

**Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author
of an American Story in conversation with award-winning
journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky**

National Webinar Transcript

June 3 2021

Presented by:



This program is in partnership with:



This program was made possible with support by:



Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Elana Silber:

Good evening, everyone. So, glad to see you all. My name is Elana Silber and I am the CEO at Sharsheret. I am so thrilled that tonight's program will feature the most inspiring, Hadassah Lieberman, who's a friend of mine and the author of Hadassah: An American Story in conversation with the award winning journalist, editor and author, Sandee Brawarsky.

Elana Silber:

Before we begin, I just wanted to thank our sponsors for tonight's program, Merck and Seagen. Their generosity really enables us to continue to bring education and support programs to you and your family all across the country. I'm also really pleased and grateful that we have several community partners here with us tonight who helped share this event with their communities and bring us all together. Thank you to the Bikur Cholim of Far Rockaway and The Five Towns, Hewlett House, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, The Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, The JCC of Chicago, Mid Island YJCC and the Suffolk YJCC.

Elana Silber:

Please note that the webinar will be recorded and it will be posted on Sharsheret's website along with a transcript. Your faces, the participants' faces will not show up in the recording. So, you can keep your screens on and don't worry. We won't be seen afterwards. Also, when we let you in tonight, into the Zoom, you were entered on mute. We really ask that you keep yourself muted. We have lots of people on the call and we really want to hear the presentation. And to really enjoy the presentation to the best extent, put your screen on speaker view. You can find this option in the upper right hand corner of your screen. And you will have an opportunity to ask your questions to Hadassah and to Sandee through the chat. So, you can write anything you want and the chat button is at the bottom of your screen.

Elana Silber:

So, for those of you who are new to Sharsheret, we are the national Jewish breast and ovarian cancer organization and for the past 20 years we have been providing support and education programs and much to our good fortune, in some ways, we have always provided services remotely. They've been easily accessible by phone and email and through the internet. So, over the past year and a half we were able to continue providing programs and services throughout the pandemic and we continue to do so as things start to ease up a little bit.

Elana Silber:

So, again, we want you to keep us in mind should you or anyone you know be affected by breast cancer or ovarian cancer, to please feel free to send them our way. I also wanted to do a little bit of an introduction to the remarkable women who we have on our call tonight. I'll start with Hadassah Lieberman.

Elana Silber:

Hadassah Lieberman has dedicated much of her life's work to healthcare issues. Assisting non-profit organizations, improving educational standards and promoting international understanding with a particular focus on global women's health. Hadassah was the global ambassador with Komen for the Cure's global initiative for breast cancer and worked to create sustainable breast cancer outreach and education programs all across the world. And many of you may remember that the very first Race for the Cure hosted by Komen years ago was one of Hadassah's projects and we were so fortunate to be a

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

part of that experience in Jerusalem, bringing together all different members of the community for a common cause. It was truly inspirational and Hadassah was the brains and the beauty behind all that.

Elana Silber:

Hadassah was born in Prague in the Czech Republic in 1949. She left Eastern Europe with her family and moved to Gardiner, Massachusetts where she grew up. She went on to earn a BA from Boston University in government and dramatics and an MA in international relations and American government from Northeastern University. She built a career devoted largely to public health that has included positions at Lehman Brothers, Pfizer and the National Research Council. After her first marriage ended in divorce she married Senator Joe Lieberman, the US Senator from Connecticut who was the democratic nominee for vice president with Al Gore and would go on to run for president. So, welcome, Hadassah.

Elana Silber:

For Sandee's bio, Sandee is an award-winning journalist, editor and author. She recently received her fourth Simon Rockower Award for Excellence in Jewish Journalism. Her essays and articles have appeared in many publications including The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, The Lancet, Hadassah and Jerusalem Post. And for many years, Sandee served as culture editor of The Jewish Week.

Elana Silber:

Sandee lives in Teaneck, New Jersey with her husband, Barry Lichtenberg, and family and I just want to mention she's the author of several books. Most recently, "212 Views of Central Park: Experiencing New York's Jewel from Every Angle" with photographer, Mick Hales.

Elana Silber:

"So, with that I turn the floor over to Hadassah and to Sandee. And take it away. Thank you everyone for joining us.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Thank you so much, Elana, and good evening everyone. It's really a pleasure to be here with Hadassah Lieberman and to speak with our friends at Sharsheret. Hadassah has written a really terrific book. It's beautifully written, so thoughtful, generous, proudly Jewish, deeply personal and also universal with so much that's resonant for so many of us. And it's a great American story told with gratitude.

