A Lifetime of Giving: One Family’s Legacy

For nearly three decades, Nancy Black Simches has been an ardent and steadfast supporter of McLean Hospital. Thoughtful and strategic, her philanthropy has furthered the tripartite mission of McLean and its commitment to improving the lives of people and families affected by psychiatric illness.

“McLean is tremendously fortunate to have had Nancy’s trust and friendship over the years,” said McLean President and Psychiatrist in Chief Scott L. Rauch, MD. “She is dedicated to the well-being of children and so astute in her philanthropy. We are currently facing a mental health crisis of unprecedented proportions and Nancy’s support is driving progress — and hope — on multiple fronts.”

In celebration of her philanthropy, Nancy’s family, Sherri and Thomas, wanted to acknowledge her generosity in a way that is both meaningful to her and reflective of her ongoing dedication to advancing the treatment of those struggling with emotional issues. They reached out to McLean for thoughts on a legacy gift and the Nancy Black Simches Endowed Visiting Scholar Fund was born.

The fund will bring distinguished experts from around the world to McLean to share their knowledge, promote collaboration, and inform practitioners, educators and researchers alike. Integrated into McLean’s Grand Rounds, the Nancy Black Simches Visiting Scholar Series will comprise eight to ten lectures annually. These lectures will focus on a broad range of behavioral and mental health issues and, in memory of her beloved daughter Joanne, will include topics related to child, adolescent and young adult mental health, as well as suicide. This endowed lecture series is the third major initiative funded by the Simches family in advancement of McLean’s mission.

A Legacy of Giving

The first such gift was made in 1991 in memory of their daughter Joanne who was treated at McLean for serious depression. Sadly, Joanne died tragically at age 25. While at McLean, she received excellent care and developed meaningful relationships with staff. In honor of their daughter’s courageous battle with mental illness, Nancy and Richard Simches established the Joanne B. Simches Endowed Research Fund. A seminal launch, the fund supports novel research into a wide range of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders.

“McLean holds a special place in my heart. I have great hope that, by supporting McLean and its mission, we will come to better understand psychiatric disorders and the lives of those struggling in the shadows of despair.”

Nancy Black Simches
Dear Friends

In our summer edition of Horizons, we share stories that highlight the myriad ways legacies can be built — from philanthropy to service to innovative clinical care.

Our cover story highlights one donor’s three-decades long trust in McLean and willingness to associate the family name with McLean through several substantial gifts. In another, we share the story of a very special man whose gratitude for years of care inspired him to leave a generous bequest to McLean. His sister shares his story and her plans to continue his legacy.

We also welcome three fantastic new Trustees to the McLean family. Their commitment to advancing our mission and their tremendous range of expertise will benefit the hospital for years to come. They will build on the leadership of three outgoing Board members who each served 12 years — the maximum tenure — and will remain associated with McLean in honorary roles.

And finally, we share an update on one of our treasured and highly innovative child and adolescent clinical programs — The McLean Anxiety Mastery Program — which redefined itself during COVID and, through innovation and hard work, is stronger and more effective than ever.

I hope you enjoy these stories and look forward to hearing from you.

Lori Etringer, Senior Vice President and Chief Development Officer

A Lifetime of Giving continued

Since that time and in recognition of the importance of early diagnosis and intervention, Nancy and Richard dedicated themselves to advancing the treatment of young children and adolescents through a wide range of gifts to McLean and other institutions. With this in mind, in 2012 Nancy endowed McLean’s Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry as her next major initiative, lending her name and that of her late husband to this division reinforcing the second leg of McLean’s tripartite mission — clinical care. A decade later, The Nancy and Richard Simches Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is a robust and cutting-edge element of McLean’s top-ranked offerings.

“Throughout the years that I have known Nancy, her focus on young people has never wavered,” said Joe Gold, MD, Chief Medical Officer and former Chief of the Simches Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. “She is very special to us for all the ways she supports our youth — truly spanning the full gamut of McLean’s mission.”

And today, with the inception of The Nancy Black Simches Endowed Visiting Scholar Fund, the third leg of McLean’s tripartite mission — education and training — will be bolstered by her philanthropy. This pinnacle gift will sponsor a visiting lecture series as part of Grand Rounds, McLean’s renowned weekly educational program designed to offer top-notch educational presentations to faculty, trainees and staff at McLean, as well as the general public, and will enhance McLean’s preeminent position as a beacon of innovation and thought leadership.

“McLean holds a special place in my heart,” explained Nancy. “I have great hope that, by supporting McLean and its mission, we will come to better understand psychiatric disorders and the lives of those struggling in the shadows of despair.”

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Joseph Gold, MD, Chief Medical Officer, McLean Hospital
“When Bob felt like he was in trouble, when he knew he needed help with his disease, there was only one place in the world he wanted to go and that was McLean.”

