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Opening Remarks: J-Serve 2020

I want to tell you about a Woman named Aarone. She is 82 years old, and was born and raised in Long Branch, NJ. At the age of 18 she went to college at Monmouth University, and she was sitting at a table in the Cafeteria one day with her girlfriend when a man named Shelly walked across the TABLES, looked at the girlfriend and said, "Your friend and I are going out tonight". I asked her if she went out with him & she said, "No Way! I made him work for it." 2 years later they married. They raised 2 children and have 3 grandchildren. In retirement, they moved to Florida. This past September, they drove back up to NJ to live closer to family. Since then, Shelly was in & out of the hospital 15 times, his illnesses getting more & more complicated, until he died in April. He died in the Hospital, without his wife, as visitors are banned because of COVID19. They had been married for 62 years.

When Stacy asked me to come speak with you today, she asked me to talk about my own experiences with COVID 19 and try to inspire and motivate you do good. She told me that YOU inspire HER, and that YOU give HER hope, with your desire to do good in the world.

Now I can tell you about my experiences with COVID 19...

I can tell you about the Friday night in March when I called my parents from work & said, "Are you sure you want me for Shabbat Dinner? Its here." I went home, stripped in my garage & put

my clothes directly into the laundry, took a long shower, and then joined them for dinner. But this was the last time that we sat together for 3 months.

I can tell you how, in the very beginning of this, how I had to screen patients in triage for suspected COVID & the first time that I had to activate our Infection Control Plan my Charge Nurse asked, "Are you sure? Are you sure that you don't want to check with the Director of the Emergency Department?" Because activating this plan meant redirecting our patient flow, moving everyone out of the halls that we would be using to transport our suspected COVID patients, breaking out our N95 masks & PPE. It meant waking up our Administrators in the middle of the night (not a favorite thing for them). It meant that everything that went into the room with the patient had to be scrubbed down. It meant an increase in the demands for our time & manpower. I said, "I don't need to check with anyone. I'm sure".

I can tell you about the bruising on our faces from wearing PPE all shift day in & day out.

I can tell you about our Pediatrician who almost died from COVID 19 & is still in Rehab (but thankfully getting better every day).

I can tell you about the 600 or so health care workers who HAVE died from it.

I can tell you about the baby that died 12 hours after birth, & the grief of his asymptomatic father who then tested positive for COVID19.

I can tell you about patients who died at home or came to the hospital at the brink of death, in kidney failure, with toes literally falling off, because they delayed seeking medical care because they were afraid of COVID19.

But I'd rather tell you about some of the things that have helped.

For the first month, there were donations of food and personal care items literally NONSTOP! There were so many donations, that the Hospital had to appoint someone to track them so that one unit wasn't overwhelmed. People were working long & demanding hours. And it was amazing that some of us could just pack up a plate of food to eat at home with our family instead of trying to figure out how to go grocery shopping & cook.

We wash our hands - 40 times per shift? More? So many times, that our hands crack & bleed. Spending 20 seconds breathing & rubbing in a donated gently scented hand lotion? Priceless.

I can tell you about the smile on my face when I pulled into my driveway and saw a sidewalk chalk picture of a rainbow & flowers and the words, "Thank you". To this day, I don't know who did it. But thank you to whomever did it.

I can tell you about my Israeli Au Pair, who decided NOT to return to Israel, & couldn't go on her planned vacation to New Orleans, but instead was VERY Flexible with her schedule & became an AMAZING Substitute Teacher for my now Distance Learning kids.

I can tell you about walking through previously boring white Hospital Hallways & stopping to admire a new Thank you sign of a smiling dog like creature sitting in a sort of beach like setting, clearly drawn by a child.

I can tell you about Hazel, one of our amazing ICU nurses, who – just like many of her other colleagues, spent time after her shift was officially over, just sitting at the bedside of a patient so that he didn't die alone.

And I can tell you about a Woman named Beth. Who, after Shelly died, answered Aronne's phone calls 10 times a day. Who listened as Aronne cried, mourning the loss of Shelly as well as the loss of Shivah – cancelled because of COVID 19. Beth has since been able to sit outside with Aronne and just listen; to bring her a snack, to drive her back to her childhood home & listen to those old stories. To take her to the Laundromat so that she has clean clothes. To just BE THERE.

I know that Life is Busy. But COVID-19 has forced many of us to scale back our activities. To spend more time with those with whom we live. To ZOOM mini family reunions. How many Pesach Seders included family from out of the state or out of the country?

Social media communication, while not perfect, allowed our local Kosher Meals on Wheels to collect and deliver toilet paper along with its meals, and re-fill the food & money coffers of a local food pantry experiencing increased demand.

My young cousin is one of many who posted themselves reading kids' books, complete with crazy voices, for others to view.

Most of us are not donating a Kidney, but we are giving of our time, or our money, or our empathy. EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US has something to give. And you will likely never know how many people saw your donation or felt its effects.

But every little bit helps. It really does. And in the end, all you can do is try to inspire others.

Try to give hope.