

Melissa: Widely shared McSweeney's piece, an open letter to Tiffany & Co about their advertising campaign for the ring that helps women remember they survived cancer. She's also written for the New York Times, The New Yorker, TODAY.com, and AARP. Gila is a 15-year breast cancer previvor and survivor. Her feel it on the first campaign uses tongue-in-cheek photo and video reminders to prioritize breast health and has directly led to earlier diagnoses and treatment for some very grateful women.

Adina Ciment is a writer, educator and mother of five based in South Florida. Her powerful collection of essays, "Wasn't Expecting This," documenting her transformative journey as a woman and a mother following her own breast cancer diagnosis and her son's brain tumor diagnosis is set to be published by The Journey Institute Press this coming winter. Through her educational company, the Raven Writing Company, Adina empowers students to develop their writing skills and for prepare for college, while inspiring readers to embrace resilience in the face of life's unexpected challenges. She can be found on most social media platforms as @aciment and on her blog at [writingelves.com](#).

And you may already know tonight's moderator, Shera Dubitsky. Shera served as the Director of Clinical Services at Sharsheret for many years. She now sits on Sharsheret's Medical Advisory board and serves as a special advisor to the clinical team. She's a therapeutic coach who has earned three master's degrees in clinical, counseling and educational psychology and completed the coursework in clinical training toward her PhD in clinical psychology.

Shera has over 30 years of experience working with children and families living with trauma. She frequently lectures across the country on topics including life skills, navigating day-to-day experiences, managing the emotional impact of illness, parenting, and spirituality. You'll be able to tell tonight that she also uses humor to help others manage difficult circumstances.

So, I am going to exit the screen and add some additional spotlights. Not that one, but hello. Okay, and there's Adina. Perfect. Okay. Thank you very much and enjoy the evening.

Shera Dubitsky: Okay, so I'm just going to jump right in, and I am going to give the Reader's Digest version of Gila's story and Adina's story. So, Gila like me, we both lost our moms early on in our lives to breast cancer and kind of been like patients in waiting for many years. And Gila ended up doing prophylactic surgery and they tested the tissue and there was a pathology. And it turns out that she went from doing something prophylactic to now being diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer, and she went through the cancer journey.

All of that is in her book and it's detailed much better than what I just did. But for the purpose of tonight, I'm watching out shift to Adina. So, Adina calls me at Sharsheret, she reaches out to Sharsheret, and she had something called LCIS,

which is like a pre-cancer, I think is what it was, whatever, and that they were saying that she should do also prophylactic surgery because there was a high-risk of getting a cancer diagnosis.

So, Adina called me weekly and I found her peer supporters, and we gave a lot of information. And Adina went doctor shopping, looking for one person who was going to tell her don't do the prophylactic surgery. And this took months. And of all the women I've spoke to, thousands of women that I've spoke to at Sharsheret, she probably did the most research.

So, she calls me one day and she goes, "Fine, I'm going to do it." I called her the day after the surgery is scheduled. And I said, "How did it go?" And she goes, "Well." I said, "What happened?" She said, "I'm on the gurney, and as they're putting me in towards the OR, I said, stop, let's not be rash. Let's take a moment to think about this." And so, they were like, your surgeon's waiting. I'm going to fast forward. As it turns out, they also tested Adina's tissue. She got her pathology back and it turns out that they found cancer. And this was just extraordinary because we don't typically hear stories like this.

So, I said to Adina, "I have a great peer supporter for you." And she goes, "Is it Gila?" And I said, "You know, Gila?" And she said, "I don't know Gila, but I was on Sharsheret's website and I was going through videos and women's stories, and I saw Gila's story, and it was because of Gila that I decided to do the surgery." And so, it really was quite life-saving.

So, now here we are all these years later and they both, again, published books six months apart, and they're parallel and colliding. Life trajectories are just really extraordinary. I just want to point out that these two women are tenacious and they are funny and they're bright and they're accomplished. And collectively, this is the bedrock to how they cope with things. And they both are from communities that are incredibly supportive.

And we get a lot of phone calls from very accomplished women who have a lot of inner strength and a lot of support out. And it's not unusual for us to get a phone call that says, "I'm actually doing okay. But everybody keeps saying, "You got to call Sharsheret." So, I'm just calling Sharsheret to quiet those voices, not necessarily to quiet my own voice. And so, I'm not really sure why I'm even calling."

And typically, by the end of those phone calls, there's an aha moment of why they reached out to Sharsheret. So, we meet people where they are. And for some women, it really is a broad range of support that we give. And for some cases, it's more we're just filling in the gaps. So, Adina and Gila, Sharsheret bridged your stories and bridged your friendship. Just out of curiosity, what made both of you reach out to Sharsheret? I'm going to start with you Gila, because your story starts first.

