

# Local

## Happy Tears

By Lauren Sachs

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For those who still use an old-school paper calendar, I imagine that - like me - you may feel some sense of hope and optimism when starting a new one. Personally, a clean calendar with its empty pages and straightforward design feels, in and of itself - refreshing. Though the weather in the Midwest may be anything but spry in early January, the notion of beginning again calls to us with a seductive siren song. Whether setting New Year's Resolutions to improve our

mental health or physical well-being, trying to reach a goal, or simply making plans to quit a bad habit, it is a time tinged with possibility. For those who have lost a loved one, the New Year may even bring a surprising sense of relief, knowing that the added strain of coping with grief during the holiday season is over - at least for the time being. Still, like so many aspects of loss, new beginnings are never experienced without complex and conflicting emotions.

I have come to understand that loss is a constant exercise in holding opposing truths. Sometimes the opposition is quite straight-forward, such as looking ahead to rebuilding one's life without a loved one while simultaneously honoring the past and the beloved's role in one's circle of friends and family. At other times, the conflicting states are harder to reconcile: like when we feel a sense of healing and peace only to have that calm broken by a strong wave of grief. Another closely related opposition that is seemingly impossible to juggle comes from attempts to maintain a sense of control over our feelings, versus the times when our emotions wash over us. With all these paradoxes, I firmly believe there

is no right or wrong way to address them. Grief is an idiosyncratic experience where each person must walk their own path in their own time.

During my spousal loss support group, we often discuss the concept of starting over, prompting a series of questions for which there are no ready answers. Searching for guidance and support, the fellow widows and widowers in my group often ask: Am I ready to look to the future? Should I accept this new reality or try to maintain my former life in some way? Even if, and when, I want to move forward, will others in my life accept the changes? Why are some of my friends and family pushing me to make changes when I do not feel prepared to do so? How would my late spouse want me to live my life in his/her absence? What do I even want for myself at this stage of my life? Why is the concept of change so incredibly scary? How can I manage this new path when I feel so alone?

In the face of such uncertainty, I suggest that my fellow mourners try to relieve the self-imposed pressure we may feel by changing our perspective. Instead of putting such high expectations on ourselves to find the "right" answers,

perhaps we can play a mental game and pretend that we are advising a good friend. After all, we are often much kinder and less judgmental with others than we are with ourselves. Maybe we could simply accept the cognitive dissonance of our reality instead of trying to reconcile it, realizing that we are capable of holding these opposite states. Could we allow ourselves time and space to know the new person we are becoming, and even give ourselves permission to embrace the change? Would it help to find a quiet and contemplative time to ponder these questions so that we are able to tune in to our own thoughts? Might we benefit from discussing these matters with others in grief?

Though we so often feel that we should know how to navigate our future, one of the greatest lessons of grief is coming to understand how very unpredictable our future truly is. This New Year, I hope that this uncertainty does not cause you angst and, instead, you will open your real or metaphorical calendar with a sense of fresh optimism. I also wish you a sense of peace, with the reassurance that the universe is there to guide you along the way.

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grew up worshipping Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax, will likely spend the rest of his career playing in the city with the most Jews in the world. Fried joins fellow Jewish pitcher Scott Effross, who was traded to the Yankees in 2022 but missed all of 2023 and most of 2024 with multiple injuries. Jewish Yankees pitching prospect Eric Reyzelman is working his way through the minor leagues. Brad Ausmus, the team's bench coach, is also Jewish.

### Aerin Frankel and Quinn Hughes headline a banner year for Jewish hockey

On the same day Fried signed his massive deal with the Yankees, the Vancouver Canucks became the first team in NHL history to feature three Jewish players in the same game.

Defensemen Quinn Hughes and Mark Friedman and forward Max Sasson all played for the Canucks as they lost to the St. Louis Blues 4-3 in overtime.

The Jewish hat trick capped a banner year for Jews in hockey.

