

Bar/bat mitzvah tutoring in the home

Because of his family's after-school activities, Jordan didn't attend Hebrew school and although his family felt connected to the Jewish traditions and holidays, they weren't affiliated with a synagogue. The schedule made it impossible for Jordan's parents to drive him to Hebrew school twice a week, but they were looking forward to celebrating Jordan's bar mitzvah.

Melinda was on a dance team and could not miss a day of practice to study at Hebrew school.

Evan attended Hebrew school, but needed extra help reading the Hebrew and chanting the prayers, and with his Torah portion.

These situations have brought these families to Cantor Barbra Lieberstein's lifecycle business. Since officially starting her business a year ago, "Cantor Barbra," as she is called by her clients, has received many calls from families desiring guidance in the lifecycle support and traditional rituals. Whether the family desiring Cantor Barbra's assistance is synagogue-unaffiliated or affiliated, the additional guidance enriches a meaningful religious event.

Cantor Barbra served Reform and Reconstructionist congregations in New Jersey and Long Island. After being a pulpit cantor for 12 years, she transitioned to the freelance world to spend more time with her family — three children, two of which are twins. Her first foray into the clergy consultant field was tutoring a

friend's child in becoming a bat mitzvah. The following year the friend asked Cantor Barbra to officiate at her first pupil's two sisters' b'nai mitzvah. That's when she realized there was such a need for this type of service.

There are families who are unaffiliated, and want to give their child the opportunity to enter the "Jewish rite of passage." There are also students who belong to synagogues, but need extra guidance to supplement their 15- to 20-minute sessions at the synagogue.

Cantor Barbra will tutor students in the convenience of their homes in Bergen and Rockland counties. She has recently received requests outside the area to conduct lessons by webcam. Webcam has become popular with long-distance college learning, voice lessons, and now bar/bat mitzvah lessons.

Cantor Barbra accommodates each family by tailoring the bar/bat mitzvah service according to the student's strengths and the family's preference. She normally uses the Reform siddur for Shabbat morning or Havdalah services. However, one family rented out the sanctuary of a Reconstructionist synagogue for a Havdalah service using the Reconstructionist liturgy. Another family, who came from a more traditional background, requested a Conservative Havdalah service. There is also a trend of intimate ceremonies in family living rooms.

Just as in religious school, Cantor Barbra encour-

ages her students to complete a chesed project or perform community service. UJA Federation of Northern New Jersey has been helpful in suggesting mitzvah projects, but some of her students created their own. One of her bar mitzvah students was an avid basketball player. During spring break, he taught a group of second-graders to play basketball. One student worked with Asperger's children, and another visited a concentration camp in Poland with her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. Social action projects are adapted and accommodated to the student's interest and skill.

B'nai mitzvah parents have joyously witnessed growth in their children's Hebrew knowledge, prayers, and Torah study, and have observed low frustration levels in their children's preparation under Cantor Barbra's tutelage. Although it's difficult to leave the families after the bar/bat mitzvah, Cantor Barbra hopes that the foundation she has given to her students will encourage them to continue to study Judaism and the Torah.

Cantor Barbra received ordination from The Academy for Jewish Religion, a pluralistic seminary for rabbis and cantors in New York City. She is also certified through the American Conference of Cantors (Reform) and the Cantors Assembly (Conservative). She is a member of the Women's Cantors Network and has been singing with the New Jersey Cantors Concert Ensemble since 1995. For the past four years, she has been conducting a High Holiday choir. In addition, she officiates at baby namings, funerals, unveilings, and weddings.

To reach Cantor Barbra, visit her website, www.cantorbarbra.com, or call (201) 788-6653.



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