It is Thursday, March 12, 2020, the day before the US begins to lock down for real in response to the initial wave of Covid. My little brother, Todd, and Sister-In-Law, Deb, are in Houston at MD Anderson. Todd is nearly recovered from the ten-hour surgery he had six weeks ago to save his leg following the recurrence of his bone cancer.

Todd is Superman; in his mid-forties, he handles chemo, radiation and surgeries much easier than most. He takes any treatment without complaint and bounces back quickly. He’s willing to do whatever it takes to survive. He’s an optimist with a darn near perfect life and he has always had a real passion for fully living each day.

Deb is Todd’s incredible wife, Superwoman, in every sense of the word. She has a special beauty that shines forth from within. There is no finer a person or friend, and we feel so blessed that she is part of our family.

Todd and Deb are the perfect complement to one another. He’s the super relaxed, a life of the party, fun guy, and she is a type A perfectionist, work from before sunrise until late into the night until everything is perfectly tended to and finished kind of woman. Todd has gotten this far in this treacherous journey, in no small measure, thanks to his beloved, devoted partner who is not only by his side through it all, but is expertly educating herself on this extremely rare cancer, so that they can make the best decisions together.

Todd’s oncologist says he doesn’t need chemo or radiation for now, but instead just fresh scans every six weeks to look for tumors, but his surgeon recommends an additional consult with another top doctor in the field.

Todd and Deb enter the office to meet with the head of the sarcoma department of MD Anderson. This man doesn’t know them. He doesn’t know they are the parents of two exceptional little girls, that they are leaders in their synagogue and local community. He doesn’t know how much they are adored by their family and many dozens of close friends.

This man is a medical expert and he is there to give them his expert advice. “Todd, chemo and radiation have not worked for you, and unfortunately, this cancer will recur, sooner than later,” they hear him say. “I would love to be able to tell you that we will be meeting here in two years to discuss your situation, but the chance of you living that long, in my opinion, is about 1%. Go and do anything on your bucket list and set your affairs in order.”

Todd and Deb fly home in anguish, and Todd doesn’t get out of bed the next day. Bucket list? The world is closing down as Covid ramps up its reign of destruction. Sarah and Lilah are only eight and five. There is disbelief, tears, fear.

But Covid comes with some blessings too. With the girls doing virtual school and both parents working from home, they begin to spend so much extra time together. They realize the ever more sacred and urgent nature of each day, and determine to take advantage of each opportunity to create precious memories and even more boldly celebrate and live life.

By fall, with the decision to keep the girls in virtual school, Deb makes the agonizing decision to leave her dream job. Once a brilliant and compassionate music teacher, and now a highly skilled and effective high school guidance counselor, she realizes something has to give, and this is how she can best support the family. She resigns her position so that they can really enjoy Todd’s healthy time in a scary Covid world.

They travel by car to a family lake house in upstate NY. Spending precious time with Deb’s parents, siblings, nieces and nephews after such a long time apart is soothing balm in these painful times, and exactly what they need.

Lilah and Sarah, born and raised in sunny, hot south Florida, want to see snow, so they pull them from virtual school one day to enjoy a snowy day sledding down hills in Lake Placid. After a wonderful time in NY, they stay in beach homes in South Carolina and Florida, riding bikes, swimming with dolphins, jumping waves, playing and searching for shells.

By this past November, as the doctor predicted, new scans reveal the cancer has returned to the same leg, and Deb immediately springs into action with an energy like no other. She works to become even more of a Ewings Sarcoma expert, and speaks with anyone willing to answer calls and respond to her emails. There is one clinical trial, and fortunately it is in nearby Tampa. Deb gets all of the paperwork and tests sent, and Todd is admitted into it. The treatment at first appears promising and he handles the side effects well. There is hope once again.

Deb is my hero! She is laser focused on providing Todd with any form of support to give him a better chance for a cure, or at least more quality time. She intuitively thinks of ways to make life easier for him, and acts upon them. She is the kindest, sweetest, most selfless and generous person I know. No one expects to have to rely on their spouse in this way at such a young age, but there is no doubt that having a partner who is so capable of skillfully and energetically juggling so many complicated tasks at once, a person who doesn’t know the meaning of quitting, who doesn’t have a lazy bone in her body, well this is incredibly fortunate. Todd says that Deb is the reason he is so lucky, and he’s right!

