

Sharsheret National Book Club with Jason B. Rosenthal

Author, *my wife said you may want to marry me*

National Webinar Transcript

May 16, 2022

Presented by:



SHARSHERET

The Jewish Breast & Ovarian Cancer Community

This program was made possible with support from



Deborah Litwak:

Hi. Good evening. Thank you so much for joining us today for Sharsheret's sixth national book club program. My name is Deborah Litwak and I am the Florida program coordinator for Sharsheret. Tonight's program will feature Jason Rosenthal. The author of *My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me*. I want to thank Jason in advance of his presentation for taking the time tonight to share his story of life, love loss, community, and resiliency. I want to recognize our sponsors for this program. Daiichi-Sankyo, GSK, and Merck, whose generosity allows us to continue to provide support and education to you.

Deborah Litwak:

Before we begin, I have a few housekeeping items to share. The webinar is being recorded and will be posted on Sharsheret's website along with a transcript. Participant faces and names will not be in the recording. You may have noticed all participants were muted upon entry. Please keep yourself on mute throughout the call. We recommend you keep your screen on speaker view. This will enable you to see the presentation clearly. You can find this option in the upper right hand corner of your screen. There will be time tonight for you to ask questions of our author. Please enter your questions in the chat box, and we will look out for them. You can access your chat box at the bottom of your screen.

Deborah Litwak:

For those of you who are new Sharsheret and as a reminder to others, Sharsheret has been providing telehealth services to the breast and ovarian cancer communities for 20 years. I'm proud that during the past two years, we've not only continued to offer support as we always have, but we've even gone above and beyond. We've increased our support service opportunities, and we've been pretty creative about how to do it.

Deborah Litwak:

Among the many free programs and ways to receive support from Sharsheret to help women and their families navigate different aspects of a cancer experience, I want to highlight two programs that resonate with tonight's discussion. Our Spungen Foundation Family Focus Caregiver Kit can help you support your loved one and includes resources from Sharsheret and other cancer organizations to help you understand the diagnosis and treatment of breast or ovarian cancer and the support options available to you. And Living Legacies is a program for the Embrace community at Sharsheret. Through our partnership with Memories Live, Sharsheret provides the opportunity for those living with advanced cancer to use the power of film to create living legacies for their family members and friends. Links to these special programs are in the chat box now.

Deborah Litwak:

As we move into the webinar itself, I also want to remind you that Sharsheret is a national not-for-profit cancer support and education organization, and does not provide any medical advice or perform any medical procedures. The information provided by Sharsheret is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should not use the information to diagnose or treat a health problem. Always seek the advice of your physician or qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

Deborah Litwak:

And now, I'm honored to introduce Jason Rosenthal. Jason B. Rosenthal is the co-author with his daughter, Paris of the New York Times number one bestselling book, *Dear Boy*. He's also a foundation board chair of the Amy Krouse Rosenthal Foundation, which supports both childhood literacy and research in early detection of ovarian cancer. Jason is a public speaker, a lawyer, and a devoted father of three. He is the subject of an essay written by his wife, Amy Krouse Rosenthal called *You May Want To Marry My Husband*. That piece written in 2017 is heartbreaking, brutally honest and funny. It is a creative play on a personal ad for Jason in which a dying wife encourages her husband to go on and find happiness after her death. The column quickly went viral reaching millions of people worldwide.

Deborah Litwak:

Jason's memoir, *My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me* was published in April 2020 by Harper. It is an inspiring personal account of life, love, loss, and new beginnings in which Jason describes what came next. His commitment to respecting Amy's wish even as he struggled with her loss. Surveying his life before, with and after Amy, Jason ruminates on love, the pain of watching a loved one suffer, how he and their three children move forward with resilience showing how change and growth can come from the most challenging times. As he reflects on Amy's gift to him, a fresh start to fill his empty space with a new story, he shares important and inspiring lessons on hope and resilience in the wake of tremendous loss. Jason is passionate about helping others find ways to fill their blank space as he continues to fill his own. Jason resides in Chicago, a city he is proud to call home and we welcome him from his home to Sharsheret tonight. Thank you for joining us this evening.

