

Reflections on My Child's Year at JPS

By Olga Klibanov

It's hard to believe that in only a few months Leah will be graduating from preschool. As I reflect on her last three years at the Jewish Preschool on Sardis, I am amazed at how much she's grown.

From the first time we walked into JPS for a morning of Mommy and Me, we knew this was the right place for Leah. She was a 14-month-old toddler at the time, shy and full of stranger anxiety. Yet, from the moment we walked into the Mommy and Me classroom, she toddled towards the fun toys, participated in circle time, and danced with the plush Torah. To me, that day, and every day thereafter, JPS felt like home.

When it was time to enroll Leah in a preschool, I scheduled a tour of the school with Dedee Goldsmith, the Director. I don't remember much of what was explained to me that day. One memory, however, stands out. Upon entering the four-year-old classroom, Dedee noticed a child building a structure out of blocks, stating that it was similar to where

his father works. Immediately, Dedee urged the teachers to take a photo of that moment and email it to the boy's parents. That individualized approach to the children is what impressed me the most that day. And it wasn't for "show." There were several times in the last few years that Leah's separa-

tion anxiety resulted in tears at drop off. On those few occasions, Dedee always sensed my anxiety, as I left my child behind. But whereas I would be close to tears for the entire drive to work, Leah's tears never lasted more than a moment. And as soon as I got to work, I'd open an email

from Dedee with a picture of Leah's smiling face, engaged in something fun at school.

When Leah turned 18 months, she officially started at JPS, in the toddler classroom, with Ms. Ellen and Ms. Galia. Right away, big changes could be seen in my little girl. She seemed to become more mature, verbal, and independent every single day.

As she progressed through the 2s with Ms. Jen and Ms. Jennifer, the teachers worked tirelessly with her to transform her into a kind, gentle, and more socially-aware toddler.

The year of the 3s with Ms. Wanda and Ms. Kate instilled a great amount of knowledge in Leah, and she would always tell me something new that she learned at school each day. From making the dinosaur diorama, to learning the Pledge of Allegiance,



Olga and Leah



Learning to write.

Leah soaked up every ounce of information being taught to her at school. Her confidence level grew significantly that year, but there was still some work to be done.

This last year of 4s preschool with Ms. Beverly and Ms. Elizabeth has been an amazing time of growth and development for Leah, to prepare her for Kindergarten and what lies ahead. Recognizing confidence as an area for improvement, Leah's teachers have worked with her each day to make her more comfortable speaking in front of a group and making her opinions heard, if she has something on her mind. At home, she shows off her letter- and number-writing skills, teaches me the names of the 50 U.S. states, and tells amusing stories about her friends at school.

The story of the JPS experience wouldn't be complete without discussing the incredible experience that the children get in their Judaica classes with Morah Jayme. Not only do the children learn about the different Jewish holidays, but a true sense of Jewish pride and identity is instilled in them. Leah's excitement about Judaism and the happiness she feels when she talks about Shabbat and the holidays is infectious. She randomly starts singing Jewish songs in public, and teaches store clerks how to count to 10 in Hebrew. Her love for Judaism has resulted in us making our own new traditions at home, from lighting Shabbat candles on Friday nights, to making challah together, to celebrating the Jewish holidays in our own special ways.

I'm filled with excitement and pride of how far Leah has come. The little toddler that used to cling tightly to my hand at every step is now slowly but surely letting go, in preparation of new and exciting adventures that lie ahead. I'm so thankful and grateful to the teachers and staff at JPS for providing the most nurturing, loving, and happy environment for my child and setting her up for nothing but success in her future endeavors. ☆

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