Joan Peebles, Robert Peebles’ sister

A Bequest and Two Books From a Grateful Patient

There are very few photos of Bob Peebles. An avid photographer, Bob was always the person behind the camera. He was attached to his three bulldogs and was happiest while outdoors — playing tennis, skiing, and fishing for trout in the Adirondacks, where his family had a summer home. But most of all, he loved his family and friends, and was extremely proud of his daughter.

According to his sister, Joan, Peebles struggled with mental illness for much of his life, beginning in his senior year of high school in the 1960s. When he died in 2020, he left a generous bequest to McLean — without restrictions, meaning it will support the full breadth of the hospital’s mission.

“When Bob felt like he was in trouble, when he knew he needed help with his disease, there was only one place in the world he wanted to go and that was McLean,” said Joan. “He knew it was the best psychiatric hospital in the country, and he believed in the treatment he got there.”

“Bob had been an annual donor for many years, so the bequest was the natural culmination of his decades of giving,” added Joan. She, too, recently became a McLean donor and has included the hospital in her estate plans.

Although he lived most of his life in upstate N.Y., Bob had relatives in the Boston area, including his grandfather, a professor at Boston University, and his uncle, a physician affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard. When Bob became ill before his high school graduation, the family knew about McLean and it was a natural choice for treatment. Joan, who coincidentally went to boarding school near the hospital at the time, used to visit him almost every Saturday. She remembers the record player he had in his room and his request that she bring him a 45 record that was a hit that year — The Boy from New York City by The Ad Libs.

In the early days of the pandemic, Bob’s mental health began to deteriorate, so he sought treatment again at McLean. But because of some underlying physical health problems, the hospital was not able to admit him. “I was at Bob’s house when he received a phone call from a social worker at McLean,” recounted Joan. “Although she knew he wasn’t going to be treated there, she called to check up on his welfare. I had tears in my eyes because the hospital cared about him, even though he wasn’t going to be admitted.”

Bob was also an avid and eclectic reader, and after he died, Joan sorted through his large collection, giving some books to friends and family, and donating many boxes to the public library. But two particular books caught her eye, both histories of McLean Hospital. She knew exactly where they belonged and contacted the hospital to let them know she wanted to donate them. Today, they’re in a small lending library in the cafeteria. “He had such high esteem for McLean, and I knew that’s where they would be most appreciated,” said Joan.

For more information on legacy giving, contact Keith at kraho@partners.org.
As some reports suggest that anxiety disorders may have more than doubled during the pandemic, the McLean Anxiety Mastery Program (MAMP) has been at the vanguard of treating children and adolescents who suffer from a wide range of disorders, including social anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia, separation anxiety, and specific phobias. MAMP also treats obsessive-compulsive disorder, which often co-occurs with anxiety disorders and responds to some of the same types of treatment.

Soaring rates of anxiety and the return to school has been particularly difficult for many children. That may, in part, be because remote learning allowed them to avoid many of the situations that trigger their symptoms.

"Many children who have come to our clinic have reported that they attempted to go back to school, but experienced overwhelming anxiety symptoms, due to a range of fears, including that they might have a panic attack or embarrass themselves in front of their peers," explained Program Co-Director R. Meredith Elkins, PhD, who leads MAMP together with Jacqueline Sperling, PhD. "And they may struggle to maintain pace academically often because they feel they’re ‘behind’ due to prolonged remote learning."

Not surprisingly, MAMP has seen an increase in clients who refuse to go to school.

"You have this confluence of standard stressors — peers, anxiety symptoms, academic work — that have been amplified because kids have had limited opportunity to naturally engage with, and possibly overcome, their fears during the pandemic," added Elkins.

The MAMP program itself was transformed during the pandemic, going completely virtual at the beginning, and transitioned to a hybrid model this summer, with one programming day in person. Children and teens ages 6-19 attend the intensive, group-based program four days a week from 2-4:30 p.m. for a minimum of four weeks and an average duration of six-and-a-half weeks.

Philanthropy has been critical to MAMP, as a portion of the program’s cost is not covered by insurance. Gifts from donors have created a scholarship fund that helps offset these out-of-pocket expenses.

“We can offer treatment to families with limited financial resources thanks to the generosity of donors,” said Elkins. "And we’d like nothing more than to be able to increase the number of scholarships we offer and broaden the reach of our services.” Added Sperling: "We want mental health treatment to be a right, not a privilege, and we’re so grateful to the donors who have allowed us to take steps in that direction."