Gila: Yeah. And also, I think I came to Sharsheret first. Not that it's competition, but I have been with Sharsheret actually since their inception. This is, I mean, I'm going to say it's in my book a lot because everything we're talking about it's in my book, but the final chapter of my book actually takes place at a fundraiser at Sharsheret. And I talk about how I came to find you.

And I went to high school with Rochelle L. Shoretz, may she rest in peace. She was a year ahead of me in high school, and she was just this larger than life, tremendous individual who reappeared in my life a few years later when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. I mean, anyone who knows the history of Sharsheret knows that Rochelle or Roche as I called her, started it. I, having lost my mom, immediately got involved as a volunteer. I was like, this is the organization for me. I can make purpose of the loss of my mom, and I can lick envelopes and mailers and do whatever," it was you did in the early days before you mushroomed into this multinational organization.

And I started out as a volunteer, and it was years before I actually needed Sharsheret's services, which was the time that I... As Shera mentioned, my mom died. She was 42, I was only 20. And I got very vigilant about my own breast health. And eventually, when genetic testing became available, which was only in the early 2000s, I went and tested, no shocker, I was tested positive for BRCA1. And I think that was the first time I really reached out to Sharsheret. It was like, "Hey, I'm BRCA1, what do I do?"

And at the same time, I learned about this preventative double mastectomy, which again, this was, I had the surgery in 2008, but I first heard about it in 2005. And today, it's a household name because Angelina Jolie made it as such, but at the time, no one was talking about it. So, I'm like, "Help, Sharsheret." So, that was the first time I went from being a volunteer to a beneficiary. I'm like, "Okay, I need you guys."

And all along the way, they paired me up with a link. The core program is the link program. And I would speak to someone who'd been through what I went through, but my story changed very rapidly. I went from being preventative and having the preventative double mastectomy to six days later finding out that, surprise, this cancer already in there. And I was only 34 and no one was expecting that. Not to rip off Adina's book title, but it was like, "What?"

So, my needs for Sharsheret were very rapidly evolving, and there did not seem to be any end to what they were able to provide. And I know I leaned on Shera a lot. That's how we became good friends. And as I said in the video that Adina would've seen, I mean, God that goes back like 12 or 13 years. I remember it so clearly. I remember where we filmed it. I remember being there. And I remember just saying they had all the time in the world for me, and no one has all the time in the world for anyone. So, I came to Sharsheret in a very fluid and organic manner. And I'm happy to say that I've gone from volunteer to beneficiary to ambassador...

Shera Dubitsky: A lifesaver.

Gila: And to what?

Shera Dubitsky: A lifesaver, literally.

Gila: Yes, exactly. I didn't even know I became a link before. I knew I was a link, but it wasn't like I reached out to Sharsheret to say, "Hello, I found you." It was more, they were already there and you just kept morphing in terms of how you presented in my life. And it was through Sharsheret that I met Adina, which is probably one of the more important things that you've provided for me. So, thank you for that. Over to you, Adina.

Adina Ciment: I still remember what you said when you called me, because I called you, I got your phone number and I called you. And I don't know if you remember, but I will never forget the first thing you said to me. You said, "Hi, I don't think you realize how long I've waited for someone to get cancer the same way I did." And that was, I just still remember that. That like, and I'm like, "Okay. We're good, we're good. This is a really good beginning." That was the first thing you said like, "You have no idea how long I've waited."

Gila: So, we backed into it, and I think there's still really only two of us on the whole planet. No, there's more. But at that time, it really, it was miraculous to find someone who could understand that this wasn't the typical path. So, I met Adina. And then...

Shera Dubitsky: How did you find Sharsheret? What made you reach out?

Adina Ciment: So, I was like, breast cancer was not even in my thought. The only I had donated to Sharsheret... I also donated to other organizations, which I since became client of. So, I started... I actually donated to the Guide Dog Foundation because I figured if I have this track record of becoming a client of the places that I donated to, at least I'm getting a dog out of the thing.

So, I was like, "I'm going to become a Guide Dog donor." But when I reached out to Sharsheret, I was really looking, first of all, like Shera said, I didn't believe anything that the doctors were telling me. This came out of nowhere. There's no family history in my family. I didn't really believe what they were telling me. I thought everybody, it's true, going into surgery, I was like, "Let's not be rash." But I had said that immediately when they're like, "Oh, you need to do this thing." And I was like, "I'm not doing that. There's no way."

And so, I guess in the beginning, Sharsheret was just this place of more information because they were the breast cancer authorities, and they were the breast cancer authorities in the Jewish world. And I could read medical journals and I can shop around for every doctor, which I did. But it was sort of like a base of knowledge for me that, "Okay, let me find out what has someone said about this? Let me get information about it." And Shera was always very careful not to

say anything too. She's like, "I'm not going to say yes or no to the question that you're asking."