Jason Rosenthal:

Good evening, everyone. And Deborah, thank you so much for that really nice introduction. I'm very grateful. And I'm going to share my screen. Hang on. No, not that. Hold on. Here we go. Fantastic. Well, I'm sorry I couldn't join you in person, but I'm really pleased to be part of this great organization and to come to you tonight to talk about a few different topics. We're going to spend some time talking about grief and how I dealt with grief at the time I lost Amy and then a series of losses after that. We're going to talk a little bit about what it's like to be a caregiver, the burden, the boundless love and the beauty. And also, we're going to have a little conversation about hope and resilience. As it turns out that even though everyone experiences loss differently, there's enormous comfort and hope in learning how others got through the inevitable painful darkness and that they got through it. After my loss, many people reached out to me with their own stories of loss.

Deborah Litwak:

Jason, I'm sorry to interrupt. I cannot see your screen.

Jason Rosenthal:

Oh.

Deborah Litwak:

And I'm wondering if we can take ... if it's just me or I think others are having trouble too.

Jason Rosenthal:

Ah, interesting.

© 2022 Sharsheret, Inc. All rights reserved. The information contained herein is intended to provide broad understanding and knowledge of the topics presented and should not replace consultation with a health care professional.

Deborah Litwak:

It says Jason has started screen sharing.

Jason Rosenthal:

Is that good?

Deborah Litwak:

Not yet. It says I'm viewing your screen, but I don't know what's on your screen.

Jason Rosenthal:

Interesting, because all right. There's always technical glitches, folks. Hang in there. I'm going to stop here and start again.

Deborah Litwak:

Yeah, exactly. Stop screen share and start again.

Jason Rosenthal:

All right, here we go. Better?

Deborah Litwak:

Not yet.

Jason Rosenthal:

Interesting.

Deborah Litwak:

I know we had this issue right when we started and then.

Jason Rosenthal:

No, this is something altogether different because I can see my screen and it says that that I'm sharing. I think the only thing I can do is maybe log out for a sec and log back in.

Deborah Litwak:

Yeah. Want to try that?

Jason Rosenthal:

Hate to do that but here I go.

Deborah Litwak:

Okay.

Jason Rosenthal:

Be right back.

Deborah Litwak:

Okay. Thank you so much for your patience this evening. I don't know if there is weather around the country where you are, but certainly here in Florida, it has been rainy and windy and busy all day. And I was worried about the technology from my end too.

Jason Rosenthal:

Well, I am back. That's a good sign.

Deborah Litwak:

Okay, great. Also, you can email the-

Jason Rosenthal:

Your host disabled participant screen sharing so [inaudible 00:09:29]

Deborah Litwak:

Okay. So we'll make you the host. Great.

Jason Rosenthal:

Good?

Deborah Litwak:

All right. Yep. You are a co-host again. Are you able to screen share?

Jason Rosenthal:

How's that?

Deborah Litwak:

Yeah. Now you're talking. All right. Thank you so much [inaudible 00:09:50].

Jason Rosenthal:

Thanks for your patience, everyone. All right. So after my loss, many people reached out to me with their own stories of loss. And I came to an epiphany of sorts that I'm reminded of this evening. And that is that loss is loss is loss. Unique for each person yet a shared story for us all. Oh goodness. Hold on. All right. Now, I think it would be irresponsible of us not to touch a little bit on the topic of COVID and how it's affected all of our lives throughout the past couple of years and a half or however long it's been.

Jason Rosenthal:

Just yesterday, there was a big piece in the New York Times that talked about those who have survived these terrible losses. And Julie Bosman wrote that a widow in North Carolina whose husband died of COVID-19 feels crushed when she hears people talk casually about life in America returning to normal. "I

will never get back to normal," she thinks to herself. "I still feel as though I'm missing a limb." And I think that's really an important message for all of us to keep perspective. Perhaps many of us have been through a similar experience, not related to COVID, and just to be mindful of that as we move through this phase of the pandemic.

Jason Rosenthal:

Well, the main reason that you're asking this kid from Chicago to tell you his story is because I wrote a memoir called *My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me*. And in that book, I talk about many topics and it's really in three parts. We're going to start with the very first part. And it begins with this cute little face and this person who grew up in Lake Forest, Illinois with that infectious smile and a thirst for reading, as you can see here. But she grew up to be a beauty. And I met her at that phase of her life. And I knew that I wanted to spend a good deal of time with this person.

Jason Rosenthal:

Now, Amy famously wrote that she knew she wanted to marry me after our first and only blind date. Took me a little bit longer, but I realized as I was preparing for this evening, that tucked into her maiden name, Krouse were the first four letters of my last name. So further evidence that we were meant to be together. And that's what happened. We met and we spent so much time together and you can see on these young faces, the joy that we had just being in each other's presence.