Sandee Brawarsky:

I was an admirer of Hadassah even before I read this memoir and now I'm an even bigger fan and I'm so impressed by her abilities to draw people together. I remember hearing her powerful speech at the democratic convention with thousands of people holding up placards that said, "Hadassah."

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, the format is that we're going to have a wide ranging conversation and then we'll leave time for your questions. Some of you have already sent in questions and you can continue to send them to us through the chat function.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

So, Hadassah, I thought we'd start with the inspiration for writing your book, *Hadassah: An American Story*. Maybe you can tell us about that and also, why now?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, first of all, I want to say hello to everyone who's joined us and I want to begin with a statement of applause, deeply meant applauding Sharsheret. The wonderful works that you do for so many people around the globe really in your unique position. So, thank you.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, here I am. You don't think in advance, oh, I'm going to write a book. Maybe some people do but that wasn't my thing. I wasn't sitting there authoring books, as my husband's done. And all of a sudden, my mother had died, I was sorting through her library, things she had around her apartment, as so many of us do at certain times in our lives, and then I came across a book that ended up being a diary written in the Czech language, which I didn't know. I knew Yiddish. I didn't know Czech. And I took it to the Holocaust Museum when we were in Washington and I had them translate this record of my mother's starting with a short message that said, "I cannot write anymore. I depend on my children, my daughter and my son, to build on this story, to say what needs to be said."

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, when I read that I was shocked. I started shaking because I said, "Oh God, I have to write. I have to do research. I have to see what's going on." So, I began to write and I looked through all these little pictures and all kinds of things that told me what I had to do. And I did it at that point when she had died and all I had was this diary and other things, her paintings, her words. And I knew that here I had come to this point in my life, married to Joe. So, I was a senator's wife, a senator who had run a national campaign that I was part of as vice president and then later as president.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And I knew that I had come out of this dark milieu and I had been born out of my mother coming out of Auschwitz, liberated from Dachau, my father from a slave labor camp and I being the baby and I knew as I got older that this was an opportunity that I was blessed with to be in places and see things in an American story, as my husband ran for these offices. And to be thankful that I could now write and tell people what I had to tell them. And that was why I ended up here.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Now, when you were growing up, did your parents talk much about their experiences during the Holocaust?

Hadassah Lieberman:

They talked but not so much. They talked. My mother would say, "Oh, that's something I saw back then or oh, this is our uniform." She had it in a drawer from Auschwitz. And both of my parents talked but they didn't over talk about these things. And my mother just said, "Look, I cannot even recall some of the things that happened to me. I knew she had lost her family there. I knew for both my parents and I knew there were many stories I had not heard.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

We were in Gardiner, Massachusetts, so there weren't friends from the Shoah. I know there were groups in New York that got together, New Jersey, who were Shoah survivors, Holocaust survivors, and they came together. I didn't have that. I was in a totally different atmosphere where no one spoke Yiddish, which was my only language.

Sandee Brawarsky:

What was it like growing up in Gardiner as your father was the local rabbi?

Hadassah Lieberman:

He was the rabbi. My dad had gone to a yeshiva at an early age and I think he started at the age of five and that was amazing. And when we had to make our emancipation, our immigration story to the United States, he had practiced law, he'd studied it but he wasn't about to go into law in the states, which is what he would've had to do. And instead, he applied to a congregation in Gardiner, Massachusetts. So, my father sat at his desk with a tape recorder. Excuse me.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Take some water.

Hadassah Lieberman:

My hay fever, so please excuse me.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Anyway, so my father, really had to learn how to talk to, give a sermon to people who only spoke English in Gardiner, Massachusetts and they were everything from, not orthodox, conservative to reform to unaffiliated. And I know one time when Korim dad first started out and we weren't with him that Yom Kippur, he said he knelt down for , the kneeling service on Yom Kippur, and when he jumped out he turned around and no one understood what he had done.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, that's how it happened. We were in a very different place. And I guess one of the stories to show just how different it was that I went to kindergarten and the kindergarten teacher had this big basket she put over our heads filled with candy and dolls and cars and trucks and if you were good that day you got to put your hand up and take something out of the basket. I was surprised because I never saw anything like that and I came home on that first day of kindergarten and my mother said in Yiddish, "How did it go? How was the day?" And I looked at her and I said, "Mommy, no more Yiddish. Only English." The way of the immigrant.