But I think Sharsheret also became a place of sanity for me because I really felt like I was losing my mind because I was in a... I had been shoved into this world that I didn't think I would ever be a part of. It wasn't anywhere on my radar screen. It was something that happened to other people. And so, while I was going through this and trying to make these decisions, I really... Like Shera's joke, like she said, yes, I called every week. But it really was because I needed some kind of grounding place to know that I wasn't losing my mind. That no, this is what happens.

And so, that's sort of how it happened. And then, yeah, Gila's video, even though I was looking for any doctor that would tell me not to do the surgery. I really was. I went to Colorado. I called people. I was looking for someone, 1-800 doctor like, "What's your opinion? I'll go with it." But I did play Shera's video a couple of times. And it was a Gila's, sorry, Gila's video a bunch of times that I... And I did say in the back of my mind, I was like, "What if I'm Gila? What if there is something there that I need to do?" And that really was the reason why I did it. So, I mean, we've spoken about that, but yeah.

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah.

Gila: And I was like, "Take that Angelina. I'm influencing people too."

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah. So, something that was clear to me. I read both the books and I really, I'm going to buy copies of these books... Both these books for so many people. They're just incredible. But given that you're both strong women, funny women, again, you have a strong community, but you're seen as kind of externally very put together. You have your stuff together because that's how you present. It's funny and strong.

And I was wondering in both of your books that you were vulnerable. You put yourselves out there. And I'm wondering for anybody who's on the call today, how do you balance sharing your stories as you're going through it? In your case, even writing the book, and deciding how vulnerable you want to be? So, I hand that over to you guys.

Adina Ciment: Gila, you want to start?

Gila: Sure. I don't know that it's a decision. I think it would be dishonest to tell the story in a way that presents as being only put together and only strong and only the humorous face of, first of all, I think that's boring. Nobody wants to read that. Nobody wants to read a story about the woman who didn't face any challenges, and then everything was fine, the end. That's super boring, and it's not true.

I think that in both of our cases, while writing the book is vulnerable in and of itself and putting our stories out there as people, I'm sure I've told Adina,

certainly have told me like, "I can't believe you were so brave. You told your story." For me, it was empowering. It was reclaiming my agency. It was taking something that really didn't make so much sense to me because I was so on top of it, because I was so proactive. I was so preventative.

From the age of 20, I was vigilant. I was checking. I was self-examining. I had a breast surgeon in my 20s who I see twice a year. I had MRIs. I had mammograms. I exercised. I did all the right things. I did all the right things, and it still came for me. And it was like, "How dare you?" And so, it was almost necessary that I tell this story to reclaim some of that power.

And the vulnerability, that was actually the harder part for me to write. It's all fun to write jokes and talk about how proactive I was. And like Adina was looking for every reason not to have the surgery, I, the minute I heard about it, a friend of mine did it. I'm like, "That's what I'm doing. I'm doing it whether I'm BRCA or not because my mom died at 42, her mom died at 49. I'm like, "I see what's happening. I see what's coming for me."

The vulnerable parts where I felt a couple of days after surgery where the pain was just so overwhelming is the scene where I've got drains and tubes coming out of me, and I just have this breakdown in front of my husband like, "Why did I do this?" This is before I found out about the cancer. "Why did I do this? This was a terrible mistake. I'm in so much pain." Or, of course, the scenes where I'm trying not to lose my hair but losing it anyway.

And again, how I try to take that power back by shaving my head. This is going to sound like maybe a little bit corny, a little cliché, but I think there's also power in writing with vulnerability. I think that it's saying to people, "Look at when I was down, but I'm writing from a place of where I'm up." And so, also I had in mind, and maybe you're going to ask this question later, but I think it's important for me to say this now is that, I was writing this for myself, but also for a lot of other people, for family, for other people who are in this situation, who could be in this situation.

For some people, they hold it to themselves and don't want to talk about it. For me, talking about it was, again, making it count for something, making sense of it. And I'm not saying that there's any one right way to be. There's plenty of people out there, plenty of people on this call who will not go on to write their story, not in a book, not in an essay, not in a text, not in a nothing. But I wanted to tell it, and I know that it will resonate with other people. So, if that requires some vulnerability, then that's absolutely fine with me.

Shera Dubitsky: Adina?

Gila: Was that your answer, Adina? Did I steal your answer?

Adina Ciment: Yeah. By the way, same, same. No, the truth is that, for me, I honestly don't think it was a conscious decision. It wasn't this like, "Okay, now I'm going to be

vulnerable. And now, I'm going to reveal the truth and how I felt at 3:00 in the morning," and that kind of thing.

When I was writing, I was writing throughout the entire process because it was a very different experience. I mean, the process of writing it. I never... I never... Okay, not to say I never expected it because to throw out the title. But the truth is, I never expected to write a nonfiction book. I was writing about Harry Potter and I was writing about Magic and Wizards, and that was the book that I thought I was going to write.

