

Mitzvot from the heart

our community's bar and bat mitzvah projects

Natalie Hillman
Central Reform
Congregation

Natalie knew her spot at Camp Kamaji was secure for the summer and she wanted to make sure other girls would have the opportunity to go to camp as well.

So, in lieu of *bat mitzvah* gifts, she requested monetary donations from her guests and donated them to the Camp for All Kids Foundation. Natalie received over \$5,300.

Started in 1995 by the current owners of Camp Kamaji, Mike and Kathy Jay, Camp for All Kids has sought to diversify the camp experience and make it accessible to low-income children.

Each summer, more than 70 children are provided full "camperships" to private independent residential summer camps where all campers gain skills and independence, and make friends with people they might never have known. As Kathy Jay said, "We cannot begin to put into words the impact that the Camp for All Kids' scholarship campers have had on Camp Kamaji's campers.

We believe it is in settings such as camp where children, who will make our society a better place, learn their life lessons ... where acceptance begins ... where the tapestry of belief gets woven ... where our children see similarities rather than differences. And when differences are noticed, they are a cause for celebration and growth — rather than fear and mistrust — for everyone! Camp for All Kids ensures that these lessons are learned in a diverse environment."

Daughter of Jennifer and Tom Hillman, Natalie was OK with not receiving gifts for her *bat mitzvah* because the money she received was going to a good cause. "If I really wanted to go to camp and couldn't, I'd be upset, so I wanted to be able to give someone else the opportunity to go," she said.

"A huge 'Thank You' to Natalie Hillman for her *bat mitzvah* contribution to the Camp For All Kids Foundation. What a wonderful gesture! Her kindness will give other children the opportunity to attend camp for four weeks this summer," said Mike Jay.

It has been the Hillman family philosophy to give back to their community. So, Natalie tagged along with her older brothers for the past five years doing different service projects. One in particular was at Food Outreach, serving meals on Mondays. Natalie loved it so much that she will continue doing it throughout her summer vacation. "It is lots of fun and everyone there is so nice and appreciative," she said.

Food Outreach is the only St. Louis area organization whose mission is to provide nutritional support and enhance the quality of life of men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS or cancer.

Natalie also participated in Rabbi Randy's 7th grade project, "Putting the Mitzvah in B'nai Mitzvah." The kids participated in different service projects from serving meals at the Ronald McDonald House and Trinity Episcopal Church, to planting trees in Forest Park. They also volunteered at PetSmart, Parkside Nursing Home and Beyond Housing.

A student at Crossroads College



AT CRC Natalie Hillman holds the Torah on the bimah at Central Reform Congregation, along with Rabbi Randy Fleisher and Rabbi Susan Talve. Photo: Faller Photography Group

Preparatory, Natalie is very gifted, creative and artistic. So it was only natural that her *bat mitzvah* prayer book be reflective of that. After reading *Hannah's Suitcase*, Natalie wanted to honor all the children

that were lost in the Holocaust. Her custom prayer book included artwork, reading and poems by kids from Terazin, a concentration camp. By doing this, Natalie taught her guests not only about her Torah

portion but also about a piece of the Holocaust.

To make a donation in Natalie's honor and learn more about Camp for All Kids Foundation, please visit their Web site at www.campforallkids.org.

Highlight your child's mitzvah project

If you would like to feature your child's *mitzvah* project, please contact Elise Krug at the *Jewish Light* by calling 314-743-3671 or by email at: ekrug@thejewishlight.com.



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