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, your parents had amazing resilience, which I think you have too. I love this line, your father told you to go out and write your name in the sky. I wonder, how do you explain their spirit and their resilience and all that they accomplished here?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

They came out of nightmares. When I was younger, I was a young child, my mother ... I remember the screaming at night from her nightmares. And I would listen. I didn't know what to think. I'd never heard nightmare screams. I never knew anyone who had nightmares.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, it was one of those amazing times where you depend on parents to give you lessons to help you. They simultaneously talked about slave labor camp. I know my father would talk about when he marched through cold areas, I think some of them Russia, and some of the men marching froze and died on the side of the road. And my father remembers how he felt horrible that these were Jews who were not going to be buried. And he would often say to me, "I always felt horrible. Who would say Kaddish? Who would say the mourner's prayer for these dead people?"

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, it was always there but at the same time, my parents wanted us to do well in school, to be proud Jews, to get people to respect us and to try to make other Jews, who knew nothing about it, understand what meant so much to you as a Czech immigrant.

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, I've been getting a lot of questions and one related question just came in. Someone who read the book asks, she said that you say, "I bear some of the hidden scars of a survivor's child," and is wondering what are those scars and what did you mean by that?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, I think that most survivor's kids and, in the meantime, there are less and less parent survivors because they're aging rapidly. But most of those descendants ... Like I just talked about nightmares. I know I always thought about relatives. I'd never had a table full of people for Thanksgiving until I got married and there were others, or holidays. You were limited to your parents or my Rogi neni and Moshe bacci, my Aunt Rose and Uncle Moshe. I knew what to call them in Hungarian. These were the few people that you had.

Hadassah Lieberman:

But I was raised to be strong, to be honest and to stand straight as a Jew and to understand that we, and I repeat this all the time to friends, to kids, grandchildren. We are the PR for our people. What they see is what they know.

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, the book goes on from your family to talk about so many different aspects of your life, but one of the things that I thought would be particularly interesting for us to talk about here is your journey with breast cancer. And I think the book, if I'm right, is the first time that you've really spoken out publicly about it. Can you tell us a little bit about your experience, Hadassah?

Hadassah Lieberman:

I have never talked about it publicly except for a few friends and even not all my friends. It was private. And with time and as I was writing this book I said to myself, "It's not fair because maybe someone will derive a lesson from what I have to say and share. Maybe I can be of help."

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of *An American Story* in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Hadassah Lieberman:

What happened to me is I was working for the Susan G. Komen group and trying to help people and went to Brazil and international activities for breast cancer and did the Israel Day Parade in Jerusalem, all these events, all these things. Then one night I was lying in bed, sitting in bed watching TV and all of a sudden I touched myself and I found a lump. And my husband was right there and he said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I just found a lump, Joey." And he said, "You have to go to the doctor tomorrow." Well, I thought I was in a nightmare dream.

Hadassah Lieberman:

The next day I went to be x-rayed and sure enough they found something but they said they had to put something in to determine if it was cancerous or not. And I thought I was in a dream I'd never had before. He told me, "Yes, it is and you now have to go to the hospital for this," and I was lucky. Then they had to find out what stage it was at, all of those details. And I found out, luckily I was stage one and I needed to have whatever was there removed. And then I started, I think it was weekly, chemotherapy and did that for the time. Then I had the HER2, so I had to have the medicine for that. I was told, "This is only seven years old or six years old. If you had had this earlier you would not have medicine for it." Then I went through the radiation.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, the experience taught me you can't be afraid. You have to go forward. And I realized that even more when I met these poor women from Brazil and women in Saudi Arabia where they had to have cars, trucks coming to their section of the world.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And I went through that and I remember, with the chemotherapy, the doctor said to me, "Well, you may lose your hair." I thought, oh no. I don't want to lose my hair. And it took a few months and then I lost my hair. And my daughter, Hani, said, "You have to go buy a wig, Mommy." We did that. Losing hair for some women is traumatic. Well, for me, it seemed so minor and shallow but that was a big shock.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So ... Go ahead, sorry.

Sandee Brawarsky:

What was helpful to you in getting through those difficulties?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, what was particularly helpful, and I remember this because I had some friends who knew about this and one of them across the street from Georgetown University Hospital said to me, "Oh, I'll bring you over to chemo. I'll bring you over." And I said, "No, thank you. I was able to do it at 7:00 AM so Joe could come and do it with me before he went to work." I remember he'd be sitting there and sometimes the phone calls from these famous colleagues, whatever, were there and it was so funny because I was thinking, oh my God, here I have the chemo intravenous.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

So, that is the greatest thing that helped me. Also my children were very supportive and very caring and kept saying to me, "You can do this. You can do this. You're smart." Hani would always, the baby, she would always say, "You're brave, you're smart, you have to do this. So, you'll just have a wig. Big deal."