Jason Rosenthal:

Fast forward. Not that much longer, about a year and a half. And there we were on our honeymoon, which is when we came up with a list, and I got a sense of what it was like to live with a writer, because we called that list, Amy and Jason Rosenthal's marriage, goals and ideas. A few highlights were dinner time, a time to be together. Music in the background is fine, but TV is not. And never stop learning. Take classes, read, cook, and travel. And we did a lot of that, both individually and together as a couple. And this one's important and has resonated with lots of folks all over the place. And that is to get dressed up and go on dates to remember who those two people were before the chaos of life ensued. And that's what happened for us.

Jason Rosenthal:

These three beauties were in our life very quickly after that. Two kids in diapers for about six years of our life, shortly after that. And when that young girl right there Paris was born, Amy made a big pivot in her life. And perhaps many of you know her as a very accomplished author, which she was. Lots of these titles appeared on the New York Times bestseller list. And I will tell you that one of them still appears on the New York Times best seller list around this time of your graduation season of the book I wish you more, which is the case this week.

Jason Rosenthal:

And I asked the boys when they were very, very young when their mom made this transition to being a full-time writer, what they thought about that move.

Speaker 3:

I think she's a very good, very good like-

Speaker 4:

And I think it's pretty interesting that she has wrote almost five books.

Speaker 3:

500.

Speaker 4:

Truth. She's an amazing writer.

Jason Rosenthal:

Both true. She wrote somewhere between five and 500 books and she was really a wonderful, wonderful writer. And she was also a filmmaker. So I wanted to share with you just a small clip of how her film's not made for any financial gain, but just put out there into the universe, inspired people, made people smile, just because that was Amy's way.

Speaker 5:

(singing)

Jason Rosenthal:

As you can see that, it was as fun for the participants as it was for the day to day commuters. And Amy was also this incredible genius at wordplay, seeing things within words that you and I would never see in a lifetime, such as the time when we took our entire family to Israel for Paris's bat mitzvah. And this poster was slapped on the side of the tour bus that our family drove around in. Pretty great, right?

Jason Rosenthal:

Now, the second part of this story is one that many of your community may be familiar with. It's not easy, but I think it's really important to share. And I know that many of the members of your community are introduced to this topic without any advanced warning. In fact, one of the testimonials on your website indicates that a severe stomach ache forced me to a local urgent care. And within four days, I was admitted to our local cancer hospital and was being prepped for surgery and a journey that would change my life.

Jason Rosenthal:

So as I've learned over the last five years, certainly my story was more public, but it is not a unique story. In fact, it was a very similar story. Amy was on a business trip and called me from the road and said, "My stomach is not feeling 100%. I don't know what it is. I called my family doctor and she recommended that you pick me up from the airport and take me right to the emergency room." Which is what I did.

Jason Rosenthal:

And it was there at that moment that our world too was rocked because the young baby face doctor had to come out and inform us that there was a tumor, was probably cancer and that we needed further consultation, which we of course immediately did. And so I like at the moment of this talk to do a short PSA, and that is to introduce you to this acronym, which is BEAT. Why? Because women are so tough and have a lot of these symptoms in their everyday life and don't know that it could lead to something,

of course, more severe. B being for bloating, persistent. E is for difficulty eating and feeling full more quickly. A is for abdominal pain that you feel most days. T is for toilet, which is changes in urination and bowel habits. And through our foundation, we're trying to circulate this information, not just to women, but to their partners, to their family physicians too, who often don't know what to look for.

Jason Rosenthal:

And so we immediately became that cancer family. And though Amy went through a similar experience, had a very detailed and long surgical procedure thereafter had extensive treatment, a few ups and downs there, but we ultimately found ourselves in home hospice. And I wanted to share this quick anecdote about our hospice experience, which is that we learned a lot about the beauty of the human race. I know we don't hear much about that in today's headlines, but this particular sign is important to us because one evening when I was caretaking for Amy, which I did 24 hours a day, of course, I stepped out to get some groceries at the local store. And when I came back, I walked down our tree lined street and it adorned to our entire fence across the whole fence were a series of open yellow umbrellas. And this sign and the beauty of it all was an anonymous gift and remains to this day a gift that we have no idea who did it.

