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The Meaning Behind the Red Shoes

Shelly Duskin

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When you live in a place like Israel, you are bound to experience the sound of the sirens signaling that your country is being under attack and you need to take cover. Israel is in the Middle East and unfortunately, the Middle East is an area full of never-ending problems.

So, how are you supposed to react when the siren goes off?

One of the first things you're supposed to do is run for it (Ashley). You hear that alarm, you run as fast as you can to find safety. You run for cover because depending on the area you are in, you may have less than a minute to run for safety before those missiles can hit and destroy everything in your path.

If you're on the top floor of a building, you must make your way downstairs (Ashley). This, however, does not guarantee your safety. It just may lessen the impact if that missile happens to hit your area.

If you are out and about on the streets when the siren goes off and you don't have enough time to seek out proper shelter, you should run to the nearest staircase and hope that it is strong enough to withstand the impact of a missile (Ashley).

If you're driving, get out of your car and lie down on the road and cover your head with your arms (Ashley). You don't have any other choice.

You are told not to panic when you hear this loud siren, no matter how intense the chills are that are sent up your spine when you hear that sound (Ashley). You are supposed to react in a timely manner and seek safety out quickly. Otherwise, you are risking your life.

I knew about the sirens that go off whenever Israel is being under attack and how that sound has traumatized my mother for the rest of her life. What I did not know was the extent to which it has impacted her.

If there is anything I know about my mother for a fact, it is that she loves the color red and she is crazy about shoes. When she sees a pair of not just

shoes but red shoes, she freezes and gasps, and then this wide grin takes over her face and her eyes light up. I never knew that there was a reason behind this desire for red shoes until I finally sat down to speak to my mother about it. It is during this interview that I discovered that red shoes are a symbol to her that represent the struggles she had to endure as a child living in Israel.

As I walked into the living room, I was hit by the light that shined through the windows and illuminated the entire room. The room felt cozy with the three big grey couches that all surrounded the coffee table in the middle of the room, facing the flat screen TV that sat on the reddish-brown wooden entertainment center. On both sides of the TV were glass cabinets with glass shelves inside them that hold just a few of our many Disney figurines and snow globes. On the wall to the right of the entertainment center were four beautiful Disney paintings of Pirates of the Caribbean, Peter Pan, the seven dwarves from Snow White, and my favorite, Beauty and the Beast done by the artist Thomas Kinkadee. The living room almost felt like being at Disneyland, minus the rides and small children running all over the place. Although, we do have many cats that like to run around and chase each other as if they are children playing tag. Several cat towers could be seen in the living room behind the couches and in front of the windows and arcadia door, so that the cats can relax and look outside.

Sitting on one of the couches is my mother, Edna, who was playing a game on her laptop and sitting around her are just a few of my nine cats; Tigger, Trixie, and Figaro. Tigger sat to the left of her, staring intently at her face while he purred loudly, hoping to win over her attention. Trixie sat to the right of my mother, bobbing her little head in every direction that she heard a sound coming from. She often let out a meow, signaling she was not receiving enough attention and that this was unacceptable. Figaro was sitting behind my mom on one of the cat towers behind the couch. He was sleeping and minding his own business. I sat across from my mother on the couch and asked her if she was ready for me to interview her. She nodded, and without a word, closed her laptop slowly, as the cat, Tigger, purred in sync with her motion on the couch. I had everyone's attention as her and the cats turned to look at me.

I already knew that my mother was born and raised in Israel, a country that is recognized by some and despised by many. I knew that she experienced much more there than my sister or I ever have growing up in America. I have heard her talk about what it was like growing up on a farm surrounded by animals, which is why she has come to be such an animal lover and a cat rescuer. I have heard her talk about members of her family and what they were like. My

grandmother was a beautiful lady that had thick black eyebrows and wide dark eyes. My mother described her as being tiny but mighty. She would tend to worry a lot and would always be thinking two steps ahead of everyone else. My grandfather was handsome and friendly. He loved to tell people stories and people loved to be around him because he would light up the room and make everyone laugh. My mother's oldest sister, Nicole, was beautiful and kind. My mother had expressed to me that she was like a second mother to her, that she always spoiled and took care of her. She was, however, naïve and easy to pull pranks on. My mother's other older sister, Miri, was also very beautiful, but she was also quite lazy and did not have a good relationship with my grandmother growing up. My mother's older brother, Jojo, was an adorable kid that loved to play soccer. He was extremely shy and was a mama's boy. He constantly craved approval from my grandmother.

What I have not heard her talk about was why she is so obsessed with the color red. So much so that she must have everything in that color, including her Honda Odyssey, her nails, her dishes, and of course, her shoes.