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, was your natural optimism and resilience helpful to you? Was that a source of strength?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Yes. Yes, it was helpful. But having never gone through this, it was helpful in a remote way because this was a new experience. And I'd never had it and I began to understand how so many women go through this and traveling around the world, so many women don't identify it and they don't make it. They can die from breast cancer and today we have more and more better cures. And I know when I discovered it it was backward and it was what, 11 years or so? Backward to what happens today. Today they tailor things toward the individual more because we're more advanced.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, we have to say, thank you to places like Sharsheret, which help us all get better and thank G-d I have been better.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Many people are writing in the chat those very words. Thank G-d that you're okay. What about the word survivor? Are you comfortable with the word breast cancer survivor? We talk about Holocaust survivors. We talk about survivors of divorce. Does that sit comfortably with you?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Yes. Yes, absolutely because a breast cancer survivor, that describes exactly what she/he are. They're breast cancer survivors. That's what they survived and they're lucky to be a survivor. So, I don't have any ... I don't compare the two or talk about the two in the same context.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Holocaust survivor is a very different label than a breast cancer survivor. They're both survivors but different areas.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Thank you, Hadassah. So, we'd move on to talking about the subject of immigration and I think it would be interesting for people to hear you read a little section of the book because it's written so beautifully.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Yes. I would love to do that.

Sandee Brawarsky:

The beginning of chapter three, My Immigrant Identity, which begins on page 22. Maybe just read a few of those paragraphs.

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Hadassah Lieberman:

Yes.

Sandee Brawarsky:

I think it's great for people to hear the writing on the page because it really is beautiful.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And I also narrate an audio tape of the book, which was a different experience.

Hadassah Lieberman:

My Immigrant Identity. Let me begin with a quote, Exodus 23:9. I chose this, "You shall not oppress a stranger for you know the feelings of a stranger having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." If I had to summarize the essence of the American immigrant experience in a single word I would choose promise. I've met thousands of my fellow immigrants and promise runs through us like current through copper wire. The word itself, promise, means both a vow that something will happen and the potential for achievement. These are the assurances that bolster the courage of those who leave their country and set out in search of a better life. It is also a good descriptor for the American shores on which they land.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Every immigrant believes that the opportunity to advance socially, economically and personally in this country is more than a possibility. It has the certainty of a promise. I'm not suggesting that immigrants view the United States as a utopia where all of their problems magically disappear. Immigrating to a new country has never been easy. It can be an arduous, sometimes terrifying and often disorienting experience. Immigrants find themselves uprooted from all that is familiar, in a place where the food seems strange, the language indecipherable, the culture endlessly confusing, the dislocation that comes from living far from extended family and facing the difficulty of finding work can be daunting. Even minor differences can make them stand out in a way that has them questioning where they belong. It is a willing sacrifice, yes, but a sacrifice, nonetheless.

Hadassah Lieberman:

As I write, these are especially anxious times for immigrants. Though xenophobia has always existed, it seems to have increased of late. For sure we need rules about who can enter our country and we have to watch our borders, but I believe that if we view immigrants with respect, they will view themselves with respect and that is crucial to moving forward together. The vast majority of new arrivals will contribute to our country.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Thank you, Hadassah.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Thank you.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Very beautiful.

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Hadassah Lieberman:

Thank you.

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, would you say that you still see the world as an immigrant?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, I don't see everything as an immigrant but I am born as an immigrant and I see much from that perspective. It's interesting. One day I was going into New York with Joe in a car and the man who was driving him to work, because I was getting off close to his office so I thought, I'll hitch a ride. He was a Pakistani driver and he heard me talking in the backseat to Joe about immigration. I was just telling him some things I thought and then this gentleman said, "Oh, Hadassah, I would like my children to read that book, to read that chapter because you were talking as an immigrant and I want my children to understand what you're saying."

