

Cheryl Mandel has always loved performing and dancing.
(Courtesy photos)



‘How does one prepare to be a bereaved mother?’

Zieva Dauber Konvisser’s ‘Living Beyond Terrorism’ is a look at how 48 survivors of terror move forward with hope and optimism.

An excerpt

These are the stories of three Jewish-Israeli mothers who made aliya from North America with their families; three mothers who lost their sons horrifically during the second intifada; three mothers, bereaved by terrorist violence, who recognized the importance of sharing their sorrow and overpowering feelings of loss and pain with other mothers whose grief they can understand in a special way.

These three mothers help each other with support, comfort, and laughter, while providing others with support and hope through acts of altruism. Sherri, Susie, and Cheryl volunteer to help other families, provide extra food for soldiers, and raise spirits in their community through the performing arts.

Sherri Mandell’s young son Jacob (Ya’acov, Koby) was the innocent victim of a random act of terror, one of the first victims of the Second Intifada. On the morning of May 8, 2001, Koby and his friend Yosef (Yossi) Ish-Ran played hooky from school to hike in the dry riverbed of Nahal Hariton. Later that day Koby and Yossi were found in a cave about 200 meters from Tekoa, bludgeoned to death with bowling-ball sized stones, an act attributed to Palestinian terrorists.

The soldier sons of Susie Weiss and Cheryl Mandel, Staff Sgt. Ari Yehoshua Weiss and Lt. Daniel (Mendel) Mandel, were killed by terrorists while they were serving their country as members of the IDF. Ari, 21, was killed and his good friend Shai Haim was badly wounded on

September 30, 2002, when Palestinian gunmen opened fire on an army position in Hamas headquarters in the Nablus casbah.

Before dawn on the day before Passover, April 15, 2003, Daniel, 24, the commander of “the Mendel Platoon,” an elite IDF reconnaissance unit, was in the field leading his soldiers. They were on a mission to capture three terrorists believed responsible for two earlier bombings that killed more than 30 and injured over 140 Israelis. Daniel was killed in battle on the streets of the West Bank town of Nablus. Two other Israeli soldiers were injured.

The lives of these three mothers are intertwined in a very special way. Six months after Ari was killed, the Efrat/Gush Etzion Raise Your Spirits Summer Stock Company, which was originally conceived as a morale builder following several terrorist murders that rocked Gush Etzion and environs, brought their production to Ra’anana. It was a fundraiser for Ochel Ari, founded by Susie to “bring food to soldiers in the field with no kitchen facility and no warm food.”

During the intermission, Susie remembers that “Cheryl Mandel, this funny lady, sought me out and gave me a big hug. It was a very emotional evening and I was crying in front of everybody as we sang “Ani Maamin” (I Believe). Oh God, she was so sweet and two weeks later her son was killed.”

A few months later, Susie and Cheryl reconnected at a women’s health retreat sponsored by the Koby Mandell



Daniel Mandel, left, marches with his comrades at Beit Lid.

Foundation, established by Sherri and her husband, Seth. Cheryl invited Susie to “just come and we’ll be roommates, and we did.” They also saw each other at IDF Nahal [events], where they were well-known, the only representatives from the English-speaking community. They keep in touch and are “kindred spirits.”

Cheryl called Susie just before Daniel’s *yahrzeit*, because she “can’t ask just anybody, ‘But do you think that pink suit is too sexy for me to wear?’...So thank God we have each other to talk to and joke with.” Cheryl adds: “We should do a stand-up comedy act called ‘No one wants to be me!’”

For Cheryl, keeping her sense of humor is a positive. Before Daniel was killed, she and Sherri always joked about the confusion between the two of them. Cheryl would be introduced as “This is Cheryl Mandel, the manager of the Gush Etzion Judaica Center for Alon Shvut,” and they would say, ‘Ah, Sherri Mandell, I’m so sorry about your son.’ And I would say, ‘No, it’s not my son. I’m Cheryl Mandel. She is Sherri Mandell, the author of *The Blessing of a Broken Heart*.”

After Daniel was killed, Cheryl and Sherri again were able to laugh together. “Now there is no need to clarify things.”

Now when people tell Cheryl, “Oh, I read your book,” she replies, “No, I’m the dancer and she’s the writer. She’s



Susie Weiss with her children Yedidya and Ayelet visits her son Ari on his base.



Koby Mandell with his parents, Seth and Sherri, shortly before his murder.

the blonde.” When asked if they are related, Cheryl laughingly responds: “We’re sob sisters!”

How did they cope?

Sherri and Seth Mandell not only had to cope with the loss of Koby, but also with the horrific way in which he had lost his life. “We had the advantage of living on a *yishuv* (settlement) with other people of similar belief systems – spiritual, not materialistic – and with very big hearts. It was a very strong community, reaching out to us, respecting our loss, and giving us energy to continue.”

