

Kol Nidre Heroes

Temple Israel congregants save a life on the holiest night of the year.

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Special to the Jewish News

The solemn night of contemplation that is Kol Nidre included a life-and-death emergency during a late evening prayer service at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield.

Congregants were getting settled in their seats for the 9 p.m. service on Sept. 17 and the rabbi and cantor were about to begin when Benjamin Barish, 85, a dual resident of Farmington Hills and Tel Aviv, suffered a sudden heart attack and slumped over in his chair.

His wife, Bruria, and only son, Dan Barish of West Bloomfield, looked over in shock and disbelief. Witnesses heard Dan shout, “Abba, don’t leave me!” and “Someone call 911!” Sitting one seat over was a complete stranger, Dr. Carrie Leff, 35, of Bloomfield Township. The wife and mother of two young children is trained to save lives.

“He wasn’t breathing; he had no pulse; he was dead,” Leff recalls. “His heart had stopped in this most sacred of places on this most holy of nights, right next to his family just as he was to be inscribed in the Book of Life.”

Leff, one of five doctors with Novi Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, says her instincts and medical training took over. She immediately began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and CPR.

“He lay across the chairs where we were seated. I bent down and began to breathe for him,” she wrote in her online blog (www.thedoctormom.com). “Then I started chest compressions to circulate the blood that needed to get to his brain quickly.”

Four other doctors — Marc Weisman, Dan Cohen and Sanford Rautbort, all of West Bloomfield, and Brian Kern, an emergency room physician from Royal Oak — rushed over to help. Benjamin Barish was carried out to the hallway where they continued CPR.

In the midst of the commotion, Temple Israel Executive Director David Tisdale of West Bloomfield had the presence of mind to grab the synagogue’s automated external defibrillator (AED). The small, portable device is designed to deliver an electric shock and restore the heart’s natural rhythm. It had never been used



Benjamin Barish, 85, of Farmington Hills suffered a heart attack during Temple Israel’s Kol Nidre services.

before, but was in good working order.

“Dr. Kern hooked it up and [Barish] actually came back with just one shock,” Leff said. “He started breathing on his own and his pulse came back. His eyes opened. He’d been dead for four minutes. It seemed like an eternity.”

Right Place, Right Time

By all accounts, Benjamin Barish is not your typical elderly patient; and by all accounts he was in the right place at the right time.

The longtime patent attorney still maintains a regular work schedule. He’s on staff at Ehrlick & Fenster in Ramat Gan, Israel, handling “the preparation and prosecution of patent applications in Israel, the U.S. and most countries throughout the world,” according to the company’s website. He also holds several patents; he applied for one earlier this year for a multi-action toy water gun and variable-fluid discharge devices.

Barish and his wife spend six months out of the year in Israel and six months in Michigan, near their son, daughter-in-law Mary and two grandchildren Natali, 13, and Gabriel, 9.

“He’s a brilliant person,” Dan Barish said about his father. “He has degrees in law, chemistry and engineering. He’s also a good, giving person who many people admire. My dad is my idol and my hero.”

After Benjamin Barish was rushed to the hospital, doctors discovered the heart attack was caused by an 80-percent blockage in one of his arteries. He had no previous history of heart problems. Family members say he did not experience chest pains and there were no other warning signs. A stent was used to open



Dr. Carrie Leff of Bloomfield Township and four other doctors helped revive Mr. Barish after his heart stopped.

the blocked artery and he was released after about a week in the hospital.

“This is just unreal; it’s a miracle,” Dan said. “My parents were supposed to go to the 7 p.m. service and I was supposed to go to the 9 o’clock, but we all went together. If he was at home or in the car when this happened, he wouldn’t have made it. Everything happened for a reason. You could not have asked to be at a better place at a better time.”

Leff also believes her involvement was *bashert* (Yiddish for “meant to be”). Her family was running late that night, which is why she ended up in the row of seats toward the back of the sanctuary. She later learned Benjamin Barish is the uncle of one of her former partners.

Leff has wrestled with the concept of being called a “hero.” Here’s more of what she wrote in her blog where some Barish family members and friends have posted comments and expressed their gratitude from as far away as Israel.

“Good or bad, as a doctor, my job never ends. It is a constant responsibility, as it should be. I consider what I did to be an extension of that job, my duty to put my knowledge and education to use when someone needs it most. Not a hero; just lucky. Right place, right time. Able and willing to help along with many others who put forth great effort to make a difference.”

Divine Intervention?

Following what she calls a “Kol Nidre to remember,” Leff returned to services and tried to process what had just taken place. The rabbi made an announcement letting people know the man who’d been carried out of the sanctuary was on the road to recovery.

While she doesn’t consider herself religious or spiritual, Leff says the passages and prayers she heard after the rescue that night carried a deeper meaning.

She said, “One passage read, ‘*Great is the eternal power at the heart of life; mighty the love that is stronger than death. Faithful love gives life to all, the acts of grace restore our strength.*’ It was hard to hear those words and not feel as though they were being spoken directly to those of us who helped bring this man back to life.

“Was there some divine intervention that put me in this place? Was this night not supposed to be his last? Could his family’s blessings of love save this man from death?”

Time To Reflect

Leff took the time to visit the elder Barish in the hospital and has spoken with his son.

After the close call, Dan Barish is a bit philosophical, too. He plans to donate another defibrillator to the temple as a token of his family’s appreciation.

“My dad remembers asking me for the synagogue tickets a tenth of a second before he was gone,” he said. “It was like the gates opened up and then shut on him. I think God said, ‘We don’t need you right now.’”

For David Tisdale, witnessing the ordeal during the Days of Awe left him in awe of the talented, dedicated professionals who sprang into action.

“They were amazing; to watch them work on this man was amazing,” he said.

“If they hadn’t worked as hard as they did, and we didn’t have a defibrillator [which was there thanks to funding from the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit], he would not have survived. He was fortunate and we were fortunate; he was lucky and we were lucky. And God was definitely watching.” □

Learn CPR!

Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak offers CPR training and AED certification classes for \$30-\$50 per person. To register, call 1-800-633-7377.