

THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

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We were approaching the year of bar and bat mitzvah. Every child in the class would be celebrating his or her Jewish coming-of-age ceremony over the next few months. We the parents met to discuss how we should celebrate this milestone with a class gift for each child.

We agreed it should be something tied to Jewish tradition. Ideally it would be practical and usable, and not too expensive, but also be beautiful and unique. It should be something that would remind the kids of this transformative moment in their lives, and of their friends and families who celebrated them as they took their place in the community. It should be something they might enjoy not only as tweens, but also long after the b'nai mitzvah year was over.

We settled on a clever little candle holder. When unfolded in one direction it became a Shabbat candle holder, perfect for two Shabbat candles; when flipped over it became a Hanukkah menorah with places for all nine candles.

The sides of the holder were a colorful depiction of the Jerusalem skyline. Best of all, it had room for a plaque. We inscribed it with these simple words:

From your JCDS Friends
Class of 2009

In our family that little candle holder is a fixture. We used it to celebrate Hanukkah on a trip to London in 2008. This past winter, it traveled with us across Vietnam and Cambodia during all eight nights of the holiday.

The best part about that little traveling candle holder is that each time we use it, I am reminded of the people who were dear to us in those years.

As parents, we were a team, taking care of one another's kids, driving carpools, cheering at sports competitions, and hosting movie nights and sleepovers. We celebrated each child's bar or bat mitzvah ceremony together, witnessing the special moment when each of our children accepted the responsibilities of Jewish adulthood. I think of my own daughter's ceremony and how she powered through it with a fever of 102° with her friends by her side. Each bar and bat mitzvah was unique, as was each of our children.

That 8th grade class of 2009 also experienced deep sadness together. Tragically, two of the parents from that class died before their children reached middle school. I think of how we banded together to support one another through the initial days of mourning and the difficult days thereafter. **Looking back, I realize just how much we leaned on each other as we struggled to figure out the right words of comfort and ways to help.**

Our children learned early on that unthinkable things do happen. They learned how to be there for their friends during funerals and shiva and for an entire year of reciting *Kaddish* (the Jewish prayer said when mourning). By the time their bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies came around, all of those children knew firsthand of the support that a community brings.

The children of that 8th grade class are now graduating from college, completing army service, entering the work force, and starting their adult lives. I hope that when they think back on their b'nai mitzvah and those middle school days they remember the good people who were there for them. I hope they see the many gifts they received that were way more precious than their beautiful little candle holders.