

Shui Maizlech:

Kind to the Core

BY BETH PANITZ

It was a request that might make many teens squeamish, but Shui Maizlech, 13, didn't think twice about saying yes. His mom, Mimi Maizlech, works at a funeral home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and to satisfy Jewish tradition, she needed a *shomer*—someone who prays for the soul of the deceased from the moment of death until burial.

“Why shouldn't I serve as a *shomer* if no one else can?” Shui asked himself. “I would be helping my mom, the funeral home, and the *meit* (the deceased) and his family.” Once Shui agreed, his mom explained a *shomer's* responsibilities: At all times, you must stay in the room with the closed casket or remain close by, she told him. But more importantly, a *shomer* must treat the deceased respectfully. “That means no Game Boy, no cell phone, no iPod.” Instead of entertaining yourself, she explained, you will recite *Tehillim* (Psalms), which comfort the *neshamah* (soul) of the departed. “This is your opportunity to perform an act of pure kindness, a *hesed shel emet*, the greatest of all *mitzvot* because it is carried out without expecting anything in return.”

In the three years since he first helped his mom, Shui has served as a *shomer* at least a dozen times.

The truest acts of kindness can never be repaid.

Meet Shui

Age: 16

School: Hillel Academy of Pittsburgh

Favorite Class: Chemistry

Just for Fun: Plays basketball and baseball; loves to cook (he works at a pizzeria); likes hanging out with his friends

Favorite Prayers: The *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayers because the tunes are uplifting and fun

Career Aspirations: Owning a restaurant or working as a caterer

Favorite Holiday: Sukkot because “I like the whole atmosphere of being outside in the *sukkah*.”



He usually sits for a couple of hours in the evening or early morning before school, though once he worked all night. His most difficult and emotional experience occurred this year when he served as a *shomer* for a young friend who passed away from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The whole community gathered in the young man's honor, with friends working shifts around the clock as *shomrim* (plural of *shomer*). “It was definitely a downer,” says Shui, “but I felt gratified knowing that I could somehow help.”

Whether he serves as a *shomer* for a friend or for someone he never met, Shui knows that the kindness he extends to the deceased is important, even though they can never thank him. “It feels good doing this *mitzvah*,” says Shui. “I do it because it needs to get done, not to get repaid.”

Shui recites psalms for the departed.



how to comfort mourners

