

# The JFS Bar-Bat Mitzvah Fund

By Susan Schwartz

The birth of their son, Barry, was a highlight in the lives of Carol and Irving Burstein. His Bar Mitzvah, 13 years later in November of 1998, was a close second. They knew they were fortunate in being able to provide a beautiful Bar Mitzvah celebration for Barry. And they wanted to share some of their good fortune. Barry's godmother, Linda Kislowicz, is a close friend of Carol Burstein and, at the time, she was executive director of Jewish Family Services. At her suggestion, they created a special fund at



Jewish Family Services called the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Fund, to be used to help the families of JFS clients who needed help: help in the form of money for a new suit and tefillin for the Bar Mitzvah boy, for instance, or funds to permit a modest Kiddush which otherwise would not have been possible.

Their founding gift was \$1,000 and they have contributed a similar amount each year. Friends and family contributed when Irving had a 50th birthday party - and when Carol turned 50 and had a full Bat Mitzvah. By 2002, there was \$10,000 in the fund.

Since then, more than two dozen families have been helped, with allocations of up to \$500 which meant they could buy new clothes for the ceremony or defray the cost of Bar Mitzvah lessons; in one case, the fund enabled a girl to be a part of a group Bat Mitzvah.

All the families helped are financially vulnerable - because of illness or unemployment or because they earn small incomes and have large families to support. To date, all have been clients of JFS.

"All the requests submitted have been modest," said Nancy Engels, director of administration at JFS. "But the requests that were fulfilled made a difference that was anything but modest."

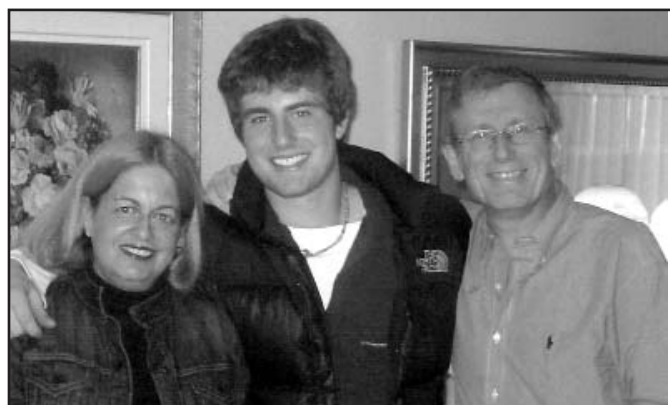
Levi, for instance, is the eldest of three boys. His mother, who has been married three times and is now separated and contemplating a third divorce, is on welfare. Levi is sad, angry and frustrated. Too many "fathers" have left. Without the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Fund, it would have been impossible for his mother to afford the modest Kiddush for friends and family after Levi recited his Haftorah.

Now the fund is nearly depleted. And JFS is committed to continue to help families through this very worthwhile vehicle the Bursteins established.

*"Now we want for others to help."*

Carol is prepared to fundraise on behalf of the fund, approaching rabbis, school principals and other community leaders in a bid to make families of children preparing to become B'nai and B'not Mitzvah aware of the existence of the fund.

"We adopted it as our charity," said Carol, who is a social worker. "There are a lot of very poor Jewish people - and people need to know the fund exists. If more people knew, I believe they would want to contribute."



**Carol, Barry et Irving Burstein**

"For a time, we were the fund," said Irving Burstein, a family doctor and a member of the JFS Board of Directors. "Now we want for others to help."