And this book sort of evolved throughout the experience. It was sort of a book that was born in retrospect, like you said. At the end of the day, looking back and saying, "Wow, look at what has happened here and look at the things that I've written throughout, and look at the story that has taken place here. And the vulnerable pieces that I wrote at the time, I think I share what you say, that I would write it and it would help me. I don't think I wrote those vulnerable pieces thinking, "I'm going to write this and it's going to help somebody."

I wrote it, and it sounds a little selfish, but I wrote it because it was helping me to process it and to put it on paper, and to take whatever it was that I was dealing with and putting it somewhere else. And the place that it went was on the paper. And I heard from people who read things that I had written that it was helping them, and/or they read pieces and they're like, "Oh, my gosh, this was exactly how I felt." And that was when I sort of had that moment of, "Okay, yeah, I did it really for myself," but it wound up turning into something that was helping other people.

So, I think it's a complex answer about deciding to be vulnerable and then just being vulnerable because I think that's part and parcel of the experience. I don't think anybody can go through, like you said, "Okay, it's a boring story." I was like, "Hey, everything's great," and for my entire life. And I think that's just part of life is having those moments, and everybody I think has them.

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah. As I'm listening to the two of you, I'm thinking, so you guys are both storytellers by nature, right? So, I know that probably as you were going through it, you already had narratives going on in your head. And I'm curious for both of you, is how much editing of your narrative went on from real-time experience, to do you think your narratives changed? And therefore, your perspectives changed about what you went through? If you can...

Adina Ciment: So, I think that, okay, I don't think that I thought of the narrative. I mean, while I was going through it. I did think of my life as a movie because the truth is that I always think of things in terms of literature and movies. And so, everything that happened to me, I had some kind of pop reference for the experience. So, I had a line that I could pull out of a film that would play out at that moment, and it worked out perfectly. And that was how I looked at it.

As an overarching narrative, I think that's something that you have to experience in retrospect where you look back and you see the story. And one of the things I wrote about in my book is this idea of in Greek literature, there's this story of the hero's journey that the hero follows. And I wrote about that in terms of my experience. Now, you can't, when you're in the middle of your own journey, I hate that word.

But when you're in the middle of whatever experience... I know because there's no tequila in this journey. But when you're on this path, so every part of that hero journey is part of your experience. You're facing crazy things and you are crossing thresholds and going into worlds that you did not ever expect to be a part of.

And at the end, that's the chapter in my book about is the return, when you have to come back and you don't come back the same. You're not the same person. But I think you can recognize the story that you went through. So, in terms of putting my story together, no, I didn't edit it to make myself better. I think if it was a picture book, I would definitely have made myself look a lot better, looking back.

But in terms of the actual narrative, there was no editing necessary, I think. And I think the truth is, is that everybody's story is a story, and you can't write it when you're in the middle of it. You need to look back and say, "Oh, look at that, and look at that plot twist, and look at the climax here and look at how it ends up, and everybody has it. So, I think that's how it kind of unfolded.

Gila:

Yeah, I agree with that. I mean, I'm jealous of Adina that she had the benefit of journals and essays that you'd written all along. I did a podcast, a couple... It published today actually with a library. And one of the questions the interviewer asked me was, if I kept journals, and I was like, "Oh, I wish I kept journal. I'm the worst at journaling." I have probably from my youth, five or six notebooks that have five pages filled in, and then they're all blank.

And then, what I do with those journals is that as an adult, I take papers out to write to-do lists and shopping lists so that ultimately you get this hardcover book where the two ends touch because there's only the five pages left of the stupidity that I wrote when I was a kid. And I always wanted to be somebody who documented, but I don't.

I think that's why I love Instagram story so much. And I'm busy on the real day because my brain has somewhere to comment on everything and put in process and be like, "Look at this weird thing." I saw a comment on it. That's a good way for me to tell my own stories. Of course, those disappear after 24 hours. But in terms of structuring my own narrative, it was a very interesting exercise to write a memoir, because a memoir is not a biography, it's not an autobiography. It's not like Prince Harry's book. It's not a takedown. It's not a tell all. It's a story you're telling. It's very much fiction except that it's true. And a memoir, comes from the word memory. You're telling it from how you remember.

So, the first thing that my editor and I had to do was decide, where does this story start? And where does it end? Where do we take this thing in for a landing? My original proposal started from when I was a kid in Staten Island because I thought, just writing about Staten Island would be hilarious because that's a punchline in and of itself. Sorry, fair from Staten Island.

It's cool now it's fine. Colin Jost is from there. It's fine, it's good. But that's how I thought I'd introduce my humor. And it was my editor who said, "Actually, this story begins, I think when you're 18, about to board a plane to Israel for Shana Betz. And you've said goodbye to your parents, and your mom decides right then and there is the perfect time to blur it out across a sea of people. I think I might have cancer.

