

**FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF
BETSYHCOHEN@GMAIL.COM**

From the St. Louis Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/print-edition/2016/06/03/st-louis-character-lena-pearlman.html>

St. Louis Character: Lena Pearlman

Lena Pearlman helps children, adults cope with stress, tragedy

🔑 **SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:** Jun 3, 2016, 5:00am CDT

When Lena Ilyashov Pearlman turned 6, she was given a gift that became a vivid and transformative memory. Her family living in Minsk, Russia, immigrated to the U.S. and settled in St. Louis in 1979. Lena's father, Semyon Ilyashov, was a watchmaker, and her mother, Alina, a baker. They weren't allowed to practice their Judaism, tried to leave, were denied, lost their jobs, and were finally granted permission to emigrate.

When they landed here, Lena's eyes were locked on the people affiliated with Jewish Federation agencies who helped them acclimate to a new home and gave them food, clothing and

housing. She didn't know who the people were but felt safe when they were around. Lena traces the route to her vocation today as a clinical social worker and psychotherapist to those early days. When she was 8 years old, Lena, now 42, recalls telling her parents, "I want to help people some day like the people who helped us."

Lena's parents went on to start Timekeepers, and her two younger sisters work in the business. Lena opted out. She's the family risk taker. Rock climbing, one of her passions outside of work, can be a metaphor for her life and career. She had to overcome hurdles to get where she is today — learned English, taught it to her parents, and became the only one in her family to go to college and get advanced degrees.

After graduating from Parkway North, she attended Saint Louis University on a full scholarship where she received a degree in social work in 1995. She did three internships: MERS Goodwill in the head trauma program, Alexian Brothers Hospital in a drug treatment outpatient program, and the JCC Adult Day Care Center. In 1997, she got a master's at SLU in social work and went to work for various hospitals with her last stint at Children's Hospital as a child protection social worker. This work piqued her interest in forensic social work, a combination of law and social work, and she earned online certification from Arizona State University in legal studies. Four years ago, she worked at Metropolitan St. Louis Psychiatric Center. After two-and-a-half years there, she opened a private practice, Lena Pearlman LCSW, which grew from 15 patients a week to more than 60 within one year.



DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ

Lena Pearlman (bottom right) and her husband Bryan Pearlman (right) operate her private psychology practice, Lena Pearlman LCSW. The couple has 18-year-old twins, Samantha and Matthew.

Laura Tishey, a clinical psychologist, met Lena when they were on the same treatment team at Metropolitan Psychiatric Center. "I found her to be kind, engaging, bright and funny. We worked together daily doing competency restoration training and therapy with clients so they could stand trial. Lena always worked above and beyond for her clients and made sure she followed through with everything she promised she'd do. Just the way she interacted with clients, her compassion, kindness and therapeutic approach, made her one of the best social workers I've ever worked with."

This past February, Lena expanded her practice, brought on five new social workers/therapists and calls that part of her practice, Dr. Lena Pearlman & Associates. Plans are in the works to hire three more therapists. Currently, Lena's personal caseload is 200-plus patients a month. With the hope of treating the whole person, last year she earned an online Ph.D. in holistic natural health from the College of Natural Health.

Attorney Chantal Methot with KAZANAS LC met Lena in 2009, when the two worked together at another small law firm. "Lena was a paralegal taking a year off from social work that had become too emotionally intense right after working at Children's Hospital. Also, she had just received her legal studies certification and wanted to see first-hand how the system worked. She is very competent, organized and on top of things. I found Lena to have high integrity and high standards for herself and her family. She adores her husband and kids and puts them first."

Lena and her husband, Bryan, who is her business manager, live in Lake St. Louis. They are the parents of twins, Samantha and Matthew, 18.

Where you can find Lena Pearlman

Swimming at the Y in Creve Coeur

Walking with son Matthew

Shopping with Samantha

Eating at Annie Gunn's, The Cheesecake Factory, Olivette Diner, First Watch, Crushed Red
stlmentalhealth.com

What have been some of the biggest challenges in your career? The limitations. Before I opened my practice, I didn't get to see the whole gamut of healing — the start, middle and end. I wanted to have the time to see it from start to finish.

What have been some of the most difficult and defining moments?

Patients who committed suicide or didn't want help. One of my first traumatic experiences happened with a patient in a drug treatment program. One day I saw her and the next day I found out she committed suicide by overdosing. I blamed myself. Did I do or say something wrong? It's those incidents in a career that make you question your career choice.

How do you connect with a patient? I build rapport by being honest. I let patients know they have a voice. I'm here to listen and help guide but they drive and we go as fast or as slow as they want to go.

Do you do phone therapy or telepsychology? I won't treat over the phone unless it's an emergency. I do telepsychology with a patient I had been seeing who moved and wanted to continue to see me. Bryan set it up and it follows all the HIPPA rules.

Do you make a nice living doing this? My husband likes to say: "You make a living by making a difference." We'll never be rich, but I didn't get into social work for that.

To what do you attribute your growth in clients? There is a shortage of good therapists out there and people are more willing to seek help.

What are the biggest issues you're seeing today? Depression and anxiety.

What's behind some of the depression and anxiety in kids and adults?

It can be abuse, alcohol or substance issues, school related pressures and issues, trauma, PTSD.

What's the typical scenario with kids? "I don't know what I want to be when I grow up. I don't know what grades I'll get in high school. What if I don't get into the school I want to get into, or if I do, what if I don't do well? I don't know what I'm going to do in college. What is my major going to be?"

How do you talk to young people who are used to communicating by text and not in person? They can talk face to face. The first thing I'll ask them is, "What's going on?" This is a broad and open question. It implies, "Talk to me because if you can't, I don't know what's wrong and can't help you help yourself."

Ever treat someone who won't talk? Yes. They look at me and I look at them. I have no problem with silence. They first need to feel comfortable in this environment. If they come here, no one forced them. I won't treat a patient who was forced to come.

What's typically bothering adults? "I don't like my job. I don't know what else I want to do." I'll say, "Okay, let's talk about that. Why don't you like your job? Is it really your job or something else? Let's figure out the root."

What's your success rate with couples? About 50 percent. They have to want the help, do the homework and both must be 100 percent on board. Sometimes they'll come just to make the other person happy or to tell the attorneys they came. If the reason isn't because they want to stay with the other person, the therapy isn't going to work.

When do you know it's time to discharge a patient? When they can talk about what bothers them, recognize that it's still painful and also accept they are going to get through it. Yesterday I discharged a preteen I had been seeing for the last year and lauded her for where she is today.

How do you decompress? I rock climb and swim. I go to movies. We binge watch TV on Sunday nights as a family.

Talk about the most difficult times in your life? I had an ectopic pregnancy, almost died and couldn't get pregnant for two years after. I had IVF and got pregnant with twins. It was a hard road and they were nine week early and spent six weeks in an incubator.

Something no one knows? I can throw a football like any dude; I have a good arm. I am freakishly strong.