Jason Rosenthal:

Many of you may know Amy from the essay that Deborah referenced in my introduction, it's called You May Want To Marry My Husband. And it appeared in the Modern Love column of the New York Times just 10 days before Amy died of ovarian cancer. It was a beautiful story about love. Of course, it was funny in a way that was unexpected because of the real serious nature of the issue ovarian cancer. And it was the end of Amy's life, but it was a real typical piece of prose that Amy put together and resonated so, so deeply with millions and millions and millions of readers all over the world. And it brought us to part three of the story and a lot of lessons that I began to grapple with.

Jason Rosenthal:

I saw this tile in a small store in Morrison, Colorado, and I knew I had to get it and it said new life chapter one. And that's exactly where I found myself. And because of the public nature of our experience, many people in the press reached out to me to tell our story, to tell my story, to seek information from me, salacious details about my romantic life, literally weeks after or days after I lost Amy. And I had no interest in going through that process. But when the folks at TED called to ask me if I wanted to tell my story in my own way, I thought, "You know what? That's going to be a public archive forever. And I might be able to help some people by sharing my experience and what I went through though everyone does it differently. I think that I can touch people." And that's what I did. And here's a little clip from that.

Jason Rosenthal:

But home hospice is not so beautiful for the surviving family members. I want to get a little personal here and tell you that to this date I have memories of those final weeks that haunt me. I remember walking backwards to the bathroom, assisting Amy with each step. I felt so strong, not such a big guy, but my arms looked and felt so healthy compared to Amy's frail body. And I failed in our house.

Jason Rosenthal:

It was a powerful piece for me and for many, many people in attendance and continues to this day to get feedback. And as I've processed all of this information and continue to speak publicly about these issues, I'm asked why I do it. I have a lot of reasons we can talk about some of them, but I found this quote that I found very interesting. It says if love involves the formation of an identity in and through another person, then to fully get over grief would be to unravel one's own identity. Besides external commemorations of a deceased loved one, an ongoing stance of inward commemoration is a wholesome way of continuing love. And the lack of it is more likely than not to represent serious dysfunction. And so I'm comfortable continuing to speak about Amy, to you, to anyone who will listen even as I move forward in this new life.

Jason Rosenthal:

We talked a bit about lessons that I learned and that I continued to talk about and maybe we'll talk about some of them this evening. But I learned to embrace grief and know that everyone processes their loss differently. There's no right or wrong way to flow through this process. It's so difficult and confusing. And try to appreciate the simple moments that life has to offer. Now, that's a message that, of course, I learned from Amy. She lived that way. I didn't, I'll be honest with you. And it took losing Amy to really, really appreciate that message. But that's why I want to talk about it with your group and with other groups, because I feel like it's so, so important. And it changes for everyone, right? It could be just the way you look at your child or your partner or the flower is growing on your neighborhood.

Jason Rosenthal:

It could be anything, but just to really take a pause and to appreciate what's going on around you. And then to explore a little bit about what resilience means. Resilience, the major positive changes that men and women have in their personal meanings and in their psychosocial functioning in adjusting to loss are an enhanced sense of self-discovery and enhanced sense of social autonomy and control, and an enhanced sense of resilience and renewed personal meaning leading sometimes to a kind of self-transcendence. The experience of loss is frequently a necessary catalyst for restructuring one's life. I never really thought about that so much, but truly, I'm a living example of how we can interpret resilience and incorporate that meaning into our life moving forward.

Jason Rosenthal:

I was recently reading a book on hope for personal reasons, but also in light of the state of things happening around the world today. And in it, there was a quote from Vaclav Havel who while in jail at the time said, "Hope is an ability to work for something because it is good not because it stands a chance to succeed." And I like that message. And I feel it's really in line with how Amy taught me to live in this world. And perhaps some of us can take that message away from tonight as well.

Jason Rosenthal:

And so that's what I've been trying to do. I'm trying to find my speaking voice and my writing voice. I wrote a response column to Amy's the following year on Father's Day that appeared in the Modern Love column. And as Deborah said I wrote a book with my daughter, Paris that became a number one New York Times bestseller, what a privilege and a beautiful experience. And I started a foundation of our own. I just knew I needed to do it. And today, I'm really happy to report we have two of the leading oncologists in the country on our board, and we are doing the best we can to make a dent into early

detection of ovarian cancer, which is really our mission. So we've funded several grants to date for physicians to work on this topic.

