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Weaving a Family Heirloom **A TALLIT TO Treasure**

By Bethany Kandel



Jacob on the loom

When Jacob Solomon stands on the bimah to read from the Torah for his Bar Mitzvah on February 5, 2022, he will be wearing a very special tallit. In fact, although he's only nine-years-old, he's already helped design and weave it himself, with his siblings, parents and grandparents. Even his 92-year-old great grandmother wove a few lines.

The Livingston, N.J., family began creating this labor of love for Jacob, along with a tallit for

his 5-year-old brother, Liam -- who won't be Bar Mitzvahed until 2026 -- and a challah covering for his 7-year-old sister, Marisa. They started years in advance to make sure all their loved ones were able to participate.

"I felt it was important for them to have something to cherish forever," says Jacob's mom, Laurie Solomon, who came up with project. "I could have bought a tallit in the store and that

What is a tallit?

The tallit is a four-cornered prayer shawl with specially knotted fringes called tzitzit. The tzitzit are a visual reminder of God's commandments. Men and women are traditionally wrapped in the tallit when they pray or read from the Torah. Boys and girls usually receive their tallit in preparation for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah and often they are handed down from generation to generation.

Photos by Laurie Solomon

would be totally fine, but this adds another layer of meaning about the importance of Judaism and family, too.” Besides, she says, she likes the idea of giving her children a beautiful heirloom to which all the important people in their lives have contributed. “It’ll make them think of us when we’re not all around someday.”

Hand weaving a personalized tallit has been a tradition in Solomon’s family. She and her family wove a tallit for her older brother Carey’s Bar Mitzvah in 1986. The original weaver they worked with had since passed away. Another weaver suggested she contact Neve Shalom Synagogue in Metuchen, NJ, where three years ago, the sisterhood created a “loom room” with a donated loom. There, congregants, students and visitors have woven close to 100 tallit, tefillin bags and matzah and challah covers with the guidance of trained volunteers.

“The beauty of this is that you are creating a Judaica heirloom that is totally customized, will last a lifetime and that you created yourself,” says Cory Schneider, founder of the Neve Shalom loom room. She has personally created tallitot for her three sons, friends, other relatives and several grandchildren. “Every time a child puts on hand-woven tallit, they will remember the participation of their family members, living and passed. When you’re wrapped in it, it’s like being hugged by them.”

Solomon began making the three-hour round-trip to Neve Shalom several times a week to get the bulk of the weaving going. Soon she was spending up to four hours at a time working on the various projects. “It was relaxing. Some days I’d drop the kids off at school, drive there and spend the whole day weaving. The only reason I stopped was that I had to pick up the kids from school. I got in the groove.”

On weekends, she began bringing her children and various family members to weave so everyone was represented. Even her five-year-old would painstakingly add a few threads to his and his brother’s tallitots. The boys chose contrasting colors: Jacob’s tallit has a white background with five blue stripes representing the five members of their immediate family; Liam’s has a blue background with five white stripes.

In total, Solomon estimates, they spent more than 65 hours on the projects. “I enjoyed the process and was sad when it was done.”



Top: From left, Jacob’s Great Grandma Minnie, Grandma Pauline and Grandma Lois; Middle: Mom Laurie Solomon at work; Bottom: Liam’s tallit.





The Solomon family at the loom; parents Laurie and David, Jacob, Marisa and Liam

"It's so special," says Jacob's grandma, Lois Solomon, who loved being included. "Everyone had a hand in it. Laurie knows who did what lines; someday when I'm not here, she can point to them and say 'This was done by Grandma Lois.' That makes it much more significant. A piece of me will always be here with them."

Jacob agrees: "It's a good memory," he says. And of his treasured tallit, "I'll save it forever."

After removing the tallitot from the loom, they will each be attached to an atarah (neckband) embroidered with their Hebrew names and the names of their parents, and four corners with Jewish stars. The family will complete them by hand-tying the tzitzit, or knotted fringe.

Then the two finished tallitot will go into their matching woven pouches, waiting patiently for each boy's Bar Mitzvah day. •

Here are some ways to create your own hand-crafted tallit:

- To learn more about the Neve Shalom weaving program, contact Cory Schneider, 717-574-1807 or email, corstan65@gmail.com. neveshalom.net/sisterhood
- There is also a loom room at the JCC of Wyoming Valley in Wilkes-Barre, PA, 570-824-4656, ext. 237. jewishwilkes-barre.org/activities/programming/tallis-weaving-at-the-jcc
- Pennsylvania Rabbi Rayzel Raphael makes personalized silk-painted tallit. She also holds workshops where you can make your own. shechinah.com/shechinah-silks.html. For more information, call: 215-782-1221
- Look on Etsy.com for customized tallit. Many artists will incorporate your design, colors and materials to make a one-of-a-kind prayer shawl.

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