And so, when writing, having that jumping off point changes, not the narrative, but the perspective from what you're telling it, because now I'm starting to tell it from when I'm 18. And like Adina said, I can't make myself look better. I don't want to make myself look better. It was hard to have this reckoning of not to ruin it for you, but it happens in the opening scene where she tells me this thing, I don't know what to do with this information.

It's clear that we have had a bit of a choppy relationship until then, and I don't say a word. I turn on my heel and I board the plane. And it's really hard to look at yourself and be like, "Why?" If this was a movie or TV, I would've dropped my bags and run up to her and said, "Oh, mom, I'm going to stay here and be here for you." But that wasn't the truth. That wasn't the nature of our relationship.

And so, in writing the story, I didn't have anything written down that I could draw from. I had to remember. And I do have a very good memory, and there are scenes in my life like Adina, I also think in scenes and in movies. In fact, the epigraph of my book is a quote from Kung Fu Panda. And there's a scene when I'm getting chemo where my brain... And I didn't make it up for the book. I literally thought of this song while I was having chemo, a song about chemotherapy set to Under the Sea, sorry, Under the Sea from the Little Mermaid.

So, I think Adina and I, because we're creatives, that's where our brains go. But in terms of telling the story, I just tried to stay as true to it as I could without harming anyone, taking anyone down. Some names have been changed for a variety of reasons. When you're reading someone's memoir, you're not reading every single thing that happened to them because it would take you, my story spans 25 years.

You're not going to spend 25 years reading my story. It's more, what tells you what you need to know about me as a person, what tells you what you need to know about my motives to stay alive and to reverse the trajectory of my parents, of my family history because my dad died at 55 of cancer, so it's like cancer, cancer, cancer, cancer, die, die, die, die. It's very clear what my motivation is, right?

So, the very middle of the book, the inciting incident is, and now I'm going to have this preventative surgery, and that's where the book should end. But nope, we found cancer in there. So, there's more to tell. So, in plotting out the story, it really was just staying true to myself. But I learned a lot about myself in terms of why am I like certain ways? Why am I always pushing a glass on a counter if I see it too far to the edge? Why does my brain always go to prevention of any kind in the worst case scenario?

So, in terms of having... We all tell ourselves stories about ourselves, right? But it's very different when you're telling your story about yourself to other people and you're not just relaying it in a conversation, you're writing it down. And in that, you want to decide what are you trying to convey. So, yes, it's helpful to convey things about myself, and a big part of myself is humor and cracking jokes at perhaps inappropriate times, but that's how I get through. But it's also what do you want the reader to take away about me, my story, and ultimately about the theme, which is prevention, survival, and grit.

Adina Ciment:

I think that's also the difference with writing. And you were saying about Instagram stories. So, writing, when you're on Instagram, if you follow anybody on Instagram, everyone's got their filters on and everybody looks great and everybody's like, rah, rah. It's very easy to create an image of perfection or an image that isn't real.

And I think writing is, you're creating like what you said, what do we want the readers to get and how a reader going to take my words and interpret it on their own, and how are they going to relate? I'm giving it to them without the filters and without anything else, just this is how I wrote it, this is how I want you to get it. And hopefully, they'll get it the right way. But I can't put the filter on it.

Gila:

I mean, there's still some filter in that you're deciding what to share, what not. I chose every word in my book very deliberately, and I say this to thank God it's landing well, it's being, getting the most wonderful emails and messages from people who've either experienced cancer, had someone in their family who did, are in any way connected to it, which is a surprisingly large amount of people.

And I'm always so interested in which parts landed with them. You can't decide as the writer, you don't know which part is going to stand out. It could be the most minute detail, and that's theirs. Once it's out and living and breathing in the world, that's for someone else to take away. But in terms of filters, I pride myself on showing up as imperfect. I'm on Instagram, I'd say probably 80% of the time my hair is up in a bun and I'm wearing my workout clothes or pajamas or whatever. I don't dress up for it.

You're not going to see a fashion shoot of me. If I'm going out and I look nice, this is me going out looking nice. But mostly, this is how I am. I literally wasn't wearing makeup 45 minutes ago like I put some on, I look gross, and I just thought, "Hey, this is being recorded, make an effort." But I genuinely am more interested in the real and the true and the not perfect.

And in writing the book, I thought the more interesting parts were the parts where I didn't look the best and I wasn't the most magical daughter, and I wasn't Sister of the Year. And maybe I had some real breakdown moments with Phil, my husband, when I was frustrated. I just don't think it's true or helpful to try to put a perfect sheen over a story.