Hadassah Lieberman:

I was talking about the dangers. See when parents don't understand a language so well your children come home with friends who speak another language that they don't understand and then they're erased from getting to know your friends and talking to them in a decent way. So, I remember that instant.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And the other thing I wanted to make note of now is, I can't tell you the number of immigrants during campaigns who came up to me and the secret service were trying to get more of a distance and I would say, "Oh, let me talk to her closer," and they would say, "You are an immigrant. You will understand me. Thank you. I'm an immigrant." And I was so touched by that every time that happened.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Do you think that your experience and your parents' experience also had some influence on Joe as a lawmaker?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, for sure. Joe's always been sensitive to immigrants and immigration. His grandparents immigrated, not his parents. So, he always was mindful of it but having a wife and in-laws coming from different places and ways, he began to understand how different it is living with an immigrant and living with an immigrants' daughter and son.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, I think, yes. I think people who listen and keep their eyes and ears open to immigrants are really made more sensitive to the journeys they have to take to move forward.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Thank you. So, another really interesting aspect of the book that I think people will find particularly interesting is this remarkable balance that you're able to achieve between being a very public person

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

and living a very observant lifestyle and not compromising. What was that like for you being in public life and being on the road?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, when I met Joe he was shomer Shabbat, as I, and we were both kosher and Joe made it clear that he was running for office, senate before attorney general, but certainly the national office. And he made it clear that he was going to continue observing Shabbat unless there were crisis in his position but otherwise ... And it's so funny because Al Gore said to me, I'll never forget. We were laughing and he said, "I've been missing out on Sundays for a long time now. I think what I'm going to do is I'll take over watching everything more carefully on Saturday and Joe will watch Sunday more carefully." So, I laughed when I heard that.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, it really, what we did showed people ... We were in the Midwest, for example, for one of the campaign trails and I was at the one I was at alone and I was walking around shaking hands and these people came up to me. I had no idea, were they going to vote democratic, republican, independent or nothing? And they said to me, "I like your husband. He is a religious man. We like him." And when I had people come up to me in that way I was really touched. I was touched as a Jew, as a person, as an American. And so many times there were fond, more intimate personal stories conveyed as we march through the town in a very personal, meaningful way.

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, how has keeping Shabbat enriched your life over these years?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, keeping Shabbat has always been an important moment for Joe and I and our children. We sit at a table together and we're not going to the TV, we're not going in a car, we're not going to the movies. It's our time as a family to sit together, to pray together, to sing together. It's a very special moment. As a matter of fact, Joe did this beautiful book on Shabbat and it's now, this fall, going to be published in a translation to Hebrew in Israel. So, that will be interesting, I'm sure, for Americans but Israeli Americans or Israelis in general. So, I'm looking forward to that sharing.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, we were blessed with Shabbat. And people who truly observe it know this. But what happened when we went around the country and one of the times we marched from the hotel to the synagogue, Shabbat morning, and we walked all the houses on the sides of the street came out because they had a wedding reception or a dinner party and they all, and some of them even said Shabbat Shalom hearing that. So, everyone wanted to make us welcome and we appreciated that.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, we had all the different staff people marching with us for Shabbat to the synagogue and when we got there I asked the rabbi. I said, "Rabbi, this synagogue is very full." I said, "Does this happen every week?" He said, "No, there are people who have come for 95 miles. I never had such a crowd." So, it was part of our time and it was special and people really enjoyed it and liked it and felt we were a different breed of couple, parent, children. It was very special.

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Sandee Brawarsky:

I think you also did a service to observant people who now feel more understood in the world.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, yes. Well, that was what happened. It was so funny because some young woman said she had just started a job and she was trying to tell her boss that she was Sabbath observant and said, "You know, like Joe Lieberman." So, he said, "Oh, okay." That's so cute. So, you don't know how you influence people, right?

Sandee Brawarsky:

So, I think listeners might enjoy hearing the story of how you met Joe.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, okay. Well, it's a great story. He tells it better but he tells it longer and I'm going to make it-

Sandee Brawarsky:

You tell it well too.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Okay. Well, Joe and I ... Well, I have a roommate. I was at Stern College for two years, part of YU, Yeshiva University. And then I went to Boston University. So, I had a roommate from Stern College who ended up going to Boston University for graduate school and coming and joining in an apartment and she wanted me to meet someone who was in her synagogue in New Haven, Connecticut.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, I didn't know. I listened and she said, "I want you to meet him. He's a politician but he's a nice guy." So, I thought, well, that's an introduction. Then she said, "And he looks a little bit like your son, Eitan. So, this is good." So, I thought, okay, I'm listening, quiet. And then I went up to her house for a Shabbat and I was there Friday night. Then Shabbat afternoon I was sitting in her garden outside and reading and then all of a sudden Joe Lieberman walked over because she had told him she wanted him to meet me. So, he said, "Well, I'll walk over."

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, he walked over, came in and introduced himself to me and he was in the midst of his campaign for attorney general. So, he then asked me, "Oh, do you have time to go out tonight?" So, you think someone asks you that, they'll tell you they'll pick you up at 7:00, 8:00, whatever. So, it had to be later after Shabbat. So, he said to me, "I have a social, political fundraiser at someone's home in the middle of the state and why don't you come with me and then we'll go out after. Around 11:00, 11:30, I should be done."

