

Foreword 3407 Anthology

It was May 14, 2009. Buffalo was dressed in her best spring colors. All of her trees showed new green leaves and her gardens were full of pink, white, and yellow flowers. It was my friend's birthday. I drove to a local supermarket to buy her flowers. Back in January, on the 28th, she had surprised me with flowers on my birthday, a small lovely bouquet of tulips were delivered that afternoon. It was an unusual gesture. She was way too busy and too involved to bother with trivial things like that, so I treasured it all the more. I had just returned from a trip to LA, and she was going off for two weeks of vacation in Costa Rica. On January 30th she sent me an email: "I'm going out of town tomorrow for almost 2 weeks. Sorry I'll miss your reading. Hope your LA trip was great."

I found a bouquet of colorful flowers and joined the line at the cash register. It was lunchtime, and the line was quite long. In front of me were two older ladies. You know the kind of ladies who, in their eighties, seem indestructible, full of energy, and with too much make-up on their leathery skin. One of them turned to me and asked me about the flowers.

- "They are for my friend," I said. "Today is her birthday."
- They nodded wisely.
- "You will give them to her?"
 - "She gave me flowers on my birthday back in January, so I will give her flowers on hers." They nodded some more. "They can arrest me if they want," I added defiantly, wondering what my two daughters would do if I called them from prison.
 - "Arrest you?" The other old lady was curious.
 - "My friend died in Flight 3407," I said. "I am taking my flowers to the crash site."

Something momentous and unexpected happened then. All the people who were in line ahead of me stood aside—a communal gesture of respect and grief! I hesitated, but the old lady in front of me grabbed my left arm with steely strength and looked me in the eye:

- "Now, you take all your good memories with you," she said. "All your good memories!"

And I did.

Leaving the store I thought: only in Buffalo! This is such a unique community. As a friend of mine, a native Buffalonian, put it: "We care for each other here."

Sitting in my car in the parking lot, I could still feel the old woman's hand on my arm, see her dark, painted eyes, and hear her voice. Maybe, I thought. Maybe in some small way we could help each other with our grief? We are all mourning in deeply personal ways and to different degrees, but we are all grieving. That was the simple beginning of this project, and it took root on the road out to Clarence and at the empty place on Long Street where I left my flowers.

I knew I could not do it on my own, so I called Gary Earl Ross. He had recently released a lovely book on a very different topic involving over 50 local writers and poets. Maybe we could do something similar for and about the victims of Flight 3407? Gary was supportive from the start.

Since the tragedy was so recent and an open wound to so many family members and friends, we waited until October to release a call for submissions. By Thanksgiving we knew we had an unusual problem on our hands: Almost all the submissions we had received were dedicated to Cantor Susan Wehle. There were at least two clear reasons for this. On the one hand, Cantor Wehle was a public figure in Buffalo and beyond. Through her work and her life, she had touched so many people's lives. Also, many people who knew Susan knew of our CD and the work we had done together; they trusted that bond. Everywhere I went I heard stories about her. It was wonderful and awful at the same time! But slowly the word of the anthology began to spread, and we started to receive submissions for and about many of the other wonderful people who perished that night. It is with a mixture of deep gratitude and an irrevocable feeling of loss that I dedicate these pages to all the victims of Flight 3407, and to their families and friends.

These pages are what we hope will be a First Edition of an ongoing project. I trust that in another year or two, we will be able to produce a larger, more inclusive edition. As I write these words, only eleven months have passed since that terrible night of February 12, 2009. I know of many people who cannot yet speak about it, let alone write about it. Maybe by reading the words of others, they can begin the long road toward what Susan called Refuah v'Tikvah or "Healing and Hope."