We all know that the gift of Deb to Todd and our family is absolutely priceless and we are so grateful for her. I just hope she knows that we see all she is doing, that we know this hasn’t been a fair or easy journey, that we are praying for Todd AND her, that her love, sacrifice, dedication and devotion are making incredible impacts in immeasurable ways. I hope she knows how much I appreciate our short and long calls, answering the difficult questions and keeping me in the loop. I hope she knows that my offer to help is genuine and that she can call upon me for anything, because I want to support the one holding up the sky and give her a little help where I can be useful. And oh how I hope I get many more amazing visits with Todd and quiet late-night wine talks on the couch with Deb.

It is March of this year, and after additional scans, and upon the advice of all of their doctors, Todd and Deb make the prudent decision to proceed with an above the knee amputation. This will give Todd the best shot at the longest amount of time. Todd and Deb continue to inspire me. And I am not alone in noticing the strength of this great couple, making the best of this most challenging of situations.

I fly in for the surgery and again, Superman stuns us all, coming home after only one night in the hospital. He comes to the front door and we watch as he maneuvers a walker to take his first step up into the house. He is wearing shorts and yes, it does look a bit strange as we see him for the first time without his lower leg.

He carefully makes his way in and we open a new rye and a bottle of wine as we have drinks together sitting on the couch. Lilah says we should each say something nice about Daddy. Then she suggests we make toasts to him. The palpable love lingers in the air of the family room. We savor this special moment, as we quickly understand that Todd is still 100% Todd, the funny, cool, loving man we know, and Deb is the rock-solid partner right there by his side.

And Todd bounces back from this adversity with the most contagious, fun-loving spirit that makes you feel blessed to get to hang out with him. He never complains or asks why; instead, he celebrates each moment that he’s alive with his family and friends.

It is now over three years since he was first diagnosed with Ewings Sarcoma. There have been so many highs and lows, and you can never prepare yourself for the next dip or turn, and we are in for another very bad one. Only four weeks post amputation, the new scans show that this monster has returned, this time spreading to his lungs. It’s bad, but Todd isn’t done fighting yet. There is one final Hail Mary treatment, an experimental drug that has worked sometimes with other cancers. Though they don’t give us much hope, we learn that the reason you throw a Hail Mary pass at the end of a football game, is that sometimes it works.

Another four weeks later, the scans show the tumors actually shrinking. Next scans are in seven more weeks. There is an incredible family reunion to a beach house in Captiva, a trip to a Bat Mitzvah, an outdoor concert with fifty friends. There are more trips to the NY lake house and finally a dream week in Maui. More gatherings and travels are planned as long as the July x-rays come back with good news, and they do. The tumors are continuing to shrink. New scans in eight more weeks.

Off to the races once again. Todd is better than any professional travel planner and it gives him so much joy to do each of these trips. A week at a gorgeous beach condo in Boca, two Phish concerts in Atlanta with Deb, a resort vacation in Marco Island, back to NY and finally a gathering of close family friends in Bal Harbor for Labor Day. Great memories alongside ample exhaustion.

Life between the scans is insane, trying to pack more than seems possible into each day and appreciate each experience. Some days are easier than others, but the treatments aren’t without their rough side effects. Every step of the way, Deb is there to troubleshoot, pivot and provide any needed care and support, almost always with a smile and joyful spirit. Of course, there is sadness, worry, grief, anxiety and tears, but it exists side by side with so much gratitude, blessing, hope and love.

Deb is a rock, our rock. She handles every detail of everyone’s needs. Does she know she doesn’t have to be so strong, so perfect? Does she allow herself the time to consider her own loss, anger and sadness? Does she know that she should ask for and accept the help she needs? I hope so. I think we tell her so, but I’m not sure.

There is a song that we sing in our synagogues, written by Debbie Friedman, about the biblical story of our ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, the first Jews, partners in life who left a great legacy. Got sends them on a treacherous journey that is scary and unknown. And God assures them, that they will be a blessing:

L’chi Lach – to a land that I will show you.

Lech L’cha – to a place you do not know.

Lechi Lach – on your journey I will bless you.

And you shall be a blessing, and you shall be a blessing, and you shall be a blessing L’chi Lach.

I pray that in her darkest hours, no matter the challenge, Deb knows that she is truly a blessing: to Todd, to her family and to the world.