

My Bat Mitzvah Went to the Dogs

By: Elana Fink

Jackson, a sweet, lovable Benji-type terrier mix, has been part of my family longer than I have! He has influenced my life and my enormous love of dogs. So when we began to prepare for my Bat Mitzvah, I wanted it to involve dogs somehow - and did it ever!

Deciding on a *chesed* project was 'doggone' easy after I read a sad but inspiring article in the Cleveland Jewish News about a bomb-sniffing dog who died in the line of duty. The dog was part of **Pups for Peace**, and as soon as I could, I checked out the website, www.pupsforpeace.org, given at the end of the article. "**Pups for Peace** is a humanitarian, non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to reducing death and injury through the use of explosive-detection dogs to counter terrorism in Israel," I learned. Basically, **Pups for Peace** acquires and trains capable dogs to sniff out bombs in everyday situations in order to save innocent lives. The organization was just an idea in the spring of 2002, and approximately three years later, over 100 dogs and their handlers have been trained, mostly used in public transportation security. And there is a great demand for more detection dogs and handlers. **Pups for Peace** needs money to continue and expand its work. I knew what I had to do.

This was the perfect Bat Mitzvah *chesed* project for me, combining dogs AND Israel, but how could I raise money? I'd use dogs! Soon I developed a flyer telling about myself, my upcoming Bat Mitzvah, my cause, and my prices for dog-walking, letting out your dog, and cleaning up your yard. With my parents' permission, I passed out the flyers around my neighborhood and called families I knew with dogs, and I got a good number of clients. Some dogs I do are huge and require lots of energy, and others are kind of old. Max is one of my best clients - his owners even made me a key to their house because they often stay downtown after work and call me to go let him out and play with him. Cleaning up yards isn't always so fun, but it's something I do knowing it helps **Pups for Peace**.

As an extra project to help local animals, my mom arranged for my 7th grade class to volunteer at a nearby humane society one morning. We thought we'd just play with the puppies and kitties, but instead we learned

how hard it is to run this kind of non-profit organization and what the daily chores of the place are. We scrubbed food bowls, washed toys, laundered towels and blankets, took out the trash, sorted pet food samples, etc. It was a real lesson in volunteering and I was able to tell my classmates all about **Pups for Peace** in Israel and the volunteers there.

At my Bat Mitzvah, the centerpieces were realistic resin dog-head banks and the giveaways for the kids were little plush dog key chains. My speech topic was "Animals in the Torah and what we learn from them" and then I talked about my class' trip to the humane society and **Pups for Peace** and what I had been doing to raise money. I urged people to give *tzedakah*, to donate to this worthy cause as my present.

My support of **Pups for Peace** clearly demonstrates the value of *tikkun olam* - fixing the world or making it a better place. A line in one of the pamphlets says, "Supporters of the organization do not believe **Pups for Peace** will stop terrorism - only that it will save innocent lives." That reminded me of a popular Hebrew song we sing at my school and at summer camp: *Lo alecha hamlacha leegmor, v'lo atah ven choreen l'heebatel meemena...* "Even though we are not responsible for completing a job, that doesn't mean we are free to disregard it." We have to at least make an effort, and that's why I decided to do what I can to help **Pups for Peace**.

I've already sent in one large donation from earned money and my own, and I've received several certificates of donations made in my honor. I'm continuing to service my clients and collect more money so that one day, I can contribute the amount needed to be able to name a **Pups for Peace** dog. The name I'll choose? "J.J." - for "Jackson Junior."