

Journeys Through Grief

Judith Burdick's new documentary helps people in the process of surviving the loss of loved ones.

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Contributing Writer

A mother surviving the loss of her teenage son and a daughter surviving the teenage loss of her mother appear on film to reveal how they moved beyond deep grief.

Elizabeth Guz and Ricki Friedman are among seven people spotlighted by Judith Burdick, a Bingham Farms psychotherapist who wrote and directed the newly released *Transforming Loss: A Documentary*.

Burdick, who has her own grief-survival story to tell, believes in the healing power of relating to what others have experienced. Much of her own healing as a young widow with two children had to do with becoming a psychotherapist counseling others through tragedy.

While there are no tickets left for the film's February premiere at the Maple Theater in Bloomfield Township, two additional screenings are being planned in the near future and will be posted on Burdick's website, <http://transforminglossdocumentary.com>.

"The film has a cohesive message of hope that flows in a way that's similar to the way the process of grief unfolds," says the 52-year-old Burdick, whose premiere is being sponsored by Temple Beth El, where she had religious training and remains a member.

"In the beginning of the film, viewers experience the loss of each individual, three of whom are Jewish, as the stories are told. Viewers next go through the healing process with them.

"The third part of the film focuses on how these people transformed or are transforming their lives and how they are helping others as part of that transformation."

Guz, who lives in Franklin and appreciated the support of the mourning process by the Temple Beth El community, had tried to help her son through his emotional difficulties before she had to face his death.

"I had two other kids and a husband, and I knew I had to be strong for them," says Guz, who read about spirituality and pursued exercise classes to fill any free moments during the immediate time of adjustment. "I found out I was stronger than I thought."

As Guz, whose daughter Lauren Guz composed the score for the film, was working out emotional issues surrounding death, she learned a lot about herself and the importance of prioritizing.

"I felt there's a choice if something terrible happens," she explains. "I can't change the past, but I can move forward."

The idea for developing a film to capture different ways of moving forward came to Burdick about three years ago when she had become frustrated with attempts at completing a book on the subject.

After stepping away from her initial chapters on the advice of a friend, she came up with the idea for the film and worked with Marguerite Parise as producer and John Anderson Beavers as director of photography.

"I learned as I went along," says Burdick, who contacted patients and people in the community as she sought individuals to include onscreen. "It was like being in school."

Burdick (nee Hamburger) had been attending the University of Michigan when she met and married Mark Rubens. They moved to California as he pursued his medical career, and she became a stay-at-home mom for their two children, Andrew and Laura.

After her husband's 1991 death during a scuba diving accident, Burdick decided to move back to Michigan and be close to family and friends. She re-enrolled at U-M, earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and completed a master's degree in clinical psychology at the Center for Humanistic Studies (now the Michigan School for Professional Psychology), then in Detroit.

"It's pretty standard when you go through a loss that you find out who your friends are," she says. "I was able to make some new friends, and I advise patients to open themselves to others through new experiences where they might meet people having similar interests."

In 1995, the psychotherapist married James Burdick, an attorney who was able to become the father figure in the lives of her young children.

"I wanted to specialize in grief because of my life challenges," says Burdick, whose son is in medical residency and whose daughter is studying English literature. "My practice



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— Filmmaker Judith Burdick

has been a gift to me. I hope it's been a gift to others."

Friedman, 24 and a resident of Birmingham, is a friend of Burdick's daughter.

"I learned that I had to keep persevering," says Friedman, a weight-loss motivational coach who has been active with Temple Israel. "I went on wilderness trips, and that pushed me to be stronger and let me know I could work well at motivating people.

"As I learned a lot about myself, I found that helping others is the key to recovery."

Burdick's early professional initiatives were through the Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network, where she could call upon her religious foundations. Her belief in God had motivated study in Israel during her sophomore year in college.

"Resiliency is really important, and that's what I hope to share with people through the film," says Burdick, who has found that gardening and outdoor activities offer relaxation.

"We have this ability to access an inner



Judith Burdick consults with Director of Photography John Anderson Beavers.



Elizabeth Guz of Franklin is profiled in the film: "I can't change the past, but I can move forward."

strength available to anybody with the belief in that resource and with the tenacity and strength to take the next step in the face of tragedy.

"That's what people will see in this film — examples of people who have suffered but have accessed the inner wellspring that gives them strength." □

While tickets for the Feb. 6-7 screenings at the Maple Theater in Bloomfield Township are sold out, two additional screenings are being planned in the near future. Register for updates on screenings at transforminglossdocumentary.com.