

Brooklyn Bubbies Become Bat Mitzvahs



Bat mitzvahs are not only for youngsters. On August 19, 2010, five grandmothers, ranging in age from 83 to 94, became bat mitzvahs in a ceremony at Menorah Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing Care.

The five Menorah residents—Lillian Bellows, 83; Rose Blume, 91; Marion Lechitz, 94; Paula Rubenstein, 85; and Marion Salamon, 89—grew up at a time when girls rarely had bat mitzvah ceremonies, which signal reaching the age of responsibility.

“I heard about women holding bat mitzvah celebrations later in life,” said Esther Blech, a Recreation Leader at Menorah. “I realized that is something we could do with our residents.”

Blech reached out to Menorah residents with the idea, getting enthusiastic responses from the five women. “I am so excited to be bat mitzvahed,” said Lechitz. “I’m 94. How much longer could I wait?”

In the weeks leading up to the event, each participant worked closely with Blech to select and rehearse a Hebrew-language song or prayer to perform at the ceremony. “I taught Hebrew school for years,” said Bellows. “It feels good to be a student again.”

Preparing for her bat mitzvah also brought back memories of Blume’s student days. “I went to Hebrew school and loved it,” she said. “This has let me refresh some of the things I studied years ago.”

Salamon also called on her background and training to sing “Avinu Malkeinu.” “I used to be a professional singer,” she explained before the ceremony, “so I shouldn’t be nervous.”

None of the women had reason to fear. The ceremony came together without a hitch and their performances were lovingly received by the audience, which included more than 60 family members.

“This has been great,” said Jeff Salamon, who was there to support his mother. “Menorah does so much for the people who live here.”

The highest praise of the day, however, was reserved for the five women. Designated family members were asked to come forward and share observations about their mothers. In so doing, the adult children uncovered a recurring theme. Each woman had worked hard to uphold Jewish tradition and placed a high value on family.

“The presence of families here today reminds us that tradition is important in Jewish culture,” said Rabbi Samuel Fischler, Director of Pastoral Care at Menorah.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the bat mitvahs and their families enjoyed a salmon dinner with a celebratory cake. Rubenstein beamed at and shook hands with well-wishers, laughing often. “I’ve always been a party gal,” she said.

The celebration continues. The event was covered in a photo and article in the New York Daily News on August 20 and the women were interviewed on NBC’s local news on August 26, prompting letters and cards of congratulations from people throughout the Greater New York City area.