"Three months at MAMP was life-changing for our daughter who entered the program at age 11 with severe OCD and anxiety," said donors Jeff and Tori Constantino. “The combination of highly trained clinicians at the program, as well as the individual and group therapy it provided was just the help she needed to manage her symptoms. She has thrived since participating in the program and is headed to college this year. We will be forever grateful to McLean and MAMP and are delighted to support the program.”

Exposure and Response Prevention

The centerpiece of MAMP’s treatment is Exposure and Response Prevention, which puts participants in situations that induce and challenge their anxiety or compulsive behaviors. “The exposures are designed to help children gradually approach previously avoided experiences and learn that they can manage them,” explained Sperling.

One advantage of a virtual treatment format is that the exposures are performed in home environments, where many fears originate. For example, if a child has separation anxiety, the therapist might ask the parent to take a walk around the block during the session. A youngster with a fear of vomiting may be tasked with finding an unsavory leftover in the refrigerator and taking a bite. And those with contamination concerns could be asked to refrain from washing their hands after touching a pet.

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Donors Tori and Jeff Constantino
The Coping Toolkit

After the exposures, clients do a mindfulness exercise, such as slowly savoring a piece of candy, using all their senses. “Anxiety is often future-oriented — we’re worried about what will happen in the future,” explained Elkins. “Mindfulness helps kids focus on the present moment without judgment, rather than focusing on what happens next.”

Next comes the psychoeducation piece, when kids learn more about their symptoms and acquire a “coping toolkit,” as Elkins calls it. That might involve teaching them how to notice and change unhelpful thought patterns, learning relaxation skills, or developing “cope-ahead plans” for future stresses. “Not every skill will be every kid’s favorite, so we give them many different options,” observed Elkins.

Each patient and family also meet with a psychiatrist for intake and weekly visits. These sessions incorporate education about pharmacological treatments, discussion about the complexities of comorbidities, as well as actively adjusting medications to target psychological symptoms.

Family Involvement

Family work has become an increasingly important part of the program and, every Tuesday, parents and kids meet with clinicians to focus on family support — including learning what behaviors from parents are not helpful. Well-intentioned parental actions like buying certain foods or being in constant text communication may temporarily soothe a child’s anxiety, but in the long run may maintain and even worsen it.

“A big part of the family meetings is helping caregivers gradually reduce some of these accommodation behaviors,” said Elkins. Staff also work with parents to create exposures outside of clinic time, for example a sleepover at a grandparent’s home for the child with separation anxiety. The weekly psychiatry visits are a great opportunity to review common areas where patients often struggle, including sleep, nutrition or exercise. MAMP psychiatrists collaborate with caregivers and patients to help improve these habits in support of their overall mental health and treatment goals.

The meetings are also an opportunity to learn more about families’ cultures and values. “We want to make sure that the tools we implement are in line with what’s important to them,” explained Sperling. The virtual format has made it much easier for parents to attend these sessions.

And convenience is not the only advantage of taking MAMP online, according to Elkins and Sperling. They are about to submit a research paper with data demonstrating that kids who have participated in MAMP’s telehealth-based treatment are doing just as well as those who previously were receiving only in-person care. “This is particularly exciting research because we’ve documented that kids have been coming in with more acute symptoms at intake, but have been improving just as much as those who received care in person,” said Elkins. “That has given us the confidence to be thoughtful about retaining certain remote features of the program that circumvent some traditional barriers to care and increase accessibility for many families in need of services.”

“We want mental health treatment to be a right, not a privilege, and we’re so grateful to the donors who have allowed us to take steps in that direction.”

Program Co-director Jaqueline Sperling, PhD
McLean’s Three New Trustees Bring a Wealth of Experience and Expertise

Cathy E. Minehan, former Board Chair of Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and former President of the Federal Reserve Bank, Valerie Mosley, CFA, founder of BrightUp and former partner at Wellington Management Company, and Chandra Ramanathan, PhD, MBA, executive-in-residence at Mass General Brigham (MGB) and former Global Head of Pharma R&D Open Innovation at Bayer, have joined McLean Hospital’s Board of Trustees.

“We are delighted to have Cathy, Valerie, and Chandra join as McLean Trustees. All three are eminent leaders and innovators in their respective fields — finance, business, global health, translational research and technology. Their guidance, support and oversight as board members will be enormously valuable to advancing McLean’s mission,” said Scott L. Rauch, MD, McLean’s president and psychiatrist in chief.

McLean Board Chair Carol Vallone added, “Cathy’s and Valerie’s experience in business best practices and corporate social responsibility, and Chandra’s expertise in translating scientific ideas into treatments and access for patients, are tremendous assets to our board and will benefit the entire McLean community. We are thrilled to have them joining us.”

