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Madeline Chais: Kindness by the Book

Madeline Chais, 17, Marlborough School (Going to: University of Michigan)

BY DANIELLE BERRIN

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Madeline Chais

Madeline Chais grew up in the privileged world of private school where pretty much everything she wanted, she got. Then in sixth grade, while volunteering to organize a book drive at the John Thomas Dye School, Chais learned about the abominably low literacy rates at public schools throughout Los Angeles. That same week, she helped mobilize 300 students to collect more than 8,000 books, which were then distributed to needy schools through the nonprofit organization Bookends.

Today, Chais sits on the board of Bookends.

In 2008, Chais created the Bookends Youth Leadership Board (YLB) and was careful to include students from donor schools as well as students from recipient schools.

Under Chais' leadership, the YLB distributed books at Adoption Day, a day when hundreds of children are formally adopted at Edelman Children's Court in East Los Angeles; it also established libraries at the Los Angeles Ronald McDonald House and in the children's waiting room at the Van Nuys Courthouse. Plus, she organized a Scrabble tournament at the Beverly Hills Library, which brought in \$10,000 for the organization.

Chais even brought her book smarts to Israel, where she coordinated a book exchange between a low-income school and a wealthy one.

And to keep it hands-on, Chais spends one day a week mentoring at-risk middle school students through the after-school enrichment program Los Angeles Team Mentoring.

For all this, Chais received the Youth Volunteer of the Year award from the City of Los Angeles and was recognized as an outstanding student

leader by the Tavis Smiley Foundation earlier this year.

As her rabbi, Laura Geller, senior rabbi of Temple Emanuel pointed out, "Recently, Maddy's family has been challenged with some very difficult circumstances that have affected their lifestyle and their role in the larger community. Maddy has risen to these challenges with elegance, grace and an optimistic spirit. It is difficult to put into words how impressed I am with her."

"It's definitely been a hard year," Chais said, explaining that her grandfather is also battling a form of bone marrow cancer.

Chais said the challenges have strengthened the bonds within her family.

"My parents raised me to be strong and never succumb to things going on around me, and to stay true to myself," she said.

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