



Happy Tears

LAUREN SACHS

It is early evening in September as I sit on the deck under my leafy pergola. I type away on my laptop in a state of deep focus, vaguely aware of the beautiful scene around me. To a casual observer, nothing is happening, but the natural world is full of activity.

I listen to the hum of cicadas, feeling a gentle breeze on my bare legs, looking up from time to time at the clear blue sky, hearing the birds sing and the leaves rustle, all while watching the sun stream through the trees and form shadows on my lawn and the rear of my house. I feel a sense of peace and solace: the kind that nature readily affords, but that can also be found through a yoga class, a recovery run at the park, a therapy session, or via a bit of self-care such as a visit with a close friend. With my teenage daughters back in school, I am able to catch my breath and reflect on the gauntlet of grief that summer brings. It starts in early June with my late husband's birthday, followed quickly by Father's Day, and rounded out with a bang through Brad's yahrzeit in late August, and - finally - our wedding anniversary in early September. With these fraught events in the rearview mirror, I can ease into autumn with a sense of relief. I am especially grateful for the nearly three-quarters of the year before the cycle begins anew.

Since my birthday is in the fall, with its colorful leaves, chilly days, and the start of the college basketball season, I feel a sense of calm anticipation. Five years ago, my life was vastly different. In the months following Brad's death in 2020, I dreaded my birthday. I was in no mood to celebrate and was unsure I could handle the pain of another milestone day. Most of all, I was overwhelmed by the idea of being alone and worried about what my life would look like as I

aged without him. In the interim half-decade that has followed, I have found a new perspective and allowed myself to live and love again. This personal evolution was full of twists and turns, stops and starts. Though it was anything but easy, I am gratified by the personal growth I have experienced. In particular, I am pleased that I was able to mark the five-year anniversary of Brad's passing in a way that would have made him proud.

Reflecting back on this summer's grief gauntlet, I now realize that something changed for me, which allowed me to not just survive the milestone, but actually feel like I was thriving. As I consider how I felt, it occurs to me that I managed to find some serenity despite the weight and significance of it being the five-year anniversary of my loss. It also raises several important questions. Why was this year less challenging than years past? How did I reach this new stage? What lessons have I learned that might benefit others struggling with loss and grief?

Though I cannot say I know all the answers, I have some hypotheses. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that five years out, I have processed my loss and found healing for my heart. I also imagine that forging alliances with others in grief and finding new love provided significant solace. Still, I think there is more to it than even those critical pieces can explain. I believe that much of my ability to tolerate the milestone has to do with being honest about the pain and dealing with it on a regular basis. Because I am constantly thinking about loss and

examining it through my writing, in therapy, and as a hospice volunteer, I feel I have benefitted from allowing grief to companion me on a regular basis. Rather than pushing it away, it has simply become a regular part of my existence. With its consistent presence, my grief has evolved into a dull and

distant ache, rather than an acute, piercing pang. This subdued state of discomfort allows me to feel great empathy for others facing grief in the early aftermath of loss. It also allows me to experience a deep and abiding gratitude for my life, knowing how precarious our existence is. Perhaps most important, it keeps me connected to Brad and to the tears that I still shed on milestone days, and whenever another wave of grief comes rolling in.

Lauren Sachs holds a bachelor's degree in English and Psychology, and a Master's Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, she worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently serving as the Chair for the 20th Annual NW Ohio Jewish Book Festival. In addition to her involvement within the local Jewish community, Lauren serves as a volunteer for Hospice of Northwest Ohio. She is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief. To learn more about Lauren's journey and her work on living well after loss, visit www.literally-lauren.com.

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