

Grateful

SPOTLIGHTING THE ORDEN AND FLESH FAMILY

BY STEPHANIE LAGER

How do you turn a broken life into a beautiful one? Some might say hard work and diligence. Others might say compassion and will power. Ted and Hedy Orden will tell you without question that it's gratitude.

In 1959 Hedy and Ted Orden were finally free. They arrived in the U.S. from Romania after surviving the torture of WWII and communism. They were truly broken. They were physically, mentally, and emotionally tortured. Their world was overtaken by an inescapable, impenetrable darkness. Despite all the terror, heartbreak, and inconceivable brutalities, one thing was certain: they always had hope. With two little girls in tow and nothing but one small suitcase and no knowledge of English, they began to build their new life in a foreign land.

Miraculously, through a Romanian friend and classmate, Hedy landed a job as a bookkeeper for a dress shop in downtown L.A. "I was working hard, learning English, cooking, cleaning, taking care of my young daughters, but I was so happy to be here! To be free and to have choices," Hedy says with a noticeable spark in her eye. After settling in the United States, her husband, Ted, started a new business and Hedy gave birth to their third daughter. They worked tirelessly and never complained.

Ted and Hedy were introduced to Beit T'Shuvah through the wonderful work their daughter, Judy Flesh, was doing as a volunteer. In 1999 Judy heard about Beit T'Shuvah through a friend and wanted to get involved; she soon became one of their first volunteer therapists. Equipped with a comprehensive background in clinical art therapy, Judy provides a therapeutic outlet for residents to express themselves and reconnect with their feelings in her weekly group. Although Judy was never personally exposed to addiction, she witnesses the way Beit T'Shuvah's treatment program changes lives. "It's a great program because it gives you a new chance at life," Judy says. When people are so beaten down that they can't imagine a future for themselves, and then they shift and see that it is possible, "that's the most meaningful thing...it's very touching," she says.

Judy understands the transformation the residents' experience at Beit T'Shuvah because it's reminiscent of the struggle her parents went through. "It's a tale of redemption and renewal. Both require the philosophy to never give up, to always have hope, and to understand that there is always the possibility to start anew," she says.



JUDY FLESH AND HEDY ORDEN

At 88 years old, Hedy is a petite, warm, lively woman filled with love and generosity. She continues to use her story of triumph as inspiration for many who are suffering. People who are tormented by suicidal ideations reach out to her and she helps them work through their pain by changing their life outlook. "Being able to help those who couldn't imagine living and now have a life is very, very rewarding," she says.

Starting broken and shattered and then mustering the courage to rebuild one's life—it's the story of survival. And, it's the story of sobriety. As Hedy puts it, "Everybody has bumps, you always have to find the light and look for the good parts. You must never give up hope. No matter how dark your past is, and mine couldn't be darker."

Ted and Hedy donate a generous sum to Beit T'Shuvah every year. "It gives me the best feeling possible. I want to do as much as I can because it's such an important organization that changes people's lives. I am so appreciative and grateful that I'm in this position to help," she says.

Despite the pain and struggle Hedy has endured in her life, and continues to endure with her ailing husband who is 93, she consistently says, "I'm the most blessed person in this world." Her face lights up and her delicate arms grow animated and full of life as she says, "I wouldn't change places with anyone in the world. I have such a good life and good family." She has 16 beautiful grandchildren and three great-grandsons.

More than anyone I've ever met, Hedy is an exemplar of gratitude. She is living proof that anything in life is possible; any amount of pain can be turned into joy when you commit to a life of appreciation and generosity. Overcome with the innumerable blessings in her life, Hedy says, "Why shouldn't I smile so much?"

And that's exactly how we feel about her.