



SIMON HAYTER/TORONTO STAR

Toronto lawyer Ned Levitt found he could cope with the death of his daughter Stacey by refusing to let the memory of her fade.

# Learning lessons of grief

## Brief Encounter

SAN GREWAL

Ned Levitt has found passion in his quest to help others devastated by death.

"Many people find themselves, their real selves, while they're dealing with a trauma and its effects — there is no ego, no ambition. There's surviving something like this and then there's living," he says.

"I made a commitment at a certain point to not only survive it, but to also live after it."

Ten years ago, Levitt's Toronto law practice and beautiful family were thriving. His health was never better and his approach to life never more optimistic.

Then, on a Wednesday night in August, his 18-year-old daughter Stacey, who had been out for a jog, was hit by a car and pronounced dead shortly after.

In the aftermath, Levitt weathered a roller-coaster ride of

law and courting suicide, publishing a book of his daughter's poetry, climbing a mountain in Mexico that she had tried to climb and, most recently, writing his own book.

He has been able to live on by refusing to let the memory of his daughter fade.

"I've really found ways to bring Stacey to the world, talking about her, publishing her poetry, climbing the mountain for both of us. It's a good feeling for me, it's like keeping her alive."

Climbing Mount Ixta was one of many things Levitt did to help overcome the sense of loss, guilt and hopelessness he experienced after Stacey's death. The trek, which he has now done three times, allowed him to memorialize his daughter by leaving a box with the book of her poetry for other climbers to read. It was a climb his daughter had attempted but failed to complete a year before her death.

over the years has been overwhelming and a tremendous source of support for Levitt.

"I have given away over 4,000 copies of her book, mostly to other parents who have lost a child. I've received many letters and emails from parents thanking Stacey for her poetry."

A self-described obsessive personality, Levitt read any literature he could find about bereavement and loss, while approaching professionals about their work in the area. Eventually, he began to get referrals to counsel parents going through the same experience he did.

"I thought, if I'm going to be asked to help others, I better learn everything I can. I was able to get my life back together. I got my practice up and running again. I looked after my family, my wife and two other daughters and I kept my marriage together. Then I was able to find a synthesis where I brought the practical skills of law together

ing I had gained, to help others.

"It was surprising when I started to realize I had this positive impact on people."

That revelation encouraged him to write a book about Stacey's death, its impact on him and how others can help themselves. *No Mountain Too High* was published by ECW press.

"My hobbies — sports — my family and the law were my life before Stacey's death. I wasn't passionate about anything else. Now, people say, 'You've never been as passionate about anything as the work you now do to help others.' I say, 'Yeah, you're right.'

"I can understand what a passionate artist, a passionate musician feels; it's wonderful. When you start getting older, there isn't as much to get passionate about. I can't bring Stacey back, but would she want me to find this passion and feel good about it? Absolutely."