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, I looked at him. I said, "Well, what are you going to call me? Who are you going to say I am?" He said, "You'll be my driver." Oh G-d, this is funny. Okay. So, as I'm going through these little [inaudible 00:43:04], then that night we went to this place and we were sitting down and we were talking and I

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

thought, this is a nice man. Then we started talking about the kids we have and I was thinking, hmm, he has two teenagers, I have a six-year-old, at that point.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Anyway, we went to my friend's house and we sat in the living room until 3:00 AM. Then he said, "I have to go because I have to go for a political rally in Hartford," or whatever it was, campaign stops all day. But I'll call you." So, he ended up coming down to see me after his campaigning a couple times a week or I would go up and end up in a fundraiser or a political rally and-

Sandee Brawarsky:

Still as the driver?

Hadassah Lieberman:

No, he had a guy who was a policeman who became a close friend. Well, he was to Joe, Jimmy O'Connell, and he was very close with our family. So, he'd be driving back and forth afterwards. This was after all the stuff he's doing. And I'll never forget, Joe's daddy said one time. He said, "You better be careful, you're doing so much driving around, the two of you. You have to be careful. It's too much time taken on the road."

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, then he said, "Well, the election is in November and we can't announce our engagement." He didn't want to announce anything before. So, we ended up with his uncle and my parents and his parents going to my apartment to have a brunch and then we decided we'll go to Moshe Peking afterwards. We had seen a play, Amadeus, I think it was, and then we went to Moshe Peking. I'd never seen this kosher Chinese place they brought me too. And we had a lovely time. Then we finally were able, within time, to announce our engagement and to get married and to learn about each other's kids, which was our time.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Very nice. So, was being a rabbi's daughter, in some ways, good training to being a political wife?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, yeah, because you can't, according to my parents anyway. A rabbi's daughter does not speak too loudly negatively in public and you behave a certain way. My mother was always, "Oh, tie your hair back. Oh, no, you wear a skirt for this." I was in kindergarten and she had me wearing skirts and my hair tied back in braids. So, I was used to that.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Well, if you have the old fashioned European family it's totally different than the American, than our grandkids today. Everyone gets a little different. So, it was an experience and I have friends who have European parents and we share some of our experiences and we share how we're different and we tend to like people more like us. But, I like everyone. I can't say that as a political wife.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

I want to make sure we have time to talk about your own professional life and some of the interesting work you've done. Maybe you can tell us a bit about your career trajectory and also what you're working on these days.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Okay. Well, these days, my book and the Zooms and the interviews. It's a lot. I'm just waiting to emerge out of this. So, right now, and I'm really thinking about my next chapter. I'm not sure. I have to breathe some air after all the stuff I'm doing.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And I started out, I was a political science major and I remember that I did all kinds of things. And one of the things that I did in high school was I was the winner of the I Speak for Democracy Contest and of course, my father sat down to his desk and said, "I must edit this a little," and I thought, oh, because my father wasn't going to let me go without having it edited. Then, I won and I will never forget, I was in the congressman from Massachusetts, and it wasn't Ted Kennedy, car, his convertible and I sat there and I stood up and I was waving to the people. And my parents, who always went to Memorial Day, always did every patriotic American event because you had to see this event and salute it. And when I went by them they were waving with a smile and I saw the tears in their eyes because to them I had come to the top of the, in their minds, the top of the small town, Gardiner, Massachusetts, with the congressman riding through the streets waving with the music.

Hadassah Lieberman:

And then I studied. So, my father, first of all. At first I wanted to study China. I thought I was going to do studies at Boston University in China. They had some great professors. And my father went with me for a visit and he didn't like the cubbies, the little seated lounges with the boys and girls together. My father said, nisht far dir, that was it, not for you, and he said, "You must, we will go to Stern College for women and you will go there for two years, at least."

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, there I was and I continued my political science, history and I always did theater. Then, after two years, I decided I was going to move to Boston, enter Boston University and study international relations, American government and China, which I found so interesting how leaders could control a country that large with that many people. Well, the secret word in it is you have to have the right type of government to do what they've done.

