

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 a board member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo. 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.



Before becoming a parent, I was a practicing child and family therapist. I studied hard to obtain my clinical social work degree, then completed both an internship and fellowship where I received excellent hands-on experience and training. In the early years of my career, I firmly believe I was able to provide helpful guidance and support to the children and families I served. Still, despite how much I prepared for my professional life, I now know that something was missing. Becoming a parent myself gave me an almost inexplicable sensitivity about raising children and informed how I thought about the myriad challenges of growing up. In a similar vein, I can now say that I truly did not understand grief until I lost my husband in August of 2020. Before Brad died, I believed I could use my sense of empathy to conceptualize what it is like to live with grief. I now know that intense grief is like nothing I ever could have imagined. Three years after losing Brad, I sometimes feel as though grief is like a spider's web. While it remains largely unseen, it

lingers in your life and its strength can catch and hold you at the times you least expect it.

Much of what I have learned about grief has come from my own experience of loss. Still, I have also gained tremendous insight about the nature of bereavement as I have listened to the stories of those in my spousal loss support group. Once one emerges from the fog of early grief, we are able to step away from the intensity and take a more objective look at its constantly evolving nature. In my situation, even early on I started to realize that losing Brad meant rethinking my entire life. Without him, I had to newly consider who I was and what I wanted for my future. Since I was no longer part of the we that developed over our 20 years together, I was left to wonder about how to define myself and reimagine my own hopes and dreams. I have heard these same sentiments echoed by my fellow widows and widowers on many occasions. None of us seemed to anticipate all the secondary losses that accompany the loss of a spouse, particularly the loss of identity that inevitably arises. Like me, the members of my group regularly express how comforting it is to be amongst others who get what it is like to go through such a painful and life-altering experience.

Though no one's story of loss and bereavement is the same, we often hear echoes of our own experience as we sit with others in grief. Feeling seen and understood by others offers great solace as we try to adjust to the new lives we find ourselves living. In our group, we have sometimes discussed the idea that this evolution in our lives takes many forms and gives us permission to try new things. One woman in the group spoke about her experience of buying a bike and trying out cycling as a new hobby, feeling invigorated by the energetic activity. Another widow offered up how meaningful it was for her to start volunteering and giving of herself on a regular basis. Personally, my own endeavor into writing represents an evolution in my life since I had never seriously considered myself a writer before Brad died. As we look forward to spring, a time of hope and renewal, it feels like a very appropriate opportunity to make changes and try new things. Change can certainly be part of anyone's life. But loss has helped me to feel less afraid of the unknown, giving me permission to dust off the cobwebs, honor my grief, and trust myself enough to begin again.



Members of Jewish Toledo performed several *mitzvot* (good deeds) and *chesed* (acts of loving kindness) last month at Pancakes with a Purpose at Temple Shomer Emunim. The program included public service, pancakes, and passion for our community in Toledo and abroad in Israel. Service projects will benefit our local Jewish Senior, Family & Social Services (JSFSS) Family Food Pantry and families in Israel.

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pancakes
with a purpose

