

One Room, One Prayer, Many Hearts



By Michael Feldstein

I still remember the weight of the pen in my hand.

It didn't feel like signing a consent form.

It felt like signing something far more final, far more terrifying—permission for strangers to take our child into an operating room and do whatever they needed to do to keep her alive. Twice it was open-heart surgery. Once it was back surgery. Each time, the words were clinical, but the meaning was anything but.

We went through this three times—when our daughter was just 5 months old, and then again at ages 10 and 12 years old. Each surgery was serious. Each one carried risk. And each time, we handed her over to the doctors and nurses and then walked away, because that's what parents are asked to do in these moments.

But what stays with me most isn't saying goodbye and good luck to our daughter before she entered the operating room or even the surgeon's explanations beforehand.

It's the waiting.

The children's hospital waiting room becomes its own kind of world. Time stretches in unnatural ways there—minutes feel like hours, and hours feel like days. You sit ... you pace ... you try to read ... you pray ... you try not to imagine what is happening behind those closed doors.

And while you might be performing these acts in solitude, you are not alone.

There are other parents in that room. You don't know their names. You don't know their stories. But you know exactly what they are feeling. You can see it in their eyes, in the way they grip a cup of coffee that has long gone cold, in the way they look up every time a door opens.

Because every time that door opens, everything stops.

A doctor steps out, and the entire room collectively holds its breath. Conversations freeze mid-sentence. Heads turn in unison. For a very brief moment, every parent is thinking the same thing: *Please let it be my child. Please let it be good news.*

Sometimes it is.

Sometimes a name is called, and you watch another parent stand up—hesitantly, almost afraid to hope too much—and walk toward the doctor. And for a moment, you share in their outcome, whatever it may be. Relief, tears, gratitude.

Or sometimes, quiet devastation.

Then the door closes again, and the waiting resumes.

What struck me the most in those rooms, across all three surgeries, was how different we all were—and how none of that really mattered.

We came from different backgrounds. Different religions. Different races. Different economic realities. Some families

spoke different languages. Some sat in silence; others prayed out loud. Some had large extended families surrounding them; others were alone.

But in that waiting room, all of that disappeared.

We were simply parents.



Parents who loved our children with everything we had. Parents who would have traded places with them in an instant. Parents who shared the same fragile, desperate hope: *Let my child be okay. Let them come back to me.*

There was a kind of unspoken bond there—one that didn't require introductions or explanations. Just a glance, a nod, a quiet understanding: *I see you. I know what you're feeling. I'm feeling it too.*

And on rare occasions, you might engage in conversation. I remember sitting next to a Hasidic Jewish woman in the waiting room during one of our daughter's operations. As a Modern Orthodox Jew, I don't have many friends or acquaintances in the Hasidic community, but I

remember connecting with this Satmar mother of a sick child. We may not have had much in common in terms of our backgrounds, but we were bound together by a shared concern—our child's health and welfare.

I've thought about those waiting rooms many times since then.

And sometimes I wonder: *What if the world's conflicts could be reframed through that lens?*

What if, instead of negotiating across tables filled with politics and history and grievance, we brought together parents sitting in a room like that? Parents from different places, who see each other as enemies. Russians and Ukrainians. Turks and Armenians. Israelis and Palestinians. People taught to distrust, to fear, to divide.

And we asked them to sit together and wait for news about their children.

Because in that space, stripped of ideology and identity, something very different emerges. The labels fall away. The narratives soften. What remains is something far more fundamental and far more powerful: love, fear, hope and the fierce, universal desire to see your child live, heal and thrive.

In that room, no one is the "other."

Everyone is just a parent.

And maybe—just maybe—that is where peace begins.

Michael Feldstein, who lives in Stamford, is the author of "Meet Me in the Middle" (www.meet-me-in-the-middle-book.com), a collection of essays on contemporary Jewish life. He can be reached at michaelfeldstein@gmail.com.

Letters to the Editor

CONTINUED FROM P. 22

Strong participation also sends a clear message to elected officials, party leaders and future candidates that the Jewish community is an active and dependable voting bloc whose concerns and priorities cannot be ignored.

Mail-in ballots have already been sent out and must be returned by Election Day. Early in-person voting begins May 26, and Election Day is June 2.

The Jewish community has always understood that survival and influence require consistency, not just intensity. Let this primary—uncontested as it may be—be one more link in a chain of civic engagement we are building together, year by year, election by election.

See you at the polls.

Bergen County Jewish Action Committee:

Dov Adler

Tirza Bayewitz

Elie Berman

Rachel Cyrulnik (Vice President)

Yali Elkin

Emma Horowitz (President)

Nina Kampler

Eli Klapper

Note: This letter originally appeared in the Washington Times

Trump's National Sabbath Is a Beacon of Hope

As the daughter of a prominent Orthodox rabbi who served as the spiritual leader of the largest synagogue in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn (the site of the filming of the Nicolas Cage film "Lord of War"), I was heartened to learn of President Trump's recent national Sabbath proclamation, "Shabbat 250."

The proclamation aims to encourage all American Jews to observe Shabbat this weekend, from sundown May 15 to nightfall May 16.

One might say that "Shabbat 250," which is part of the administration's faith-based "Rededicate 250," sets the stage for the National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving scheduled for May 17 on the National Mall. The Sabbath, a symbol of quintessential harmony and peace, creates an ambiance that augurs well for everyone.

By preceding the exhilarating spiritual exuberance of the jubilee with the National Sabbath, Mr. Trump shows that he understands the complementarity of Christianity and Judaism and its power in encouraging patriotism.

By proclaiming a universal day for all Jews to observe the Sabbath, Mr. Trump has affirmed the American Jewish community's worth. It's an act that has been applauded by the Coalition for Jewish Values, Agudath Israel of America, Aish and other groups.

It's a balm to the collective spirit, especially at a time when the Jewish community has witnessed a significant increase in antisemitic attacks.

"Shabbat 250" serves another purpose in addition to showing parity of religion: By publicly proclaiming a national Sabbath, a day on which all Jews should cease prohibited activity, we are given an opportunity moment to share the beauty of the Sabbath.

President Trump's call for a national Sabbath both honors Jewish heritage and allows Americans of all faiths to come together for the shared purpose of restoring hope, faith and trust in our nation.

Amy Neustein
Fort Lee

Genocide and Wholesale Massacres Were Committed by Communist Regimes Also, Not Just Nazis

Having just commemorated Yom HaShoah marking the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany, and juxtaposed with the alarming rise in antisemitism in America today, Jews inevitably are beginning to compare today's environment to that of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, which led to the Holocaust.

However, a much lesser-known fact is that genocide, wholesale state-run concentration camps, slave labor, death camps and ethnic cleansing were committed by Russian communists before the Nazis did the same. In fact, some historians think the communist regime's actions may have served as the model for many of the later Nazi actions.

Under Stalin, the vast system of communist-run camps were called gulags, and "being exiled to Siberia" meant slave labor camps under brutal conditions. And these existed all over Russia, not just in Siberia. In addition, the collectivization of farms in Russia gave the state a monopoly on farming and resulted in mass starvation among

CONTINUED ON P. 121