

After our two beloved children, Ruby and Hart, were killed by a drunk driver on June 12, 2019, we felt more alone, afraid, and adrift than we ever thought possible. Day after day, when we thought we might literally not survive the pain, our IKAR community surrounded us and held us up. Their unending acts of loving kindness, of hesed, kept us afloat in the wreckage of our lives. We can't possibly thank each and every member of IKAR who came to our rescue, but we'd like to do our best.

First and foremost, to Sharon and Melissa who came to our house moments after we got home from the hospital. As Sharon held our hands and listened to our horrifying story, Melissa was calling the funeral home and making arrangements. The next morning, Sharon picked us up and drove us to the mortuary to choose burial plots, caskets and decide where to hold the funeral -- all the terrible tasks you should never have to do for your children. Having the burden of these awful obligations taken off our shoulders was a mitzvah greater than anything we can imagine. In the face of the unthinkable, where no one knows what to do or what to say, they found the words and did the jobs we were in no position to do for ourselves.

The next day Jesse Zilberstein, who has turned the profound pain she endures since losing her precious son Gidi, into a mission to help fellow IKARites in their grief, came to us and offered the first words of guidance about moving through this new world of grief we found ourselves in. She also wrote the guide that was given to everyone who came to shiva and that was full of essential advice on how to behave, and what was helpful to say or not say. So many friends and family members who were afraid to talk to us for fear of saying the wrong thing, told us how grateful they were to have that pamphlet full of clear, loving guidance.

We also want to thank the anonymous members of IKAR who stepped forward to perform Shmirah, the beautiful and holy act of staying with the bodies of the dead before burial, keeping them company. These volunteers read children's stories to Ruby and Hart as their bodies lay in the mortuary overnight.

And we are so grateful for the hundreds of IKAR members who came to the funeral, and then to Shiva. Our house was flooded with people swooping in nightly to take care of every need: chairs magically appeared, food filled our table, people came night after night, filling our home and spilling out onto the yard, offering love and support and bearing witness to our loss.

Then there was the incredible meal train that Rabbi Keilah organized, along with Heather Simpson, the head of Campbell Hall's Viking Cares program and several of our friends. Many people called us to complain that they couldn't sign up to bring us meals -- all the slots were taken immediately by members of IKAR. And when we told Keilah that after four months it was time to end the meal train -- that we needed to start shopping and cooking for ourselves, she pleaded with us to keep it going -- how could she ever face all those IKAR members who were desperate to do something for us?

We'll also be forever grateful to everyone who came at eight am every Wednesday morning, even if they weren't in mourning themselves, but just to provide us with a minyan, and support us in saying Kaddish for our babies. Rabbi Ronit, Rabbi Keilah and Rabbi Kasher led those minyans and took extra care of us, showing more vulnerability than I can imagine. Keilah, as the most junior Rabbi, admitted that she felt overwhelmed and out of her depth when faced with the magnitude of our loss. And yet, she walked alongside us with bravery and honesty. Ronit struggled with when to tell us she was pregnant, for fear that her wonderful news would be too painful for us to endure. She never could have known that all these months later, Noa's gorgeous face and presence at our virtual minyans brings joy to our mornings.

Finally, we have to thank Sharon again for not only helping us through those first torturous days but also for holding us up all year long, leading us through the rituals of shiva, shloshim, and the unveiling. She took us out for breakfast every week for months in a row, listening and responding in a way that showed that no matter how disjointed our thoughts, she was able to hear and understand us. A friend on the East Coast who told their rabbi about IKAR said that his response was, "Oh, Sharon Brous is a very famous rabbi." But Sharon, both before this tragedy and now, has never felt like a famous rabbi. She's always first and foremost been *our* rabbi, who makes us feel like no one is more important to her than us.

We love you all and are so grateful for the depth of hesed we have received. Thank you for holding us tight.