

From Generation to Generation
By Sue Pickens Owens

My Jewish Story

Growing up a Reform Jew in West Texas, girls didn't have a bat mitzvah. So neither I, nor any of my three sisters, had a bat mitzvah. So I, as the baby of the family, and my second to the oldest sister, decided to have our own bat mitzvah.

Oh, did I say my sister is twelve years older than me and left our house when I was 6? She moved back into my life when I was 58, when she and her husband (she was 70 at that point) moved to the town I lived in. We both joined the same synagogue, Temple Emanuel.

When I was 65 and she was 77, our synagogue decided to offer an adult b'nai mitzvah class. So we decided it would be fun and wonderful to do this together. Our journey began. We attended prayer classes, Hebrew lessons, D'var Torah classes, trope classes, practiced our Torah portion, and did community service. For 18 months we shared this wonderful journey together, holding hands as we crossed the red sea, (an experiential part of our prayer class) and built a beautiful bond.

During this time of study, our synagogue finished a multimillion dollar construction project creating a brand new chapel: a chapel of wood, with vaulted glass windows overlooking a sea of live oak and red maple trees and with an Ark whose doors were constructed from recycled Mylar balloons the colors of the rainbow. This beautiful setting was where my sister and I were to complete our b'nai mitzvah.

When we sat down with the Rabbi who would lead us through our ceremony, he asked us who we would like in the service. Who do we want to dress and undress the Torah? Who do we want to carry the Torah and be part of the Hakafa (marching the Torah through the congregation)? Who do we want to say the blessings before and after the Torah readings? Who do we want to read the Haftorah?

With all these positions filled with spouses, brothers, sisters, and friends, I had one last question for the Rabbi. We had all these children and grandchildren who were not part of the service. They didn't fit any of the standard roles. How could we include them? The Rabbi thought for a few minutes and said, "I have an idea. Don't worry about it, but I will work on it."

We continued with our work and finally our big day came in May of 2017. We had the Holiness Code as our Torah portion. "I am holy so you shall be holy." And with that, our b'nai mitzvah began.

After the Torah Portions were read, and after the D'var Torah's were given, with the Torah still out, the Rabbi said, "This is going to be a surprise for Sue and Evelyn: I want all Sue and Evelyn's children and grandchildren to come onto the bema and

stand in order from youngest to oldest with Sue and Evelyn on the end near the oldest." And in age order from 4 to 57, stood twelve children and grandchildren. And the Rabbi said, "It is our Tradition when a child comes to Torah to pass the Torah down from one generation to another, but here we have adults becoming b'nai mitzvah, so we will pass the Torah up from youngest to the b'nai mitzvah."

My heart was about to burst as we passed the Torah to each grandchild and child and finally to our hands. We passed the Torah UP bound together by love, tradition, and family.