So, what I am in Instagram is what I am in real life is what I am in the book. In fact, I narrated the audiobook, it's coming out August 12th. And so, for those who are audio readers, by all means listen to it. But even if you're not, anyone who knows me will hear my voice reading the book because this is me.

Shera Dubitsky:

Yeah, I think that's true in both the books. I really heard both of you loud and clear. And I have to say, what was striking to me as a reader was I had my own personal experience with my mom going to Sloan Kettering and seeing her in the chemo chairs and seeing her in the recovery rooms afterwards. And certainly, for the thousands of women that I've spoken to at your Sharsheret. And what I felt from both of you was you were so... The way that you wrote was so visual.

And there are things where I was thinking, "Oh, that never occurred to me," in all these years that I've been working with women and speaking to women, it didn't occur to me. For example, in your instance, Gila, when you talked about going into the chemo room for the first time and everybody's sitting in their infusion chairs, and what your experience was like for the very first time going and sitting in an infusion chair and what that was like, and them saying, "Do you want a blanket?" And you're like, "I'm not sick. Why a blanket?" Right? And it didn't occur to me what that would be like for the first time.

And also, with you Adina, there were things that you discussed and I was thinking, "Wow, that just never occurred to me." And I'm thinking specifically even around you're working with insurance companies and the hours and hours that it goes into to get something covered. I know that was more for your son, but there's essay upon essay that you offered where I was thinking, "I've spoken to women about this a million times," but the way that you write both of you is so visual that I think even as caregivers, it's so important for people who are friends or family to read both of your books.

Gila:

Yeah, that question actually came up in... I was at the JCC last week, and somebody in the audience after the talk asked, "How can I..." She wants to know how she could offer support to someone in her neighborhood who had cancer in the family, and she didn't specify whether it was her friend or her friend's child. But she was interested in instead of saying like, "Oh, I got this, I know what to do." That was the question that she could have asked anything about anything. But she wasn't asking for herself. She was asking for someone else.

So, first of all, I said, "The fact that you're asking already says a lot about you as a person and a friend and the kind of support you offer." But what I essentially

said in a much longer version was, "Don't make it about yourself and try to let the other person lead. And if the other person says, they don't want something, don't inject yourself into that process," right? You're laughing because this happens all the time. It's like it brought you lasagna. I don't want lasagna, but I brought it for you. I feel great about myself because I brought you a lasagna.

And it's, look, the three of us have a greater understanding of how to offer support because we've been on the other side of it, and that's one of the benefits of being in the club. But my book was originally supposed to be called Great at A Shiva. And now, one of the chapters is called Great at A Shiva. And what I was trying to convey in that title, aside from that it's Jewish and dark and funny, is that I've been through things that put me in a unique position to now be comfortable and very uncomfortable situations.

And so, it's really important for caregivers to know how to relate to the person in crisis, how to relate to the family of the person in crisis. Another piece of advice I give is, if it's a woman going through breast cancer, someone check on the spouse, someone check on the partner, someone check on the guy, take him out to play darts, whatever guys do, I don't know.

All the focus tends to go on the woman. It's like, well, what about the guy who's shouldering, the partner who's shouldering all of the other stuff? And so, you're right like, I read Adina's book too, and it's a must read. There's so much in there. I almost feel like... There's more in there than mine because yours is just essays that you've structured in this really interesting way that does take you on. I'm not going to say the J word, but on a trip, it takes you on a trip, on a path. And hopefully, people can come away with this knowing we're telling you as people who have gone through crapola what we don't want. So, you can take that hopefully and never be the person in crisis, but know what to bring to someone who is.

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah. Well, I'm thinking about one essay in particular with Adina is kind of what doesn't get said. It was the one on the MRI, how did the MRI go? And then, you start off, the way that it's written is that it's in bold letters. So, the MRI, and then the rest is in the parentheses, italicized, and then it says, "It was fine," right?

And so, as receivers of information, what we get is everything, or it was fine, but we missed that whole process of what the experience was because that's not the thing that's always shared. And I felt that certainly in that particular essay, Adina, but I felt that also with Gila as well, is the things that you experience that aren't said to people but that you are experiencing. And I thought that that, again, was also so helpful as somebody who sometimes cares for people and offers support.

Adina Ciment: Yeah, everybody means well.

Gila: But also, it's an interesting point you make about when you're going through something, your interior narrator is not on the outside going, "This is what I'm

feeling I'm thinking now." But when you write, someone who was right alongside you during that time, saw it from their lens, but they weren't in your brain. Now, they're re-experiencing it with the added overlay of what you were thinking and feeling and the horror and the relief and the terror and the joy and the...

Adina, you can say, "Let's not be rash here." But that doesn't tell me what you're thinking in your brain. Were you embarrassed to be messing up everyone's schedule by saying, "I know I'm in the schedule for surgery now, but let's all go watch Friends instead." Did you feel brave and powerful that you had the power to stop this thing in its tracks? This is where storytelling is so rich and layered because you can present it how you want and you can give the reader so many different. It's like different cameras spotlighting the same thing happening at the same time.