When I asked my mother if she could tell me about a memory that really resonated with her, she expressed to me that there were so many memories that came to mind when I asked her this question, but that there definitely was one that recently had stood out to her.

She started off by saying that it was October 6, 1973. It was Yom Kippur and the men are in the temple praying and the women are waiting for them to come out so they can break the fast. As my mother began to speak about Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in Judaism, I remembered all the times we have celebrated it and how my mother tends to get uneasy and nervous as it approaches. I have found this behavior to be evident in my mother when it comes to several other Jewish holidays. Over the years, I have come to discover that it is because of what she connects these holidays to. Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, is about making amends and asking for forgiveness from your family and friends. One of the ways you do this is through fasting for twenty-five hours. You are not supposed to eat, drink, bathe, wear perfume, have sexual intercourse, or wear leather during this twenty-five-hour period of fasting. Not only that, but you spend these twenty-five hours praying intensely and making a commitment to change your bad behavior. Yom Kippur is a day for Jews to seriously commit to improving themselves and amending broken relationships.

The meaning of Yom Kippur and what it is supposed to accomplish is truly

amazing, or at least I think so. So, when my mother told me what happened on this specific Yom Kippur on October 6, 1973, I was shocked to say the least. She continued on to describe this day when she was five years old and she was sitting outside with her family in the front yard of her house. She is reminiscing about being with her family, sitting in the front yard of her house on what looked like such a beautiful day. The area was green and was full of tall eucalyptus trees that provided my mother and her family with shade. Across from her house was the temple, where the men were currently praying at. I saw the smile on my mother's face quickly start to fade as she talked about her cousin Yoni who she refers to as being a jerk. My mother's smile returns as she describes the day that she got those special red shoes. She even chuckles a little bit as she recounts shopping with her parents and seeing those red shoes for the first time.

"I had to have them, I just had to have them" she says.

My mother notes that she is the youngest of four siblings; she is the baby and as the baby, she was often spoiled. However, as she begged for these red shoes and her mom declined as she felt my mother did not need any more at the time, my mother's frustrations grew. She threw a tantrum and since her father was usually incapable of saying no to her, he bought her those beautiful red shoes that would soon become an important symbol to her.

Next to my mother's house is a bunker, which many houses in Israel have where you and your family are supposed to hide when you hear that alarm. That same day, my mother's cousin Yoni was picking on her. After a while, my mom couldn't take it anymore, so she chased after him, losing her brand-new red shoes in the process. She told her cousin that when his big brother comes back from the army, he would punish him for being so cruel to her. To my mother's astonishment, however, he replied, "He will never come back from the army. He will die in the army." My mother didn't even have to express how much it upset her to hear this, her face said it all. I could tell she loved her cousin and at the time, and she was too young to understand what serving in the army and going to war entailed. She didn't have time to think about this though, because at that moment, the sirens went off signaling the breaking of war. The Yom Kippur war that would be fought from October 6th to October 25th and would take the lives of twenty thousand people.

My mother recounted the events that took place after the siren went off. I can almost imagine what it must have looked like as she began to describe how the men that were in the temple praying darted out and ran to their homes to put on their uniforms, because they knew a war was breaking out. There were

airplanes in the sky and chaos all around. My mother didn't understand what was happening, but she remembered she had lost her shoes while chasing her cousin, so she ran to go get them. However, her parents were trying to get her to go to the bunker, which was the opposite direction of her red shoes. Her parents chased after and cornered her, so all she could do was scream about her red shoes, even though her father was telling her he would buy her a new pair. She wanted that pair, though. Eventually, her father successfully scooped her up in his arms, but she was strong, and she kicked, screamed, and jumped out of his arms and got ahold of those red shoes, causing her father to fall as he tried to grab her again. As her father regained his balance, he picked her up as she held onto the pair of red shoes with dear life. He handed my mother off to her mother, and she ran down the bunker with her. My mother was completely oblivious to what was taking place outside, but she was grateful to have her red shoes. She described how the thought of losing those red shoes was terrifying and that they represent the struggles she endured as a child, but are also a symbol of her resilience and survival through these traumatic events. As a child, my mother did not understand death, nor did she understand war yet.

Unfortunately, as a result of the Yom Kippur war, her cousin never came back home. He died while serving in the army and protecting his country. His mother (who was my mother's aunt) had to go recognize her deceased son's body after the war ended.

I saw many emotions arise on my mother's face. I sensed anger, frustration, resentment, heartache, and sadness. I could tell that that experience, like many other ones she has had, had impacted her greatly. Her emotions grew as she expressed her disdain for the idea of war. She did not see the point of fighting, especially for land, at the cost of human lives. She correlated this experience of struggle and loss with the holiest day of the year. What once was a holiday for family to get together and make a commitment to improve themselves, has become something my mother no longer enjoys celebrating.