Hadassah Lieberman:

But anyway, that was great. And then I got out and I worked for a few pharmaceutical firms. I was specializing in women's health and the cures and at that point I studied a little bit about breast cancer and problems in pregnancy, all things that touch women so strongly. Then, I was at the National Health Screening and talking about the importance and studying the importance of science and mathematics in this new age that was looking more and more computer like. I was somewhat struck by the changes in the work environment.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

So, there's so many other, and it's in the book. So, they have to get the book to read the rest of it, please.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Another thing, you write quite openly in the book also about divorce and more about how you really successfully merged your families and created this really strong family and I think you have a great attitude about that. Can you share a bit about that with us?

Hadassah Lieberman:

Yes, I would love to because this is an important chapter in the book and I feel compelled to talk to people about this experience because it's become part of our culture. More and more people are divorcing and some of the divorces are coming earlier and some of them later. But it is happening around us. And I began to talk about when I married, and I talked about that aspect too. We all marry for first time and if you divorce you're divorcing from that first time but you owe it to your children to make sure, hopefully and not every couple can do that. Not every divorcee can do that. It's very important to tell them that they have been the first borns who came out of an earlier marriage and it's important for you to respect them so that every time you walk into a joyous occasion, a simcha, it is not marked in a negative, dark way because you and your ex-spouse are arguing.

Hadassah Lieberman:

You can't do that. I know that's very hard. I'm not saying everyone can do that but we decided no step. We call our children our sons and our daughters. No step anything. You marry a partner and you have to take on their children and love and show love even if it's hard. It didn't happen right away. It took me a few years and you know what you have to do during those few years? Shut your mouth because you can't leave footprints. It's different. You yell at a kid you've given birth to, they don't feel it as badly. If you're trying to build a relationship you have to be careful not to have arguments that leave bad tracks in the sand.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, I think that divorce is very ... One of the things I said and my children's mother called me on it when we talked. She just said she was touched because I talked about the chuppah with our daughter and we were standing under the chuppah and her mother was next to me and we leaned on each other's arms and I felt that. And she was so touched that I had even said that in a book review of my book. So.

Sandee Brawarsky:

That's beautiful, really. So, we're running out of time. I have lots more questions but one quick thing that's come in from somebody listening is, can you give advice to somebody about how to be a good caregiver and what are the things that somebody should be thinking about?

Hadassah Lieberman:

A caregiver for someone else's children?

Sandee Brawarsky:

I think specifically relating to someone who's suffering from breast cancer and someone who's taking care.

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

Hadassah Lieberman:

Oh, a caregiver of a breast cancer, yes, who has children or who may not have children. You know what, a caregiver has to be honest, trustworthy and really, I think for a woman going through breast cancer, some women want to talk to someone intimately. And they want someone to listen to them.

Hadassah Lieberman:

I was not that way but I did have my husband to talk to. But you have to differentiate between a person who wants to talk to you and needs to talk to you and you need to be helpful and sweet and ask them, what's the kind of ... Do you want some ice cream? What would you like? What kind of drink do you want? Or what can I get you that would be fun? Or where can we go together just to be together and not see anyone and do what you want to do?

Hadassah Lieberman:

You have to try to be closer because they're missing things. Some of them are missing an appendage of their body. It's a hard experience and they may have lost hair so you have to help them. I have this great hat. Everyone complimented me on it. It was a baseball hat with hair coming out of the bottom of the baseball hat and I looked so good. It was so cute. I was like a baseball player and I didn't have hair underneath and everyone was, "Oh, this is great." And no one had to ... I went everywhere and nobody knew.

Hadassah Lieberman:

So, it's really helping a person but just like they are now looking at the individual who has breast cancer, with the individual therapy, the caregiver has to look at that individual as a person who may need to talk, someone else who doesn't want to and you have to figure it out as a caretaker who cares.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Thank you, Hadassah. So, I really want to recommend that everybody read Hadassah's terrific book. Thank you so much, Hadassah, for your wisdom, your candor, your generosity. It's really great to hear you and want to thank you and I'm going to turn it back to Elana.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Okay. Let me thank you, Sandee.

Sandee Brawarsky:

Nice to be with you.

Hadassah Lieberman:

You're terrific. I really appreciate it. Okay. I'll turn it back now. Sorry.

Elana Silber:

Thank you. Thank you, Sandee. Hadassah, I think you've done it all.

Elana Silber:

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

You've taken us through from the Holocaust to kindergarten to immigration to politics to Shabbat to marriage and love to divorce and love. You've done it all. You are a true American heroine and so much for us to learn from you. And thank you for sharing so personally about your breast cancer. I remember at the time it was so private and we're happy that we were able to stay close with you all these years. So, really you're terrific. Sandee, you did a great job bringing out really salient points.

