

News

Email from Israel

January, 2024

The following is an email from the daughter of a woman who was raised in Toledo and now lives in Israel. The writer is a family physician and her children are Ben, Nicole, and Juliet.

To set the scene I want to describe what's been going on here with a few personal examples.

I am seeing patients at my family medicine practice who have been evacuated from the south of the country who lost 20 or so friends on October 7th in the kibbutzim and moshavim. They are living in hotels and have no idea if it will ever be safe enough to return and rebuild their homes. I am also seeing young people who survived Nova (the music festival) and have severe PTSD having witnessed things no one should ever have to experience. And one of my patients was killed age 24 in the army a month ago.

Ben's friend, Naama, is 19 years old and was raped and taken into Gaza (I'm sure you've seen the video) and is still a hostage 103 days later. She was doing the same job in the army that Juliet did, watching the screens and cameras on the border when her base was invaded by terrorists who raped and murdered most of the girls. Her mother is a family doctor in Ra'anana who helped me when I was working in Ra'anana. They have no idea if she is alive or dead or pregnant or sick.

Ami (Nicole's boyfriend) lost ten friends in his army unit on October 7th and went straight back into the army having just finished his six-year service in an elite unit. Nicole's friend Shirel was shot and left for dead at the Nova festival and is still in hospital recovering from a shattered leg. Her other friend survived hiding in a vegetable patch. Oz is in the army reserve duty in Gaza in a tank unit helping to escort the wounded and protect the soldiers and was initially serving up North, sleeping at night in an open field on the border.

Ben is working extremely hard day and night in the army also. And as Mum mentioned our friends' son is in ICU with head and spinal injuries following a car ramming attack in our hometown Ra'anana on his way back from school. His mother is a family doctor also. Ben is best friends with their daughter.

And as I'm writing this, Ben, who is in Jerusalem this evening for a weekend off the army, has sent me a photo of a crime scene he has just walked past at the bus station where a terrorist who stabbed and killed a tourist in Tel Aviv today just arrived in Jerusalem and was killed after pulling out a knife.

Juliet has had to run in the middle of the night down to the one shelter in the basement of her apartment building during rocket attacks and help the young mothers there with their babies. They have 90 seconds to wake them up and get them to the shelter.

I was given a trauma backpack at work this week to have with me in my car containing military grade tourniquets, head flashlight, cannulas for chest drains, pressure bandages, flare sticks "just in case".

I could go on because the list is endless and the stories are endless.

This country is in great pain and it will take a long time to heal. Friends have been to funerals of their kids' close friends.

Wishing for happier peaceful time.

Please let your friends and colleagues know what it really is like here at the moment.

Sending love and hope we can be reunited in happier times.

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.



Because the beginning of April celebrates the art of practical jokes and pranks, I cannot help but think of my late husband around this time of year. Brad was endlessly entertaining himself and others with funny stories and just plain silly behavior. While he was constantly trying to make our daughters laugh, one of my favorite stories about his humor was one that I heard indirectly from his sister. This story also perfectly illustrates how my late husband found humor in the most unusual places. While Brad and his two siblings stood by in the hospital waiting area during their mother's orthopedic procedure, Brad felt compelled to joke around and behave in such an absurd manner that it caught the attention of one of the hospital's nurses. Apparently she was so confused by his unusual behavior that she asked this highly educated, specialist physician if he had ever actually been in a hospital before. Though Brad's chosen profession as a Hematologist/Oncologist was one that focused on serious matters of life and death, he managed to find humor in most situations and subsequently helped ease the heavy burden his patients carried.

When Brad died suddenly in August 2020, I can honestly say that finding levity in life was not an easy task. Still, even in the earliest months following his death, I could not help but smile to myself when considering how he might have seen the absurdity of certain events, such as medical recruiters calling our home to make him posthumous job offers. Even before I could fully embrace the idea of finding humor in the midst of my pain, I found myself trying to help my daughters through the use of comedy and laughter. I knew that Brad would have tried to help us cope by incorporating humor so I soon found myself doing the same. In the hopes of making my girls smile, I would remind them of ludicrous things their father said or imitate the farcical dance moves he regularly did to imitate our daughters. Eventually, my girls started to follow suit, cracking jokes and sharing their favorite amusing Dad memories. While tears are still shed in my home when we find ourselves missing him, I imagine many people would be surprised to learn how much my daughters and I laugh during our reminiscences.

Knowing how much my family has embraced humor on our path to healing, I highly recommend finding a way to lighten the burden of loss with laughter whenever possible. Recollecting happy memories of your loved one, sharing the inside jokes that connected you to your person, or simply looking through old photos of times spent together may help. No matter the avenue, giving yourself permission to laugh after loss can be a critical part of coping with grief. Sometimes I have found that embracing dark humor has been particularly helpful: like joking with my daughters about how crazy it is that their dad still seems to get more mail than the rest of us. Perhaps the best part of the joke is knowing that Brad would have approved, and been laughing right along with us. In this way, we honor his memory and continue to feel his presence through both our laughter and our tears.

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