



How do you want to be remembered?



Cindy Moritz, Hayley Pogrud, Lauren Gillis, Terry Locketz, Avigail Popack and Cara Katz

There was no better way to celebrate Spring Day and anticipate Rosh Chodesh Elul than to gather at the Nechama-organised breakfast at Coffee Time to hear Lauren Gillis speak on the topic 'How do you want to be remembered?'

Lauren spoke from the heart and dedicated what she said to the memory of her late mother Rita Friedlander who had passed away four months before to the day.

It was on that day Lauren became an orphan, and had to step into the daunting role of family matriarch. She was reminded then that life always comes to an end and that perhaps the most brutal experience in this life is dealing with inevitable loss.

Both her parents had been selfless and gave generously to the community. It was therefore a given that she would have chosen to work in a helping profession, and she shared her experiences as a social worker before speaking about starting and running Relate Bracelets.

Running for change

As a young social worker in 1981 she worked in the field of the newly blinded, where she started training blind runners. Her first one was Jonny Demas, a victim of gang violence and many years later she watched him complete his 20th Comrades marathon, while gainfully employed and self sufficient.

When Lauren celebrated a milestone birthday, she resolved to change another life through running, and when she met Bret Jackelow, a beautiful but troubled soul who had one leg shorter than the other — after sustaining more than 48 operations he had a hip removed — she resolved to train and accompany him on the New York Marathon. Less than five months after his surgery, they actually completed the New York marathon together, with Bret on crutches.

Sadly, Bret died in a car accident two years later, but rather than the negatives, it was for his courage and determination that he is remembered.

Next Lauren invited a friend's

daughter, Donna Chait, to join her to run the New York marathon. Donna may have had physical and intellectual challenges. "How would we tap into Donna's potential, or even know what that potential was?" thought Lauren. In both 2012 and 2014 Donna achieved success and completed the 42,2km challenge.

One Bead at a Time

The now well-known Relate Bracelets story took Lauren from helping one individual at a time to uplifting and creating opportunities for many more. She had seen the Livestrong bands and contemplated the potential for something similar to be made by hand, and used as a tool for social upliftment.

Relate Bracelets' first order was for Nando's and came from a spark in Lauren's mind about the possibility of demonstrating how to pair celebration with responsibility. Nando's was turning 21 and Lauren would gather together a team that included Nellie Mkunqwana — her ex domestic worker and now through Relate, 3rd year Social Work student — to fill the order of 6000 units.

Relate has since raised over R36 million for all sorts of worthy causes and social upliftment of the beaders.

"We need to find creative solutions other than always bringing the begging bowl," said Lauren. "If every tax paying person in South Africa bought one Relate bracelet a year, imagine what could be achieved?"

"Biographies and resumes are not that important. Your legacy is possibly more important." Lauren stressed. She urged everyone to live life with a focus on how they want to be remembered rather than the accolades one can add to a resume.

Lauren wants to be remembered as authentic, honest and having lived with integrity; a good wife, mother, grandmother, family person and friend. Above all, she wants to be remembered for having lived a life of purpose, having made a difference, and having done mitzvot that will have elevated the souls of her beloved parents who gave her life and for whom she has the deepest gratitude.