YIZKOR - YOM KIPPUR 5783
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Amy Krouse was born and raised in Chicago. She left the nest to attend Tufts University before returning to her hometown. She married Jason Rosenthal in 1991, and became Amy Krouse Rosenthal, and they became the loving parents of Justin, Miles and Paris. Amy was incredibly creative and became a talented and prolific writer of over 20 children's books, adult books and memoirs. Some of her children's books became New York Times bestsellers.

In September of 2015 Amy was in some pain, so her husband Jason took her to emerg, they thought it might be her appendix, the examination revealed that she had ovarian cancer. Their lives changed in an instant.

After more than a year of fighting, it became apparent that Amy was not going to make it. So she did what she had been doing for most of her adult life–she wrote. She wrote

an essay for the New York Times, the essay was entitled "You May Want to Marry My Husband," and it was written in the form of a personal ad for Jason. She describes their first date when they were both 24, a blind date facilitated by her father's best friend, who knew them both and thought they would be perfect for each other. By the end of dinner, she knew she wanted to marry Jason. Jason knew a year later.

She describes Jason's sartorial adeptness—he is a smart dresser. He is a good cook, a wonderful father. He is creative; a talented painter. He is giving, thoughtful, considerate, and attentive. And, by the way, incredibly handsome.

Knowing that her time was limited, Amy laments how she wants more time with Jason and her children; more time "sipping martinis at the Green Mill Jazz Club on Thursday nights." Knowing that cannot be, she explains that she is writing in the hope that "the right person reads this, finds Jason, and another love story begins." At the end of the

column she left a blank space, a space for another love story to begin.

Amy's column was published in the Times on March 3 of 2017. A few days later Jason issued a written statement about the column. He reported, "I was with her as she labored through this process and I can tell you that writing the story was no easy task. When I read her words for the first time, I was shocked at the beauty, slightly surprised at the incredible prose given her condition and, of course, emotionally ripped apart." He later would describe the column as "unbearably sad, ironically funny and brutally honest."

Ten days after her article was published, on March 13, Amy Krouse Rosenthal died. She was 51.

I wish I had known Amy Krouse Rosenthal. I wish I had known her when she was alive and not learned all these wonderful and beautiful things about her after she died.

I will admit to you that I feel that way every single time I sit with a family before the funeral and you tell me stories about your loved one, every single time.

That feeling is a blessing.

The most important lesson you learn in life is that life is finite, that no one lives forever, not you, not the people you love, not the people that love you, sometimes loving you in spite of you. Everyone in this room has learned that profoundly important lesson, you have learned it intimately and painfully.

If death can teach us anything; may it teach us how to live, how to spend the precious time and moments we have with those people we love.

These holidays remind us that life is fragile and that it is temporary. “On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: Who shall live and who shall die” in the coming year. “Who by fire, who by water.”

On Rosh Hashanah we celebrated the creation of the world and now ten days later, on Yom Kippur, we recite Yizkor, a prayer of memory for those we have lost. It might seem that we go right from joy to sadness, but there is a lesson in the linkage that can help us in difficult times.

What is the beginning of creation? "Let there be light." Creation happens against a background of darkness. In order to make something in this world you must insist on light even when all the world seems sunk in night.

I marvel at that blank space that Amy left at the end of her essay, space for Jason and his new love, in Amy's words, "to give you two the fresh start you deserve."

Everyone here, you have been living in that blank space since the death of your loved one. Against the dark background of their passing they have set before you not more darkness but the opportunity as Amy said "for a fresh start".

Our blank space is our Book of Life, our Sefer Hayim. It is the days, the years, hopefully the decades we have ahead. What will we write in that space? How will we fill it? Will we honor those loved ones we will recall in our Yizkor prayers by living our lives with goodness and generosity? I believe that that is how we honor them most of all—by embodying the values they passed on to us and hopefully modeled for us.

We are here on this Yom Kippur afternoon to remember loved ones who have gone to their eternal home. But we will do much more to honor their memories after Yizkor, after Yom Kippur, by what we do and how we conduct ourselves each and every day. With what we write in our blank space, in our Book of Life.

Jason Rosenthal asks us: "What will you do with your empty paper? With your fresh start?" In other words, how will we live our lives going forward? Will we live with gratitude for the gifts we have been given? Will we use

our time wisely? Will we strive to make the lives of those around us better? Will we live lives of integrity, honesty, kindness and love? Will we treat each other with compassion, understanding and dignity?

These are Yom Kippur questions, but they are meant to be taken with us beyond this sanctuary, beyond Yizkor, and beyond this day, into our homes and our neighborhoods and our workplaces. And into our hearts. How will you make the most of your time here? What will you do with the days and the years you are given?

In a world and lives beset by pain, the Jewish approach is neither to ignore tragedy nor to give it the last word. We grieve, but then we move toward the Neilah service, when sins are forgiven and another year dawns for us all. A blank space, an empty page, that is where we will write the next chapter of our story, as a tribute to our loved ones who we mourn today, we must go on living, laughing, loving. That's what Amy wanted for her Jason, it's what all those we mourn today wanted for each of us.

And there will be evening and morning, a blank space, full of possibility, imbued with their loving memory, a new first day.