

# Book Review

## Cottaging family faces tragedy but still smiles

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "You have to accept whatever comes and the only important thing is that you meet it with courage and the best you have to give." What an apt description of the Cohen family, who we are invited to meet in Lainie Cohen's, *Crooked Smile: One Family's Journey Toward Healing*.

Our introduction begins with a charming description of the last weekend of summer at the cottage. "No need to hurry, a place where time doesn't matter," marks the peaceful beginning to the last Sunday in August, which livens up as three children and friends make preparations to return to the city, and quiets down again as the older children leave, daughter Alyssa in her own car and son Daniel with friends.

As they are finishing their leisurely dinner, however, the phone rings and every parent's worst nightmare becomes real. Alyssa is calling to say that Daniel has been in a car accident and has been taken to the hospital. Daniel, only 17, has suffered a severe brain injury and, now, he and his family begin the daunting task of learning to cope with life on terms radically different from anything they had ever imagined.

As Lainie explains, she began the book to record Daniel's story, to give him a sense of what happened to him in the first year following his injury. She draws on the daily log book that was kept next to his bed to record vis-



Photograph: Martin Avery

### Lainie Cohen has written about her family's healing process, following her son Daniel's devastating car accident.

its, activities and progress, as well as newsletters she composed and circulated to family and friends. The story, though, soon becomes very much her own as she comes to realize that what has happened to Daniel has had a profound affect on all family members and on her own roles as wife, mother and daughter.

Soon, Daniel's story is

interwoven with all the threads of family life, including the decline and passing of her father, illness, surgery, more illness and, finally, the passing of her mother, as well as meeting the challenge of finding out her younger son has succumbed to the temptation of drugs and seeing her daughter in a wheelchair after the collapse of her health.

This all sounds very grim and, indeed, the tragedy of the events cannot be minimized, but what comes through to the reader is a wonderful celebration of life and love. It is the little events of life that become precious and are savored - family traditions and celebrations, faith, "the crunch of snow," memories of a "mahogany table with its thick pedestal base," the aromas of food preparation, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins and friends, hugs and togetherness.

This is not a modern-day fairy tale, where all dreams are realized as the book comes to a close. But, after nine years, we find the Cohens still celebrating life and love. They are still at the cottage, enjoying the end of summer. It has remained a nurturing place of stability as they have moved through crisis to regeneration.

Life is never what we expect and hope it will be. The realities of anger, anxiety, pain, disappointment and grief are all acknowledged with an honesty that gives depth and substance to the successes that are achieved, step by step, through determination and diligence. Courage and love keep them moving forward and finally allows for the grace of acceptance as is appropriate.

Lainie Cohen is an educator and psychological consultant. This is her first book. It is written with honesty and elegance and will be an inspiration to anyone who reads it with thought and attention.

- Judith Ruan  
The Bookcase