

Good afternoon. L'shanah Tovah.

It is a joy and honor to speak to you today.

I was so surprised when Rabbi Lyon called to ask me to participate in the symposium. I was scared and still am and didn't think that I had a story to tell. Finally, he convinced me that I could do this. After agreeing, I realized that the most difficult decision was, "what should I wear?"

The late Erma Bombeck once said, "There is a thin line between laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt." I know this line well. For many years, I lived on the lighter side of that line, with the most wonderful man, my late husband, Morris Cweigenberg.

I met Morris on blind date—sounds archaic, I know. Our date was a leap of faith and trust in a mutual friend who convinced me to take the chance, because "Morris, he said, was the most honorable man he had ever known."

It only took a few dates for me to see that my friend was right. Morris was not only an honorable man; he was a unique individual who knew how to enjoy life. It was a no-brainer. He was definitely the man for me.

Looking back, that blind date was more like an awakening than a chance meeting. It was as if we had just been given sight and were looking at a whole new, amazing life laid out before us. Before we knew it, we were doing what people in love do. We were getting married. I have two sons, Scott and Kevin Pasternak, and Morris had one son, Michael Cweigenberg.

I have to say, though, if you will indulge a mother's heart, that I am so proud of all three of them. They are all married now, and have children of their own. Michael has two and my sons, Scott and Kevin have two each, also.

I am so blessed to have sons that are loving, kind, successful, and, if I may humbly boast, they are great parents. I get so much joy from being with them and watching my grandchildren growing up.

I have also been blessed in my profession where I have worked for the past 21 years. I have enjoyed the privilege of career advancement and have used my skills to benefit the companies.

Clearly, I have much for which to be thankful. However, I have to admit that there was a time when I was desperate for encouragement. My life had taken an unexpected downturn, and I needed something to rescue me from events that were sweeping me across the line and away

from the lightness I had known, to the other side where tragedy loomed—a tragedy that would redefine my life, probably forever.

On November 12, 2009 my dear husband, Morris, passed away. Trying to emerge from the loss of him was like climbing out of a freeway crash. I felt mangled and torn from grief and the loneliness of living without him.

But somewhere in the sorrow of it, tucked away in the special place where he and I coexisted in mutual respect and love, there was a part of him that remained untouched by the grief. You could call it a gift he left especially for me.

During our 18 years of marriage, he had ingrained in me his unshakable philosophy that life was meant to be enjoyed. He loved life, and he wanted me to embrace it as he did and to live it to the fullest, never giving in to fear or apathy. So he left me his joy.

I am a blessed woman.

I am blessed because he taught me not only to be joyful but to be strong and to welcome each day. He had long ago internalized the realities of the thin line and chosen to live on the light side, neck and neck with laughter, comedy, and humor. He had had enough of darkness, having survived the holocaust, not that he ever forgot the horrors of that experience. No! He simply refused this experience.

He was proud to be a Jew and part of a rich culture that was his birthright. So, he rarely talked about his stolen youth in the ghettos of German-occupied Poland, or that he was put into several different concentration camps, nor did he linger on the loss of his father and two brothers in the camps, and the slave labor he was forced to do, before he was finally freed, at the age of eleven.

He was such a strong man, that he would not bow and he would not be broken. He knew that he, too, had been blessed, that blessings are meant to be shared. And share them he did with family, friends, and all his customers. He completely immersed himself in the privilege of being an American and devoted himself to giving back to the people, country and Israel that he loved, and that meant so much to him. After his death, I was inundated with calls from his customers who wanted to express their gratitude for the wonderful acts of kindness he showed them, and to tell me how much they missed him.

I miss him. I miss his optimism. Who but an optimist would come to America at the age of 19, with no money, no family, and very little English and expect to prosper? But as he always said, “I walk between the raindrops,” and “everyday is my birthday.”

Friends, as I stand before you today, I feel like I am the most blessed woman I know. I can declare this because I feel that I have had the best that life offers. I received an excellent education and have a successful career. Most importantly, Judaism has been at the core of my

life from the time I was very young. My grandparents were founding members of Beth Israel. My parents were also life long members there and taught my brother and me Jewish values. I have wonderful memories of celebrating all the holidays with family and friends. I grew up in Beth Israel and have been a member here all my adult life. As I have matured, I appreciate even more my rabbis and what Judaism has given me.

Thankfully, widowhood is not what it once was. I was happily married. I am happily single. I have enough confidence to press on toward a great future yet to be imagined and the chutzpah to persist in achieving the desires of my heart, come what may.

I guess you could say that I am like the little girl who, after her parents had put her to bed, tucked her in, said her prayers with her and kissed her good night, wanted something more. So she called out, "Daddy, I need a drink of water." Her father answered, "You had a drink of water! It's time to go to sleep." After a couple of minutes, the little girl pleaded, "Daddy, I need a drink of water!" "No," her father answered, somewhat frustrated, "and if you ask me one more time, I'll come in and spank you." A brief silence followed, then, in a resolute voice the little girl called out again, "Daddy, when come in here to spank me, would you bring me a glass of water?"

Why shouldn't we be as adamant about possessing our dreams as this little girl was about a glass of water? Why shouldn't I seek great things-why shouldn't you? My life so far tells me that there are many blessings just waiting to be discovered, if we don't shrink back. After all, Morris was a blessing to me. He was an unexpected godsend who embodied the hope of our family, our aspirations, as well as our Jewish heritage. My children are blessings. They are wonderful adults committed to carrying our traditions into the next generation, because of their Jewish identity.

Today is our holy day of atonement, when we come together in unity before almighty God, but to me, it is also a reminder that we are a blessed people who have been given an identity that is unlike any other nation, society, or culture in the world. My challenge to you on this most sacred celebration of Yom Kippur is that you thank God for your blessings, do as Morris did and as he taught me to do: enjoy life, follow your dreams, and walk between the raindrops.

Thank you.