



Happy Tears

LAUREN SACHS

During a recent email exchange with a friend, he offered some insight about his elderly mother's health that struck me as profound. Though his mother was recovering from surgery and experiencing all the myriad challenges of getting older, he stated simply, "I know that aging is a blessing not all get to experience." I found this statement quite moving for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I appreciated him acknowledging the idea that aging is a privilege, especially as my own husband died at the relatively young age of 49. Since Brad was an oncologist who witnessed more than his fair share of suffering and loss, he was highly attuned to quality-of-life issues. Knowing this was his lens, I am certain that he would have wanted to avoid unnecessary suffering and pain; however, I am also sure he would have cherished the opportunity to see his children reach adulthood, would have loved to savor the pleasures of retirement, and would have wanted to spend more time traveling and exploring the world. In summary, I believe he would have relished the chance to do all these things, even if it meant struggling with the common trials of getting older.

Another reason I valued my friend's comment on aging is that it was a thoughtful and empathetic way to address someone like me who knows the alternative to aging all too well. Since my husband died, I cannot count the number of times people have shared about the health and aging issues that either they or their family were facing. At these moments, my interlocutor seemed blissfully unaware that it might cause me pain. I am quite sympathetic to other's struggles and understand that talking about these challenges may provide some small amount of relief. Still, it surprises me that people fail to realize why this might be hard for someone like me to hear. Brad was essentially robbed of all the aspects of getting older, good, bad or indifferent. Occasionally, an

extra thoughtful acquaintance will stop themselves mid-sentence when discussing their aging concerns and share what is plainly obvious: that I may feel triggered in some way by such conversation. I certainly do not believe that everyone should be a starry-eyed idealist when it comes to aging. Yet I do think it is worth taking time to reflect on the good parts of our lives, helping us to foster or maintain a sense of gratitude. Working on developing our gratitude muscle may even help us become more resilient in the face of the most salient hardships of our lives.

A further reason I valued my friend's statement has to do with an attitude shift I experienced after becoming a widow in my mid-forties. Losing my husband compelled me to focus on living well in the face of

my loss. Despite my loss - or perhaps exactly because of my loss - once I started to cope with my grief, I began to see waking up every day as a privilege. Moreover, I realized it was important for me to live fully in my late husband's honor as he was no longer able to do so. Knowing that not everyone gets the chance to live out

their lives, I felt I should not take my own life for granted. Since western society tends to be obsessed with staying young and is hugely grief-phobic, I know that aging with grace is not easy. Nevertheless, I like to think I have adopted my late husband's approach to finding humor in the face of challenging circumstances. Using humor in this way helps me to maintain some perspective when I am faced with the normal issues of getting older, but it also allows me to laugh at myself when I get too bogged down in the minutiae of such matters. Though I have not had to face any significant health challenges of my own, I hope this attitude continues to keep me grounded and grateful if I am presented with such new adversity. No matter what, like my friend, I want to continue to recognize aging as the gift it is, cherishing the time we have and finding a sense of peace and fulfillment along the way.

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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seders that offer beautiful readings and symbolic foods related to the New Year of the Trees. He is also committed to performing reverse Tashlich - cleaning of waterways - but not just at Rosh Hashanah; he noted that a similar action can be done in the spring, along the lines of searching for chametz and removing it.

He remarked with a smile that Shavuot is another holiday he likes, because there's "not a lot of prep - no sukkah to build or house to clean. Just some sermons to write."

With regard to his sermons, "Ideally, I want [attendees] to learn one thing they didn't know about, or think about something they hadn't thought about before. And also, to laugh once - if I

can get them to laugh once, that'd be great. I usually incorporate terrible puns," he chuckled, noting that "midrash is all based on wordplay," which he enjoys.

But services and sermons are not the only important aspects of Judaism, Rabbi Marsh insisted.

"I think it's important to make lots of different ways that people can be involved in Jewish life," he said. "It's not just about the prayer and the study - Judaism has to have more ways into that, whether it's community service projects," fighting antisemitism, or other activities in which one finds meaning.

One of these entrées - pun intended - could be cooking.

The new rabbi isn't "too much of a picky eater," he shared, though cooking

is "more of a functional thing for me than something I enjoy," he admitted.

But "I like a lot of [Mom's] recipes for the holidays and for Shabbat, because that's where I learned to cook."

As for other pastimes, Rabbi Marsh has "no pets, no hobbies - no time for hobbies, really. [And] I mostly kill my house plants."

He did follow the Red Sox for some years, "because my whole family's from Boston and they'd kill me if I didn't!" That only lasted until the team broke the Curse of the Bambino by winning the World Series in 2004; after that, the thrill was gone. (Despite not being a devoted baseball fan anymore, Rabbi Marsh did acknowledge that he might be persuaded to watch our own Toledo Mud Hens take on the Rochester Red

Wings some time.)

Mostly, though, "I don't follow sports at all," he said. So, he has no preference among Toledo's split loyalties for professional teams: Tigers or Guardians, Pistons or Cavs, Lions or Browns.

But, what about the most critically important of the loyalty tests: Michigan or Ohio State?

"I didn't even know there was a thing about that, until somebody told me," he said with some surprise.

So to be safe, he declared, "I will remain rabbinally neutral on this topic!"

Mary Bilyeu is Community Relations Programming Specialist at Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo.

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competition, referencing complaints by several European broadcasters who raised questions about Israel's victory in the contest's audience poll in May.

Israel's Yuval Raphael came in second after being bolstered by the popular vote and drawing points from the juries in 14 countries.

The EBU had rejected pressure

to exclude Israel but later opened a process to solicit feedback from the contest's 37 participating countries over how it should navigate geopolitical tensions. Martin Green, the contest's director, said in a statement on Friday that the process was ongoing.

"Broadcasters have until mid-December to confirm if they wish to

take part in next year's event in Vienna," he said. "It is up to each member to decide if they want to take part in the contest and we would respect any decision broadcasters make."

The director general of Icelandic broadcaster RÚV signaled that while so far the EBU had resisted entreaties to exclude Israel, he was hoping for

change.

"I think it is likely that if there is no change in EBU's position and it does not respond to these voices of concern coming from us, from Spain and Slovenia and others, then that will call for reactions from these broadcasters," he said. "But let's just wait and see."