Elana Silber:

I also encourage everyone to purchase the book through Amazon and the link is in our website. We also want to thank again, our sponsors, Merck and Seagen, and also there's a quick evaluation survey in the chat. I really encourage you. It'll take two seconds. Click on it, let us know your thoughts. It really helps us to develop our programs. Evaluations are your ways of telling us instead of us talking to you. So, please fill them out.

Elana Silber:

Also, if you do fill out the survey, you have a chance to win one of three personalized autographed copies of tonight's book, Hadassah: An American Story, and if you were as inspired as I was you want that book in your house with her name on it, with her personal stamp because she's someone that makes a difference.

Elana Silber:

So, please fill out the survey. We'll get your books right away. Hadassah will sign them and it was really so terrific tonight. Following up on this we have another webinar next Monday night, June 7th, for National Cancer Survivor's Day. I know Hadassah spoke a lot about Holocaust survivor, cancer survivor. There's a lot more to that discussion and this is just the springboard for that.

Elana Silber:

Finally, just to remind you what Sharsheret does. A lot of you came on for Sharsheret but I know more of you came on to hear Hadassah's story, so please remember we all know someone who's touched by breast cancer and ovarian cancer, whether they're living with it or at risk. Sharsheret provides free and confidential compassionate emotional support, mental health counseling, financial subsidies for non-medical services and life-saving education. So, please feel free. We are eager to hear from you to help you. We want to. That's what we do. Besides the book clubs, we're doing that too. So, your health and wellbeing, that's the priority. So, feel free to lean on us.

Elana Silber:

Thank you again, Hadassah. You were wonderful. Sandee, terrific. If you haven't filled out the evaluation, once more and really ... Thank you all for joining us this evening. Stay well, stay safe and we hope to see you in person sometime soon. Have a good night.

Hadassah Lieberman:

Thank you, Sharsheret. Thank you.

Elana Silber:

Thanks. Thank you.

About Sharsheret

Sharsheret, Hebrew for “chain”, is a national non-profit organization, improves the lives of Jewish women and families living with or at increased genetic risk for breast or ovarian cancer through personalized support and saves lives through educational outreach.

With four offices (California, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey), Sharsheret serves 150,000 women, families, health care professionals, community leaders, and students, in all 50 states. Sharsheret creates a safe community for women facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer and their families at every stage of life and at every stage of cancer - from before diagnosis, during treatment and into the survivorship years. While our expertise is focused on young women and Jewish families, more than 15% of those we serve are not Jewish. All Sharsheret programs serve all women and men.

As a premier organization for psychosocial support, Sharsheret's Executive Director chairs the Federal Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women, Sharsheret works closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and participates in psychosocial research studies and evaluations with major cancer centers, including Georgetown University Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. Sharsheret is accredited by the Better Business Bureau and has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for four consecutive years.

Sharsheret offers the following national programs:

The Link Program

- Peer Support Network, connecting women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer one-on-one with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences
- Embrace™, supporting women living with advanced breast cancer • Genetics for Life®, addressing hereditary breast and ovarian cancer
- Thriving Again®, providing individualized support, education, and survivorship plans for young breast cancer survivors • Busy Box®, for young parents facing breast cancer
- Best Face Forward®, addressing the cosmetic side effects of treatment
- Family Focus®, providing resources and support for caregivers and family members
- Ovarian Cancer Program, tailored resources and support for young Jewish women and families facing ovarian cancer • Sharsheret Supports™, developing local support groups and programs

Education and Outreach Programs

- Health Care Symposia, on issues unique to younger women facing breast cancer
- Sharsheret on Campus, outreach and education to students on campus
- Sharsheret Educational Resource Booklet Series, culturally-relevant publications for Jewish women and their families and healthcare Professionals

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document is presented in summary form only and is intended to provide broad understanding and knowledge of the topics. The information should not be considered complete and should not be used in place of a visit, call, consultation, or advice of your physician or other health care Professional. The document does not recommend the selfmanagement of health problems. Should you have any health care related questions, please call or see your physician or other health care provider promptly. You should never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read here.

Sharsheret's National Book Club with Hadassah Lieberman, author of an American Story in conversation with award-winning journalist, editor, and author Sandee Brawarsky

The information contained in this document is compiled from a variety of sources ("Information Providers"). Neither Sharsheret, nor any Information Providers, shall be responsible for information provided herein under any theory of liability or indemnity. Sharsheret and Information Providers make no warranty as to the reliability, accuracy, timeliness, usefulness, or completeness of the information.

Sharsheret and Information Providers cannot and do not warrant against human and machine errors, omissions, delays, interruptions or losses, including loss of data.