Sherri recalls that “I appreciated just having people there. I had a need for them, to know it matters. I had no defenses. I was open emotionally and didn’t care about people judging me.”

She wasn’t ready to be alive. “I didn’t do anything for the first four months. I cried and tried to deal with the loss... I grieved. I needed to empty myself totally – the first step in building strength.”

“Once Koby was killed, I couldn’t bear to hear or speak ordinary language because it was part of ordinary life. There’s a different language after you’ve been through a trauma – not just a verbal language. I needed the words of the prayer book and Tehillim [Psalms]. Religion became a place to go for dealing with this – maybe more than the psychological – it was the spiritual.”

She studied with many teachers, using stories from the Bible to understand grief as a sacred space and make meaning of her loss. “Death inscribes you; you can’t get away from it. So the main thing is how to live with it as a place to grow from. There is pressure to move on, like closing the door and going on with life, but it is really moving with – moving forward with the experience. It’s like if you are pregnant, you never forget you are pregnant. If you have pain, it’s always a part of you; you

always carry it around.”

As a creative writing teacher, journalist, and author, she needed to do something creative to grow. Hearing the stories that Sherri kept telling about Koby throughout the shiva [mourning period], her husband and friends encouraged her to write. After four months of doing nothing, Sherri began to tell the story – hers and Koby’s – writing through her tears *The Blessing of a Broken Heart* (Toby Press, 2003), “taking ownership of a story and telling it to others who will hear it and be transformed.”

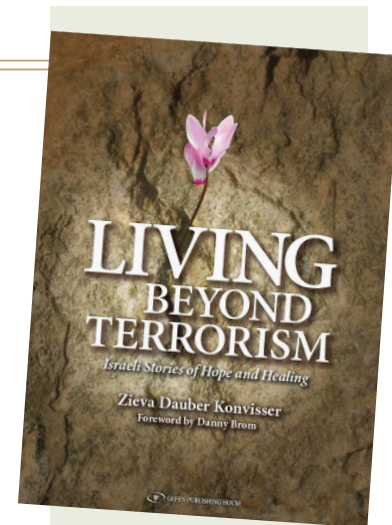
Together, the Mandells knew that it was important and necessary to find meaning in their loss, and to help others do the same. They knew that they had to fight against their despair and their pain and give their other three children “a full life, not one of just sadness. We wanted to show them we are still their parents and models for them.”

They decided to create something special to honor Koby, and keep his memory and spirit alive in the world. As Sherri explained, “Although his body is dead, I’m not going to let him die.” Determined not to let their lives be ruled by hate, the Mandells established the Koby Mandell Foundation to help bereaved families keep their hearts open and spirits alive. It was their way to take the cruelty of Koby’s murder and transform it into acts of kindness and hope. They wanted to enable people like themselves, struck by terror, to return to life with strength, hope, and healing.

For the past 13 years, Camp Koby, one of the cornerstone programs of the foundation, has provided children of families struck by terror and other tragedies with a place where others understand. As Sherri explains: “Children are often the silent victims when the tragedy

of terrorism strikes a family. They keep changing and developing and going in and out, yet they feel it just as much.”

Surrounded by their peers, trained counselors, and professional therapists, 500 children each summer share their stories and express their feelings naturally. They feel free to have an incredible time and most return to life with increased vigor and emotional stability. They know they are not alone.



Living Beyond Terrorism

By Zieva Dauber Konvisser
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SUSIE WEISS and her husband, Stewart, responded to the tragedy in different ways. Stewart, a rabbi [and a *Jerusalem Post* columnist], put a lot of effort into creating a community learning center in Ra’anana that could house a number of different programs and institutions simultaneously. Called Ohel Ari, which means “the tent of Ari,” it welcomes and offers spiritual and physical sustenance to both citizens of central Israel and IDF soldiers looking for a friendly smile, a hearty meal, and a bit of strengthening.

Susie can’t associate a building or bricks with Ari. Instead she has started a project called Ochel Ari, which means “the food of Ari.” “Ochel Ari, I can do. When it comes to food and feeding and moms, I can do that.” In fact, 13 days before Ari was killed, Susie had organized a huge delivery of food donated by local shops and people to Ari’s unit. “I was on the phone with him and it was right after Rosh Hashana. ‘Mom, we’re starving here. We were out in the field. There’s nothing to eat. I can’t stand pickles and olives and corn anymore.’ And there I am sitting looking at his favorite shawarma place.

“I said to Ari, ‘All right, give me a few minutes,’ and I said to them, ‘I need about 35 shawarmas now. These guys are starving.’ He said, ‘Just tell me what time you need it.’ And I walked down to a wholesale grocery and got 80 drinks. And a little further there was a bakery, I got the cakes. Friends called and by the time I walked home, I had a carload of stuff. By the time we got it to him, it was quite a feast. When he called at midnight, the guys were screaming and laughing and grabbing the phone.”