Minehan is a director of Bright Horizons Family Solutions LLC, and a trustee of The MITRE Corporation and the Brookings Institution. She is an honorary trustee of MGH, after serving for more than 10 years as board chair and is co-chair of the Mass General Brigham Institutional Conflict Committee. She is also the outside board member of the American Board of Thoracic Surgeons, and serves on numerous other boards, as well as on the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and the Boston Women’s Workforce Council, which works to end the gender wage gap in Boston.

“I knew about the excellence of McLean from many sources, but it was not until I needed to find help for my husband who was quite ill with Alzheimer’s that I realized the magic of the place — its truly amazing care and caregivers,” said Minehan. “They helped me as well as him, and I will never forget their excellence and kindness. What better reason to join the McLean board than to help ensure that level of care remains both the standard and available to all?”

Minehan was the first woman to serve as president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. After retiring from her 39-year career with the Federal Reserve System, she served as dean of Simmons College’s School of Management. She is a graduate of the University of Rochester and a member of its Board of Trustees. She holds an MBA from New York University.

Valerie Mosley founded BrightUp, a financial wellness platform that democratizes the creation of personal and financial wealth, in 2020. Previously, she spent 20 years at Wellington Management Company, LLP, and retired as a partner and senior vice president portfolio manager and investment strategist. She serves on several corporate boards, as well as on the board of a social venture capital firm.

Mosley cited McLean’s strong performance in mental health treatment, education, and research, as well as the hospital’s commitment to pursuing a variety of leading-edge capabilities for broader societal good, in her decision to join the board.

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Scott L. Rauch, MD, McLean President and Psychiatrist in Chief
“McLean is a leading psychiatric hospital and as an investor, I’m eager to invest in quality assets that I know will add value,” Mosley said. “In addition, I’m passionate about positively impacting our society. McLean does a fantastic job serving individuals and families. I’m particularly excited about and interested in using technology to ensure more people have access to critically important mental health services.”

Mosley has been recognized as The International Person of the Year by The UK’s Power List, one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business, and one of the Top 75 African Americans on Wall Street by Black Enterprise Magazine. She earned a BA from Duke University and an MBA in finance from the Wharton School of Business.

In his position as executive-in-residence at MGB, Chandra Ramanathan works with investigators to identify and advance technologies toward commercialization. He also advises start-ups in the therapeutics and cell and gene therapy technology space.

He said he is excited to join the McLean board because of the great potential clinical innovation holds for addressing unmet mental health needs. “There is tremendous opportunity to couple the advances in our understanding of the complexity of the brain with digital tools, which can lead to transformative options in neuropsychiatry and patient care,” he said. Ramanathan has led several initiatives across pharma, biotech, start-ups, and academia from early-stage discovery programs to launching new products.

Prior to joining MGB, Ramanathan held various leadership positions at Bayer. Most recently, he was the Global Head of Pharma R&D Open Innovation, where he led Open Innovation Centers (OICs) around the world. The OICs focus on early access to breakthrough technologies, management of strategic alliances, and public-private partnerships.

Dr. Ramanathan is an adjunct assistant professor at the Tufts School of Medicine and is on the Board of Directors of MassBIO, the Massachusetts Biotech Council. He is also a member of the Innovation, Development & Entrepreneurial Advisory Board at Johns Hopkins University.

Ramanathan earned an MBA from Columbia Business School, a PhD in Genomics/Bioinformatics from the University of Georgia, an MS in Medicinal Chemistry from the Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University), and a BS in Pharmacy from Birla Institute of Technology and Science.

Ramanathan, Mosely and Minehan begin their roles as three long-time board members — W. Lloyd “Skip” Snyder, Rick Kelleher and Bob Pierce — stepped aside this year after serving the hospital for 12 years each, the maximum tenure allowed. Snyder, Kelleher and Pierce each will continue to stay involved as honorary trustees.

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Thrassos Calligas, MD, has been working at McLean for three decades. Even before he began his faculty tenure at the hospital, he completed both an adult psychiatry residency and child psychiatry residency at McLean in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. Throughout his career, Calligas has dedicated himself to working with children with complex psychiatric and psychosocial disorders. His current leadership role of associate medical director at the McLean-Franciscan Child and Adolescent Inpatient Program is a reflection of his compassion and expertise. He is also one of many sustaining donors to McLean and has been making monthly gifts to the hospital for years. He began this practice decades ago and says his giving is largely in gratitude for the education he received at McLean and in recognition of the excellent treatment patients receive at the hospital. “Monthly giving seems like an easy and organized way to support a hospital that gives so much back,” said Calligas. He also shared how moved he has been by the hospital’s tireless efforts to address the pandemic and resultant mental health crisis.

Supporting a Hospital That Gives So Much Back

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Join Dr. Calligas in making monthly unrestricted gifts to McLean. Contact Ben Ogilvy at bogilvy@partners.org for more information about becoming a McLean Sustainer.