

The Month in the Wilderness

“Grandma, you're the best friend a boy could have!”

-Doni at age 10

Doni had a very difficult time in his Hebrew Day School. He had great difficulty reading especially the Hebrew. He couldn't hear well, He was very active physically so it was hard for him to sit still. By the time he was in 5th grade, he was longing for “times in the wilderness.”

That spring, he had a meltdown. He came home from school and told his mother, “I told you I needed a week in the wilderness. Now I need a MONTH in the wilderness!!”

Aliza called me for help.

“I will be taking him on his 10 year trip in July,” I said.

“That is not soon enough,” she answered.

So Doni flew to Oregon, April 15, 2004, for “a month in the wilderness.” His Aunt Shana bought a large tent and we set it up in the woods a distance from the house. Doni and I slept there for two nights and then he was ready to spend nights in the house. It was a little scary – all the sounds of owls and coyotes, frogs and wind in the trees.



Doni and I, with the help of my housemates, Michael and Judea, had a wonderful and “sweet” time together. Michael took him on some fishing trips, to flea markets, and an Eastern Oregon

adventure. Judea helped him play with our cat. I played with him, fixed kosher meals and kept the Sabbath with him.

I took him to the Oregon coast to visit his Grandpa Mark who brought a fish home from the market to grill for us. Mark playfully tossed it to Doni, saying, “Now you can tell the folks in Denver that you caught the fish for supper!” Doni loved that.

In 2013, I found these precious notes in my files that I took during that time almost 10 years ago:

“During this time in the wilderness, Doni has been very responsive to my requests. He helped create the kosher corner in the kitchen, made scrambled eggs two mornings and braided the challah and made cinnamon rolls for our Sabbath



meals. He goes to sleep easily. When he is done with the day, he is done! Sleep calls and he's in bed. In the morning he dresses and comes upstairs by himself.”

“We buy a few things at Michael's craft store the Doni can do himself without my help - balloons and a balloon inflator, velvet coloring poster, stacking bubbles and a box of 1000 craft sticks.

On the way to the car Doni is excited especially about the thousand sticks.”These will keep me occupied until I'm as old as you.” we laughed

“My grandchildren will play with these, my great-grandchildren!” We laugh about me visiting his grandchildren and asking if they were playing with the sticks.”

“Doni loves looking at all the crystals around the house. He loves to explore, to touch and handle things. He bent over a large clear quartz crystal and said, ‘Oh, look at this one! SWEEET ... Oh, I bet you have *already* marveled over it!’”

“On one of our walks in the forest, he said, “You have something to say about everything in the wilderness and you're always right. **I guess age gets you something.**”

I had told him about poison plants having an antidote in the same region possibly within a mile or less. I told him Hashem did that and people found out in different ways through dreams and experience.

Doni “I'm glad you believe in Hashem”

Oralee “Why is that?”

Doni “Because then you know the one true God, not like Buddha. He was just a man.”

Oralee “a wise man”

Doni “Yeah, *p a u s e*, Jesus was a bad man.”

Oralee “How do you know that, Doni?”

Doni “He ran away from Judaism.”

Oralee at the last Sabbath meal before he goes back to Denver, “I think I've done a pretty good job fixing Sabbath meals for us.”

Doni gets up and comes over to hug me. “That is an understatement! You've done an excellent job, a superb job!”

Doni and I are at the kitchen sink in his Grandfather's house

Doni “You're really are rich aren't you!”

Oralee “Why do you say that?”

Doni “You're happy with what you have.”

Oralee “Yes, you're right. I'm very rich in friends and love too!”

Doni “Yes you are!”



Doni, “I think I'll put the soda away. You've gotten me to like healthier foods here. I have eaten more and eaten healthier food. I think I gained 5 pounds.” *This was a good thing for him.*

“We are listening to an audio book in the car. The dog in the story says to another dog “you're the best friend a dog could have.” I laugh and Doni wonders why.

Oralee -“because we say ‘dogs are man's best friend’ so it's funny to hear a dog say that about a dog”

Doni looks at me and says, ‘**Grandma! you're the best friend a boy could have!**’

I smile and hold his hand and kiss it.

‘**Thank you, Doni!**’”





The “Month in the Wilderness” gave us time for many adventures. We went to old growth woods, to a cave on the Pacific coast, to the visitor center at Mt St Helens to see the volcano damage and re-growth in the area, and to see the fish at the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River.



His Grandpa Mark taught him how to chop wood and took him on a steamboat ride on the Columbia River.



He learned how to clear bush on the land, build fires to burn it, and oh yes, roast marshmallows in the fire – why waste a good fire? He baked a birthday cake for his aunt Shana and took wood carving classes.



Lively, inquisitive, caring, and adventurous Doni enriched all of our lives during this precious time.