HELP AND HOPE
Lisa Honig Buksbaum is a woman with a mission to alleviate the suffering of others

BY HARVEY COHEN

It’s 4 a.m. and the phone rings: you learn your brother has died of an asthma-induced heart attack. Two hours later, you cry as you inform your parents that their son is dead.

Five weeks after that, your father is diagnosed with cancer and receives a bone marrow transplant, but the doctors say recovery is impossible and the family needs to prepare for his death.

Then 10 months later, the tragedies continue as you learn your young son has rheumatoid fever with heart damage and neurological impairment.

But sometimes suffering can lead to inspiration and hope, and a mission to alleviate the suffering of others.

So it was for Lisa Honig Buksbaum, a resident of the Upper West Side and the CEO and founder of Soaringwords, a not-for-profit organization. Lisa’s father lived for 19 years after the doctors gave up hope and her son is now 28 years old, over six feet tall and fully recovered.

Through her experiences with sickness and death and recovery, Buksbaum learned how to bring hope and healing to hospitalized children who face chronic or serious illnesses and to offer support to their families. And she is now a woman with a mission — a mission to inspire ill children and their families to take active roles in their own healing.

Soaringwords is unique among other groups assisting sick children and their families as it is guided by the principle that you can heal by helping others who also need help. So the organization goes into hospitals and works with children to create art, video, fiction and other projects that are then given as gifts of hope to other ill children. And many is the day that Buksbaum will hear a child say, “Today was the happiest day of my life.” And that, of course, is what makes her day.

Buksbaum developed the “soaring into strength” model that has been tested among thousands of children, based on concepts of positive psychology. The model has proven to be a source of comfort and healing, guided by seven components:

**Shifting:** Creating shifts in your attitude, your body and overall wellbeing.

**Optimism:** Choosing to notice and celebrate good things even when times are difficult or painful.

**Altruism:** Gaining a sense of control by sharing your creativity, kindness, strengths and hope with others.

**Resiliency:** Flourishing even in difficult times.

**Imagery:** Connecting to your inner knowledge to heal.

**Narrative:** Sharing the power of positive storytelling, reading and writing.

**Gratitude:** Recognizing and celebrating moments of appreciation.

Buksbaum has also completed a manuscript for a new book: “Soaring into Strength: The New Science Approach to Help You Heal.” The book highlights fifteen inspirational stories of children and their families who grappled with illness and are now thriving. After each chapter there is a workbook section where readers can journal to bring about changes in their thoughts and actions to help them experience transformative healing in their own lives.

If you want help Lisa Honig Buksbaum helps others, you can contact her at: lisa@soaringwords.org

Lisa Buksbaum presents a puppet and other gifts to a patient at Beth Israel Medical Center.
Photo: Angeline Eckbert