

Who Will Live—and Who Will Die?

Last High Holy Days, as I sat in the Sanctuary, I pondered these words. We have ten days to repent, to apologize, to seal our fate. As I looked around at the captive audience, the only thing I could think was... this is a missed opportunity. All of these people under one roof, with nothing else to do but pray?!? (granted, that's just a personal thought)

Our father, Stephan Plager, was a sixty-eight year old renowned ophthalmologist who served as a Lt. Col. in the Air Force, raised five kids, sailed, biked, drank wine, founded a cancer center, and started every conversation with a joke. Over the years, when his patients could not afford to pay, he traded check-ups and surgeries for boxes of artichokes, lettuce, and haircuts. When he was twenty-six, he saved a man from a train wreck, and during his practice, saved the eyesight of countless people. Our Dad was thoughtful, generous, and charismatic.

Then, on July 12, 2007, during a routine exam, he was diagnosed with leukemia. Fifty-nine days later, at Stanford, where he taught medical residents for the past ten years, he died. It was like watching a house burn to the ground. He was gone before we had a chance to blink. More than one thousand people attended his funeral in the small town of Santa Cruz. The California Highway Patrol, for whom he volunteered, blocked off Pacific Coast Highway and gave him an eleven-mile escort to the cemetery. I've heard that time is the great healer, but I still cry every single day; our family misses him so much.

Which brings me back to the synagogue and to you... Who will live? Had our father survived the second round of treatment, he would have needed a bone marrow transplant. Neither of his brothers were a match: in fact, less than thirty percent of all bone marrow recipients match family members. Over seventy percent rely on the benevolence of the general public. Last year, our father died the week of Rosh HaShanah, but had he needed a match, we would have stood up in the Sanctuary and begged people to get tested. There's no room for embarrassment when you could save a life. Wouldn't you do that for your parents, your spouse, your child? Wouldn't you want someone to do that for you?

Each and every day, 6,000 women, men, and children are where my Dad was—in that “eleventh hour,” the last chance for hope, and they are looking for a hero. They are waiting for you to help inscribe them for health in The Book of Life. All it takes is a moment for you to open your mouth. The screening process is a simple swab inside your cheek with a Q-tip®. If you continue to be a match after further testing, there is an 85% probability of being asked to participate in a process that is only slightly more complicated than giving blood. The remaining 15% of those who match are asked to donate bone marrow, a more involved process; however, most donors resume activities the very next day.

My father ended every phone call with, “I am so proud of you.” So, for those of you who choose to donate, we say to you in advance, “We are so proud of you!” From our family to yours, *Shanah Tovah* and May you be inscribed in the Book of Life!

Sincerely,
Lori Plager & Cole Plager
Linleigh, Russ, Alec, & Aidan Richker
Joey, Audrey, Chase, & Chaz Plager
Josh, Constance, Allison, Jack, & Sam Plager
Jeremy Plager & Andrea Savage
Linda Plager & Kristin Neff
Marcia Plager & Steve Klein