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Rehoboth – as in the Delaware beach town long popular with Washingtonians – has always had a special mystique for me. Growing up, I spent part of every summer there in a small cottage which my grandparents had built in the 1930's... and even though our family no longer has that cottage, still the allure of Rehoboth remains strong. My love for Rehoboth is a *mélange* of various factors: the broad, beautiful beach, the excellent biking, a sense of relaxation which I experience more fully there than anywhere else – and an intangible, emotional overlay of the generations. When I am in Rehoboth, the images of my own childhood quickly come to the fore:

my sister and I playing endless games of Monopoly on the screened porch –  
my mother swimming out in the ocean far beyond the breakers –  
my father teaching me to drive on a remote country road bordered by high cornstalks.

It was to Rehoboth that Beverly and I brought our children when they were young – and even now, our kids still try to get there every summer. Hopefully, all of us have those kinds of memories, which we do not want to lose.

In early August, Beverly and I were again in Rehoboth. We had come back from our typical late-afternoon jaunt to the beach – and there was still just enough daylight for me to take a bike ride. It was a mellow hour, which I always enjoy.

I returned to the house where we were staying, took one look at Beverly and knew that something was wrong. She pointed me to an email on our laptop with the news that a young woman we admire – a gifted educator in the Baltimore Jewish community – wife of a rabbi, mother of three young children and daughter of a professional in our Washington Jewish community – had been killed instantly in an automobile accident that morning. Life is so fragile, so precarious, so unpredictable, and how nonchalant we are about it much of the time. Even Rehoboth could not offset my gloom that night.

Oliver Sacks, a distinguished physician and author of many books including *Awakenings* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, wrote an essay in the *New York Times* on February 19, 2015, which began:

“A month ago, I felt that I was in good health, even robust health. At 81, I still swim a mile a day. But my luck has run out. I have learned that I have multiple metastases in my liver.”

Dr. Sacks continued: “It is up to me now to choose how to live out the months that remain to me. I have to live in the richest, deepest, most productive way I can...”

Over the last few days, I have been able to see my life as from a great altitude, as a sort of landscape, and with a deepening sense of the connection of all its parts. This does not mean I am finished with life...

On the contrary, I feel intensely alive, and I want and hope in the time that remains to deepen my friendships, to say farewell to those I love, to write more, to travel if I have the strength, to achieve new levels of understanding and insight.

This will involve audacity, clarity and plain speaking: Trying to straighten my accounts with the world. But there will be time, too, for some fun (and even some silliness).

I feel a sudden clear focus and perspective. But, there is no time for anything inessential.

This is not indifference, but detachment. I still care deeply about the Middle East, about global warming, about growing inequality, but these are no longer my business; they belong to the future. I rejoice when I meet gifted young people – even the one who biopsied and diagnosed my metastases. I feel the future is in good hands.

“I have been increasingly conscious,” Dr. Sacks notes, “for the last 10 years or so of deaths among my contemporaries. My generation is on the way out – and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away of part of myself. There will be no one like us when we are gone – but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled – for it is the fate – the genetic and neural fate – of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death.”

And Dr. Sacks concludes: “I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and travelled and thought and written...

And above all, I have been a sentient human being, a thinking animal on this beautiful planet – and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.”

Dr. Oliver Sacks died on August 30.

Yes – life can be snatched away much too easily – as the death of my young friend so powerfully reminds us – and yes – life needs perspective and wisdom – as Dr. Sacks’ eloquent reflections teach us.

All of us visit grief and loss. If we have not had that experience already, we will – it is inevitable. So what do we do when a loved one dies, and we have to “soldier on?”

Many of you may have seen an exquisite, exceptionally open and courageous posting by Sheryl Sandberg, an executive at Facebook, whose husband, Dave Goldberg, died unexpectedly while they were on vacation in Mexico.

As she completed “Sheloshim,” the 30-day period after her husband’s death, Sheryl Sandberg tried to synthesize some of her emotions. She writes: ‘A childhood friend of mine who is now a rabbi recently told me that the most powerful one-line prayer he has ever read is: ‘Let me not die while I am still alive.’ I would never have understood that prayer before Dave died. Now I do...” Sheryl Sandberg continues:

“I think that when tragedy occurs, it presents a choice. You can give in to the void, the emptiness that fills your heart, your lungs, and constricts your ability to think or even breathe. Or you can try to find meaning. These past thirty days, I have spent many of my moments lost in that void. And I know that many future moments will be consumed by the vast emptiness as well...

I have learned that I never really knew what to say to others in need. I think I got this all wrong before; I tried to assure people that it would be okay, thinking that hope was the most comforting thing I could offer ... (But) real empathy is sometimes not insisting that it will be okay, but acknowledging that it is not. When people say to me: “You and your children will find happiness again,” my heart tells me – “Yes, I believe that,” but I know I will never feel pure joy again. Those who have said: You will find a new normal but it will never be as good – comfort me more because they know and speak the truth. Even a simple “How are you?” – almost always asked with the best of intentions – is better replaced with “How are you today?” When I am asked “How are you?” I stop myself from shouting, “My husband died a month ago, how do you think I am?” When I hear “How are you today?” I realize that the person knows that the best I can do right now is to get through each day.

Sheryl Sandberg comments on various themes:

practical stuff matters...

how ephemeral everything can feel...

how she, the consummate Chief Operating Officer, has learned to ask for help...

that resilience is a skill that can be crafted...

that the “elephant in the room” – i.e. the reluctance of friends to talk about her loss – must be confronted...

and that in spite of everything that has happened, she is grateful for so many kindnesses.

Sheryl Sandberg’s posting concludes:

“I was talking to one of my friends about a father-child activity that Dave is not here to do. We came up with a plan to fill in for Dave.” I cried to him, ‘But I want Dave. I want option A.’ He put his arm around me and said: ‘Option A is not available. So let’s just kick the “you-know-what” out of Option B.’

Dave, to honor your memory and raise your children as they deserve to be raised, I promise to do all I can to kick the “you-know-what” out of Option B. And even though Sheloshim has ended, I still mourn for Option A. I will always mourn for Option A. As Bono sang: “There is no end to grief... and there is no end to love.”

Sheryl Sandberg's post evoked thousands and thousands of responses... Details vary, but loss has certain common denominators.

Darrin Dixon wrote: "Sheryl, you are not alone.... Thank you for reminding me that I'm not either."

At Yizkor on Yom Kippur, none of us is alone. We are together in a common assemblage, united in our remembrances and rooted in our love.

And since Option A is not available to us... those for whom we mourn are gone – we are all in Option B together – choosing life – in spite of loss – with all the courage and determination we can muster...