Jason Rosenthal:

And I commissioned a piece of public art. I share this because I want you, when you come to Chicago, it's a beautiful place to come in the spring and in the summer, even in the fall. A piece of public art in Amy's honor that was erected in Lincoln Park. I navigated the bureaucracies of the city of Chicago in the park district for a couple years. And finally this beautiful piece sits in Chicago for everyone to enjoy.

Jason Rosenthal:

And I thought really hard about your organization's name and I know that it means like a chain in a different way, perhaps, but I interpret it as an opportunity for us to talk for a minute about what's necessary, what links are necessary for someone who has survived this insidious disease or other cancers and those of us who've survived after losing someone. And I like this chain because it tells me a lot and I hope it resonates with you, because it starts with one self. We don't really take care of ourselves when we're caretakers or when we're sick. And I think it's really important to engage in self-care and whatever that means for you, whether it's a mindfulness practice or a physical exercise practice, or reading, or taking a walk or being in nature, whatever it is, it's so important.

Jason Rosenthal:

And family, not all of us have big families, but it doesn't matter. Reach out to your family. If they ask you to help you accept that help. And I would say that's the same for your friends. They're going to do it. They're going to want to help. Let them in. I think that's important. And then there's our community and whatever that means for you. Could be your podcast group or your book group, or your synagogue or your neighbors. Again, reach out to your community when they come in and seek to aid you and to help you.

Jason Rosenthal:

And finally, there's the spiritual piece. For most of us, that's something religious, whether it's the Jewish faith or another or it could just be spirituality in general, whatever that means to you. For me, that many of those categories fell into these three incredible human beings, my now adult children, who I'm not just guiding as a single parent, but who really have taught me a lot along this path as well.

Jason Rosenthal:

I think the key that I would love for you to take away from tonight's talk is this word. It's kindness, kindness to yourself and kindness to others. And Amy made a film about this topic, and turn up your volume and let's share this together for the next few minutes.

Speaker 6:

What constitutes a life worthy of being remembered? How do you want to be remembered? It's a whopping question as grand and important as they come. It shakes you up. It gets you thinking about the big existential picture. It's all too easy to just slide from one day to the next on autopilot, being steered by our daily to-do lists. At the end of a life, at the end of your life, when everything else falls away, what essence emerges? What have you filled the world with? In remembering you, which words will others choose? I wonder, don't you?

Speaker 6:

Of all the possible adjectives, I think that if the word kind appears in the mix, chances are very good that you have led a life worthy of being remembered. Kindness acts as a revealing marker that way. Here's something I observed many years ago while romping around the thrift shop. An older woman was struggling to refold a large blanket. Another customer quietly walked over to her, grabbed an end and together they quickly and efficiently folded the blanket. The old woman thanked the young man, and then everyone went back to their browsing. This act was not major heroic, but it was major kind.

Speaker 6:

A society is actually fueled and propelled by kindness. There's a sort of economics to it. There's a phenomenal book that delves into this very topic, it's called Born to be Good. And it centers around Jen Science, Jen being a Chinese term not a girl's name. I quote from the book. Jen was the central idea in the teachings of Confucius and refers to a complex mixture of kindness, humanity, and respect that transpires between people. Modern Jen science shows that positive and negative interactions can actually be charted, creating what they call a Jen ratio. A high Jen ratio, meaning more positive human interactions than negative, is central to a meaningful life, to goodwill in school, in a community, even to a thriving society. If there's one thing you remember from our minutes here, remember this book, Born to be Good, bright yellow cover.

Speaker 6:

So lucky for us, kindness is an easy and natural thing. All it requires is an awareness of those around you, being in tune to your fellow human, maybe even, oh, the thought of it, turning our gadgets off for a second. I share this last anecdote from one of my favorite magazines called The Sun. A gentleman went to the doctor with various ailments. The doctor asked questions and listened closely to what the man had to say. After a thorough examination, the doctor scribbled something down on the prescription pad and handed it to the patient. Here's what he prescribed. Less CNN, more Mozart.

Speaker 6:

To round out the cure, I'd add more kindness. Finally, we might ask, how do we collectively as a people want to be remembered, what is our purpose? Who are we? I think the answer is built right into the word. We are mankind. Oh, and about that blanket folding man at the thrift shop, after witnessing that moment, you know what I did? I married him.