Jews featured prominently in the inaugural season of the Professional Women's Hockey League, which dropped the puck on New Year's Day, led by Boston Fleet goalie Aerin Frankel, who is arguably the best Jewish player in the league.

Frankel posted a .929 save percentage in 18 games last season, but her breakout came in the playoffs, when

the Northeastern alum saved over 95% of shots and earned the moniker "Green Monster" — an homage to another formidable Boston sports presence — for her clutch performances. Boston lost to Minnesota in the finals in May despite Frankel's brick wall.

In the NHL, Edmonton Oilers star Zach Hyman put on a career performance last season, tallying 54 goals, the third-most in the NHL, plus 16 more in the playoffs. And Hughes finished with 75 assists, the third-most in the league, and won the James Norris Memorial Trophy, which is awarded to the NHL's best defender.

During the offseason this summer, Ryan Warsofsky became the first Jewish NHL head coach in three decades, University of Denver star Zeev Buium was selected 12th overall in the NHL Entry Draft and Jack, Luke and Quinn Hughes became the first brothers to grace the cover of the flagship NHL video game.

### Israeli Yaniv Bazini leads UVM to its first-ever NCAA soccer championship

Before this month, the University of Vermont had won six national championships in the school's history — all in skiing. On Dec. 16, the Catamounts captured the NCAA Division I soccer championship, thanks in large part to Israeli star Yaniv Bazini.

Bazini, a senior from Ness Ziona in central Israel, joined UVM in 2022 and became an anchor of Vermont's

offense. This season, Bazini led the team with 14 goals — including six scored in postseason games — which is the second-most in a single season in program history. His 30 points were third-best in the UVM record books.

Beyond his offensive prowess, Bazini was also known for his proud embrace of his Israeli and Jewish identity. Last October, Bazini draped himself in an Israeli flag after scoring his first goal following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. He brought the flag back out to celebrate the national title.

Bazini told JTA he cherishes the opportunity to represent Jews on the pitch — which he hopes to do professionally, either in the MLS or abroad.

"It means everything," he said. "I got so many messages in the past couple days of kids that are impacted, and not only my soccer, but how I show that I'm Jewish and not afraid of it. By doing 'Shema Yisrael' at every beginning of the game or halftime, or every time I score, every time to thank God."

### Honorable mentions

Here are a few other Jewish sports stories from the past year that are worth noting:

**Assaf Lowengart** made history as the first Israeli-born position player to sign a professional baseball contract in the U.S. when he joined the Frontier League's New York Boulders in February.

**Hapoel Jerusalem** honored slain

hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, whom they called "our friend in the stands."

Orthodox MLB prospect **Jacob Steinmetz** continued his ascent through the minor leagues, joining the Hillsboro Hops, the Arizona Diamondbacks' High-A affiliate.

MLB veteran **Kevin Pillar** enjoyed a late-career resurgence with the Los Angeles Angels — and embraced his role as a Jewish ballplayer.

**Team Israel** launched an American organization to strengthen its national team pipeline and support baseball's growth in Israel.

**Náutico Hacoaj** became the first Jewish soccer club to compete in Argentina's Amateur Promotional Tournament since 1967.

Israeli fencer **Yuval Freilich** won a gold medal at the 2024 Qatar Grand Prix on Jan. 31, while wearing a uniform with an Israeli flag and the message "Am Israel Chai," Hebrew for "the people of Israel lives," written on his shoulder. Qatar, which does not have diplomatic ties with Israel, has played home to Hamas' leadership.

And last but not least, Jewish wrestling promoter **Paul Heyman** and boxing publicist **Fred Sternburg** were each inducted into their sport's respective halls of fame. And the **Jewish world mourned the deaths of Ken Holtzman, the winningest Jewish pitcher in MLB history, and Hall-of-Fame jockey Walter Blum**, who rode to victory in the Belmont Stakes.