Adina Ciment: Yeah. But Shera, you actually, you said something to me years ago, I don't know if you remember this, when you were telling me not to Google things, okay? And so, and I, at that time, Googling stuff, I was a big believer and I'm an intelligent person, so I'm not going on bobsmedicalblog.com and reading his take on whatever symptom. I'm plugging into his little chart. I'm not going there. I'm going to NIH sites, and I'm reading real things. So, what would be the bad thing?

And I remember you gave me this beautiful example and you said, "Okay, you go into a waiting room and there are people sitting there and they all have the same diagnosis, but guess what? Every single person is different." So, we may have this label cancer, this little halo sitting in that room, but my history is different than Gila's history. And so, things are different and they're going to approach it differently because it was so many different things. And it was this eye-opening moment of I think everything is like that.

And so, yeah, I resented the lasagna. I did. But there are people out there that probably loved it and were like, "They brought me lasagna six times and it was just amazing." And that's fine for them. But I think you're right, it's like no matter what everybody does mean well, and I think everybody has, I don't know if there's a... I like to think that there's this checklist of this is what you do. But I think everybody is a different person at the end of the day.

And knowing that, being able to, like you said, being able to tell someone, "Listen, this is what worked for me." There were a lot of people that helped me a lot. I remember after my surgery, I also was sitting, I had four drains, I was in a lot of pain, and people were coming in and sitting around talking and I felt like I needed to talk to everyone because they were coming over to my house. And so, I needed to... Even though I couldn't move, and my arms were like a T. rex and it was scary. But I'll never forget something that someone did for me. She sent me a card in the mail. Nobody does that anymore, okay?

And I never forgot that card that just came in that day. My husband's like, "Oh, look, you got a letter." I was like, "I got a letter." That's great old school. And it was that she took the time, not just to, and people text and everybody is reaching out. But that card, I still remember it. It is been 10 years and I remember everything about it. It just touched me so much that someone took that time at that moment. So, you never know.

Gila: And I think to add to that, it's like that's exactly the point is that person wasn't making it about them. They weren't trying to do a grand gesture. They could have done something really over-the-top and people rack their brains like, "Oh, what can I do that's so special to make this person forget her troubles?" Or you can't take cancer away and you can't have the chemo for you. So, barring that, think about small meaningful gestures. It doesn't have to be big.

And again, I always go back to, no, don't make it about you. Don't overthink it. Just a small gesture. And even if that gesture is too small to get noticed, you've done something good. You haven't burdened in this person with the need to be over-the-top in their thanks. And I also like, the best gifts I remember were fuzzy socks and this fuzzy blanket, which...

Adina Ciment: By the way, I think that's a universal thing. The fuzzy socks and fuzzy blanket is a key.

Gila: But the person could have been like, "Oh, no, I have to get her an embroidered pillow with her name on it." Actually, Sharsheret sent at that time a bolster, a pillow of support. So, that was lovely. But that's not fair like, you guys have an advantage. You know what mastectomy patients need, like come on. That's not fair. But really, it's... Don't make it about you.

And even if your gesture is unneeded and the best thing you do is you give that person space, that's huge also. You don't have to pile in and be one of the barrage of people who did something. Sometimes, people will overstep in terms of asking the woman going through cancer or whatever she's going through more information. And come on, you can tell me I'm a trusted person. You can confide in me. And you have to be able to read other people. If a person just wants to let it go, let it go. You don't have to be in the center of knowledge. You're not...

Adina Ciment: Don't be a grief tourist.

Gila: Mm-hmm?

Adina Ciment: I said, "Don't be a grief tourist."

Gila: Yeah, yeah, don't be a grief tourist. It's hard. It's hard. I like to give people the benefit of the doubt and think that there are some people who are just awkward and uncomfortable and don't know what to say and don't know what to do, and they just want to make it better for you. But less is more. Less is

more. Or one other thing I'll say is, if you are in a unique position to help someone, that's something as well.

Everyone can make lasagna. Lots of people can give your kids rides somewhere. But if you bring something to the table that really only you can do like, there was this ER doctor in our neighborhood who, it was a Christmas weekend and I had these sutures that I just desperately wanted out and I was going to have to wait until after Christmas to take them out. And my drains and my stitches were driving me crazy. And he's like, "Hey, how you doing? Can I help you with anything?" And I was like, "Actually." And he came over, snip, snip, instant relief. I couldn't have done that myself. My lasagna friends can't do that. But that was it. That was kind of the end of it. So, it's recognizing if you were in a unique position. And if you're not, that's okay too.

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah. So, I could do this for hours literally. And it made me feel like, I said to Adina...

Gila: This is the problem.

