Boys have celebrated Bar-Mitzvahs for hundreds of years. But for many years, girls could not celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs. The first Bat-Mitzvah in America was in 1922, only 89 years ago. Many grandparents today were born at a time when girls could not celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs.
Why couldn't girls celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs?

Some people thought it wasn't important for girls to learn Torah or Hebrew.

They thought girls should only learn how to clean and take care of children.

Some people thought God didn't want girls to celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs.
Judith Kaplan was the first girl to celebrate a Bat-Mitzvah in America.

Judith was very smart.

Judith learned how to read when she was two years old.

When Judith was three years old, she learned how to read Hebrew!

Judith's father was an important Rabbi.

Judith's father, Rabbi Kaplan, thought it was important for Jewish girls to learn Torah and Hebrew.
Judith Kaplan was the first girl to celebrate a Bat-Mitzvah in America. Judith’s father, Rabbi Kaplan, thought it was important for Jewish girls to learn Torah and Hebrew.

Judith Kaplan in the 1930’s with her family. From left to right are: Her sister Naomi; her mother Lena; her husband Rabbi Ira Eisenstein; Judith; Judith’s father Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan; and her sisters Selma and Hadassah.
Rabbi Kaplan wanted Judith to celebrate a Bat-Mitzvah at his Temple.

Rabbi Kaplan taught Judith blessings.

Judith also learned how to read the Torah.

1922

In 1922, Judith was ready to celebrate her Bat-Mitzvah.

She went to Temple with her father, her mother, and her three sisters.
At Judith's temple, men and women sat in different rooms.

Judith sat with the men to be close to the bimah. She was nervous because she could not sit with her mother and sisters.

Judith had to be brave.
At her Bat-Mitzvah, Judith stood on the bimah.

Judith led the blessings over the Torah.

Judith read her Torah portion.

After her Bat-Mitzvah Judith had a small party with her family and friends.

Some people were unhappy Judith celebrated a Bat-Mitzvah.

But many people were happy and proud of Judith.
Judith's Bat-Mitzvah was different from Bat-Mitzvahs today.

Judith did not wear a tallit.

Judith did not lead many prayers.

Judith only led the blessings over the Torah.

Judith did not hold the Torah.

Judith did not read from the Torah.
Judith read her Torah portion from a book. But Judith's Bat-Mitzvah was important because it was the first Bat-Mitzvah in America. Judith showed people that it was okay for girls to celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs. Today, many girls celebrate Bat-Mitzvahs.
This is a picture of Judith in 1992, seventy years after her Bat-Mitzvah.

When Judith was 82, she celebrated a second Bat-Mitzvah.
She went to temple with her husband and two daughters.

At Judith's second Bat-Mitzvah, she wore a tallit.

At Judith's second Bat-Mitzvah, she read from the Torah.

Many important Jewish women went to Judith's second Bat-Mitzvah.

They thanked Judith for celebrating first Bat-Mitzvah in America.