Jason Rosenthal:

Over and over, loss calls us to reckon with the universal impermanence, with the baffling maddening, heartbreaking fact, that something that was just here can be all of a sudden just gone. And I want to leave you with this message that I incorporated from a talk podcast that Sam Harris did. He's a neuroscientist and a deep thinker, a writer, podcaster, and he emphasized to do that most important thing now. Express your love, now. Relinquish those hangups, now. Bury the hatchet, now. Recognize the nature of the mind, now. And finally, live fully, now. Thank you all so much for putting up with our technical difficulties and for listening to tonight's program.

Deborah Litwak:

Thank you. Thank you, Jason. Wow. Thank you for sharing your love story with Amy. Really sharing your heart and for sharing your sensitivity and wisdom learned through the grief and moving forward

© 2022 Sharsheret, Inc. All rights reserved. The information contained herein is intended to provide broad understanding and knowledge of the topics presented and should not replace consultation with a health care professional.

process. As you say, in your book and then in the beginning of this presentation, a loss is a loss is a loss and each of us can connect with you on that level in different ways. You have provided a template for moving forward with resilience and joy in the wake of devastating loss. So thank you.

Deborah Litwak:

We do have a few questions that came in ahead of time. And if anyone has any questions that they'd like to add into the chat, we will look out for them. But I wanted to go back to the beginning of this. Amy's personal ad for you, her love letter, her letter of respect was really public in the New York Times reaching over time I think they say five million people. Why did you feel the need to respond in public as well? And what was your ultimate goal or message in publishing your memoir and wanting to share it?

Jason Rosenthal:

It's a great question. Before all of this happened, if you were to search for Jason Rosenthal on your favorite search engine, you'd pretty much come up with nothing, maybe another Jason Rosenthal who was a lawyer in Chicago as well. But I was a pretty private man, with my head down, raising my family and trying to provide for them and going through life. But again, I touched upon a little bit in the talk. I recognized there was a platform for a message that I wanted to share with the world coming out of this. And it wasn't about being on the nightly news, it was about what it was really like to be with someone that you love at the end of their life and some of the reality of that process in addition to what it feels like to emerge from it.

Jason Rosenthal:

And so that's what I did. When the folks at TED came calling, I said, "Yeah, this is a good opportunity to do that." And I wasn't necessarily a writer before this. I certainly wrote a lot of legal briefs and other things, but as I started to reflect and do a lot of personal writing, it just felt like what I needed to do.

Deborah Litwak:

Wow. You've said that Amy's message to you giving you permission to find joy again, to find love again was really a great gift to you and really a gift to everyone who faces a situation like that. What were some of the challenges you faced or even new activities that you embraced to challenge yourself during this time?

Jason Rosenthal:

Well, I mean, at first, it was extraordinarily challenging to emerge as a single human being, a single man in this world after being together with someone that you love for half your life. I didn't know how to navigate any of those things. So that was certainly, certainly difficult. And then moving forward, I began to dip my toes into things that I thought would be helpful along my self-care recovery. Everything from mindfulness to reading a lot more to going to music by myself, all of those things. So that's how it happened.

Deborah Litwak:

Nice. At Sharsheret, we try to educate people to not ask what do you need, but rather be forward and say ... To give a specific example, I'm going to drop off dinner tonight. Is six o'clock okay? In reading your book, you really could have written a lot of our talking points that we use when we educate about caring community, how one should respond in a situation where a friend or an acquaintance is facing a cancer

diagnosis or an illness of any kind. You consistently say people are good, right? People mean well. Maybe. And I'm adding, I'm not putting it in your words, but maybe they're not so natural at being a comforter or knowing what to say. So are there tips that you can suggest for people who really want to be helpful or maybe even share a funny story about someone who did absolutely the wrong thing?

Jason Rosenthal:

Well, yeah, I could probably do both, but one great story is a friend of ours while we were in hospice would come by every Sunday or Saturday and bring to us three yellow objects. It became Amy's color was yellow. And this ranged from a bottle of mustard to a rubber ducky, anything that he could come up with. And he'd come to the door and he'd give me these items, he'd give me a big bear hug and then he would leave. He'd had no other expectation. He didn't even know if I would answer the door. So I thought that was just a wonderful way, just a natural way to be present and supportive. There are ways not to be supportive certainly that I highlight a little bit in the book. And you're right though, it's confusing for people. People don't know how to react or how to respond.

