

# One Person's Manhattan

## 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 rheumatic 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.

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

Soaringwords has grown and has now assisted over 500,000 children and their families in 196 hospitals around the world.

Here in Manhattan Buksbaum has worked with Mount Sinai Beth Israel, Weill Cornell and New York-Presbyterian, NYU Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital. Her corporate sponsors include Johnson & Johnson, JPMorgan Chase, New York Life, BNY Mellon, Goldman



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

Photo: Angeline Eckbert

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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.

Sachs, American Express, Viacom and NYC offices of Cisco, Facebook, Google, Deloitte and Verizon.

Buksbaum, who has an MBA degree from Columbia and formerly worked at major New York advertising agencies, has also used her business and marketing skills to form successful alliances that benefit the children. These partners include New York City public schools like P.S. 1 in Chinatown and P.S. 152 in Washington Heights; the Metropolitan Museum, MOMA, the Museum of Art and Design and community groups such as the JCC, YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs and local churches and synagogues.

It's hard to imagine, but besides all of this, Buksbaum finds time to enjoy activities in Manhattan. Though she was raised in New Jersey, her earliest and fondest memories are crossing the George Washington Bridge to visit her grandmother in Manhattan.

She remembers sleeping over at her grandmother's apartment and being too excited to fall asleep. She fondly recalls the thrill of seeing Broadway plays like "Pippin," "Cats" and "Phantom of the Opera."

These days, she walks through Central Park six days a week to get to the Manhattan JCC where she starts her day with a morning swim and twice a week takes a Pilates class.

In the evening, she can often be found walking through Central Park with her husband Jacob or visiting a museum. Every Saturday morning she attends services at B'nai Jeshurun and often attends lectures and social events at The Jewish Center.

"My faith informs everything I do," she says. "Waking up each morning is a gift and something I do not take for granted." And clearly

she has used that gift to find meaning by helping children and their families work through difficult situations with hope and optimism.

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 help others, you can contact her at: [lisa@soaringwords.org](mailto:lisa@soaringwords.org)

Know someone we should profile in One Person's Manhattan?  
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