

Liz Winter-Cohen

My parents had a fabric store in Long Island, and for many years it was the center of everything. We all worked very hard; my mother was in the store from 9 to 6 while my father was out measuring for curtains. My sister and I were responsible for dinner, after which my parents would go down into the den and make curtains until three o'clock in the morning. In the morning, I ironed the curtains for 25 cents a panel; it gave me the value of a dollar.

I remember my mother doing Shabbat—the candles, the prayers, the roast chicken—when I was very young. But over the years, as money grew tighter, religion sort of went by the boards. It was a question of survival, and living Jewishly came second to that. In addition, my father, who was born in Poland, never really believed that the girls should have an education. My brother was *Bar Mitzvahed*, but my sister and I never really had a Jewish education.

We both fought to go to college, and we won. I studied business and became the owner of a market research company. I had done very well at work, and I wanted to give back what someone had given me; that is where my *tzedakah* comes from. When we moved to Greensboro, I joined the Women's Philanthropy Division at the Federation. I was secretary first, and later on I was the Women's Campaign chair, as well as head of the Philanthropy Division for two years.

When you own your own company you are the star. Hopefully you have smart people under you, but they look to you for knowledge and problem solving. But when you participate in the Federation, I found that I was listening to some really brilliant people. That was part of the pleasure of working at the Federation. The work we did there felt important to me. But my involvement in the Federation gave me so much more than the rewarding fundraising:

I believe in fate. And I believe all the work we did at the Federation was so that my husband and I would have Lena in our life. During the final meeting the end of Campaign I chaired in 2005, a young lady came to speak. Her name was Anya Romanetz, and she was a junior at AHA who had come here from Moldova. She was quite a speaker, and I could not get her words out of my head. Anya made me realize that I had always given a hundred dollars here, 100 there for whatever cause was pertinent. But can you imagine changing someone's life right in front of your eyes? So I spoke to Alina Spaulding, the head of the Moldova program, and I told her I would like to sponsor someone. And she sent over this little 15-year-old girl, Lena Mironciuc, and she is just wonderful, very bright, very sensitive, very loving. And all of a sudden, we had a daughter.

In the beginning I thought I would just be funding her, and that would be it. I never even considered what it would be like emotionally. At first, she went to AHA and she lived at the school. Each weekend she visited brought us closer and closer. By March of the second year, she came to live with us, and we became a family. She has added a dimension to our lives, and you cannot put a price on that. I do not sit here and total up how much money I have spent on her over the years. It is not the amount of money that I donated to AHA to have her go there for four years. It is taking her shopping for clothes, hearing about her boyfriends. Lena's a sharer; she is like a combination between my best friend and the daughter I never had. I think it is a good combination for her, too.

When we met, Lena was a timid little 15 year-old-girl with a ponytail and bangs. By the time she left AHA, she had short hair and complete confidence in herself; she was an artist, she was going to Wellesley on a full scholarship—she was completely different. That was a marvelous thing to watch happen, and I feel badly that her mother could not.

She continues to win scholarships and create opportunities for herself. I hope her gratitude for what she has received will motivate her to give back.