Susie is still associated with this mission. “Between pity and my persuasive powers, Ochel Ari has gotten food and wholesale prices and donations from all over Israel and America. It gives me a little bit of satisfaction to do this in Ari’s name. And I know that he is proud of me up there.”

It is hard for people to say no to Susie. “People are very gentle with me, sometimes too gentle. They are too scared that I will break.”

If anyone had told Susie that she could do such things after the death of a child, she wouldn’t have believed them. But Susie is a strong person. “I guess you don’t know that until you are tested. I would have thought I would have stopped living.”

wof other people, both in the first horrific hours and the weeks and months that followed. “Most helpful to me were people who had gone through a tragedy, who showed up at my door; also thinking about people who had gone through a tragedy and grew from it. Unfortunately here in Israel, we are no stranger to tragedy.”

Cheryl is a fighter. After giving a beautiful eulogy at Daniel’s funeral, “people couldn’t understand how I had such strength and was so positive at my son’s funeral. They would ask, ‘How can you be so strong?’ I would look at them and say, ‘If I thought crying day and night would bring Daniel back, I would cry.’ So I just accepted it because there was nothing within my power that I could

do to bring Daniel back, and there was just no sense in breaking down.

It's like somebody who has lost an arm; you adjust, not to the fact that you don't have an arm but you adapt, you figure out how to do things with only one arm. But it doesn't mean that every minute of every day, you don't wish you had that arm back and you don't remember how great it was with it."

Her experience has strengthened her resolve to live in Israel. "Now my son is buried here, no way I'll leave here. With Daniel's blood we have become real Israelis, and the connection I feel now to Israel is really much, much, much deeper. I am connected by blood now with 22,500 other mothers who have lost a child."

She is steadfast in the belief that "the enemy had a victory over me when they killed my son, and they will have another victory over me if I go down with him. I have chosen not to give it to them."

On the first anniversary of Daniel's death, Cheryl told the group gathered at his gravesite how he had to carry a heavy machine gun for 90 kilometers, although he had not been prepared physically or intellectually to do it. But he did it because his commanding officer told him to do it.

"As a bereaved mother, I feel like I am in the middle of a trek that is called life, and now I have been handed the machine gun to carry. I wasn't trained to carry this heavy load and I certainly have not been prepared to do it, not physically and not emotionally. How does one prepare to be a bereaved mother? But I am carrying it because that is what my commanding officer, Hashem [God], has commanded me to do. And I am doing it with as much dignity and as much positiveness as I can for two reasons: out of love and respect for my beloved son Daniel and out of love and respect for all *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish people)!"

Cheryl makes other people happy. Cheryl Harmony – yes, that is her actual middle name – has always loved performing and dancing. As she approached her 60th birthday, Cheryl wanted to mark it in a significant way. She decided to tell the story of her life through dance – from life as a teenage go-go dancer in Toronto to a religious life in Alon Shvut, with many interesting stops along the way. She also decided to film the performance, as an example to others of the beauty and freedom of an autobiographical film, to offer food for thought about the mysterious paths that life takes us on, and as a gift to her family for generations to come.

"I want them to be able to say, 'This was Cheryl Harmony, and she was a cool grandmother!'" ■

By FAYE LEVY

"This time of year is a pastry chef's paradise," said my friend Robert Wemischner, author of *The Dessert Architect*.

Summertime is indeed the season when the markets offer the greatest variety of fruits – apricots, peaches, nectarines, cherries, plums, mangoes, melons and more. They find their way into all sorts of desserts, from simple to elaborate.

In our home, for a sweet ending to everyday meals, we often eat diced fresh fruit with yogurt. We might use vanilla yogurt or opt for plain yogurt drizzled with honey, silan (date molasses) or pekmez (grape molasses), and top the yogurt-fruit mixture with walnuts or other nuts.

Fruit salad is another easy summer dessert we often prepare. Usually we add a sprinkling of sugar and a squeeze of lemon or lime juice, or a spoonful of orange or cherry liqueur.

A memorable fruit salad we enjoyed recently was a plum salad made by Zel Allen, author of *The Nut Gourmet*. She made it on the spur of the moment from four kinds of plums of different colors and a dressing of pomegranate molasses, rose

water and a hint of balsamic vinegar.

