

Devori's Graduation

To my dear family and friends.

By Libbi Kakon

It is with great regret that I am unable to be here in person today - however, it is a balm to my soul that Devori is getting such good care here at Hasc School and at her residence, Pesach Tikvah in Williamsburg, as well as Camp Hasc in the summers.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to be able to address all of you from here in Toronto on this very special day of the graduation of Devori and her peers. What a milestone - and a remarkable one at that.

So much to write and so much to say, yet the words don't come so easily because of the strong emotions I am experiencing as I sit and write this.

It has been a long, long journey - and a journey that I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams, a journey that I do not think I would have chosen had I been given the choice, but the bottom line is I had no choice - Devori was born to us right around Purim time, the sixth child - and we embraced her forever. She was the force for change in our lives. Forever.

I have never minced words and am not about to do so now - it was not easy. Devori brought out the worst AND the best in me. I had to advocate for my child, while raising other children, two of whom had hearing loss, while trying to give my hearing children what they needed to flourish. I had to advocate for Devori medically and educationally and make sure she got the proper care she needed. I personally live with hearing loss, so this made everything all the more challenging. Imagine having to start explaining to a medical professional that firstly, I do not hear. THEN dealing with what Devori needed. Then multiply that a hundred times year in and year out with medical teams and hospitals and therapists.

But advocate I did, and I was never the same as a result. I found out who my real friends are. I found out I was much weaker AND stronger than

I thought. I found out I did not know it all. I found out that Hashem believes in me. And I learned to listen to others and myself and to trust my instinct.

Devori, you were a gorgeous baby - and you have grown into a beautiful young lady who lights up the lives of all who know you. Your smile is infectious and when that giggle bursts through, everyone giggles with you. Your intelligence really shines through, you do not miss a beat and your good nature endears you to all those who know you. You have such a fan club from Israel to Toronto to New York and in between. I still get calls from counselors from ten years ago asking me how you are, 'how is MY Devori', so many of them ask. And you indeed are OUR Devori - you belong to everyone.

Devori, you were born on Friday night right after candle lighting. Your father lit the electric Shabbos candles in the hospital room and then he danced while he sang Kabbalas Shabbos and then soon after you were born. I held you and cuddled you and I saw your gorgeous face and I knew.

I whispered to your father, I cannot do this anymore. I have been through enough. It is the end.

Your father looked at you, Devori, and then he looked at me and he said to me, "No, it is not the end; it is the beginning."

I did not see it then, but looking back now, Abba was right - it was indeed the beginning -

The beginning of a very difficult trek but the beginning of:

- New friendships
- New perspectives
- New appreciations for life
- New roads
- New scenery
- New skills

