

Shalom

To stand in front of you and speak words of comfort or words of wisdom or any words at all is not an easy task. By now so many words have been said and so many tears have been shed. We are slowly learning how to live without Wendy Wayne in our midst. We probably shared a similar reaction after the initial stab of heartache and emptiness when we heard the news of Wendy's passing, when the bottom fell out of our world. How would we find life possible without her? How could we become like Wendy Wayne, fill the void? Because Wendy's presence was that large.

We know about her accomplishments in the community. Those we can list. The list is long and impressive, even visionary. Did you know that list includes something called the Child Passenger Safety Commission? That was a long time ago, but I remember it because it was one of many things Wendy tried to involve me in. I however, didn't quite get it. It didn't sound that exciting, this Child Passenger Safety Commission. I thought I would pass. But do you know what it did? It led to the car seat law! How many children's lives has that saved! Visionary.

But more than the list of accomplishments, and where we feel the ache I think, is in missing the sheer force of Wendy. And I think that is where the panic sets in that makes us want to fill that void. Could we? Let's imagine a day. And let's face it, no matter how pure and purposeful our my intentions – my intentions - were I to vow to arise at 6 each morning, walk 3 miles, do some volunteer work, send out a dozen birthday cards, take someone to a birthday lunch, bake cookies for a sick friend, have a dinner party, visit someone in the hospital, watch the news, write in my journal, read for the book club, plus do a full day's work – realistically, perhaps I could do this for a week. But – I'd have to take the entire next week off work to recover. And that's something Wendy would never do – take time off and be unproductive.

So as quickly as we fall into the panicky idea of ramping up to fill the void Wendy leaves, we fall out of it, realizing we can only be ourselves; but Wendy left us such a wonderful template for life and how to become our better selves. That we can do. We can look at the traits that made Wendy Wendy, and consciously enhance them in ourselves, and I think that would be Wendy's best legacy.

We could call them Principals of the LAW – Law standing for Life after Wendy.

Perhaps one of our Principals of the LAW could be to become better listeners. Hearing is easy; listening is hard. But didn't we all feel special with Wendy, like we were the most interesting person she had ever met? It's because she listened to us. Did you ever try to ask Wendy anything and shortly thereafter find that you were talking about yourself again? Wendy always tricked you like that. Wendy included listening as one of her words of wisdom to the graduating class at CSUB a couple of years ago, telling the graduates that you can't learn anything if you're talking. Not

long ago, I said to Wendy, "It's just amazing how you like everyone." She answered, "Let's just say I find something in everyone." Because she listened.

Wendy would insist that we include acts of kindness as a principal of our LAW. I would say random and not so random acts. Daily. Could that be so hard? Wendy's illness was the great challenge of her life and the knowledge that others were doing acts of kindness as well as hugging each other truly did sustain her. Her spirit can now sustain us if we continue to do acts of kindness both large and small. As a teacher, I learned that there are no throwaway words or actions, that you never know what is going to make a difference for someone no matter how small or inconsequential it seems to you.

Throughout her illness, Wendy was discouraged at times, in pain, suffering ill effects of the treatment and disease, at times wanting to give up, but she didn't allow herself to stay in that place for long. She consistently called herself the luckiest person in the world, and reinforced the joy and good fortune she had received in abundance throughout her life. That joy and good fortune did not just fall into her lap, however. She earned it through giving. She always said that a life of service returned more to her than she gave, and it certainly left us all the better for it. Maybe we can make that our third principal of the LAW – give to receive. We can make our light shine just a little bit brighter by giving a little bit more of ourselves. It's often said that the harder we work, the luckier we get. Maybe we can become the luckiest people in the world, too.

When Maya was born, Larkin and Katie's first child and Wendy's first grandchild, Wendy shared some expectations and hopes that expressed those qualities I most admired about her and had tried to incorporate in my own life already. I think we can appropriate those hopes Wendy had for Maya and incorporate them into Principals of our LAW #s 4-8, for they can apply to any age...and are most appropriate to filling the void left by Wendy's passing.

Her hopes are these. That you nurture your Jewish heritage and continue to make the world a better place; never meet a stranger; extend yourself to all you meet and ensure that doors of opportunity open; have a home that is always available for gatherings and sharing of wisdom; erase the word "no" from your vocabulary because you see only possibilities and never obstacles.

Imagine if we all lived like this. Imagine a community that behaved like this. Build a community like this. Think of it as a challenge Wendy has left us because I think she would like that more than all the words of praise we could offer. To make a difference is what gives Wendy's life meaning. She has done that, no doubt.

However, like it or not, I am going to offer some words of praise because coincidentally, after I wrote this, I found a letter to the editor I wrote in 2005 after it was announced that the Hillel Award was being conferred upon Wendy. Here's what it says. (*Read letter*)

We honor Wendy and multiply her life exponentially by continuing to make a difference. In the words of Hillel, "If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?"