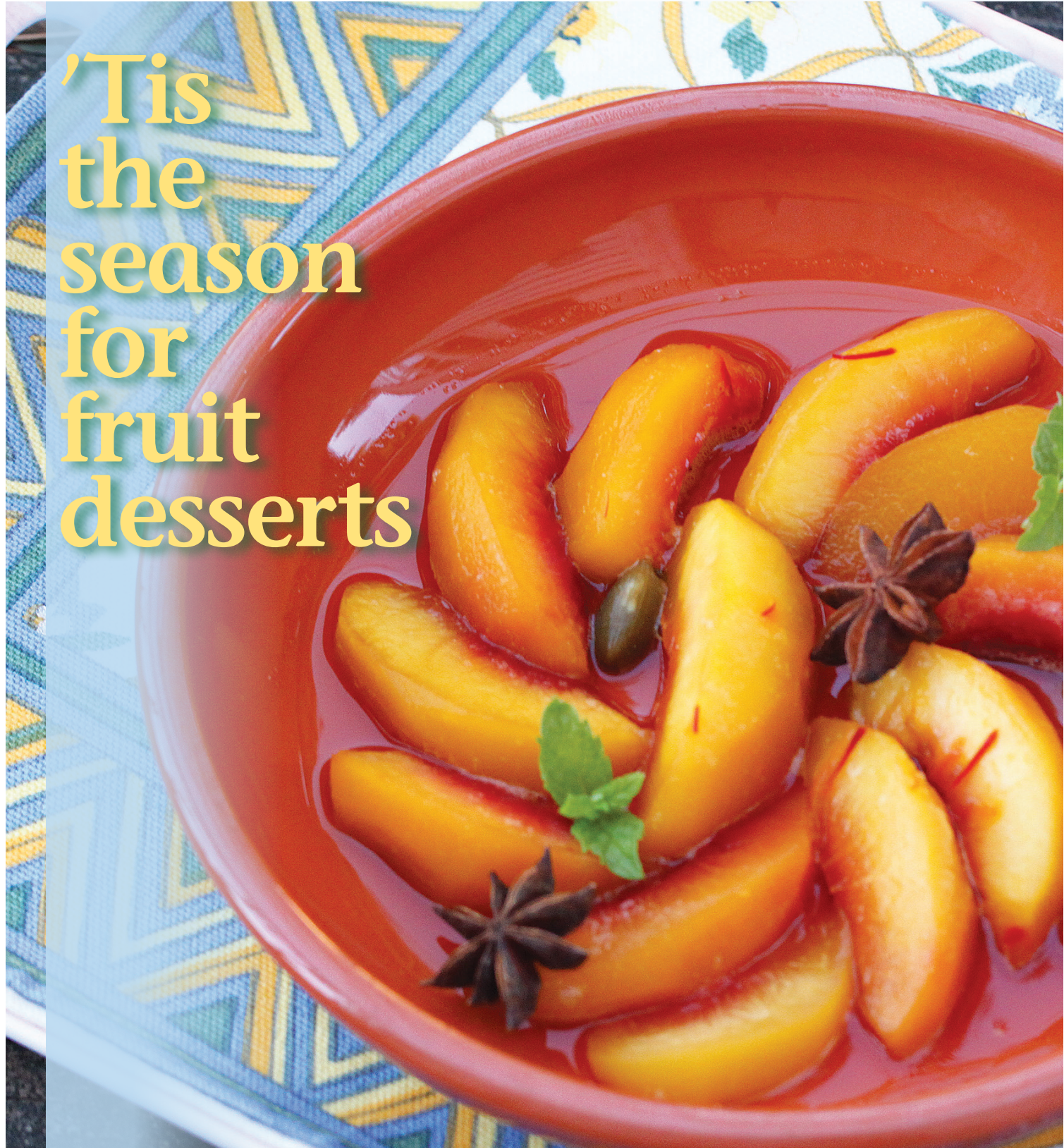
For preparing warm fruit desserts, a popular technique is sautéing. This method is perfect for cooking tender fruits like peaches, nectarines, plums and ripe pears. The high heat produced during sautéing, wrote Deborah Madison in *Seasonal Fruit Desserts*, brings out the fruits' sugars, which caramelize lightly. Sautéing can also "improve fruits whose flavors lack luster. And when fruits are at the peak of their flavor, such cooking concentrates their sugars and flavors" so that they "can possess such intensity that only a few bites are needed to satisfy."

To make a plum dessert in a few minutes, Madison sautéed sliced plums in butter with sugar and ground cardamom, and finishes the dessert with Grand Marnier, which dissolves the caramel that has formed in the skillet.

Poaching fruit in a syrup of water and sugar is a quick method, too, especially if you cut the fruit in pieces before adding it to the hot syrup. "A syrup, however light or minimal, gives fruits a jewel-like appearance as well as a sauce," wrote Madison.

Poached fruit and syrup are useful as a base for more complex

'Tis the season for fruit desserts



Say What?
BY LIAT COLLINS

Hom Yuli-Oogust חום יולי-אוגוסט

Meaning: The heat of the summer (Literally: July-August heat)

Example: *Hom Yuli-Oogust* and the whole world seems to have gone crazy.