

Meira Weiss:

A Thank-You from the Heart

BY BETH PANITZ



Meira with her father, Ari

“Come down to the playroom, girls,” called Meira’s father. “I want to talk to you.” Nine-year-old Meira Weiss felt her stomach tighten as she and her three younger sisters headed downstairs along with their mother. During the past year, Meira’s life had

A local Jewish organization proved a lifesaver when Meira’s father was diagnosed with cancer. How could she ever thank them?

become one huge Extreme Makeover. Her family had moved from Margate, New Jersey, to Baltimore, leaving behind all her friends. Somehow she had made it through the first months of a new

school, in a new home, with a new baby sister.

Just when her life was beginning to feel normal, her father was informing her that he had a serious illness—lymphoma, a type of cancer. Her dad reassured her that he was going to get well, and Meira even giggled when he said his “hair would disappear” from chemotherapy. Still, Meira felt uneasy about the ramifications of her father’s disease.

Her anxiety increased when her parents began running around to doctors’ appointments, with her father going to the hospital every few weeks for the intense cancer treatment. “It was close to impossible to deal with everything,” says Meira. But help was on the way. The Jewish Caring Network (JCN),

a Baltimore organization dedicated to helping families cope with serious illness, heard about the Weisses’ situation.

Knowing that the family was often too busy to cook or clean, JCN provided money for restaurants, a six-month supply of paper goods to allow for quick cleanup when the family ate at home, and a cleaning service. JCN sent birthday gifts to Meira and her sisters, treated them to *Disney on Ice*, and delivered overflowing gift baskets for each holiday.

“We would be really stressed and then, at just the right moment, someone would arrive at our door with a gift,” says Meira. “It would sidetrack us and take a weight off. It was comforting that other people cared so much.”

After six grueling months, the Weiss family received good news: Meira’s father was better. Searching for a way to thank the organization that helped her family through its trying ordeal, Meira decided to raise money for JCN as a bat mitzvah project. JCN never asked for or expected anything in return, but Meira thought it only right to “pay forward” the favor. “I wanted to give back to them so that they could help other families,” she says.

Meira tapped into her passion for reading, and asked family and friends to donate funds for each page, chapter, or book she read from January 20, 2007, through her bat mitzvah on May 12. Through a flurry of e-mails, word spread about her project. In less than four months, Meira read 26 books, 500 chapters, and 7,000 pages, raising more than \$2,000.

Meira believes her project brings *kavod*, or honor, to a well-deserving organization. “I helped raise awareness about the JCN’s amazing work,” says Meira, “and now more people are giving to the organization. I feel great about that.”

Meet Meira

Age: 12

School: Yeshivat Rambam in Baltimore

Favorite Book: *Artemis Fowl* series by Eoin Colfer

Favorite Jewish Book: *Kids Speak* series by Chaim Walder

Favorite Quote: “‘Attitude is everything,’ that’s what my father kept saying when he was sick.”

Favorite Prayers: Psalm 20, which is said when praying for someone’s recovery, and the paragraph of the *amidah* in which we ask for a *refuah sheleimah*, a complete recovery.

Favorite Holidays: “Purim because we get to dress up and give *mishloah manot*, and Hanukkah because of the *menorah*, dreidels, and presents.”

Just for Fun: Reading, writing, drawing, kickball, dodge ball, basketball



meet Meira

