

A PSYCHOLOGIST by training, Baum started the Resilience Unit at ICTP just as the second intifada broke out. 'My work over the next 13 years was to teach people skills to help deal with trauma and stress in everyday life.'



NAOMI L. BAUM, 59
FROM BROOKLYN, NEW YORK,
TO PETAH TIKVA, 1971
FROM CLEVELAND, OHIO,
TO KIBBUTZ TIRAT ZVI, 1987

Catching the curveballs of life

Naomi Baum has perfected stability – from marriage to work, war to disease

• ABIGAIL KLEIN LEICHMAN

Naomi Loewenberg was 16 when her family of six made aliya – and such a gung-ho Zionist that she arrived a month ahead of her parents.

She had lived in seven houses in four cities (Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis and New York) and attended six schools, so moving again wasn't all that daunting – though it put close to 10,000 kilometers between her and her high-school sweetheart, Mike Baum.

One might guess her father was in the military, but in fact Meir Loewenberg was a German refugee who earned Ivy League credentials as a social worker, and later headed Bar-Ilan University's School of Social Work.

"I know all that moving around sounds unstable, but our family was about as stable as you can get," says Naomi, now married for 39 years to Dr. Mike Baum, with whom she has seven children and a dozen grandchildren all living within an hour's drive of the Baum homestead in Efrat.

As a psychologist, Baum knows more than a little about stability. Until last July, she directed the Resilience Unit of the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma in Jerusalem. She established the unit based on her pioneering expertise in creating and implementing resilience-building programs for people suffering the effects of trauma in Israel, Mississippi, Haiti, Mexico and Spain.

She left her position in order to have more time for international consulting, but immediately was pressed into service due to Operation Protective Edge.

"I started running groups for parents who had sons fighting in Gaza, a population that was in many ways overlooked. I know how difficult and how important it is to give parents support, because I had three sons in the Second Lebanon War, and in Operation Cast Lead our son was wounded in Gaza. Most people will get through this reasonably well, but we can teach them and give them permission to touch the pain, sadness, anxiety and fear, talk about it and then step away from it, and try to live life normally."

Giving birth to a book

Having sons in combat is hardly the only trauma the Baums have faced. In 2003, Mike's close friend (and Terem emergency care network cofounder) Dr. David Applebaum was killed in a suicide bombing. And three years ago, Naomi was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Following nine months of treatment and surgeries, she "gave birth" to a book that she recently self-published, *Life Unexpected: A Trauma Psychologist Journeys Through Breast Cancer*, available through Amazon or through her website, www.naomibaum.com.

"I combined the personal and the professional in my book," she says. "It's about what happened to me, what I took from it and how it can help others. The response has been very gratifying."

Baum received her bachelor's from Bar-Ilan University, and her master's and doctorate from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where she and her husband began their married life at the tender age of 20. When Mike finished medical school three years later, they moved to Cleveland for his internship and residency. Naomi was the school psychologist at the Hebrew Academy, then taught psychology at a local university.

"We had two children at the time, and while I worked there we had twins. Those were very intense years," she recalls.

The Baums agreed on a 10-year plan toward aliya, and weren't far off the mark, moving to Israel after 12 years in America and finally paying off their education debts.

"Life was good in Cleveland and we felt very much at home, but we knew this was what we wanted to do," she says.

A gift in mid-career

After three months in a Jerusalem absorption center, where the couple polished their already high-level Hebrew skills, they moved to Kibbutz Tirat Zvi on the hottest August day of 1987. "The weather was biggest challenge of living there, but it was really a paradise for the kids," she says.

Mike was the kibbutz doctor and worked in the emergency room at Emek Medical Center in Afula; Naomi worked in schools and kibbutzim across the Beit She'an and Jezreel valleys as an employee of the regional psychological center. She also taught at Oranim Academic College in Kiryat Tivon.

Two more children were born during their six years as "honored guests" on the kibbutz. However, in 1990 the Baums bought a small house in Efrat to make use of their immigrant benefits, and in 1993 they decided to move there permanently.

"We liked the Jerusalem area and picked Efrat be-

cause we had family and friends there," she says. "For us it's really a bedroom community, because we are so busy with our careers and family."

Still on the board of Terem, Mike has practiced family medicine for the past 21 years at the Maccabi Health Fund clinic in Ma'aleh Adumim, and also is the doctor of Kibbutz Kfar Etzion.

Naomi started out as the director of psychological services for Gush Etzion, and taught in various colleges. One day in 2000, when she was 44, she spotted a poster advertising a two-year fellowship at the Mandel School for Educational Leadership for people aged 45 and under. The application deadline was the following day; she applied immediately and was accepted.

"It was really a gift in mid-career," she says of her fellowship. This is when she began an in-depth study of how to help people find their inner resilience in the face of trauma, a novel concept that only took root internationally after 9/11.

Travel blogger

Her approach was soon put into practice, as the second intifada broke out not long afterward. "About 70 percent of the Israeli population had post-traumatic symptoms of one sort or another," Baum says.

"I started the Resilience Unit at ICTP and my work over the next 13 years was to teach people skills to help deal with trauma and stress in everyday life. Our first program, Building Resilience Intervention (BRI), was for teachers – because we consider them the gateway to children," she says.

"This program has been taught to thousands of teachers here, from *gan* [preschool] through high school, and we've also done a lot of work internationally because this program addresses a real need. We have adapted the BRI to work with many other professional groups including police, firefighters, paramedics, nurses and rabbis."

Naomi loves to travel not only for work, but for pleasure. She and her husband learned to scuba dive in Sharm e-Sheikh in Sinai before their oldest daughter got married.

"I've done about 75 dives, and I'm hoping to go to Malta soon," says Naomi, who blogs about her adventures at Slow Travels (slowtravelsblog.wordpress.com). "Our best diving has been in Red Sea, and last fall Mike and I went scuba diving in Curacao."

She emphasizes that she is not a fan of sightseeing, preferring to learn about other cultures by interacting with people.

"I'd love to take off a few months and volunteer in Africa or something. One of the things I've learned from cancer is that you don't push off your dreams." ■