Shera Dubitsky: Yeah, we're going to have to do a podcast.

Gila: Sign me up.

Shera Dubitsky: So, but just to kind of wrap this up, I want to just say that it's interesting that we ended on how you can be a better caregiver. And what's striking to me is sometimes, you don't even know when you've given. And I think the story between Gila and Adina is exactly that. I don't think Gila had any sense that by saying yes to doing a video for Sharsheret and sharing her story, that she would literally be saving somebody else's life. And you just don't know.

And I suspect that people are going to be quoting both of your books for a long time. I know I have been doing it in every opportunity, and that there are going to be things that maybe you didn't even realize that was going to really impact somebody because it wasn't an outright here's advice. But it was just a small thing that maybe you said that could help either a woman who's going through it, a family member who's going through it, or as we said a friend.

So, with that, I want to thank both of you really, because I think that you are going to be helping people in ways that you hadn't even conceived of. So, I'm going to hand it back to you, Melissa, to bring us home.

Melissa: Amazing. Thank you. So, the reason it took me a second to get here is because I was just putting in links to order and to pre-order the books. Please... And those links will also be in the follow-up email. As we conclude...

Shera Dubitsky: Wait. Sorry, Melissa. Sorry. But I know that Gila had said that if you do want to continue this conversation and Adina, you can do it too. Gila, do you just want to give the plug on that?

Gila: Yeah, I know, I wish we had time for Q&A, but there's a lot of you. And I'm speaking to you from London where it's 1:00 in the morning. So, if you want to find me, I'm @gilapfeffer on all the socials. I live on Instagram, find me on Instagram. Or you can go to my website, gilapfeffer.com. There's a contact form there. I'm very responsive. I'm very communicative. Reach out, tell me something, ask me something. Just say, hi. If you read my book, let me know what you think of it, please. But please do feel free to reach out.

Melissa: Adina, do you have contact...

Shera Dubitsky: Adina, is there a way of reaching you?

Adina Ciment: Yeah, you can send a raven. You can reach... I guess the best is, I mean, I am on Instagram, but my Instagram is private. I don't have a public Instagram except... So, but I will answer an email if you send it to me. It's really, it's adinaciment@gmail.com. It's very creative. So, if you send me an email and just put in the subject, "I was on the webinar, and now I have a question." I'll totally answer you. So, that's...

Melissa: That's such a generous offer from both of you. I just want you to know, and I don't know if you're seeing, because you were talking the texts, the chat's coming in. There are a ton of them, but somebody summed it up. Heroes. Okay, so thank you for that.

Gila: I'll speak on my behalf not Adina's, who literally has a red cape in her Insta or profile.

Adina Ciment: I do. Yes, I do. Everyone should have a cape. By the way, it's a very... I don't know why they went out of style.

Melissa: They didn't. You can bring it back in style. I think the message here is that the two of you should collaborate on some sort of breast cancer heroin book for the future, super hero.

Gila: Don't say journey. Do not say journey.

Melissa: No, I never use the word journey. I'm survivor myself. I never use the word journey.

Gila: You should be [inaudible 00:53:28].

Melissa: Okay, we got to end. Thank you, thank you, thank you to Gila, to Adina, to Shera for the generosity you have in sharing your story with not just us, but everybody who picks up your book and helping those who are... Helping those manage who are now dealing with these kinds of things. Thank you again to Daiichi Sankyo, and Pfizer for their generous support and to Women of Reform Judaism for their partnership.

Please take a moment to click the evaluation link that's in the chat box now. You can click it and/or will be any second. You can click it and still listen to the rest. Lots of reasons to fill out the evaluation survey, of course, because it helps us plan future programs. But there is also within the evaluation, an opportunity to request support to get hooked up with your own peer supporter.

And for anyone who fills out the evaluation, you have a chance to be... You'll be entered in a raffle for a chance to win signed copies of Gila or Adina's book. Ah, look, okay, hold them up, guys.

Adina Ciment: Well, this isn't really the book because mine is only pre-order. But it's a picture of the book that you...

Gila: There's signed copies at my publisher to our programs.

Melissa: It will give you the opportunity to indicate you are interested in one of those. Finally, I want to remind you that Sharsheret is here for you. Our social workers are able to answer questions, provide support, and connect you to resources. And, of course, after tonight, you know the impact of our renowned peer support program. When you complete the evaluation, just like I said, there's an opportunity to request, among other things, a peer supporter.

Let's put that evaluation link one more time in the chat box. And as that is going in the chat box, thank you all for joining us and have a wonderful evening. Have a good night and good night to Gila.

Gila: Good night. Thank you so much for having me, and I really just wanted to hang out with Adina and Shera, which is why I agreed to do this. So, see you tomorrow night. Same link.

Melissa: Good night, everyone.

Gila: Thanks, guys.