Jason Rosenthal:

So for example, I was walking down the street one day when I was going to get some mail downtown I think it was, and a gentleman who I knew I would call an acquaintance, but knew, our kids knew each other just walked up to me. We were at a crosswalk and did one of these where nothing came out of his mouth. He just could not figure out anything to say. And so he just walked by. It's really tough. So don't do that.

Jason Rosenthal:

I think the main message I would say is, and I know it's simplistic and I could expand on it a little bit, but basically it's just to say something. You're not going to make a huge mistake. It's really not going to happen. Something as simple as "I don't know what to say. And I just want you to know that I'm thinking about you." Simple.

Deborah Litwak:

Thank you. Sorry. I'm distracted by a question. Thank you for recognizing that loss and facing hardship is a real and regular part of life, but it's an individual's response or their resilience to the challenge that can make their path ahead more palatable. What one thing or set of things has really helped you on your path moving forward?

Jason Rosenthal:

I think it's that chain really that I came up for you guys. It's really that whole community, those groups of people that stood me up, starting with my own family. What a wonderful privilege that I have that, of course, and that Amy's family equally was so supportive in my life continuing to this day and includes me as a sibling and a son and all those things. And I'm blessed to have a great group of friends, two of my best friends, you read my book, that I've known for over 50 years. And so it was a combination of all of those things that really got me through the first year, year and a half in particular.

Deborah Litwak:

Amazing. Because of the last couple of years where we really have been separated from our family and friends, do you have any advice for people living with grief who don't have that immediate sense of

community or don't have that immediate family surrounding them because of the pandemic that has changed all of our lives for the better, I mean, has changed all of our lives.

Jason Rosenthal:

Yeah. I mean, it's really hard to answer that question because I think now all of us have different levels of comfort. So just to be sensitive to how people are walking through life at this point, but there's lots of opportunities, including online communities and groups and websites and presentations like this and other groups. But just be patient with yourself, be kind to yourself. Like I said, go out and take a walk. You can do things that don't require face to face contact and still really take care of yourself.

Deborah Litwak:

Nice. Your experience certainly is yours alone and you've shared it in order to help others. And we so appreciate that. The comments in the chat have been resoundingly grateful to you for sharing your story and kindness to yourself and to others is really the message you're leaving us with. But if you had to pick one more thing, what might that be?

Jason Rosenthal:

Well, let's see. Many of the people that I speak to and then that reach out to me even up to now are going through a grief experience of some kind, not always loss. And I think my main message is to not shy away from talking about those difficult things, even if it's a dinner party and that's what you're thinking, maybe it's overwhelmingly consuming your thoughts. Why? Because the chances are the person sitting next to you has a similar story or knows someone who has a similar story. And I think getting deep like that isn't so scary, isn't so sad. You'll find that it really brings people closer to one another.

Deborah Litwak:

Amen. Thank you. I found your presentation, this discussion to be helpful and heartfelt for sure. If you would like to purchase Jason's book, you can do so through the link in the chat box now. You can also click on the link to the Amy Krouse Rosenthal Foundation to learn more about their commitment to childhood literacy and early detection of ovarian cancer. Once again, I want to thank our sponsors of this important program Daiichi-Sankyo, GSK, and Merck. A link to a quick evaluation survey is being placed in the chat box. Please click on it now. You can listen to the rest of this as we go.

Deborah Litwak:

Evaluations really do inform future programming. And I'm happy to share that someone who fills out the survey tonight will win a copy of Jason's book, *My Wife Said You May Want To Marry Me*. I'm excited to share information about two upcoming webinars, next Monday night *Exercise to Fight Osteoporosis and Protect Your Bones* with Rebekah Rotstein, founder of Buff Bones. And May 31st rounding out our month is an important webinar on clinical trials with Dr. Brian Slomovitz, but please check our website regularly because we're always posting new events. We have a busy summer with exciting events, both in person and virtual. You can also access all of the recordings and transcripts of past webinars there on our site. Those are in the chat box as well.

Deborah Litwak:

And finally, as always remember, Sharsheret is here for you and your loved ones. We provide emotional support, mental health counseling, and other programs designed to help navigate you through the cancer experience. All are customized, confidential and completely free. Contact information is in the chat box. Your health and your wellbeing are our priority. Feel free to lean on us. And as a summary from what Jason said, we should strive for a high Jen ratio. I really like that graphic of the striving to do good with others. Thank you again, Jason. And thank you to each of you for joining us this evening.

Jason Rosenthal:

Thank you all so much.

Deborah Litwak:

Have a very good night.