

Poetry of deceased daughter eases healing process

By Atara Beck
Tribune Correspondent

In *No Mountain Too High: A father's inspiring journey through grief*, published this year by ECW Press, Ned Levitt, a bereaved father, describes the healing process he has undergone since the sudden, tragic death of his talented 18-year-old daughter Stacey nine years ago.

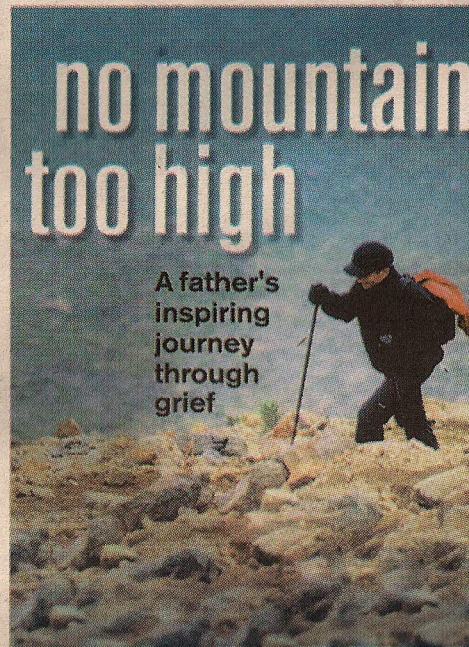
Levitt, a prominent Toronto lawyer, is an active member of the Steering Committee for Bereaved Jewish Families of Ontario and speaks often on television and radio, as well as at public lectures, on the subject of grief and healing. In this remarkably personal memoir, the author openly discusses the profound emotions he has experienced since the fatal accident that instantly transformed the lives of the Levitt family.

Stacey was a remarkable athlete and creative poet. Her written work reveals a maturity and wisdom well beyond her years. A year following Stacey's death, her family published a book of her favourite poetry, *I Am a Rose*, the title of the first poem of the collection written at the age of nine.

Certainly nothing can replace the loss of a child; nevertheless, Levitt's cathartic climb of Mt. Ixta in Mexico – a journey originally begun by Stacey, who was unable to complete it because of poor weather conditions – helped him to regain control of his life. During the adventure Ned befriended a number of people with whom he forged a strong emotional bond by sharing his story as well as Stacey's poetry, and by hearing about their own challenges. He placed the poetry book in a box on the mountain, along with pens and a notepad in which he wrote the following message to Stacey:

"I put this box with your book at this place so those people with strength and courage who pass this way will know you and know of your great strength and courage. I love you so deeply words are not enough and I had to express my love with deeds."

A number of climbers read the poems and were deeply moved, some to tears, by Stacey's words. They added their own messages. One person wrote:

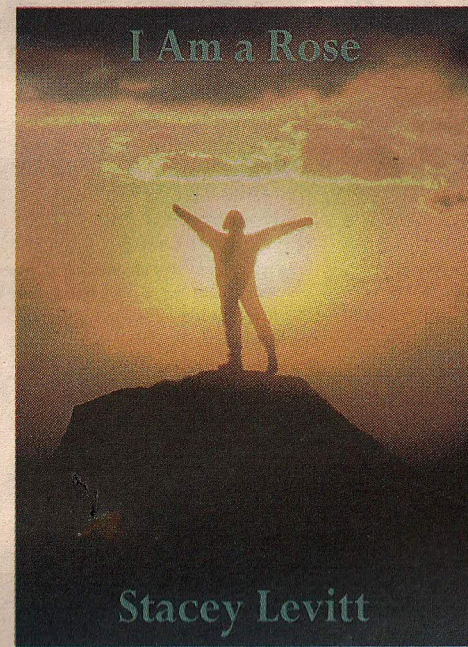


In a remarkably personal memoir, Ned Levitt candidly discusses the emotions that rocked the lives of his family after the tragic death of his daughter Stacey, author of *I Am a Rose*.

"If death transforms us to a spirit which enters more deeply into the heart of those we have loved, then perhaps it is in death that we are fully known. And so we live on in the heart of another and the sharpness of death slowly fades.... I only know Stacey through the love of her father and through her words carefully chosen. It is enough. Stacey moves me."

In an interview with the *Jewish Tribune*, Levitt, an unusually warm and open person, stressed that *No Mountain Too High* is a book about life, not death. So many people have taken comfort in Stacey's poetry. Did he recognize this as a divine purpose to her time here on earth?

"On a spiritual level," he replied, "I choose not to believe or disbelieve – an agnostic attitude – whether or not there is another side. I choose not to go there. I am acutely



aware of the healing purpose of belief in afterlife. For most of us, it is very comforting to have that as a possibility."

Tribune: Is there anything in Judaism in particular that has helped you through this nightmare?

Levitt: Just having something beyond one-

self is completely comforting. There is a system to follow, prayers laid out. People don't realize how important this is. That first Rosh Hashana dinner after her passing, I never felt as close to God as I did that night. Nothing mattered more at that time than sitting at that table and doing whatever we were supposed to do.

Tribune: It sounds like you can feel Stacey's presence.

Levitt: Absolutely. There's a great deal of literature on the death of a child. I've read so much of it. One way of looking at it is that when your child dies, he or she leaves you a gift, or gifts, meaning that you'll begin to realize what's truly important in life – humanity, goodness. Stacey has given me gifts and continues to do so. Second, we can establish a new relationship with the deceased child. For instance, when I do public speaking, I introduce Stacey, because I'm conveying not only my ideas, but her ideas.

Tribune: Do you not find it fascinating that Stacey seems to have understood so much about life when she was so young? In fact, she wrote a brilliant poem on the subject of death at the tender age of 12.

Levitt: I agree. If it weren't so, I never would have published her poetry. We don't realize how much and how deeply children think, because they haven't been educated enough to express it. What was extraordinary about Stacey was her ability to express her thoughts.

Levitt will be at Temple Sinai on Nov. 23, at 8 p.m. For more information about the books, see www.iamarose.com.

Canada Israel Trade Breakfast at BAYT

Israel's Economic Mission to Canada, based in Toronto, and the Israel Action Committee of Beth Abraham Yosef of Toronto (BAYT) have planned the first Canada Israel Trade Breakfast at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 5 at the BAYT.

The purpose of the breakfast is to find ways to further the development of commerce, trade and investment between Canada and Israel.

The keynote speaker will be Ephraim Shoham, trade commissioner for Israel

based in Toronto. Other panel members will include those from the private sector and relevant trade organizations.

The two-hour breakfast costs \$25 for each ticket, which may be purchased at the synagogue.