

I Am Proud Of My Kids

I am proud of my kids. I am proud of them in many ways, but I'd like to focus on one aspect that's relevant today.

This B'Nai Mitzvah is very special for us. None of us, the parents, had one. Neither had our parents.

Back in the Old Country, we have always identified ourselves as Jews, and the Soviet establishment never failed to remind us of that. But we never had a chance, and never developed any interest to practicing even the most liberal form of Judaism. We are so-called "Jews by culture and origin" but not by religion.

In addition to that, when we came to America we suddenly became "the Russians", and not Jews, even though nobody in their clear mind would call us Russians back in Russia. If nothing else, this transformation could have potentially eliminated any hope for becoming Jews again, let alone bringing up our children as proper Jews. And yet...

What we have here today is totally the kids' initiative. Somehow, something had triggered this renewed, totally un-imposed interest in Jewish heritage, this need for belonging that we all often talk about.

Martin's road to Bar Mitzvah was totally independent and on the surface not necessarily a straight one. In spite of few years of Jewish school, the religious concepts didn't sink in too deep while having to compete with military jets, super cars, progressive rock, cats, and adventure books. As it turns out, Martin's devotion to his Jewish identity, and specifically interest in Israel, was his well hidden secret. For him, having a Bar Mitzvah was never a question. When the time came, he just presented it to us as a fact, and from that moment on he was the major driving force and inspiration behind it. Recently when charged with a year course paper at school, Martin decided to actually do something very useful and relevant. He invested that time into studying, analyzing, and presenting in 42 paragraphs or more the history of the State of Israel. The result of that project is available here for you to take home and read.

Nicki's road was longer than Martin's. Time wise and distance wise. First there was SOTA – SF School of the Arts. Nicki found SOTA and insisted on it. Not exactly our neighborhood school, or even remotely close to what could be our choice of a high school for Nicki. But what it had was a group of kids who knew exactly why they were there, and who wouldn't be anywhere else. Then there was a trip to Russia for a month of submerging into the culture (or lack of thereof) and feeling for the first time ever that we are special, and no matter whether we are labeled Americans or Russians, you are really Jewish. In college, joining the Jewish sorority (yes, there is such a thing) and working for the Hillel organization further shaped Nicki's Jewish identity. And finally, a year in Sweden, frozen and in a dark 9 months out of 11, Nicki managed to not only survive but make new friends from all over the world, visit almost every European country except Albania, and built that spirit of independence that we all can't stop enjoying even now.

So, this is why I am so proud of my kids. In a family like ours, without much of "formal" guidance, it would have been much easier to focus on many other important things in their lives instead. And yet, something deep inside both of them told them that they wouldn't feel complete, wouldn't have this sweet sense of accomplishment, and be a full-pledged member of the most amazing tribe on Earth if they didn't do it. They've earned it today. We are very proud of them.