent time with Saul. He'd go in and out of consciousness. Of course, I still sat with him. Many times in silence.

Saul was failing from a bout with lung cancer, which spread like wildfire through his thick, manly, 6 foot 5 inch frame. He and Eileen decided that home hospice was the path they needed to take. Saul wanted to die at home peacefully, surrounded by his family.

One day in mid summer, I got an emergency page. Saul had taken a turn for the worse. Eileen panicked. She called 911 and had him rushed to the hospital. As I was getting out of the car in the hospital parking lot, I realized that I completely forgot to bring any of my Jewish resources with me.

With each step down the long hospital hallway to Saul's room, I pondered nervously, "What am I going to say?" Eileen rushed up to me and gave me a bear hug that lasted forever. Surrounding the bed were Saul's two siblings and best friend.

I began chanting a prayer that we sing during morning tefillah. *Elohai neshama shenatata bi tehora hee*. My god the soul you have given me is pure. You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me. I repeated this line over and over again until there was a meditative presence hovering over the bed. I spoke to Saul quietly, holding his wrinkled and frail hand. His eyes were closed and there were long gaps between each short breath. I chanted a mi shebeirach for everyone in the room. Saul was not the only one in need of healing.

Eileen placed her hand on Saul's forehead and caressed him as we recited the Priestly benediction together. *Yevarechcha adonai vayishmarecha*. His eyes opened. A few tears escaped and ran down his face. They hadn't seen each other in days. Eileen whispered in his ear and then told him she loved him and that it was all right to go. I began singing a song *Hinei ma tov umanayim, shevet achim gam yahad*. How good and how pleasant it is for us to be here together. This isn't usually sung in an end of life situation, but somehow it seemed appropriate. I hadn't planned on it, but it just came out. The 5 of us sang this song until Saul breathed his last breath.