



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Community Service”

by Isaac Mann

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Since my community service project is all about my dog, I want to introduce her to you. (Hold up picture) Her official name is Mazuza but we all call her Zooza for short.

It was satisfying to complete this chapter of my Bar mitzvah, although this was a hard part. My brother Jake, also had a hard time finding something for him to really care about doing. Isabelle had told us that someone in the congregation had their dog trained to be a therapy dog. We later learned that a therapy dog is permitted to go into hospitals and cheer people up. I liked the idea of taking Zooza, my dog, around to see people in hospitals. But, in the beginning, only half of me was into this job. We took Zooza to be trained in Park Slope, and it only took her one month to pass the program. Not only did she learn to behave in a hospital setting, but I also learned how to handle her better.

At first, I was anxious about going to Cobble Hill Nursing Home, and worried that I wouldn't really enjoy what I was doing. We met lots of Alzheimer patients and at times I had to repeat Zooza's name five times before they got it. Some of them had no reaction whatsoever. They stared into space blankly. Almost everyone was in wheelchairs; and many were unable to move on their own. It was hard to return to the nursing home. But soon I came to see that there were lots of people there who really loved seeing Zooza and looked forward to our visits. Elaine, an activities coordinator in the nursing home who comes from Barbados, grew up with tons of animals as pets including monkeys and she instantly fell in love with her. (who could blame her). She guided us to different rooms the first five months we were there. Every time she introduced us to a room full of senior citizens watching TV or reading a book, she called in a happy and inviting voice to get their attention. I like the way Elaine always addresses people according to their individual and unique needs.

Sylvia is one of Zooza's biggest fans at the nursing home. When she lays her hands on Zooza's furry head she always repeats; “oh, I could play with you all day!” Mom found an article in AARP magazine about the bond between animals and humans. When humans pet a furry animal, a hormone called oxytocin creates feelings of warmth, pleasure, and connection in both the animal and the person. Every time Sylvia pets Zooza, you can see how it works.

Sylvia's experience with Zooza also brings back to her happy memories from her childhood. Sylvia had every kind of dog when she was younger. She often talks about how she used to sleep with a little dog right next to her on the bed and how her mother put a pillow on the floor next to the bed so that the little dog wouldn't fall and hurt herself. All of this made me feel happy for Zooza and Sylvia and really glad that I provided these moments for them.

Theresa is also another big Zooza fan. She once had a dog named Skippy. The dog actually understood Italian as well as English.

I never thought becoming a Bar Mitzvah and fulfilling my community service responsibilities would result in a better connection with Zooza and appreciation of her but it has. Although I do not plan to bring Zooza back to the Nursing Home every weekend, I do want to return there once a month because I simply can not leave it all behind me, especially when so many people got so much joy out of seeing and petting Zooza.

I also want to donate ten percent of my Bar Mitzvah gifts to Heifer International. This organization provides animals for poor families all over the world. The animals become both a part of the families and provide a means of livelihood for them.

By doing community service, I provide more activities for my dog Zooza and that's good for her. She spends a little too much time inside. I give the senior citizens someone to pet and love and remind them of days past. And by performing this Mitzvah, I help myself as well.