

Mutual Support: A Personal Reflection

Could we have managed on our own? Yes. We could have. Michael was still able-bodied. He quickly and efficiently learned to manage the needs of 2 bodies, of continuing to see his full patient schedule, of scheduling patients so I was never alone for more than 45 minutes, of maintaining the household, doing laundry, paying bills, filing, filling out insurance forms and dozens of patient forms for me, returning phone calls and emails, keeping family and friends informed, scheduling doctor appointments. Could he have shopped, cooked dinner or ordered in? Yes. But.

When congregants suggested the MealTrain, our first thought was that we didn't really need that. And we would have never thought to call someone to ask for it. But Cindy and Susan didn't listen to us. They knew what we needed when we did not.

I will say again: yes, we could have managed. But we understand in hindsight that the aftermath of an accident is traumatic, that it involved not only continuous physical ministrings, but a good deal of crying together, processing unknowns, anxieties, incapacities, pain, and fears. We see in hindsight that managing on our own would have meant Michael having not a minute to take care of himself, and it would have robbed us of the gift of time that your meals allowed for taking care of everything related to our physical and emotional needs. So, having dinners show up at our door 3 nights a week (all of which were plentiful and generous enough to last us 2 or more nights) was something akin to manna falling from the heavens.

And there was something at least as important that came our way with each delivery. We received so much more than dinner. We felt the loving care of home-cooked meals and the generosity of meals ordered from our favorite places. We felt people's care and concern and willing outreach to participate in our ordeal. And, as nourishing as the food was, we felt nourished by love that honestly sometimes made us weep with how lucky we are to have had this network, you all, behind us, along with us, within us. And it was incredibly healing and uplifting. Body and soul embraced in the simple yet awesome, kind act of a meal offered.

And each week, we would say to ourselves: "do we really still need the MealTrain?" (and sometimes joking: "how long can we keep this going?!") as I became bit by bit more able to re-enter the world and friends from the synagogue and beyond took me to lunch or visited and brought brunch or sweets. With increased mobility came the continuing question of whether we still needed the Mealtrain. We were told, wisely by our generous organizers and friends, to allow it to continue. It was truly a Godsend, allowing Michael to work and me to sleep each afternoon after exhausting physical therapy sessions and welcomed but fatiguing early social forays. And today, as I write this, is our last meal delivery and wonderful feelings both of grateful thanks and "we can take it from here."

Here are a few things that we learned that we would like to share:

1. We do not enjoy the feeling of being vulnerable and we will deny it and hold onto a self-image of competence even when doing so makes our life more difficult in extraordinary circumstances.
2. Maybe because of this, or maybe because of a sense of pride or privacy, most of us will not ask for help. However,
3. When we let people know what's going on, friends, family, community members, and sometimes even barely known acquaintances are amazingly generous in stepping in and not just offering but actually doing.
4. Even simple things make a real difference, are remembered, and have an important and relieving impact.
5. People feel good to help
6. Whatever vulnerabilities we would like to deny, having people step in, fill in, help out is a kind of embrace that more than compensates for feelings of vulnerability, that reminds us we are not alone and we belong to a group that very much cares about us.

Something we felt badly about is that, as a result of this accident, we heard others' stories of falls, surgeries, rehabs that we hadn't known about.

We hope that if you are facing or know someone who is facing a challenging life circumstance, you will reach out to someone in the congregation who will mobilize a mutual support network to assist.

And we hope that if you have a need, you will say yes to what is willingly and lovingly available to you.

So, of course, thank you. But more than thank you. We are in the arc of healing, which, because of you, is actually a manifestation of the arc of a covenant we share as a people, as a community.

Sheri and Michael Lindner