

'Amazing' Grace

First-time author Judith Minkove writes about her late daughter's courage in the face of illness and adversity.

By Caryn R. Sagal

The British novelist Agatha Christie once wrote, "A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world." Northwest Baltimore resident Judith Minkove embodies this sentiment with the release of her first book, a tribute to her late daughter, Rachel Tova Minkove.

"Tired of Being Amazing: Rachel's Story" (Epigraph) begins in 2008 when Rachel was teaching at a Jewish day school in Los Angeles. The 24-year-old graduate of Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School and University of Maryland, College Park, developed an unbearable itching followed by a persistent cough and fatigue.

Rachel returned to Baltimore, at the urging of her mother and father, Dr. Judah Minkove, and was diagnosed with stage 4 Hodgkin lymphoma. She immediately embarked on a battle for survival that included chemotherapy, radiation and a bone marrow transplant from one of her brothers.

Throughout such dark times, Rachel exuded a sense of resilience and optimism. She worked at the library at Beth Tfiloh School and attended a year at the University of Maryland School of Social Work with the goal of helping young adults with cancer.

Ultimately, Rachel could not conquer her cancer and passed away in July of 2012. Nearly 11 years later, Judy Minkove's account of Rachel's journey and its impact on her family and community is now available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Jmore recently spoke with Minkove, a retired senior writer and copy editor at Johns Hopkins Medicine, about "Tired of Being Amazing."

***Jmore*: Why did you write this book?**

Minkove: I wanted to perpetuate Rachel's way-too-short life and her legacy of hope, resilience and purpose, especially for young adults grappling with a cancer diagnosis. There are many books about children with cancer and memoirs about celebrities and other adults who have undergone cancer treatments, but very few books focus on young adults with cancer. I also wanted to pay tribute to the people who supported her.

"There definitely were times when I had to step away from writing, but I was determined to share her extraordinary persona and impact."

— Judy Minkove

What was your writing process?

For four years, I'd get up early every morning to write and peruse memoirs and essays from others who have chronicled their experiences. I also read my journals dating back to Rachel's diagnosis, which helped me recall chal-



Northwest Baltimore resident Judith Minkove says she wrote "Tired of Being Amazing" as a way to "perpetuate Rachel's way-too-short life and her legacy of hope, resilience and purpose, especially for young adults grappling with a cancer diagnosis." (Provided photo)

lenges and loving moments — in and out of the hospital.

And I revisited dozens of condolence letters that captured many powerful interactions with Rachel.

Was it difficult to write about something so incredibly personal? Very much so. It was wrenching to relive Rachel's many hurdles, yet I tried to provide context about her irrepressible optimism, determination and popularity among her friends and her mission to raise awareness about young adults with cancer.

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Where does the title come from?

Rachel would hear people tell her how amazing she was. She told us often, "I'm tired of being amazing! I just want to be a normal 26-year-old girl!"

What's your message to readers? As Rachel pointed out, your life can be up-

ended in an instant by devastating news. But aided by family, friends, community and faith, there is hope! The outpouring of love and support is something our family will never forget.

What should people know about

Rachel? That even in the face of devastating news, she radiated hope and positivity, and demonstrated that a cancer diagnosis shouldn't define you. As my husband said in his eulogy, 'She taught us how to live.'

Rachel was truly a beautiful person, inside and out. Even as a young girl, she was kind to everyone and beloved by so many. More than 900 people attended her funeral.

To what do you attribute her resili-

ence? I think it was in her DNA. My father, Rabbi Alfred Fruchter, was warm, good-natured and always instilled hope in others. My mother-in-law, Bea 'Bootsie' Minkove, was a beloved Hebrew school teacher and a tremendous role model.

What's your advice for those facing a serious illness? To quote Rachel, 'Don't let your diagnosis define you. Go about your life as best you can. Socialize with friends even as you grapple with fatigue and doctors' appointments.'

How does Rachel continue to be

present in your life? Our grandchildren — two of whom are named Rachel — emulate and physically resemble her, sparking loving memories. We share Rachel stories and photos. Her close friends still stay in touch with me. Her brothers have perpetuated her memory through Tour De Court, an annual basketball fundraiser for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the Jewish Caring Network.

Sometimes, I find myself talking to Rachel, and we visit her regularly at the cemetery.

Having completed the book, what are your next projects?

I'm fairly busy babysitting my grandchildren and plan to become more involved at Beth Tfiloh School, where two of them are enrolled. 📞

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