When people hear about Israel on the news, it is often followed by something negative. Israel is often followed by any chaos that is taking place in the Middle East, whether it be missiles being fired, war, civilians dying, or land being stolen. The most common issue one may hear about regarding Israel is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This conflict that many believe will never be resolved has been taking place since the beginning of the 20th century. It all started when Jews were desperately trying to escape Europe due to being persecuted (Beauchamp).

However, the Jews did not necessarily have anywhere else to go as they had no homeland, so they went out to look for one. They considered several different areas, but ultimately decided on a territory that was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time. This territory was largely populated with Arab and Muslim people who had no intention on sharing this land that they believed to be their own. As Jews started to immigrate here, the Arab and Muslim people resisted, and since then, there have been several wars and too many deaths to count on both sides. There was a point where the United Nations tried to give part of the land to Israel and the other part to Palestine.

This plan failed as Israel does not recognize Palestine's existence, and Palestine does not recognize Israel's existence (Beauchamp). Both sides are guilty of committing terrible acts against each other and both Muslims and Israeli and/or Jews face discrimination all around the world. Israel, however, is currently recognized by most of the world but that does not make them popular. Antisemitism, which has been prevalent since Jews first existed, has been on the rise recently (Beauchamp). This is frightening for those who are of Jewish descent because many of us have lost members of our families due to extreme hatred that led to the Holocaust. This violence and persecution against Jews did not just start during the Holocaust, however. Violence against Jews can be dated as far back as 740 BCE and has been prevalent ever since then. They have been used as slaves, killed, forced to flee from many different places, and have been victims of multiple genocides, the Holocaust just being the largest one (Beauchamp).

While it may make sense to assume that all Israelis hate Palestinians and vice versa due to it being all we hear about in the media, there is hope. In fact, even back then, some Israelis and some Palestinians were able to live in peace and harmony. My mother told me that before the Yom Kippur war, her family was close with some Palestinians. In fact, some of the employees that worked on the farm she lived on were Palestinians. They used to celebrate and eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. Whenever they needed help, my mother's family would help them and whenever my mother's family needed help, they would help them. At the time, it didn't matter that my mother and her family were Jewish Israelis and these people were Palestinians. Unfortunately, after the Yom Kippur war, this relationship changed. The people who my mother considered to be her friends and family slowly disconnected. There was now a division and she has not heard from her old Palestinian friends since she was just a little kid. As she told me this, I could clearly see how heartbroken she still felt.

Despite being upset, my mother continued on to voice her appreciation for her parents, especially for their values of acceptance and simply loving one another, regardless of differences. At the end of the day, everyone shares the same desire. We all want to be happy and we want our loved ones to be happy. We are all human and we can put our differences aside and not only accept each other for those differences, we can celebrate them.

My mother started to discuss her thoughts of the political mess we are in America. She is frustrated by how divided we are as a country, so much so that we can't even sit and talk to each other civilly. We have forgotten that regardless of our beliefs, we are all human and at the end of the day, we all want to be happy. We all want the best for our loved ones. She expressed her frustration for how judgmental we can be towards one another, often because we have been brainwashed. She does not understand why to this day, we still follow "insane" ideas from the Bible, whether it be the Old or New Testament. She pointed out that we don't really know who wrote those ideas, and it doesn't make sense for us to follow those ideas because while we are doing that, we are forgetting to appreciate what we have. We are forgetting how to take care of the environment and take care of the animals that also call this planet their home. We are too busy looking for new things to fight over, and there is so much greed that we forget to look at the beauty of what we have and what we have achieved.

As my mother finishes up what she is talking about, I already begin to reflect on the interview as a whole. I think about how she is the type of person to help the underdog and how she is so sensitive to anyone suffering, whether it be animals or humans. When you think about what my mother had experienced in Israel, and you are aware of the hatred against Jews, it is easy to become angry at the world. It is easy to have that victim mentality and just throw your hands up in the air and give up. My mom, however, while I can recognize how hurt she is, she has used her experiences to her advantage and is a very compassionate and empathetic person. She enjoys helping others and she dedicates a good portion of her life to rescuing cats who are ill, who have been neglected and/or abused, who have been abandoned, and who are about to be put down in shelters. She takes them in, and she will spend day and night nursing them to health and giving them as much love and affection as she can. She fosters these cats for a very long time until they are healthy and ready to find their forever home, which she makes sure is the perfect home for them to spend their lives in. My mother has proven how resilient she is time and time again. She has not let her

experiences get the best of her and she has chosen to spread love rather than spread hate and for that, I am grateful.

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