

Hahem ve'etzili

“Hahem ve'etzili” were the words my grandmother—my *savta*—used to describe me. For a long time I couldn't understand those words, since they were in Hebrew—Savta's mother tongue. Finally, Savta told me after one of the biggest nights of my life.

I was walking down the skinny cobblestone steps of Central Theatre and Savta walked up to me, a proud smile plastered on her face. “Hahem ve'etzili! Smart and noble. That's what that means! You, my dear, are smart and noble. See what you accomplished? See?”

I looked around at Central Theatre. I had just shared words I had always felt such an itch to present. There were hundreds of people in the audience, and their attention was on me! The simple thirteen-year-old who somehow happened to be in the spotlight, who only wished to present her case.

This itch started years ago when I was around six and Savta took me to a beach. There was so much trash and plastic washed up on it, and unfortunately it was not enjoyable like it used to be years ago. Ever since that day, I have been an activist for this Earth and my biggest priority was to make this huge issue known. People needed to recycle more and waste less.

My activism DID pay off though, and I got invited to speak at the Central Theatre, a major theater in a town called Camry, around an hour away from the mountain cabin Savta and I lived in. It was incredible—almost like a dream come true.

As we headed home that night, I crossed my fingers, hoping that my speech had made an impact for the better. It had to, but I had seen many of these speeches being done by other activists and unfortunately, the trash still piled higher.

But hope and relief met my eyes when I saw the headline in a local newspaper: “Residents have Turned Camry into a Circular City.” Circular city? That means they are recycling more and wasting less. We even saw people picking up trash on the news and I couldn't smile more broadly and proudly. My effort had paid off. Again, Savta repeated that saying: “Hahem ve'etzili.”

But this was only the beginning of what I wanted to do. Camry was practically the size of a crumb compared to the rest of the world. I needed to get into the more major cities like Chicago. My dream was to present my speech in the Goodman Theatre.

“Ata tigrom leza likrot, ani yuda she'ata yechul,” Savta said. I tilted my head for a translation. “You can do it, I know you can,” she repeated, this time in English.

“Yes, well hopefully,” I said, as I slumped down on the couch.

Just then a genius idea erupted in my mind! I couldn't believe it. I was going to organize a “Save Our Oceans and the Planet” protest on the streets of Chicago. Then hopefully I would be noticed and then invited to give my speech at the Goodman Theatre.

“Savta, take me to Chicago,” I said.

“Now, explain to me why you want to do that now?” Savta asked, before grumbling, “Ki anachanu le yecholim leharshot zot le'atzmanu.”

“What?” I asked.

“My dear, I don't think I can afford plane tickets right now.”

I felt a wave of disappointment.

“Tickets for *both* of us,” she said with a sly smile on her face. “You will have to go alone.”

I couldn't believe it! My hands trembled as I turned to Savta, embracing her in a long-lasting hug!

"Our oceans are piling high with trash—plastic mostly, and now it's on all our beaches; a place people used to go to have fun and enjoy the world's beauty. Sadly, these once beautiful places are the equivalent of dumps!" I shared my story of when I was younger and Savta took me to the beach. I ended with a closing statement, "So that's why I believe so strongly in this issue. In helping our hurting world. Thank you," I gave a small bow and applause, screams, and horns filled my ears. Nope, this was no Goodman Theatre, but this was the massive protest I had put together. I hadn't thought so many people would come to support me and march, but boy, I was wrong. Streets filled with people and even roads were closed off. My exceptional hard work had paid off—well almost.

And we did hear about how Chicago residents started recycling more and wasting less! One huge milestone out of the way.

Throughout my life as an activist, I gave speeches all over the world—yes, I DID get to Goodman Theatre, but I also got to Tokyo, New York City, Los Angeles, and many European cities such as London and Rome.

Over time, we began to see a decline in all our waste and more beautiful oceans. I had never smiled wider. And yes, there was Savta smiling with me, murmuring "Hahem ve'etzili" in my ears.