

Local

Happy Tears

By Lauren Sachs

Lauren 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, Lauren 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. Lauren 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.



Sitting in one of the few empty conference room seats, I silenced my cell phone and took a deep breath. After smiling at the woman to my right, I exchanged silent hellos with the staff who had prepared me for this day. I was happy to be at hospice and taking part in the volunteer training I had eagerly anticipated. Given the kind and supportive experiences I had with hospice after losing my husband, I felt honored to finally be in a position to give back. Following his own introduction, the President invited us to each share our reasons for volunteering with hospice. When it was my turn, I explained that my late husband died suddenly; therefore, I only became familiar with the hospice bereavement department in the wake of his demise. I went on to say how incredibly helpful the staff

and my spousal loss support group had been, adding that my late husband had also referred his own patients to hospice given his work as an oncologist. A short while later, I noticed the woman sitting on my right glancing at my name card before turning to me with an epiphany. “Your late husband was my oncologist” she offered warmly, adding “I really loved him.” To which I replied, “I really loved him, too.” A rejoinder that elicited a burst of laughter between us both.

If you have experienced personal loss, perhaps you have heard people say that our relationship with the deceased does not end simply because they are no longer alive. When I was initially introduced to the idea of an ongoing relationship with our dearly departed, I could not wrap my head around it. In the wake of my own loss, I was incredulous that anyone could suggest such a ludicrous thought, struggling as I was to accept his death. As I have come to process my own loss more thoroughly, I have started to view this idea anew. Certainly, no one can bring back their beloved to our mortal world, but in many ways they are still with us. We talk about our lost loved ones with family, tell stories about them with those we meet, reminisce with others who shared affection for them, and think of new ways to honor their memories. Sometimes these reminiscences feel good, and sometimes it is painful to bring them so close without having access to their corporeal self. Nevertheless, through time, I have come to realize that our beloved do not

stop being a part of us after they die. Indeed, while they may not be here in the flesh, we continue to consider and reconsider who they were and how they influenced our lives.

As I have pondered this notion that our relationship continues after death, I have been particularly awestruck in witnessing this dynamic with my children. Though I certainly continue to ponder my own connection with my late husband, I started to realize that our daughters have an especially complex path of grief since they have changed and grown so much since his untimely passing. My daughters will always recollect their father through the eyes of a child, even as they continue to blossom into young women. I have seen my girls yearn to share newfound thoughts and ideas with their father, and wish they could engage in the more mature conversations which now regularly take place in our home. Like anyone who has lost a loved one, my daughters have missed their father at milestones and longed for more time together, yet they also wish their father could see them moving through new stages of development. As our daughters grow ever closer to true adulthood, they have started to newly evaluate who their father was, think about how he prioritized his time, and question which of their traits and habits were formed by observation or genetic ties with him. Perhaps most of all, they have continued to see themselves and their relationship with their father in a new light as they

have grown and evolved.

The bittersweet truth of loss is that we who are bereaved do not leave our loved ones in the past as we move into the future. They stay with us, and though at times it causes our hearts to ache, it is also a thing of beauty. We often feel their presence in meaningful moments and can imagine how they would take in our lived experience. Attuned to how they made us feel, we may even find ourselves questioning if they were there at events after they died, feeling almost certain of their attendance despite the knowledge that it could only be possible in a spiritual sense.

Over lunch at the hospice training, speaking with my late husband’s patient gave me the chance to once again feel close to him. As my fellow trainee shared memories of her office visits at the cancer center, she reminded me of Brad’s work ethic, his kindness, his humor, and even his obsession with American politics. Talking about him in this intimate way brought tears to my eyes, but also a sense of gratitude that I could share memories of him with this perfect stranger. I could imagine him getting worked up about the political climate of the day, and could envision him making the necessary calls to advocate with her insurance company for genetic testing they had previously balked at covering. As we parted ways that day, I felt a sense that our meeting had been beshert, and just the thing I needed to know that Brad was still part of my life.

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would have a reason why, and she would have a reason why, and I would understand where she was coming from,” Tejada said. “She saw a lot of things as a mom or as a woman, or as whatever ethnicity she was, and so do I. So different POVs might give you different answers. It doesn’t mean that it’s wrong.”

Over the six-month fellowship, the group also took a trip to Washington, D.C., and some of the fellows put on a multicultural dance and music festival at the Brooklyn Children’s Museum in August.

One moment that stuck out to Dani Kogan, associate director of Brooklyn Initiatives at the Center for Shared Society, was when a fellow reached out to her after the Donald Trump-Kamala Harris presidential debate. Trump repeated unfounded claims that Haitian immigrants were eating dogs and cats in Springfield, Ohio, and the fellow asked for assistance to organize a rally in support of the Haitian community and children who were being bullied in school.

“JCRC representation came, other fellows came,” Kogan said during the

reception for the comic book Monday. “The rally was stronger because we were there together. That’s really the power of this fellowship, these kinds of connections that work all day to keep this going.”

Greenblatt, who grew up just outside of New York City, said she got to learn about different Jewish immigrant groups to New York, and about the diversity within her own cultural and religious community.

“There was a lot of reflection on who I am, what being Jewish means to me, what community means to me, how to kind of be a part of a diverse community while still having a strong sense of identity and not feeling bad about that,” Greenblatt said. “As someone who grew up doing a lot of multicultural work and DEI work, it’s very much been like — you speak for the other. But also: Who’s speaking for me?”

Medgar Evers College, Greenblatt said, has been largely spared from the campus antisemitism controversy that has roiled other campuses that are part of the City University of New York over the past year, since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack in Israel and the war in Gaza began.



Deborah Greenblatt, an assistant professor at Medgar Evers College, reads her comic in "We Are Brooklyn: Stories of Hope." (Jackie Hajdenberg)

The fellowship, she said, gave her a place to discuss her feelings about the war, and about Israel.

“Having a safe place to talk about it, both with our Jewish and our non-Jewish folks in the fellowship, has been immensely helpful,” Greenblatt said.

For now, the book is available for purchase through the JCRC with a \$5 suggested donation that goes to Be’chol Lashon.

Voloj is thinking about ways to bring “We Are Brooklyn” to a wider audience.

“I have some ideas, but I think we just want to figure something out that goes really beyond,” Voloj said. “But I feel like there’s so much more we can do. And, yeah, we might do a Be’chol Lashon event, like a panel with some people on it or something. I mean, I think it’s a perfect tool for bringing people together.”