

If you had told me four years ago, as I sat in my white graduation gown, that on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, I'd be back at Beth Tfiloh to honor Daniel Siegel, I would not have been surprised, I would have been curious: I would have wanted to know-- in what remarkable way had Dan changed the world?

I always knew that he would.

Daniel was an intellectual giant, absolutely the most brilliant student I have ever known, and the most dedicated. For his friends, his name was always synonymous with excellence. To "Daniel Siegel" a test was to ace it with confidence. To do a "Dan" on your homework was to buckle down and ignore your cell phone. Daniel's teachers at Yale said that he did the work of their better graduate students as a sophomore.

But he was not merely excellent. Daniel was *good*.

He smiled that famous smile, and you could feel all the love, sweetness, and strength that burst from his core. He loved those around him with loyalty and patience. He gave us the benefit of the doubt, even when we didn't deserve it. He was always available to listen, comfort and cheer his friends, no matter how trivial our worries.

Two years ago, Dan was diagnosed with brain cancer. You might think it was time for his friends to care for him. We thought that too. But still it was Dan who took care of *us*, comforting us, supporting us, making us laugh despite the pain- "Optimism, dignity and humor"—this was how he sought to approach his illness, and he—true to form-- succeeded with a strength that I didn't know was possible.

When Daniel died in November, it shook us to the core. We wondered how we could go on living our lives the same way without him. How could we think about our futures knowing all that had been taken from the best person we ever knew?

But even as we struggled with these questions, it was Dan that got us through. Because Dan never allowed despair to get in his way. He pushed to be the best, and most loving person he could be, at all times, to give everything he could to everyone he knew. To do a "Daniel Siegel" has taken on an even broader meaning for us now.

This is something I feel fortunate to share with you today. You see, I was lucky to know Daniel. But here's a beautiful thing: if you are here, you *do* know him, because Daniel embodies the very best of what Beth Tfiloh celebrates and nurtures.

To be like Daniel Siegel is to nurture all your gifts with dedication and humility, and to face all your challenges with strength and magnanimity. It is to be excellent in all you do, but also to be *good*. It is to lead your community by exemplary living, but also to lead that community through the dedication of your time and skill.

This is how Daniel changed the world for all who knew him, and how he inspires us to improve the lives of others every day. And it is this legacy that the Daniel Joseph Siegel Award honors. Every year at graduation, this award will be given by one of the people whose lives Daniel touched to a distinguished Beth Tfiloh alumnus who exemplifies his qualities of excellence, goodness and dedication to the community.

I encourage everyone here to learn more about Dan, and the foundation his wonderful parents have established in his memory by going to [www.sparksofchangefoundation.org](http://www.sparksofchangefoundation.org).

It hard for me to tell you today how much it means to see his name continue to be linked to the kindness, talent, and success I knew Daniel to embody. I look forward to seeing the ways we as a community continue to keep his values and legacy alive.