

Los Angeles Jewish Home Seniors Reach Goal to Become Bat Mitzvahs A Milestone for the Ages

Recently three women celebrated their adult bat mitzvahs at the Los Angeles Jewish Home, culminating a period of intensive preparation and personal exploration.

One is never too old to make dreams happen, including the dreams of three women living together at the Los Angeles Jewish Home. Known as a destination for Los Angeles-area seniors, LAJH has an environment offering warmth, caring, compassion and safety. For many seniors including Edith Frankie, Linda Frankes and Mildred Moccio, it is also a point of embarkation to set out on exciting journeys of growth, self-discovery and making dreams come true. Recently all three women celebrated their adult bat mitzvahs at the home, culminating a period of intensive preparation and personal exploration.

For these three seniors, who live in one of the home's skilled nursing facilities, life is full of meaning, learning and celebrating. For the first time in their long lives, they were able to wrap themselves in a tallit, recite the blessings and perform customary rituals. By engaging in the deeply spiritual Jewish practice of learning Torah, they moved closer to G-d and Judaism in a most profound way. Linking the past of ancient Jewish text with their peers and how it applies to life today, it brought Torah alive for them and made it relevant to daily life at the Jewish Home.

Edith, Linda, and Mildred's admirers extend well beyond their immediate families. "It was a privilege to attend the b'not mitzvah of these very special Jewish Home residents," says Andrew Berman, chair of the home's board of directors. "I'm thrilled they were able to experience the joy and fulfillment of this monumental event at this stage of their extraordinary lives."

Working together with the residents to make this mitzvah possible was Rabbi Karen Bender, the Jewish Home's Skirball Director of Spiritual Life; Ilana Springer, CEO/Administrator for the Joyce Eisenberg-Keefer Medical Center; and James Mackay, administrator for the Mark Taper Skilled Nursing Building.

It was Edith, recalls Rabbi Bender, who provided the initial inspiration for the bat mitzvah event. "Edith is a Holocaust survivor, and she had sponsored an honorary bat mitzvah for her six-year-old sister, who never made it out of the camps," Rabbi Bender says. "One day, I suggested she consider having her own bat mitzvah, and she quickly embraced the idea."

From there, Edith picks up the narrative. "I was worried at first because I don't read Hebrew, but Rabbi Bender was very encouraging about how I could learn," she says. "I thought, 'What a terrific way to get revenge on Hitler: to deepen my understanding of Jewish history and culture!'"

Once Edith was on board, Rabbi Bender extended the offer to her Jewish Home congregants at large. Linda and Mildred stepped up immediately.

Overcoming a variety of physical challenges and health issues, these remarkable women worked hard to celebrate their B'not Mitzvah. Their joy and excitement in learning is palpable. The camaraderie that has developed is as strong as it is unexpected and an inspiration to others around them.

Rabbi Bender points out that, in addition to engaging in a life-affirming act for themselves, Edith, Linda, and Mildred have also helped blaze a trail for other seniors like them. "The moral of this story is that you can keep stretching and growing at any age," she says. "It's never too late to learn something new."

